Aviation City

By Robert L. Cohen

It all started on the sands of Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, in December of 1903. The first attempt at flight was made by the Wright Brothers of Dayton, Ohio, on December 14, but after some trial and error with Orville as pilot on December 17 around 10:30 A.M., the flyer moved down its rail and took off. The first heavier than air engine powered flight lasted 12 seconds and went 120 feet. The craft was 21'1" long with a wing span of 40’ 4". The engine was 4 cylinders, 12 horsepower, and the top speed was approximately 30 miles per hour. There were three other flights that memorable day, the longest being the fourth and last with Wilbur at the controls, and it went 59 seconds and traveled 800 feet.

The Wright Brothers went from owning a bicycle shop that allowed them to tinker and invent to founding an industry that continues to develop known as the Aerospace industry. The basic company they founded has become through many changes in its history the Curtis-Wright Corporation. During World War II Curtis Wright grew to become the second largest American corporation with only General Motors being larger.

The Wright Company was set up by the brothers in Dayton, Ohio, and they built their first plane in 1909. By 1919 after mergers and acquisitions, the company became known as the Wright Aeronautical Corporation. An example of this merger activity took place in 1916, when the company combined with the Glen Martin Company. This merger lasted only a couple of years until the Martin Company left the Wright Company and went on its own. Today it remains part of a viable company called Lockheed-Martin.

During World War I a lot of work was done at the Wright plant in New Brunswick, New Jersey. After the Wright-Martin Company was dissolved in 1919, the Wright Company moved to Paterson into a new plant. The plant was built by the Paterson industrial Development Company, established to bring new industry to Paterson.

This first Paterson plant was built on Beckwith Avenue, occupied 90,000 square feet and employed 350 people. The Paterson plant was noted for the high quality of its engines, which did quite well in air races between the wars.

Charles L. Laurence had been developing air cooled engines, and in 1923 Wright bought Laurence’s company and made him a Vice President. Later he became Chief Executive of Wright. The air cooled engines were further developed: They were named after winds and...
## Calendar of Events
### January – June 2012

**January 28, 2012**: A Presidential Year. An exciting new exhibit at Lambert Castle exploring the role of the 44 Chief Executives in our cultural history. Opens January 28 and runs through October 7.

**February 11**: Genealogy Club Meeting. Saturday, 10 am, Lambert Castle. Program to be announced.

**February 17, 2012**: A Presidential Year Exhibit Opening Reception. Friday, 7 pm, Lambert Castle.

**February 20–26**: Presidents’ Week. Lambert Castle, open seven days. Children free with paid adult (limit two children per adult). Scavenger hunts (ages 4-12), prizes.

**March 7**: PCHS Quarterly Meeting. Wednesday, 7 pm, Lambert Castle. Program: “Jacqueline Kennedy’s Historic Preservation Legacy,” presented by Kathleen Galop. Free and open to the public. This program is presented through the support of the New Jersey Council for the Humanities.


**March 10–11**: Local Authors’ Showcase. Saturday, 1-5 pm, Sunday, 10:30 am-5 pm, Lambert Castle. Talks, book signings, panel discussions featuring local authors. Regular museum fees. (Please note that the museum will be closed on these two days.)

**April 14**: Genealogy Club Meeting. Saturday, 10 am, Lambert Castle. Program: “20th Century WWI and WWII Military Records,” presented by Toni McKeen.

**April 19–22**: Afternoon Tea at Lambert Castle. Noon and 3 pm daily. $35 admission, advanced reservations required. Program to be announced.

**May 2**: PCHS Annual Meeting. Wednesday, 7 pm. Reports and elections. Program to be announced.

**May 12**: Genealogy Club Meeting. Saturday, 10 am, Lambert Castle. Program: “Silent Cities, Graveyards, Churchyards and Cemeteries,” presented by Peter Osborne.

**May 30**: Garret Hobart Lecture. Wednesday, 7 pm. A discussion of New Jersey’s own Garret Hobart, Vice President under William McKinley. Presented by Passaic County Historian Ed Smyk and local writer Bob Cohen. $5 admission, free for PCHS Members.

