

## Nutley Historical Society and Museum | Nutley Yesterday · Today - 1961

### *NUTLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND MUSEUM*

ANN A. TROY

THE search by the newly formed Nutley Historical Society in 1945 for a permanent meeting place resulted in the restoration of the old school, 65 Church Street, as a home for the Society and a Town Museum.

In January 1945, a group of citizens requested Mayor William J. Jernick to consider the formation of a Nutley Historical Society. His interested response brought about a meeting of a "Steering Committee" early in February. This committee prepared plans to be presented at an open meeting on March 5. This date commemorates the change in the name of the town from Franklin to Nutley in 1902 by the New Jersey Legislature.

On March 5, 1945, over two hundred residents of Nutley met in the Stockton Room of the Nutley Public Library to hear the plans for the formation of a Nutley Historical Society presented by Mayor William J. Jernick. Upon vote of those present such a Society was formed.

The plans presented were drawn up by the Steering Committee with whom the Mayor had met on February 2nd and on February 23rd, 1945. The members present were Miss Elizabeth Tuers, Frank B. Speer, representing oldest families; Mrs. H. W. Goodrich, co-author of 1907 History of Nutley; H. L. Steul, World War II Defense Council Historian; Miss Helen Terry, Librarian, Nutley Public Library; Wallace H. Gibson, President, Nutley Board of Education; Dr. Floyd E. Harshman, Superintendent of Schools; Everett Zabriskie, Nutley Planning Board; Mrs. Russell Hay, Nutley Sun; Dr. Robert F. Heald, Nutley Adult School; Miss Ann A. Troy, Principal, Washington School, and Mayor Jernick. Miss Adrianna Van Riper, Miss Eulah Symonds, and Marion L. Lewis were invited but were unable to be present.

The hostesses for the March 5th meeting were Mrs. Horace Tantom, Mrs. H. W. Goodrich, Mrs. Edgar Sergeant, and Mrs. William J. Jernick. A birthday cake was cut by Frank B. Speer and Mrs. H. W. Goodrich with a sword used by a member of the Speer family in the Revolutionary War. The Boys Choir of Washington School gave selections and Dr. William R. Ward, President of the New Jersey Historical Society, addressed the group. Nominating and Constitution Committees were appointed and on April 11th and May 2nd organization meetings were held.

Marion L. Lewis was named honorary President with Robert F. Heald elected as first active President for 1945-1946. Other officers were: Vice President, Mrs. W. L. T. Armstrong; Secretary, Mrs. Elizabeth Teel; Treasurer, Archie C. Barbata; Curator, Mrs. Adolph A. Wolfe; Directors, Roscoe Symonds, Dr. L. J.

LeBel, Bruce M. Lewis, Miss Florence M. Eccles and Miss Ann A. Troy.

Committees appointed were: Program, Philip H. Woodcock; Membership, Miss M. Agnes Kelly; Finance, Roscoe Symonds; Museum, Miss Marie Spinning; History of Nutley, Miss Ann A. Troy.

The objectives of the Society were stated in the Constitution: "The purpose of this association is to collect as much as possible of the available historic material connected with or associated with the history of Nutley and carefully to preserve it. It is also our purpose to collect, preserve, and diffuse such information as may be available in the field of genealogy connected with the town of Nutley. These objectives include the collection of historic objects, museum materials, copies of local papers, old Church records, private papers, monographs, letters, and other materials of such nature. This will ultimately lead to the writing of the History of the town and to the maintenance of future records."

The acquisition of the Church Street School by the Nutley Historical Society as a museum was celebrated at a dinner meeting held March 5, 1947. Four guests, members of the first classes of the Church Street School were invited: Mrs. Laura Kingsland Ackerman, George Crabtree, Louis Day and George L. Rusby. The two first mentioned were able to attend. Messages were sent by Louis Day and George Rusby. Many others at the dinner were members of the classes of Church Street School and much history was reviewed. The school in its present form was built in 1875 to replace a wooden structure built in 1856 and burned in 1874. Land for the Church Street School was donated by Henry Stager. Among teachers and principals of the school from 1875 to 1894, when classes were transferred to the newly erected Park School were Mr. Willert, Mr. Applegate, Gertrude Broadbent and Kate Lambert. At intervals from 1910 until 1927 the school was used for boys' vocational classes. When disbanded as a school, various town organizations used the building as a meeting place.

