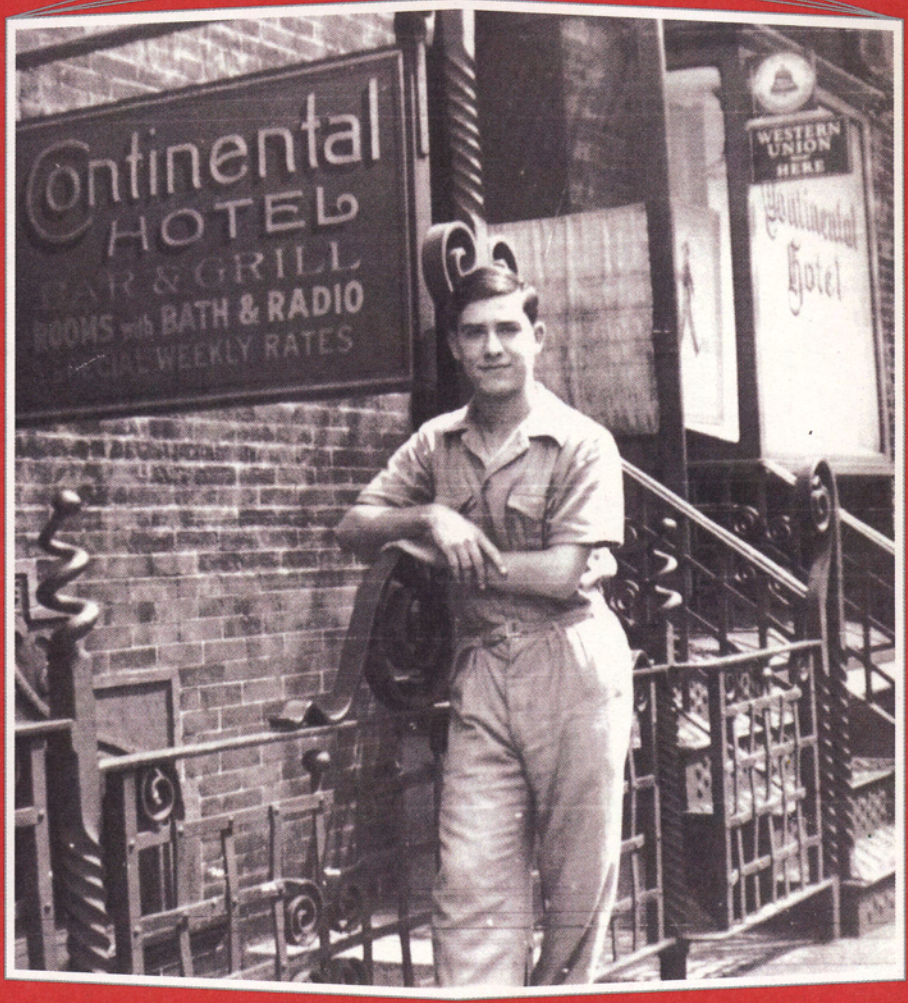
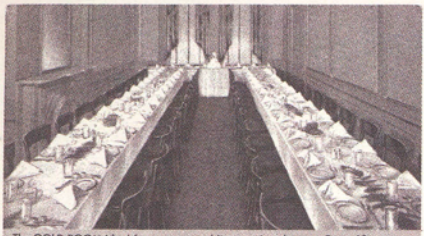
A Nice Tavern

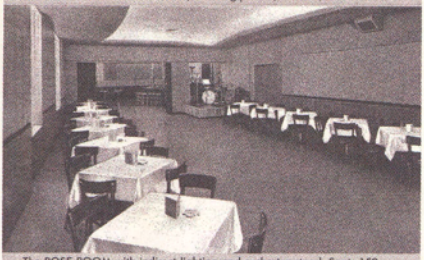
Remembering the Continental Hotel and the Union Club



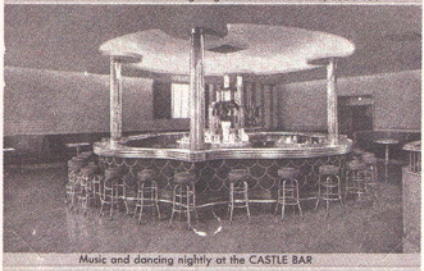
Recollections of Paul Samperi



The GOLD ROOM ideal for women, wedding parties, showers, Seats 60

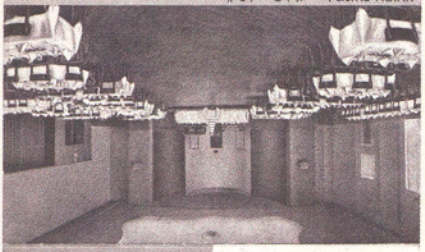


The ROSE ROOM with indirect lighting and orchestra stand, Seats 150



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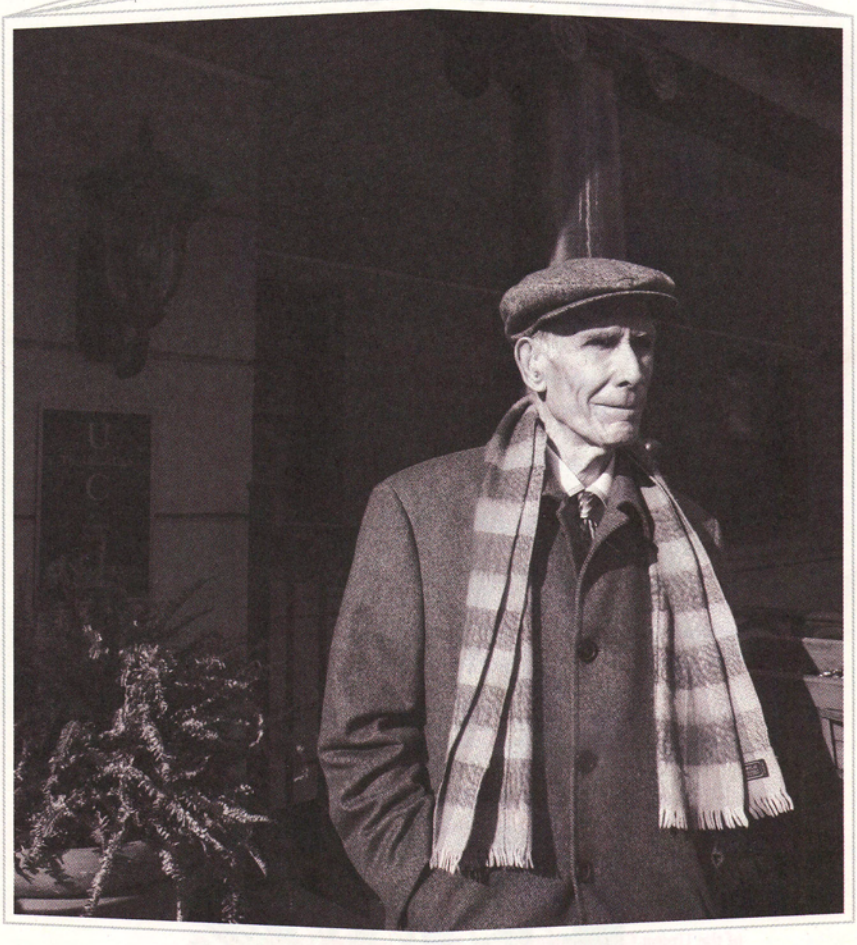
Union Club

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A Nice Tavern

Remembering the Continental Hotel and the Union Club



Recollections of Paul Samperi

A chapbook from the "Vanishing Hoboken" series
of the Hoboken Oral History Project

VANISHING HOBOKEN
The Hoboken Oral History Project

A Project of
The Hoboken Historical Museum
and the Friends of the Hoboken Public Library

NEW JERSEY COUNCIL FOR THE HUMANITIES

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For more information or to purchase copies of Hoboken Oral History Project chapbooks, contact: Hoboken Historical Museum, PO Box 3296 (1301 Hudson Street), Hoboken, NJ 07030; and Friends of the Hoboken Public Library, 500 Park Avenue, Hoboken, NJ 07030.

