The Official Journal of the Organization

The Hoboken Historical Museum Newsletter

OF BY And FOR Museum Members.

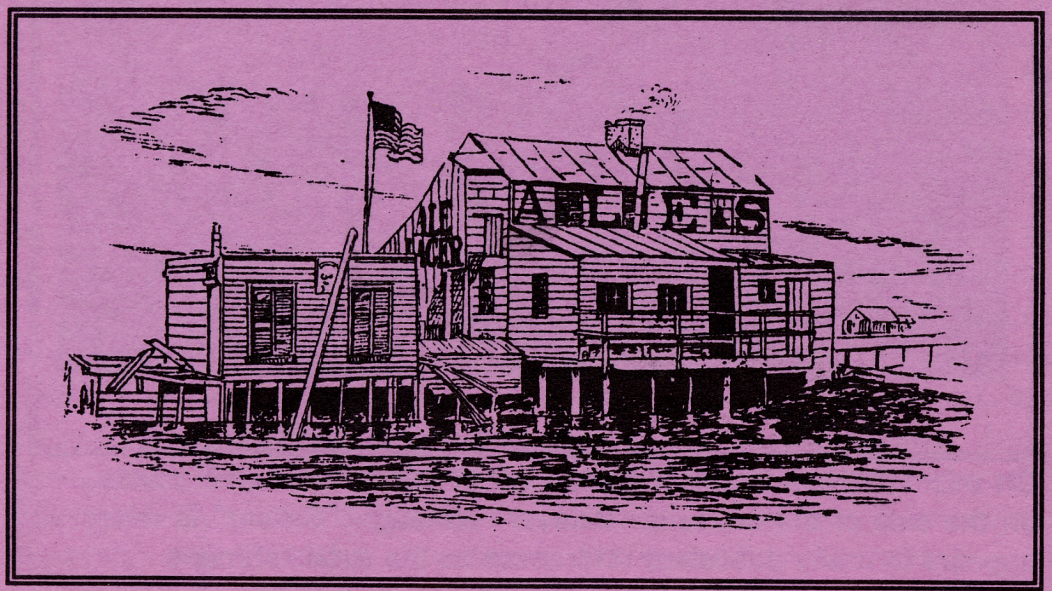
DECEMBER 1990 HOBOKEN, NJ No. 44

The Mysterious Bolivar House

The old Bolivar House stood at what is now 15th Street and Park Avenue. Below is a reproduction, from the *Hoboken Inquirer*, March 25, 1905, of a drawing from a photograph of this tavern.

Quite a few glasses of ale were raised at the old weatherbeaten resort which stood for many years in a swampy patch of land at what is now Park Avenue and 15th Street. Narrow wooden walks on stilts led to it. "If it had received a coat of paint in its halcyon days it was not noticeable," wrote Richard Anzer in a series of articles which started to appear in the *Hudson News* on June 7, 1929. "Its dilapidation was in contrast to the famous General [Simon] Bolivar [1783-1830] who liberated so many South American countries from Spain and after whom it was named.

"The House was a few feet from the Hudson river, which swerved in from beyond Hudson Street to Park Avenue. In this inlet were rafts of thousands of logs. The water was only a few feet deep and its muddy bottom made it a favorite place for crabs. It was an easy matter for boys to catch

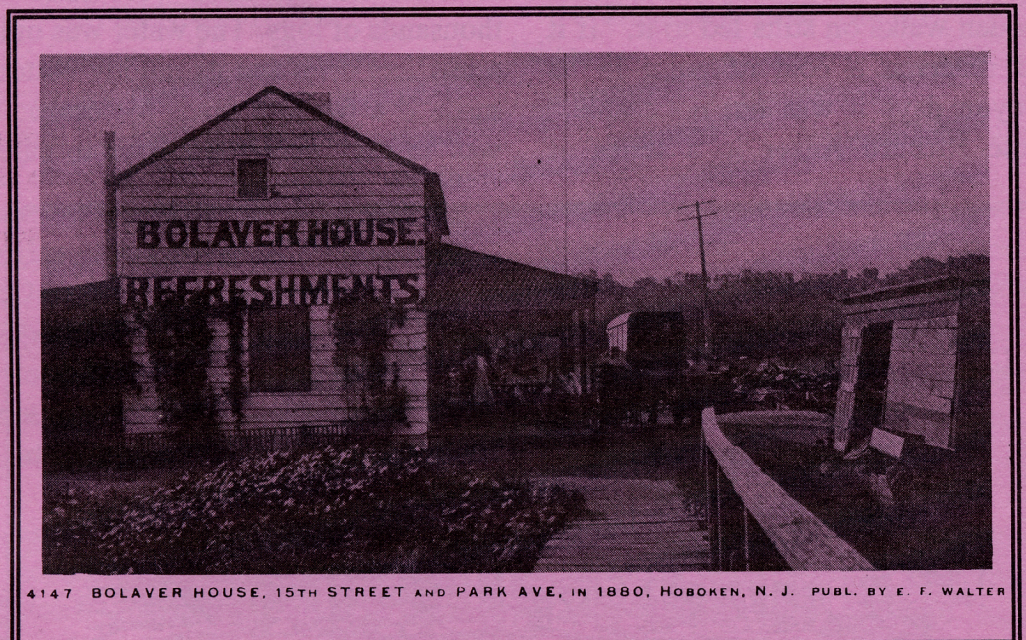


hundreds in an afternoon. Swimming from rafts was quite feasible at high tide. This site was later occupied by Tietjen & Lang's mammoth dry docks, while the shores were crowded with the Terminal building, Lipton Tea Company, Continental Baking Company, and other industries."

