The Hoboken Historical Museum

Newsletter

The Official Journal of the Organization

OF BY And FOR MuSeum MemberS.

Published monthly | Hoboken, NJ, July 1987 | Vol. 1, No. 6

MUSICAL EVENT THIS WEEKEND

Our musical fund-raiser at Maxwell's on June 27 & 28 looms near - if you haven't already bought a ticket, you may purchase one at the door. Please pass the word to all of your friends - this event will bring many noted Hoboken talents into the limelight in Maxwell's, a club that's been highly praised in the press as one of the East's most important musical centers.

Divided over the two evenings will be some twelve to fifteen groups composed mostly of current and former Hobokenites, as well as about ten individual musicians, stand-up comedians and m.c.'s, not all of which are listed here:

Saturday, June 27th

ELEMENTS - Emilio Dizefalo & Michael Kilmer (music), Stephanie Sylvia & Stephanie Schwartz (dance)

JOHN PARROTT & BETTY BERKEN

THE a BAND - (members of The Bongo's and individuals)

THE MAESTROS - Perry Robinson and Gary Schneider

THE CUCUMBERS

JAMES MASTRO

YO LA TENGO

CRIES

M.C.: BOB O'BRIEN



Sunday, June 28th

SPECIAL INTRO OPENING CEREMONY WITH CLASSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT 6:00 - 6:30

THE PAST ELLES

THE PLUMBERS SHELDON BIBER

LYELL SINGS THE BLUES JIM DILLMAN

Sunday, June 28th continued

BIG JUMP

THE COSMIC SWING BAND - Perry Robinson, Mark Whitecage, Laurence Cook

WHO'S YOUR DADDY

77 SUNSET STRIP

JAM - featuring Julio Fernandez of Spyro Gyra

M.C.'s: MICKEY D and JIM CRAMER

MUSEUM DISPLAY

Musical memorabilia from Hoboken's past will also be on display at Maxwell's. The items on exhibit in the Museum's portable display cases will include photographs, small posters and flyers, mostly form the last 20 years. We'll also show some items devoted to great American composer Stephen Foster, who lived in Hoboken in 1854 when his famous song "Jeanie With The Light Brown Hair" was published.

In the future this weekend will doubtless itself be remembered as historic. Don't miss the opportunity to be a part of it.

SCHOOL CHILDREN VISIT MUSEUM

Eighteen fifth-grade students from the Calabro School, 524 Park Avenue, recently visited the Museum with their teacher Fran Cavalli. I had the pleasure of leading the class through the Museum and discussing with them each of the Hoboken pictures in the exhibit and the various items in the display cases on the second floor. It was gratifying to witness such interest and enthusiasm from these 10 and 11 year olds. They also enjoyed a visit to the Mayor's Office, and met His Honor. In the days following each student wrote a nice thank-you letter, all of which will be quoted in a Museum testimonial page to be published in an upcoming issue.

Jim Hans

MEMORIES OF THE EMPIRE THEATRE

AN INTERVIEW WITH RALPH HELBER

by Sean Devney

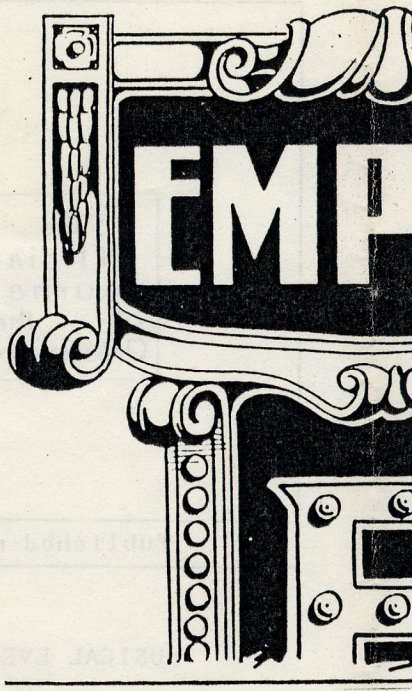
Ralph Helber is 79 years old and has lived in Hoboken most of his life. He remembers what it was like back in the early 1920's when the city was a thriving and bustling community. The waterfront was the most important aspect of Hoboken. Ships arrived daily from around the world bringing immigrants, who came to America, seeking a better life. Some of them stayed in Hoboken, like Helber's parents.*

Hoboken was filled with theatres and silent movie houses. The silent movies were popular with the immigrants, many of whom could not speak English. A piano player banged out music to accompany the action on the screen.