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COVER: Photo of Paul Samperi, circa 1940, in front of the Continental Hotel, Hoboken, NJ. Courtesy of the Samperi family. BACK COVER: Foldout postcard of the Continental Hotel, ca. 1960.
TITLE PAGE: Contemporary photo of Paul Samperi in front of the Union Club condominiums, 2008 by Jean-Paul Picard.
FRONT ENDPAPER: Foldout postcard of the Union Club, 6th and Hudson Street, Hoboken, ca. 1950s.

Unless otherwise noted, all images are from the collection of the Hoboken Historical Museum.

Now the Continental Hotel, in 1939, when Dad did the bar over, and made it into a nice tavern, we installed a Carrier air-conditioning unit. We were the first business in Hoboken, after the theatre, to have air-conditioning. It really helped business. The place was quite modern. It was a horseshoe bar. Behind the bar there was a great big tank with goldfish swimming around. It had a lot of nautical scenes on the walls, and the room next to the bar resembled a ship. It had an artificial railing against the wall, and there were ships in the distance painted on the wall. At night there was a romantic moon, with a light behind it, shining out. So people kind of liked it.

—Paul Samperi, April 27, 2006



Continental Hotel matchbook, ca. 1940.



ABOVE: *Deutscher von Hoboken Club, 6th and Hudson Street, Hoboken, ca. 1860. Hoboken Public Library Historical Picture Collection.*

Introduction

The Samperi family owned and operated the Continental Hotel and Grill (101 Hudson Street) and the Union Club (600 Hudson Street) during heady times in the city of Hoboken—through Prohibition (when Hoboken was a notoriously "wet" town controlled by rum-runners and political bosses), the Depression, World War II (when Hoboken shipyards were bustling), and into the 1950s, when the city hosted many industries and its docks remained busy.

Joseph Samperi had started it all—leaving school in the early 1900s to work on the docks, sell newspapers and flowers, work as a hotel clerk and shipping agent—saving and planning until he could buy the Continental in 1923 and the Union Club in 1935.

With the Union Club, in particular, he was buying a piece of Hoboken history. Originally founded in 1864 as the Deutscher Club von Hoboken, the establishment changed its name to the Union Club when the United States entered the war against Germany. The Club's purchase by an Italian American was a sign that this newer group of European immigrants was making some headway in a city that had once been known as "Little Bremen."

But with both businesses, Joseph—and later, his sons, Paul and Michael—guided their development so as to serve the city's population in changing times: During Prohibition (when clubs were repeatedly raided) they managed to serve alcohol; air-conditioning was introduced in the late 1930s to draw customers, as were the jazzy interiors that lured a steady stream of high-flyers. In the 1940s and 50s the Union Club was known as a premier setting for weddings and the parties and events sponsored by Hoboken-based industries, shipyards, and railroads, as well as City Hall.

When Hoboken's industries began to move to the suburbs, the Samperis knew their client base was on the decline: They sold the Continental in 1950, and the Union Club in 1960. (The Union Club now houses luxury condominiums; it was converted to housing in the 1980s.)



Paul Samperi eventually retired to the Jersey shore, but his daughter, Pat, lives in Hoboken and volunteered to interview her father for the Hoboken Oral History Project. The transcript of the April 27, 2006 interview, from which this chapbook is derived, has been deposited in the Hoboken Public Library.

ABOVE (LEFT TO RIGHT): *The Samperi family, Sarah, Paul, Michael and Joseph, ca. 1946. Courtesy Samperi family.*

OPPOSITE: *Joseph Samperi, ca. 1926. Courtesy Samperi family.*

My Father, Joseph Samperi

[When] Dad came to Hoboken, he was seven years old. That was in 1897, because he was born in 1890. The whole family came over. Let's see now, there were seven of them all together—five children and two grownups, his father and his mother. [They'd taken] an apartment in New York City [at first.] They stayed with relatives in New York City, and then my dad's father found out that there was a barbershop available in Hoboken, that the owner was going back to Germany—it was a German who owned it—and it was available.



So [my grandfather] came to Hoboken with this relative, and they liked the terms of the shop, the payment of the shop. Everything seemed to be good. Then they realized they'd have to move to Hoboken. So they got an apartment above the Clam Broth House. They lived there, on the second floor, for many years.

Dad did take some schooling, but he didn't like [it] at all, so eventually he dropped out and started working on the docks—at first shining shoes, then selling newspapers, then selling flowers.

All along River Street [in those days], German was spoken. [Dad] had a knack for picking up the German language, so he got very proficient. After a while, everyone thought he was German, and, of course, that helped him. The Germans, [believing] he was German, would give him more business, whereas if they knew he was Italian, they might have discriminated against him. I don't know. I'm guessing.

So then he says to himself, "Why should I sell for someone else, when I can sell for myself?" Now he wonders, where does the boss get his flowers? So one night he followed the boss, on the ferry, and the boss went to New York. There's a flower district in New York, where he bought all the flowers. That's all he needed. He gave the boss notice, went to New York every day, and bought flowers. Business got so good that he got his cousin, Joe LaPaglia, to help him out

[LaPaglia eventually became a florist.] And Joe [LaPaglia] did the same thing [Dad did.] He says, "Why should I work for my cousin, when I can work–?" So Joe followed my dad to New York, and knew where the flowers were. Good thing it didn't bother my dad.

[What else did Dad tell me about his youth?] He said in Hoboken the German lines picked up business after the *Titanic* went down. He said the business increased. By this time Dad had gotten out of the flower business, and he was working at one of the hotels. There must have been about eight hotels in Hoboken. He worked [at one] as a janitor. Then he worked himself up from janitor to, I guess it would be, equivalent to a bus boy, cleaning tables. After that, he became room clerk. After room clerk, he became what was known as a runner.

Now what does a runner do? He goes down to the steamship lines, and he mentions to the people coming in who he is and what hotel he represents, and "Would they like to stay at the hotel?" Most of them would stay a day or two at the hotel, then they would get tickets on railroads going out west. A lot of the Germans went to cities out west and to farms out west. So he would go to the German lines, the Holland line, and he would tell them, "I'm from so-and-so hotel." First it was the Central, then it was the Grand, then it was the Meyers. "We'd like to have you. We'll take care of all your needs. If you'd like us to get you tickets, to anywhere in the United States, we'll be glad to take care of you."

Then there was also a stream of people going back to Europe. They had been [in the United States] since the 1880s or maybe even earlier, they had made their money, now they wanted to go back to Germany and live a nice life in their old hometown. A lot of these people who were going back to Europe would want to see America first. They'd never seen New York, or they'd never seen any of the important things there, so he would act as a guide, on his time off. He would take them to New York, and, of course, they tipped him.

[And then,] a lot of them would say, "Well, gee, maybe I should get some new clothes to take with me," so he'd take them over to Geismar's [clothing store on Washington Street in Hoboken,] and Geismar would give him a commission on whatever he brought in.

BELOW: *Horse-drawn delivery wagon of Joseph LaPaglia, Florist, at 162 First Street, ca. 1910.*



Life around the Continental Hotel

I was born June 20, 1926, in Hoboken, New Jersey, at 103 1/2 Hudson Street, next to the Continental Hotel. Then Dad decided to move to 10th and Washington Street, where we lived a few years. I must have been maybe one or two [when we moved out of the hotel.]

[But then] the Depression came along, and things got quite bad, financially. The hotel occupancy rate [had] dropped to about half. Dad was strapped for money and he told Mom, "We're going to be moving from 10th and Washington Street, to the hotel. Since the hotel rooms aren't being used, we'll move in and save all that rental that we were paying at the apartment house." I must have been around three or four [when we moved back to the Continental.]

