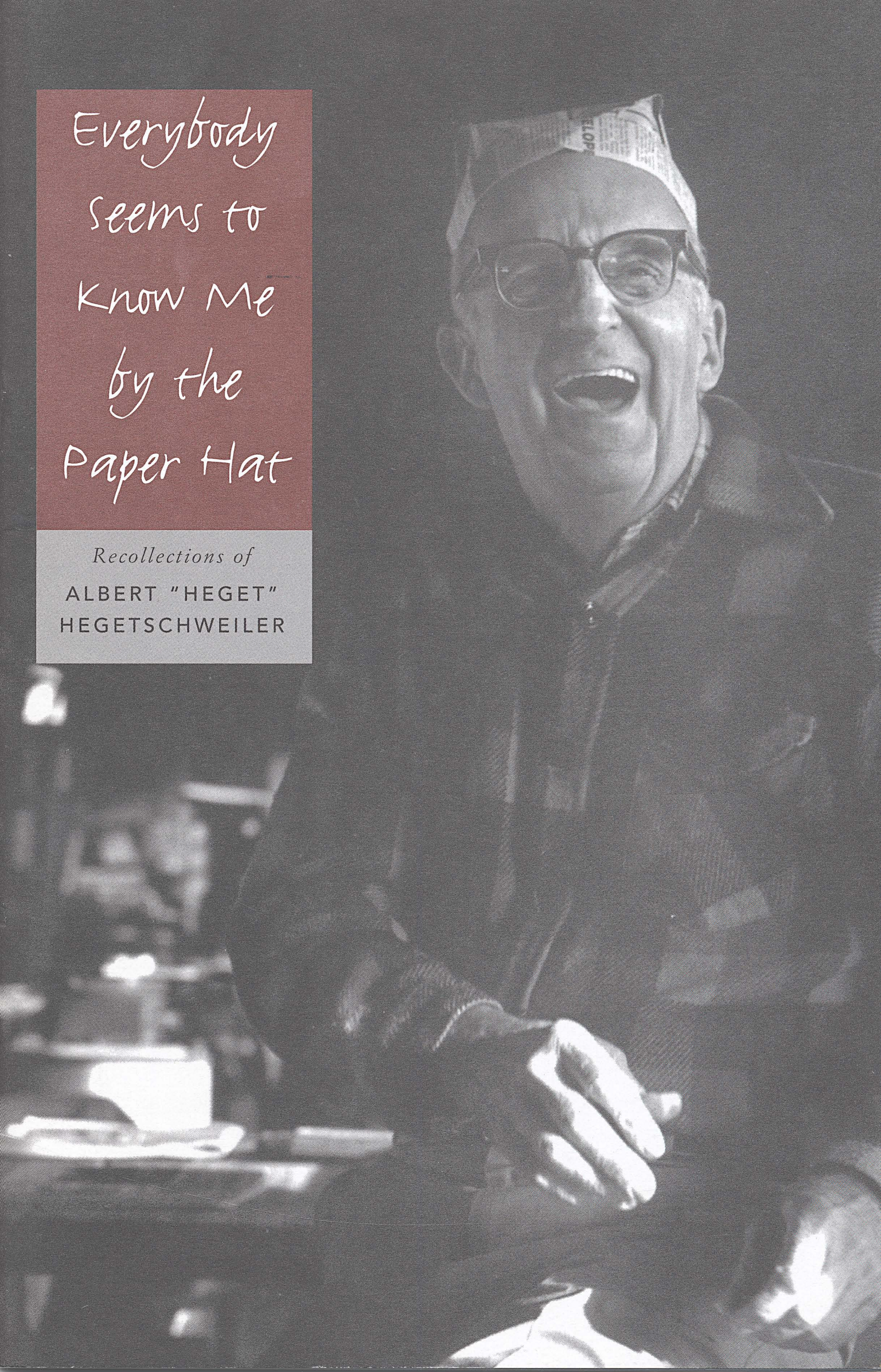
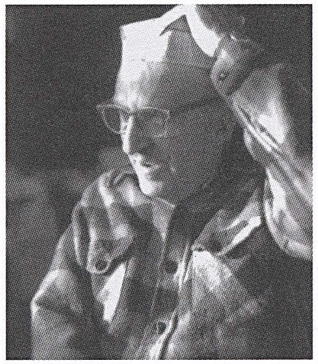
Everybody Seems to Know Me by the Paper Hat

Recollections of

ALBERT "HEGET" HEGETSCHWEILER





Pressman's Hat

1. Start with a newspaper sheet folded to page size. Turn it so the fold is closest to you.

2. Fold top corners to center.

3. Fold the remainder of the top sheet in half. Then fold it again, so that the bottom fold comes to the base of the triangle.