At the age of fourteen the curly-haired Helber got a job in the Empire theatre selling refreshments. He worked in the theatre for a year and a half making about fifteen dollars a week. (His stepfather made about seventeen dollars a week.)

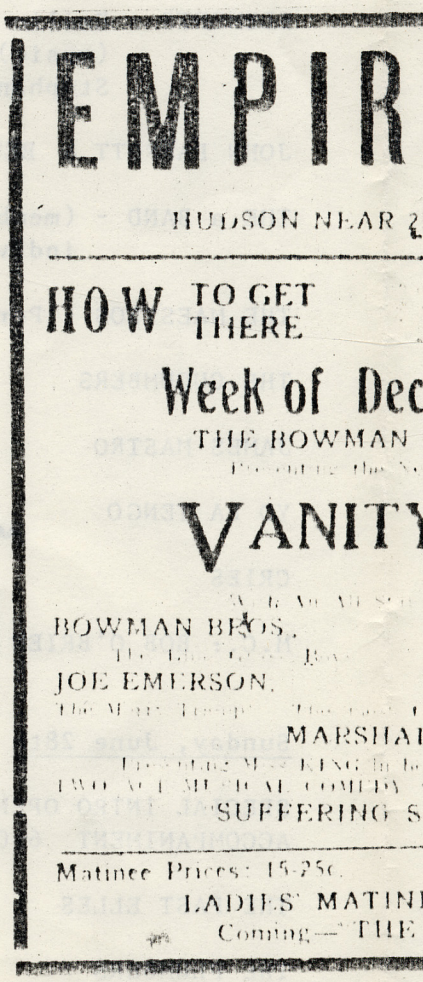
Whenever the owner of the concession left town on business, Helber was in charge of doing the spieling before every show. He would walk in front of the orchestra pit and tell the audience about the different candies the theatre was selling. Each candy had a bally wrapped up inside. (A bally was a prize, usually a trinket or a novelty.) Then the ushers would walk up and down the aisles carrying boxes full of candy.

* In 1921, Congress acted to cut off the flow of immigrants into the United States, depriving the transatlantic steamship companies (with landings in Hoboken and elsewhere) of one third of their total revenue. However, during the peak years prior to World War I, more than a million immigrants a year had arrived from Europe.



THE EM

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and gave Hoboken a nat
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RIES OF THE EMPIRE THEATRE

