

IN BERGEN'S ATTIC

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Greetings fellow members, I hope you are all doing well. After 4 months into my new role as President of the Bergen County Historical Society, I would like to introduce myself to you. My husband Joe and I have proudly raised our family in Bergen County since 1971. Throughout our child-rearing years, I was involved in volunteering with the Bergenfield Junior Woman's Club for 12 years and a past president. Professionally, I am a retired RN with experience in two hospitals and ended my career as the school nurse in New Milford High School.

I believe that volunteers are the heart of every organization. Our first involvement with BCHS was on a fall clean-up day at Historic New Bridge Landing. It was advertised that volunteers were needed, and



These unusual pandemic times we are living in have closed the historic buildings and changed the plans for the activities that BCHS had made, like all historic and museum sites, but we continue with our mission to "preserve and promote US history, with Bergen County as our priority", by promoting outside activities and virtual programming, always following safety guidelines, with masks and social distancing. Since the COVID 19 restrictions have been in place, we have had five walking tours, a commemoration of the passing of the 19th amendment with a speech and ringing of bells, participated in a national forum *America's Summer Road Trip* with a 45-minute video about HNBL (which can be viewed on our website), had an outdoor concert fundraiser with the Enslows for the museum fund, wreath layings for Memorial



THE ENSLOWS, AT LEFT, PERFORM WITH A SAFE DISTANCE AT THE CAMPBELL-CHRISTIE HOUSE

to bring gloves and dress in work clothes. Well, those first three hours were indeed messy and tiring, but very rewarding. We met other volunteers and felt the gratitude of the members there that day. The history of HNBL in the Revolutionary War is amazing, and we continue to learn more through the School of Interpretation, lectures, tours, events and historians. Being a volunteer has been very rewarding.

Day and for Veteran's Day, monthly virtual lectures and two webinars.

Please check the website often, follow us on facebook and emails to stay informed of our upcoming programming and events. Your continued loyalty and kind support is appreciated as we look forward to the future opening of the museum buildings when our nation's health returns. Thank you - Stay healthy - Stay safe. - Carol Restivo, BCHS President

The Ackerson Canoe: Radiocarbon Dating and Wood Identification Report to the Bergen County Historical Society

R. ALAN MOUNIER

OCTOBER 16, 2020

Introduction

This article presents new information concerning the age and type of wood comprising the Ackerson canoe, which is a log boat or dugout canoe that was reportedly discovered in 1868 in Hackensack on land belonging to Colonel Garret G. Ackerson. His heirs donated the craft to the Bergen County Historical Society in 1904. Since its form and the tool marks from its construction provide scant clues to its origin, the age of the canoe has always been a matter of conjecture. Radiocarbon dating demonstrates that the canoe is the product of the historic era, most likely dating between ca. AD 1650 and AD 1815. The identity of its makers remains unknown. Microscopic examination of wood reveals the parent wood as American chestnut (*Castanea dentata*), thus, amending a historical misidentification as white oak (*Quercus alba*). This article describes the analytical techniques involved in the present study along with relevant background information.

Joseph R. Arsenault and I examined the canoe and took samples on August 29, 2020 at the Steuben House, River Edge, N.J. Mr. Arsenault is a senior ecologist and archaeologist, as well as an esteemed research associate. Representing the Bergen County Historical Society were Deborah Powell, Michael Ginch, and Carol Restivo. I am indebted to each for valuable information and for help rendered during the sampling process.

Particular thanks go to Ms. Powell



for providing archival materials relating to the history of the canoe, and for organizing the sampling event. Judith J. Sullivan kindly provided references to other dugout canoes found elsewhere in the region.

Background Information

Log boats have been made around the world wherever forests supply trees of suitable size. The fundamental design is practically universal: a section of trunk is flattened and hollowed out to create a hull. Our information about Native American canoes comes from a handful of early historical accounts, chiefly by John Smith in Virginia, William Wood in New England, and Samuel de Champlain in New France (Plane 1991:10). Secondary accounts recite species identity on the strength of previous testimony with no attempt at authentication. Various references indicate that sycamore, cedar, chestnut, and pine were used by indigenous peoples here and elsewhere along the Atlantic seaboard (Heston 1924; Monthly Evening Sky Map 1924; Newcomb 1956:29; Plane 1991; Wheeler et al. 2003; Mounier 2003:113).

