

# 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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## A Century and a Half to Remember!



*Historical Society member Celia Morrissette, pictured in her circa 1892 home on Sixth Avenue, is taking the lead in coordinating a city-wide slate of events in honor of the 150th anniversary of Asbury Park's founding. Photo by Susan Rosenberg*

There are those who maintain that Asbury Park was born on March 26, 1874 — the day when the town was incorporated as a borough of Ocean Township, and a date that served as the reference point when the city celebrated its centennial in 1974.

Then there are those who look to March 25, 1897 — the day when Asbury Park became a self-governing city — as the one to remember when planning a birthday celebration. Here at the Historical Society, however, we've concentrated on January 24, 1871 — the day that New York businessman James A. Bradley closed on the purchase of some 500 acres of largely undeveloped seaside property — as the point where it all began. With the year 2021 signifying the 150th anniversary (or *sesquicentennial*) of that 1871 founding, one very busy city resident is stepping up to take the lead, in coordinating an ambitious slate of public-welcome events.

A longtime member and former vice president of the Historical Society, fashion and textile designer **Celia Morrissette** has embraced 2021 as the year in which to celebrate the dynamic, progressive, trail-blazing, diverse and forever fascinating cultural footprint of our "little but loud" City by the Sea. Working from the historic Sixth Avenue home that she shares with husband (and owner of Brooklyn-based Urban Architecture) **Keith Johnson**, Celia has reached out to numerous members of the city's creative,

business, and nonprofit/activist communities, to convene a committee and design a program of events that are scheduled to run through the fall — with the added goal of "positioning Asbury Park as a year-round destination, not strictly as a summer resort."

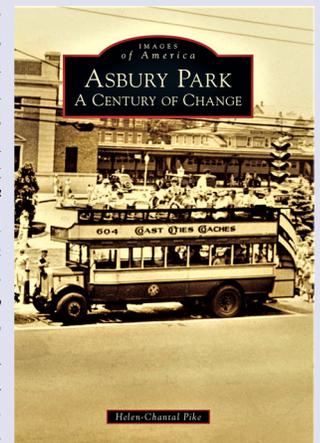
With Asbury Park taking its first cautious steps toward emerging from the lockdowns and limitations of the extended pandemic interlude, a crucial component of the sesquicentennial celebration would play to our city's greatest cultural legacy and principal export: *music*. In partnership with such nonprofit organizations as the **Asbury Park Music Foundation (APMF)** and **Asbury Park African-American Music Project (AP-AMP)**, Celia has envisioned a series of concert events that touch upon every aspect of the town's rich soundtrack — from the immensely popular boardwalk band concerts of Arthur Pryor in the early 1900s, to the fertile jazz/ gospel/ doo-wop spawning ground of the city's West Side, to the rock and roll bar-band scene that shaped iconic superstar Bruce Springsteen.

Also in the works are a video/ oral history project highlighting the many voices of our diverse community — and a November 2021 City-Wide Birthday Party, in which "all churches, clubs and organizations will be invited to bake and submit a birthday cake" as their custom-crafted contribution to a special Cake Contest.

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### *Helen Pike returns to Asbury, for a June book launch event*

One of Asbury Park's most dedicated chroniclers in words and pictures returns to her favorite seaside city on the evening of June 24, 2021, when author **Helen Chantal Pike** appears for an in-person book launch and signing event keyed to her newest release, *Asbury Park: A Century of Change*. Hosted by the Historical Society at the Asbury Park Public Library, the event will find the author of *Images of America: Asbury Park* and *Asbury Park's Glory Days* offering a slide presentation based on her latest volume from Arcadia Publishing — a tour, told in words and generous pictures, of our community's ever-evolving social, economic and public profile, from its incorporation as a self-governing city through to the sea-changes of the new millennium. Signing copies will be available for purchase at the event, and additional details will be posted to our official website and social media accounts.