**June 9**: Genealogy Club Bus Trip. Program and schedule to be announced.

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### Quarterly Meeting • March 7th

**Jacqueline Kennedy’s Historic Preservation Legacy**

This year, with an exhibit exploring the history of the American Presidency on display at Lambert Castle, it seems only fitting to hear the story of one of our most prominent First Ladies and her role in historic preservation. Kathleen P. Galop, a practicing attorney who, like her subject, has taken a special interest in preserving history, will present “Jacqueline Kennedy’s Historic Preservation Legacy” at the March quarterly meeting of the Passaic County Historical Society.

In her talk, Galop will trace “Jackie” Kennedy’s interest in saving the historic Lafayette Park neighborhood across the street from the White House and discuss the impact that success had on the enactment of the Historic Preservation Act of 1966. According to Galop, Kennedy’s interest in Lafayette Park changed the course of the American historic preservation movement just as the bulldozers were set to move in.

Galop, a former trustee of the New Jersey Historic Trust, co-authored a history of Branch Brook Park (in Newark and Belleville, NJ) and has served as a consultant on a documentary film entitled *Branch Brook Park: Legacy of the Gilded Age*. She prepared the nomination that placed Branch Brook Park on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Preservation. Galop has also contributed to the *Encyclopedia of New Jersey*, and currently serves as Principal of Preservation Possibilities, a historic preservation consulting firm based in Summit, NJ.

Galop’s extensive knowledge of First Lady Kennedy’s interest in historic preservation led her to be published in the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s *Forum Journal* in 2006. Since then, she’s been speaking all over New Jersey as a member of the New Jersey Council for the Humanities Horizons Speakers Bureau.

The quarterly meeting of the Passaic County Historical Society will be held on March 7, 7 p.m., at Lambert Castle. The program, free and open to the public, is presented through the courtesy of the New Jersey Council for the Humanities.
**Holiday Highlights**

**Wine Tasting**

Shown socializing in the Atrium, guests sampled wines and enjoyed hors d’oeuvres, buffet dinner, and desserts throughout Lambert Castle at the Holiday Wine Tasting Social.

**Holiday Decorations**

The public was enthralled to view the beautiful rooms of Lambert Castle, each decorated for the holiday season with its own color scheme and theme. Photo right shows a portion of the Dining Room, including tree and decorative mannequin, which boasted brilliant red as the prominent shade.

The elegantly decorated Breakfast Room, shown below, utilized soft, varied shades of greenery with white trim.

**Gingerbread Creations**

An exhibit of lavishly decorated gingerbread houses created by area bakers was on display in the second floor Round Room.

One of the creations, photo top, was a reproduction of Lambert Castle, complete with its original northern section. It was made by Morgan G. Dowd of Lincoln Park.

**Storytelling with Santa**

Mrs. Claus, portrayed by Seraphia McCormick, is shown above reading a Christmas story to visiting youngsters. The empty chair next to her was later filled by Santa, ably personified by Leon Kish. The couple posed for holiday photographs with the children, who were also treated to cookies and juice.
The Great Falls: America’s Newest National Historic Park

At 77 feet high, the Great Falls of the Passaic River are one of America’s largest waterfalls. While they have been admired by many for their beauty, visionaries such as founding father Alexander Hamilton also recognized the Great Falls for their industrial potential. Now, 35 years after they were designated a National Natural Landmark, they have been established as the nation’s 397th National Historic Park.

The Great Falls have been tied to the industrial history of Paterson since the 18th century, when they were at the center of a water power system that helped to build various types of manufacturing in the great city. The Falls have been featured in everything from the five-volume poem Paterson by William Carlos Williams to two episodes of the hit HBO show The Sopranos. The hope of many, such as Paterson’s Mayor Jeffrey Jones, is to have the Falls “re-emerge as a leader in the American renewable energy revolution.” The designation of the Falls as a National Historic Park is the first step in this direction.