The deed to the property has been described in the Board of Education Report, dated April 1, 1893. William R. Wright, Superintendent of Schools, states, "We have not been able to find the original deed of the Church Street property, but after much inquiry of the older inhabitants, and a thorough search of the records at Newark it was found that an unrestricted deed of this property was given to the District by Henry Stager on the 28th day of May, 1857, and the same was duly recorded. We have obtained a certified copy of that deed, and it is now in the possession of the District Clerk."

The building, constructed in 1875, to replace the wooden school burned in 1874, has been declared structurally sound. Much volunteer professional help has been given the Museum Restoration Committee of the Nutley Historical Society.

Acquired from the Nutley Board of Education on February 3, 1947, with an annual lease, the Society in the first year centered its efforts on repairing the

slate roof and converting a wooden addition to a five room apartment which was occupied the first year by Mr. and Mrs. William Meseck as custodians.

On January 8, 1951 the newly organized Nutley Art Group held its meeting in the first floor room despite cracked, unpainted plaster and with heat supplied by a picturesque coal burning stove of not too recent vintage.

In September, 1951, Mr. and Mrs. Albert Jennings became custodians and the fine spirit and cooperation of the Mesecks continued with the supervision of Jennings.

During this year, the entire first floor, hall way and kitchenette were plastered and painted. A new porch and steps were built, leading to which was laid an old-fashioned brick walk.

With the granting of a 20 year lease by the Board of Education on March 19, 1952, for the building and grounds of the Church Street School and with the leasing of corner lots from the Town of Nutley for a Colonial Garden, the Nutley Historical Society's Committee, with Harry Cromley as chairman, assured the membership of the interest of Nutley citizens in this town project.

With this increased responsibility for restoration of the old school, the Society launched its first town wide drive for funds on November 8, 1952. Robert F. Heald, president, appointed Edwin Wolferz as general chairman; George R. Brownell headed an organization of 21 teams, which reported on February 15, 1953, a total of \$4,266, with an average subscription of \$20 a person.

This substantial amount resulted in contracting for the rebuilding of the belfry and main gutters and cornices of the old school. Pigeons were driven from their ancestral home and the second floor made dust proof. Much volunteer work was done by Edwin Ganong, in cutting 32 large wooden brackets to support the gutters and 24 smaller wooden brackets used in the restoration of the bell tower. The new stainless steel weathervane in the shape of the crowing cock was supplied by Edwin Wolferz and its position on the belfry was checked against the compass by Roscoe Symonds.

In preparation for the coming official opening, Jennings directed the sanding and refinishing of the floors, the laying of rubber tile in the halls and kitchen, the rebuilding, glazing, and painting of windows in the second floor room and office.

Painting and plastering of the second floor walls were completed by volunteers, among whom were Charles Hammond, Livingston Roosen-Raad, George Brownell, Gerhard Kunst, A. J. Mohr, Paul E. Bennett, Robert Heald, Mrs. Victor Anderson, Mrs. Robert Heald and Miss Ann Troy.

The antique coal stove was replaced by a more modern oil burner, a gift of Homer Lyman. A new kitchen sink, a gift of Irving Scott, together with facilities for a men's lavatory in the basement, completed the plumbing work done by John Windheim.

A new acoustical tile ceiling in the second floor Museum room and lighting, designed especially for modern museum use, were also completed.

The committee for drapes and blinds was headed by Mrs. John Fikus.

Firms and individuals who made special contributions to the restoration work are: Gantner's Hardware Store, Rose Hardware, Nutley Paint and Supply Co., Ivor Brandstedt, William Iverson, Richard Basil, Edgar W. Wright, D'Ambola Electric Co., John Windheim, Walter G. Hoehn, Irving Scott, Frank Simmons, Peter Newman, Mrs. George Werner, Mrs. Philip Woodcock, Mrs. Victor Anderson, Mr. and Mrs. A. F. Lindstrom, Everett Zabriskie, Roy Shope, Mayor Harry W. Chenoweth and Everett Vautin.

A plaque, secured by a committee headed by William Gaynor, was placed on the outside of the Museum.

Over 300 members and guests attended the dedication ceremony on Sunday afternoon, September 26, 1954. The group was addressed by William J. Jernick, Mayor Harry W. Chenoweth and President of the Board of Education, Edward J. Lenihan. The keynote speech was presented by Mrs. Kathryn B. Greywacz, Chairman of New Jersey Museum's Council and Director of the State Museum at Trenton, N.J.

