

Local Spotlight: Repository Holdings Denville Historical Society & Museum

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The Special Projects Group ("SPG") members are visiting local repositories to learn what genealogy related materials may be available for review by our MAGS members in researching their ancestors and/or gaining historical context to enhance their stories. In this issue we cover our visit to the Denville Historical Society & Museum, Morris County, New Jersey. Website: www.denvillenj.org

On the banks of the Rockaway River the Denville Historical Society & Museum ("Museum") resides between a township park and the Denville Library at 113 Diamond Spring Rd., Denville, NJ. We met with Vito Bianco, Vice President and Historian for the Society & Museum and he graciously shared the multitude of resources available on the founding families of the township and many of the original businesses. Denville celebrated its 100th anniversary of incorporation during 2013, but as a specific area it has been inhabited over 300 years, originally as part of Hanover Twp., then Pequannock Twp, and finally in 1913 it broke loose from Rockaway Township. These transitions are important to know for those looking to find records on their ancestors in this area of Morris County.

The Museum contains numerous historical artifacts of farm and business implements used in the past, along with photos of past residents. But of interest to our members would be the depth of its family records. The Museum has a public Resource Room containing a large collection of local history books culled from the Denville Library's holdings, along with a master index to the collection. It also houses a good count of family histories stored in large binders. At the time of our visit though there was no master index to this collection, but the family names are visible on each binder located on open shelving. As with the other local repositories visited, the Museum has a large collection of photos covering a variety of time periods along with numerous local maps. It holds an original 1868 Beers Atlas, an original J. P. Crayon scrape book, DVDs of the old Denville TV productions from the 1980s-1990s, and a film produced by the Society on Denville's history for its 100th anniversary.

Within its private resource rooms on the second floor Museum members are cataloguing and organizing numerous materials donated such as family bibles, journals, original deeds, store ledgers, more photographs and old postcards. Here is maintained a four-drawer file cabinet containing lateral files for family histories, local business and organization records. Once again there was no master index; however, the MAGS SPG scheduled a volunteer day where we created indices for both the collection of Family binders and family and business lateral files. The Museum has agreed to allow us to publish those indices on our MAGS Member Only website. We expect the indices to be available on the website by year-end 2015.

Some highlights of other records held by the Museum include recently donated diaries. One is of Kate Ayres covering 1911-1931, a local schoolteacher. Another interesting diary is that of S. H. Beam, a local woman who wrote about daily life and the impacts of WW I during 1917. The private resource room contains business ledgers that include the names of local consumers from the Righter General Store, tax bills and documents from Peer's farm and Morris Canal house, and records of the Union Hill Civic Association and its neighborhood newsletter from the 1940s-1960s. It also holds local historian Bob Illeg's collection of photos from 1890s – 1940s of people and buildings in Denville, Knights of Columbus, Rotary Club and Police & Fire Dept. past documentation.

The Museum is open on Saturdays from 10am – 2pm and by appointment from April through October. Queries on available records may be made to the Museum's email address at denvillemuseum@gmail.com. It does not have a website, but there is a FaceBook page. Public programs offered by the Museum include local walking tours. If you visit please note that the Museum lacks a copier, but if something is desired you may take a photo of a page, or leave your driver's license while you visit the public copier at the Denville Library next door. Otherwise, the Museum can make arrangements to have the materials copied for a fee.

On August 22, 2015 the three members of the MAGS SPG spent the day at the Museum creating an inventory of the 19 Family Binders housed on the first floor Resource Room, which are easily assessable to visitors. We also completed an inventory of the 105 lateral file contents of the four-drawer file cabinet located in the private resource rooms on the second floor. Visitors would need permission to visit these materials. We're happy to share that we completed an excel workbook containing two files of this information. The first lists the lateral files alphabetically with drawer number as stored in the four-drawer file cabinet in the private resource room. The second file captures the 19 Family Binders located in the first floor Resource Room. The Museum was also given these files electronically so that a printout is available for visitors, while also allowing for future updates for new materials. Please note that there are more materials not yet captured in our inventory such as the diaries noted above and a closet full of early local maps held by the Museum. We hope to revisit the Museum in the future to capture this information and share with our membership. *

* Denville's inventory has been completed and is available on the MAGS Public Website.