With the National Natural Landmark designation in 1976, the Falls became protected from federal development, but it was not until March 30, 2009, that President Obama signed legislation designating the Falls a national historical park, providing additional federal protections and authorizing the park “to preserve and interpret for the benefit of the present and future generations certain and natural resources associated with the Historic District.” On November 7, 2011, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar and Paterson Mayor Jones signed the transfer of property, authorizing the establishment of the new National Historic Park.

“I’m incredibly proud, as a New Jerseyan and as the son of immigrants, to witness today’s declaration of Paterson Great Falls as a National Historic Park,” said Senator Bob Menendez, who fought to get the legislation authorizing the new park approved by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. “From the Great Falls, through the raceways and waterwheels along the Passaic, flowed the blood, sweat, and tears of the men and women who powered the industrial revolution and made this nation great. The Park’s history is now part of the story of America.”

The Falls are viewable from Haines Overlook Park on the south and Mary Ellen Kramer Park on the north. For more information on the history of the Falls, as well as the history of the City of Paterson, stop by the Visitors’ Center at the corner of Spruce and McBride Avenues.

The poem below was penned in 1833 by Orson M. Allaben was a storekeeper, postmaster, physician and surgeon from Margaretville, Delaware County, New York. This rare letterhead engraving of the Passaic Falls is from the collections of the Passaic County Historical Society.

Passaic, an emblem I notice in thee,
Of life in its changes and death in its gloom,
I observe in thy course from the hills to the sea,
The descent of youth, manhood and age to the tomb.

Thy cool bubbling fountains and rivulets clear,
That through the green meadows go purling along;
Remind me of childhoods with innocence near,
And youth with its gambols and mirth with its song.

The ripples that dance o’er thy heaven-lit face,
Tell that man has a countenance wrinkled with care;
And thy rapid which hasten the onward apace,
Show the passions of mind and anxieties there.

The rocks that thy bosom unconscious hides,
To wreck the unwary and frights the unfirm;
Are the vices of man and the folly he bides,
And the woes that befall and the fears that concern.

Thy cataract roar and thy wide dashing spray,
As thy torrent descends to the dark gulf below,
Are descriptive of nature’s approaching spray,
And show man the ordeal through which he must go.

The dream sunless pool that incircles thy fall,
And the ocean that mingles thy waters so pure,
And eternity boundless and endless and sure.

O. M. Allaben
From the President’s Desk... Geraldine Mola

Have You Met our New Staff Members Yet?
If you’ve been to the Society’s Library since April, you’ve met Linda Pabian, our Librarian, on duty whenever the Library is open.

A Paterson native who now resides in Bergen County, Linda has a degree in Library Science from Drexler University and worked at the Wyckoff Public Library. Since joining us, she has been fielding research inquiries and presiding over the Society’s collection of books, papers, photographs, and other printed material.

More recently, we welcomed two staff members to fill senior positions. Charles Casimiro, Historic Site Manager (formerly the job of Director) is a 25-year museum veteran who last worked for the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation at Philipse Manor Hall State Historic Site in Yonkers, New York. Quietly efficient and with years of experience in the field, Charles is handling building, security, public relations, staff, computer and programming concerns.

He and Curator Heather Cunningham, both New York natives, began their jobs early in October and assumed their duties with enthusiasm. There the similarity ends. Where Charles is low-key and methodical, Heather is a pepper-pot of ideas and energy.

The new Curator, who earned History and Archaeology degrees in New York and England, respectively, previously worked at the Mabee Farm Historic Site in Schenectady County, New York. She has already produced two Society exhibits, is in charge of our Collections, and is already bringing in interns she’ll supervise on curatorial projects.

Hectic Holidays. With the Holiday House Boutique held in November, that has long been the busiest month of the year at Lambert Castle. This November the Boutique attracted 7,525 shoppers who came to browse and shop for holiday gifts.

For the last three years, attendance has been increasing in December, too, since we launched the viewing of magnificent holiday decorations in the Castle and the very popular Wine Tasting Social. By annually introducing new features — like the gingerbread house exhibit and storytelling by Santa and Mrs. Claus — public interest has grown, this year bringing 1,350 visitors to Lambert Castle from December 9 until January 8.

