

Places In Time

LAWRENCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FALL 2014

Lawrence History Month Events – 2014

Saturday, October 4th

Brearley House open for free tours, 10:00-Noon

Sunday, October 5th

Community Day, Village Park, 1:00-5:00. The event will also mark the publication release of the NJ 350 History Series funded by a grant from the Mercer County Cultural & Heritage Commission.

Tuesday, October 7th

Unveiling of township history display in municipal building, 6:15 p.m. Funded by a grant from the Lawrence Township Community Foundation

Sunday, October 12th

Annual Mary Tanner Lecture

Dan Druckenbrod, Associate Professor of Environmental Science, Rider University

“Rediscovering Aldo Leopold's Big Woods: 100 years of environmental history in Lawrenceville”

Rider University, Sweigart Hall, Room 115, 2:00 p.m.

Aldo Leopold, one of America's foremost ecologists and environmental philosophers, spent 1904-1905 as a student at the Lawrenceville School where he explored the surrounding countryside. In his writings, Leopold relates detailed observations of the natural history of Lawrenceville, including a hand-drawn map of fields, forests, and streams.

Notably, Leopold referred to the woods west of Rider University as the Big Woods. Tree-rings recently collected by Rider University students confirm this interpretation and show that a few trees precede even the Civil War. This presentation will discuss Leopold's writings and how our local environment has changed over the ensuing century.

Sunday, October 19th

Brearley House open for free tours, 2:00-4:00

Tuesday, October 21st

Brearley House open for special lunchtime free tours, 11:30-1:30

Wednesday, October 22nd

Lecture

Dennis Waters, Lawrence Township Historian

“The Street Where You Live: How Lawrence Became a Suburb 1900-2000”

Lawrence Headquarters Branch of the Mercer County Library System, 7:00 p.m.

Lawrence Township Historian Dennis Waters reprises his talk from the 2013 annual meeting of the Lawrence Historical Society. Join us to learn how the Lawrence of 1900 became the Lawrence of now - and hear the fascinating stories behind many of our town's best-known neighborhoods.

Halloween Flashback by Brooke Hunter

The last Halloween I dressed up was as the teenage mutant ninja turtle Donatello in my senior year of high school. That was 1989. Flash-forward to mid-August 2014 and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* is #1 at the Hollywood box office. The new TMNT film will undoubtedly launch a resurgence of turtle power this Halloween just as the *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise and blockbuster action/superhero films have sparked past trends. According to the National Retail Federation, the most popular Halloween costumes have not changed much in the past few decades—superheroes and princesses have dominated. But how do early 21st century costumes compare to those from one hundred years ago?

Most Popular Costumes in 2013

10. Spiderman
9. Superman
8. Animal
7. Pirate
6. Vampire
5. Zombie
4. Action / Superhero (other than Superman, Spiderman or Batman)
3. Princess
2. Batman
1. Witch

Since no equivalent national statistics exist for the early 1900s, I'm relying on an article from the *Trenton Evening Times* about a party held in Lawrence Township in 1914 to gather evidence about the era's popular costumes. The party was hosted by Taylor O. Cook, then 21 years old, at his parent's home on Main St. The house was "elaborately decorated with pumpkins, cornstalks and autumn leaves. All lights throughout the house were pumpkin heads." Hildebrecht's catered the event serving the "the regular Hallowe'en menu" at midnight. Entertainments included dancing, cards and games. Halloween costume or masquerade parties became popular for children and adults in the U.S. during the early 20th century. Trick-or-treating was not the custom

until the 1930s. Below Cook's guests and their costumes are listed (regrouped by type but retaining separate lists for male & female from the original newspaper article). Can you spot an ancestor among the party-goers?

Popular Costumes in 1914

Girls:

Anna Dunnigan, Pierretta
 Ruth Applegate, Yama Yama
 Gertrude Weller, Fairy
 Ruth Brokaw, Pink lady
 Eliza Thropp, Dutch girl
 Eliza Quick, Dutch girl
 Ethel Brokaw, Spanish girl
 Jessie Mackenzie, Princeton girl
 Annabel Hennessey, Little girl
 Helen Kline, Puritan
 Martha Eldridge, Martha Washington
 Mary Hennessey, Country school teacher
 Marguerite Ribsam, Pumpkin

Boys:

Clarence J. Steffen, Pierrot
 Clarence Eldridge, Yama Yama
 Kenneth Mackenzie, Yama Yama
 John Blake, Clown
 Jack Wells, Clown
 Harold Brooks, Buster Brown
 Taylor O. Cook, Southern gentleman
 Henry Cotts, Farmer
 Charles Brakley, Motorist
 Joseph Thropp, Club man
 Milton Stevens, Football player
 George Wistner, George Washington

Most of the 1914 costumes are recognizable and some still in vogue, but no direct overlap exists with the top ten from 2013. The costumes in 1914 appear less scary (no witches, blood-sucking vampires, or walking dead) and more realistic (fairy excepted). Historical costumes were more prevalent then. And those named Martha and George clearly felt an obligation to dress up as our nation's founding mother and father. As some looked to the past for ideas, others drew from contemporary life. As a

motorist, Charles Brakley sported a cutting-edge costume. Henry Ford began the mass production of cars in 1903. Sales for the “Big Three”—Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler—soared as automobiles became more affordable, practical, and reliable. National vehicle registration rose from 8,000 in 1900 to 7.5 million by 1920. The costume choices also reveal the traditional gender roles of the period—football player or club man vs. schoolteacher or “fill-in-the-blank” girl. Since Princeton University did not admit women as undergraduates until 1969, a “Princeton girl” could only be a girlfriend and not a student in 1914.

However, the most popular costume was worn by both sexes. Seven of the revelers came as clowns making it the clear winner one hundred years ago. Yama Yama, Pierrot and Pierretta all referred to a particular clown costume style—black & white satin suit, cone-shaped hat and black & white make-up. While Hollywood drives costume choices today, Broadway served that role first. People did not even have to attend the theater to experience the shows as popular songs were also played at home using sheet music or on a Victrola. “The Yama Yama Man” was a comical song performed in Pierrot clown costume as shown on the sheet music cover for *The Three Twins* (1908) pictured. Ruth Brokaw’s pink lady costume provides another example of Broadway’s influence. *The Pink Lady* was a smash hit musical performed at the New Amsterdam Theater in 1911 that sparked a craze for “pink lady” drinks (gin, grenadine and egg white) and fashions (Think *Hello, Dolly!*, not *Grease*).

One more thing is clear: comics have consistently inspired Halloween costumes over the years though the characters have changed A LOT from Buster Brown to Batman. Richard Felton Outcault created the Buster Brown comic strip in 1902. The character as shown is well-known for his pageboy haircut, smart attire and dog, Tige. His clothing (belted suit jacket, knickerbocker pants, floppy necktie & round hat) believe it or not reflected the height of boys’ fashion at the time. Like many modern comic legends Buster Brown gained greater fame through radio and tv productions as well as advertising for the Brown Shoe Company.

So if you, your kids or a friend want to go retro this Halloween, consider the clown or one of the other costumes worn by a Lawrence resident one hundred years ago.



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Return Service Requested



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