Although the Linnaean names are rarely cited, one may suppose that sycamore refers to *Platanus occidentalis*; cedar to white cedar or *Chamaecyparis thyoides*; and, chestnut to *Castanea dentata*. Among pines represented in canoe inventories are white pine (*Pinus strobus*) and yellow pines (e.g., *Pinus echinata*, but generally not listed by species). In areas where it occurs, cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) has been identified in prehistoric canoes (Wheeler et al. 2003: 542). Among the Lenape or Delaware Indians, the favored tree for dugout canoes was the tulip tree or yellow poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*). Indeed, the Native word for this poplar translates as “the canoe-making tree” (Mahr 1954:382).

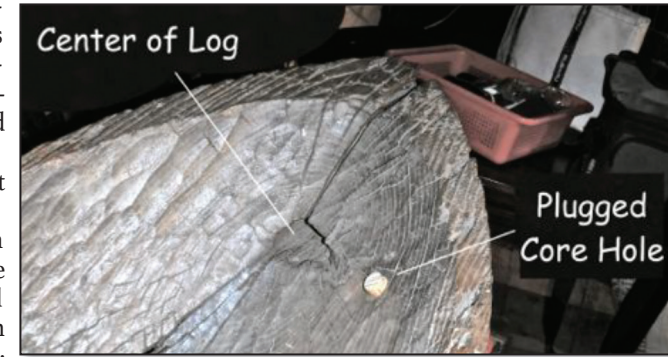
There has been some confusion about the wood from which the Ackerson canoe was fashioned. According to the current display plaque, “The United States Forestry Department has identified the wood as white oak.” However, documentation supporting that identification appears to be lacking. A newspaper account dating to 1904 asserts, without verification, that the canoe was made of chestnut (Passaic Daily News 1904). Since it is likely that any suitably sized tree could be fashioned into a hollowed log boat, a detailed microscopic analysis of wood samples was necessary to make an accurate determination. As shown in greater detail below our analysis demonstrates that the boat indeed consists of chestnut.

The creation of dugout canoes by selective burning and scraping was well known among the Indians of the eastern forests, which yielded large trees appropriate to such production (Wood 1989; Wissler 1938:38; Zeisberger 1910:23). Plane (1991:10) quotes William Wood’s early 17th century account of canoe making: *Their Cannows be made...of Pinetrees, which before they were acquainted with English tooles, they burned hollow, scraping them smooth with Clam-shells and Oyster-shells, cutting their out-sides with stone-hatchets* (Wood 1898:96).

Europeans also fashioned boats by hollowing out logs, but frequently wood was removed by hewing and gouging with steel tools, thus eliminating or reducing the need of fire in the production process. In hewing, an axe is used to sever the wood fibers across the grain so that pieces could be pried or chipped out at the chop marks or “stop-cuts” with adzes or chisels.

Traditional boat builders often relied upon modified tree trunks as keels and built upwards with boards to create hulls of considerable depth. In some cases multiple logs were joined together to fashion the hull. This procedure was historically employed in building the famous bugeye boats for oyster dredging on the Chesapeake Bay.

Propelled by poles or paddles, dugout canoes permitted travel as well as the transportation of heavy or awkward cargos. While push-poles and paddles are unknown from archaeological contexts in New Jersey,



LOCATION OF CORE SAMPLE
NOTE MANUFACTURING TOOL MARKS.
PHOTOGRAPH BY R. ALAN MOUNIER

Harington (1924:258) reported the discovery in 1880 of a deteriorated oak paddle from Canoe Place on eastern Long Island. In historic times, dugout canoes were often outfitted with masts and sails.

History of the Ackerson Canoe

History records that the canoe was discovered in or about 1868 along the Hackensack River on the estate of Colonel Garret G. Ackerson (McMahon 1992). Note that a newspaper article from 1904 dates the discovery to 1858 (Bergen Evening Record 1904). Early accounts indicate that the canoe contained

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



a halberd or other articles, but these reports must be greeted with some skepticism for want of contemporaneous documentation or surviving artifacts. A persistent anecdote relates that the canoe was used for a time as a livestock trough, being fastened to a supporting structure with iron nails, remnants of which still pierce the sides beneath the gunwales.

