

# ATLANTIC HERITAGE

Newsletter of the Atlantic County Historical Society

SUMMER 2026

## Dear, just stand up straight...and dance..

by Cindy Mason-Purdie

A group of local women of varying ages sat around one evening recently in a living room in Somers Point, gathered for the purpose of recalling how they had been impacted by a teacher; specifically a teacher of dance. From the conversations I overheard it would seem that impact included “being significantly nurtured” by this teacher.

In 1950, professional dancer Jeanette Garrette opened two dance studios, one in Brigantine NJ and one on Shore Road in Linwood, NJ. She had decided to put down roots after touring professionally for almost 20 years (yet she was only 32 years old.) How did this woman born in Chicago and raised in Canada find her way to Atlantic County, New Jersey? It was an extraordinary path.

Jeanette’s American born father George was a theatrical manager and producer of shows and musicals on the Canadian vaudeville circuit from Halifax to Vancouver and back again. A typical show might include some (or all!) of the following: comedic skits, scenes from plays, a musical act, acrobats, trained animals, jugglers, ballet dancers, a lecture, and even a short film. From infancy Jeanette was thrust into this theatrical pageantry and by 4 years of age she was onstage. Along the way she keenly picked up skills and performance techniques from the adult entertainers, especially in dance where she showed an early aptitude.

Jeanette’s formal dance training began with Florence Rogge, a ballet dancer and teacher. Florence danced as well as directing stage shows at the Capitol Theatre in Montreal (Her sister Hattie did the costumes) and the Uptown Theatre in Toronto. From time to time she also toured other Canadian theatres with Russian ballet dancer Leon Leonidoff. By the time Jeanette was five years old through her training with Rogge she was accomplished enough to accept featured roles in musicals



Garrette at 7, in Canada

Continued on page 4

# Events and Happenings

## Program Logistics

### RISLEY HOMESTEAD

8 Virginia Avenue  
(near 400 block of Shore Rd)  
Northfield, NJ



Saturdays & Sundays, 11am – 4pm

## Program Description

The [Risley Homestead](#) is one of two 18th century houses in Atlantic County individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places and was home to many generations of Risley oystermen. The ACHS received the Homestead and its furnishings by bequest from Virginia Risley Stout in 1989. The Homestead is open Saturday & Sunday for individual and small group guided tours. Contact ACHS for details about large groups.

## Yard Sale

Saturday, June 6<sup>th</sup> - 8:00am – 2:00pm  
(Rain date, June 13<sup>th</sup>)

and

Saturday, Sept. 19<sup>th</sup> - 8:00am – 2:00pm  
(Rain date, September 26<sup>th</sup>)

Many items for sale,  
including extra Library books.

Risley Homestead  
8 Virginia Avenue  
(near 400 block-Shore Rd)  
Northfield, NJ

Saturday, October 17, 2026, 11:30am

Crab Trap Restaurant  
2 Broadway, Somers Point  
Cost: \$32.00/per person

**ACHS ANNUAL LUNCHEON** Members and the general public are invited. Following the installation of the nominees to the governing Board, “The “Bringing History to Life Award” will be presented. **Members will vote on nominees to the 2027-2028 Governing Board at this time. Contact ACHS to purchase tickets. Check Facebook or the ACHS website for more info.**



### ATLANTIC COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

907 Shore Road  
Somers Point

Saturdays: JULY 18<sup>th</sup> & AUGUST 15<sup>th</sup>  
*Inside & outside ACHS.*



## SAVE THE DATE!!



## HOLIDAY SWEET SALE

Saturday  
December 19<sup>th</sup>  
12:00pm – 3:00pm  
Atlantic County Historical Society  
907 Shore Road  
Somers Point

### Need to Contact Us?

Phone: (609) 927-5218 or

Email: [ACHSinfo@comcast.net](mailto:ACHSinfo@comcast.net)

Follow us on Instagram, Facebook or on our  
website [www.AtlanticCountyHistoricalSocietynj.org](http://www.AtlanticCountyHistoricalSocietynj.org)

### Newsletter Editor, Layout & Graphics:

Ellen Hyatt

### Contributors to this Issue:

Sid Parker, Cindy Mason-Purdie, Norm Goos & Lynn Wood,

*The Atlantic County Historical Society has received special project grants from the Atlantic County Office of Cultural & Heritage Affairs.*