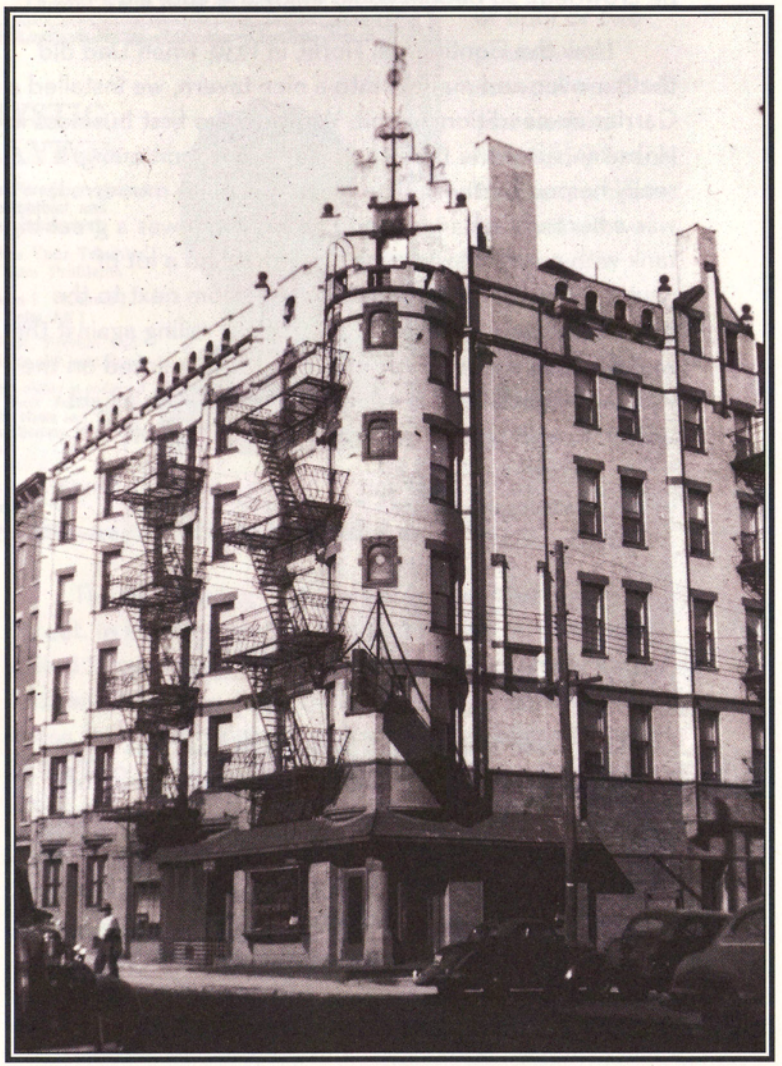
When we lived at the hotel—which was right in back of River Street—River Street had all this shipping. I remember on foggy nights, the foghorns going almost continuously, as the ferries and some of the ships were pulling into port. It was a nice sound. I didn't mind going to bed listening to that sound.

It was a busy area. There were a lot of taverns on that block [First and Hudson], and, also, north of First Street. A lot of the people who worked on the ships—the seamen—would come to enjoy themselves at some of the taverns that were on Hudson Street. There were a few restaurants, too, but most of the good restaurants were on Washington Street, and beyond.

I remember seeing James Cagney stay at our hotel, the Continental. I was a little boy then. That must have been around 1928-'29, something like that.

And I do remember, in the summertime, going to sleep—we were on the third floor of the hotel—and across the street was a tavern, and you could hear everything that was going on in [there], because all the windows were open. Once in a while you'd hear somebody screaming or arguing, but that was very seldom. But I do remember, at times, smelling the vapors from the beer, from the tavern all the way up to my room, on the third floor. [And] they did have music. I think it might have been sort of a jukebox. But that didn't bother me.

BELOW: *Continental Hotel, 101 Hudson Street, ca. 1946. Courtesy of the Samperi family.*



Air-Conditioning Comes to Hoboken

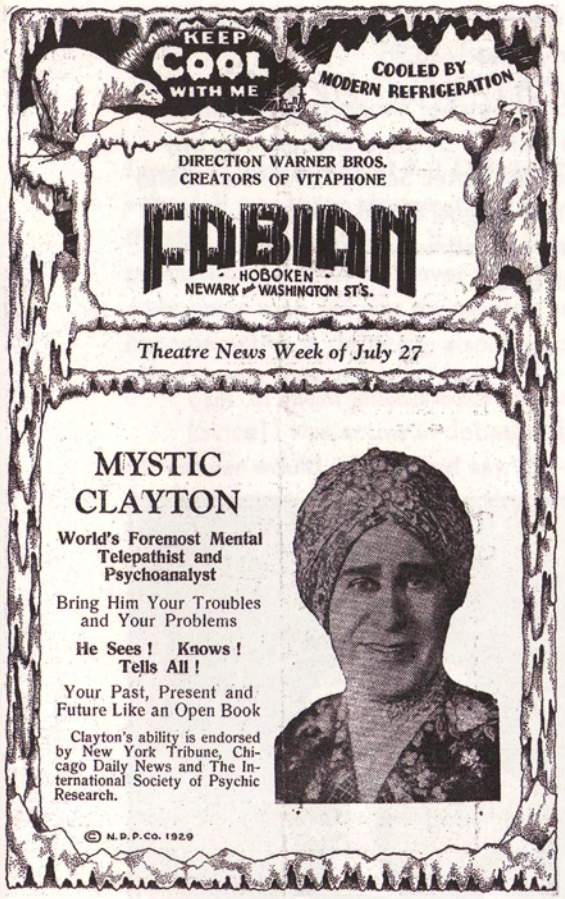
[Until the late 1930s, the only air-conditioning in the city] was at the Fabian Theatre, which was a new theatre that was built, I think, in 1929. That was always loaded in the summertime. People would go in there to relax (even if the movie was a crummy movie, the place would usually be crowded), so people could enjoy the cool air.

Now the Continental Hotel, in 1939, when Dad did the bar over, and made it into a nice tavern, we installed a Carrier air-conditioning unit. We were the first business in Hoboken, after the theatre, to have air-conditioning. It really helped business. The place was quite modern. It was a horseshoe bar. Behind the bar there was a great big tank with goldfish swimming around. It had a lot of nautical scenes on the walls, and the room next to the bar resembled a ship. It had an artificial railing against the wall, and there were ships in the distance painted on the wall. At night there was a romantic moon, with a light behind it, shining out. So people kind of liked it.

OPPOSITE: *Handbill, Fabian Theatre, Newark and Washington Streets, July 1929.*

Washington Street

[Walking down Washington Street,] oh, that was nice. There were all sorts of stores. There was a paint store, and a hardware store, and then there was a store that sold tobacco. A few restaurants. There were three five-and-dimes. As you moved farther up there were furriers, small grocery stores—National had a grocery store there. The grocery stores in those days weren't like the supermarkets today. You walked in, and there was a man behind the counter (usually the manager), and whatever



you wanted, you told him and he would go and get it. Most of it was displayed. Some of it was in the back. He had a big barrel of flour, so if you wanted a pound of flour or two pounds he'd scoop it up. Or if you wanted beans, dry beans, he'd scoop them up. And a lot of things were packaged, pre-packaged. He also sold candy. A lot of the general things. No fresh vegetables, all grocery items.