4. Turn the paper over. Fold sides in to center.

5. Fold in corners of bottom edge.

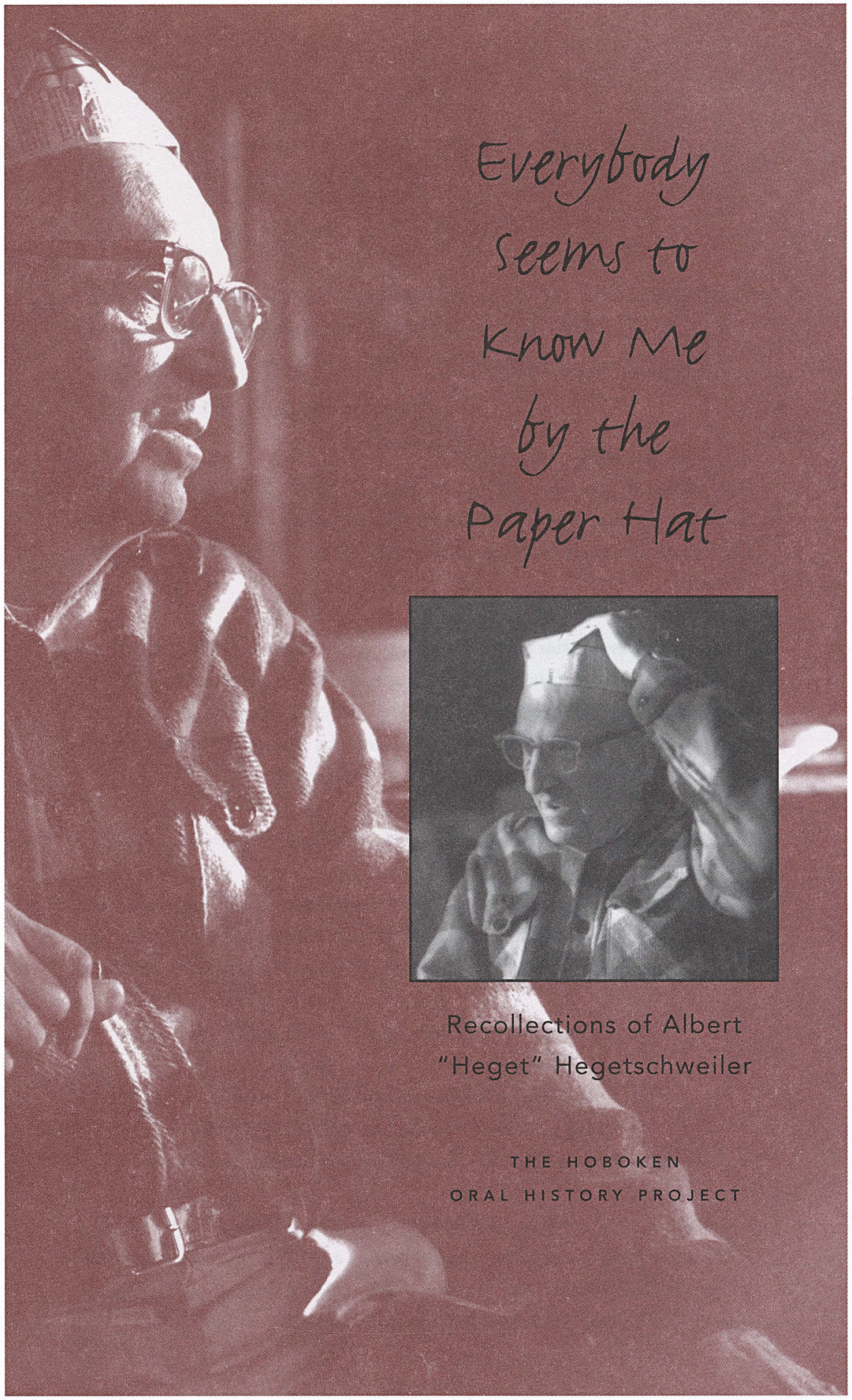
6. Fold bottom edge up and tuck under flap.

