

***LOCAL HISTORY,
GENEALOGY &
SPECIAL COLLECTIONS***



DEPARTMENT ANNUAL REPORT

JANUARY 1 TO DECEMBER 30, 2010

Compiled by Sarah Hull

ABOUT THE DEPARTMENT

From January 1 to December 30, 2010, the Local History Department employed two full-time and five part-time staff members. Together we have moved the department into a leadership position where other libraries turn to us for guidance, education, and best practices.

The reduction of funding in 2010 necessitated our cutting Saturday service, as well as discontinuing evening hours except by appointment. City budget cuts forced the Library to decrease the hours of all part-time staff, including the archivist, who became solely supported by grant funds. During this year of economic recession, our outstanding programs received several grants for special exhibits, staffing, supplies, and digitization projects. These included general operating and special project grants from:

- ◆ The New Jersey Historical Commission – provided general operations support for the department, helping us to employ three part-time staff members. We also received project support towards the digitization of historical newspapers, *The Daily Press* and *Plainfield Daily Press* (May 1887 to September 1916).
- ◆ The Union County Office of Cultural & Heritage Affairs – provided project support for the Courier News Photograph Archive and processing of related materials.
- ◆ The Plainfield Cultural & Heritage Commission - provided project support for the Courier News Photograph Archive and processing of related materials, as well as the professional conservation of the newly donated Catherine Webster family tree and Audubon print through the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts, and later the beautiful, archival-quality framing of the Audubon print through Swain Galleries.

Over the course of the year, the Department received 1,112 patrons in the Plainfield Room. We fielded 409 reference questions by phone, 416 by email, and 52 by mail. In addition, we received 435 young visitors (under 18 years old). An analysis of our statistics reveals the following activity:

- ◆ 2,183 Plainfield history questions were answered for 1,989 Local History patrons including 1,112 Plainfield Room visitors.
- ◆ 5,395 patrons visited our in-house Local History programs and exhibits.
- ◆ Our heaviest used resources continued to be New Jersey and Plainfield historical texts, photographs, city directories, and yearbooks.
- ◆ Remaining questions were regarding blueprints, genealogical research, materials from our Diversity Studies Collection, manuscript collections, and records from local organizations.

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

During the 2010, the Local History Department processed 36 linear feet of archival materials and received 39 new donations including genealogical papers, artwork, photographs, many publications, and a variety of artifacts and ephemera. Most notably, we received:

- ◆ An 1828 double elephant folio of Audubon's *Black-billed Cuckoo on Magnolia Grandiflora* (image on cover) and two oil portraits of Catherine Webster that originally hung in Plainfield's Catherine Webster Home.
- ◆ A hand-written family tree of Catherine Webster's family (this includes the Vail side).
- ◆ 278 additions to the Barbara Polk Riley Book Collection.
- ◆ 2 linear feet (2 storage boxes) of Plainfield Music Club records.
- ◆ Several Plainfield Police Department photographs and artifacts from a private donor.

Our collection of clubs and organizations records now contains documents from 148 agencies. This year we revised the content description of 119 Plainfield organizations. We created and encoded another 8 illustrated finding aids which are also accessible on our website. Having the finding aids online has proven to be beneficial in attracting other collections, because potential donors can see how much work is done by the Library in organizing and preserving these important records, and how easily they can then be accessed.

We have also expanded the Plainfield Reference collection through our new program of transcribing local church and cemetery records. These historical documents contain important information that genealogists can use to research their family heritage (see page 6 for details).

We created a new web page to highlight our manuscript collections, which has improved the management of these historical collections. Finding aids for the following collections are now available to the public:



- ◆ Plainfield Garden Club (addenda), 1915-2005.
- ◆ Plainfield Musical Club, 1892-1967.
- ◆ Plainfield Outdoor Arts Festival, 1971-2004.
- ◆ Robert L. Bender Papers, 1959-2001.
- ◆ Frederick F. Lennep Papers, 1946-1980.
- ◆ Dix-Lawrence Family papers, 1840-2004.
- ◆ Plainfield Families, papers, 1830-1988.

*Katherine Lawrence and grand daughter
Dorothea Dix Lawrence, circa 1910.*

GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH

This past year, we continued to provide outstanding service for our patrons who focus on genealogical research. We are fortunate to have two staff members who are professional genealogists; one of whom is taking courses towards her formal certification. A large percentage of our reference questions involve family research. Topics range from a quick look-up in the Plainfield city directories, locating an obituary on microfilm or in our archive, to building an extensive family tree over several visits. We have assisted patrons of all cultures, both young and old, and on an international level.