"At the Bolivar House is where good ale, ginger pop and the real old-fashioned coconut cake, and bolivar sandwiches were to be had," reported the *Inquirer* in 1905. "A pond, just in the rear of the house, afforded great amusement to the youngsters and was known as the 'killying' pond. Day after day during the vacation period the shoreline of this pond was crowded with juvenile fishermen, they selling their catch to the older fishermen for bait to catch larger game.The 'rafts' directly in front of the Bolivar House furnished all-day bathing for both young and old."

Before 1888, when the Tietjen & Lang shipyard began operations here, this area, still called Weehawken Cove today, was a dumping ground for abandoned canal barges and other vessels. Dozens of shad fishermen and their families lived in makeshift houseboats and discarded barges.

Fishing in this area provided a professional, as well as a sporting, interest. According to the memoirs of John Perkins Field ("Halo Over Hoboken," Exposition Press, New York, 1955.) "As the incoming tide swept up toward Guttenberg, striped and black bass, bluefish, shad, tom cods, even young swordfish succumbed to the bait and nets of fishermen. The Bolivar House served for a time as headquarters for the shad fishermen. Hung upon stout lines suspended between tall poles deeply



4147 BOLAVER HOUSE, 15TH STREET AND PARK AVE, IN 1880, HOBOKEN, N. J. PUBL. BY E. F. WALTER

On this 1880 photo, from a postcard of 1905, the name painted on the side of the house is "Bolaver" although "Bolivar" is what appears in many published references to the establishment.

rooted in the ground, their nets hung out to dry. During the night passing steamboats frequently damaged nets placed out on the river for a catch. The river was cleaner then, and fish, sold fresh, made an economical dish."

"In 1891 the Bolivar House still specialized in coconut cakes, nickel beer, and bolivars and New Yorkers and other visitors knew it." wrote Field, who described bolivars as "pancake-sized ginger cakes with scalloped edges."

It is not known just when Bolivar House began business, but in 1884 it was said that fishermen at the old Bolivar House still yielded a "rich store of recollections" and that "It was kept many years by a little white-haired veteran, with the brogue to his speech."
(*History of Essex and Hudson Counties*, Vol. II, 1884, page 1317.)

According to Hoboken police documents, a Samuel Watson in a shaky hand had signed as witness on June 13, 1892 a note certifying that one Robert A. Carpenter had bought from a Cathaline Babcock "all right, title and interest in all the wood Boats and Tools in the wood yard at 15th St. and Park Ave., in consideration of fifty dollars in hand paid." Carpenter had three years previously paid Mrs. C. Babcock $150 "for one half-interest in wood business in Elysian Fields."

The last evidence that we have is from May 1897, when Mrs. Samuel Watson (perhaps the widow of Samuel) was issued a summons from the Hoboken District Court to vacate premises of the "frame dwelling house known as the Bolivar House situated above 14th Street between Garden Street and Park Avenue," belonging to the "Hoboken Land and Improvement Co., the Landlord." The tenant, Mrs. Watson, it stated, had not paid the rent of 15 dollars per month for the past eight months.

THERE'S NO BUSINESS LIKE SHOW BUSINESS

Opening night of our Fifth Annual exhibition "Hoboken Shipyards: Past and Present" played to a standing-room-only crowd that thronged City Hall's corridors, consumed hors d'oeuvres, and admired the curatorial efforts of Bob Foster and the Museum's active members Friday night, November 16.

Bill Miller's slide lecture on the Hoboken waterfront played to an attentive and enthusiastic audience. Every visitor received a program produced by Bob Foster, in which the history of Hoboken's shipyards was described and illustrated. We hope you'll support the businessmen who advertised in the brochure.

A great many museum members helped in many ways. Among them are: Maureen Allex, Paul Blocklyn, Joel Coyne, Dennis Darragh, John De Palma, Luke Faust, Danielle Foster, Beverly Hans, Stephen Hefler, Kathi Hoffman, Bill Kadish, Hugh Kilmer, George Kirschgessner, Earle Lewis, Rose Lippman, Virginia Newman, Perry Robinson, Frank Todd, Nancy Wenner, and Uilli Zimer. And we cannot forget Frankie Fame and his musical accomplices who added so festive an air to the evening.

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MEETING NOTICE: NOMINATIONS

Nominations for Officers and Trustees of the Hoboken Historical Museum for 1991 will be made at our next meeting, at the Clam Broth House in Hoboken, at **7:30 PM** on **Tuesday, December 18**. Voting will be in January. Additional nominations may be submitted by mail, and from the floor at the January meeting. All meetings are open to the public. No obligation, no solicitation of funds.

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December 1990 No. 44

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Membership: 1 year, $15; 2 years, $25
Out-of-Town Membership:Add $3/year
Lifetime Membership: $100

SORRY!

Our apologies to lifetime member Elizabeth Liddy Roake, of San Mateo, California for misspelling her name. Also, in the program brochure for the shipyards exhibition, the address for Sorkin's stationery and office supply store should have been given as 400 Washington Street. Again, apologies.