Because of its dugout form, claims have been advanced concerning the canoe's origin in prehistoric times or at least at the hands of Native artisans. Very crisp tool marks strongly suggest that the implements used to hollow out the log (or to finish it) were made of sharp steel, in consequence of which an origin in the historic period has been conjectured.

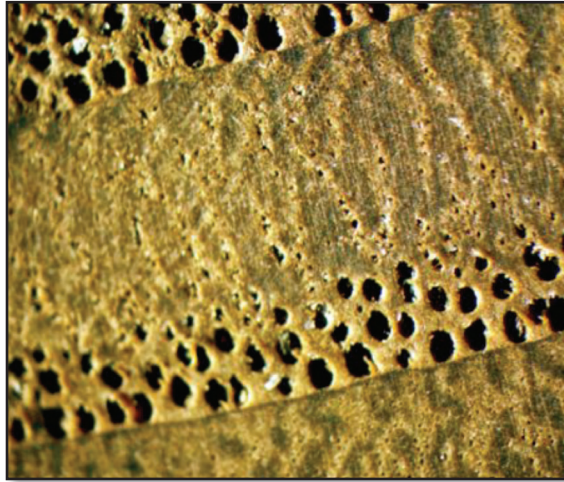
Description of the Canoe

The canoe is a long, narrow boat, fashioned by hollowing a length of tree trunk. The hollowing cuts reveal the radial core of the log, approximately at mid-depth in the hull. The wood is remarkably well preserved. The craft is symmetrical, terminating in gently rounded, somewhat pointed shapes at either end. When viewed from the side both ends sweep downward from the gunwales towards the bottom, forming distinct arcs; thus, making the bow and stern functionally equivalent. With no distinct keel, the bottom of the hull is rounded, presumably following the natural contour of the parent log.

The upper surfaces of both ends display shallow rabbets, cut to receive horizontal boards known as breasthooks, each of which served to strengthen the gunwales, to provide a small deck, as well as a convenient handhold when launching or landing the canoe. In addition, the chamber created beneath these boards might have accommodated a small amount of stowage.

The breasthooks were removed at a time and under circumstances now unknown. However, we have a photograph showing their presence. More or less vertical holes in the gunwales suggest fastening by means of nails. Indeed, a vertically aligned nail still remains in one end of the boat.

As reported by McMahon (1992) nails pierce the sides of the craft at various points beneath the gunwales. The surviving fasteners are cut nails, so-called because of manufacture from sheared blanks of flattened iron bars. Such nails originated in the late 18th century but were not in common use until around the third decade of the 19th century (Nelson 1968; Wells 1998). Prior to the introduction of this technology, nails were made at the blacksmith's forge by hammering narrow strips of



TRANSVERSE SECTION OF CANOE SHOWING TYPICAL STRUCTURE OF CHESTNUT (21X)
NOTE PORE STRUCTURE AND THE ABSENCE OF CONSPICUOUS MEDULLARY RAYS.
PHOTOGRAPH BY R. ALAN MOUNIER

wrought iron to produce tapered shanks and flattened heads. The presence of cut nails would be consistent with the manufacture of, or modifications to, the canoe during or after the first decade of the 19th century. While already attributed to the use of the canoe as an animal trough, the nails may give plausible evidence of blocks mounted to support oarlocks, thole pins, or thwarts.

Dimensions

The dimensions of the canoe, recorded at the time of our inspection, were as follows: Length: 4.55 meters (14' 11-1/8"). Width at Top-Center (Gunwale to Gunwale): 0.48 meters (1' 6-7/8"). Depth at Center (Gunwales to Floor): 0.23 meters (0' 9-1/16"). Height from Bottom to Gunwales: Not measured.

The color of the wood varies from reddish brown to grayish brown depending upon location and past treatment. In places the wood lacks luster and has a rather coarse texture. Elsewhere it gleams and has a waxy look as well as a smooth feel. Preservative coatings doubtless affect the perception of color and texture. McMahon (1992) mentions traces of blue-gray paint as well as a glossy, transparent finish that he says was applied in 1937. On surfaces freshly exposed by our sampling, the color is reddish yellow, in the Munsell color range of 7.5YR 6/6-7/6.

