

The Millburn Poor Farm

by George Goffe

Poor people in Millburn...it almost sounds like an oxymoron. Of course, there *are* residents who have financial difficulties and some who may require public assistance, which is available in many forms these days, such as unemployment insurance, food stamps, etc. Years ago those in financial difficulty in Millburn had no welfare programs available except for the Poor Farm.

The Poor Farm was established on a plot of approximately 69 acres acquired in 1879 at a cost of \$2500 plus \$102.37 for legal fees. It was located on White Oak Ridge Road and is now the site of Gero Park. The purchase, however, was very unpopular; the newspapers insisted that the money was being spent to keep tramps. Investigations were demanded of its operations and every penny was scrutinized and criticized. Sounds familiar...

The farm became a working farm, used for growing crops and raising livestock. The paupers had the pleasure of seeing their names published in the annual report of the township committee. For the year ending Feb. 16, 1884, the names of

the paupers at the farm were John Hart, Moses Green, Harvey Vreeland and Beriah Wood. The crops raised in that year included:

- 81 bushels potatoes
- 200 bushels corn
- 20 bushels buckwheat
- 87 bushels apples
- 85 bushels oats
- 30 bushels rye
- 7 bushels white beans

The farm made other sales that year, including eggs for \$17.28, pigs for \$17 and milk for \$13.03. A total of \$94.93 was received for "teaming". Expenditures for the farm included \$17.40 for ploughs and other agricultural tools, \$236 for repairs to the barn and house and \$33.91 for fertilizer.

Poor Farm, cont'd...

It is not clear if the farm was self-sustaining. For the fiscal year noted above, \$900 was appropriated by the township committee for "support of the poor". However, this amount covered other expenses, including the following:

- \$153.07 to W.W. and W.E. McCollum for groceries
 - 149.71 to John Drake
 - 41.72 to A.S. Reeve for meat
 - 15.00 to S.C. Smith for funeral expenses for paupers
 - 12.00 to St. Stephen's Cemetery for two graves for paupers
- The overseer, C. Van Wert received \$300.

The inventory of stock and crops at the Poor Farm taken February 2, 1884 included:

- 2 horses.....\$125.00
- 2 horse blankets.....1.00
- 1 ton rye straw.....12.00
- 95 chickens at \$.50.....47.50
- 3 turkeys at \$1.50.....4.50
- 25 bushels corn at \$.60.....15.00
- 8 pigs.....10.00

By 1914, the farm was down to three inmates and it became too costly to maintain, requiring a full-time overseer, so it was rented to George Trowbridge with the obligation to take in any indigent persons the town saw fit to send him.

Paupers were also buried on the farm and a Potter's Field is located near the intersection of Parsonage Hill Road and Kennedy Parkway (see map on page 1; note location of "CEM" on Poor Farm property).

In 1925, the Fin, Fur, Feather, Skeet Club was established on the property.

During the Depression, the responsibility for the indigent apparently came under the supervision of Essex County.

In 1934 the property was rented for use as a dairy farm and later for boarding horses.

The Poor Farm also had its fifteen minutes of fame in 1919 when it was used as the setting for the motion picture "The Stream of Life", produced by Paramount Pictures. Several local children had parts in the picture.

Now the site, with its pools, tennis courts, and playing fields, provides pleasure for all the residents of Millburn...and the price was right.



In Search of the Condron Family, Part Two

The author of this article, Mr. Joseph Ringers of Virginia, wrote to the historical society looking for information about his mother, Julia Condron Ringers. In part one of the article, which appeared in the last *Thistle*, Mr. Condron related that his maternal grandmother, Mary Halpin Condron, died in 1904, leaving her husband William with four young children. At the time, William was also sick with tuberculosis. Shortly after their mother's death, apparently, three of the Condron children were sent to Millburn to live with Felix and Elizabeth McGee. Mr. Condron's mother, Julia, was one of the three children who lived with the McGees and it is believed she was about 5 years old when she came here...

It is believed that Elizabeth McGee was William Condron's sister; there is a photograph of a woman holding a baby. It is inscribed "Mary and Aunt Elizabeth Condron". Mary was born in 1891, the first girl and her middle name was Elizabeth. According to the 1910 census, the McGees were married about 1899 and Elizabeth entered the US in 1880. Felix McGee claimed to have been born in New Jersey.