Of particular note is a woman who came to the Library with an old snapshot believed to be of a distant Plainfield family member. She was shown how to use the digitized city directories in tandem with census records available on a subscription website supplied through the Library. Her success in unraveling that mystery inspired her to become a Library Champion even though she is not a resident of Plainfield and had never visited the Library before discovering the extent of information available on its website. Another researcher received good news when the newly digitized *Plainfield Daily Press* revealed a 1902 marriage announcement — lost before our new digital keyword search feature since it was reported several months past the actual wedding.

Because genealogy-related questions and research are becoming more and more common, we are planning a special genealogy workshop in 2011. This new workshop, *Climbing Your Family Tree: Genealogy for Beginners*, is designed to assist the novice researcher in tracing their family history and using the outstanding resources available in the Library. The class has quickly filled to capacity, and the waiting list grows longer each week.

IN-HOUSE EXHIBITS

Due to the construction and relocation of the Children's Library, we were unable to hold exhibitions in the usual space within the Anne Louise Davis Gallery.

Union County Teen Arts

In January 2010, the 2009 Union County Teen Arts Touring Exhibit hung in the Library lobby, lobby wall case, entry way, and main reading room. Approximately 80 items were on display for the entire month. This annual exhibit is sponsored by the Union County office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs.

Chronicles of Plainfield, 1870 to 1970

In January, the exhibit, *Chronicles of Plainfield, 1870 to 1970*, opened. This exhibit highlighted four photographers whose works comprise the heart of the Library's photograph collection and document the history of Plainfield as it changed from the 19th to the mid 20th century: Guillermo Thorn (1837-1920), Reina Lawrence (1869-1949), Paul Revere Collier (1886-1952), and Irving Georges (1933-). To emphasize the diversity that is Plainfield, included in this group are one woman and an African-American. Though their works differ in content and context, together they offer a continuum of history for a New Jersey community that has undergone dramatic change. Due to the renovation of the Children's Library, the usual Anne Louise

Davis Gallery space was not available. To accommodate the 75 photographs, the in-house program was exhibited in three separate rooms with three additional flat cases holding ephemera and artifacts. The entire exhibition drew 3,584 visitors.

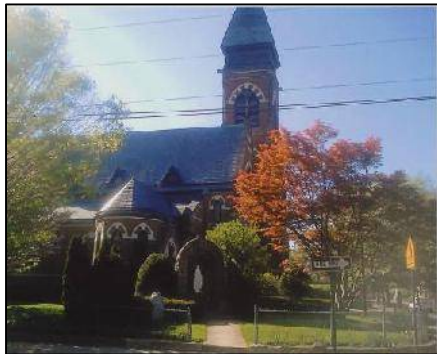
Plainfield Music Club

In February, a variety of records from the Plainfield Music Club Collection were on exhibit. Displayed items included minute books, scrapbooks, programs, newspaper reviews and other clippings. This exhibit was especially prepared for current club members during their monthly club meeting.

Jean Mattson Retrospective of Photographs

In April, local photographer Jean Mattson loaned us 30 of her photographs for an exhibition. 84 patrons attended the opening on April 17th. The photography retrospective took the viewer from Mattson's explorations of the streets of Dublin to the gardens of Plainfield underlining the community spirit in each. This exhibit ran through August 2010.

Plainfield Public Library's Fifth Annual Photography Contest



Our 5th Annual Photograph Contest exhibition "East Side, West Side, All Around The Town" reflected various aspects of life all around the city of Plainfield. The 2010 competition met with the enthusiastic response of 20 contributors who entered 72 images of Plainfield. All entries have been digitized, indexed, and added to our Historical Photograph Collection. Over 714 patrons visited this exhibit.