Analytic Sampling

Samples were removed from the canoe to provide information on its age and to identify the wood from which it had been made. In concert with museum staff, we discussed various possibilities for sampling to obtain adequate specimens that would not unduly modify the appearance or physical integrity of the canoe. We decided to remove a small cylindrical core from the inner surface of one end, as well as a modest, rather cuboidal section of the gunwale at a point where a cut had been made in the past for the attachment of a breasthook.

The Core Sample:

We placed the sample hole about 80mm (slightly more than three inches) below the gunwale, where the thickness of the wood permitted relatively deep penetration without the risk of boring completely through the wall. We used a 19mm (3/4-inches) diameter hole saw to cut a plug about 15mm (19/32-inches) in diameter and a similar depth into the side of the canoe. We judged that this depth would be sufficient to penetrate the body of the canoe beyond the reach of any chemical preservatives previously applied. This was important to ensure an uncontaminated sample for carbon dating. The saw contained a centrally mounted pilot drill, which left a hole in the core. By placing a close-fitting screwdriver into the pilot hole, and applying lateral pressure, the plug was snapped off and removed from the hole. Next we extracted a sample of shavings or chips from the hole, using a specialized, chisel-edged drill, known as a Forstner bit.

These shavings comprised the sample sent for age determination. To minimize the possibility of introducing contaminants into the sample, we chose a bit that was slightly smaller in diameter than the preliminary hole.

As the bit penetrated the wood, the shavings were collected on a piece of cardboard and immediately transferred to a scale for weighing. The empty hole was plugged with a pine (*Pinus* sp.) dowel trimmed for a snug fit. The dowel was inserted into the hole and then cut off slightly above the surface to permit easy removal if desired. The dowel contrasts in color and composition with the canoe, thus making obvious the point of sample extraction.

The dimensions of the core are as follows: Outer Diameter: 15mm (19/32-inches). Inner Diameter: 6.35mm (1/4-inches). Length: 15mm (19/32-inches). Weight of Core: 1.0g. Weight of Shavings: 0.8g.

Summary

The physical condition and construction details of the canoe suggest that it is a product of the historic era, including a time when at least some of the Native peoples were still present among the European colonists. A radiocarbon assay bolsters this interpretation, with the most likely date falling between AD 1652 and AD 1814. Microscopic examination of wood samples demonstrates that the canoe was made from American chestnut, previous claims to the contrary notwithstanding. Because of technological similarities in the manufacture of dugout watercraft across time and space, there is insufficient evidence to attribute the manufacture of the Ackerson canoe to a particular group of people, whether autochthonous or otherwise. Early but persistent reports of associated exotic artifacts or other articles should be treated as apocryphal until such time as their validity can be substantiated

TO REVIEW THE ENTIRE REPORT ON
THE CANOE AND THE DATING
PROCEDURES GO TO:
BERGENCOUNTYHISTORY.ORG
UNDER HEADING PUBLICATIONS
LOCATED IN RESEARCH PDFS

HNBL Bake Oven

Michael Ginch of River Edge recently completed an Eagle Scout project that saw the addition of a bake oven to the property. This fantastic project, located near the out-kitchen, adds another layer of historic interpretation to the site. We know that a bake house once existed on the property and we are now able to further demonstrate 18th century foodways outside.



RIGHT UPPER, EAGLE SCOUT MICHAEL GINCH WITH THE FINISHED BAKE OVEN FIRED UP.

LEFT UPPER, USING A TRADITIONAL STOMPING METHOD TO COMBINE CLAY AND STRAW TOGETHER.

LEFT LOWER, APPLYING THE FIRST OF TWO LAYERS OF CLAY OVER THE PAPER COVERED SAND AND BRICK MOLD.

RIGHT LOWER, CLAY OVEN DRYING AFTER TWO LAYERS OF CLAY HAS BEEN APPLIED. WHEN CLAY WAS DRY, BRICKS AND BLACK SAND MOLD WERE REMOVED.



Look for a new on-line publication of Documents Related to Slavery from the Collections of the Bergen County Historical Society at BergenCountyHistory.org

Due to funding of the Historic New Bridge Landing Park Commission, a contract was awarded to have the exterior wood work of the Von Steuben House painted, the first time since 2001. Funding also covered a new gravel pathway through the meadow. Other projects continue to be in development for the site. It should also be noted that County of Bergen installed a backflow preventer in the storm drain near the Von Steuben House river landing. This device is designed to prevent the river from backing up through a storm drain at high tide and is a first step to resolving sunshine flooding. -Jim Smith, Chairman of the Historic New Bridge Landing Park Commission

Celebrate the Season
Sunday * December 6
at 4 o'clock
 Twilight Tree Lighting,
 Traditional Caroling
 with Linda Russell,
 Visit with Sinter Klaas
 and more at HNBL.

