

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE ASBURY PARK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**JOIN UP OR
RENEW YOUR
MEMBERSHIP!**

See Page 4 for Details!

*Where the Past
Meets the Future*

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Many Voices, Many Stories...150 Years

The APHS...and YOU...team up for the Asbury Park Story Project!

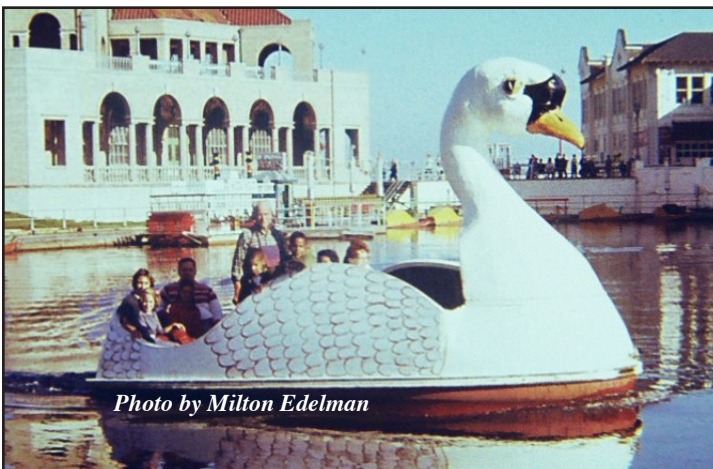


Photo by Milton Edelman

There are blissful memories of childhood summers...as well as tales of surviving and thriving in the face of constant challenges. Stories that have been shared through the generations...and first-person accounts that bear witness to the day's headlines. Stories of everyday lives and extraordinary people; stories of tragedy and triumph; stories that capture, each in their own way, the many-faceted experience and the spirit of Asbury Park.

Whether your family roots go back for decades in our seaside city; whether you've kept Asbury Park in your heart as your path led elsewhere; whether you're one of the latest new arrivals who have been drawn to its unique energy...or even if you've never lived a day of your life here...you've got a story to tell, and the Asbury Park Historical Society would love to hear it.

As we approach the 150th anniversary of Asbury Park's 1871 founding by James A. Bradley, the Historical Society is putting out the call to any and all past or present city residents, any seasonal guests and frequent visitors, anyone of any age or background, to take part in **The Asbury Park Story Project**. Beginning in the fall of 2020 and continuing throughout the "sesquicentennial" year of 2021, we'll be collecting your stories, sharing them with our membership, and posting select submissions to our newly redesigned website at aphistoricalociety.org.

Near the end of 2021, plans are to host a live Asbury Park Stories event, during which many of our contributing storytellers will be invited to share their submissions (a Story Project committee will be selecting featured entries and gifts will be awarded to the stories judged most outstanding). In the event that in-person indoor gatherings are still not advisable, an alternate plan would call for a publication compiling the Best of the Story Project.

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The Stephen Crane House marks a silver milestone

The announcement that Stephen Crane — the 19th century storyteller, poet and journalist whose onetime home serves as our Historical Society headquarters — will be inducted this year into the **New Jersey Hall of Fame** coincides with another milestone of interest here in Asbury Park. The year 2020 marks a quarter century since the house at 508 Fourth Avenue in Asbury Park was rescued from abandonment and years of neglect, through the efforts and vision of **Thomas and Regina Hayes**. The New Jersey Natural Gas executive and his wife purchased the derelict property (including its rear carriage house) for the rock-bottom price of \$7,500 in 1995 — on the recommendation of fellow Garden Club member **Doug Mauro**, who knew of the old cottage's association with the 19th century author Stephen Crane.

From there began the labor-intensive (and still very much ongoing) process of rehabilitating the 1878 residence once known as Arbutus Cottage...a project that would see the Hayes family first open it to the public as **The Stephen Crane House** in 1996. As a museum dedicated to the literary legacy of the author who wrote the classic American novel **The Red Badge of Courage**...as well as a venue for arts events, community meetings and more...the Crane House would transition to the stewardship of **Frank D'Alessandro**, and in 2015 the retired educator would donate the the State and National Historic Site to his fellow trustees of the Asbury Park Historical Society.