Special guests were recognized by G. R. B. Symonds, Board of Directors of the Historical Society. Among these were: members of the Clergy: Reverend H. J. Berkobin, Rabbi Hyman Danzig, Rt. Rev. Monsignor James J. Owens; members of the Board of Education: Henry Baun, Mrs. Herbert G. Bedell, Mrs. William S. Clarke, David H. Jackman, Wayne K. Johnson, Ralph Kimball, Edward Lenihan, Mrs. John Peddieson, Stephen Schanes; members of the Board of Commissioners: Robert Anderson, Harry Chenoweth, Theodore DeMuro, John H. Lucy, Edgar Wright; Superintendent of Nutley Schools, Robert A. Flood; President of Fairleigh Dickinson College, Rutherford, N.J., Dr. Peter Sammartino; President of State Teachers College at Jersey City, Dr. Michael Gilligan; Editor and Publisher of The Nutley Sun, Ralph E. Heinzen; President of the New Jersey Historical Society, Dr. Richard B. McCormick, Rutgers University; Director and Staff of Museums of other communities.

The formal dedication of the Museum was done by Robert F. Heald, President of the Society. The entrance ribbon to the Museum was cut by two year old Janet Livingston Symonds.

Others taking part in the outstanding celebration were:

Honorary Hostesses: Mrs. H. W. Goodrich, Mrs. Robert F. Heald, Mrs. William Jernick, Mrs. M. L. Lewis, Mrs. Edgar Sergeant, Mrs. G. R. B. Symonds, Mrs. Horace Tantum, Mrs. Philip Woodcock and Mrs. Edgar W. Wright.

Hospitality: Mr. and Mrs. Harry Cromley, Chairmen, Mr. and Mrs. Robert B.

Anderson, Mr. and Mrs. Archie Barbata, Mr. and Mrs. J. C. Brown, Mr. and Mrs. George Brownell, Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Ganong, Mr. and Mrs. William Gaynor, Mr. and Mrs. Wallace Gibson, Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Lewis, Mr. and Mrs. John Meyer, Mrs. Emil Miller, Mr. and Mrs. Carl Orechio, Mr. and Mrs. Abner Rutan, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Schaefer, Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Spinning, Miss Helen Terry, Mr. and Mrs. Dean Welch and Mrs. Everett Zabriskie.

Program: Philip Woodcock, G. R. B. Symonds.

Music: Dr. Ernest Ersfeld, C. A. Fell.

Refreshments: Mrs. Paul Bennett, Chairman, Mrs. Victor Anderson, Mrs. Robert Citrino, Mrs. Roy Denslow, Flora Loudon, Mrs. A. J. Mohr.

Decorations: Mrs. Charles Guenzler, Chairman, Mrs. John Fikus.

Seating Arrangements: Albert Jennings, A. J. Mohr, Paul Bennett.

Membership and Finance: Ann Lambiase, Helene Matt.

Exhibits: Mrs. Edward Assmus, Araminta Ayers, Mrs. George Berger, William Gilligan, Charles Hammond, M. Agnes Kelly, Florence Muller, Maritta Palmer, Clifford Place, Elsie Ryan, Mrs. M. L. Smith, Frank Speer, Marie Spinning, Jeff Stewart, Elizabeth Teel and Adriana Van Riper.

Junior Museum Assistants: Doreen Dafeldecker, Pamela Hayford, Deuse Hillman, Joann Robistrow, Barbara Parr.

General Chairman: Ann A. Troy.

On entering the second floor of the Museum building, one sees a wooden cupboard. Known as a Dutch Kas, the cupboard was donated by Warren Vreeland in 1906 to the Nutley Library which occupied a room in the oldest section of the now demolished Park School.

This description, handwritten, was pasted on the inside of the two-foot wide cupboard door by Warren Vreeland:

"A historical description of this piece of furniture which I propose to donate to the Nutley library.

"It was brought over from Holland by one of the first dominies that came to the Second River now Belleville and was a wedding present to my grandmother by her father John Oldham.

*"It has occupied a place in the old stone house by the bridge on Chestnut Street over 100 years ??? until the settlement of her da??? John Oldham when I bought it.*

*"Its antiquity can be demonstrated by examining the back; here is where you find quartered oak to perfection. The timber has been rived or split from the*

*log probably before saws were in use.*" (Question marks used because handwriting is blurred on 1906 writing.)

When the new library was opened in 1914, the cupboard was placed in the school supply room. Here it served a useful purpose for many years. During this time its unusual historical significance was recognized and observed by Miss Ann Troy, a teacher in the Nutley schools.