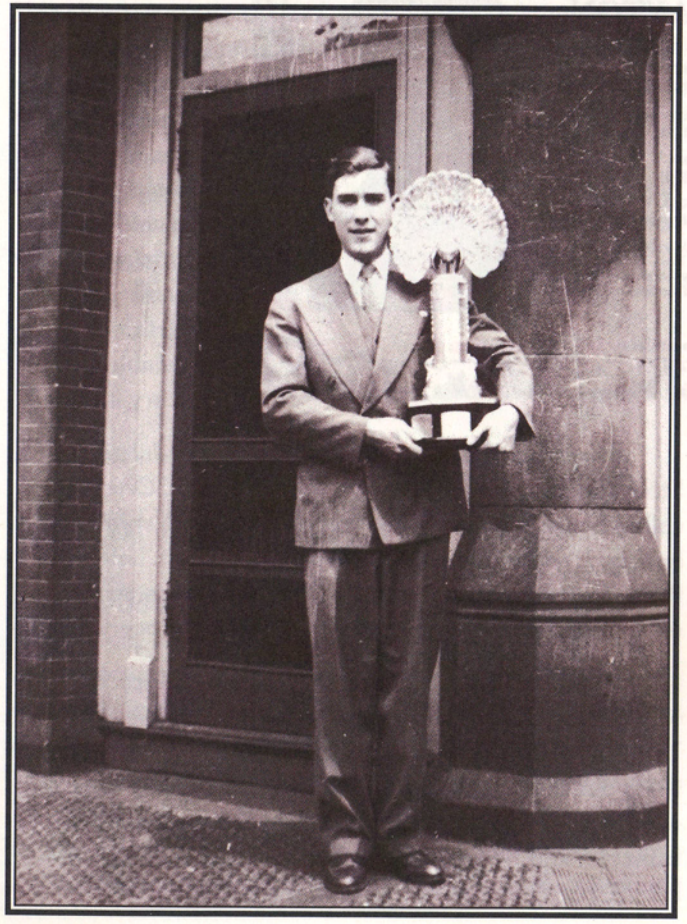
There was a big vegetable store on Washington Street. In fact, there were two that I know of. One was called Singer's. Singer's was run by a family—a wife and a husband, and they had, I think, three children. Later on these formed a big cooperative, and they became part of either Foodtown or one of those [other] big grocery stores.

And downtown Hoboken, on my way to school, I would pass this chicken place. They [had] all live chickens. They were inside cages, and he [the butcher] would roll them out during the day and have them on display. Any woman who wanted a fresh chicken, she would order it from him and he would go in the back, cut its head off—kill the poor chicken—and prepare it and take the

feathers off of it, so when this woman came back she would have a chicken all ready to go.

There were a lot of butcher shops, [too.] Schmitt's was one I used to go to, for Mom, and Dad used to buy items from Schmitt for the hotel. Schmitt's had a son, and the son cut himself [and he got] blood poisoning. The poor fellow died. That was rather sad, a nice young man passing away—Schmitt's son.

BELOW: *Paul Samperi with high school debating trophy, ca. 1949. Courtesy of the Samperi family.*



Introducing Frank Sinatra

I went to high school at A.J. Demarest. It was quite a school. It was three stories; it had a gymnasium; it had a theatre, or an auditorium. It could be used for theatrical productions. Arthur E. Stover was the principal, who was a very nice man. He was my mentor, more or less, when I became active in debating; also, my coach. I debated other teams from other schools.

[Since] I was active in debating, lots of times Mr. Stover would call me and say, "So-and-So is coming. I'd like you to introduce him to the audience." Every Wednesday we had a get-together. But this particular time, Sinatra—I forget who called, whether it was his agent—he came on a Tuesday, so we had to call a special meeting for the auditorium, a special group. Mr. Stover told me he was coming, told me the hour, and he also said, "Make sure that the girls or the fellas don't ask for his autograph, because he's on a tight time schedule." In fact, he was coming with, I believe it was, *Life* magazine. They were going to photograph Frank at his old desk, photograph him in the gymnasium tossing one of the basketballs.

So Sinatra came. That was 1943, a year before I graduated. I was backstage, I spoke to him, I went out and I introduced him—mentioning that he was formerly with Tommy Dorsey's orchestra, and that now he was on his own, appearing in New York at the Paramount Theatre.

Sinatra came out. He gave a very interesting talk. He talked about being kind to other people, advocating loving one another, being a good person. He was noted for that. He was going around to a lot of schools, preaching "Americanism."

After his talk, which was maybe fifteen or twenty minutes, the audience started saying "Sing! Sing! Sing!"

I'm watching Sinatra from backstage, and he says, "I have no music. I have no orchestra," and they keep [on.] So Sinatra sang something like four or five songs without any music—and I tell you, that's not easy. What a crowd! What an enthusiastic group—especially the girls.

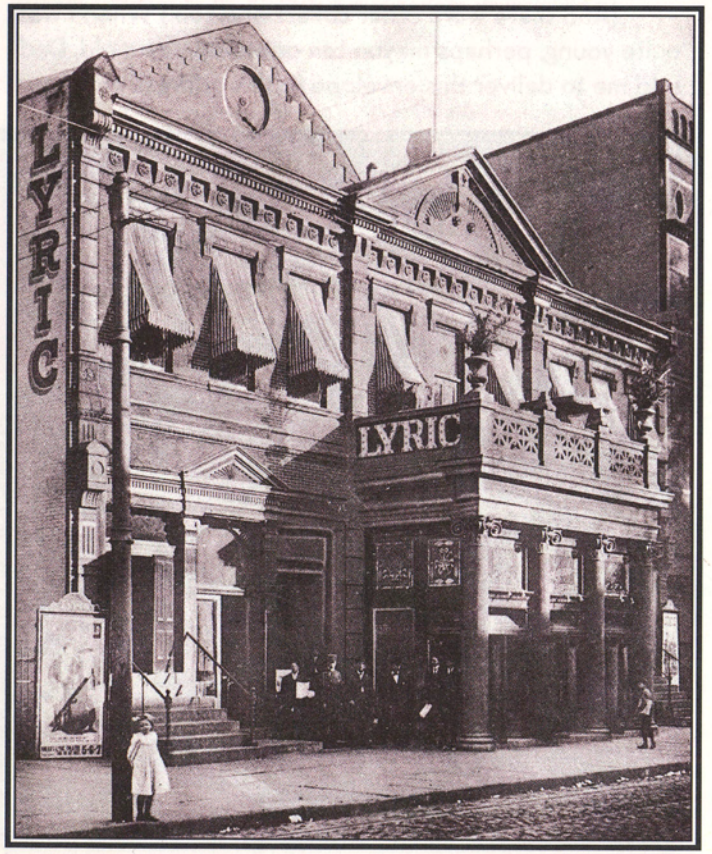
Now I remember Stover telling me he was on a time schedule, "Keep the girls out of the back. Don't let them in," because they would tie up the time schedule when he got through talking on the stage. So while he's singing his last song, a group of girls started to march in. There must have been around thirty of them, and I'm saying to myself, "How the heck am I going to keep thirty girls out of this place?" So I said to them, quietly, "If you're very quiet, I'll let you stay"—sounding as if I had the authority to keep them there.

So they all were very quiet, Sinatra comes out, I thanked him for his talk, and I said, "Mr. Sinatra, these young ladies here would like your autograph." He looked at me and he said, "I'd be delighted." So as the girls came up, he signed the autograph that the girls had, and every time he signed he would look at me. Another girl came up, he would sign it and look at me. And I'm saying to myself, "Why the heck is he looking at me?" Then it dawned on me that maybe he wanted me to ask for his autograph. So at the very end, I had the speech, which I had memorized, introducing him, I pulled it out, and said, "Mr. Sinatra, may I also have your autograph?" and again, he said, "I'd be delighted." So he signed it, he left, and that was the last time I spoke to him. I did see him at some theatrical performances, but that was the last time we spoke.

OPPOSITE: *Postcard of the Lyric Theatre, 81 Hudson Street, ca. 1910.*

Theatres in the Mile Square City

[There was] the U.S. Theatre, which was on Seventh and Washington Street, and that was also owned by Warner Brothers, who owned the Fabian Theatre. That had vaudeville, years ago. There was the Lyric Theatre, where George Burns met his wife—Gracie Allen. That theatre was closed for many years—then, in the '50s, it was torn down and made into a parking lot. But Hoboken, at one time, had something like 35 theatres. Most of them were vaudeville type theatres, and some of them were silent movie theatres, when they started.



Collecting in Hoboken

In [the 1930s and 40s], horses were used for picking up garbage, for cleaning the streets, picking up snow during snowstorms. They were stabled downtown, and by "downtown" I mean west of the Hudson River. There was one stable that I know of. It was on First Street, downtown, below Willow Avenue.

