

HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 1994

Next Meeting! September Panel Discussion

FAR FLUNG BATTLEFIELDS OF WORLD WAR II

On Wednesday night, September 28th, the Society will host the fourth in a series of panel discussions featuring local veterans of World War II. The meeting will be held at 7:30 P.M. in the Fellowship Hall of the First Presbyterian Church on North Main Street, Hightstown. The panelists are still being selected at this time. ■

HOUSE TOUR OCTOBER 16th

The Society will hold its third historic house tour on Sunday afternoon, October 16th, from 1 to 5 PM. The tour will feature four houses in Hightstown Borough and one in East Windsor Township. Tickets will be \$10 each; for tickets, call 443-6864. ■



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

September

- 12 Business Meeting, 7:30 (Ely House)
28 General Meeting, 7:30 (1st Pres. Ch.)

October

- 3 Business Meeting, 7:30 (Ely House)
16 House Tour, 1 - 5 PM

RON AXELRAD HIRED AS CONSULTING ARCHIVIST FOR LIBRARY PROJECT

A major project of the Society to reorganize the Library got underway this summer with the hiring of Ronald H. Axelrad as consulting archivist. Mr. Axelrad, of Highland Park, who is also the part-time archivist of the Jewish Historical Society of Central New Jersey, began work in July. The library project will include the reorganizing, re-folding, and re-boxing of manuscript collections, the preparation of an in-house finding aid using the Society's computer system, and the publication of a guide to library holdings. The Society will also distribute the guide to a long list of schools, historical societies, public libraries and universities, both in New Jersey and across the United States. The project is scheduled to be completed by December 1995.

THOMAS AND OLSEN ADDED TO SOCIETY OFFICERS

At the Annual Meeting this past May, members elected two new officers. Dr. Edgar C. Thomas, the former Chief School Administrator of the East Windsor Regional Schools, was elected President, succeeding Robin Smith. Shirley Olsen, a realtor with the Van Hise Agency in Hightstown, was elected Recording Secretary, taking over from Clifford Pullen. Pullen, the Recording Secretary since 1978, was the longest-serving officer in the history of the Society, which was founded in 1971. Thomas and Olsen join Joel Larsen, who was re-elected Vice President; George Dubell, re-elected Treasurer, and Lois Groendyke, re-elected Corresponding Secretary. ■

The project is supported by two grants, one from the New Jersey Historical Commission, which was reported in the May-June newsletter, and a larger grant from the New Jersey Council for the Humanities (word of which reached the Society too late to be included in that newsletter). The Council grant is of Federal monies from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and represents the first Federal grant that the Society has obtained. Mr. Axelrad will be spending approximately two days per week at Ely House for the next year. ■

SOCIETY CHARTS AMBITIOUS YEAR OF PROGRAMMING

The Society will increase its programming this year, beyond the five general programs usually held. In addition to these programs, the annual Christmas Tea, and the biennial House Tour, the Society will add programs in February and April, as well as a program in January separate from the annual banquet. The following programs have been scheduled (dates are subject to change, so consult future newsletters).

- 9/28 Far-Flung Battlefields (WW II)
10/16 House Tour 11/16 Precious Memories (HEW Memorabilia)
12/11 Christmas Tea
1/17 "Please Be Seated" (Antique Chairs)
1/22 Annual Banquet
2/14 Bridges of New Jersey
3/14 Youth Explores Our Past
4/18 Finding Your Historical Family
5/13 To Be Announced ■

Genealogy

FAMILY TREE NEWS & QUERIES

by Richard Hutchinson

Deeds, A Researcher's Friend

Land title deeds, which document the sale of real property, play an important role in genealogical research. Deeds often tell you where an ancestor was living at a given point in the past, and these "wheres" and "whens" are two of the most important questions to be answered in genealogical research.

But deeds can also do much more. They can give you unexpected pieces of information, including occupations, family relationships, places of prior residence, places where other family members lived, the location of wills and inventories, the identity of landmarks that can help explain the meaning of other records, and so on. In ongoing research for two out-of-state clients who trace their ancestry to the Hightstown-East Windsor area, deeds have identified and expanded their family descendants.