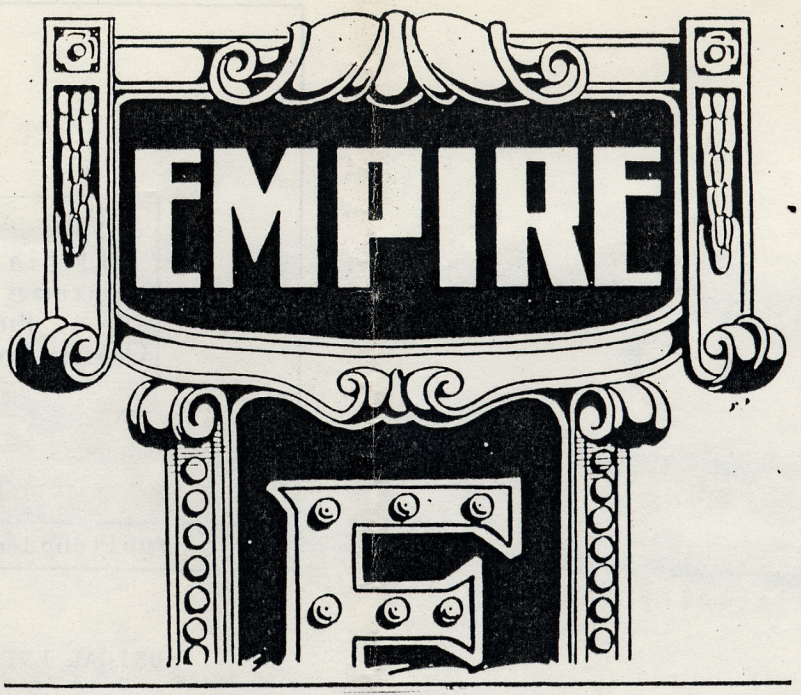
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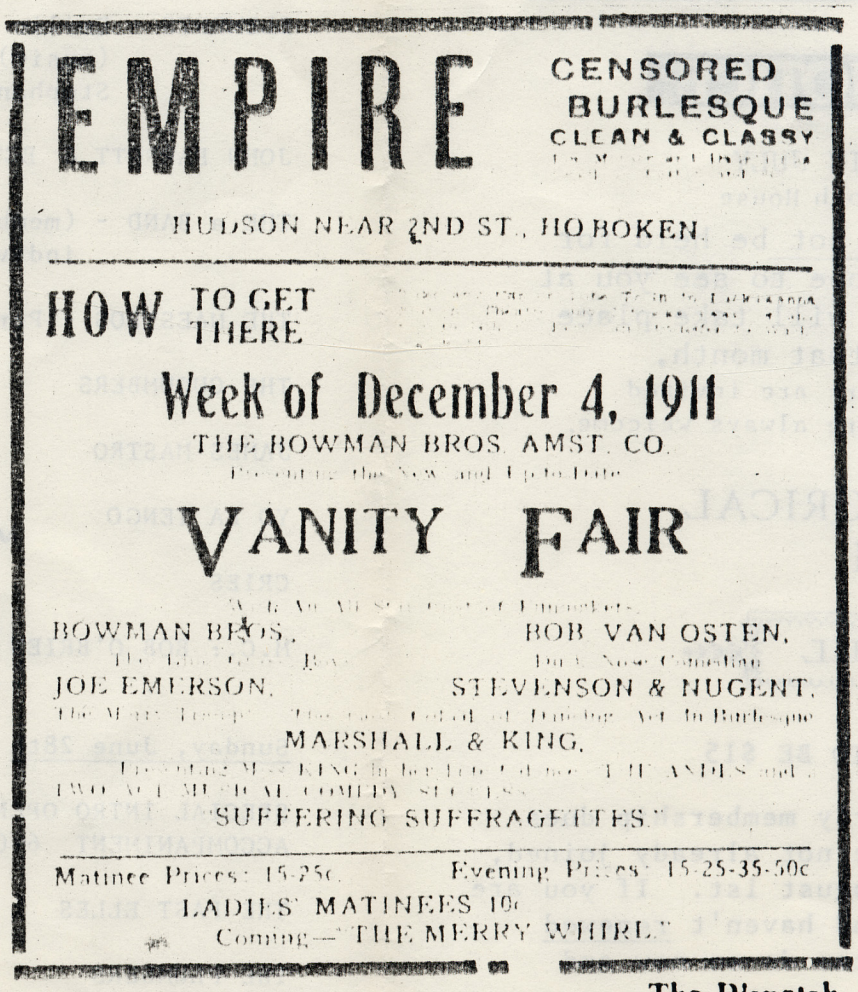
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THE EMPIRE

Among the greatest and largest of Hoboken's theatres was the Empire, on Hudson Street between First and Second Streets. The noted literary figure, Christopher Morley discovered it in the late 1920's, refurbished it. and under the name of the Rialto staged old time melodramas which took the entire theatre world by storm, and gave Hoboken a national reputation. The Empire, "one of the handsomest and costliest and most luxuriously appointed theatres in the state" was erected in 1902 on the site of the old Germania Garden Theatre, Hoboken's most popular theatre for many years going back to about 1865.


EMPIRE

CENSORED BURLESQUE
CLEAN & CLASSY

HUDSON NEAR 2ND ST., HOBOKEN

HOW TO GET THERE

Week of December 4, 1911

THE BOWMAN BROS. AMST. CO.

VANITY FAIR

BOWMAN BROS.

BOB VAN OSTEN.

JOE EMERSON.

STEVENSON & NUGENT.

MARSHALL & KING.

"SUFFERING SUFFRAGETTES."

