

# Places In Time

LAWRENCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPRING 2009

## Celebrating New Jersey's Baseball Past

By Bob Golon

As the calendar approaches April, it will be time to once again "play ball" in the Trenton / Lawrenceville area when the Trenton Thunder open their season April 8<sup>th</sup>. Currently the oldest minor league club in New Jersey, the Thunder continuously draw over 400,000 fans per year at Mercer County Waterfront Park and have become a staple of local summer activity in the Trenton area. But Trenton is not the only locale in New Jersey to host exciting minor league and independent professional baseball.

Between New Jersey's turnpikes, parkways, and interstate highways, among its cities, industrial centers, shopping malls, and rural suburbs, the Garden State has grown a whole new crop of lush green fields in the form of baseball parks designed for family entertainment and fun. Should New Jersey be only known for oil refineries, factories, and traffic jams? Not any more! New Jersey is also now known for exciting and fun minor league and independent professional baseball parks, where the evenings are cool, the baseball is hot, and the entertainment is affordable and abundant. Nearly two million fans attend professional baseball games in New Jersey yearly!

New Jersey's baseball roots go all the way back to 1846, when the very first game ever played using Alexander Cartwright's modern rules took place on the Elysian Fields in Hoboken. From 1873 through 1950, no less than 16 New Jersey communities hosted minor league and professional baseball clubs, including long-standing successful franchises in Newark, Jersey City, and Trenton. The Bears of Newark, Giants of Jersey City, and the Little Giants of Trenton all enjoyed strong community identities as well as affiliations with local major league organizations. Yogi Berra, Charlie "King Kong" Keller, Joe Gordon, and Tommy Henrich all graced the Newark Ironbound's Rupert Stadium turf on their way up to the parent New York Yankees. Newark was also home to the legendary Eagles of the Negro National League, which fielded eventual baseball Hall-of-Fame members and New Jersey natives Monte Irvin and Larry Doby in the 1940s. Jackie Robinson became the first black man ever to integrate "white professional baseball" when he took the field at Roosevelt Stadium in Jersey City in April 1946 for the Montreal Royals against the Jersey City Giants. Also on the field that day was Bobby Thomson, who would hit the most famous home run ever, the "Shot Heard 'Round the World," for the New York Giants, clinching the National League Pennant against the Brooklyn Dodgers in a dramatic playoff in 1951.

*Continued on page 2*

## Upcoming Events

April 4: Canal Path Walk

Enjoy a morning walk along the canal with Delaware & Raritan Canal Park historian Vicki Chirco and enjoy two of Lawrence's historic houses along the way. The event begins at the Port Mercer Canal House with a tour of the house and brief canal history presentation at 9:30am. The Canal House is located at 4278 Quakerbridge Road. The 2.5 mile walk includes a mid-way break with a tour of the 18th century Brearley House on Meadow Road.

April 4: Apple Day

Gary Mount will demonstrate how to prune fruit trees on our heritage apple trees at the Brearley House at 2 pm. Includes a brief history of apple-growing in New Jersey and discussion on Colonial use of apples in cooking. Refreshments will be served.

May 17: Baseball in New Jersey

Bob Golon, author of *No Minor Accomplishment*, will speak about the history of baseball in new Jersey and the return of the minor leagues at 2:00pm at the Lawrence Branch of the Mercer County Library. Co-sponsored by the Friends of the Lawrence Library. Refreshments will be served.

## D&R Canal Celebrates 175th Anniversary

2009 marks the 175th Anniversary of the opening of the Delaware and Raritan Canal. To help celebrate, Lawrence Historical Society is planning events throughout the year. The annual garden party at Port Mercer will take place on Sunday, June 14 from 1:00pm-4:00pm and is held in conjunction with the township's Canoe the Canal Day. On the anniversary of the canal's opening, June 25, Port Mercer Canal house will be open all day and the society will host a Victorian tea party in the late afternoon. For more information on these and other events, please visit us at [www.thelhs.org](http://www.thelhs.org) or call 609-895-1728.



## Prep School History A Hit

The 2009 Annual Meeting of the Society scored a win for the home team when recent co-president Jacqueline Haun gave an illustrated talk on the 200 year history of the Lawrenceville School. An unusually large turn-out of members and friends kept Jacqi answering questions for nearly half an hour. What a story she had to tell of a modest day school for nine local boys that grew into a renowned co-educational boarding school with 800 students from all over the world. Many in the audience were surprised to learn that the school, known as Maidenhead Academy, was actually owned by its first three principals. The big change came when a former student who had amassed a huge fortune in the "China Trade," (actually opium) created a foundation that endowed the school. With the school, and the town, renamed Lawrenceville, major expansion and improvement soon followed.

In 1957, the school created quite a stir when Fidel Castro was invited to speak. Another controversy surrounded the movement to admit girls, which finally happened in 1987. Imagine what some of those original nine boys would think to see the sprawling campus in 2009 under the leadership of a woman, Headmaster Elizabeth Duffy.

### Baseball, continued from page 1

Locally, a bit of baseball history was made right at the Brunswick Circle, bordering on Lawrenceville, and where the current New Jersey Lottery Headquarters building stands. Willie Mays, who dominated the National League for twenty years between 1951 and 1973, honed his skills in the outfield at Trenton's Dunn Field as a member of the Little Giants in 1950. Some say that the outfield ground that Willie Mays patrolled at Dunn Field was actually over the Lawrenceville border, adding credence to the area's involvement in baseball history. Regardless, until the 1950s, New Jersey was truly a hotbed of baseball.

