

## Remembering Millburn ...

by William R. Forstchen, Ph.D.

**F**ormer Millburn resident, William R. Forstchen is now a professor of history at Montreat College in Montreat North Carolina and graciously shared this delightful bit of history with our readers:

My name is Bill Forstchen, I'm fifty four years old, currently a professor of history at a small private college in the mountains of North Carolina and a published author of over forty books, including several NY Times bestsellers.

I remember Millburn. I remember how it shaped my life, forming so many of my dreams, for it was the place of my childhood.

I was born in 1950, the third child of John and Dorothy Forstchen. We resided in a small old house at 402 Millburn Avenue and rented the home from Mr. Lonergan who owned the hardware store downtown.

As a child my world was a small universe. The western boundary was that of our church, St. Rose of Lima.



*(Left: A postcard view of Millburn Avenue in the 1950's)*

To the south was the Revolutionary War-era church in Springfield and to the east was the post office. To the north was the great wooded wilderness crowned by Washington Rock and the lookout.

The magic ship that passed through our town was the railroad. At four years of age the greatest treat for me was to be able to walk downtown with my mom to meet my father's train. We would pass Cole's diner and if I had been good perhaps we would a stop at the Magic Cottage, the toy store that once occupied the old National Bank building. Mr. Lonergan, whose store was next to the bridge, had taken a shine to me and was always delighted by my visits. I believe he must have been in his seventies back then, therefore he must have lived in Millburn in the 1880's.

We would sit on the bridge together and he would spin stories to me about being a boy, what it was like when horse drawn carts filled the streets, when the train was pulled by steam locomotives and when that great wonder, the electric trolley, came to town. The trolley connected Millburn to the distant eastern realm known as the Maplewood Loop, which was so named because it had a turnaround track for the trolleys.

From Mr. Lonergan's we would walk to Woolworth's five and dime, perhaps to sit at the counter and have a ten cent soda, then out the back door,

following the path up to Essex St. If Mom had to do any shopping we'd stop at Dave's Market.

As I remember that market now, it does seem like a connection to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Imagine a market where there was still sawdust scattered on the floor by the butcher's stall, a few cats stalking the aisles on the lookout for mice, and if you needed your groceries delivered you went to the checkout counter at the rear of the store where your purchases would be boxed and loaded aboard the delivery truck. They would be waiting on your porch when you got home.

My older brother worked there and I'd hear stories about how on some evenings, *after the store was closed*, Dave would whip up a good meal, complete with pickles out of the barrel, and feed "his boys" before sending them home.

From Dave's, Mom and I would walk to the new library on Essex street, which I understand had once been a synagogue. How appropriate a transformation, I think, that it was merely a changing of venue of worship, as it was there that I learned to worship books.

The children's library was a bright airy room filled with wonders and I'd always leave with a bag full of books. I still fondly remember a day, years later, when I must have been nine or ten and I solemnly announced to the children's librarian that I had pretty well read

everything in their collection, except for “girl stuff” like Nancy Drew. She gravely escorted me upstairs and informed the head librarian that it was time I had an adult’s card. What a thrill that was.



But back to my childhood walks with Mom. We’d finally arrive at the train station. What a beauty that place was to me ... the old station smelling of cigar smoke, the ticket stall with the clerk behind the window ready to sell you a passage to distant lands, the wooden-back benches, the pedestrian tunnel under the tracks to the westbound side. At that time there was still an 1890’s-period shelter on that side. At last the waited-for train would come around the sharp bend, passing under the bridge at Wyoming Avenue ... one of the old MU model trains, painted (or was it dirt?) green-brown, with faded gold lettering of the Erie Lackawanna on the sides.

Dad would get off the train and the day was complete. I’d stand there mesmerized by that train, imagining Mr.

Lonergan’s stories about the days of steam, listening to the strange whir of the electric motors, the smell of the train still fresh in my memory. There was one conductor who just loved me and would leap off with a shout of “Hi Billy.” He’d always make a big ritual of punching some tickets for me and handing them over. He would shout dramatically “Aboard!” then climb up, give me a wave and the train would be off, whistle blowing. It’d start up and go around the sharp bend, heading west. The way the train leaned over in that curve, the little boy in me was always waiting for it to suddenly tumble off in a spectacular crash and plunge into the creek.

Then we’d walk home together. In wintertime it’d already be dark, but in summer, the evening would still be brightly lit with the promise of a few more hours of play before bed time.

Mom was a story teller. When I speak of her now and describe her, I tell friends that my mom had created a Spoon River Anthology for Millburn and Springfield.