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Thomas Hayes c. 1999 • Photo by Milton Edelman

“Signs of the times” illuminate local history for a new era

by Susan Rosenberg

RAINBOW ROOM sign
*Asbury Park Transportation Ctr.,
Main St. at Cookman Ave.*

For decades, it stood at Ocean and Second Avenues — emerging as a premier hotel in the 1930s, and reborn as an even grander destination following a 1940 fire that decimated the adjacent Steeplechase Park. Boasting 100 rooms and three bars, the **Albion Hotel** was perhaps best known for its 3,000 square foot ballroom, the “Rainbow Room.”

By the 1970’s, however, the city’s fallen fortunes as a vacation resort took their toll on the Albion, and the 14-foot metal and neon “Rainbow Room” sign that had once signaled nightly dancing and popular entertainment, went dark.

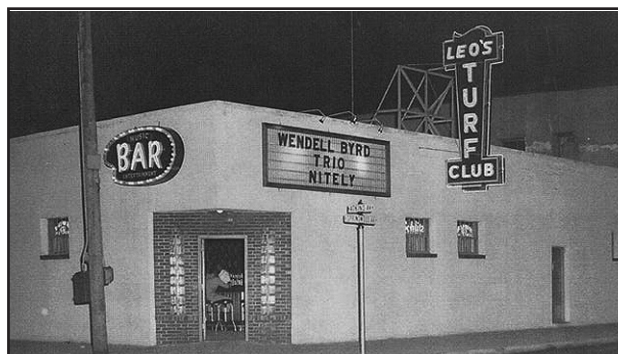
In 1981, **Carol Torre**, **Camille Neto** and **Kay San Filippo** were looking to establish a gay-friendly establishment where those who were “out” could feel comfortable. The three partners bought and refurbished the dilapidated Albion Hotel, re-opening the landmark building’s doors in June 1982 under the name **Key West**.

At the Key West, women of the area’s lesbian community bonded through myriad activities, established meaningful friendships, and staked out a popular scene at the hotel’s Over the Rainbow disco, with the grand Rainbow Room opening for special occasions and celebrations.

While the region’s gay community was making a considerable investment in the rebirth of Asbury Park, the city’s waterfront was the subject of an ambitious redevelopment plan. Eminent domain would cause the doors of the Key West to close on New Year’s Day, 1990. The Rainbow Room sign went into storage at the Public Works yard, and the Albion met the wrecking ball in 2001.

In 2012, in homage to the LGBTQ community that had played such a pivotal role in the city’s remarkable comeback, the Asbury Park Historical Society joined city councilwoman **Sue Henderson** and other local officials, in an initiative to recover and restore the iconic link to the past. Both the APHS and the city’s LGBTQ community conducted fundraising efforts for the restoration project, which took two years and cost \$15,000.

The fully-functioning Rainbow Room sign can be seen inside the **James J. Howard Transportation Center** on Main Street, where it was dedicated by Mayor **Ed Johnson** on June 3, 2012.



TURF CLUB bar sign
*Asbury Park Senior Center,
1201 Springwood Ave. at Atkins Ave.*

Between the early years of the 20th century and the summer of 1970, the celebrated club scene on Springwood Avenue was a mecca that nurtured such future music greats as Duke Ellington and Count Basie, producing breakout stars of ragtime, jazz, gospel and R&B, and attracting some of the biggest touring acts in the business.

The **Turf Club** was one such hotspot. First estab-

lished in the 1930s at 1125 Springwood Avenue, it became “Leo’s Turf Club” when new owner **Leo Karp** hung his familiar bold sign outside in 1948. In 1955, Karp moved the building to its present location, 1200 Springwood Avenue at Atkins Avenue — and for the next fifteen years, (Leo’s) Turf Club showcased nationally-known jazz and R&B acts along with local artists, furthering its robust reputation.