The children's father, William Condron, did not accompany them to the McGee's. When he entered Bonnie Brae (TB) Sanatorium in 1916, he gave his residence as 243 Union Street, Elizabeth. His parents were listed as Lizzie McGill and Thomas Condron of Ireland.

Felix and Elizabeth McGee lived on Highland Avenue in Short Hills in 1910, according to census information. On the same 1910 census, the three Condron children (Phil, Mary Elizabeth and Julia) are listed as "boarders", although Phil was reported by his son Francis to have left there in 1902. The census taker reported this as a rented house and that there were 14-20 farm animals there. Anna Cecelia was sent to Passaic, where she died in 1907. Mary Elizabeth left around 1909 to live on Main Street in Millburn. Only Julia is believed to have been at the McGee's when the census was taken in 1910. She left about 1912-13 to move to Passaic, then to Paterson.

In 1919, Felix McGee was listed as a recorder for the Police Department in Millburn.

Julia always referred to him as "the judge". He also served as the health inspector for the Board of Health for a number of years. In the Annual Report of the Township Committee of Millburn, NJ for the year ending January 31, 1907, his annual salary was listed as \$106.13. However, his name also appears on the "List of Unpaid Taxes" with the amount of \$4.09 for the year 1902. There is no information about what tax he owed or why the amount is so small. A map of the period does not show any property that he may have owned.

I suspected that Felix McGee also might have been Overseer of the Poor, but I have been unable to confirm that. The 67 acre Poor Farm in Millburn was established in 1879 on White Oak Ridge Road.

When Julia spoke of her youth, she mentioned both Millburn and Short Hills. Millburn is in the southwest corner of Essex County and was formed from Springfield in 1857 when Union County was organized. During its early years, the manufacture of paper was established and several paper mills were erected. One of the early paper mills survives as the "Paper Mill Playhouse". Later, railroads helped establish the industry of manufacturing hats, which became the principal industry in the 1880's.

Julia Condron was confirmed at the St. Rose of Lima Church on April 13, 1909. Her name appears as *Julia Magdalene Condron*. The sponsor was "Jno. Lonagen" and James T. Brown was the rector. She never revealed this to her children.

The church of St. Rose of Lima was organized in 1852 in Springfield. The physical structure was moved from Morris Avenue, Springfield to Short Hills Avenue in Millburn in 1876; the move took six weeks. It was a wooden structure with 300 sittings. The parish (about 1883) had 500 souls and a cemetery fitted up near the church. St. Rose of Lima Parochial School was established about 1869. Two Sisters of Charity nuns were teachers of the 80-90 scholars in 1883.

In all probability, Julia attended that parochial school. While she never spoke of her education to her children, she was definitely educated and she encouraged her children to go as far as they could in school. Her handwriting was fine; her general knowledge was certainly in keeping with that expected of one who had attended school; and, she had some musical talent both in voice and piano. She had several clerical jobs, as well as sales clerk. She wrote poetry which was published in the Paterson (NJ) *Morning Call* newspaper. She even left a note in rhyme to her children, which was found after she passed away. Since she obtained working papers at or about age fourteen and went off to live on her own in Paterson, her schooling must have been limited to the elementary grades. Someone or some school in Millburn served her well.

Condron, cont'd...

Julia left Millburn to go first to Passaic, where her brother Phil had married. She decided to move on to Paterson where she got a job at Meyer Brothers Department Store "through the influence of the judge." The store employed her on the condition that she would get her own working papers. Her pay was \$4.50 per week, of which she paid \$3.00 for board. She had to save her money for clothing; shoes cost about \$2.00 a pair, so she would set five cents aside each week toward a pair of shoes.

She may have broken from the Catholic religion about this time, possibly because of the influence of her girl friend who became an evangelist in Florida. She and the friend changed jobs to make more money. At the new job, a fellow worker befriended her and took her home to meet her brother (Joseph Ringers, Sr.), whom she married in the rectory of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Paterson on December 1, 1917. I was born on April 19, 1919 and my brother on December 28, 1935. There was at least one miscarriage between the two boys.

Julia spent her youth in Millburn. She was educated there and was healthier, due in large measure to the better life available to her in Millburn with Felix and Elizabeth McGee. Julia died at age 80 on July 8, 1978.

