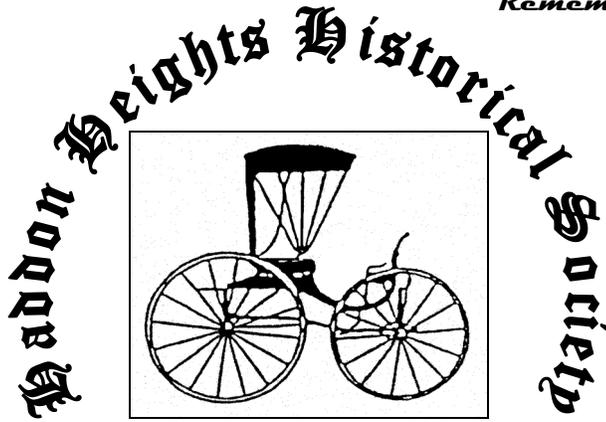


" Remembering Yesterday For The People Of Tomorrow "



Bulletin

WWW.HHHISTORICAL.ORG

P.O. Box 118 • Haddon Heights, NJ 08035

Volume 39 Number 2

April 2014

We meet on the third **MONDAY** of January, April, July, and October - at **7:00pm**

ALL ABOARD !!!!!!!!!!!!!- We are now boarding all First Class passengers for the Haddon Heights "Express" ... otherwise known as our April 2014 Historical Society general membership meeting. At 7:00pm on Monday evening April 21st, we will be treated to a presentation by two gentlemen with strong railroad ties to Haddon Heights! The topic of their presentation is "Haddon Heights Railroad Heritage", and boy do they know their stuff.

Robert Cubberley, President of the Delaware & Susquehanna Model Railroad Club, and Richard Magee, President of the West Jersey Chapter- National Railway Historical Society, will present an illustrated program on the history of the railroad and trolley lines that served Haddon Heights. Those lines significantly contributed to the growth and prosperity that formed the town we know today. Bob will provide a status report on the restoration and preservation work going on at the Passenger Station. Rich will cover the history of the growth and decline of the rail lines that were part of the lifeblood of the community. We will see many historic photos, some not previously shown.

Bob has been a member of the Delaware & Susquehanna club for 23 years, serving as its President for 8 of those years. Rich has been an active member of the West Jersey Chapter for 49 years (yes that is forty nine) and has been its President for 18 years. Rich is also a retired veteran of three railroads, including the Pennsylvania-Reading Seashore Lines, which served Haddon Heights. So..... Here is your last call. I hear the whistle... "All Aboard!!"

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE- Now that "the winter of our discontent" {William Shakespeare} is over, we can relate to Percy Shelley, "Winter is come and gone...." Spring is finally here!!!! Goodbye to ice and snow and hello to chirping birds, budding trees, blooming flowers, and warmer weather!! I am pleased to announce that Bob Hunter is our new Vice President and Joan Rossler is our new Membership Chairperson. Welcome aboard Bob and Joan.

Our two new interpretive signs are completed. A very special "THANK YOU" to Margaret Westfield for all her hard work and dedication to this project. We hope to see you at the ribbon cutting ceremony in the park on May 10th during "Down By The Station Day".

A very special "THANK YOU" to Anne McAdams and her committee for organizing the League of Historical Societies Meeting on March 8th. Our presenters were: Bob Hunter, Margaret Westfield, Michael Westfield, Ken Funkhouser and "Florence," and The Delaware & Susquehanna Model Railroad Club, Inc. "THANK YOU" for bringing the history of Haddon Heights alive to



our guests. It was a beautiful day and our guests enjoyed walking around our Historic Borough. Anne's committee is to be commended for their hard work and for the many touches that were donated to make the meeting room attractive. Peter continues to plan interesting and informative meetings and Ken faithfully publishes a very informative newsletter to keep all of us up to date. I am very lucky to work with such an exceptional board. I can't begin to individually thank everyone for all of their dedication and hard work. We would appreciate having YOU on the Board. I know you are out there and we really need a photographer. Please consider joining this vibrant group of volunteers. I am looking forward to seeing you at our April 21 meeting. Please consider bringing a friend. *Elena*



VOLUNTEERS FOR BOARD POSITIONS BEING SOUGHT- Please see page 4 for openings on the Board and Committees. To volunteer/suggest someone for an opening, let us know at the April meeting!

JULY 21, 2014 MEETING TOPIC- We will feature a multi-media presentation by local historian and educator Bill Lange on the events of "D-Day", June 6, 1944.

RITZ THEATER FIGHTS THE ODDS- It is now 2014 and the Ritz Theater in the Oaklyn Section of Haddon Township continues to provide live entertainment much as it did beginning in 1927 when the doors first opened. As you may know, the Ritz has played a large role in the lives of the Funkhouser family; from my children and I acting in "Scrooge the Musical", our 29 years as season subscribers, continuing right through my election as President of the Board of Directors. To say I have a unique perspective on this Grand Lady on the White Horse Pike, is an understatement.