The ultimate trip for me was when we’d go to Springfield. Sometimes we’d walk it and on the way our first stop would be a huge old oak tree on Main Street, in front of the home of a postman. This was the legendary cannonball tree, which supposedly had a Hessian-fired cannon ball embedded in it.

Main Street then had yet to be bisected by the maze of interstates and you could walk on it straight to the Springfield Church. It was a good hike for the two of us.

And then the stories would start. We'd sit on a bench in the middle of the graveyard and I'd beg my mom to tell me stories about who was buried beneath those old, leaning, moss-covered stones. She would think for a minute then start spinning out her tales of the brave men who were heroes in the great Battle of Springfield. She'd point to the church steps and tell me of the gallant reverend, tearing up hymnals for gun wadding and shouting "Give them Watts boys!"

Just recently, in our college chapel, we were having a service and one of the hymns was by Watts. I smiled as I imagined his work getting torn apart for the cause of freedom and I was actually tempted to tear the page out.

I believe it was there in the Springfield churchyard that I first started to become an historian. I was fascinated by the stories, and I remember now, more than once, having to correct my mom, "No Mommy, the man under that headstone wasn't a general, he was the blacksmith who shod George Washington's horse, don't you remember you told me that last time?" Mom would gravely nod over this fault of memory and then she would valiantly press on. I do wonder if the poor woman hid a notebook in her purse in order to keep

her imaginary tales straight! A hundred or more headstones and she had to keep every story correct in every detail.

Usually we'd then stop at Newberry's for a soda then take the 70 bus back to downtown Millburn and walk the two blocks back home.

The other place of history for me was the post office. There was this magnificent WPA mural on the west wall, "The Charge of Light Horse Harry Lee." It was wonderful -- a true work of inspirational art for this five year old.



(Mural by Gerald Foster, originally at Millburn PO)

It thrilled my imagination with the thought that this famous hero of the revolution lead a cavalry charge, undoubtedly, right past my house. At night, when unable to sleep, I'd look out the window and imagine him thus. A distant past concealed just beneath the pavement. Our house even had a connection to that time. It was built around 1820 and my brother unearthed an old penny from 1830 in the dirt floor basement. The other glorious find he

turned up was a six pound cannon ball in our backyard.

One of the great crimes of so-called progress was, for me, the loss of that painting at the post office. Some years back I stopped in Millburn to take my future wife on a walking tour of childhood memories and I was crushed -- in fact, I was furious -- when I walked into the post office and found myself staring at a blank white wall. I asked a clerk, an elderly gentleman, what happened and he was in full sympathy, telling me that a former post master had simply disliked the painting and ordered it white washed over. I'd like to think it survives under that coating, Light Horse Harry still pointing his sword and leading the charge, and that someday the painting can be recovered. *(Editor's note: The historical society was told that the painting was removed during renovations and its whereabouts are unknown.)*

When I was six years old Millburn celebrated its centennial. What a day of magic that was. The parade went right past our house so we had the best seats going, with lawn chairs set up right by the curb. What I remember so clearly now were the veterans. Riding in antique cars came the honored veterans of the Spanish-American War. Old men even then, they are now long gone. Behind them marched rank after rank of doughboys from WWI. They were still relatively young, in their fifties and

sixties. Next came the very young veterans of WWII, men my father's age, mostly in their early to mid-thirties.

And so the parade went by, thrilling me with its music, its heroes, and its memories. It is strange now as I write this to realize that nearly half a century has turned over since then. Long gone are those who were at the Argonne, and Belleau Wood. Quickly fading are those once-young veterans of Iwo Jima, Omaha Beach, and Guadalcanal.



(Former Washington School, now Schoolhouse Plaza)

I was blessed to be able to go to the old Washington School. I've been in the field of education my entire life, starting as a middle school teacher, then high school, then on to a Ph.D. and now a college professor. With great nostalgia I look back on the team that worked at Washington school, but also with respect for their skill and professionalism.

I might get the spellings wrong but I remember my first day in kindergarten with Mrs. Witzick. Every

day was filled with hugs, kisses, laughter and learning. The kindergarten wing, which was knocked down years ago, had been built, I believe, in the 1920's when the thinking was that such rooms should be solariums, filled with natural light. The room was ringed with large broad windows and in memory now it was suffused with a soft golden glow.

My father lived in Millburn in the early 1920's and several of the teachers at Washington School taught him as well. I remember when his former teachers would smile at my father when he came to the school and how gravely respectful he became, the way all of us are when we meet a beloved teacher of our early childhood.

Interestingly, classical music was part of our curriculum. During drawing time our teachers would play old 78's of famous pieces and I guess something stuck for I still love classical music above all else today.