## IN MEMORIAM: Ray Sternesky, Vivian Stine

### Remembering Ray Sternesky — friend, family member, and artist who made a colorful splash in the community



**LEFT:** Ray Sternesky is pictured in his oceanside element with Historical Society trustees Dolly Sternesky and Teddy Chomko, during the 2019 edition of the annual Art on the Boardwalk event. **RIGHT:** A series of banners, designed by Ray and celebrating the city's resurgence in the 21st century, hangs on display at the Asbury Park Senior Center on Springwood Avenue. Photos courtesy Dolly Sternesky, Susan Rosenberg

On Tuesday, March 2, our extended Historical Society family experienced a tremendous loss with the passing of **Ray Sternesky**. The veteran artist and husband of APHS trustee **Dolly Sternesky** passed away peacefully at Jersey Shore University Medical Center in Neptune at the age of 85, following a long illness that he navigated with his life-long upbeat attitude. For all who knew him, the Brooklyn native left a significant mark in the seaside city where he made his home in the new century — an impact that lives on in vivid splashes of color and exuberant energy.

Members of the Asbury Park Historical Society are no doubt familiar with Ray's watercolor renderings of such iconic local landmarks as the Carousel House, an image that the painter donated to the organization for use as our logo. Having moved to town in the year 2000 — a time of rebirth, renewal, and resurgence for the renowned resort — Ray and Dolly "quickly embraced their new hometown," in the words of the Sternesky family's tribute. That love affair found one of its greatest manifestations in a series of banners — each one celebrating a different aspect of Asbury Park, as captured in watercolor by Sternesky — that were displayed in some 50 locations throughout the city (a complete set remains on display inside the Senior Center at Springwood and Atkins Avenues).

For many more years going forward, the *very* active retiree and his locally themed paintings were an integral part of **Art on the Boardwalk**, the outdoor fundraiser art show coordinated each summer by APHS trustee **Teddy Chomko**. It was a new chapter in a lifetime of passionate pursuits, for the man born in Houtzdale, PA as the youngest of 10 children on August 7, 1935. Relocating with his family to Brooklyn at an early age, Ray developed a flair for artistic expression that would lead to a 35-year career as a self-employed commercial artist, with major clients (including L'Oreal, Danskin, and the Central Park Conservancy), and a downtown Manhattan studio to which he would commute via his beloved motorcycle.

It was in Brooklyn that Ray met and began his 58 year marriage to Dolly Kenney, with the two inseparable soulmates tying the knot in 1963. The addition of three children (Kenneth, Nancy and Michael) inspired a move to Englewood, NJ for the growing Sternesky clan in 1970 — a place where the dedicated family man could make room for his paintings, his backyard koi pond, his Frank Sinatra records, and his classic automobiles (particularly his prized powder-blue 1967 Corvette Stingray convertible).

With the kids having grown up, Dolly and Ray made the decision to "down-size" and retire to Asbury Park — a place that would continue to inspire Ray, who would spend hours sketching away on the beach or boardwalk

— and who would fine-tune his interest in the watercolor medium by taking classes and entering juried art shows. As the family's obituary tribute described him, Ray was "A veteran who proudly served his country...an amazing portrait in contrast; gentle yet strong, humble yet talented, old school yet progressive, proud yet self deprecating...he was an incredibly unique person who will be deeply missed and always loved."

In addition to his wife and three children, Ray is survived by his five grandchildren (Gabriel, Alina, Lola, Shane, and Quinn) and many friends old and new. The Sternesky family, who have recommended donations to the Asbury Park Historical Society in Ray's name, will be hosting a Memorial Mass in August — and when the Historical Society's art show returns to the Asbury Park waterfront in summertimes to come, it will officially be known as the **Ray Sternesky Art on the Boardwalk** event.

### Vivian Stine, 1917 - 2021

Asbury Park bid farewell to one of its oldest living fans and cheerleaders on April 6, when **Vivian Stine** passed away peacefully at her Ocean Township home, just days after her 104th birthday. An area resident for an amazing 75 years, the mother of former Historical Society president **Don Stine** was described by her granddaughter, APHS trustee **Jennifer Rae Stine**, as "a wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother (to 17 great-grandchildren), community supporter, best friend and all around superhero" who "loved attending (Ballard United Methodist) church, working at the thrift store several days a week, traveling, playing board games, the piano and cards (especially at The Woman's Club in Wanamassa), receiving actual letters in the mail, reading, knitting, crossword puzzles, the hokey-pokey, root beer, ice cream, an occasional beer and a really good eggnog." A witness to — and fully engaged participant in — a grand parade of local history, "Viv" will be remembered always for her love of life and community.