In 1969, Karp sold the business to **Wayland Howard “Wakie” Goldston**, who renamed it “Wakie’s Show Place.” By December 1969, the nightclub became known simply as “The Club” — and while the venue was slightly damaged during the July 1970 uprising, it continued booking music for several years before giving way to a market and eventual abandonment.

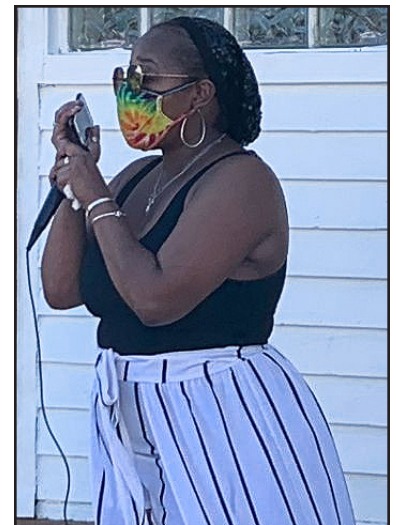
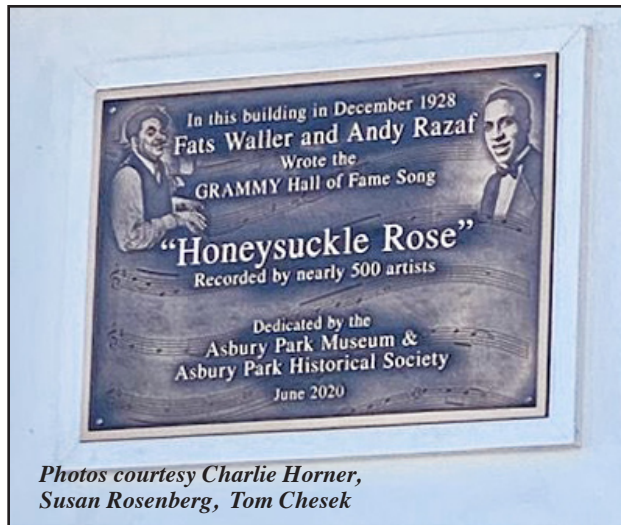
Don Stine, then president of the Asbury Park Historical Society, had the foresight to salvage the distinctive “Music-Bar-Entertainment” sign, and safeguard it in storage. Describing the 8’x4’ metal artifact as “one of the last-remaining iconic symbols of the West Side’s glory days,” Stine made a formal fundraising appeal to help pay the anticipated \$10,000 restoration costs. When Kevin White of Allied Environmental Signage learned of the effort, he volunteered the services of his Farmingdale-based company to fully restore the sign’s neon and electric lights.

The work in progress was first displayed to the public at Monmouth University’s Pollak Gallery — and on June 18, 2015, the fully restored Turf Club sign became the centerpiece of a landmark exhibit about Asbury Park’s West Side music legacy, curated by **Charles and Pam Horner** for the Monmouth County Historical Association Museum in Freehold. Legendary sax player Cliff Johnson, then 89, provided the soundtrack as the signifier of West Side history was formally lit up for the first time after four decades.

The sign now hangs for all to view in the lobby of the **Asbury Park Senior Center** at 1201 Springwood Avenue, directly across the street from the old Turf Club building. Meanwhile, artists working with the Asbury Park African American Music Project and Springwood Avenue Rising have recently adorned the old club with murals paying homage to the West Side music scene.

Thanks to the Asbury Park Historical Society’s mission to preserve and promote our city’s amazing history, these two iconic signs each serve in their own way to remind us of those who “kept the lights on” during the challenging times of the past — and to illuminate Asbury Park’s legacy of pride and accomplishment for a new generation.