In his recollections in the Fall 2001 Thistle, Steve Henkel talked about the song book used in his school in the 1940's. We still had the same ones in the 1950's. Every morning, after prayer (yes we actually prayed and had a bible reading), we saluted the flag and then out would come the song book. "America," "The Star Spangled Banner," or my favorite, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," would echo from all the classrooms. I can't help but comment that there seemed to be no harm done, as

would soon be argued in the Supreme Court. In fact it was a solid ritual that started each day for us, connecting us to our history and our religious traditions.

The janitor, who we nicknamed Happy, was always out in the corridors, polishing the varnished wood floors, ready with the green sawdust when one of us suddenly got sick. On winter days he was standing there forlorn as we came herding in, leaving trails of mud and slush. He must have identified with Sisyphus, who was doomed to push that rock uphill forever.

I recall one day when some poor kid had, yet again, gotten sick before making it to the bathroom. Such an event always caused an uproar of delight from us kids and the victim was something of a cult hero when he got better and returned to class. I was walking down the corridor with a friend, edging around the scene of the disaster. Happy was spreading out the green sawdust and we started to tease him regarding his task. With a deft swing of his broom we were showered with green sawdust that was soaked with ... well, you know. We howled as we beat a hasty retreat and our teacher, who saw it all, sternly told us we deserved it and to go back and apologize then wash up. As a teacher myself, years later, I suspect the two of them high-fived each other and burst out laughing the moment we disappeared into the bathroom. Happy had tremendous power there and we never teased him again, for

his vengeance would be certain. I loved that old glum-faced guy who was filled with funny jokes and was definitely a grandfather figure in that building.

The playground ... well, by today's standards it would have been jumped on by OSHA and every other organization imaginable. It was paved with asphalt and many was the scraped knee or elbow by the end of recess. A great thrill was when a well hit foul ball would loft over the chain link fence and come crashing down on a car passing by on Millburn Avenue. Whenever the safety patrol and the teachers were not looking a volley of snowballs would go over the fence as well, especially at trucks and, forgive us, police cars.

This was a wonderful age, when Christmas and Hanukkah were part of our school lives. A great tree and menorah would be set up in front of the office of Mrs. Sheera, our principal. Each of us would make a decoration for the tree or menorah, which we then took home at the start of Christmas vacation. There'd be a Christmas play with carols and my mom, who was stuffed with pillows since she was so slender, would usually play Santa Claus. Something was rather strange for me for when I climbed into Santa's lap as it felt so oddly familiar. Mom would often laugh about how I would stare at her closely with that "Don't I know you?" look.

The town would be decked out with lights, and our yearly ritual was to

go to Mr. Lonergan's. One magical Christmas it was a near blizzard when we did this and I still remember the lights shining dimly in the swirling snow as my brother, sister, and I walked home carrying the tree.

I must offer here a special word of praise to Mrs. Ida Singer, my sixth grade teacher. I had at that stage entered a rather difficult, distant period of my life. I was a bit withdrawn and shy, already something of a nerd, not athletically inclined, and whichever team got me knew they were doomed to lose. I was far more interested in books about history and adventure, but not academics. In one sense she gave me a terrible year, always pushing me to do better. One day I had not done my homework and when she got to me I lied, saying I left it at home. "Well go home and get it," she announced. I walked out of the school, terrified and slowly stumbling the one block back to my house. Mom was waiting by the front door, red with fury, for, of course, Mrs. Singer had called her during my walk home. Mom made me quickly write out a letter of apology, then I made the long slow walk back, like a condemned man shuffling towards the electric chair. I handed over the note and not another word was said. Thus I learned the supreme folly of lying to a very savvy teacher. How different it was back then. Imagine today a teacher pointing to the door and saying "Go home and come back with your

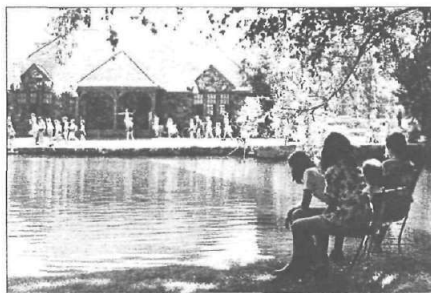
homework," then running down to the office and calling the parent. Lawsuits would be waiting in the wings. Horror of horrors! A child wandering outside at midday, unsupervised ... and an important lesson never learned.

