

SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Its Origin And The Long Road To A Permanent Home

By Robert Hageman

1927 – The Idea Emerges

In 1927, Summit's local newspaper - the Summit Herald - called for the formation of an historical society. Two years later, on the evening of February 4, 1929, a group of citizens met in the office of Judge Arthur W. Hicks on Beechwood Road and decided to form such a society.

Judge Hicks was named temporary chairman and Stephen W. Kent the temporary secretary. Chairman Hicks was given the authority to name a committee of five to develop the details of the organization. These would include investigating the operations of other historical societies, a constitution, a set of by-laws, and a plan for the functioning of the organization.

It was also felt that since Summit was not a stand alone community in its very early days, when it was partially included in the old townships of Springfield and New Providence, that it would be best to include members from these communities in its operations. (In 1809, when New Providence separated from Springfield, the areas that were to become Summit were divided between the two towns. It was not until 1869 that Summit, with a population of 1,300 became a township and thirty years later an incorporated city with 5,200 inhabitants).

At the conclusion of the meeting, it was decided that in the initial stages of the organization the facilities of the Summit Free Public Library would be provided to house any records or historical materials of the organization.

Two Decades Later

Little or nothing was heard again until 1948 when the Summit Herald wrote "we need an historical society."

On June 13, 1949 a meeting was held at the library. See *The Historian* article of May, 2008 entitled: "The Summit Free Public Library – A Town Treasure".

Another meeting was held at the library in September of that year to preliminarily organize the Summit Historical Society. Twenty-three Summit residents were present. Officers were selected: President Lemuel Skidmore, Vice President Marion Winser, Treasurer Clifford Bernard and Secretary C. Baldwin White.

Another Fifteen Years

Over the years, other articles and opinions appeared in the Summit Herald. On July 20, 1961 the Herald wrote: "one thing our community lacks is an active Historical Society which would serve as a common source for recollections of bygone days."

In 1962 another article calling for an active Historical Society appeared in the Herald. Later that year, on December 27, the Herald reported that according to former Mayor Maxwell Lester, Jr., such a society was in existence and that he was the president. Maxwell also declared that no meeting had been held in more than a decade, that the organization had never disbanded, and that it had \$44.00 in the treasury.

Nearly two years later - 1964 - the Society, under the guidance of then President David E. Trucksess, Margaret Long and C. Baldwin White, officially became an active organization. New bylaws were adopted, membership classifications and fees were established and committee chairman were appointed. The officers were: President C. Dale Whitesell, Vice President Mrs. Kenneth Robson, Treasurer J. Alan Drummond, and Secretary C. Baldwin White.

Seeking A Permanent Location

Several temporary headquarters existed over the years, including at Central Presbyterian Church and at Wilson School, but it wasn't until 1986 that the Society secured a permanent home.

The previous year - 1985 - Aircast, Inc. purchased the land on which the Carter House sat at 92 River Road. Rather than raze the house to build an office and manufacturing facility, Glenn W. Johnson, Jr., founder, owner and president of Aircast donated the Carter House to the Summit Historical Society in 1986 and provided matching funds to move the house down the street to its present location at 90 Butler Parkway. This became the new and permanent home of the Summit Historical Society.

The origin of the Carter House goes back to 1740 when Benjamin Carter acquired 600 acres of land from East Jersey Proprietors along the Passaic River. The house was constructed in 1741 and is the oldest remaining house in Summit. The Summit Council leased the city-owned land to the Summit Historical Society with the assurance that the Carter House would be used as an historic museum. The land on Butler Parkway is actually a part of the parcel of Benjamin Carter's original land holding (see *The Historian* article of May, 2006 entitled: The John Belcher Sayre Link To The Carter House).

The Carter House is not just the headquarters of the Summit Historical Society, but a wonderful museum of Summit's history. Among its features are microfilms of old newspapers, artifacts such as furniture, cooking implements and tools, maps, vintage clothing, pictures showing the growth and transformation of Summit, descriptions of its homes, its businesses, its people and its public services.

All of this, and more, is found in an historic home that allows those who step into it to go back a couple of centuries to life as it once existed.