

Thistle



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A Library Comes of Age

A center of community life for more than 80 years, the Millburn Free Public Library has come a long way since its early days housed in a former butcher shop at the corner of Old Short Hills Road and Brookside Drive.



The Millburn-Short Hills Historical Society is very pleased to invite you to a Wednesday June 9th, 2021 program by Millburn Library Director Michael Banick. This will be a zoom presentation which will begin at 7:00p.m. with a short annual meeting, immediately followed by our featured speaker.

Specifically geared for the historical society, Director Banick will look at the Millburn Library over the years and how it has evolved and transitioned to include a variety of modern services, which might not be familiar to everyone. Also, did you know that the library will be renovating later this year? Learn about the future plans for this cherished township institution.

Michael Banick has been the Director of the Millburn Library since 2013 worked in libraries since

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The first library was a small house at the intersection of Brookside Drive and Old Short Hills Road.

1998. His library experience is varied and includes positions in museums, academic libraries, and public libraries. "Initially, I wanted to work in archives, where I would be able to bring together my interests in history, access, and preservation, but career paths are not always linear, and sometimes we are introduced to new things that take us down different tracks within the same profession. I have worked in a book preservation lab, served as a front-line reference librarian, overseen special collections, and been a university library instruction coordinator; but I have never been happier than I am now as the director of the Millburn Free Public Library."

Participants can join the zoom presentation anytime with the meeting ID and passcode. There will be no waiting room. See details below.

Millburn Short Hills Historical Society Annual Meeting

Time: Wednesday June 9, 2021 at 07:00 PM

To join the Zoom Meeting go to:

zoom.us/join and enter meeting id and passcode

Meeting ID: 847 1490 1607

Passcode: 924069

One tap mobile

+13126266799,,84714901607#,,,,*924069# US (Chicago)

+16468769923,,84714901607#,,,,*924069# US (New York)

Alternately you may visit our website mshhistsoc.org and click the zoom link for the annual meeting

ANY CHANGES TO JOIN THIS MEETING WILL BE POSTED ON THE
MILLBURN LIBRARY WEBSITE

<http://millburnlibrary.org/>

Remembering a Millburn Trailblazer



This article, by Michelle Miller with input from Vera Colitti, was originally written in September 2014 for the historical society event “An Afternoon with Vera Colitti: Meet the Woman, See the Clothes, Hear the Stories”.

Sadly, Ms. Colitti passed away this year. She was a long-time Millburn resident and successful business owner. This is her story.

Vera Colitti came to the United States from Italy in the 1950s. She and her family settled in Millburn, New Jersey. Vera, a graduate of the Italian Academy of Art, loved fashion and design. She began traveling to NYC where she found work as a model. Her love of fashion, which she considered art and artistic expression, inspired her to open a small shop in Millburn (about 1955) which she named Eleganza. Vera traveled to Italy to buy clothes for her shop, which sold almost immediately. She focused on items that inspired her personally. Her shop became so successful that she enlisted her brother Aldo to help and mother, Ines, who became head seamstress.

Her early buying trips to Italy focused first on Rome, with the glamorous fashion house founded by designer Princess Irene Galitzine, known for the famous evening pant “Palazzo Pajamas”. Also in Rome, Vera was inspired by and included clothes from the Italian label founded by Louisa Spagnoli, the pioneer of angora knitwear. Vera was invited to attend fashion shows at the Pitti Palace in Florence. She expanded Eleganza’s inventory of designers from Florence to include the popular Valentino, Emilio Pucci, Ferragamo and Gucci. Traveling to Milan brought her further success as she added designer Walter Albini, considered the first design superstar, and fashion houses Kritzia and Prada. Vera also met Ottavio and Rosita Missoni and was one of the first boutiques in the United States to carry the Missoni brand. The Missoni knitwear was very popular for Eleganza and remained a personal favorite of Vera’s.

Eleganza became the New Jersey fashion center for glamour, elegance and originality. In the United States, Vera’s reputation as a style influencer grew, along with her customer base, which included women from New York City, and socialites such as Doris Duke. Articles about Vera emerged in such fashion magazines as Vogue, Harper’s Bazaar, McCall’s, Glamour, Mademoiselle; and newspapers such as Women’s Wear Daily, and many Italian language journals. She appeared on Italian and American TV and radio.

Her dramatic success and business mushroomed to the point where, in 1968, Vera moved to “The Common”, a new 5,000 square foot location in Millburn, and changed her boutique’s name to “Colitti Collection”. Vera was traveling back and forth to Europe multiple times a year. She met boutique owners and buyers from all over the world and became an active participant in the Italian and European fashion scene. As her business

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The always elegant Vera Colitti, with mother Ines and brother Aldo in her Millburn boutique Eleganza.

grew Vera extended her collection to Paris and London. Colitti became an acquaintance of the designer Yves Saint Laurent, and became the largest New Jersey seller of his designs. Other popular labels at Colitti Collection included Cloe, Lacroix, Ungaro, Gucci, Sonia Rykiel, Nina Ricci, Thierry Mugler, Lanvin, Dior, and Givenchy.