7. Fold pointed top down and tuck point under flap.

8. Open, pulling gently until the opening edges meet in the opposite direction. Crease the outside edges.

9. Fold outside corners down and tuck under flap.

10. Open into hat shape.



VANISHING HOBOKEN

The Hoboken Oral History Project

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

NEW JERSEY COUNCIL
FOR THE HUMANITIES

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Cover and inside photographs of Albert Hegetschweiler by Robert Foster. All other images are by Robert Foster, except those on page 16 and 17, which are from the collection of the Hoboken Historical Museum, and on page 19, which is courtesy of the Hoboken Public Library Historical Photographs Collection.

Everybody seems to know me by the paper hat. The funny part about it, sometimes I get in the car and forget I have it on, and I stop to go to the store with a paper hat on. I don't realize I have it on, because I have it on all day long.

ALBERT "HEGET" HEGETSCHWEILER
January 31, 1989

INTRODUCTION

Albert "Heget" Hegetschweiler

Albert Hegetschweiler, born in 1914 in Weehawken, New Jersey, became involved in the Northern New Jersey maritime industry in the early 1920s. He learned the woodworking trade in the 1930s in an apprenticeship with skilled woodworkers employed by his uncle, Mr. Soborg, whose Hoboken-based company he inherited. Most of the men in his extended family worked in the maritime industry, several as turbine engineers or wood turners—trades now extinct or extremely rare. In later years, the Soborg Woodworking Company found steady work in the production of wooden knife–and–fork holders for the Englishtown Cutlery Company.

This chapbook contains quotes from an interview with Mr. Hegetschweiler, who was known as "Heget," at his wood shop, Soborg Woodworking Company, 1429 Clinton Street, on January 31, 1989. The interview was conducted by Robert Foster, director and curator of the Hoboken Historical Museum.

A few years after this interview was conducted, the workshop, built out of second-hand lumber in 1908, burned to the ground. Mr. Hegetschweiler died soon after.

The Hoboken Historical Museum began its maritime oral history

project in the late 1980s to document the last surviving remnants of the industries that served the once-busy New York/New Jersey Harbor (when, as one interviewee put it, "traffic jams occurred on the river instead of the roadways.")