The garbage collection was under the McFeely name. [They] owned the sanitation trucks (all horse and wagons) that operated in Hoboken. [Bernard] McFeely also was the mayor of Hoboken, so there never were any contracts given out to other garbage people. He more or less had that sewed up.

[And there were other collections, too.] When I was quite young, perhaps maybe ten or eleven years old, Dad told me to deliver this envelope to this address on upper



Washington Street. I think it was around 11th or 12th Street. When I got there I rang the bell, and this elderly gentleman came out, with white hair, and he said, "Oh, hello. How are you?" I told him who I was, he shook my hand, and he was so friendly. I said, "My dad told me to deliver this envelope to you when I got to this point." "Oh," he says, "fine." He took the envelope, he said, "You're a nice-looking young boy. Give my regards to your daddy." So I left. A few years later I found out that I was delivering graft money to the Chief of Police of Hoboken—[Edward] McFeely [one of the mayor's brothers]—and he was the type that if you didn't pay the annual fee for being in business, he would put you out of business. He was actually a mean old man.

OPPOSITE: U.S. Camera *photograph of horse-drawn carts used for garbage collection by the McFeely-owned cartage company, 1941.*

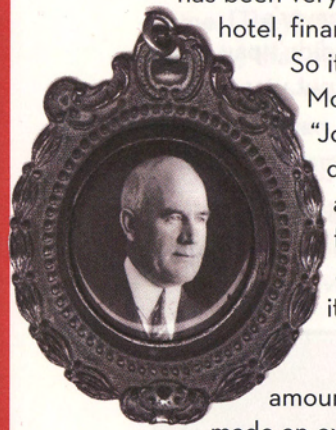
Working at the Union Club

I worked two nights a week at the Union Club. I worked Friday nights and Saturday nights, and Dad was very particular. He said, "When you work—before you go to work, you have to rest up." So after dinner, on a Friday and Saturday, I would go to bed around 6:30 and I would awaken around a quarter to 9:00.

At the beginning, when I first started working there, I was in the office. Lots of times phone calls would come through, so I would go out and get people, or I would announce it over the public-address system. After that I worked in the hatcheck. The hatcheck girls—we had three girls—they could use help, especially when it was very, very busy. After that, as I got older, when I was about sixteen or seventeen, I was cashier in the upstairs ballroom bar.

Trouble with McFeely Round One

During Prohibition [and the Depression], when things were really bad, there was a certain amount of money that was expected twice a year from every businessman. So when the graft man came along to collect his money, Dad told him, "I can't give you the full amount. Business has been very bad. I'm just about ready to lose the hotel, financially. All I can give you is this amount." So it was less than what [Police Chief] McFeely expected, and the bag man said, "Joe," my dad's first name—he said, "Joe, you don't do things like that. McFeely will get after you. If I were you, I would pay the full amount." So my dad says, "Look, that's all I've got to give. I'm in bad shape. Take it or leave it."



So [because] he presented the [smaller amount of] money to McFeely, Dad had to be made an example [of]. So one Saturday night, at the Continental Hotel—where we had a grillroom and we used to sell food, and liquor, even though it was Prohibition—McFeely set up a phony frame-up. They said there was something going on with one of the women underneath there—a prostitute or something—and they closed the grillroom down. It took Dad weeks to find out the reason why he was closed. The city would say, "Well, it's not us, it's Hudson County police." Hudson County police would say, "Well, gee, we don't know anything about that. That's local. Go see the mayor." So it took a while.

Then they said to Joe, they let him know that, because of the smaller amount of money he gave for graft, that was his penalty. He had to be penalized; after all, if everyone started giving less, it would set an example.

During Prohibition, raids would be made every so often by federal men, if you were serving liquor. Hoboken was almost an open town. People would come from New York, Weehawken, all different places, to enjoy themselves in restaurants, speak-easies, nightclubs, taverns, bars. Dad was informed the first time that federal officials were coming over. Usually, when you were informed, you put all your liquor away and you tried to hide everything. You just showed that you were serving near-beer or just soda. But the one time Dad wasn't informed (and I guess McFeely might have been mad at him, because he was the one who would do the informing; he knew who was coming), Dad wasn't informed. They came in, they found liquor behind the bar, and they closed Dad down.

A month or so later Dad was fined, and also given a prison sentence because it was his second offense. He was sent to Hudson County jail for one month. It was a jail that didn't have any locked doors; you could wear your own suit; you could go out during the day or night if you wanted to, to have dinner out, so long as you were there at night. So it was really a joke, the whole thing.

One time we kind of missed Dad. We didn't know where he was, and Mom said, "We're going to go and see Daddy. He's in Chicago." So we got on the Jackson trolley, went up to Jersey City, made a couple of turns, got off, and there was the Hudson County jail. I think it was my brother who said, "Wow, Mom. Chicago isn't that far away. It's pretty close!" So we went to see Dad and we had a nice afternoon.

But one thing I wanted to mention—Dad could have, if he had wanted to, get a substitute person to go to jail for him for a month. In those days you could do that. But Dad says, "No, I could use the vacation. I'll go to jail, take my penalty." And that was it.

OPPOSITE: *Commemorative photo medallion of Bernard McFeely, ca. 1930.*

Trouble with McFeely Round Two

[Around 1944, though, when we had the Union Club, my father did get in trouble with Police Chief McFeely.] We used to get a lot of dancers on Friday and Saturday nights from various clubs with big bands. People would love to come and dance. One of the nights, I think it was on a Friday night, the police found out that three of the girls who were there were underage, and they had been drinking. It was funny how the Chief got a hold of this. It was at another hotel—which was technically our competitor, that these three same individuals were having drinks, alcoholic drinks— when the Chief of Police's nephew was in the hotel. He saw these girls with a Chinese gentleman. The girls had already been served the drinks, the Chinese gentleman had his drink, and the relative on the police force of Chief McFeely just didn't like the idea of three Caucasian girls drinking or being entertained by the Chinese gentleman.

So he came over to the table and asked some questions—"What are you doing here? How come you're with these three girls?" and the Chinese man says, "I am a good friend of the father. I was at the Union Club, and we were enjoying the dancing." Apparently, this hit some sort of a bell in the detective's mind. He let the three go, and the next day he found out, or he surmised, that these three girls had had alcoholic drinks at the Union Club. So he interviewed the waiter who had served them, and we were brought up on charges by the local ABC board as serving alcoholic beverages to underage people. It always amazed us how we were indicted for serving them; yet they had the same drinks—three Tom Collinses—at Meyer's Hotel, and nothing was ever mentioned in the papers that they were served there, underage.

So we fought them at the local board. Our lawyer told us that we were going to lose the case (he knew it ahead of time), but he brought along a stenographer, who took all the records, everything that was said down, and we appealed what happened to the ABC in Newark. (That's where they were located at the time, not Trenton, but Newark.) The thing that got Dad aggravated was that even though we served three underage girls, the penalty for that would be about a twenty-day closing, and that would be about it. Yet, [Mayor] McFeely, when it came to making the final decision—and I was there at the board meeting—said, "Revocation of liquor license." Period. In other words, you're out of business. If you don't have a liquor license, you can't serve liquor—which really surprised us. That's why we got the lawyer and fought this.

Driscoll, who later ran for governor, was the head of the ABC board. He didn't want to go against the city, yet he mentioned that this was a very strong penalty, that we shouldn't have a revoked liquor license. So he made the penalty ninety days—which, to our way of thinking, was way out of line. Of course, ninety days is better than being put out of business completely.

It was apparent that there was something afoot. Then we found out the reason. The reason behind it was our lawyer was James Brown, and our lawyer's partner, [James Guilford], was very active in politics. He was a very good friend of [Mayor] McFeely. They used to go out double dating. [Mayor] McFeely was single, and [Guilford] was divorced. One time when they were out, Guilford went to get the coats at this restaurant, and one of the girls was in the Ladies Room. [Mayor McFeely got] close to Guilford's girlfriend, and he tried to make a date with her. So that night, when she got home, at the door, she told Guilford what had happened, and this created a rift between the [two men]. Guilford really told the mayor off the following day. [But] the mayor was a vengeful man. He knew Guilford was [partnered with] our lawyer. His partner, James F. Brown, was the one who handled all our business. So, as a result, to himself, he must have said, "I'll ruin you." And he went after us, to prove to Guilford that he could be a mean son of a bitch—pardon the language.