The year 1983 was a turning point for Colitti Collection. Karl Lagerfeld had moved from design label Chloe to become the head designer for Chanel. Vera was a fan of Lagerfeld's and was in attendance at this premiere show for Chanel. Vera recounted that soon thereafter she was approached by Chanel to carry its clothing, and

Colitti Collection became the first free standing Chanel boutique in the US. This was a savvy business move on Vera's part as Chanel ultimately would account for one third of her boutique's revenue.

Another turning point for Vera was the addition of a menswear collection. Brother Aldo soon became the face of menswear at Colitti Collection. Together, this brother and sister selected all the fabrics for the men's clothing lines they carried. The men's line was so successful, it expanded to include the iconic Italian menswear brands of Zegna and Brioni, where Italian tailors regularly would fly in to Millburn to meet with her customers. Colitti Collection sold other iconic menswear brands Armani, Pierre Cardin, Cerruti (1881), Missoni, Gautier, Versace, Valentino and Chanel.

In fact, the list of designers sold in Vera's store was an encyclopedia of European fashion. No doubt some designers were more successful than others, but each was important to Vera and she could name, with great care, everyone. And for each name she listed, she could tell you why she selected their clothing and what she saw in their design. And despite the changing face of fashion over her 40 years in business, the one constant at Eleganza / Colitti Collection was Vera, her brother Aldo, and her mother Ines. It started, and ended, as a family business. Looking back, Vera herself was amazed at her success – and that she did it herself – managing the business and selecting and buying all inventory. Although the popular Millburn business closed in 1998, the very elegant and fashionable Vera Colitti was seen in and around town, patronizing our businesses and enjoying Taylor Park. She will be missed.

The following article originally appeared in the April 1, 2019 eNEWS, a publication of the Garden Club of America.



In 1975, the Short Hills Garden Club initiated a project to create community garden in Millburn, New Jersey, for use by residents of the township who did not have their own land to cultivate. The Community Garden was modeled on advice received from ‘Gardens for All,’ a non-profit organization at a time in the early 1970’s when families were looking to grow their own food to help fight the rising cost of inflation and consume more nutritious, better tasting food. A vacant lot on Church Street was chosen for its central location near the township’s commercial center and for those residents living in nearby apartments who could walk to the garden. The community garden sits on what was part of a bequest from long time township resident Mrs. John Taylor, who designated the land be used for the “permanent enjoyment” of the residents of Millburn Township. The Neighborhood House

Nursery School, part of the Neighborhood Association of Millburn Township, leases the land to the Short Hills Garden Club for use as a community garden.



The original condition of the vacant lot when it was chosen as the site of the Community Garden and the Neighborhood House Nursery School. Photographer: Unknown, April 1976.

Members of the Short Hills Garden Club prepared the overgrown urban site using donated materials and in the first growing

season of 1976, twenty 10 x 20 feet garden plots were planted to the “permanent enjoyment” of residents in the Millburn-Short Hills community. Slightly larger than one acre, the Community Garden is surrounded by a chain link fence with a locked

gate. Each member is given a key providing them the convenience to set their own gardening schedule.



The new spring growth of vegetables is just beginning to fill in the garden plots and climb the trellises. Apartment buildings and retail stores surround the community garden. Photographer Lisa Gadsden, May 2011



The garden club created and maintains the front border gardens along the outside fence, including these daylilies at the entrance gate. The double gate entrance on Church Street provides easier vehicle access to the garden. A central garden path leads from the entrance gate to the back of the garden and the Neighborhood House Nursery School, the white two-story structure seen in the background. Photographer: Lisa Gladsden, 2012.



In early spring, the plant growth is so low that for the time, the Neighborhood house Nursery School and its playground are fully visible. A picnic table placed inside the garden is shared by both nursery school students and the gardeners from the community garden. Photographer: Lisa Gladsden, May 2011.

The individual gardeners raise vegetables and herbs, perennial and annual flowers, spring bulbs, and berries with many of these grown organically.

In 2013, after thirty-seven years, the Short Hills Garden Club felt that it was time to make much needed improvements to the garden and submitted a grant application to the New Jersey Committee of the GCA for funding of a new front entrance gate, repairs to the original



At the height of the growing season, a variety of annuals and vegetables including squash, zinnias, daisies, and sunflower fill the garden plots, and the surrounding trees obscure the view of the nursery school playground. Photographer: Lisa Gladstone, July 2012.



Looking back toward the entrance gate and surrounding residential properties, the individually leased garden plots are in full bloom by summer. Photographer Lisa Gadsden, July 2012



The central gravel path is flanked by individual garden plots on the east and west. The neighboring St. Stephen's Episcopal Church and homes along Church Street share views of the activity inside the garden. Photographer; Lisa Gladsden, May 2011.

perimeter fencing, installation of a storage shed, new plot markers, and gravel replenishment of the paths. That same year, the Short Hills Garden Club began collecting extra vegetables from gardeners to be donated weekly during the harvest season to the Interfaith Food Pantry of the Oranges and documented the garden which would go on to become the first community garden accepted into The Garden Club of America Collection in the Archives of American Gardens, Smithsonian Institution.