Their value can also illuminate the local history of Hightstown. In looking for the origins of Isaac Britton, for one of my clients, the following information about Hightstown's early taverns turned up in deeds recorded in the Middlesex County Clerk's Office in New Brunswick.

Britton lived in Hightstown during the last years of the 18th century, where he operated a tavern at Main and Stockton streets on the site of Cunningham's Pharmacy. On May 1, 1797, Stephen Hooper of South Brunswick Township sold to Britton a lot in Hightstown that Hooper had bought precisely two years earlier from another tavern keeper, Okey Hendrickson. In another deed from

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE FROM DR. EDGAR THOMAS

This summer has been a time of considerable activity for your Society. Aided by grants from the New Jersey Council for the Humanities and the New Jersey Historical Commission, we have employed a consulting archivist, Mr. Ronald Axelrad, to organize and describe the extensive holdings of the library. This process when complete will facilitate scholarly research.

The Society is indebted to our newsletter editor, Mr. Robert Craig, for the preparation of the grant applications and his guidance through the funding process.

We are indebted by the work being done by our architect-in-residence, Mr. Lee Stults. He is a senior architectural student at the prestigious Roger Williams University.

Working with members of the Society, Mr. Stults is directing his design activities to the rehabilitation of the Freight Station and its integration into the programs of the Society.

Mr. Stults's work is being supported by generous grants from Mr. Charles S. Stults III and the Continental Insurance Company. The O'Connor Group, Architects & Planners, is making its professional facilities available to Mr. Stults throughout the Summer.

All of these happenings augur well for the strength and future growth of the Society.

Please encourage your family, friends and neighbors to participate in events and become active members of the Society. ■

June 29, 1798, Britton's occupation is identified as "tavern keeper." These two documents were made at the beginning of his career. Of all the tavern keepers in Hightstown, Britton probably endured the longest; in 1838, through another deed, Isaac sold a small lot adjoining his tavern lot, indicating that his tavern was still in business. ■

CEDAR HILL FOOTNOTE

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Society library holds a copy of Richard S. Hutchinson's massive index to the burials in the old section of the Cedar Hill Cemetery. His search into the Cedar Hill records, however, left an important unanswered question: how to account for graves with tombstones that were older than the cemetery itself, which was incorporated in 1854? The following item Hutchinson spotted in the Hightstown Excelsior, of July 23, 1857. The Excelsior was a local weekly newspaper that appeared from 1857 until 1861.

"The Trustees of the M.E. [Methodist Episcopal] Church in this borough have been engaged for some time in removing bodies from the burying ground adjoining their church [on Stockton Street]. The bodies are taken to Cedar Hill Cemetery and those unclaimed by friends are buried at the expense of the society in their plot. The ground, after the removal of the dead, is to be the site of the new M.E. Church edifice."

The church was built, and it stood on the site of the present United Methodist Church on Stockton Street, which was built near the end of the 19th century—Editor. ■

WORLD WAR II MEMORIES

by Oscar Lewis Rand

The Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor shocked and enraged me as it did all Americans. I was determined to enlist as soon as possible to do my part in defeating this formidable foe. However, I did not pass the Navy's physical exam, since they discovered that I had a hernia that I was unaware of. They said I must have it repaired and to come back in six months. If the Army tried to get me earlier, they would take me before they could act. I had the necessary surgery at the end of the school year in 1942 and was sworn in as an Ensign in the US Naval Reserve on November 11, 1942. My first assignment was to the US Naval Training School at Cornell University, where I reported on January 1 for a month of indoctrination. Upon the completion of that schooling I received what the

Commandant of the Training School termed "dream orders." I was directed to report to the Advanced Naval Intelligence School in the Henry Hudson Hotel in New York for two months' training, then to the Naval Intelligence Section of the Navy Department in Washington, DC for a week, and finally to the port in which the Commander of the US Naval Forces in the South West Pacific might be.