A song is born...and remembered anew...in Asbury Park



Photos courtesy Charlie Horner, Susan Rosenberg, Tom Chesek

It's a genuine classic of the Great American Songbook; a Grammy Hall of Fame standard that's been performed by more than 500 artists, ranging from Ella Fitzgerald, Lena Horne, Louis Armstrong and Nat "King" Cole, to Tony Bennett, Robert Palmer, Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, and Harpo Marx. And it was at 119 Atkins Avenue in Asbury Park, NJ, where in December 1928 the great **Thomas "Fats" Waller** joined his frequent songwriting partner **Andy Razaf** at a rented piano, inside what was then the home of Razaf's mother. On the evening of July 9, the Historical Society joined the team from **The Asbury Park Museum and Springwood Avenue Rising** to formally recognize and dedicate what is now the **AME Bethel Church Ford Center** as the birthplace of the song "Honeysuckle Rose."

The invitation-only event represented the culmination of years of intensive research and hard work by APHS members **Pamela and Charles Horner** (left), the music scholars/ collectors/ archivists whose recently published **Springwood Avenue Harmony, Vol. 1** traces the formidable musical legacy of our "little but loud" city's West Side music scene. In addition to Charlie Horner, the masked speakers included APHS officers **Kay Harris** and

Eileen Chapman, city councilwoman **Yvonne Clayton**, journalist and community organizer **Michelle Gladden**, and Bethel pastor **Rev. Danielle Hunter**, whose Ford Center building now serves the community's needs as the Bethel Food Pantry and Clothing Closet. After an official unveiling of the custom bronze plaque designed by **Beth Woolley**, the ceremony climaxed with a performance of "Honeysuckle Rose" by vocalist songsmith **Khadijah Mohammed** (right). A followup reception was hosted at the Ford Center's cool green backyard, and Interfaith Neighbors' adjoining **Kula Urban Farm** — and everyone in attendance played an important part in the success of the proceedings; socializing and celebrating with restraint, respect, and regard to the well-being of their friends and colleagues.

The "Honeysuckle Rose" plaque featuring likenesses of Waller and Razaf remains on permanent display at the Bethel AME Ford Center — located at 119 Atkins Avenue, across from Springwood Park, right next door to the Urban Farm greenhouse, and just steps from Kula Cafe AND the onetime site of Leo Karp's Turf Club, newly decorated with jazz-themed mural art by a multi-generational crew of local artists.

IN MEMORIAM: Andrew L. Skokos, Gertrude Harris Sealo



Photo by Susan Rosenberg



Photo courtesy Kay Harris

All of us at the Asbury Park Historical Society wish to extend our deepest condolences to our trustees Susan and Andy W. Skokos, whose son **Andrew L. Skokos** passed away on May 15 from COVID-related complications at the age of 52. A self-employed painting contractor who resided in Tinton Falls, "Andy Boy" (pictured at right in 2018, with then-APHS president Don Stine at left) died at Jersey Shore University Medical Center in Neptune. Our love goes out to our organization's treasurer Andy W. and our membership chair Susan, as well as the entire Skokos family, and details will follow on a memorial planting or other observance at the Society's Stephen Crane House headquarters.

As the widow of the city's first African American elected official (Dr. Lorenzo Harris Jr.), daughter-in-law of the legendary artist and activist Lorenzo Harris, and mother of four children (including former city councilwoman Sharon Harris and APHS president Kay Harris, pictured at left), **Gertrude Harris Sealo** was a link to generations of Asbury Park history. Born in South Carolina in 1921, the retired educator in the city's school system passed away on July 5, just one month shy of her 99th birthday. A member of St. Augustine's Episcopal Church and numerous volunteer organizations, the Howard University graduate traveled the world, attained numerous honors, and remained an active participant in community life.

Public Programs from the Historical Society

As has been the case since March of this year, the ongoing public health emergency in the state of New Jersey has necessitated the cancellation of all public indoor events and larger outdoor gatherings. It's a measure that has sidelined the Historical Society's slate of activities at the Stephen Crane House and the Asbury Park Public Library, as well as the annual **Art on the Boardwalk** show planned for early August and other events at which the Society has traditionally maintained a presence.