With as many as 8,875 people passing through the castle in two months, we could not have handled the tasks and traffic without the extraordinary work of our many volunteers. (Please see box right).

No Quiet Time This Winter. After the tiring holiday schedule, everyone looks forward to “winding down” and “catching up” during the quiet winter months. But this year Lambert Castle is buzzing with activity. Most of the action involves staff, volunteers and interns, who are hard at work on the monumental job of updating, computerizing and digitizing the Society’s inventory of art and artifacts. This important job is being executed in the third-floor gallery, now set up as a temporary work area. Until the task is complete, the third floor will be closed to the public, and exhibits will be displayed only on the second floor.

Reason for the Curatorial Project. Plans to update Collection records, long overdue, was prompted by an offer from Passaic County officials to provide free, safe, off-site storage space to house the Society’s Collection.

This will result in substantial savings to the Society, which has been paying $6,900 annually to rent a storage room. In future these funds will instead be used to conserve and improve the Collection. In late December, when official documents were signed between Society and County officials, the plan to move off-site paintings, sculptures, documents, and boxed artifacts to the new storage facility was set in motion. Items are being identified to provide an accurate list of off-site inventory and will then be archivally repackaged before transfer to the new County facility.

The Society owes a great debt of gratitude to County Freeholders for this outstanding contribution to PCHS.

Work Space Expansion. One of the positive offshoots of updating the Collection is the clean-up and refurbishing of the third-floor round room, until now a catch-all area. Recently cleaned out and painted, it has been transformed into a curatorial office and work room.

“Plastic” now accepted. The Society has taken a major step toward becoming more “user friendly.” After years of only allowing payment by cash or check, the Society will now accept credit card transactions as a convenience to patrons. Card terminals will be located at the reception desk for admission and museum shop sales and also in the office to allow ticket or other purchases by phone.

Looking Forward to our Spring Tea. The next major event at Lambert Castle is the formal Afternoon Tea held in the beautiful historical period rooms on the first floor. Reminiscent of the elaborate high teas so fashionable in the Victorian era, guests will enjoy a choice of teas, tasty scones, tiny sandwiches and savories, and delightful desserts.

Tea will be served on four days, Thursday to Sunday, April 19-22, with seatings at noon and 3 pm daily. Reservations at $35 per person are required in advance and are already being accepted. I look forward to joining many of you for Tea in the Spring.

Geraldine Mola, President
February 2012
2012 has only just begun and already our ears are buzzing about this year’s Presidential election. Here at Lambert Castle, we too have turned our attention to politics. Rather than focus on the hot issues of today, though, the Passaic County Historical Society is concentrating on the Presidents of the past. This year's first exhibit, *2012: A Presidential Year: A Reflection on America’s Past Presidents* will be opened at the end of January and will run through October 7.

This exhibit tells the story of Presidential visits to Passaic County and demonstrates the importance of cities such as Paterson and Passaic on the campaign trail of many of our nation’s presidents. Visitors will also be able to view some of the Society’s large and varied Presidential memorabilia, including buttons, posters, postcards, and banners as well as photographs and portraits. All of these objects together demonstrate the popularity of many of our past Presidents and their ability to capture both the esteem and imagination of many Americans, in some cases even long after their deaths. One section of the exhibit will be dedicated specifically to President McKinley and his relationship to his Vice President, Paterson local Garret Hobart.

An opening reception will be held on Friday, February 17, 7 p.m., at Lambert Castle. Members are invited to attend.

In addition to the exhibit itself, the Society is also offering a variety of Presidential-themed programming as well as a scavenger hunt for children. See the Calendar of Events on page 2 for more details.

As many of our readers know, Passaic County is rich in history, although many of its stories have yet to be committed to paper. Many history enthusiasts may not think themselves capable of writing historical texts, but perhaps it is not such a daunting task.

Of course, there are many challenges to be considered, such as where to start researching, what aspects of the past are worth focusing on, and what topics are of interest to publishers. The Passaic County Historical Society is aware of the many questions potential authors face and plans to address these problems at an event focused on local history authors.