## Member News

# Welcome

### NEW MEMBERS

Sharon Martin, *Cherry Hill, NJ*  
Patrick Tandy, *Timonium MD*  
Johanna Coleman, *Absecon, NJ*  
Joe Milano, *Margate, NJ*  
Thomas J. Camp, *Absecon, NJ*

### *In Memoriam*

W. Fred Reitmeyer, Jr.



## REPRIEVE!!

A second opinion revealed that our 37-year old boiler was a Rolls Royce version when it was installed, it has been properly maintained, it is in fine working condition and, most importantly, **parts are readily available**. We shall therefore keep the “old girl” and turn our attention to two other **not** inexpensive matters.

The message board in front of our building has succumbed to the ravages of time and weather and we plan to replace it with an LED sign which can easily be changed by the use of an app on our phones. No more changing letters and numbers in cold, wet, snow, rain and wind.

We also plan to remove our ancient pull-down screen and dying projector in the auditorium and replace them with a 73" or 84" monitor which, with the appropriate cables, etc., will accommodate the now-prevalent use of laptop power point presentations by current program speakers.

Progress ain't cheap! We hope you will help ameliorate the damage to our treasury.



## Donations

### *Friends \$1 - \$49*

Jim & Lu Leeds, Thomas J. Camp

### *Patrons \$50 - \$249*

David Betterton, Carol Zepfel (for programs),  
Mary Rydzewski

### *Sponsors \$250 - \$1000*

Alan E Kligerman

### Donations for America 250 Celebration

BF Mazzeo, Glenn Insurance Co.,  
Wimberg Family Foundation,  
Ameriprise Financial, D'Arcy, Johnson & Day  
Lawyers, Kathy Brady (Fox & Roach),  
Heather M. Clark Family Dentistry,  
Sid Parker, Jim & Beverly Schroeder,  
Carol Zepfel, Rose Ewing, Carol Dotts,  
George McNally, Kathy Fritz,  
Diane Miller & Family, Dale Lonkart,  
Kim Brown, Norman & Marilyn Goos,  
Bushar & Coppola Family,  
Robert Reitmeyer (Bayshore Decoys),  
Susan Reitmeyer

The Atlantic County Historical Society  
will be closed June 6<sup>th</sup>,  
July 4<sup>th</sup> & September 19<sup>th</sup>

OUR REGULAR HOURS ARE:  
Thursday – Saturday: 10:00 – 3:30pm

## Dear, just stand up straight...and dance..*continued...*

throughout Canada. And now she was a bona fide performer, known as the Canadian Shirley Temple.

Reviews of the day attest to her popularity with the audiences. The Ottawa Journal, October 9, 1926: "Little Jeanette Garrette has stopped the show at least once a night at every performance so far. She is a diminutive danseuse who does, naturally and seemingly without effort, intricate steps which still puzzle many a headliner." The Sault Star, Nov 13, 1926: "Jeanette Garrette, described by critics as a "Pint sized premiere danseuse" and a "vest-pocket edition of Pavlova" ... carries her own school teacher with her on the entire transcontinental tour. If you are interested in seeing the extra meaning of "stopping the show" see her dance specialty "A Winter Episode". The applause following it invariably holds up proceedings..."

In 1929, the US stock market crashed and its economic impact on life also reached into Canada. With the closing of its theatrical touring circuit Jeanette's father was out of work. Fortuitously, Jeanette's former teacher Florence Rogge had recently established herself in New York City as the choreographer and ballet mistress at the Roxy Theatre. Jeanette and her mother moved to New York in hope of finding work. The Roxy first opened in 1921 and was the biggest and most ornate theater of the time. At eleven years old, Jeanette was hired as a dancer at the Roxy Theatre, it was her first real paying job but most significantly she was now sole source of her family's support.



The owner of the Roxy Theatre, impresario Roxy Rothafel, decided to build an even bigger and better theatre. Radio City Music Hall opened in 1932 – and on stage as the youngest member of the corps de ballet was Jeanette Garrette. While the job had many perks, e.g. she got to meet and work with many big names in theater, the schedule was physically grueling, especially to her ankles and feet. It often involved multiple daily rehearsals along with the five performances, as America's first permanent corps de ballet nothing was permitted but perfection. After four years she needed a break and chose to leave Radio City stage and seek a great adventure.