And yet I knew how much Mrs. Singer loved me as well and set in my heart a desire that would one day blossom as an historian and writer. On my last day in that wonderful school, I remember her asking me to be the last one to leave the room when the bell rang. She put her arms around me and burst into tears, telling me how much she loved me as if I was her own son and that she expected great things of me. In spite of the promise of a summer of freedom ahead I walked out of Washington School with my eyes clouded, sensing that I was forever leaving something behind, which, indeed, I was.

On special occasions at school our gym teacher ... I believe his name was Mr. Longo ... would take us over to Taylor Park and cut us loose. That was -- and still is -- such a beautiful park. The children's playground still has several items from my own childhood there and on a recent visit it was a delight to send my daughter down the sliding board that I once slid on.

I learned to ride my bike there and I remember fondly the wonderful Fourth of July carnivals and winter nights skating on the lake.

I recall as well that in the summer time we actually used to swim in the lake. There was even a diving board for the older kids, in front of the club house. I believe there is a photo of me in the 1957 centennial book, a hundred or more kids lined up in our 1950's style bathing suits.



(Swimming in Taylor Park in the 1950's)

There is a sadder memory tied to that as well. The last great polio outbreak happened when I was about four or five. The town shut down for kids that summer. I recall Millburn suffered half a dozen cases and fear was evident with our parents. Swimming was shut down, never to reopen in fact. No going to the park, not even the movies. We were all put in isolation. One or two play partners would be allowed, as our parents agreed that we did not play with anyone else. Thus I spent a long summer locked in the back yard, with my backyard neighbor, Nora Lee DeClassis, my one friend to



play with ... a friendship, by the way, which has endured to this day.

I recall one wonderful public relations disaster at the pond. The town decided to have a trout fishing tournament and with great fanfare hundreds of trout were dumped into the lake on a Friday evening. Every kid was atremble with anticipation of the great trophies he would take and best of all the legendary fish that had stapled to its fin a tag that was worth a prize of something like fifty dollars. Back then that was half a month's rent, a couple weeks' worth of groceries, or an overflowing cornucopia of toys. My buddies and I tore our mother's gardens apart looking for the fattest worms to offer up the following morning.

We stormed down to the lake after hurried breakfasts, hundreds of kids muscling for a spot to cast a line, waiting for the fire siren to sound at 8 a.m. and announce that we could cast in. Thousands of writhing worms were impaled on hooks, bobbers set, cops yelled at kids who tried to cast in early, and then the siren shrieked and was greeted with wild cheers from the frenzied mob. We were miniature Captain Ahabs eager to find and slay our Moby Dicks lurking in Taylor Pond.

Within seconds dozens of fights were breaking out as kids cast over each other, lines tangled, unwary parents stood behind their blood thirsty darlings and got snagged by hooks. First aid

crews were soon busy at work ... and no fish were biting.

It was hot ... and getting hotter by the minute. Then the first trout bobbed to the surface, belly up. Another rose and another. Others just surfaced, flapping out their death agonies on the surface and then just going limp. I remember as one poor fish was coming close to the shore a dozen of us shoved and fought to put our tasty worm in front of it. But that poor fish was in extremis. It was like trying to offer a steak dinner to someone having a cardiac arrest. A trout breathing water in Taylor Pond was like one of us trying to gasp for air downwind of the meadowlands refineries before the days of the EPA.

Oxygen! They needed oxygen! The fire department tried to come to the rescue, rolling one of their trucks up to the edge of the pond and turning on their biggest hose, sucking water out of the pond, spraying it high into the air, hoping to draw a little O<sup>2</sup> into the brown liquid as it splashed back down.

Rumors flew through us mob of kids. Some scoundrel had been seen dumping poison in up by the bridge. The little arched bridge over the stream used to be a hangout for the tougher kids in the neighborhood. We called them "the bridge sitters," those guys with greased back hair and black leather jackets and word was they had poisoned the waters.

By ten in the morning it was chaos. It was boiling hot, kids were

yelling, shoving each other in the pond, which was a horrid fate since we now knew it was poisonous. Hundreds of dead trout were bobbing about and the firemen gave up and the party was over. I still remember my Mom sitting on a bench, doubled over laughing. She could see the humor in tragedy better than I.

Amazingly a trout was caught ... by my brother. Actually, the fish committed suicide to get the heck out of the pond and end it all by jumping on my brother's hook as a way out. It was an 18-inch rainbow, which he proudly carried down Millburn Avenue and presented to my mother, demanding that it be cooked. It went into the trash, the neighborhood cats dragged it out, and I think a couple of them died.

For weeks afterwards we kids prowled the stream below the dam, the smell of dead fish ripe in the air, and leapt at the sight of any decaying trout as we looked for that prize tag which was never found.