So on April 2, 1943 I left San Francisco in a Liberty ship which was eventually headed across the Pacific, after stops in Long Beach and Port Hueneme to load cargo needed to carry on our war campaign. There were a variety of officers and enlisted men aboard as well, including an entire PT squadron and the equipment it needed to set up camp. We were assigned bunks below decks where there was little ventilation and much humidity and heat. Fortunately I made friends with a warrant officer who was a survivor of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. At his suggestion we slept top side every night in a life boat and awoke each day quite refreshed.

Since we traveled at a speed of 8 knots, it took us 5 weeks to reach the coast of Australia. By that time I knew that the Commander of our naval forces in the southwest Pacific had his command post wherever General MacArthur had his, for he was under his overall command. The SW Pacific Naval Forces were called the Seventh Fleet. General MacArthur's headquarters were in a bank building in Brisbane, Queensland on the east coast of Australia and the 7th fleet headquarters were a floor below his. I reported there on May 11, 1943, little realizing that I would be there most of the time for the next 18 months.

Upon reporting for duty, I was assigned to the Fleet Intelligence Plot Room, next door to the Fleet Communications Office. All messages from our fleet units and air commands were brought immediately to our office, together with any messages between Japanese forces whose codes we had broken. My job during much of the war was to digest these reports in time to brief the admiral and his staff every morning. In addition, I prepared a message each day that went out to all fleet units and shore installations summarizing the previous day's military activity of all branches of our armed forces and those of the enemy in the southwest Pacific. It

was a most interesting job, since I always knew what was going on and what was being planned.

During my first year in Brisbane the 7th Fleet was very small, for the bulk of our naval forces in the Pacific were needed in the central Pacific. In the meantime the Japanese forces in New Guinea were threatening to advance over a mountainous trail and attack Port Moresby, just a stepping stone from Australia itself. The Aussies were fighting hard to hold them back and General MacArthur and his staff flew up to Moresby to supervise whatever help we could give. Wherever MacArthur went the 7th Fleet headquarters went too and I was fortunate enough to be chosen as part of our skeleton staff. The fighting was touch and go for a bit, but finally the allied forces prevailed and the Japs were never again to threaten Australia. New warships, planes and war materials were now beginning to flow out to us, despite the demands of the European forces. Our constant bombing of the Jap mighty fleet base at Rabaul, from which the warships that had caused us so many losses in the Solomons had come, was now made useless. We could now begin the island hopping campaign, bypassing the Japanese strongholds. General MacArthur decided to move his headquarters to Hollandia on the north central coast of New Guinea. The small port was easily captured and a settlement of Quonset huts arose on the mountain side above the heat and humidity at the shore. Here our fleet headquarters were established and we began to finalize the plans for the invasion of Leyte in the Philippines.

On September 1, 1944 I found myself in the midst of a navy task force headed for Leyte Gulf. Our ship, armed only with some A/A guns was not a fighting ship, but a floating radio station. We "guarded" every radio channel used by our armed forces and the Japs as well. Nearby was General MacArthur on a cruiser. Our trip to Leyte was without incident and the first landings had already been made with little opposition. Mac Arthur was soon to wade ashore, although he could easily have got off at a pier, and proclaimed to the world that he had returned.

Things were not to remain that quiet for very long. Our people had

broken the Japanese codes and were able to learn their whole plan of attack if we invaded the Philippines. They planned to use the strongest naval force they could muster to drive us out. Their fleet was divided into three task forces. One was to come through the southern islands and round the southern tip of Leyte to attack us. The second, and most formidable, was to come through the northern islands and come down to hit us. The third, a diversionary force, was to come down toward us from Japan.

Naturally we were prepared for them. The 7th Fleet had available a few of our old battleships. Most of them had been sunk at Pearl Harbor, but were now back in good condition and had been used for the bombardment of the Leyte shore prior to our landings. The ships, along with every other fighting vessel at our disposal, were sent to block the passage at the south end of Leyte. Admiral Halsey's huge 3rd Fleet, the strongest naval force ever assembled, was guarding the north passages.

The night that the southern Jap fleet was to come through the passage our battleships had lined up across the passage and our smaller vessels down either side. The Japs sailed right into this trap and were annihilated. Only one or two vessels escaped. In the meantime, the 3rd Fleet had not been idle.