Ackerman-Zabriskie Tide Mill Site

JIM SMITH



The Bergen County Historical Society is excited to announce the next chapter in historic interpretation and improving the visitor's experience at Historic New Bridge Landing with the purchase of the former PSE&G substation lot, located across Main St. from the Von Steuben House. This important property is located at the confluence of Cole's Brook and the Hackensack River and was originally called Tantaqua's Plain. About 1710, one of the earliest industrial structures was constructed at the site, a tide mill, which would help turn the Zabriskie family into one of the most prosperous and successful early families in Bergen County due to its location as a crossroads and river access. When war came to Bergen County in November of 1776, this property bore silent witness to the Retreat from Fort Lee and the surrounding property saw 11 military engagements or actions during the Revolution. Following the War, the State granted the property to Baron Von Steuben and much money was invested in the property, including repairing the mill. As production methods changed, the mill ceased operations in 1850 and burned down in 1852. Eventually the property was obtained by PSE&G and turned into an electrical substation as Bergen County grew.

The late Bergen County Historian and State Historic Sites specialist, Kevin Wright, recognized the value of the substation property and the site was included in the Master Plan for the development and interpretation at Historic New Bridge Landing. With the PSE&G shift to a resilient electrical grid system, the substation became obsolete. Discussions began with PSE&G, spear headed by David Hollenbeck of PSE&G, Kevin Wright, Deborah Powell, Mary Donohue and Jim Smith of the Bergen County Historical Society for the Society to acquire the property with a clear vision in mind and its preservation intact. Finally, in October of 2020, during the Presidency of Carol Restivo, the Society was proud to announce it has acquired the property.

Ultimately, this acquisition of property accomplishes major goals of the organization. First, the Society became involved at what would become Historic New Bridge Landing, as development and the encroaching junkyard began to encumber the Von Steuben House. The Society purchased the property surrounding the Steuben House so that it would not be consumed by development and lend itself to a new private/public park and allowed for the future preservation of the Demarest House, Thomas-Westervelt Barn and Campbell-Christie House. This purchase follows in that tradition of securing surrounding property to protect the



THE WALLS ARE TALKING!

BETH POTTER



You've probably heard the phrase, "If walls could talk!"...referring to the people and events that could tell the history of a home, "if only"... Well, these days, with online census records, digitized newspapers, and internet databases galore, the walls are, in fact "talking" – and researching a house history is easier than it's ever been.

Think of a house history as a biography of your house, and, as the author, you'll be using research techniques old and new. You'll still do in-person digging, browsing through musty old books and chatting with neighbors; but these days you can flesh out a lot of your home's story with some strokes of computer keys. By the way, I specifically mean the story of the families who've lived in a home—not the story of the architecture per se, but the story of the people who made the house a home. What did they do for a living? How many kids sat at the dinner table? Did the homeowners go to a local church, serve on

COUNTY RESOURCES- The Deed Vault

In the pre-COVID world, my first stop was the "deed vault" on the first floor at One Bergen Plaza in Hackensack, a huge room that is much larger than your average bank vault. Here there were two words I needed to know: Grantee and Grantor. I, as the current owner, was the latest "Grantee." The person I bought from was the latest "Grantor." Using a combination of county computer and some of the oversized "Grantee/Grantor" books, I built a chain of title for my house. As I went from one heavy tome to another, I went farther and farther back in time, and I found that the earliest family was that of Ervin A. and Kittie King, who bought the land on Haworth Avenue from a Haworth development company in 1891.

That early deed also showed me that the Kings had moved to Haworth from Benzonia, Michigan, a tiny town near Traverse City, just a stone's throw from Lake Michigan. A little internet research told me Benzonia was a town interested in two things: its Congregational Church and lumber mills. As it turned out, both those interests would be clues to the life of Ervin A. King in Haworth.