Another great place of memories was the movie theater. What is a movie theater today? A box in a mall, with eight or ten mini-boxes inside. The old Millburn theater was grand, complete with balcony, and, given its narrow space, a rather good screen.

In the late fifties there was a manager there whom all the kids at Washington School just loved. On Friday afternoons he'd wander into the playground and we'd swarm around him

as he passed out free tickets for the Saturday matinee. Since some of the kids in our neighborhood were recent immigrants and very poor, his gesture was a special blessing. I still remember him fondly, for those kids always came away with a coveted ticket in their hands.



(Millburn Theater photo courtesy of John Murray)

Around 12:30 on Saturday I'd hook up with a couple of friends and walk the two blocks to the theater. (How many kids can do that today?) We stopped first at Coles' to load up on Sugar Daddys, pistachio nuts, and bubble gum, then into the line.

It was still the days of the Saturday matinee -- double feature, five cartoons, and a serial, all for fifty cents. We'd pile in and the chaos would ignite. On a rainy winter day we'd all be steaming wet, wool jackets tossed over seats, and rubber boots off. The smell must have been like a cattle yard.

If a "yucky" love scene was on, as was typical in the Italian Hercules

movies, the theater would erupt, wads of spitballs were aimed at the girl -- especially certain parts of her over-developed anatomy. There'd be groans, yells, jeers, and catcalls. It was bedlam and we loved it! Half the show was not on the screen but in the theater itself with popcorn flying, spitballs aimed at the screen or a kid up front. A regular Dante's Inferno for any adult who might be trapped there.

A good fight scene would send us into an ecstasy of delight. An exploding volcano or a rocketship crashing, or, better yet, our Marines and GIs whipping on some enemy would elicit wild cheers. We loved the serials, which were usually old reruns of Flash Gordon. How hokey they were to our sophisticated 1950's eyes, but still wild fun with the rocket ships suspended by wires and buzzing around.

We'd leave, satiated on violence and explosions and blinking at the evening light, to return home for dinner. I remember at times feeling something of a touch of guilt. My parents had blown all of seventy five cents to allow me to go to the movies and buy candy. Money was tight in our house. Such a huge sum and I would thank them for their largesse. Why would they blow seventy five cents like that? It wasn't until I was a parent that I really figured it out.

One of my first brushes with trouble happened at the movies. I snuck in a long string of half-inch firecrackers

and lit them. The usher chased me up one aisle and down the other and then collared me, snagging my buddy as well as an accomplice. I was hauled out to the jeers of the other kids and I can still recall looking back at the screen, just as the volcano exploded, the big climax that would wipe out Atlantis, Pompeii or some ancient city.

The ticket-taker back then, a woman named Lucy and aunt of my friend Nora, chewed me out and said she would call my parents. Well, I took a very long walk home, stalling for time and waiting until the movie let out, then just walked into the house like nothing happened. But she had called ... and the results were unpleasant.

Going to the movies on Sunday was a big event. Even for a little boy of six it was jacket and tie time, especially if a special movie was playing. When the Ten Commandments came to town, I can recall the lobby packed with nuns from St. Rose of Lima and my having to properly bow to them. Little boys still learned how to bow back then and girls to curtsy. Charlton Heston's parting of the Red Sea blew my mind. It was in that darkened room that I developed my lifelong love of movies, especially big, epic, sprawling tales ... even those with over-endowed Italian girls, but I no longer throw spitballs at them.

It was sometime around 1960 (I can not recall the exact year) that the big flood hit Millburn. Having just endured a

double blow here in North Carolina from Frances and Ivan, I now see the tragedy of such an event, but for a small boy that flood was thrilling. There used to be a building that actually spanned the creek on the north side of the bridge downtown. Part of its support collapsed and there was fear that it would jam up under the bridge and perhaps sweep that away with it. Of course every kid was just dying to see that happen, but the bridge held. The river backed up, then blew through the back door of the old Woolworth's building.



(1968 flood in Millburn)

All the contents of Woolworth's cascaded out into Millburn Ave. Even though I was an excited boy of ten or so, that to me was indeed tragic. I recall the water, head high for me, blowing through the windows. Clothing, food, furniture, tables and toys just littered the street. Tragically gone was the old Woolworth's, with its varnished floors, its wood display cases filled with toy soldiers for five cents apiece, the old lunch counter. All gone -- and to be

replaced with plastic and aluminum. It was never the same.