When the second antique show was held by the Historical Society in the Park School gymnasium in 1950, the Dutch Kas was placed on exhibit. Following the show, this gift of Warren Vreeland, with the consent of the Board of Education and of the Library Board of Directors, was moved to the Church Street School thus becoming the Museum's first historic acquisition.

Equally interesting is the hand drawn hose cart put in service in Franklin in 1897. With the Fire Department organized in 1894, the records show this piece of apparatus to be the first acquired by the town fathers.

Purchased from East Orange, the machine saw service in that community for many years. Efforts have been made by the Historical Society, the Fire Department and the East Orange civic authorities to secure the exact date of manufacture.

Similar hose carts in the New York Museum are known to be over 100 years old.

Rating high in interest with the hose cart is the Annie Oakley collection of pictures, letters, posters and bulletins which was presented to the Society by Miss Katherine Moore, of Newark, longtime friend of Mrs. Frank Butler, Annie Oakley's married name.

Added to this collection is the Annie Oakley Victorian penny, nicked on the edge by "Little Miss Sure Shot" while it was being thrown high in the air. The penny, kept from childhood years by Allan Stirratt, of Passaic Avenue, was presented to the Museum for permanent display.

The mineral collection, together with fluorescent lighted box, was made and donated by Charles E. Wilson, of Howe Avenue.

Dr. J. Warren Young's collection of New Jersey birds is also of very great interest.

War Memorial items, dating through the Revolutionary, Civil, Spanish American, World War I, World War II and Korean periods, hold many sacred memories for Nutley residents.

Presented as a Memorial by former teachers and pupils are two mahogany bookcases dedicated to Miss Alice J. Bickers, former principal of Yantacaw and Lincoln Schools.

These contain 50 volumes of source material on New Jersey history. Added to

this collection are 12 volumes of Essex County history presented by Ralph E. Heinzen, former editor and publisher of The Nutley Sun.

Recently a well-known volume on American glass was presented by friends of Miss Araminta Ayers in memory of her mother.

The permanent exhibits are supplemented from time to time by other possessions of the Society, according to the time of year or special interest of a group.

Old Edison phonographs, iron banks, commemorative china, children's toys, old Nutley manuscripts, newspapers, photographs, costumes and glassware are among the items on display at various intervals.

Special exhibits on Indian life and forms of transportation are set up at which time classes from the public and parochial schools visit the Museum with their teachers.

Material for these special exhibits is secured, on loan, from the State Museum at Trenton; the New Jersey Historical Society, in Newark; the Montclair Art Museum; the Newark Museum and from the Museum of Natural History in New York.

Local merchants have also assisted in providing displays.

Community groups use the Museum Building and the Historical Society sponsors several programs.

Each Monday night the Nutley Art Groups use the first floor for workshop classes.

A Travelers and Photographers group has met on the first Sunday afternoon of each month. Residents of Nutley who have recently toured Europe or the United States show their colored transparencies and compare notes of their trips.

A Junior Museum Club meets on the last Friday afternoon of each month. The programs are offered to boys and girls from fourth grade up.

Cooperation with the Newark Museum has supplied speakers on nature study, rockets and space ships. A magic show by High School student Marty Morrison has been most popular.

Programs on coins, stamps, guns, boxing and other hobbies have been arranged through the cooperation of friends of the Museum.

Four meetings a year are held by the Historical Society, one of which is the annual dinner held in early March.

Special programs are offered among which during the past two years have been "Hoffmann-La Roche, past and present," by Parke Richards, Jr., of 53 Alexander Avenue; "The History of Craft Painting," by Beda Zel Angle, a

Nutley artist; a Junior and Senior Hobby Show with 21 participants; the "Edison Laboratory" by Norman R. Speiden, curator, E. Orange Museum and Memorial Service by Alice J. Bickers Memorial Library Committee; "Nutley Forty Years Ago and Now," film of 1918 and colored slides of 1958; "Festival of Dolls," collections of Mrs. Albert L. Gaydos, Mrs. Royal Stager and Miss Mary Loudon; "American Women, Historical and Hysterical," concert comedienne, Marie Shepherd.

Cooperation with town government has been shown by the efforts of the Society in directing the acquisition of a town flag now installed in the Commission chamber.

In December, 1956, Mayor Harry W. Chenoweth requested the Historical Society to submit to the Town Commission an appropriate design to be used on a flag for the town.