By the way, you can find 50 years' worth of property records online, through the Bergen County Clerk's website. Look for "Land Record Services," and there are records going back to 1970, searchable by a buyer's or seller's name. And if you're researching a house outside of Bergen

County, that particular county might have some or even all of their land records online.

Probate Records

Wills of long-gone homeowners can tell you a lot more than "who gets the money," assuming prior homeowners did, in fact, leave a will. Yes, a will can give you a

Bergen County Historical Society

BCHS has files full of information about Bergen County towns and families, maps, postcards, books, etc. Explore the Society's website, www.bergencountyhistory.org, and contact the Society's library at bchs-library@gmail.com for information and research availability.

TOWN RESOURCES- Neighbors & the Town Historian

Are there previous owners you could call/email/share a coffee with? Children of the owners? Grandchildren? Obviously, they could tell you about their family's time in the house, but they might also know some history of any previous owners or have photographs of the house or the



CHRISTMAS CARD BY PEER WEDVICK

THE KING FAMILY PHOTOGRAPH
SENT BY KITTIE KING'S NIECE.

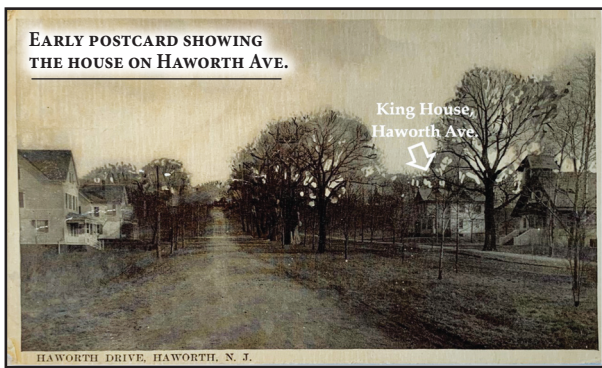


glimpse of the monetary estate, but older wills might tell you specifics, like the livestock or furniture left behind. A 19th century homeowner in Rockleigh bequeathed the individual books he had on his shelves, by title, to friends and family. In the case of Ervin King in Haworth, there were probate records which included the inventory of the carpentry mill he owned in Closter (yes, he had learned carpentry at those lumber mills in Benzonia). The reason for the inventory was a sad one—the records showed that King's business had gone bankrupt, and the stock of lumber and hardware at his mill was being auctioned off. Every nail and saw was itemized.

Probate records are in county offices in Hackensack, and at this time the county will do the research for you, for a \$10 fee per name. Email the surrogate's court at bersurrecords@co.bergen.nj.us, and they'll tell you how to proceed.

neighborhood. And talk to your neighbors. They may be more than happy to share their recollections of, and opinions about, how the house was painted, pet dogs that barked too much, etc. In Haworth, we're lucky to have town historian Mary Lou Boyd, who grew up in town, and who actually has kept notecards listing owners of many houses. So find the old-timers and the local historians and pick their brains. One older neighbor of mine used to baby-sit for the three boys who lived in our house in the 1940s. She did not enjoy the experience.

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EARLY POSTCARD SHOWING
THE HOUSE ON HAWORTH AVE.

King House,
Haworth Ave

HAWORTH DRIVE, HAWORTH, N. J.

the borough council, or—get arrested? When we moved into our 1891 Victorian in Haworth, I knew the names of three owners: us, of course; the family we bought from; and the Wedvicks, because someone would often ask if we lived in the

Borough Hall and the Building Department

Reach out to your borough hall and ask about your home's building permits. These can reveal some previous owners' names, but will also tell you if and when a porch was added, a bathroom was renovated, etc. In very rare cases, a town building office may have actual original blueprints, but don't count on it. Tax records (also on file in Hackensack) can be useful to find owners' names and to date the house; and minutes of early borough council meetings can be fun to look at, if a homeowner was involved in local government. For a time, Ervin King held the position of "overseer of the poor" and his work was noted in town records.

Churches

When I was looking through deeds, I saw that the King family had donated land for the building of the Congregational Church—again, bringing some of their Benzonia heritage with them. So I walked across the street to the Congregational Church offices, and hit gold with the minutes of the church's Ladies Aid Society. From those, I learned our house was the scene of many church meetings in the early 1900s; and when Ervin King died in 1911, the women of the church gave his widow Kittie a gold coin in remembrance.