The End of the McFeely Reign

[The year Mayor McFeely was finally ousted from office?] I believe it was '47. I was twelve weeks short of my twenty-first birthday. I was very disappointed that I couldn't vote in that election. But that was some election. Through the years McFeely and his cohorts, and his brother—they created such ill will. They were so bad that if anyone ran against the mayor, he would be destroyed after the election. Most of the time the guys running against the mayor were phonies that the mayor put up, so they weren't destroyed or harmed in any way. But through the years, the years he was there, he made so many enemies. Now [by 1945] the war was over, the men are coming home from Europe and the Pacific, we fought Tojo, we fought Hitler, we fought Mussolini, and here we've got McFeely, who's just as bad as these dictators were. A lot of the people coming back said, "We fought over there, he's got to go. We're going to clean up Hoboken."

That's eventually what happened. They got together and Fred DeSapio, who [had been] a good friend of McFeely, broke with him. There were certain things he'd wanted McFeely to do, to correct, and McFeely wouldn't do it. So he ran, [and] Grogan ran – John Grogan, who was president of the shipbuilders' union, very knowledgeable and very intelligent, a great speaker. Gee, when he got up, Grogan, he really could talk. Then they got Mongiello, who was a lawyer, who did a very good job. And Borelli, who had the Seven-Up franchise. Then there was a fifth one, George Fitzpatrick, who was a policeman.

[Police Chief] McFeely hated Fitzpatrick. Fitzpatrick was one of what they called "rebel cops." [Chief] McFeely was nasty to a lot of the policemen, except his close entourage, and he wanted to punish this individual, this particular policeman.

The Police Chief and the Mayor were in cahoots. They usually agreed on things. And since Fitzpatrick was one of the rebels, they decided to put him on "punishment duty." And what was "punishment duty?" Placing him on active duty in front of—he directed traffic in front of City Hall, where they supposedly could keep an eye on him. He couldn't be relieved from duty; he had to stay on the job. So the newspapers and the newsreels started photographing Fitzpatrick eating a sandwich while directing traffic—a sandwich in one hand, with the other hand directing traffic.

I'll tell you, that was the worst thing McFeely and his brother, the Chief, could do, because they got such bad publicity from the New York and Newark newspapers. And Fitzpatrick was made police commissioner, when the new regime took over.

The main thing was, a lot of people were afraid to vote against McFeely. They always felt that somehow, on paper ballots, he would put some sort of a sign, or signal, or checkpoint underneath. A lot of people felt that the city administration would know how they voted. So what [McFeely's opponents did, was, they started to advocate for civil service, which] McFeely, of course, was dead set against.

Civil service was a law that would allow people who worked for the City to be more or less independent. It prevented the City from firing someone unless they had an extremely good reason, and most of the time they didn't have a good reason. In the past, if McFeely didn't like someone, he'd say, "You're fired. You're out." Or he'd do some sort of a nasty thing—like one time there were a bunch of teachers that he didn't like. He was a very deceitful type of guy. He got these teachers, and he had them all switched, gradually, to School #7. So now School #7 has all the teachers that McFeely doesn't like. So what does he do next? He closes the school. No more jobs. Where are the teachers going to go? So civil service prevented all these types of shenanigans.

Another important thing was the voting machine. Before, you voted by ballot, and, of course, he always had his people inside the voting booths, and he always won. Many times people thought that, actually, McFeely had lost, but somehow finagled the votes to be reflected in his honor, more or less, to make him win a particular election.

McFeely fought [against voting machinces] very hard. I think this is what really did him in. Because now people could vote without worrying.

He was so embittered and so angered that he did not attend the inauguration, where the old mayor introduces the new administration.

About six months later I did see him in the drugstore we used to buy things from. The drugstore was about a block and a half away from the Continental Hotel. I was very pleasant—I said hello to him, "How are you?"—and that was it. We didn't see him again. He died, I think it was, eighteen months later.

OPPOSITE: *Mayor Bernard McFeely photographed during his final days in office, from the collection of Fred M. DeSapio, who replaced McFeely as Mayor of Hoboken in 1947. McFeely is at the center, wearing a straw boater (4th from left). DeSapio stands to the right of McFeely.*



Fire in the Union Club

February of 1949, we were living at the hotel, and the room clerk downstairs called us in the morning, about 5:30, and he said, "The milkman who delivers milk to the Union Club is down here, and he says there's smoke coming out of the Club. He fears there might be a fire." So my brother and I got dressed in about four minutes, we rushed down, and the milkman was still there. We got in his truck. By that time the room clerk had called the fire department. We got to the Union Club just before the fire department came, and we opened the doors by key. Because if the fire department got there before us, they would have smashed the front door down.

So when we got in, it looked like a fire in a panel of one of the electrical rooms where the main switches were. I said to my brother, "Gee, this doesn't look like a serious fire. Perhaps once the firemen put it out, we might be open tonight again, for business." The fireman (I think it was a captain) said, "Now go into your office and take out anything of importance, any books or ledgers or anything, or money in the safe. Take it out of the safe and take it out of the building to a safe place." I said, "Why do that? It doesn't look like—" He said, "Look, we know from experience."

So we took the main things out—the books and the money—and my brother, when he was taking out the money from one of the drawers (we had three drawers), he said, "This drawer has been forced open, and there's no money in it."—which surprised the two of us. We looked at the safe door; the safe door was not scratched or in any way worked upon, with hammers or anything. So we knew that somewhere along the line it had to be an inside job.

We went outside the building, and by that time a tremendous amount of smoke had been building up in the ceiling of the Castle Bar, which was the main bar of the nightclub area. So the firemen said, "This isn't going

to be like you thought it would be. We think this is a serious fire." They called for more fire trucks. It was an extremely cold day in February, where all the water started to freeze and you had to be very careful when you walked outside. They finally put the fire out, but while they were working on the fire our neighbor across the street invited us upstairs. They lived on the fourth floor, the top floor of the apartment house, and we could see everything going on down below. We could see the roof of the Union Club catching fire, flames coming up—it was really a very, very sad thing.

My dad and my mother were on vacation, out West. Once my brother and I were old enough to take over, Dad [had] worked less and less and took more time off—which he deserved.

BELOW: *Page from the Samperi family photo album showing the fire at the Union Club, February 1949. Courtesy of the Samperi family.*



While the fire was going on, this former employee of ours, whom Dad had fired for stealing four or five years earlier, came up to us, and we were shocked to see him. He said, "I'm sorry to hear what's going on with the burning of the Union Club. Can I have my old job back?" And the way he said it was very odd. We said, "Sure." He said, "I'll come to see you tomorrow." Then he disappeared in the crowd, and my brother looked at me and he said, "You know, he may have had the keys to the Union Club, to get in," because there was no forced entry, "and he may have known the safe combination." We found out later, from Dad, that during the war, when we were both away, he was an assistant general manager.

[Another thing that] happened was—I had wanted to get back into the Union Club while the fire wasn't that intense, and the fireman said to me, "You can't go in there, you don't have any boots on. It's wet and sloppy. You need boots." So I got on the bus, went six blocks to the Continental, got my boots, put on my raincoat, and went to the Union Club again. When I tried to get in, he said, "You can't go in." I said, "Why not? I've got my boots." He said, "Nope, we're not going to let you in." I said, "Look, when I was in the Navy I was in the fire department. I know how to act in fires." He wouldn't let me in, even though I insisted.

Then we found out, when the fire was all over, two of the bars [had not been] touched by fire [and someone had broken] into the cabinets, and all the liquor was gone. And downstairs, the main liquor room, they had tried to open the main door. Thank God it was strong enough, and they couldn't get in. But a lot of the liquor had disappeared. Now who do you think stole the liquor? Because when we were watching it, we didn't see any booze going out of the building.