The Ritz has been in the news a lot lately, due to the economic struggles rooted in the deep recession which began in 2008. Entertainment dollars are discretionary funds. When money gets tight, they are generally the first to be cut and the last to come back. Thanks to many, many supporters, the theater recently survived what surely would have been a crippling financial situation. That being said, the best medicine for any entertainment organization is to get people in the seats. So, we continue to look for new subscribers, casual theatergoers, and sources of funding to ensure the future.

When offered the opportunity to showcase the Ritz during the recent NJ League of Historical Societies meeting in Haddon Heights, I jumped at the chance. At the end of the day on March 8th, I had given around 20 of our statewide guests a guided tour of the theater. In preparation, I reviewed the documents submitted for our application to be listed on the NJ and National Registers of Historic Places. To familiarize you with the history of this great old theater, and maybe bring back a few memories for those who once enjoyed a Vaudeville Show or the flicker of a moving picture show there, I have included excerpts from those documents.

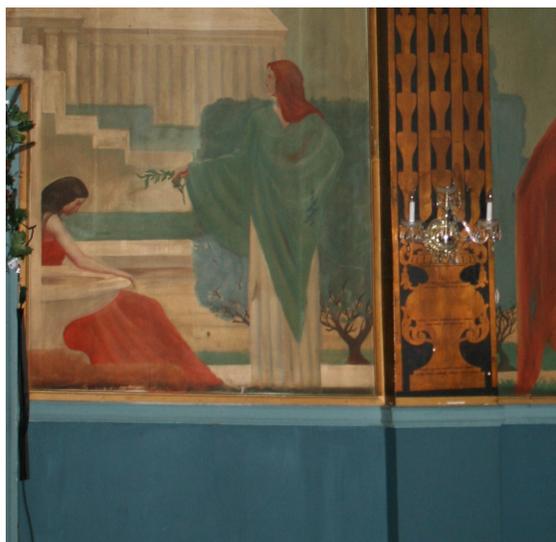


Developing from the earlier Nickelodeons, the motion picture theatre of the 1920s was typically known as a "picture palace." The most elaborate examples of the type were built in the largest American cities: Chicago, Los Angeles, New York and Philadelphia. These theatres, such as Philadelphia's Stanley and Mastbaum had designs that, in the words of theatre historian David Naylor, "mirrored that of Old World palaces of the past.". Suburban theatres, built with smaller budgets than their big-city cousins, rarely matched their exuberance, but many, including the Ritz, echoed the larger buildings in an auditorium designed to transport the audience into a world far removed from the street outside.

The movie theatres of the 1920s were, for the most part, designed not to blend in with the surrounding buildings but to serve as a focal point. In most cases, their scale was

larger than the surrounding buildings. They often rose above the two-story taxpayer strips of the streetcar suburbs that stretched outward from the center cities of the Eastern and Midwestern United States. While many downtown commercial buildings that lined such streets as Haddon Avenue and White and Black Horse Pikes were anonymous blocks with storefront on the ground level and apartments above, movie theatres often showed the hand of an architect with facade ornament and a marquee intended to draw customers. The marquee was designed to grab the attention of the passerby with bright lights, colors, and large frequently changing signs.

In 1927, when the Ritz Theatre opened, Camden County had a wealth of movie houses. Listings in the *Camden Courier* for September 12, 1927, the date of the theatre's opening, include ten movie and two legitimate theatres in Camden City, two theatres in Gloucester City, and theatres in Audubon, Haddonfield, Westmont (Haddon Township), and Merchantville. Within a few years, new theatres had opened in Delsea, West Collingswood, Clementon, and Audubon. Eighty-Seven years later, only a handful of those theatres remain. Camden City doesn't have a single historic theatre. The Westmont Theatre, which opened the same month as the Ritz, has been empty for many years. Before its demolition to make way for a drug store which only lasted one year, the New Century Theatre in Audubon housed a costume company, while the Collingswood Theatre (National Register-listed) has housed a photography studio and the recording venue of the Philadelphia Orchestra. Of the Camden County theatres listed in 1927, only the Ritz remains largely unaltered and in active use.