Matinee Prices: 15-25c. Evening Prices: 15-25-35-50c

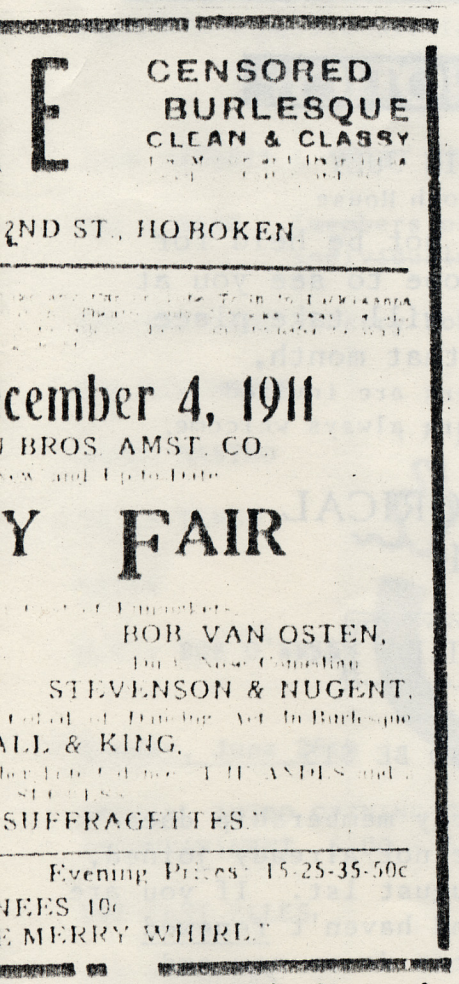
LADIES' MATINEES 10c

Coming—"THE MERRY WHIRL"

The Dispatch



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The Dispatch

Spieling was done before microphones were invented. Helber had to practically shout at the top of his lungs to make himself be heard in the balconies. After the spieling was done Helber would walk off stage, and the evenings entertainment would begin.

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The Empire theatre was a burlesque house. Popular plays and vaudeville acts were performed on its stage. Strippers, who worked at the Empire theatre, took off only clothes from the waist up. One of the most famous strippers, Gypsy Rose Lee, performed at the theatre.

The orchestra that played in the theatre was owned by the theatre. The chorus girls, worked on a circuit; they appeared in a different theatre every week. One of the most popular were Billy Watson's Beef Trust.

Helber remembers hearing about Jack Johnson, the famous black heavy-weight fighter. He appeared on stage demonstrating his boxing prowess. Every Thursday night, after intermission, prize fights were held. The fighters were usually local fighters and the boxing matches lasted only three rounds. The winner of each match won either five dollars or a watch.

After the evenings entertainment was over, people headed for the numerous bars in the area. Prohibition was in full swing and liquor was available everywhere. There were gin mills, hole in the walls and extravagent bars like the one in the Hofbrau House, a popular German hotel and restaurant. There were fights every night, and Helber remembers that the area around the Empire theatre was pretty rough. Each bar had a bouncer to keep things peaceful, and if the patrons became too rowdy the police were brought in. (Helber recalls that there were thirty bars just on Hudson street alone, between First and Second Avenues.)

More on the Empire in future issues.

Hoboken Historical Museum
P.O. Box M-1220
Hoboken NJ 07030



CONTAINS DATED INFORMATION
PLEASE OPEN IMMEDIATELY

BULK RATE
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT No. 6
Hoboken, N. J

*Postie
Robert Foster
227 Grand St.
Hoboken, NJ 07030

THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM NEWSLETTER
July 1987 Vol. 1, No. 6

Editor . . . . . Jim Hans

Assistant Editor . . . . . Mary Manhardt

Staff Writer . . . . . Sean Devney

Production . . . . . Nick Parslow

WANTED (for the newsletter)

Someone with a typewriter or word processor that the museum could have access to, two or three days a month, preferably in Hoboken but can be in New York City also. Please contact Mary (792-2347) or Jim (653-7392).

Newsletter Mailing Address . . .

605 Jefferson St., Hoboken

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Subscription Rates

Free to Museum Members

IMPORTANT NOTICE:

NO MEETING IN JULY
at the Clam Broth House

Our monthly meeting will not be held for the month of July. We hope to see you at our August meeting which will take place on a Monday, the 3rd of that month, 7:30 - 9:30 p.m. All members are invited and potential new members are always welcome.

HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM

CITY HALL

MEMBERSHIP DUES TO BE $15

As of next month, the yearly membership dues go up to $15. If you have not already joined, you should do so before August 1st. If you are an early Charter member and haven't renewed your membership yet, you can do so now and save.