At age 18, Jeanette and fellow dancer Portia Porter spent six months touring South America and Cuba with the famous Hermanos Hernandez band. Portia was a unique partner in this adventure, her dance training stretched from ballet to Spanish flamenco. However, one of Portia's most unique talents was as a "matadora" – the first American female credentialed as a bull fighter. For Jeanette this trip was a rare opportunity

to stretch her creativity – creating her own dance routines to Latin music, jazz and even classical guitar. Portia taught her the fancy cape movements used by bull fighters and Jeanette would incorporate them into her dance for the next 20 years.

Upon her return to New York City Jeanette found work dancing in various hotel and nightclub venues which is where the famous theatrical agent William Morris saw her act and signed her in 1941. Back on the road she went. For 10 years she traveled the length and breadth of North America, often opening for famous entertainers. During this period she was often booked to appear in venues in Atlantic

## Dear, just stand up straight...and dance...continued...

City, New Jersey including Babette's nightclub on the Boardwalk and the famous 500 Club where she opened for the likes of Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin.

Apparently Jeanette took a liking to the Atlantic City area and she decided it was time to stop all the touring and set down some roots. She mentions in an interview that it was when she realized all the other dancers she worked with were 10 years younger. It should also be noted that her father passed away in 1950 and she took over care of her mother. At age 32, Jeanette started her next life chapter.



“Miss Garrette” taught dance for more than 50 years, guiding multiple generations of dancers as well as creating a safe haven for her students and a place for them to grow and to feel seen and heard. And, every one of those students heard her trademark phrase at the beginning of each ballet lesson: “*Dear, stand up straight, stomach into the backbone...*”!

She eventually married another Canadian, Fred Porter, who had been a childhood friend. Though she did not give birth to her own children – she certainly considered her dancers - her “girls”- as family and made herself available to them for nurturing, as well as lessons in dance and life. She loved entertaining and held semi-annual parties for “the girls”, a tradition continued, as often as possible, by her former students to this day. An overheard comment at the evening gathering of some of her former students: “*She filled a gap in my life, she gave me confidence to succeed, and she let me know I was good enough.*” And this, Jeanette Garrette did with the grace and tenacity that defined her remarkable life.

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## EXTRA!! EXTRA!! READ ALL ABOUT IT!!

Over the last several months there have been a number of very important projects which were kicked off and which reached, or are rapidly approaching, completion. There may be in this, or in the Fall newsletter, additional details of these projects; but here, more or less in a nutshell, is where we are.

**NEW WEBSITE:** [achsnj.org](http://achsnj.org) This is certainly much easier and quicker than typing in: [atlanticcountyhistoricalsocietynj.org](http://atlanticcountyhistoricalsocietynj.org). (But if you, or anyone else did, it will link to the new site for the foreseeable future). Our very special, **BIG**, thank you to Life Member, Dennis Steelman, for taking on the total revamping of the site. His next task is training several of us to manage the site. CHECK IT OUT....WE THINK YOU'LL LIKE IT.

The abovenamed Dennis also scanned all the Society's yearbooks from 1948 through 2025 and put them on flash drives, which are available for \$25., plus \$5. mailing. The drives are searchable in PDF format and include a table of contents. Look on our website under Publications and view a sample of these,.

Not quite finished with his Herculean efforts, Dennis is also working with our main bank so that dues, donations and purchases can be paid via credit cards. Also, our PayPal account will be reactivated.

Our Society, in conjunction with other local societies and Atlantic County Government, sponsored an America 250 event. See photos on page 6, and read more on our website.

Enclosed with this newsletter, at least for members in our immediate area, is a reprintable page of tickets for the Shore Diner in Northfield. Why?, you ask. For several years, the owners have mailed us a monthly check for \$15. - \$25. representing their donation based on diners' tabs. Present the ticket to the cashier when paying; weekdays we receive 10% of the tab and weekends 20%. New Jerseyans *luv* their diners! Enjoy great food and make a donation to us. Bon appetit!

# REVOLUTIONARY WAR PENSION APPLICATIONS FOR ATLANTIC COUNTY MILITIA

Norm Goos, Librarian, who spearheaded this very large and time-consuming project (almost nine months), has stated that the manual of almost 400 pages will be substantially completed by mid- June. What will remain to be done is to get a “per copy” *print* price and also a price to make *flash drive* efile copies. Then these formats will be offered for sale, even while recognizing that there will be a limited market for the manual.