All during that day planes from our carriers had been raining bombs on the big Japanese fleet and at the end of the day our aviators reported that the fleet was in disarray and retiring. In the meantime, our search planes had discovered the fleet from Japan that was sent to lure us away. Admiral Halsey fell for the trap and took his entire fleet to attack without letting anyone know his plan.

During the evening hours the main Japanese fleet reassembled and came through the passage without any interference. Our entire landing force was now without any production. Our fighting ships were 50 miles away and without any ammunition, since they had expended it fighting. We were facing a military disaster beyond calculation. Our forces ashore would have been stranded and all the huge number of ships would have been at their mercy.

I was up for 36 hours during this period and was one of the few who

were fully aware of all that was happening. I expected to be killed or drowned. I knew that we had only six small escort carriers to pester their fleet and that Admiral Kinkaid, 7th Fleet Commander, had sent a message to Halsey, Nimitz and Washington in uncoded English: "Where is the 3rd Fleet?"

You know the rest. The planes from the escort carriers fought hard, but they were not the reason the Japanese admiral turned back. He feared that Halsey was nearby and feared a trap. He paid for his decision because the next day Halsey's planes attacked again and again, sinking their prize battleships and many other vessels. Never again could the Jap navy confront us.

The next morning I was ordered to join a PT boat crew to go down where our 7th Fleet ships had fought to see if there were any Japanese survivors in the water. We wanted to know just what we had sunk. The water as far as you could see was covered with a thick coating of oil. We occasionally saw what we thought were heads bobbing in the water, but they turned out to be coconuts. Finally we did find two men covered with oil who had been in the water for 36 hours. When we tried to get them aboard, they attempted to swim away, preferring drowning to capture. It developed that one of the men was the Captain of a destroyer that had been sunk. He was the highest naval officer captured up to that point. A navy photographer was also aboard the PT and he took a picture of the PT crew getting one of the Japs aboard. This photograph was published in LIFE magazine and practically every daily newspaper in America. The picture showed a vertical slice of me standing with gun ready. I could barely recognize myself, by my mother could. She saw the picture and said, "That's Oscar!" And she didn't even know that I was there, since I could never tell my family where I was.

The rest of our stay in Leyte was not pleasant. The Japanese began using kamikaze planes, and although most of them were successfully shot down, one or two got through the barrage every day and sank and damaged vessels. The situation was not helped by our being unable to establish a landing field because of the horrendous mud at that time of year. Eventually a place

was made safe and we all breathed a sigh of relief when we saw 12 Lightnings fly in.

The Army found unexpected resistance too without proper air cover. The Japanese were bringing in many troops from other islands and landing them on the west side of Leyte and for a time we all felt we might be repulsed.

We were the last large ship to leave Leyte and we were relieved to go because the kamikazes were aiming at the large ships. We returned to Hollandia to prepare for the next invasion, which was to be Lingayen Gulf on the west side of Luzon, north of Manila. We went to sea again in our huge floating radio station and sailed through the islands from east to west and then up to Lingayen Gulf. The desperate straits of the Japanese were apparent. We decoded a message from a Jap search plane announcing that he had spotted our task force, but aside from one harmless kamikaze attack, it was just a pleasant cruise. Our troops landed with no opposition and were soon on the march to retake Manila.

A month later, six of us officers in the Intelligence Office were permitted to return home on leave if we could find transportation from Leyte. We had been out there working seven days a week for two years and really needed a rest. As you can guess, one of the men went from one ship to another in the harbor until he found an empty tanker which was about to return to Aruba for a refuel and would gladly give us a lift to the Panama Canal.

We had a restful trip, spending many days travelling right on or next to the equator. We checked into the Naval Command in Panama and were soon given air transportation to Miami. From there I went home to New Hampshire by train and a wonderful month with my family. It was nice to learn at that time that I had been given a flattering letter of commendation and ribbon for my service for 21 months in the 7th Fleet Intelligence Center.