The Local Authors Showcase is a weekend event to be held on Saturday, March 10, and Sunday, March 11. This event was planned with two distinct purposes in mind, the first being to honor and congratulate those authors who have produced scholarly works relating to the history of Passaic County, and the second to promote and encourage others to follow the same path and dedicate some time to researching and recording history.

This two-day event will incorporate talks and book signings featuring individual authors as well as a panel discussion where attendees can ask questions and seek advice on how to start projects relating to local history. Admission fees for the event will cover both days and will also include regular museum admission.

A two-day program schedule as well as biographies and book titles of the speakers will be posted at lambertcastle.org. Reservations are not required but are strongly recommended.
Wright management wanted to put all its operations under one roof, so at the conclusion of WW II, the company moved to one huge facility in Woodbridge, New Jersey, where it remained for several decades.

In less than 40 years airplane engines went from 4 cylinders and 12 horsepower to eighteen cylinders and 2000 horsepower and that was in the early 40s. Now we have jets and spacecraft. I wonder what the next 40 years will bring, and I wonder what Orville and Wilbur would say about all this?

The author thanks County Historian Ed Smyk for providing material for this article and dedicates this article to all those Curtiss-Wright workers who “indeed helped win the war and kept them flying.”

(The Society would like to thank Paterson Museum Director Giacomo DeStefano, and Photo Archivist Joseph Costa for providing the archival photographs.)

Top: Lou Costello, Paterson’s internationally famous funnyman, was a frequent visitor to “Silk City,” shuttling back and forth from Hollywood to see his hometown relatives. Lou was a tireless booster for Paterson. In 1935 he visited the Wright Plant, where a photographer immortalized him at the front entrance. Depicted are, (left to right), Dr. Varrelo, Lou, a Wright security man, Charles Bazaz, and Les Byrnes.

(Wright Aeronautical Collection, Paterson Museum)

Center: Wright Aeronautical hired thousands of workers for their plant and office operations. In this September 1941 photo, scores of young men stood before their coworkers, a real bevy of beauties.

(Wright Aeronautical Collection, Paterson Museum)

Bottom: In August 1942, “Wright’s,” as employees called the company, received this coveted Army and Navy pennant for contributing to the defense effort.

(Wright Aeronautical Collection, Paterson Museum)
became famous in planes that helped Charles Lindbergh fly to Paris, Admiral Byrd fly over both the North and South Poles, and powered airplanes flown by other notable aviators including Amelia Earhart.

The Cyclone series of engines were incorporated in the DC-2 and DC-3 transport planes and some DC-3’s may still be flying. In 1929 the Wright Aeronautical Company merged with another Company named after aviation pioneer Glen Curtiss. The newly merged companies became known as the Curtiss-Wright Company. It is still known by that name.

The Cyclone 14 engine developed during the 30s helped establish both Trans-Atlantic and Trans-Pacific passenger flights. By 1939 seventy percent of all commercial flying was powered by Wright engines.

With war coming by the late 30s in Europe and the Pacific, an enormous expansion of Wright took place.

The plant in Paterson became the engine manufacturing division of Curtiss-Wright. In 1937 a new addition brought the floor space up to 800,000 square feet. By the start of World War II with construction continuing throughout the late 30s, floor space area was increased to 2 million square feet.

Plants included buildings in Fair Lawn, Clifton, and East Paterson as well as new buildings in Paterson on Getty Avenue and a service center in Caldwell.

Gearing up for World War II led to development of an eighteen cylinder 2000 horsepower engine doubling an earlier Cyclone’s horsepower.

As the war progressed the Wright plants produced more than 120,000 aircraft engines of all types and even licensed other companies to build engines for them. The assembly lines could produce one engine every twenty minutes, with the Paterson factory capable of turning out 1000 high quality engines per month. No wonder the home front was called the Arsenal of Democracy!

The list of planes powered by Wright engines is a lengthy one. They included the B-17, Flying Fortress Bomber, the B-25 Mitchell Bomber, the Helldiver, Avenger, Wildcat, and Mariner among others.