As I grew up and my world expanded, I discovered the great joy and mysteries to be found in the South Mountain reservation. My friend Joe Belloff and I would toss some sandwiches and sodas into our bicycle saddle bags and take off for a day of riding the trails. I think we were the ones who actually invented off-road biking. We'd take the carriage trail up to Hemlock Falls, circle around back paths, and even cut our own lanes at times. Hidden up there in those woods were wonderful stone bridges, beautiful vistas, cool moss-covered glens, deer aplenty, and the sense of a different world. I recall once being stopped by a mounted park ranger who solemnly told us bike riding was not allowed, especially on the narrow hiking trails. We talked for awhile, walking along with him, peppering him with enthusiastic questions about the park and its history and kind gentleman that he was, he finally told us, "Go ahead and ride kids, but don't let any of the other officers catch you."

For me a magical place was the old lookout building on Washington Rock. A ride or a hike would always finish up there. I'd sit and watch the trains come and go as they would swing around the bend heading towards Short Hills and Summit. On snowy days it was magical and I would imagine, yet again,

how it must have looked a hundred and seventy years past, with a ghostly sentry hovering somewhere nearby, gaze fixed on Elizabethtown and waiting for the British to move. Or on clear days I could see to distant New York, the place that the train and ferry could take me to on special outings to the museums there.

I have a very sharp recollection of the winter when I was in sixth grade. It was a winter of snow, of four or five blizzards. Snow piled up six feet high by the side of Millburn Avenue.

I awoke one morning to that wonderful sound ... silence. Millburn Avenue was silent. The tinkling hiss of snow was slashing against the frosted window panes, the steam radiator in my bedroom was clanking away and as I raced downstairs the joyous announcement from my mom ... no school!

After a warm breakfast, I bundled up, buckled my black rubber boots and I was out the door. But on that day I didn't feel like going up to Duncan Street with my sled -- a great sledding road if it had not yet been sanded -- and instead I just stepped out into the middle of Millburn Avenue.

There was no traffic and nothing was moving. All was silent. The storm was so intense that the street lights were still on, glowing softly. I walked right down the middle of the street to the center of town, bent over against the wind and my imagination took me back.

It was just like the past that Mr. Lonergan told me about, before cars, before trolleys, the world devoid of noise and bustle. Millburn was at that moment as it once was long ago.

A few store owners were outside, vainly shoveling their walkways. "Hey, Mr. Cole!" "Billy, what in heavens are you doing out in the street?" "Just walking, sir."

I reached the center of town and noticed that the few people I did meet ... well, we talked. We talked about the weather, how many inches we'd get, how cold it was, and I'd move on. I stopped in to see Mr. Lonergan and he told me how it was like the blizzard of '88 out there, a wonderful analogy for my imagination that day.



(Early view of Millburn from Washington Rock)

I went up Main Street, under the railroad bridge, following what was still then called "the cow path," a name undoubtedly linked to an earlier age when a long-forgotten farmer would

walk his cows down to the stream to water them. Then into the reservation, sloughing through the snow and up the path. I was one of Washington's soldiers on the retreat to the Delaware in 1776 and I reached the shelter.

It was empty, wonderful, all to myself. Brushing the snow off a seat I just settled down, curled up, and watched. I watched the snow coming down, the gusts of wind, the snow falling so hard the "colonial" village below disappearing completely, then dreamlike, shadowy, reemerging.

A silent train came from the west, its headlight glowing. The cry of its whistle was carried away by the wind. It drifted into the station then disappeared. In the shadows it was a steam locomotive of a hundred years past and aboard it were soldiers heading off to the Civil War.

I remember it all so clearly because of my thoughts when I walked home. I came back down at last and stopped in the library to warm up, as I dripped snow and ice on the floor. The librarian asked me where I had been since I must have looked like a snowman -- and please take those boots off by the doorway.

I took out a couple of books, she bundled them up for me, and now the last blocks home. My thoughts were that when I grew up I wanted to find another Millburn, a Millburn as it was long ago.

By the early 1960s the city was already encroaching. There was talk of a new highway cutting between Millburn and Springfield. Childhood is always about change and at that time you do not really understand how precious the few days of it are, but you start to become aware it is slipping away. And the same is sadly true for the world as a whole. Times change. A building, such as the old house two doors down from mine, is torn down and suddenly there's an apartment where once there was a vacant lot to play in. A school closes and though they give the same name, Washington School, to the new building, something is lost.

On that magical day, Millburn was, in my mind, as it once was long before I was born and I wanted to live in that place where you took the extra few minutes to talk to the shopkeeper about the weather, where you could walk down the middle of Main Street undisturbed.

The historian Bruce Catton, in his last book, *Waiting for the Evening Train*, saw trains as a metaphor for our own journey through life. They were, as well, magic carpets, linking us to distant places. Today, when I fly to Italy, Russia, or to my summer haunt, Mongolia, there is nowhere near the excitement of childhood, waiting for the morning train to take me to New York with my mom or dad.