Ground was broken for the Ritz Theatre in February 1927. The Ritz was built as part of the William E. Butler & Son chain of theatres, headquartered in Philadelphia. The Ritz doors opened at 6:15pm on September 12, 1927, showing Marion Davies in "Tillie the Toiler." This movie was followed in rapid succession by "Pleasures of the Rich," "Heart of Salome," and "Out of the Storm." A total of 1,200 people attended the first day's showings. The theatre originally had a capacity of 800, all orchestra seats, described as the identical type installed in the million dollar Freihofer Theatre in New York; a Simplex picture machine, touted as representative of the "world's greatest projectors" and a Brown cooling system, designed to maintain an interior temperature 35 degrees cooler than the exterior temperature on the hottest days of summer. Music in the theatre was originally provided by a \$25,000 Orchestration, a pneumatic organ equipped with pipes intended to replicate most of the instruments in the symphony orchestra. This instrument was described in an article in the *Retrospect* as



the "equivalent in tone and in musical selection of a fifty-piece orchestra." It was first played by Edward Sheppard who also operated a music store in the building. The total cost of the theatre was estimated at \$400,000.

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the theatre continued to show first run movies. For example, in December 1940, the Ritz presented Don Ameche and Betty Grable in "Down Argentine Way." By the mid-1950s, the Ritz had become part of the Samuel Varsalow chain of theatres that included three in Camden City, as well as the New Century in Audubon, the Collingswood, the Westmont, and the King in Gloucester City. During the latter part of the 1950s and into the 1960s, the theatre began to emphasize fine art and foreign films to create a niche for itself and to differentiate it from the increasing numbers of theatres constructed as post-war suburban expansion. By the 1970s, the theatre had become infamous. The foreign and art films had been replaced by pornography. It was operated by Budco, a company that also operated another pornographic theatre in Pennsauken. Films with such titles as "Starlet Nights," "Purely Physical," "Airport Girls," and "Man and Wife" were advertised with an "X" rating. The Ritz movie theatre closed in early 1985.



In August 1985, Bruce Curless, a producer and director, held an organizational meeting with the aim of acquiring the Ritz as the home for a legitimate professional theatre. By October 1985, the company called Puttin' on the Ritz, Inc., took occupancy of the theatre and began preparations for a full theatre season beginning January 1986. The first season opened on January 17, 1986 with "The Boy Friend" directed by Curless. The cast of this inaugural presentation was chosen from over 150 actors from the entire Delaware Valley. The Ritz currently presents a full season of six subscription productions, as well as children's theatre and special events.

2015 will be the 30th season for live theater at the Ritz. As I bring this article to a close, I invite you to come see this jewel of entertainment with its original charm. The theater is located at 915 White Horse Pike in Oaklyn/Haddon Township.

COMING EVENTS

4/ 21/14-7:00pm General Membership Meeting-
Railroad history in Haddon Heights.

7/21/14- 7:00pm General Membership Meeting-
70th anniversary of D-Day; Bill Lang

MEMBERSHIP REMINDER- Your Dues "Paid Through" YEAR date is printed on your newsletter label. If your date is not 2014, your Dues are "Due". Please make sure you are up to date. Don't risk being dropped from our mailing list!!!

HADDON HEIGHTS REMEMBERED- We have copies of the Historical Society's book "Haddon Heights Remembered" available for sale at the Library. This book is a collection of reminiscences from our past and holds much insight into the early history of our town. Whether you grew up here or just moved in, this book will provide hours of enjoyable reading for only \$20.00

Just a reminder...The Historical Society is a 501(c)3 organization. Please keep us in mind as you plan your charitable donations. Make us part of Your Legacy...

THANKS for listening... If you come across old photos of Haddon Heights, or old stories of historic interest, please contact me. I will treat them lovingly, scan, and return them. Just think..... If you send me just ONE photo, I could save 1,000 words on the next newsletter! Send me your reflections, reminiscences, memories and recollections! Thanks to Bob Cubberley for the Railroad Station Photo!

Let us continue to remember yesterday for the people of tomorrow...

Ken Funkhouser, Editor

2014 Historical Society Board

<u>President-(2012-2014)</u>	Elena Hill
<u>Vice-President-(2014-2016)</u>	Bob Hunter
<u>Past President-</u>	Margaret Westfield
<u>Treasurer-(Ends 2016)</u>	Art Ritter
<u>Secretary- (Ends 2016)</u>	Judy Buecker
<u>Trustees-(2013-2016)</u>	Virginia Appleby
	Ken Funkhouser
	Anne McAdams

COMMITTEES / CHAIRS

<u>Newsletter Ed.-</u>	Ken Funkhouser
<u>Membership Chair-</u>	Joan Rossler
<u>Web Master-</u>	Dan Alexander
<u>Nominating Comm.-</u>	Bob Hunter/ Peter Hill

<u>Borough Council Liaison</u>	Rose Fitzgerald
<u>Affairs-</u>	Ginny Appleby
<u>Merch/Fund Raising-</u>	Joan Rossler/ Ginny Appleby

<u>Programs/Publicity-</u>	Peter Hill/ Dan Alexander
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Programs/Publicity- Asst. Vacant

Digital Photographer Vacant

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