# An “archive-ological” dig through the APHS files

While much of the world maintained a low profile during the ongoing pandemic, certain corners of our historic Stephen Crane House headquarters were buzzing with activity — related not only to the ongoing renovations at the property, but to a long-overdue inventory and cataloguing of the numerous historical materials stored at the house. The Society has been the recipient of many generous donations through the years — of photographs, postcards, brochures, event programs, posters, books, and souvenirs of every sort — and the project is an important step toward our goal of creating a curated archive that can be accessed by researchers, students, journalists and other historical organizations. Here are just a few of the newly “re-discovered” gems from our files — with a reminder that the Asbury Park Historical Society is available to assist the public with inquiries on historical matters, by email ([info@aphistoricalociety.org](mailto:info@aphistoricalociety.org)), phone (732-361-089), or Facebook messaging.



The hotel itself is long gone, and the souvenir is in decidedly poor shape — but this scrapbook record of **The Ben Franklin Inn** is a one-of-a-kind treasure. Assembled by Carrie Stroud, longtime proprietor of the North Asbury Park guest house, it’s an intimate time capsule of mementos and photographs (of staff employees, of individual rooms, of the building’s evolution through the years) that remains “priceless” beyond words.



When it caught fire at sea and ran aground at Asbury Park in 1934, the maritime tragedy turned grim tourist attraction that was the **SS Morro Castle** became the subject of numerous souvenir items, as well as countless family photographs. But unique among the Morro Castle-related items at the Crane House (where our collection includes a porthole and a hatch salvaged from the doomed vessel) is the postcard pictured above — a pre-wreck view (postmarked in Havana, Cuba some four months prior to the disaster) that touts the American Turbo-Electric Liner and its sister ship The SS Oriente for being “as modern as the most modern designers could build them...(with) all the smartness of trans-Atlantic luxury and speed.”



A book on local history, allegedly written by James Bradley himself... an 1873 brochure from a vendor of building materials for a fast-growing community...a paper fan advertising Shark River Hills as the “new Asbury Park suburb”...a souvenir booklet from the March 1912 opening of our city’s grand post office...a brochure advertising a never-built Main Street shopping center. Just a handful of the many examples of paper ephemera and memorabilia from Asbury Park’s boardwalk, beaches, schools, stores, auditoriums, eateries, public buildings, parks, hotels, and houses of worship. Even our own extensive archive of artifacts is nowhere near comprehensive and complete — and we welcome the opportunity to share your donated items as part of our collection.



Even if you were aware that **3-in-1 Oil** was first formulated and marketed by Asbury Park business owner George W. Cole and associates from a West Side garage, you probably didn’t know that one of the oldest intact bottles of the long-popular consumer product — maybe even the oldest — resides here in the city of its birth. Manufactured in A.P. between 1894 and 1902 (when Cole moved the operation to a more up-to-date facility in Rahway), the product was sealed with cork stoppers like the one seen here during its earliest years, after which (according to item donor Leonard Dries Jr.) screw-on caps were used. As our donor pointed out in 2014, the fact that the little 1-oz. bottle boasts the cork, both front and back labels, and the *actual 100+ year old oil* makes it a rare find indeed.



A cake frosting spreader from Steinbach’s; a pencil from Tusting Piano Co.; a cake slicer(?) from the Metropolitan Hotel — the archives of the Historical Society are punctuated by advertising/ promotional specialty items of every variety, spanning every era from Founder Bradley’s to the present. Many of these materials are being donated in turn to the **Asbury Park Museum**, the nonprofit entity that seeks to establish a permanent location for the preservation and exhibit of all things Asbury-related.

# Take a tour of the Crane House's past, present & future!



Former Crane House owner Tom Hayes is interviewed by APHS board member Susan Rosenberg, in a special silver anniversary year video presentation produced by WeStar Productions.