The church also published a couple of community cookbooks in the early 20th century, and there I found Kittie King's recipe for something called "pork cake"

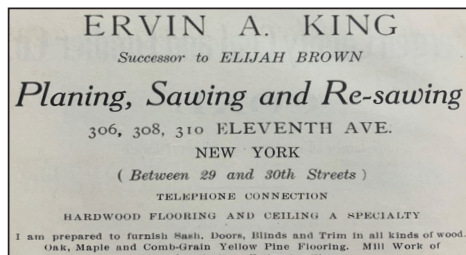
Pork Cake.

One pound salt pork chopped fine and dissolved in one pint boiling coffee, two cups brown sugar, two cups molasses, two tablespoonfuls cinnamon, one tablespoonful cloves, one grated nutmeg, one pound seeded raisins, eight cups sifted flour, one heaping teaspoonful soda.

MRS. E. A. KING.

and her daughter Joie's more palatable recipe for lemon cake (I made the pork cake once, and it may have been the explanation for Mr. King's early demise). A 1909 cookbook also had business ads, including one for Ervin King's flooring

business, a little ad that had a wealth of information about his business—and why our home's wood floors were so unusual and so beautiful.



AD FOR ERVIN KING'S FLOORING BUSINESS FROM THE 1909 CHURCH COOKBOOK

The Library

The historical collections of a library (or a historical society) will vary greatly from town to town, but it's a logical place to look for items that might tell you something about your home's history: town history books, postcards and photos that might show your house, old town maps, town directories, and the "Historical Sites Survey" of Bergen County homes that was conducted in the early 1980s. The Haworth Library sponsored some historic house tours during the 1990s, and the library has pamphlets from the tours, even some folders on individual houses. And reach beyond your own town library. For instance, the Bolger Heritage Center at the Ridgewood Library has resources that could help anyone researching in Bergen County.

ONLINE RESOURCES-

Ancestry.com/Familysearch.org

You're probably familiar with these genealogical websites and their treasure trove of searchable census records, directories, military records, etc. Familysearch is run by the Church of Latter-Day Saints, and is free to use. *Ancestry* requires a subscription, but many libraries in Bergen County have it available on their reference computers. To find out which libraries have *Ancestry*, go to bccls.org, and click on "Digital Collections," and then "Library Subscriptions." You'll search *Ancestry* or *Familysearch*

for any of the names that have popped up in your research. The 1910 Haworth census shows Ervin King as a "Manufacturer, Woodwork," and he and Kittie had a daughter, Joie, age 18, and a son, Ervin, Jr., age 10. *Ancestry* also showed me that Ervin, Jr. served in WWI. By the way, one new trick I've discovered – put your actual street address in the "keyword" search feature, and see if any records pop up. And don't expect records to have correct spellings or years. You might have to be creative.

Digitized Newspapers

There are a few archival newspaper websites—the *Historical New York Times database*, *Newspaperarchives.com*, *Fultonhistory.com*, *nystatehistoricnewspapers.com*, and *Newspapers.com*, to name a few. The Library of Congress has also digitized some newspapers, and the archival Brooklyn Eagle database can be reached through the New York Public Library website (NYPL.org). Some of the databases are free to search, some are not. Several local libraries offer the New York Times archives. For me, the most helpful site among these has been *Newspapers.com*, simply because it has the Bergen Record available, 1898-2020. Ridgewood, Garfield, and Wyckoff also have archival newspapers on *Newspapers.com*, and the old Passaic County newspapers can be helpful for Bergen County, too. For the subscription sites, you can purchase access by the month or by the year. Nearly all also have a free trial period available—if you can work quickly. [A note: the Brooklyn Eagle is useful because so many Brooklynites had summer homes in Bergen County, or moved here permanently. *Fultonhistory.com* is especially useful for New York state research.]

The newspaper sites can be overwhelming, and if you don't want to end up browsing through thousands of pages, try to narrow your search as much as possible. Search

for homeowners' names, a business name, the street address, or just the street (no numbers in the early days) to see if your house or neighborhood was in the news. Try searching for the last name first, because that's how obituaries may be listed. Try using initials, like "E. A. King" in addition to "Ervin King" and "Ervin A. King." Early in my research, I searched *Newspapers.com* for the name of "George Hurd," the second owner of our house and the town postmaster. I added "Haworth" as a search term. 225 articles appeared, in newspapers from New Jersey to Vermont to Ohio. Nearly all the stories were from 1915, and had to do with the tale of George Hurd's criminal trial in Hackensack. Seems he had taken his very young female assistant to an Atlantic City postmasters' convention and passed her off as his daughter. One story mentioned the violent arguments Hurd and his wife had had in the kitchen of their home! Our home! Just so you know—Hurd was convicted but skipped town before sentencing and was never seen in these parts again.