In addition, the Historical Society has cancelled plans to host the annual **Holiday Lights NYC Tour** in December, and will not be offering our annual **50/50 Raffle** this year. That said, there are still several projects

in the works designed to keep our members engaged in preserving and promoting the architectural, cultural and social history of our city, such as the Story Project described in this newsletter, and our special **AP150 Wall Calendar** going on sale in the fall.

Watch this space also for news and updates on several public arts events at the Stephen Crane House which may materialize as we head into 2021. Follow the APHS on social media, check in regularly to our all-new website, or join our email list, in order to get the latest details on these and other offerings to our members, friends and neighbors.

Asbury Park Story Project *Cont. from page 1*

Submitted stories can be as simple as a photo with caption or a brief impression...and as lengthy as you see fit. They can take the form of a recollection shared by a family member, or a memory (of a childhood visit, a school-days experience, a favorite local place or character, a vivid incident from your adult life) that sums up Asbury Park for you personally.

Check our official website, the Asbury Park Historical Society Facebook page (as well as other Asbury-related pages), or The Coaster newspaper for details on when and where to submit your Asbury Park Stories. They're your stories, your voice...and each one of them is an important part of our beloved city's "roller-coaster ride" through an eventful 150 years!

Also in the works for the anniversary year of 2021 is a 12-month **AP150 Wall Calendar**, featuring priceless images of the city's 150-year journey and highlights of more than 200 significant dates in the city's timeline... as well as special additional materials on the history of the APHS, and the early "pre-history" of the place that would come to be known as Asbury Park. A great seasonal gift idea, the calendar goes on sale this fall at select retail outlets, as well as at aphistoricalociety.org. Check our official website for updates and ordering information!

Stephen Crane House *Continued from page 1*

While plans were underway to honor the 25th anniversary of the house's rebirth here in 2020, pandemic-related restrictions on indoor gatherings necessitated their postponement. As we look ahead to 2021 — a year that not only marks the 150th anniversary of Asbury Park's founding, but also the 150th birthday of Stephen Crane — there exists the possibility of a salute to the Crane House and its dedicated supporters; an event featuring guest speakers *and* a first look at a new specially produced video on the life and times of Crane, created in partnership with the nonprofit **Asbury Park TV** and designed for the benefit of schools and other large-group visitors.

The 12th annual induction ceremony of the New Jersey Hall of Fame will be a virtual affair this year; a one-hour pre-recorded program that will be broadcast Sunday, October 18 on TV, radio and social media platforms throughout New Jersey (visit njhalloffame.org for updated details). In the meantime, individuals and small groups are once again welcome to stop by The Stephen Crane House for Open House hours, every Sunday from 12 to 2 pm. All visitors are asked to wear a face mask (gloves, wipes and hand sanitizer will be available), and additional tour opportunities are available by appointment. Call 732-361-0189, or contact The Stephen Crane House on Facebook.

Check out our new, improved website!

If you haven't yet checked the fully revamped **Asbury Park Historical Society website**, you'll find a lot that's new and exciting, here "Where the Past Meets the Future!" Our new mobile-friendly home on the web offers brand new content, blog posts, historical information, and a special section devoted to our Society headquarters, The Stephen Crane House. Other brand new features include integrated forms and express payment options via Pay-

Pal for easy donations and membership sign-ups — and watch aphistoricalociety.org for the introduction of our online store where you can purchase branded Historical Society merchandise and historical gift items. If you are interested in contributing content to the new site (including submissions to the Asbury Park Story Project), please contact Trustee **Jenny Stine** at jennifer@fortunewebmarketing.com.



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Join up or renew your membership today!

Contact **SUSAN SKOKOS**, membership chair, at skokose@aol.com

Donations accepted via PayPal at aphistoricalociety.org

Call the Stephen Crane House at **732-361-0189**

to schedule a tour...and address correspondence to:

Asbury Park Historical Society, 508 Fourth Ave., Asbury Park, NJ 07712