West Side, The Power of Faith
by Jacqueline Martinez

Case Exhibits

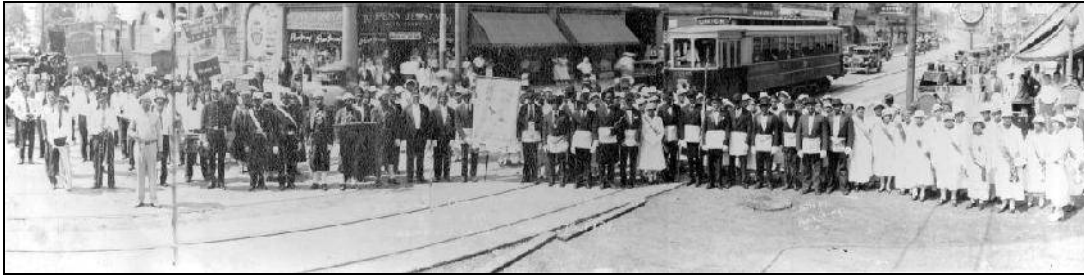
- ◆ Local Authors – presented titles from several Plainfield authors in our collection.
- ◆ Games – a fun showcase of family and childhood games we've played throughout the years.
- ◆ Trains – a time-honored, winter holiday tradition for many families.
- ◆ Plainfield Symphony – a beautiful display of musical instruments, sheet music, and ephemera from Plainfield's own symphony.
- ◆ Milt Campbell – highlighted several photographs of Plainfield's own athletic champion. This exhibit was also on display during the Y.M.C.A. Anniversary Dinner at the home of Rashid and Wendy Burney.

Plainfield Room

- ◆ Historical maps and blueprints
- ◆ Plainfield Police – logs, photographs, and artifacts
- ◆ Diversity Studies Collection books

DEVELOPING A DIGITAL ARCHIVE

The ongoing development of the Library's digital archive has helped us to strengthen and further develop existing programs, initiate new programming on local and New Jersey history, improve management and interpretation of our historical collections, increase accessibility of our historical resources to diverse communities, and increase the body and quality of information on Plainfield and New Jersey history available to the public.



Freemasons in Plainfield, June 27, 1934.

This is a rare photograph of African-American Masonic lodges at their annual state convention in Plainfield. This panoramic image was scanned in three parts and then stitched together using photo imaging software. The vertical line on the left side was visible on the original print, and was not retouched.

During 2010, 10,123 photographic prints were processed, 1,308 were entered into our online database, and 606 of them were scanned and linked to records in the public database. 58 reels of blueprints were proofed and data for 2,115 blueprint frames were entered into the public database.

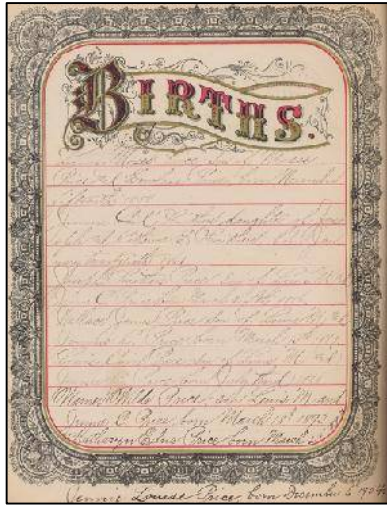
The department now has the means of scanning prints on the in-house scanner and cleaning up the digital images for upload into our online database. This new process has already saved the department approximately \$2,200 in scanning costs alone.

New Jersey Digital Highway

With the help of a Rutgers University graduate student intern, the department has broadened our public access by creating a presence on the *New Jersey Digital Highway (NJDH)*. The Plainfield Historical Maps Collection of the Plainfield Public Library contains sixteen digitized images of large-scale maps of New Jersey, the city of Plainfield, and the surrounding areas. These images of maps too large to be scanned using the in-house scanner, done free at NJDH through Rutgers, are a selection from the Plainfield Public Library Map Collection that is comprised of over 150 flat and framed wall maps dating from the 1800's through the 20th century.

Transcription Projects

Several transcription projects are underway. The Children's Home Association ledger, or Charity ledger, was added into the Local Organizations index. It has received 149 views from four countries. This index contains 1,127 names and dates of people in Plainfield who applied for relief and help for their families. The full names and ages of all family members are included in this index. Personal information about the reason for the charitable request is blocked.



Price Bible, 1842-1904.

The Price and Thoner family bibles were added into our Family Bible Project, which has already received 88 website views from two countries.

Local History staff and five volunteers are indexing and transcribing a number of records loaned by local churches. The First Park Baptist Church was first to lend its late 19th century membership lists and deceased parishioner files, as well as two ledgers from Evergreen Cemetery. Mount Olive Baptist Church has loaned two minute books with entries of deceased members dating from 1916. Crescent Avenue Presbyterian Church has loaned us an 1844 volume of church records. This leather bound journal records original members of the village church and the founding members of the Presbyterian Church. They have offered us access to all of their records. The next project will be transcribing their 19th century Session Records.

