



Beautiful Vineland

*New Jersey's Oldest Historical Society
Celebrates 150 Years!*

When 28-year-old Philadelphia attorney Charles Kline Landis decided to carve the town of Vineland out of the South Jersey Pine Barrens in 1861, he had some very specific ideas about its design. Unlike the neighboring towns of Millville and Bridgeton, which were primarily devoted to industry, he purposefully divided his community into a one-mile-square central business district that was ringed by farmland. For Landis, Vineland's growth and development depended equally on four

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components: education, business, industry, and agriculture. Although only a handful of pioneers settled there in the early days, Vineland grew quickly thanks in no small part to Landis’ promotional skills. It soon became known as “Beautiful Vineland,” a cultural mecca that welcomed newcomers regardless of their race, ethnic background or religion.

Vineland’s potential as an agricultural community was proven within a few short years. During the 19th century, record numbers of strawberries, blueberries, cranberries, and, yes, grapes, were shipped to major cities along the east coast. Later, the town became known as the “Egg Capital of the East,” as poultry farms produced Grade A eggs that were shipped to cities like New York and Philadelphia. Vineland also boasted shoe factories, button manufacturers, barrel and box makers, iron foundries, and lumber yards. At the same time, its cultural side was fed by artists like Thomas Braidwood and writers like Augusta Bristol who gathered at different studios and literary salons to share their work.

Just three short years after it was founded, the settlement boasted a new institution with the grand name of the Vineland Historical and Antiquarian Society. The members, who first met regularly at different private homes, gathered a collection of unique objects that were hand-carried in a wooden case to their meetings. Before long, they established a small wood-frame museum on property that was donated at Seventh and Elmer Streets. But as Vineland’s population grew, they realized the need for a larger establishment to house all of the artifacts and records that were given to the Society. In 1910, a new red brick museum was opened at the same location, featuring a lecture hall, exhibit space and a research library.

Fast forward to 2013 and the Society is currently planning a year-long schedule of events to celebrate its 150th anniversary as the oldest local historical society in New Jersey, headquartered in the oldest purpose-built museum in the state. The Board of Trustees will present a range of programs that include a photo contest, trolley tours of local historic sites, and a crafts program. The celebration will culminate in December 2014 with a semi-formal gala honoring three local history makers for their contributions to preserving Vineland’s past. Kevin Kirchner will be recognized for re-creating the Palace Depression, a unique tourist attraction in Vineland that once drew visitors from around the world. Vincent Farinaccio, a local author, was selected for the extensive research and writing he has done about Vineland, while retired businesswoman Arjorie Ingraham was chosen for her knowledge of the town’s history and her efforts to preserve its past.

Entering the front door of the museum at the intersection of Seventh and Elmer Streets in Vineland, it’s hard not to be impressed by the handcrafted golden oak grand staircase that dominates the Great Room,



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as well as the Victorian-era artwork and furnishings that are exhibited around the room. The space was originally used as a lecture hall, where local residents listened to guest speakers discuss important issues such as women’s rights and the abolitionist movement. Now, it features exhibits that highlight the town’s early years.

“During the 19th century, the people of Vineland were very open-minded about new ideas,” Patricia A. Martinelli, Administrator/Curator for the Society noted. “In fact, many people today don’t realize that the women’s right to vote movement actually started here.”

American women had been speaking out for a number of years about their lack of rights. Finally, in 1868, close to 200 Vineland women gathered together and cast their votes for president at another popular meeting place known as Plum Street (or Cosmopolitan) Hall. While their ballots didn’t count—since they were not legally allowed to vote—their effort sparked similar demonstrations across the United States. Today, visitors to the museum can see an exhibit that includes the actual ballot box and photographs of some of the women who participated in the

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event. Since the Society holds so many original documents related to the 19th century women’s suffrage movement, it was named in 2011 as a stop on the New Jersey Women’s Heritage Trail.

“Many people are not familiar with the contributions Vineland residents have made not just to their hometown but to the country, as a whole,” said Martinelli.

The Society’s collections includes records of Dr. Thomas B. Welch, whose formula for making juice instead of wine from grapes created an entire industry that is still successful today. Then, there was Mary E. Tillotson, a dress reformer and feminist whose writings reached a nationwide audience. In addition, the Society owns records related to local business owners like Miles Lerman, who was the driving force behind the creation of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. They are just a sample of the innovators who once called Vineland home.

Two downstairs rooms in the museum are dedicated to the South Jersey glass industry, where everything from functional bottles to elegant art glass is shown. Vineland was once home to influential glassmakers such as August Hofbauer and Emil Larson, whose genius influenced generations of glass artists. One room features examples of art glass made at the Vineland Flint Glass Works, owned by Victor Durand, Jr. Although the “fancy shop,” as the art glass division was known, was only in operation for about seven years, the glassmakers there created pieces that are still prized by collectors today. The Society also owns a collection of paperweights that includes some fine examples of the “Millville Rose,” the first uniquely American paperweight design.

The museum’s second floor galleries showcase everything from domestic items to photographs and objects related to the town’s business and industrial past. It was here that John Gage invented his carpentry plane that became popular with woodworkers throughout the United States. But he wasn’t all business. John and his wife Portia were two early supporters of the feminist movement in Vineland. For a time, they were part of an effort to create a local industrial school that would have been open to both men and women.

Separate rooms on the second floor have been set aside for Civil War memorabilia, Native American artifacts, and musical instruments from the 19th century. Another space features artwork, furnishings and other objects once owned by members of the Landis family. A world traveler, Charles K. Landis often brought back paintings, pottery, and other unique collectibles to grace his home.

Situated on the north lawn of the museum is a tiny white-frame structure that is known as Vineland’s First House. The one-room house is especially fascinating to younger visitors, who sometimes find it



difficult to believe that an entire family could have lived in such a small space.

“As far as we know, it is the oldest structure in Vineland, built in 1862,” Martinelli explained. “We believe that it was originally built for a Captain Post, and was later moved several times before being placed on our property in 1962.”

Thanks to the efforts of landscaping students at Cumberland County College, the First House now has its own herb garden located close by. The students also pruned and transplanted flowers around the City of Vineland’s time capsule, which was buried in 2011 on museum grounds. Later this year, the students plan to add a grape arbor to the site, since grapes were once shipped from Vineland to cities such as Philadelphia and New York.

In recent years, other students from the University of Pennsylvania, Stockton College, and the University of Delaware have been actively involved in everything from archaeological digs on site to inventorying and cataloging the museum collections. A small but growing corps of volunteers report to the museum regularly to help the administrator/curator with everything from tours to collections

management. Local business owners have also been very generous, donating both goods and services to the Society.

The Society recently received a \$15,000 grant from the New Jersey Historical Commission, which will allow it to hire a professional collections manager to create a preservation plan for the museum. Martinelli plans to incorporate that information into the Society's new strategic plan, which will help the non-profit organize its collections care policies in the years ahead. Another important goal for the Society is to reach out to residents whose families didn't settle in Vineland until the 20th and 21st centuries. Martinelli noted, "we feel their stories are as important as those of the early settlers."

For further information about the Society or its upcoming anniversary, visit the web site at www.vinelandhistory.org, call 856-691-1111 or e-mail vinelandhistory@gmail.com. The Vineland Historical and Antiquarian Society is a private, non-profit institution.