Dr. Robert F. Heald, president of the Society, appointed a committee to work on the flag design project. Serving on this committee were Miss Marie Spinning, Mrs. William Pratt, Mrs. Vivian Fikus, Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Sergeant, Herbert Gloss, of the High School Art Department and Miss Troy, who served as chairman.

At the annual dinner meeting of the Society held March 19, 1957, designs were exhibited. By popular vote two designs submitted by Mrs. Fikus and two by High School students Barbara Vienti and Robert Cook were chosen for the committee's consideration.

A \$25 government bond was offered by Annin Co., nationally known flag manufacturers, for the designer of the flag chosen.

On March 31, a design submitted by Mrs. Fikus was elected unanimously by the committee. Suggestions offered by the Committee members to facilitate production were accepted by Mrs. Fikus in her final design.

This completed project was presented to the Mayor and Commissioners on July 16 in the form of a 3 x 5 foot flag size sketch. Dr. Heald remarked, "We in the Historical Society, believe this design ties together the past, present and future of Nutley in a remarkably able manner and will give us a flag of which the town can be proud. We recommend it for your consideration." Mayor Chenoweth received the design and commented: "It is not often that a governing body is able to participate in a project of such an enduring nature." At a meeting, August 6, 1957, the Commissioners officially approved the design for a Town flag.

One of the more popular exhibits with both youngsters and adults at the Nutley Museum, starting its sixth year in the old Church Street schoolhouse under the sponsorship of the Nutley Historical Society, is the Annie Oakley exhibit.

Nutley's recent history was accented on Sunday, August 16, 1959, when



Annie Oakley's 99th birthday was celebrated. An afternoon "open house" party was held which was attended by 200 youngsters and adults.

Mrs. William Longfelder of Highfield Lane acted as hostess. Miss Anna Donaldson displayed guns and other trophies presented to her father, John D. Donaldson, by Mr. and Mrs. Butler.

The Annie Oakley penny, donated by Allan Stirratt, was also on display. Mrs. Longfelder at whose home Annie Oakley often visited, provided refreshments for the children present.

With the second floor of the old school in operation as a Museum, the Historical Society turned its attention to activities pertaining to the outside of the building.

In August, 1956, the new front porch was constructed. A gift from the late Grace Maude Macfarland of \$1,000 made this possible.

Iron railings and lamps were installed on a porch made of flagstone and bricks. The bricks were secured from the demolished Park School section built in 1894.

The plaque inside the door reads, "Museum entrance erected August, 1956, in loving memory of Virginia Vreeland Macfarland, 1850-1939, gift of her daughter, Grace Maude Macfarland, 1880-1949."

In the Spring of 1957, memorial plantings were placed in the Colonial Garden adjoining the Museum. Forty businessmen and individuals donated trees and shrubs in memory of family and friends.

A plaque in the Museum hallway lists the donors, the persons remembered and the names of the chosen plantings.

A major operation on the outside walls was completed in 1958. Bricks were pointed up and window frames sealed at a cost of \$1,650.

Funds for restoration work have been secured by means of membership dues and a drive for donations, profits from antique shows, auctions, card parties, bargain sales, donations from rentals, card table advertising, a business professional directory now being installed and a gift of \$100 for venetian blinds.

Mr. and Mrs. Millard Nolze, custodians since November 15, 1957, have been most helpful, taking an active part in all of these activities, much beyond the call of duty.

In planning for the fifth anniversary program of the Nutley Museum, varied activities were reviewed by the Historical Society.