A month's leave and Mother's cooking left me rested and refreshed. I reported in Washington to the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations for my new assignment and was told that I could pick whatever spot I wanted, although they preferred that I stay in Washington and do the same type of briefing that I had done for the 7th

Fleet. I had no desire to stay in Washington, for I wanted to be where the action was. I knew that naval plans called for a landing in China before the final assault on Japan and that we already had a small naval group in China. I had not been back in China since I taught school there in 1935-37 and I was anxious to return. My request for assignment to US Naval Group China was granted.

On July 4, 1945 I boarded a plane in New York which was to bring me to the Azores, Casablanca, Tripoli, Cairo, Habbaniya, and Karachi before arriving in Calcutta on July 9. Most stops were brief, but there was time to see a bit of Casablanca and Cairo.

I had expected to fly right through on that plane to Chungking, but I was ceremoniously bounced from the aircraft by the Calcutta Command. It seems that there was a huge backlog of personnel trying to get over the "hump" to their assignments in China. Since I was only a lieutenant (j.g.), I had no clout.

I was given temporary quarters in a rather drab building and resigned myself to a long wait. My morale was not helped when I developed a case of dysentery which made me miserable night and day for days. However, I was happy to learn that I had finally been promoted to the rank of full lieutenant.

I spent nearly a month in Calcutta doing nothing but reading and sight-seeing. Toward the end of the month the Naval Command was organizing a truck convoy to go over the Burma Road to China. I was assigned to drive one of the trucks! Just a day before we were scheduled to start I was rescued by someone in Washington who ordered me placed on a plane for Kunming, China. Therefore, on August 13 I flew over the Himalayas and reported to the naval unit at the airport made famous by the Flying Tigers.

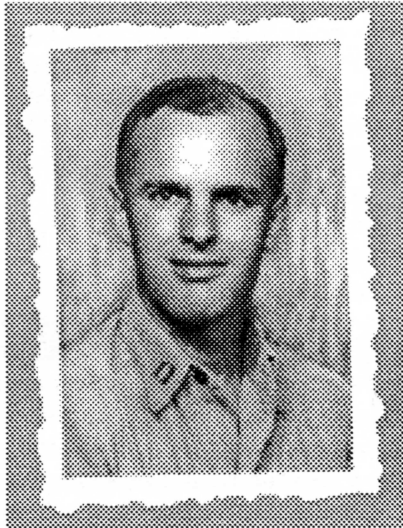
I found the small naval unit to which I was assigned was involved in making plans for our planes to mine waters navigated by the Japanese, particularly those around Hong Kong. However, two atomic bombs were dropped on Japan and a truce in military activities was established. We were ordered to destroy classified materials and get ready to leave as soon as directed. Being the newest officer in our unit, I was assigned the unenviable task of burning

seemingly countless photographs, documents, etc.

Officials in Washington were concerned about the condition of American citizens who had been interned during the war. We had found that similar folk in Manila had suffered from hunger, sickness and brutality. Therefore even though the war was not over, a plane load of us flew to Shanghai, not knowing what our reception would be. We were the second plane to land in Shanghai, but we landed at a field operated by the Japanese marines. When we got out of the plane, a marine officer told our commanding officer to get everyone back in the plane and return to where we had come from. Our C.O. said we didn't have enough fuel to return. The marine said they would give us enough. Our C.O. said theirs was the wrong octane, although we knew we could fly with it. With that he left us to cool our heels on the runway. Our C.O. kept requesting that he be allowed to talk to the Swiss consulate, for Switzerland represented us in diplomatic matters. The Japanese finally allowed him to telephone them because he didn't think it would do any good. However, the Swiss managed somehow to round up a few vehicles to take us and our luggage to the city.

Once in the city we found that the Japanese command there was cooperative. They put us up in what had been a fine hotel before the war and allowed us to visit the internment map, where we found the people had been treated well. Getting settled in my hotel room, I found my windows looked out across a narrow passageway to an adjoining building where Japanese soldiers were housed. It was a little disconcerting to look out the window and to find Japanese soldiers staring at me from six feet away!