In total, staff and volunteers transcribed over 25,000 records from our archives as well as the aforementioned local churches. Records included: *Courier News* obituary files (14,388 records), Local History Department Bio Files (5,079 records), 1,030 deceased files from First Park Baptist Church, as well as their two Evergreen Cemetery ledgers containing 201 burial records from 1901 to 1915; and church memberships lists containing 659 records from 1826 to 1890.

WEBSITE ENHANCEMENT AND EXHIBITS

The Local History Department's web pages were some of the most viewed pages on the Library's website. During 2010, 14,185 people viewed the web pages. This equals over 6% of all visitors – more than any other Library department.

Views were logged in from 28 countries, including the United States, Canada, France, Nigeria, Russia, Japan, and Australia.

Reaching New Audiences

One of our most successful pieces of web-based content is the *Historical Photo of the Month*. A number of existing prints were digitized and made available to the public through this project, which began in May 2009. This initiative drew public interest to Local History and our digital archive by offering up new images on a regular basis. Each month, an historical photograph from the collection is highlighted on the main page of the Library's website. Since its inception, the Photo of the Month web page has received 12% of all department-related views. The images are also shared on the Library's new *Facebook* page.



WWI Soldiers Leave for Duty, circa 1916.

In addition, sixteen new images were added into the *Star Ledger* “Glimpse of History” archive (see also page 9), which has received 568 website views from two countries. The images first appear in the Union County (and once Somerset County) print editions of the Sunday *Star Ledger* newspaper. The images from this on-going exhibit are also available through the Library’s new *Facebook* page.

2010 Online Exhibits

The Department created three new online exhibits in 2010:

- *Chronicles of Plainfield, 1870 to 1970* (527 views) was the online counter-part to the in-house, physical exhibit which opened in January 2010 (noted above).
<http://www.plainfieldlibrary.info/OnlineExhibits/Chronicles/Chronicles.html>
- *Milt Campbell, Plainfield Champion* (729 views) was created in honor of Plainfielder, Milt Campbell, and highlighted 44 photographs of the Courier News Photograph Archive.
<http://www.plainfieldlibrary.info/OnlineExhibits/MiltCampbell/MiltCampbell.html>
- Plainfield Public Library’s Fifth Annual Photography Contest, *East Side, West Side, All Around The Town* (946 views), highlighted the 20 contributors who entered 72 images of Plainfield for our 2010 contest.
http://www.plainfieldlibrary.info/OnlineExhibits/2010PhotoContest/2010Photo_main.html

OFF-SITE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Rutgers University workshop *New Jersey Digital Highway* - one staff member and one volunteer attended this training to learn how we can offer greater access to our archival collections through this web-based system.
- Somerset County History Roundtable - one staff member presented a paper entitled, “Preserving the Written Word.”
- Morristown Archives GW Archives - one staff member attended the History and Preservation (HP) meeting, tour and presentations by Archivist and Program Chairman on the History of the Archive, the discovery of presidential papers and rare books there and the development of programs for youth training in museum studies and conservation.
- Kean University – staff members met with Thorn photograph historian, Prof. Frank Esposito and worked with scholars on the identification of the Plainfield group of photos.
- Senior Citizens Service Center - one staff member and one volunteer held Memoir Writing Club meetings.
- Genealogical Society of New Jersey - one staff member attended a presentation and class.

- Archives Week - two staff members attended lectures by four speakers on World War II Archives in New Jersey; Oral History Project at Rutgers; Early film and photography archives of New Jersey-Steichen US Navy Photography during war; attended preservation workshop, HP meeting and planning meeting for 2011.
- Princeton Preservation Group - one staff member gave Presentation on Paul R. Collier nitrate negatives, and their preservation, storage, and printing.
- Boston University Center for Professional Education – one staff member successfully completed an Online Certificate in Genealogical Research.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

During 2010, the Local History department continued our outreach of educational and cultural programs to the people of Plainfield, Union County, and New Jersey in general.

Book Repair Workshops

Volunteer conservation consultant Leonard Cummings was hired to present two series of workshops on Book Conservation and Repair; he was assisted by Local History and other Library staff. Approximately thirteen participants composed of librarians, students, and Plainfield residents, attended each sequential session. They received a formal certificate of completion at the end, as well as the book they had completely rebuilt over the course of the series. The workshops resulted in rave reviews and strong interest in further instruction. In response, the Department is offering an advanced series of workshops in Spring 2011, as well as a workshop specifically designed for non-professionals.



Book Repair Workshop participants, Nov. 2010.