Shortly after the documentation was complete, the garden club wished to honor their member Pamela Hulshizer, who had chaired the community garden project for twenty-two years with a small garden within the community garden in a common space near the front wood bin which formerly only had a commercial grade

picnic table. Pam's Garden, designed by Claudia Thornton, a member of the Garden Club of the Oranges, was funded with generous donations received in Pam's memory and truly reflects what she loved most about the Community Garden; offering its gardeners a peaceful place to share seeds, plants, vegetables, growing tips, stories, hugs, laughter, and love.

The Short Hills Garden Club continues its stewardship of the land to the delight of its many gardeners who have this opportunity to share and apply their gardening talents. The garden offers a wonderful sanctuary in a congested community. This community project has become an increasingly popular resource in Millburn Township and currently has a waiting list of 25 prospective gardeners.



Pam's Garden, a garden within a garden, is located off the main gravel walkway near the front entrance. The stones bordered garden includes a heart shaped perennial flower bed anchored with a Cornus florida 'Cherokee Princess' (dogwood) tree. A sitting area with teak table, umbrella, chairs, two teak benches, and a small commemorative plaque finish the garden. Photographer: Lisa Gladson, September 2014.



An overhead view shows the structural design of the garden with individual garden plots and central path, and its central location within the community. Photograph: Courtesy of 2018 Google.

The Short Hills Garden Club has a committee of three members who, along with support of the other Short Hills Garden Club members with weeding and clean-up days, oversee maintenance of the flower border outside the fence and provide water, wheelbarrows, garden tools, compost bins, benches and a picnic table for use by the gardeners. The garden club committee also manages the \$70 rental fee and contracts for the 85 garden plots. They also work closely with the Township of Millburn Publics Work Department which assists with seasonal turning off/on of water, spigot repairs, removal of accumulated contents of the two debris bins, and tree pruning. A portion of the fees collected from gardeners is donated to Neighborhood Association of Millburn Township (NAMT) as per the lease agreement, with the remaining funds being used to offset the cost of water,

annual garden maintenance, equipment, and other associated expenses. NAMT retains several plots at no fee and has integrated gardening into the daily Neighborhood House Nursery School curriculum.

Last year, the Short Hills Garden Club project volunteers initiated 'Grow a Row' to further encourage gardeners to donate the fruits (and vegetables) of their labor to the food pantry. The garden club is considering submitting a second grant application to the New Jersey Committee of the GCA to fund replacement of the remaining, original perimeter fencing. Plans also are in the works to re-document the garden for the GCA Collection in the Smithsonian Institution's Archive of American Gardens. Article submitted by Lisa Gladsden, Zone IV Garden History & Design zone representative.

Historical Society Officers and Directors

President: Jeanne Weill

Vice President: Mary McNett

Treasurer: Michelle Miller

Recording Secretary: Carrie Ross Faenza

Corresponding Secretary: Sharon Petrucelli

Directors: Paul Boegershausen, Thomas Baio, Frank Delle Donne, Linda Eagle, Sandy Haimoff, Dorothy Kelly, Elisabeth Meyer, Andrew Permison, David Sorokin.

Past President, Ex Officio: Deborah Frank

Advisors: Vic Benes, John Murray, Susan Newberry

The Society Welcomes Your Participation and Membership

The historical society is dedicated to the preservation of our community's heritage. If you would like to join the historical society or have not yet renewed your membership, please use this form to do so and send a check made payable to **Millburn-Short Hills Historical Society** at P.O. Box 243, Short Hills, N.J. 07078, with the form below. Or, go to mshhistsoc.org for paypal option.

If you would like to volunteer to help with any of the many activities in which the society is engaged, or if you would like to share your memories with the society, please contact us at info@mshhistsoc.org

Millburn-Short Hills Historical Society Membership Form

Date _____

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Annual Dues

_____ **\$15 (Senior/Student)**

_____ **\$25 (Individual)**

_____ **\$35 (Family)**

_____ **\$50 (Supporter)**

_____ **\$100 (Patron)**

_____ **\$250 (Sponsor)**

_____ **\$500 (Benefactor)**

_____ **\$_____ (Other)**

ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTION \$ _____

_____ **I would like to volunteer to help.**

All contributions are fully tax-deductible. All contributions are greatly appreciated.

Donations of \$500 and up will be recognized on a permanent plaque at the museum.

Does the company you work for have a matching gift program? It **DOUBLES your donation!**



Return Service Requested

A Message from our President

Dear Friends,

Welcome to our latest edition of the Thistle. I hope you enjoy our article on Millburn's very own community garden. Also take a look at our awesome new website mshhistsoc.org which offers many new items to explore, including all of our past Thistle issues.

Happy Spring and happy reading!

Sincerely,
Jeanne