As I was walking down one of the principal Shanghai streets a few days after our arrival, I encountered David Johnson, the aide to Admiral Kinkaid, commander of the 7th Fleet. The mine sweepers had cleared the entrance to Shanghai and the fleet headquarters were on a ship anchored in the river off the Bund. Dave had the points required to leave for home, but he had to find a replacement first. I was the answer to his prayer. Within 24 hours he had gone and I had reported aboard ship! It was November 3, 1945.



Lieutenant Oscar L. Rand.
(Photographed in Shanghai)

Dave had left before I could see him again and I had no idea what my duties were or what people were under my command. I had to learn everything the hard way. I found I was in charge of the Admiral's barge crew, the Filipino mess stewards in the officer's mess, and the Chinese mess stewards in the Admiral's mess. There were even a few members of the Fleet band still awaiting orders home. The Chinese mess stewards, I found, were men who had served on our Yangtze River gunboats as the war opened and who had opted to stay with the Fleet throughout the war, although in some cases they had wives and families ashore.

Admiral Kinkaid was a kind, gentle man and it was a pleasure to work for him. I found that I had to be very careful in all I did, however, for other senior officers were envious of my access to the Admiral and watched every move I made. Naturally, my main task was to see that everything was prepared for the Admiral to travel without delays. His boat had to be ready, his car ordered and at the dock and people who were expecting him had to be made aware of his arrival time. There were also a stream of important people coming out from Washington, and they had to be met, brought aboard ship with proper ceremony, and made comfortable.

I enjoyed it most when we left Shanghai. One time we flew in an amphibious plane to an extremely rough anchorage off Tientsin in North China. We made a very dangerous landing and had difficulty getting ashore. Once

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HIGHTSTOWN / EAST WINDSOR
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

founded 1971

Serving Hightstown Borough and
East Windsor Township

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there, however, the Chinese furnished us a special train to take us to Peiping. Needless to say, we flew back in a land based plane.

We also flew down to Hong Kong to make arrangement for our ships to enter there. Later there was a lovely sea voyage involving fleet maneuvers in the Yellow Sea.

Admiral Kincaid, having served in combat areas throughout the entire war, was relieved shortly after I became his aide and allowed to return to the US for rest and reassignment. Vice Admiral Daniel Barbey took his place and asked me to stay on to be his aide. Admiral Barbey had become known as Uncle Dan, the Amphibious Man, because he had commanded our 7th Fleet Task Forces as they bypassed small Japanese strongholds and landed on island after island.

One of the trips I made with him was to fly to Nanking, the capitol of China at the time, to confer with Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek about using our ships to transport his troops

from south China to north China to confront the Chinese Communists. There were no other officers with us. We had lunch with the Generalissimo and Madame Chiang and a few of their aides. It is very polite in China to ask a person his age. When I taught in China for two years (1935-37) I had had to answer that question frequently. The Generalissimo was evidently surprised with my youthful appearance and leaned over to his English speaking aide to ask him to find out my age. Before the aide could speak, I told the Generalissimo what it was. They were astonished that I could speak their language and from then on they were very careful what they said because they thought I would understand. Actually I didn't know a word they said, but it was very amusing to the Admiral and me. It was a lovely luncheon and we did later transport their troops, mules and all. As you know, it was all in vain, for they proved to be no match for the Communists. However, these defeats occurred long after my stay in China.

In January, 1946, Admiral Barbey was relieved by Admiral Cook, who had just flown out from the States. He, too, had no aide and asked me to stay on with him. I was tempted, but I really wanted to get home and return to civilian life. So I thanked him but declined.

Before we left Shanghai, Admiral Barbey awarded me the Bronze Star medal for meritorious service as his aide and Flag Lieutenant. I flew in Admiral Barbey's plane on January 8, our itinerary included stops in Okinawa, Guam, Wake, Honolulu, San Francisco, Washington, and Norfolk, where I said good-bye to Admiral Barbey on January 17. As soon as transportation could be arranged, I went by train to Boston, where I was ordered on January 21 to proceed home for two months' leave. On May 2nd I was once again a civilian, but with many memories of an unusual 4 years of service to my country.

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