Then suddenly, it all ended.

Despite a couple of attempts to revive it, professional baseball was essentially non-existent in New Jersey from 1951 through 1993. Baseball experts cited increased television accessibility of the major league clubs in New York and Philadelphia as the primary reason for this demise, and the drought of professional baseball in New Jersey continued for 40 years.

Finally, in 1994, with the help of both private investors and local counties and communities, minor league baseball resurfaced in new ballparks in Trenton and Augusta (Sussex County). These clubs were soon followed by the Atlantic League, a high-level independent baseball league that placed teams in Atlantic City, Bridgewater (Somerset County), Newark, and Camden. The Philadelphia Phillies located one of their farm teams in Lakewood, and the independent Northeast League, now known as the Can-Am League, put a franchise at the new Yogi Berra Stadium in Montclair. By the early 2000s, no less than eight minor league and independent professional clubs called New Jersey home, all playing to enthusiastic crowds and providing affordable, family entertainment.

Baseball is once again booming in New Jersey.

So, it's time to make our plans to visit Waterfront Park or any of the other exciting New Jersey baseball venues as the 2009 season approaches. In these days of economic trouble, there is nothing more affordable or enjoyable than an evening or afternoon at the local ballpark enjoying the game, the food, the between-inning entertainment, and the fun. Let's play ball!





The 2009 Board of Trustees being sworn in by Mayor Pam Mount. The new trustees elected Laura Nawrocik as President, Carolyn Koslowski as Vice-President, Janet Bickal as Secretary and Ruth Barringer as Treasurer for 2009.



Jim Williams presents Karen Perkins with a certificate of appreciation in memory of Emory Perkins. A dedicated volunteer and supporter of the society, Emory was often seen taking photos at society events.



## Lawrence History Month Proclamation

WHEREAS, the Township of Lawrence, established in 1697 and incorporated in 1798, takes great pride in its long and storied history that has been preserved for more than 300 years; and

WHEREAS, Lawrence Township has many historical homes listed on the National Register of Historic Places, with the owners taking extreme care to preserve and protect the historic integrity of these magnificent and meaningful structures; and

WHEREAS, formerly known as Maidenhead, the Township was the center of much activity during the Revolutionary War with George Washington traveling what is now known as Route 206, which is now a National Historic Site Scenic Roadway, to take command of the Continental Army in Cambridge, Massachusetts; and

WHEREAS, on January 2, 1777, Col. Edward Hand's riflemen slowed the British Army's advance with a skirmish at the Shabakunk Creek thus allowing for the safe departure of Gen. Washington and his troops from the City of Trenton; and

WHEREAS, Lawrence Township is home to the world-famed Maidenhead Academy established in 1810, later changing its name to The Lawrenceville School after the Town's name was changed in 1816 in honor of Captain James Lawrence, naval hero of the War of 1812.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Pamela H. Mount, Mayor of the Township of Lawrence, on behalf of the Township Council do hereby proclaim the month of October to be

### LAWRENCE HISTORY MONTH

In conjunction with the anniversary of the birth on October 1, 1781 of James Lawrence and to encourage the residents of the Township of Lawrence to visit the many historical sites located within its borders and to view the Lawrence History Collection at the Lawrence Headquarters Branch of the Mercer County Library System located on Route 1 and Darrah Lane and celebrate the 300 years of our vibrant history.

Proclaimed: February 22, 2009

## Join the Lawrence Historical Society!

Join the society today or renew your membership! Members receive the society newsletter, and notice and discounts of society events. The society is a non-profit, charitable organization. Membership fees are tax deductible.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Tel (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

Street: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Student/Senior (62+)	\$5
Individual	\$15
Family	\$35
Business/Patron	\$50
Lifetime	\$250
Benefactor	\$500

Mail to:  
Lawrence Historical Society  
PO Box 6025  
Lawrenceville, NJ 08648

I am enclosing a special contribution to commemorate:

## From the Gift Store

T-shirts - \$8 child sizes, \$10 adult sizes  
Sweatshirts - \$20  
Baseball hat - \$8  
Apron - \$10  
Notecards (5) - \$5  
Canal House mugs - \$2  
Tricorne Hats - \$5  
Coloring Book - \$2  
Brearley House Drawing - \$10  
D&R Canal book - \$20  
Tercentennial Lawrence History book - \$10  
Maidenhead Minute book - \$5  
Bridgetender's Boy by Linda Barth -  
Paperback, \$10 Hardcover, \$20  
Burning Answers by Chris Lahoda - \$21  
Repro. of antique British map - \$15  
Crossroads of the American  
Revolution guide book - \$5

*Places in Time* is published three times a year by the Lawrence Historical Society. Back issues and color editions of our award winning newsletter are available at the LHS website—[www.TheLHS.org](http://www.TheLHS.org).

Contributors for this issue: Rina Banerjee (editor), Jim Williams (photographer), Laura Nawrocik (webmaster), Janet Bickal. We can be contacted at the following address: [webmaster@thelhs.org](mailto:webmaster@thelhs.org)

The Lawrence Historical Society  
P.O. Box 6025  
Lawrenceville, N.J. 08648

**Return Service Requested**



Renew on-line at  
[www.TheLHS.org](http://www.TheLHS.org)