Hoboken Historical Museum

MEMBERSHIP ROLL

June 15, 1987

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Martin Andrews
Joyce Tatom
Mary Manhardt
Virginia Parrott

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Cristine Andre
Ken Clare
John DePalma
Bob Foster
Carol Huffman
Perry Robinson

Honarary Members

Hillary Clap
Jody Roach

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Patrick J. Caufield
Ms. Fran Cavalli
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Edwin J. Chius
Mrs. Harvey Clap
Rita Cooke
Dr. Nathaniel Coyne
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Janet Crooks
Helen A. Cunning
David Currier
Donna Dale
Captain Steve Darago
Dennis Darragh
Eastern Security Management
Emma DeMarco
Sean Devney
Vincent Dimone
John Dayey, Eastern Security Management
Colin Egan
James English
Irmgard H. Erny
Virginia Fenner
Sue Ellen Fiedler
Christine M. Fleming
Joel Freiser
Josephine Givner
Leon Gold
Michael Goldfine
E. Green
Alfonsina A. Grimaldi
Antoinette Grouls
Edward F. Hayes
Pamela Hedstrom
J. Ronald Hine
Eric Hummel
Annette Illing
Thomas Illing
Mr. and Mrs. Erich Jost
Mayme and Peter Jurkat
Robert Anthony Kelly
Mark C. Kennedy
George M. Kirchgessner
High Kilmer & Family
Ms. Julia Knight
Gloria Lambson
Bo Lindner
Patricia Lowenberg
Jodie Manasevit
Helen Manogue
David March
Frank Marciano
Kevin McCloskey
Albert G. Milili
True Lash & Thomas E. Mosely
Tom & Sue Newman
Gay Ogden
Nicholas F. Parslow
Bernadette C. Pehrson
Carlos A. Perez
Mrs. Lee Raines
Sam Reckford
Margaret I. Reysen
Jane Richards
Mrs. Elizabeth L. Roake
Vinnie Rossi
Beverly Savage
Mr. and Mrs. Marion J. Schiebel
Gary & Betsy Schneider
Nancy Q. Sciancalepore
Joe Scordato & Karen Wendell
James Sears
Susan Shaftan
Ivan Silverman
Cathy Smith
Lynn Spencer
Ignatius Spinella
Daphne A. Stark
Helen Terry Sylvester
Walter Syrek
Bruce Tamberelli
Joan Terino
Christopher Thorn
Mrs. Deborah S. Thornton
Ruth C. & Samuel Toplansky
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Cecilia Valentin
Isaac & Jeanne West Valentin
Ms. Joan Verdon
Thomas F. Vezzetti
John Vitell
Larry Von Holland
Ruth Walker
James F. & Marie A. Welsh
Sherri Whaley
Carol Ann Wilson
Stephen Wolf

MUSEUM RECEIVES LETTER FROM SIXTH GRADER

The Hoboken Historical Museum recently received a letter from a sixth grader named Jim Miller from Colebrook, Pennsylvania. The letter was sent to the Hoboken Post Office who forwarded the letter to the museum. The interesting letter from Mr. Miller is reproduced below as well the response from Jim Hans, Director and Curator of the Museum.

Dear Postmaster,

Hi, I'm Jim Miller from Palmyra Middle School Pennsylvania. I'm in 6th grade. I'm sitting here in language class pondering over how your town got its name. I'm not posing a BIG assignment. Could you please send me an explanation or some background information? My class and I would really enjoy it. Thank you for your time.

Yours truly,
Jim Miller

Jim Miller
P.O. Box 20
Colebrook, Pa. 17015

May 19 87

Dear Jim,

The Hoboken postmaster passed your letter on to me. As I am the director and curator of the Hoboken Historical Museum, the post office thought I would be the logical one to answer your question about the origin of the name of our city.

As you probably already know the Dutch bought Manhattan Island (New York City) from the Indians in 1630. The land that was to be called Hoboken was included in the deal. You can see on a map of the area that it is just across the Hudson River from Manhattan. At that time the Indians living on this (Hoboken) side of the river called the land "Hopoghan Hackingh". "Hopoghan" is said to mean tobacco pipe, made from the soap stone found at Castle Point (part of Hoboken). And "Hackingh" is said to mean the land of or the place of. Thus, it was translated as land of the tobacco pipe. The only way the Dutch, who first settled here, could pick up on the name was by the sound. The Indians pronounced it, and the Dutch wrote it the way it sounded to them. So "Hopoghan Hackingh" became "Hobocan Hackingh". Later the second part of the name was dropped and the spelling of the first evolved to "Hoboken", the way it is today. This is believed to have happened because the Indian name sounded so much like the name of a European village that the Dutch settlers were already familiar with -- Hoboken, Belgium.

Yours truly,

Jim Hans

Jim Hans
Director/Curator

JH:bh