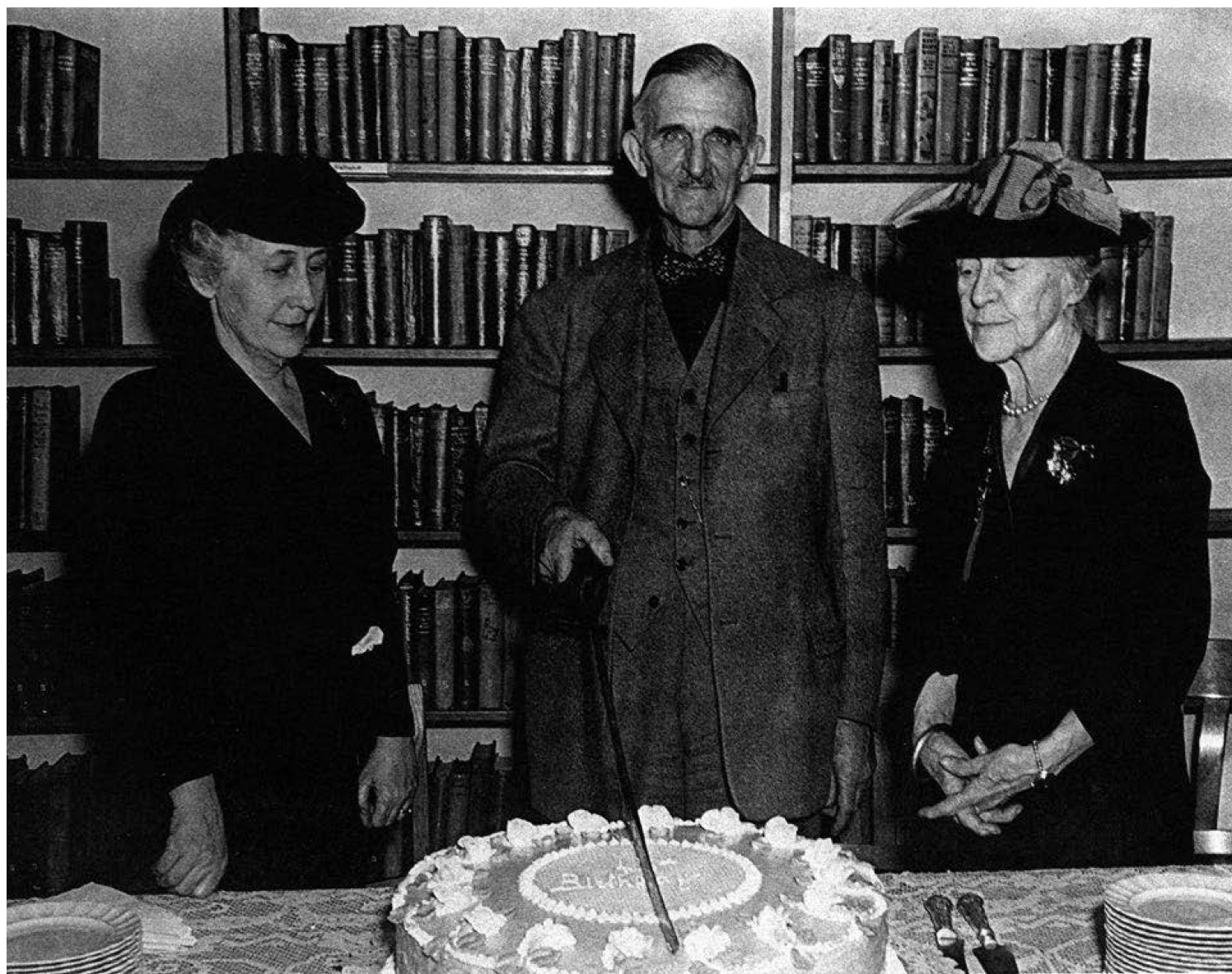
The large attendance at the September 27, 1959 program raised the total number of visitors signing the guest books for five years to 7,203 children and adults.

The glass blowing demonstration by Adrian Wargo was a unique contribution to the program. Exquisite pieces of old glass were also displayed by Mrs. Elmer B. Laughlin, Mrs. Clifford George, Mrs. Paul Bennett, Miss Ellen Nichols, Miss Araminta Ayers, Mrs. James Hurley, Miss Eleanore Stirratt, Miss Marie Spinning, Miss Ann Troy and Dr. Robert Heald.

Plans for the future were outlined as follows: a tentative date for the publication of the Society's history of Nutley was set up and means of financing such a project were discussed.

Removal of the school bell from the Park Avenue firehouse to restored belfry; completion of store rooms and vault in the cellar of the Museum; if space permits, the building of a workshop in the cellar for the restoration of Museum articles.

Securing modern museum cabinets and exhibit cases as Memorial gifts from Nutley citizens and organizations; cooperation with the Home Garden Club of Nutley in furthering plans for the colonial garden adjoining the Museum; developing plans for the War Memorial Alcove in cooperation with War Service organizations; (records and mementos of all wars to be preserved); consideration of plans for setting up classes for children on Saturday mornings in art and music; planning further cooperation with Nutley schools so that the Museum activities may coordinate with the school program; and continuance of a Museum Fund for which Mrs. Mamie D. Eisenhower's check (Mrs. Dwight D. Eisenhower) has been used as the initial deposit. This Fund will be set up to acquire articles of outstanding interest to the Museum program.



1945 Birthday Cake of Nutley Historical Society; cut by Frank Speer, with  
Mrs. Edgar Sergeant (left) and Mrs. Henry W. Goodrich (right)