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The Hoboken Historical Museum Newsletter

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OF BY And FOR MuSeum MemberS.

Preserving the Future by Honoring the Past

APRIL 1991 HOBOKEN, NJ No. 48

Hoboken Firsts

Installment No. 3 of a series compiled by Jim Hans for a future book.

NJ's First Woman Lawyer

The first woman in the State of New Jersey to apply to the Supreme Court for a license to practice law was Miss Mary Philbrook of Hoboken in 1895.

She studied law in Hoboken in the offices of Russ & Heppenheimer and of Gaede & Minturn. James F. Minturn, who later became a Justice of the State Supreme Court, made the motion for her admission as an attorney.

Philbrook spent a couple of years as a clerk in the law office of Minturn, then corporation counsel for the City of Hoboken. The office was in the old 2nd National Bank building at River Street and Hudson Place. But "she grew restless and decided she would like to become a lawyer herself," according to Barbara Petrick in "Mary Philbrook, The Professional Woman and Equal Rights," in *Women in New Jersey History*.

"Much later she said that her ambition was inspired and encouraged by her father, but there is no evidence of this in her personal papers. Minturn, her employer, seems to have had a much greater influence on her," Petrick continues. Minturn, who was a "witty and cultured gentleman, fond of writing poetry and espousing liberal causes," took a "fatherly interest in Mary and offered to sponsor her candidacy to the New Jersey Bar."

The fact that Mary had not attended college or law school was no barrier at that time. Barbara Petrick in researching for this work found that "one could 'read' for the law in the office of an attorney, and then apply to the Supreme Court of New Jersey for permission to take the bar examination."

In June 1894 the Supreme Court handed down its decision: it refused to issue a commission to Miss Philbrook because she was a woman. "Women," wrote Petrick,

"according to the Court, were a special class, with no inherent rights, except those specifically granted by law."

Barbara Petrick claims that "when the suffragists in New Jersey heard of Philbrook's case they immediately took up her cause. They circulated petitions and lobbied in the New Jersey legislature to secure passage of a bill enabling women to become lawyers.

"The enabling legislation was passed and signed by the Governor on March 20, 1895. James Minturn again moved to admit Mary Philbrook. She passed the examination and was formally admitted to the bar on June 6, 1895."



Mary Philbrook, c.1904
Photo courtesy of *NJ Historical Commission Newsletter*, March 1991

In time, Miss Philbrook "assailed the traditional view that women were a special class requiring protection, rather than equal treatment, from the laws":

The custom of privileging a woman in some matters and restraining her in others, from a feeling of pity for her bodily weakness and presumed mental incapacity, rather than for any more worthy reason, should be abolished... My theory would be to give neither sex more privileges than the other. Place them on the same footing, and by thus establishing this equality both man and woman will be better able to work intelligently in the business and professional world, wrote Philbrook in a brief.

"On November 8, 1906, Miss Philbrook was admitted to practice before the United States Supreme Court, the first woman from New Jersey to be so appointed," Petrick's article says.

During World War I, Philbrook volunteered for overseas work, and was sent to France as a lawyer for the Red Cross, along with the thousands of doughboys who shipped out from Hoboken to fight that great "war to end all wars." After the war Philbrook participated in some guerrilla tactics of the National Women's

Party, the new militant branch of the women's movement founded by Alice Paul in 1917.

In a special investigation of the "white slave" traffic, she was engaged by the United States government as a special investigator, and several important prosecutions by US Attorneys in New York, Chicago, and Seattle resulted from her investigations.

Miss Philbrook, who died in 1958, came from old New England stock. Those of her line were mostly professional people -- lawyers, doctors, and ministers. On her mother's side her ancestry is Holland-Dutch and she claimed descent from Peter Minuit, famous for purchasing Manhattan from the Indians for trinkets worth $24. She was educated in the public schools and the High School in Jersey City.

For further information, read Mary R. Murrin, ed., *Women in New Jersey History*, Papers Presented at the 13th Annual New Jersey History Symposium, Dec. 5, 1981; published 1985, New Jersey Historical Commission, 4N Broad Street, CN 305, Trenton, NJ 08625; 85pp. paper. illus., $2.00.

Our Waterfront Development Proposal

A proposal that Hoboken's waterfront development include a permanent home for the Historical Museum was placed before the Hoboken City Council by the Museum's former vice president Martin Andrews at a special meeting of the Council on March 27 at which a presentation for development was made by ecological and waterfront architect Terry Schnadelbach of New York.

The Museum proposes to install, maintain, update, and promote permanent and changing exhibits on the history of Hoboken in secure quarters donated for that purpose.

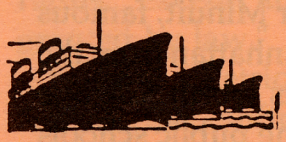
The presence of our Museum on the Hoboken waterfront with an extensive historical and contemporary waterfront collection on view would enhance the entire public area of the project

The Hoboken Historical Museum plan includes an exhibition, curatorial, storage, and administrative facility of 2000 square feet. Although Museum exhibitions would focus primarily on the history of the Hoboken waterfront, they could also include the entire New York harbor and the history of Hoboken in general.

THE FUTURE IS POSTPONED

Our annual benefit, this year titled "History of the Future," an exhibit, sale and performance scheduled for May, has been postponed until September. Past visions of what the future might be, portrayed in advertisements, posters, magazine covers, and comic strips such as Buck Rogers are sought for display and/or sale at the event. Contact Jim Hans at 653-7392 if you can help out.

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THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
CITY HALL
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Waterfront Groups To Speak

Following our next business meeting on **Tuesday, April 23**, representatives from two citizen groups, the Coalition for a Better Waterfront (CBW) and the Committee for Environmental and Economic Development Along the Riverfront (CEEDAR), will present their views on the development of the Hoboken waterfront. The presentations will begin at **9:30pm**, in the private dining room of the Clam Broth House.

The business meeting will begin at **7:30pm** sharp. This and all meetings of the Museum are open to the public with no obligation.

We invite to future meetings other groups who wish to give their points of view on waterfront development, as well as speakers on other topics relevant to Hoboken's past, present, and future.

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2 years $25
Out of Town add $3/year
Lifetime Membership $100
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