While the Paterson plants produced engines, the Clifton and Caldwell plants produced propellers for numerous aircraft during the war. The Wright plant had a workforce of 24,000 working three shifts. Of the many thousands of engines, some went into aircraft such as the Enola Gay B-29, the plane that dropped the first A-bomb; and the famous Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo, Doolittle’s B-25 raiders who accomplished their feat during the early part of the war. The B-17 was used in all theaters of the War and was the main bomber used. Engines allowing for even longer flights like the B-29 were developed and used later in the war.

After the war ended in 1945, Wright continued production for 44 commercial airlines, produced jet engines and worked on rocket engines for space travel. Wright even made a flight simulator for flight training.
Meyer Brothers Department Store: A Toast to the Past

By E. A. Smyk, Passaic County Historian

In mid-January 1991, one of the worst fires in Paterson’s long history ferociously consumed the former Meyer Brothers department store. The unrelenting, out of control flames incinerated a much beloved landmark, and in the process claimed the life of a brave, well-respected firefighter. Long ago, the building’s twisted wreckage was hauled to a landfill, but what survive to this day are the undimmed recollections of an older generation who knew and loved the store. They are, for the most part, the treasured memories of people who once upon a time flocked to Meyer Brothers by bus or auto, and made the place an undisputed shopper’s Mecca.

They are burnished memories. When asked, people brighten and will recall entering the store, and encounter what seemed like acres of polished walnut fixtures, bronze embellishments, and pleasant employees. Customers also are quick to remember the imposing, golden clock under which one collected a husband, wife, or sweetheart after a few hours of busy shopping. From the day Meyer Brothers was established, customers agreed the emporium was more or less synonymous with elegant, efficient and courteous service, but best of all, it was stocked with stylish merchandise. Located at 179 Main Street, the imposing store occupied an entire city block. It stood a princely five stories high. During the store’s heyday, there were almost 80 departments of merchandise. At holiday time, Meyer Brothers employed nearly 1000 people.

The store had been a commercial fixture in “Silk City” since the 1880s. The establishment was founded by Aaron, David and Leopold Meyer, enterprising dry-goods merchants from Newark. They opened a branch store in Paterson, assuming the then booming city would provide an excellent marketplace for their wares. Originally, they traded under the name of the “Boston Store.” The brothers’ faith in Paterson was not misplaced. Value was excellent; customers came, and quite understandably, profits soared. The trio decided to purchase property on Washington Street, directly behind the Main Street store. The “Boston Store” name soon passed into history. When the Great Paterson Fire of 1902 roared through the commercial heart of the city, it ravaged the original building. The store was soon rebuilt in grand beaux-arts style, and became a much-admired architectural adornment to Main Street. The store was a model of efficiency in the way it handled its customers. For example, tastefully uniformed elevator operators, wearing white gloves, whisked customers from floor to floor, and there they found a vast selection of merchandise that rivaled the best of New York City stores. As an accommodation, clerks spoke nearly every European language.

Aaron Meyer eventually became sole proprietor, and operated the store himself until April 13, 1925, when his son Bertram succeed him as president. “Bert” Meyer became something of a legend in the history of Paterson’s commercial enterprises. Meticulous in business as well as appearance, Meyer circulated throughout his domain, chatting with customers, and insisting that they be given the best of everything – the best of merchandise, and the
best of service “Mr. Meyer,” as he was called with deference by employees and customers alike, expected his staff to meet his peerless expectations, and he did so with a quiet panache that embellished his reputation as one of North Jersey’s finest retailers. Bert had taken over the reigns of an impressive store, but he still wanted to make it more elegant. He had the interior entirely redone in the mid-1920s. It was, as people even nowadays say, “quite a place.”

Ladies will still recall the spacious beauty shop, where operators practiced a time honored art. Located on the store’s balcony, the area was known as the “green room” after its resplendent, Celadon tiles. The beauticians’ steady customers were teachers, business women, and the wives of executives and managers, who made it a point of pride to tell their friends that they had their hair done at Meyer Brothers. Many hailed from Paterson, but others converged on the store from the suburbs, eager to fulfill their weekly appointment with a favored operator.

