

# THISTLE



Millburn-  
Short Hills  
Historical Society

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Vol. XIII

May 1990

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## ANNUAL MEETING

June 5, 1990

Millburn Library - 8 p.m.

### **"Gustav Stickley & Craftsman Farm"**

Speaker - Muriel Berson

In 1908 Gustav Stickley purchased 650 acres of land in Parsippany-Troy Hills for a model farm community. Only 26.5 acres remains of his dream. Our speaker, Mrs. Berson was the driving force to save this property and will relate the history of Craftsman Farm, its acquisition and restoration of the buildings on it and the story of the Arts and Crafts movement in the U.S.

Gustav Stickley wrote in 1909: The principles of the Craftsman idea are simplicity, durability, fitness for life that is to be lived in the house and harmony with its natural surrounding.

Many fine examples of that simplicity, durability, and fitness can still be seen in Craftsman houses built in Short Hills from 1900-20.

## Stewart Hartshorn's Little Store on Hobart Avenue

By Thomas J. Collins

Whenever I visit my hometown and drive along Hobart Avenue near Gapview Road, I pass by the building that once housed the only store in Short Hills and is now a private residence. I wonder how many who pass by are aware of the building's history.

As a boy, I spent many hours at the store in summertime, making myself useful helping the proprietor stock shelves, put up orders, and help with deliveries.

My earliest recollection of the store is of the mid-1920s, at which time the proprietor was Mr. Zemish. Zemish and his wife lived on Hobart Avenue, on the side opposite the store and a short distance away in the direction of Hillside. Mrs. Zemish was very active in civic affairs and had been active earlier in the Woman Suffrage Movement.

In the 1930s the proprietor was Mr. Fred Culbert. He was assisted by his sister, Mrs. Florence Curran, and her son, Russell Curran.

While basically a grocery, the store was unique in that it offered only merchandise of the highest quality and of great variety. It was also unique in that many of its sales were completed by customer phone calls to the store, with subsequent delivery of the goods to the home of the customer and monthly billing of charges - a charge account system sans plastic card or service charge and a system based upon the integrity of customer and merchant alike.

Mrs. Curran occupied an enclosed area at the rear of the store where she sat upon a stool before a desk, behind which stood a wall of openings (pigeon holes). Each opening was reserved for the sales slips of a specific customer. I suspect that this area served as the post office when it was housed in the store from 1885 to 1913.

When an order was phoned in, it was filled and placed in a box and left in an area just inside the front door where

they awaited delivery. Customers, by the way, entered the store through a second front door on the right side of the building.

When a number of orders had been prepared, deliveries were taken to the homes in the Ford Model T truck driven by Russell Curran or a Mr. Saggio of Millburn. I often rode with the men and was let off with an order at one house while they delivered to another. At times I was treated to cake and ice cream in Short Hills kitchens while awaiting return of the delivery truck. Among the families to whom I delivered orders I recall the names Ryan, Stout, Strong, and J.S. Baker.

Merchandise was received at the store from suppliers in Newark. Many of their trucks were electrically powered and chain driven. One could hear only the whirring sounds of motor and drive chains as these vehicles passed along Hobart Avenue on their solid rubber tires.

Most of the stock was housed in the basement of the store and brought up to store level by means of a small hand-powered freight elevator. The second floor was the residence of Mr. Hartshorn's civil engineer, Mr. Ferris Watts.

The first counter held a showcase of candies and it was here each evening that I received my daily wages from Mr. Culbert - two five-cent candy bars of my choice! Good wages for a lad when one recalls that in those days bread sold for nine cents a loaf and fifteen cents bought a pack of cigarettes.

In the store one could find a long counter behind which stood a large wooden ice box holding butter, cheeses and milk - items visible through the windows of the doors of its several compartments. While the store had a simple balance-type weigh scale, I marveled at the way Mr. Curran could cut exactly one pound of butter from the tub.

Upon entering one could also smell the rich aromas of the spices and teas such as Oolong and Pekoe. Nearby stood a sugar barrel and one of my chores was to fill five pound paper bags from the barrel. The bags were set aside for Mr. Curran to bind with cord. A large spool of cord was stored on a spindle atop the ice box and the cord was

threaded through eyelets across the ceiling and descended to the counter below, where it was used to tie items wrapped in paper. Once tied, the cord was severed by a quick snap of the hands. The trick was to have the cord cut through itself without bearing on one's fingers. (I never did learn to snap the cord without the risk of amputating a finger.)

Unlike today's supermarket in which the customer collects the items he needs and brings them to the checkout counter, the shopper in the little store stepped up to the counter and told the grocer of his needs, whereupon the grocer went about the store gathering the requested items. Many items, such as canned goods, were within easy reach. Others, however, needed to be retrieved from ceiling-high shelves with a mechanical claw on the end of a long pole. The grocer was quite adept at simply tipping the carton off the shelf and catching it with his free hand.

This manner of shopping provided an opportunity for the exchange of views on matters of concern to the community and contributed to a spirit of fellowship.

I do not recall when the little store ceased operation, but I would place its closing at about the time a number of stores opened on Chatham Road near the depot. The new store building on Chatham Road opened around 1933. Among the first tenants were the post office, formerly located on Hobart Avenue, opposite the Racquets Club, and an A & P grocery store. It is interesting to note that for a limited time the A & P store offered delivery service, but on a very limited scale. Upon request, items purchased at the store would be delivered to homes in the immediate area. Delivery was made by a local youth pulling an express wagon!

What has been recorded here has come from one who knew the store from the inside. It is hoped that this brief account will prompt other seniors to recount their memories of the place. How good it would be to have the recollections of those who were clients. Let this be your challenge!

## Can You HELP Us?

The Society held a training workshop on January 27, 1990 at the Millburn Library. We offered training in Archive Cataloging, Item Indexing, Oral History, Photo Inventory and Slide Show Presentation.

If you are interested in any of these activities, please call:

**Archives** (assisting in indexing archival materials) - Fran Land (379-3376)  
or Fran Sciulli (376-3423)

**Item Indexing** (reading and indexing back issues of The Item) - Liz Howe  
(376-1568)

**Oral History** (interviewing long-time or famous residents) - Ted Brewer  
(376-2821)

**Photo Inventory** - Owen Lampe (376-8827)

**Slide Shows** (presenting the four Society slide shows to schools, etc.) -  
Ginnie Borzner (467-8883)

or

Do you have a collection of historical items? Would you be willing to speak about your collection at a Society meeting?

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I would like to participate in the following activities:

\_\_\_\_\_ Membership    \_\_\_\_\_ Archives    \_\_\_\_\_ Item Indxg    \_\_\_\_\_ Photos  
\_\_\_\_\_ Oral History    \_\_\_\_\_ Slide Shows    \_\_\_\_\_ Program    \_\_\_\_\_ Thistle

I have a collection of \_\_\_\_\_  
which I'd be willing to display and/or speak about.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

## Is Your Membership History?

This is the time of year when we solicit renewal of membership for our upcoming fiscal year beginning July 1st. Your dues support our programs and the ongoing and special projects of the society. Among these projects are our exceptional walking tours of the township, the Thistle, archive acquisitions and photo collections and ongoing projects such as the slide shows and Item indexing.

We urge you to join our society and thereby support our efforts to increase the awareness of the history of our community. For your convenience, a membership envelope is enclosed and for those members who are interested in participating in the work of our organization, please return the survey tear-off with your renewal.

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