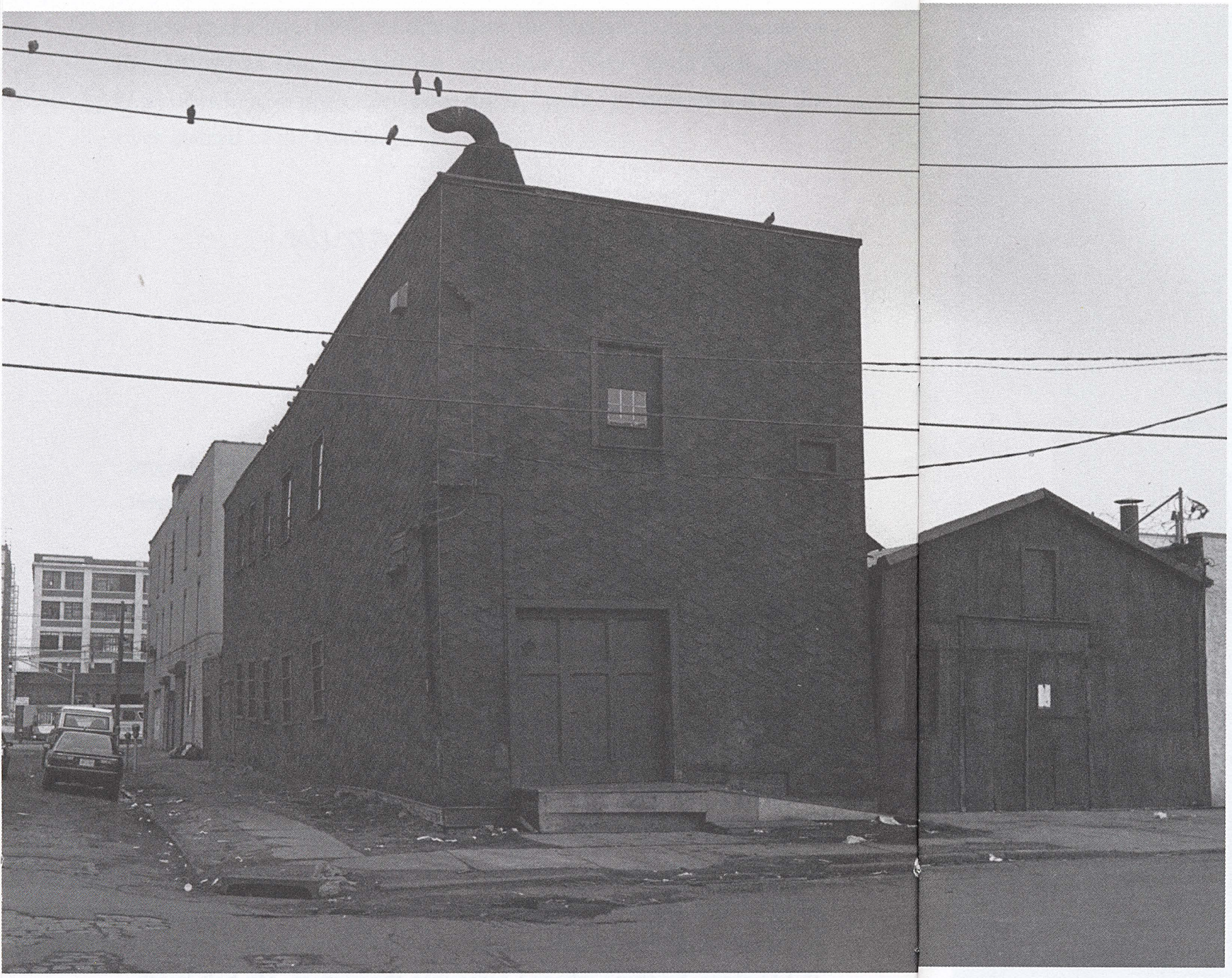
A Maritime Family

My name is Albert Hegetschweiler, but I'm mostly known as Heget. I run the Soborg Woodworking Company on 1429 Clinton Street here in Hoboken.

I was born quite locally, on 110 Maple Street, in Weehawken, New Year's Day, 1914. My father and mother were widow and widower when they got married. My father had had three sons with his first wife. My mother had no children.

My father was a triple expansion steam turbine man in Fletcher's Shipyard [W.&A. Fletcher Company on Hudson Street in Hoboken], and he was a very good friend of one of the Fletchers. In fact, Mr. Fletcher was his best man when he got married to my mother. I have a camera home in a trunk that Mr. Fletcher gave my father when he got married. Then, of course, I came along, which I wasn't supposed to do, because my mother was forty-three, and never had a child before. So that's where I came into the picture. My half-brother was the head pattern maker at Fletcher's, in the shipyard, and his son worked in Fletcher's, which became Bethlehem Steel. He was a turbine engineer, too, the son of my brother.

How I started here basically was as a child. My father died when I was six years old and my mother moved in with her sister and her



husband, Mr. Soborg, and more or less, he brought me up. I would work down here in the summertime, mostly just sweeping around, running errands, and things like that.

One of the funny errands that I always had, that everybody gets a kick out of: There was about seven or eight men working here and

The Soborg Woodworking Company, 1429 Clinton Street, was part of Hoboken's busy maritime trade for 80 years.

each one had a beer can. A little before twelve o'clock—there was a speakeasy across the road—I had a long stick with a bunch of nails, so one wouldn't bump into the other, and I'd have to go over to the speakeasy and get the beer cans filled. They chipped together and gave me a nickel for going for the beer.

As far as starting down here in the business, my mother as well as my aunt, they had it all cut and dried, that I'm going to go to work down here. When it came the time that I got out of high school, and time to come down here, my uncle, my mother, aunt, and myself were all sitting around the kitchen table having supper. And my uncle says to my mother: "Well I suppose you think Albert's coming down to the shop." And of course the two women had that all set. He says to my mother: "This is what we're going to do. The first year that he comes down here, you pay me five dollars a week for the material that he ruins. The second year he works for nothing. And the third year, I pay him five dollars a week."