After a shopping spree had ended, customers flocked to the store’s nicely appointed restaurant. At lunch hour in particular, and during the store’s celebrated sale days, the large room was crowded to capacity, with many of the diners vying for a slice of the restaurant’s signature strawberry-rhubarb pie. Among the habitués were Mr. Meyer and his close friend, Harry B. Haines, the formidable publisher of the Paterson Evening News. In summertime, the two men, attired in suits and carrying the de rigueur “boater” straw hats made fashionable in the “Roaring ’20s,” would be conducted to their table with suitable dignity by the restaurant manager.

When “Bert” Meyer died in January 1972, he left much of his fortune to various charities, but he also made bequests to a number of faithful employees of long tenure. (One of the employees used Mr. Meyer’s money to help defray the costs of his son’s college education.) Mr. Meyer was succeeded by his nephew, Philip Lowy, who continued the Meyer Brothers tradition in Paterson until 1987, when the store closed its elegant bronze doors because of various retailing changes. The Meyer Brothers presence, though, was still evident at the Wayne Hills Mall. In 1972, Lowy started construction on a 100,000 square foot branch. It opened to much fanfare in October 1973. The Wayne store had an auspicious start, and retained its profitability until suburban malls and chain stores eroded Meyer Brothers’ customer base. After more than two decades of serving happy and contented shoppers, the store bowed to the inevitable, ringing up its last sale on June 5, 1995.

History is sometimes a hard taskmaster, and places like Meyer Brothers seem fated to disappear. Buildings survive for a time – sometimes a long time – but they too can vanish. Pleasant memories, though, have a way of enduring. Who can forget what it was like to enter Meyer Brothers during Christmas time, and be dazzled by the wondrous displays, or as a youngster, plop down on the knee of a red-coated, jolly and obliging Santa? Memories like this remain indelible, and in one’s life experience, confer upon retail stores like Meyer Brothers a nostalgic, even misty-eye measure of immortality.
Bert Meyer’s letter of August 24, 1943 to employee Charlie Feitlowitz, written while World War II was raging. Bert considered many of his people almost like relatives. During that barbaric conflict, he corresponded with service personnel, sending them money. Some staffers remained with Meyer Brothers for ages, never forgetting that during the dark days of the Great Depression, the affable merchandiser was forced to reduce their salaries, but in the process saved them from a more lamentable fate. After a career spanning many decades, Charlie Feitlowitz retired as the store’s director of display. To him, Bert Meyer stood out as a fond and enduring memory.

Meyer Brothers wasn’t solely about the daily operation of a classy department store. Romance bloomed there as well. The writer’s parents, Edward C. and Mildred T. Smyk met at the store. After a one-year courtship, they married in September 1937. The photo was taken during their honeymoon at Atlantic City, then a premier vacation spot. Bert Meyer, too, found the sea breezes just as invigorating, frequenting the resort when time allowed. Edward C. Smyk joined Meyer Brothers in 1929, and remained with the enterprise in various executive capacities until his 1976 retirement.

Bertram “Bert” Meyer (right) was fast friends with Harry B. Haines, publisher of the Paterson Evening News. Bert provided Haines’ newspaper with continued advertising revenue, and Haines appreciated it. For Bert, the ever-dapper bachelor, the store was literally his life’s work. The photo was taken outside the emporium’s marquee embellished Washington Street entrance. It dates from ca. 1935.

Meyer Brothers’ famed beauty shop, ca. 1926, a place where hair stylists made ladies even more alluring.

Meyer Brothers had a celebrated reputation for fine merchandise, and sale days produced mob scenes like this one in the Boys’ Shop. The photographer had to display amazing agility in navigating among the crowd. Photo ca. 1961.
Passaic County Historical Society invites you to

Afternoon Tea

At Historic Lambert Castle

Three Valley Road, Paterson, New Jersey

April 19 through 22, 2012

Noon and Three p.m. Daily

~ Includes Program & Display of Live Orchids ~

$35 per Guest ~ By Reservation Only

~ Reservations & Information ~

Last year seats were sold out for this lovely event. If you hope to enjoy Tea at the Castle, make your reservations early.

Contact Tea@lambertcastle.org or call 201-797-2109