The year 2021 marks a significant point on the timeline for **The Stephen Crane House**, the State and National Historic Site that has served as headquarters for the Asbury Park Historical Society since 2015. It was in late April of 1996 that **Thomas and Regina Hayes** formally opened the doors of the rechristened house at 508 Fourth Avenue to the public; having painstakingly rescued the onetime home of the famed American author from decay and possible demolition.

To celebrate the silver anniversary of the Crane House — and to uphold the tradition of a special program for our members, during our annual reorganization meeting — the Historical Society put together a 30-minute video tribute to the former Arbutus Cottage; one that celebrates its 143-year history, offers updates on our ongoing project of renovation, and looks toward the future of this unique community resource.

The brainchild of APHS executive board member **Susan Rosenberg**, the video was created by **WeStar Productions**, the company co-founded by fellow trustee **Jennifer Rae Stine** and videographer **David Ziegler**. The

“work in progress” was shown in rough-cut form to participants in our January meeting (presented in virtual format due to ongoing pandemic-related restrictions) — and has since been fine-tuned and made available for streaming view at our official website, [aphistoricalociety.org](http://aphistoricalociety.org).

Click on the home page option to “Tour the Historic Stephen Crane House,” and you’ll be greeted at the doorstep of the cottage by your host and docent Susan Rosenberg. Dressed in costume appropriate to the home’s 1878 origins, the Historical Society’s secretary interviews Tom Hayes on the house’s new lease on life in the 1990s — a story of rebirth that would foreshadow the city’s wider resurgence in the new millennium.

Speaking from the meticulously restored front parlor (as well as the future “Stephen’s Room” on the second floor), APHS vice president **Jim Henry** details the many improvements involved with helping the house (generously donated to the Society by **Frank D’Alessandro**, the successor private owner to the Hayes family) fulfill its mission of offering visitors a window into the earliest era of Asbury Park’s history.

Trustee **Tom Chesek** welcomes viewers to the in-house Lecture Room Theatre, one of the property’s most popular features, and scene of the most recent improvements — while former APHS president and rare book dealer **Don Stine** explores the literary legacy of Stephen Crane from one of the house’s genuine gems: the beautiful second-floor library dedicated to the life’s work and times of the internationally celebrated fiction writer, poet and journalist who began his career while living under that same roof.

As the 25th owner (and stalwart steward) of a place that has stood witness to nearly the entirety of Asbury Park’s “roller-coaster” history, the Historical Society team welcomes contributions from the public, toward the ongoing process of renovation and many public outreach programs of The Stephen Crane House. An online donation option via Donorbox is displayed on the streaming-view page for the video tour, and other general donations to the APHS are accepted at all times via PayPal on our website.

Plans are for the video to be screened for an invited audience of longtime Crane House friends and supporters, as a (properly distanced and modestly scaled) 25th anniversary observance — and further plans are on the drawing board to re-open the Lecture Room to public-welcome events in the autumn of 2021, a season that heralds yet another milestone: the 150th birthday of Stephen Crane. Watch this space for details!

There’s even more on the agenda for the weeks and months to come — including a Then & Now menu of “classic drinks from the past” at local bars and restaurants, a Summer Sand Sculpture Competition, and a series of “factoids” furnished by the APHS. Complete details on specific events will be announced by the committee soon, as well as shared by the Historical Society on our official website and social media accounts. Stay tuned for more — and let’s all work together to promote what Celia envisions as “the Greatest 150th Birthday Celebration Ever!”

## AP Sesquicentennial From pg 1

Before all of that activity got underway, Celia turned her focus to an important aspect of the overall campaign: *branding*. Working with **Gene Mignola** of Asbury Park’s Fun House stores, the committee has finalized a logo design for the 150th birthday; one that will appear on all aspects of publicity, from advertising specialty items and wearables, to banners displayed at City Hall and other locations throughout town.

## The Asbury Park Historical Society

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**Join up or renew your membership today!**

Contact **SUSAN SKOKOS**, membership chair, at [skokose@aol.com](mailto:skokose@aol.com)

Donations accepted via PayPal at [aphistoricalociety.org](http://aphistoricalociety.org)

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

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

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