Barack Obama Green Charter School



From October through December 2010, the Local History staff instructed 249 high school students from the Barack Obama Green Charter School in Plainfield. Students received hands-on instruction about searching for local history information and were also given an opportunity to work with a variety of original, archival materials.

Students from Plainfield's Barack Obama Green Charter School learn about local history, December 2010.

Family Treasures Presentations

Local History staff members held two workshops on how to care for and preserve family papers and photographs. The February program was sponsored by the Union County Historical

Commission, and was attended by approximately 25 people. Later in October, we held a similar workshop off-site at Learning for Life located at the Presbyterian Church on Front Street in Plainfield. Both of the presentations were so well received that we are offering another Family Treasures workshop in 2011.

Memoir Writing Club

Two Local History staff members led the monthly Memoir Writing Club meetings at the Library. A second club, moderated by a staff member and volunteer, was established off-site at the Senior Center on East Front Street in Plainfield in September; this group also meets on a monthly basis. A third club was created when the SarahCare Adult Day Care Center approached us about coming to the group. Since there were too many members to be absorbed, we created a separate group for them. However, due to transportation troubles, this group only met three times.



*Memoir Writing Club meeting,
December 2010.*

NOTABLE PUBLICITY IN PRINT AND ONLINE

The Department received quite a bit of publicity during the past year. Publicity items included:

- Courier News Photograph Archive article in the *Courier News*, March 2010
http://www.plainfieldlibrary.info/AboutUs/NewsArchive/Documents/CNarticle_03012010.pdf
- Library Newsletter – Local History Special Issue, August 2010
This issue was emailed to 3224 people.
<http://www.plainfieldlibrary.info/AboutUs/Newsletter/2010/Aug2010.html>
- Netherwood Neighborhood Association Calendar , November 2010
<http://plainfield.injersey.com/2010/11/12/plainfields-netherwood-neighbors-celebrate-local-history-with-holiday-calendar-sale/>
- NJLA Chronicle, StoryCorps and Memoir Club articles, Winter 2010
<https://files.pbworks.com/download/L64PDXi67L/njla/24777490/ChronicleWinter2010.pdf>
- NJLA Chronicle, Courier News Photograph Archive article, Spring 2011 (published in December 2010, not yet available online)
- *The Star Ledger's* “Glimpse of History” series that appears in the county editions, January – December 2010. We’ve had images appear on a monthly basis.
<http://photos.nj.com/star-ledger/2010/08/un0815historylms.html>

The Library received indirect publicity through the outstanding work of *Courier News* reporter Mark Spivey. Mark was the recipient of the 2010 NJLA Journalism Award for his exceptional news coverage of the Plainfield area, which often features the Library and Local History.
<http://njla.org/honorsawards/library/2010/>

IN CONCLUSION

Local staff and volunteers are very proud of our individual and group accomplishments. We are dedicated to supporting the Library's mission and strive to educate our patrons about the importance of history and conserving historical resources. We are grateful to our donors, who have entrusted us with their personal and family items, for without them our collections would simply not exist. We are equally appreciative to the citizens of Plainfield and the Library Board of Directors, who have so successfully advocated on our behalf during this past year of uncertainty. Moreover, without the unfailing support and tireless leadership of Library Director, Joe Da Rold, the local history program would still be a dark, metal cage hidden in a dusty backroom; its treasures long forgotten.

We truly hope to continue our work in preserving local history and making the past come alive for the people of Plainfield. We are:

Joseph H. Da Rold, Director
Mary Ellen Rogan, Assistant Director, Head of Collection Development and
Head of Local History
Sandra Gurshman, Local History Librarian; also works in Reference Department
Sarah Hull, Archivist; also works in Information Technology Department
Jessica Myers, Local History and Special Projects Librarian; also works in the
Reference and Children's Departments
Sonja Sekely-Rowland, Project Archivist and Volunteer
Jane Thoner, Librarian and Genealogist
Jeff Wassen, Visual Materials and Exhibition Coordinator and Volunteer

Our professional staff is capable and energetic, but our accomplishments would not have been possible without the incredible work of our 18 dedicated and extremely talented volunteers:

Cynthia Balejsik	Eleanor Monks
Michelle Bishop	Michelle Rausa Campbell
Tressa Brown	Barbara Polk Riley
Leonard Cummings	Mary Della Sala
Edgar Freire	Debra Schiff
Bill Garrett	Sonja Sekely-Rowland
Taraka Gilbert	Adrienne Stewart
Elizabeth McNish	Jeff Wassen
Margaret Minatee	Yvonne Whaley

We thank you most sincerely.