[Fortunately, though,] the Union Club was rebuilt, [even though] the insurance we had on it never covered the full damage. We never thought there would be that serious a fire. What we did find out was that the ballroom

upstairs, the main ballroom, apparently, years ago, did have a fire, and some of the beams were charred, and some of the beams were weakened, and the beams were placed too far apart. With the new building codes, beams have to be placed closer together. So Dad said, "You know, maybe it's a good thing this fire happened, because with these new dances, like the Bunny Hop, with people jumping up and down, we could have had a cave-in, and people dying. That would have been awful. It would have been an awful tragedy. At least nobody got killed."

So we rebuilt the Union Club, and we used all-steel girders. The whole interior of the Union Club was all steel. When we got through rebuilding it, it was really a job that would last for years.

BELOW: *Michael (2nd from left) and Paul Samperi (3rd from left) at the Union Club, ca. 1949. Courtesy of the Samperi family.*
OPPOSITE: *The Castle Bar, rebuilt in the Union Club, 1950.*



Factories in the Fifties

Well, there was Lipton Tea, which, of course, they've now made into a beautiful apartment building. There was Tootsie Roll. The funny part about Tootsie Roll– Tootsie Roll, around the '50s, brought in a lot of Puerto Ricans to help them in the factories. Then a couple of years later they relocated to Chicago, and all the Puerto Ricans remained in Hoboken but without jobs. It took a while for them to get jobs, again.

Then there was the rattan factory, that worked on bamboo sticks and they made furniture out of that. There was another one called Automatic Register. My aunt worked there, before she married my uncle. There was [a manufacturer of] men's shaving creams and lotions. They moved out of Hoboken. Davis Baking Powder.

Wonder Bread was located in Hoboken, and every year, around Christmas time, the beginning of November, the Hoboken Chamber of Commerce would hold a great big dinner at the Union Club, and each of the companies in Hoboken would donate a sample of their products. They'd put it in a great big shopping bag, and it was something that everyone looked forward to. The lumber company that was in Hoboken – I think it was Dykes Lumber, would donate a big, thirty-six-inch ruler. Davis Baking Powder would donate a can of their products. Jell-O, General Foods, Standards Brands. Wonder Bread would donate a small, little, miniature loaf of bread and some cupcakes. The coconut company would donate a can of shredded, dried coconut. Neumann Leathers would donate a small, little piece of leather, which you could use as a coaster or under a plant, at home. A lot of pencils, a lot of pads, and I'm trying to think of what else – because the whole bag was really filled to the top. Oh! And Maxwell House Coffee would donate a small can, a miniature can of their coffee. In fact, I still have a can, that's over fifty years old, in my possession, and that was Sanka Coffee.



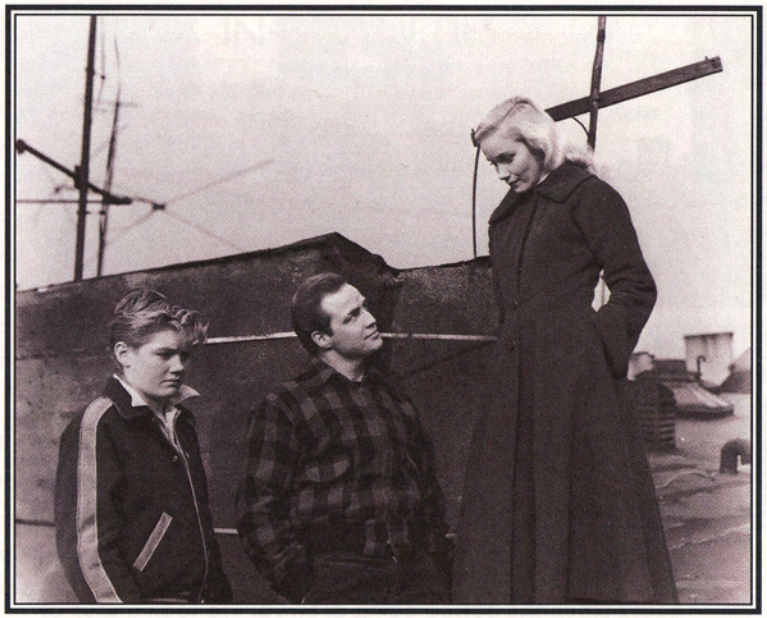
Maxwell House? Anyone who went by the plant could smell the coffee being brewed. We took a tour of the plant one time, because they were very good customers at the Union Club, having banquets and retirement dinners.

ABOVE: *General Foods float, Hoboken Centennial Parade celebration along Washington Street, Hoboken, 1955.*

Shooting On the Waterfront, 1953

It generated a lot of interest in people in Hoboken. Some of the scenes were photographed on the roof of the Continental Hotel. Of course, they had to get permission first. Some of the scenes were also – I think the wedding scene was at the Grand Hotel. They rented that.

They hired many local citizens to be in the film. I remember my old gym teacher was in it, and several other people I knew. Everywhere they went you would see people following them. But then–it's funny–when



they found out that it was a film about graft and corruption and all that, they didn't want Hoboken to be mentioned—the people of Hoboken and the city fathers. They said, "It's going to be a black eye. It's nice to have them here, but don't mention...." So Hoboken was never mentioned. I did see Marlon Brando and I did see Eva Marie Saint, though I never approached them. I wasn't an autograph hound. They stayed in New York, and they would come over by limousine and do the scenes. There was a young boy who lived close to the Continental Hotel, about six houses away, and he was the one they used in the film as the buddy of Marlon Brando. If any of you have seen the movie, you'll know who it is—a nice young man, who did a terrific job of acting. But, unfortunately, Hollywood can do good things and bad things. They promised the poor kid the world—that they would use him in some other movies—and as far as I know, he never again appeared in another movie, and it sort of broke the poor kid's heart. But he was a good actor.

ABOVE: On the Waterfront *publicity photo featuring (l to r) Tom Hanley, Marlon Brando, and Eva Marie Saint, 1953.*

Selling the Union Club, 1960

We owned the Union Club exactly twenty-five years. The reason we decided to sell was two-fold. Hoboken was starting to slide and go downhill. The big companies were all moving out of Hoboken. There wasn't enough land to expand. I don't know about the labor market, whether there was enough of a labor market, though there probably was, [but] a lot of the companies started moving out—Wonder Bread, Davis Baking Powder, all the biggies—and we used to get a lot of parties from all these big companies. And we were having trouble with the union, too. We were all union, and the union president was a bad character. He worked for us years ago, as an extra, and we had him fired for stealing. He never forgot that. When he took control of the union, he made it very difficult for us. It was every year, a new contract—not every three years or every five years, but every year a new contract.

[Hoboken] was a city that was dying. It was kind of sad to see: a lot of vacant apartments, a lot of old houses, nobody fixing them up, companies closing. On Washington Street there were some vacant stores, though not that many. On Washington Street there was Geismar's, and eventually they moved out. A lot of your good stores started to move out or close down. A lot of these guys just retired.