My mother saw red. She couldn't see that. She didn't mind me coming down for a year working for nothing, but she couldn't see paying him five dollars for me to be here. So I didn't go down. I finally got a job in a garage for thirty-five cents an hour, and I worked for two years

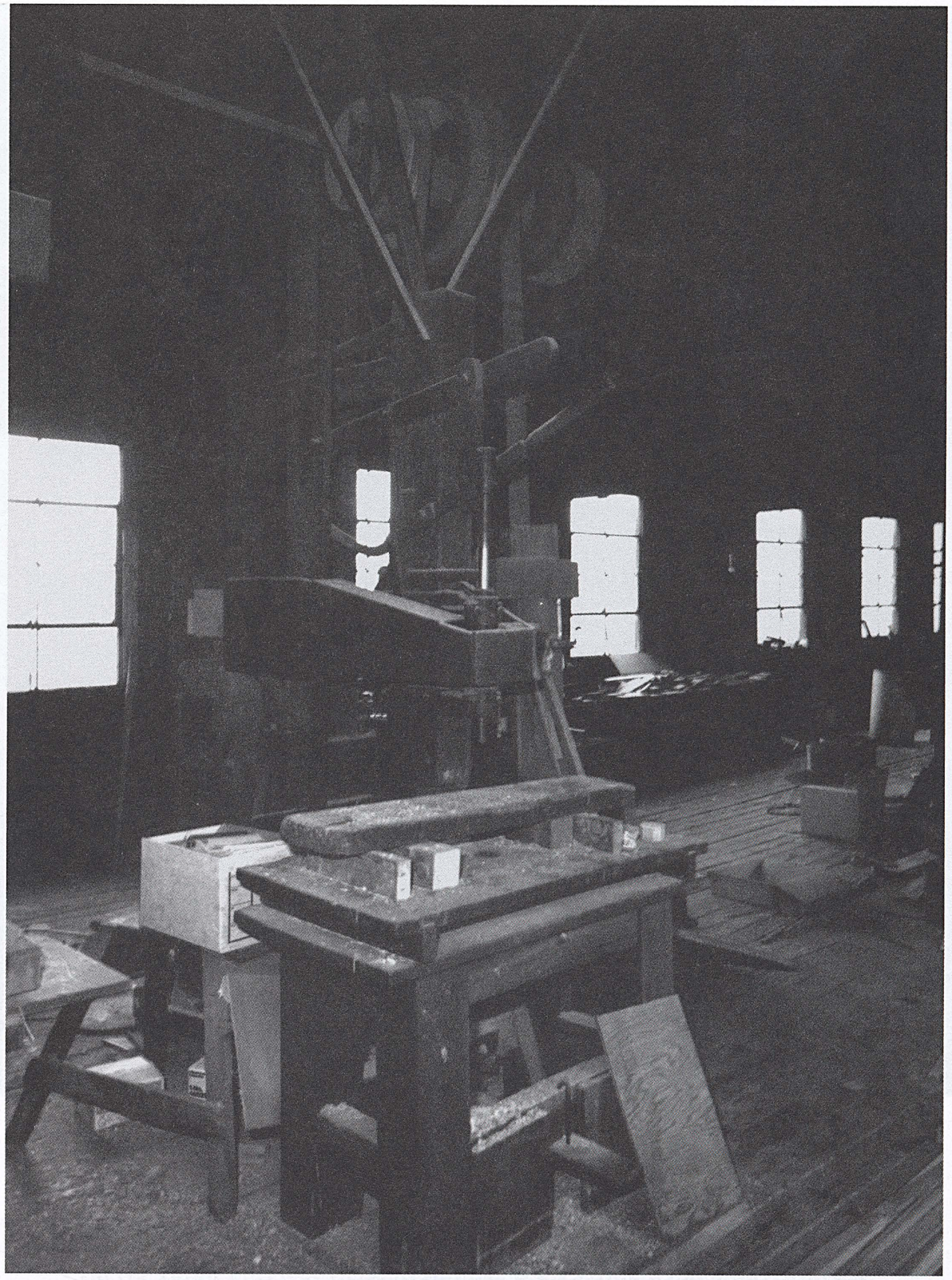
in the garage. Then he [Uncle Soborg] got sick and he couldn't come down to the shop and he called me into his bedroom and he says: "You'd better go down to the shop and see what you can do."