The old MU model cars, their smell, the wicker seats, the high domed

lights, the cry of the conductor -- "Aboard!" -- the squeal of the old brakes being released and then the clicking of the wheels as we picked up speed, passing through Maplewood, Orange, Newark and then to what I thought was a beautiful, wondrous place, the meadowlands of Jersey. Dozens of train tracks, freight cars, sleek passenger cars, the last of the old grand ladies of railroading with names like Phoebe Snow. Switching yards, a few steam locomotives still working, the tunnel and then Hoboken. "Last stop Hoboken!"

From there the walk through the terminal, dozens of trains parked and then aboard the old Eric Lackawanna ferry boat to New York City.

I lived for the mummies at the Metropolitan and the dinosaurs at the natural history museum. After a long day of museums, we'd finally make the long trek home. More than once Dad would have to carry me the last block or two from downtown Millburn back to our small white house at 402 on Millburn Avenue.

Nearly forty years have passed since I left Millburn. I've traveled around the world a number of times, lived in half a dozen states, and yet nowhere has there been a place that I've known in such detail, right down to the cracks in old paving stones on the walkway to school, which you never stepped on because of what might happen to your mom.

And yet I did find it at last, at least for my family. I live on the side of a mountain in North Carolina. The next ridge over does look somewhat like Washington Rock. I now live in a small village where it takes a half hour to pick up the morning paper and a cup of coffee because you meet a neighbor, a friend, or just lean against the counter and chat with the clerk about the weather. Kids play in the shaded streets and on the Fourth of July, fireworks burst over the town lake, where kids vainly fish for whatever might still be alive in its murky depths. There's even a train and at night the whistle echoes in the valley. It is not the sound of the old Eric Lackawanna, but close enough. We still have parades here where the joke is that more people march in it, than watch it, and though ten cent sodas are long past, there is still an ice cream store like Coles' where you can get two scoops and a coke.

I had my Millburn as a boy ... a wonderful place ... and I kind of found it again in this small village I now live in. It is a Millburn for my daughter to grow up in and hopefully remember fondly for all her days to come.



## Recent Acquisitions

The historical society is very grateful for donations of local artifacts and memorabilia from generous residents and/or society members. We are happy to be able to preserve, share and use for reference these relics of Millburn-Short Hills history.

Because of the increasing number of donations, often made outside of the museum, we may have neglected to recognize every donation here. Please help us maintain accurate records on these donations by alerting us if we neglected to include your donation here. In addition to making sure we don't forget to thank you, we need to confirm that the information is properly recorded in the database. Our sincerest thanks go to the following people for enriching the lives of all residents by their donations:

*From Margaret Hornecker*, WWII-era scrapbook of the war service of Millburn-Short Hills residents; MHS Millwheel yearbooks from 1931, 1932, 1937, 1938, 1940, and 1944; ca. 1918 photos of the student body at the White Oak Ridge/Lincoln School; colonial-style flag; Girl Scout calendars for 1966, 1967, and 1971

*From Ted Brewer*, large lot of early railroad memorabilia, including: 1905 Morris County Traction Co. gold bond certificate, courtesy of Harry Silverstein; DL&W common stock certificates; Erie Lackawanna stock certificates; DL&W employment application; 1959 DL&W long distance passenger timetable; five picture postcards of DL&W equipment; Morris & Essex RR Co first mortgage bond specimen certificate; Erie Lackawanna dispatch envelope; three photos of DL&W steam locomotives. Also donated were 1982-2003 Townscape booklets, oral history tapes, and two copies of the Junior League's 1970 Rivkin-Carson report re the East Orange Water Preserve lands.

*From Betty Cunliffe*, a stamped, addressed seashell that was mailed to her father,

Robert Faddis, in the 1940's; WWII ration books; letters to her father.

*From Kathleen Donnelly*, dollhouse model of 63 Crescent Place, SH

*From Anonymous*, a 1935 Chanticleer booklet of cocktail recipes; *Generations and Reflections: A History of B'Nai Jeshurun; More Fun*, a play program from St. Stephen's Women's Guild; *Golden Age of American Gardens; Sonnets From South Mountain; From the Roots Up* – a Short Hills Garden Club book; hat made by Josephine Layng of SH; *Food for Friends* SH cookbook; Jan 1939 *Architectural Forum; Mountain and Lake Resorts on the Lackawanna Railroad*; DL&W SH ticket agent book; Mayflower Laundry matchbook; Edward Tidaback, Realtor matchbook; Edward H. Wade "Indorsement and Memorandum Book" for Post No. 96.