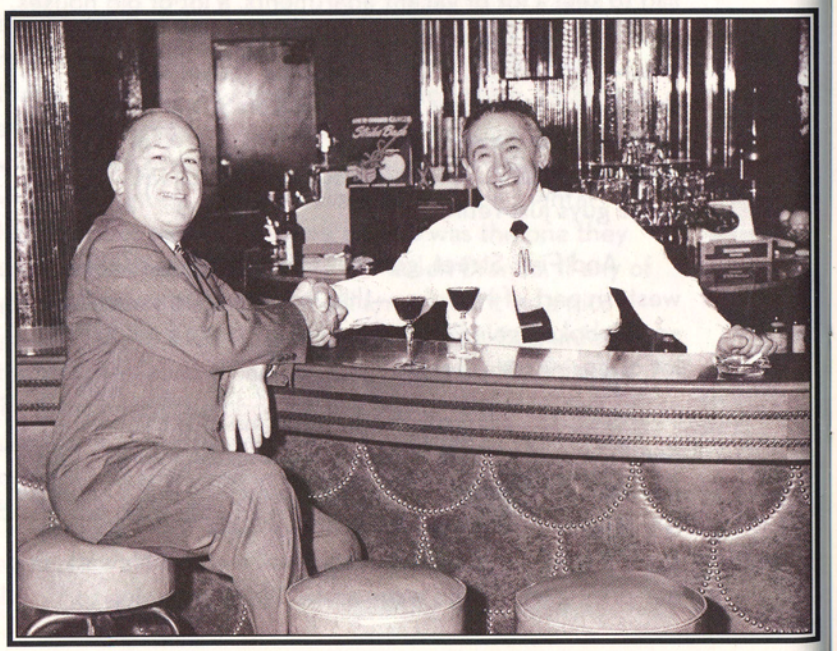
And First Street, going all the way down to the western part of Hoboken—that was dying. It was sad to see Hoboken going in that direction. There [had been] a lot of businesses there.

So Dad called my brother and me into the office one time and he said, "You know, Hoboken's going downhill. All the big companies are moving out. The union is demanding so much. We're above New York City (pay scale)," which was a competitor, "we're above Newark, in our pricing and in the wage scale. We're not going to

make it. If we don't sell now, and Hoboken keeps declining, we'll never get the price that the Union Club is really worth." So we thought it over, we analyzed it, and thought it was a good idea. So that's the reason we sold.

I think the years around the late '50s and into the '60s, [in Hoboken, were the worst.] It started to turn around in the late '60s. The downtown of Hoboken, the western part—the places where it abuts Jersey City—that was in terrible shape for many years, all broken-down houses. There were people who did maintain their houses down there, but in general, a lot of the buildings were just deteriorating. Now, when you go to Hoboken, new apartment houses have sprung up down there. It's not an old city anymore; it's a revitalized community.

BELOW: *First generation Union Club proprietor in the Samperi family, Joseph (l) with head bartender Michael Totaro at the Castle Bar, ca. 1948. Photo courtesy of the Samperi family.*





ABOVE: *Union Club Parking lot, 1959. Courtesy of the Samperi family.*

BACK PAGE AND BACK ENDPAPER: *Knights of Columbus, Hoboken Council, 60th Anniversary Dinner and Dance at the Union Club, Hoboken, NJ, April 1956.*

The Hoboken Oral History Project

"Vanishing Hoboken," an oral history project, was initiated in 2000 by members of the Friends of the Hoboken Public Library and the Hoboken Historical Museum in response to dramatic physical, social, and economic changes in the city of Hoboken over the preceding twenty years, and to the consequent "vanishing" of certain aspects of public life.

For much of the last century, Hoboken was a working-class town, home to many waves of immigrant families, and to families who journeyed from the southern regions of the U.S. and from Puerto Rico — all looking for work. Hoboken, close to ports of entry in New Jersey and New York, offered a working waterfront and many factories, as well as inexpensive housing. Each new wave of arrivals — from Germany, Ireland, Italy, Yugoslavia, Cuba, and Puerto Rico — found work on the waterfront, at the Bethlehem Steel Shipyards, or in numerous factories. Then the docks closed in the 1960s; and factory jobs dwindled as Hoboken's industrial base relocated over the 1970s and '80s. Maxwell House, once the largest coffee roasting plant in the world, was the last to leave, in 1992. In the go-go economy of the 1980s, Hoboken's row houses, just across the river from Manhattan, were targeted by developers to young professionals seeking an easy commute to New York City. Historically home to ever-changing waves of struggling families — who often left when they became prosperous — Hoboken began in the mid-1980s to experience a kind of reverse migration, where affluent condominium-buyers replaced poor and working class tenants, many of whom had been forced out by fire, through condo-conversion buyouts, or through rising rents. More recently, building construction has further altered the face of Hoboken, as modern towers are rising up alongside the late-19th century row houses that once spatially defined our densely populated, mile-square city and provided its human scale.

The Hoboken Oral History Project was inaugurated with the goal of capturing, through the recollections of longtime residents, "Vanishing Hoboken" — especially its disappearing identity as a working-class city and its tradition of multi-ethnic living. In 2001, with the support of the New Jersey Historical Commission, a division of the Department of State, the Hoboken Oral History Project transcribed and edited several oral histories to produce a series of "Vanishing Hoboken" chapbooks. Since 2002, sixteen chapbooks have been published in the series, with the support of the Historical Commission and the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, a state partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Vanishing Hoboken Chapbooks

The editor of this series chose to call these small booklets "chapbooks," a now rarely heard term for a once-common object. And so, a brief explanation is now required: A chapbook, states the most recent edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, is a

> ...small, inexpensive, stitched tract formerly sold by itinerant dealers, or chapmen, in Western Europe and in North America. Most chapbooks were 5 x 4 inches in size and were made up of four pages (or multiples of four), illustrated with woodcuts. They contained tales of popular heroes, legends and folklore, jests, reports of notorious crimes, ballads, almanacs, nursery rhymes, school lessons, farces, biblical tales, dream lore, and other popular matter. The texts were mostly rough and anonymous, but they formed the major parts of secular reading and now serve as a guide to the manners and morals of their times.

Chapbooks began to appear in France at the end of the 15th century. Colonial America imported them from England but also produced them locally. These small booklets of mostly secular material continued to be popular until inexpensive magazines began to appear during the early 19th century.

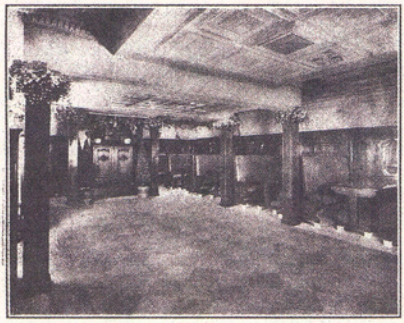
Although some of the chapbooks in the Vanishing Hoboken series are considerably longer than their earlier counterparts, others are nearly as brief. They are larger in size, to allow us to use a reader-friendly type size. But all resemble the chapbooks of yesteryear, as they contain the legends, dreams, crime reports, jokes, and folklore of our contemporaries. One day, perhaps, they might even serve as guides to the "manners and morals" of our city, during the 20th and early 21st centuries.





60TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER AND DANCE
HOBOKEN COUNCIL No. 159 K. OF C.
UNION CLUB APRIL 21, 1956.

Dining and Dancing

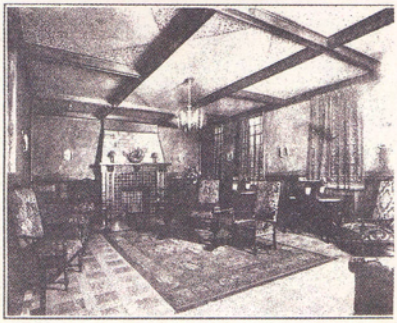


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The Grill and *Restaurant* are open from 7 A. M. to 1 A. M. and the meals which are served are of the highest quality and the prices *Reasonable*.

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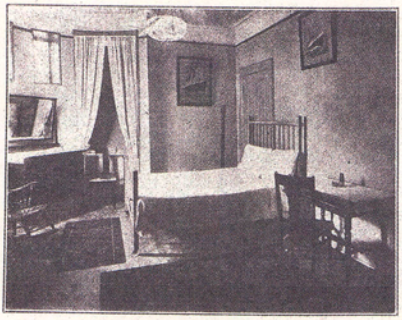
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Single room	$2.00 and upward
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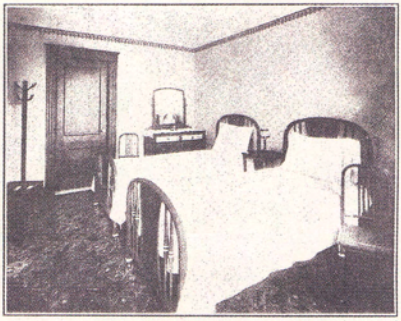
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