So many questions remain...Was Elizabeth McGee her aunt? Who educated her and how did she learn so much about music? What part of Ireland did her parents come from? Why, when, and how did her parents come to the U.S.? Why were they and who sent the Condron children to Millburn to live with the McGees? Why was she sent out into the world at such a tender age to fend for herself? Why didn't she maintain contact with the McGees? What caused her, the only one of her brothers and sisters, to leave the Catholic religion? Are there any descendants of the McGee, or others who influenced Julia's life, who are able to shed any light on her youth?

If any readers have information that might be of interest to Mr. Ringers, please contact him by mail through the society at PO Box 243, Short Hills, or call Lynne Ranieri at 379-5032.

We Are Also Looking For..

Former Short Hills resident and historian, Thomas J. Collins, has also written to the historical society looking for information about a Colonel Corkran. Mr. Collins recently learned that the lovely residential community of Henlopen Acres, adjacent to Rehoboth Beach in Delaware, was developed by Colonel Corkran of Millburn, NJ.

According to a booklet about "The Homestead", Rehoboth's oldest building, Colonel Corkran "was an architect and engineer who (beyond his military service) had worked for some years in the development of Short Hills, N.J."

The Corkrans purchased the Homestead in 1929 and restored the house and developed the area. Mr. Collins presumes that "any development that (Colonel Corkran) worked on in Short Hills was most probably in the 1920s" and recalls that in that period the Nottingham and Knollwood areas were developed.

Can any readers help Mr. Collins uncover information about Colonel Corkran's role in the development of Short Hills? If so, please contact the society at PO Box 243, Short Hills, or Valerie Bleier (376-7048) or Lynne Ranieri. (379-5032).

Members' Reception

The Millburn-Short Hills Historical Society will host its annual members' reception in early October. Invitations will be mailed to society members for this popular event.



Short Hills Antiques Show

The historical society will again have a table to sell our books, walking tours, and tote bags and to solicit members at the Short Hills Antiques Show at Community Congregational Church. The show will take place on Friday, October 1 and Saturday, October 2 (with a Patron's Preview Party on Thursday evening, September 30). We will need volunteers to run the table throughout the show. It will be a good opportunity to assist in the historical society's fund raising - and see a wide selection of antiques. If you are interested in helping, please call society president Valerie Bleier at 376-7048.



For the first time ever, the Millburn-Short Hills Historical Society is planning a wonderful December holiday house tour for members only! On December 12th, from 2-4 p.m., area residents will open their historic homes, decorated for the holidays, to members who can also enjoy light refreshments.

There will be no charge for attendance at the house tour, but members are encouraged to renew their membership now, in order that they may be eligible to join the society for this members-only special event.

Millburn History on Exhibit

The society was pleased to present photos and artifacts from Millburn's past in an exhibit at the town library during the month of June.

Residents generously donated artifacts from their collections to be exhibited in the display case and the society enlarged, and framed for display, a variety of photos from their collection.

The items on display generated many enthusiastic comments from visitors and generous offers of donations of additional photos and reminiscences about town history. "Thanks" to everyone who contributed to and help set up this very popular exhibit!

Do You Have Photos?

The enthusiastic response to the photo exhibit at the library in June has added impetus to the planned publication of a book of old photos of the town or its residents. If you have photos or postcards to share or donate, please contact society president Valerie Bleier c/o PO Box 243, Short Hills or call her at 376-7048.

Changes to Membership Dues

The following modest changes to the dues and membership categories were proposed and approved by the board of the historical society. Please note that these changes are effective immediately:

1993-94 Dues

Individual - \$10.00

Family - \$15.00

Patron - \$25.00

Business - \$25.00

Life - \$150.00

Phone No. 4

Vaux Hall Inn

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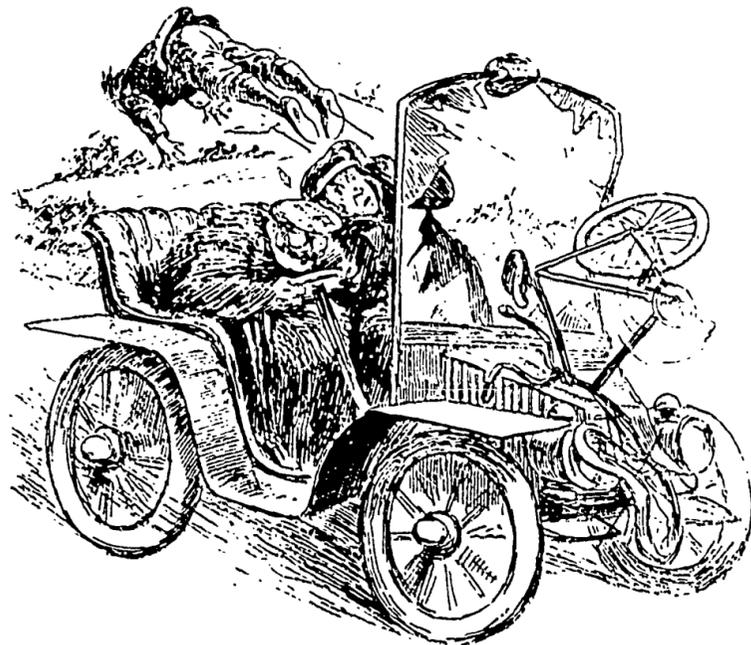
MILLBURN AVENUE, MILLBURN