Google

Search for a homeowner's name (first name first, also last name first) or your street address, and who knows what can pop up? In Ervin Abner King's case, he's on "Findagrave.com," with entries for him, his wife Kittie, and daughter Joie. They're buried in Benzonia, Michigan. Previous real estate listings will also come up, and it's worth looking at those for any new information or older photos.

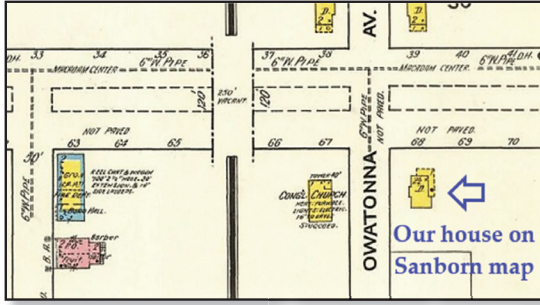
Maps

It may be that a nearby library has hard copies of old area maps (also try the Bergen County Historical Society), but there is also a website called *Historicmapworks.com* that has the 1876 Walker Atlas and the 1912/1913 Bromley map of Bergen County, both of which will show your house as

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a dot, if it existed at the time. Also, the fire insurance maps published by the Sanborn Company are extremely helpful. Sanborn made these maps periodically throughout the early 20th century, and they can be invaluable in narrowing down a time frame for your house, and its footprint. Princeton University has digitized many for Bergen County—just do a Google search for “Princeton” and “Sanborn” and an index will come up.

Finally, as you work on your history, I can bet you’ll have some nice surprises. The friendly town clerk in Benzonia, Michigan, put me in touch with Kittie King’s niece, who gave me a picture of the King family. Twice, former residents of our Haworth house rang the doorbell and walked me through how it used to be. One of those doorbell-ringers was a grown-up Wedvick boy who gave us a Christmas card with our house on it, drawn by his artistic father.



EARLY 20TH CEN. SANBORN MAP WITH THE AUTHOR’S HOUSE

And, sometimes it may not be a “wall” that will talk to you. It may be a radiator, concealing century-old wallpaper behind it. Or the backyard will yield a shard of an old dinner plate. In our case, it was a floorboard that spilled some secrets. We were installing air conditioning, and the workmen took up a floorboard in the

attic—and there was a letter from 1892. The writer was commenting on a wedding she and Kittie King would both be attending, and the letter-writer was going to be wearing a heliotrope dress. No

word on Kittie’s apparel.

Researching a house history has been compared to putting a jigsaw puzzle together. I’ve always thought of it as a detective story, with me as Nancy Drew. She always solved the case, and had fun doing it. Hope you do, too. 🌸

TIDE MILL, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

historic nature of the site. Secondly, new levels of interpretation can be explored and further discussion including archaeology of the former mill site can be planned. Next, it will allow for greater access to parking for events, which is critical for historic sites, especially older sites that may be impacted by surrounding development. Lastly, it will allow the core of the site to be protected and native plantings to be established in our effort to continue to be a good steward on the banks of the Hackensack River.

It is through the efforts of countless individuals, our amazing members and supporters that have made this once in a generation purchase possible. But we are not done yet! Please consider supporting the Society, Historic New Bridge Landing and the amazing story of Bergen County as we finalize plans to construct a proper museum building which will benefit the entire site and help educate future generations about the rich and diverse story that is Bergen County.

Visit: BergenCountyHistory.org Support or see the included envelope.

NOT RECEIVING YOUR BCHS EMAIL BLASTS? IT COULD BE BECAUSE YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS WAS ENTERED INCORRECTLY OR YOUR SERVER IS REJECTING THE EMAIL. PLEASE CONTACT US TO RECEIVE BCHS EVENT BLASTS: INFO@BERGENCOUNTYHISTORY.ORG

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