Now I didn't know that much about the shop, other than hanging around down here. Lucky for me they had a foreman, name was Arthur Kowalski. He was born here in Union City, and he had gone through pretty much the same thing. His uncle had been a stair builder. Basically he had learned the trade, but he was still afraid of the uncle. So he and his cousin were installing stairs in all these brownstones around here and the union delegate wanted to get him an apprentice card. So they got the apprentice card but it took him six weeks to eight weeks before he dared show it to the uncle. And when he did, he only threw it at him and ran.

Anyway, he had gone through that, so lucky for me, he took me under his arm. He was the foreman here, so he started me to learn and take care of everything. If it wasn't for him I really would have been in a problem. Because of the old-timers. They were very good tradesmen, from the other side. But we had a wood carver here, when I was a small little kid just looking at him from a distance, and he raised merry cane with me. He said, [and he] points up to his head: "What's in my head goes in the ground. Nobody looks." So that's the kind of people we had to deal with. You had to go through a whole apprenticeship or you didn't get anywhere.

Uncle Soborg: Carving Eagles and Turning Wood

The Soborg Woodworking Company began with Mr. Soborg. He came to this country from Norway and he went to the west coast, to Seattle. In the mills out there, he was a wood turner from the other



Inside the Soborg Woodworking Company during its final days, 1989.



side. He was turning spindles for stairs out there, out of the waste lumber. He went back to Norway. And then he came back again. The second trip he went back to the west coast to the same place, but then he came back and settled around here.

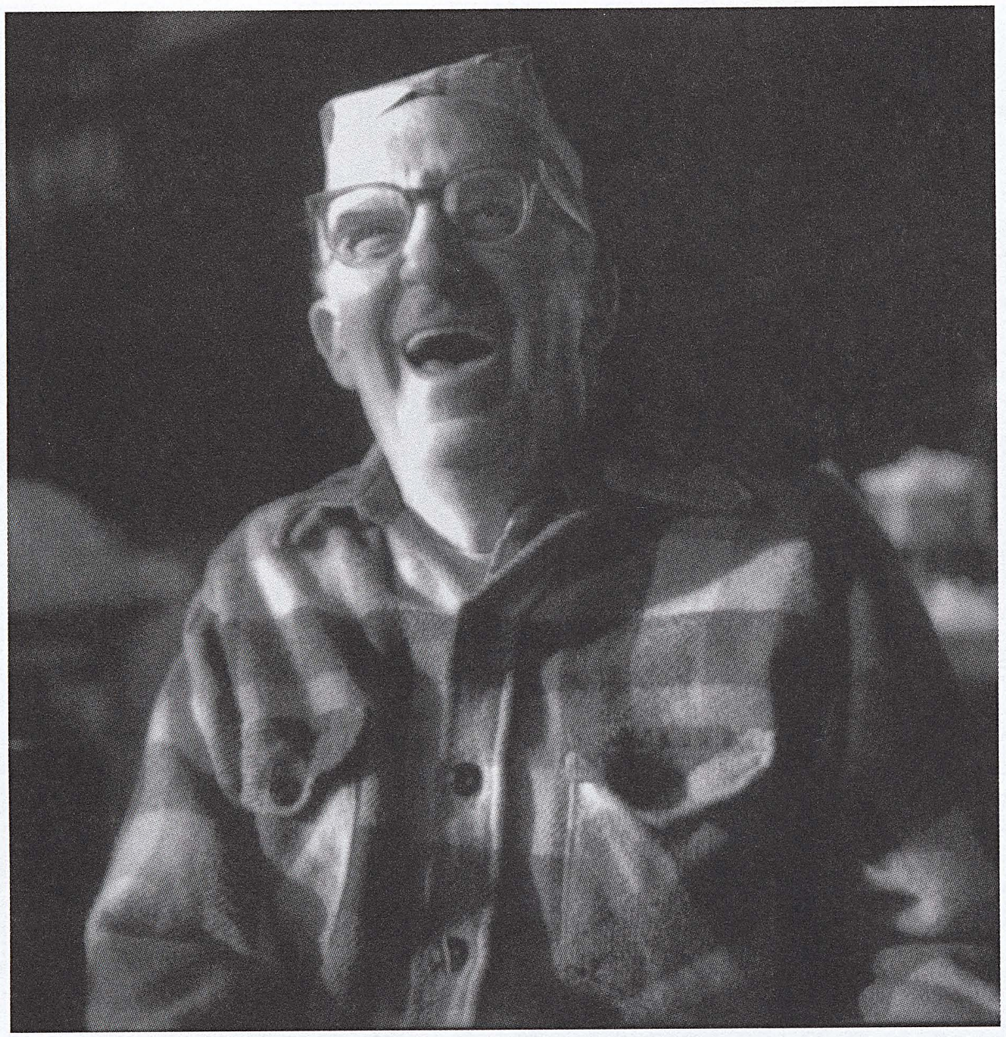
He was working for Todd's, the shipyards here and they found out