Exactly How Fast Was I Going, Officer?

(The following is an excerpt from the handwritten minutes of the Millburn Board of Health meeting of November 2, 1905)

"Mr. Madden was present and complained of the reckless manner in which some Automobilists ran through the township and requested the committee to take steps to prevent it and asked the clerk to take down No. 9269 as one that he had seen running at a dangerous rate of speed.

On motion the Chief of Police was instructed to get estimates for six sign posts and six signs stating 'Automobiles go slow'."



Historical Society 1993-4 Officers

President - Valerie Bleier

Vice President - Lynne Ranieri

Vice President - Madeline Ribaud

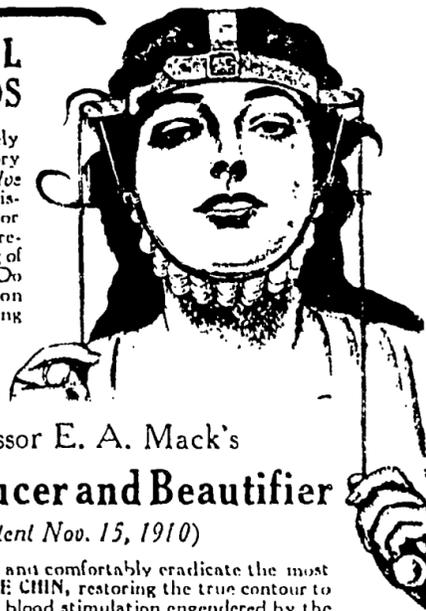
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JUST PULL THE CORDS

gently and alternately and the little "ivory tinted" rollers revolve against the fatty tissue. No irritation or undue pressure—merely a steady kneading of the fleshy folds. Do this five minutes on arising in the morning and on retiring at night. This simple home treatment afforded by



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will surely, steadily and comfortably eradicate the most pronounced DOUBLE CHIN, restoring the true contour to chin and neck. The blood stimulation engendered by the steady massage also dispels all flabbiness and stringiness of neck or throat and effaces lines about chin and mouth

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Can You HELP Us?

The Historical Society always needs help with history! You can discover how fascinating and how much fun it is to relive the history of Millburn-Short Hills by talking to residents and former residents who remember Stewart and Cora Hartshorn, or through the many pictures of the town as it used to be.

If you would like to help, please return the form below to:
Millburn-Short Hills Historical Society, PO Box 243, Short Hills, NJ 07078 and indicate in which of the following activities you are interested:

- *Archives* (assisting in indexing archival materials)
- *Item Indexing* (reading and indexing back issues of The Item)
- *Oral History* (interviewing long-time or famous residents)
- *Photo Inventory*
- *Slide Shows* (presenting the four Society slide shows to schools, etc.)

OR

Do you have a collection of historical items? Would you be willing to speak about your collection at a Society meeting?

I would like to participate in the following activities:

Membership Archives Item Indxg Photos
 Oral History Slide Show Program Thistle

I have a collection of _____
which I'd be willing to display and/or speak about.

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
PHONE _____

Is Your Membership History?

This is the time of year when we solicit renewal of membership for our upcoming fiscal year beginning July 1st. Your dues support our programs and the ongoing and special projects of the society. Among these projects are our exceptional walking tours of the township, the Thistle, archive acquisitions and photo collections and ongoing projects such as the slide shows and Item indexing.

We urge you to join our society and thereby support our efforts to increase the awareness of the history of our community. For your convenience, a membership envelope is enclosed and for members who are interested in participating in the work of our organization, please return the survey tear-off with your renewal.



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