*From Vicki Blair-Smith*, many items of infant, toddler, and adult clothing from the estate of her mother and grandmother, who lived on Highland Avenue in the early 1900's.



From *Joe Balbo*, a 1951 anniversary book for the St. Stephen's 1851-1951 centennial celebration.

From the *Southern Oregon Historical Society*, a scrapbook of ephemera related to the Montgomery Ward career of former Beechcroft Road resident Harry T. Eaton.

From *Paul Boegershausen*, an 1893 store ledger from Gentzel's Millburn store

From *James Horn*, ashtray from The Arch restaurant

From *Karl C. Becker*, a real-photo postcard of the Cora Hartshorn Arboretum

From *Anne Smith*, 1909 St. Rose of Lima souvenir program of the blessing of the cornerstone.

From *Barbara Wensberg*, ephemera from St. Rose of Lima Church

From *Ellen Morris*, ca. 1959 Millburnaires record album

From *Anne Klemme*, map of Oakey Tract/Fox Hill Reserve trails; 1960's ad featuring SH home; copy of architect's plans for SH Club clubhouse; copies of a number of early Millburn-SH maps.

From *Gail Engelschjon*, many pieces of Millburn and Short Hills ephemera, including a Dec. 1964 *Suburban Life*; magazine and two 1970's *Scene* magazine (with local ads); 1956 and 1958 MHS yearbooks.

From *Robert Varjan*, two locking and lighted, tall, glass display cases.

From *Louise Gili*, vintage clothing items from her grandmother's and mother's wardrobes

From *James Weill*, photo of demolition of Millburn RR station; *A Guide to Gracious Living in Millburn-Short Hills*; 1961 Erie-Lackawanna time table; John D. Clark, freeholder, promotional card; invitation to join Republican groups; letter to new voters in Millburn Township; 1961 general information on Millburn-Short Hills.



(1903 dashboard license plate from Milburn, NJ. Note the single "L" in Milburn.)

## Historical Society Officers and Trustees 2003-2004

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Note: Museum hours are:  
Wednesdays from 3:30-5:30,  
Thursdays from 5:30-7:30,  
& the first Sunday of the month,  
from 2:00-4:00

## Poking Through the Archives

Would you like to dig through boxes of some of the seldom-seen photos or acquisitions at the museum? Would you like to learn how to care for some of your family heirlooms? Even if you have only a couple of hours free once in a while, the historical society can use your help conserving or accessioning (adding to the collection) items in the museum. Please call the society at 973-564-9519 and leave a message with your name and number and we will call you back.

Some of the areas that desperately need attention are:

- ❖ oral histories
- ❖ conservation of photos
- ❖ conservation of maps
- ❖ conservation of landscape plans
- ❖ list of plans in collection
- ❖ and much more

Please help  
AND  
please browse!

## Local History Through the Internet

Vic Benes of the historical society board built a Web site for the society and in addition to much-needed general information (such as museum hours and parking), he added exciting features that continue to change and grow. Those features include a slide show of images from the archives and a map room with scans of some of the maps in the society's collection.

Please visit the new site at:

[www.MSHHistSoc.org](http://www.MSHHistSoc.org)

Researchers, readers, and residents may continue to contact the society through the society's e-mail address at:

[MSHHS2002@cs.com](mailto:MSHHS2002@cs.com)

The Millburn Free Public Library's director, Bill Swinson, has devoted valuable energy and resources to bringing the history of Millburn and Short Hills to residents and researchers. New and exciting additions are online and searchable at the library Web site, as the library Web site now features digitized images of a bound volume of *The Budget*, a rare 1886 Millburn newspaper, the *Township Tattle*, a newsletter that went to local WWII servicemen and their families, the *Item* from the WWII years, and the *Alert*, a local civil defense newsletter. Visitors to the museum seldom see these newsletters because of their fragile condition, but those who do see them are captivated by the news of Millburn Township's servicemen and servicewomen and thanks to the cooperation of the library, these rare artifacts can now be enjoyed by readers around the world.

The most popular local-history feature of the library Web site continues to be Marian Meisner's hefty and exhaustive study on the subject. If you have questions or are just curious about the history of Millburn and Short Hills, you can read Ms. Meisner's complete book at the Millburn library's Web site by going to:

<http://www.millburn.lib.nj.us/about.htm>

Please use the e-mail directory link at the library's Web site ("Department Telephone & E-mail Directory" near the bottom of the page above) to let Mr. Swinson know that you enjoyed or used these new features!



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