The applications for each of the 41 Atlantic County men (living in this part of then-Gloucester County) will contain copies of the original affidavits from the US Archives together with a transcription of each. There will also be a 1778 map with a numbered index showing where, and when, the militia battalion fought.

The “unofficial unveiling” of the manual will take place at the annual dinner of the S.A.R. on June 11<sup>th</sup> with many of the D.A.R. ladies present who actually worked on the transcriptions. It has been a mammoth task. Special thanks also for an anonymous donation to cover much of the printing costs. Listed below, however, are ALL (we hope) of our Society members and friends who worked **SO** hard on the transcriptions and proofreading.

Many thanks to: Colleen Basile, Joan Berkey, Megan Ernst, Wayne Ernst, Kathy Fritz, Marilyn Goos, Norman Goos, Barbi Harris, Susan Karibjanian, Tom Kinsella, Dale Lonkart, Jim Mason, Geraldine McGowan, Diane Miller, Sid Parker, Heather Perez, Debbie Polk, Bill Purdie, Cindy Mason-Purdie, Kathy Quinn, Paul Schopp, Judith Schwartz, Joy Tucci, Kathleen Watkins and Carol Zepfel.

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## Happy 250<sup>th</sup> USA!

The Atlantic County Historical Society presented "Honoring Our Heritage, Celebrating the 250th Anniversary of the United States of America" on Saturday May 2 from 10-2 at the Atlantic County Park in Estell Manor, NJ. Several participants including crafters, Eagle Scout Xavier Shea, Re-enactors sharing stories from the past, other historical societies, Sandpipers Pipes and Drums of Atlantic County, The 'Sea Dogs' displays and sea shanties, food trucks and colonial games for kids.

*photos by Lynn Wood*



# Then & Now!

By Lynn Wood

*Then & Now* is a regular feature in our Newsletter, featuring photos from the ACHS collection.



Early photo (above) shows the home (and farm) of Celia Steelman Champion and Otto Murray Champion. The home was built circa 1879. It was knocked down, foundation saved, and the brick building for Atlantic County Historical Museum (below) was built in 1968 which stands proudly today. The cinder block building to the right remains.

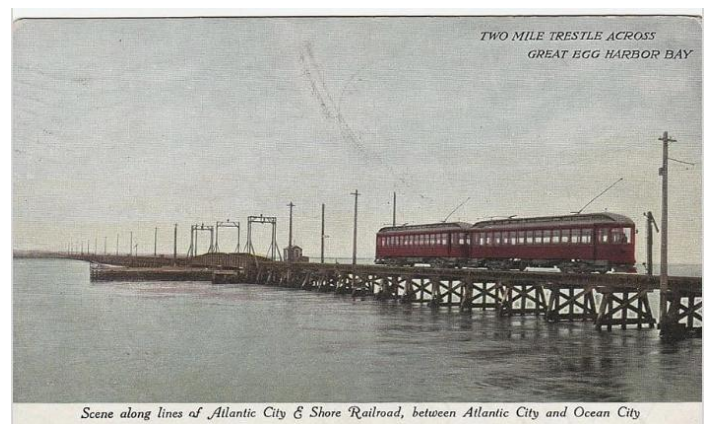


*Early photo courtesy Joe Champion.  
Today photo courtesy Lynn Wood*

# SHORE FAST LINE



Bill Elwell, adjunct professor of History at Monmouth University, gave a terrific power point presentation on the history of the Shore Fast Line to a crowd at the Atlantic County Historical Society on April 13<sup>th</sup>.



The Shore Fast Line was an electric interurban railroad running from Atlantic City, NJ to Ocean City, NJ by way of the mainland communities of Pleasantville, Northfield, Linwood and Somers Point. The line ran from 1907 until 1948. The company that operated the Shore Fast Line was called Atlantic City and Shore Railroad.

## Atlantic County Historical Society Governing Board

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**ATLANTIC COUNTY  
HISTORICAL  
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**ATLANTIC COUNTY  
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*Where Atlantic County History Comes to Life*



**Our Mission:**

- To collect and preserve historical materials exemplifying the events, places, and lifestyles of the people of Atlantic County and southern New Jersey.
- To encourage the study of history and genealogy.
- To provide historical and genealogical information to our membership and the general public.