Heget's workshop, where eagles were once carved in pine for ferryboats and tugs.

that he could carve. Of course back in those days, practically every boat in the river, on top of the pilothouse, had an American eagle. And he was carving eagles for Todd shipyards. All of a sudden, up went a light, and he said: "Why should I carve them for Todd's when I can go in business for myself?"

So over on Fourteenth Street, under the viaduct someplace, he rented a little loft and he began carving eagles. That must have been about 1906. Then he built this place here in 1908. It's built out of secondhand lumber.

The eagles were carved in white pine, which was easy to carve. Eagles were very popular back in the days of ferryboats and tugboats. Most every one of them had to have an American eagle with its wings spread on top of the pilothouses. What always amazed me was that the ferryboats had two pilothouses, one on each end, and when the ferry was going to New York from here, the one on the other end was flying backwards. Of course, they don't fly, but they were facing in the wrong direction for where they were going.



Heget recalls how the ferryboat eagles always "flew backwards" one way or another.

There was a big demand for these eagles. Everybody who had a boat had to have an eagle. It was like a fad. These woodcarvers trimmed most of it out on the band saw, roughed it out, and then carved them by hand. They were pretty fast at it too. I mean, it might have taken them a day or two to make an eagle.

The size of them more or less depended on the size of the pilothouse. On a tugboat, there'd only be a wingspread of three foot or so. On a good-size ferry boat, the wingspread could be four, four-and-a-half foot, anyway, depending on the size of the boat, so that it looked right, and not like a wart on a camel's back. Most all were

painted gold. They were gold eagles. Some painted them other ways, but most of the time they were painted gold.

Uncle Soborg had nothing to do with the painting of them. He just carved them out of wood. Actually, when he built this shop, the carving of the eagles almost disappeared because he could make more money doing other stuff. So many other [shipping] lines came in, building was going, and World War I was starting. He got more into the maritime line. He was working with the ships and had a ship joiner shop as well as making industrial parts.

Wood turning was his main line in this shop. He was a terrific wood turner. Of course, he had learned the wood turning trade in Europe. When he was out in Seattle, he worked piecework, and when you work piecework, you learn how to turn in a hurry. He was the fastest turner. I've seen a lot of turners in my years but no one stood alongside him in wood turning.

He'd start eight o'clock in the morning, take a half hour for lunch, quit at four o'clock. And if it was a simple turning, a simple baluster, he could knock out two hundred balusters in a day. He never callipered, it was all by eye. He wore glasses you pinched on your nose, the old-fashioned ones you just pinched on your nose. And he couldn't see through them. There was nothing but curls of shavings hanging on them, when he was looking over the top of them. He never turned the lathe off from when it got started in the morning until lunchtime. He threw everything in on the fly. So he was a terrific wood turner. With all the building going on it was in great demand. Of course, nowadays, it's all done automatically.

Uncle Soborg never went on the ships. Arty, his foreman, was much better on that particular thing. He was a crackerjack machine man and they also had an Italian fellow, Rocco Mancini, who was a crackerjack hand man. So I had two good teachers. Though I am not quite that good with my hands as I am with a machine, I got the principle. Where I fit in is, I can match the old broken ones.

Working on Ships

On board the ships there would be chairs that were broken, doors that didn't work, drawers that didn't pull. They needed wooden grates—they were broken—chucks for under the lifeboats, and rotten fastenings needed to be replaced. We are not to be confused with ship's carpenters. They were the ones with the hammers and the nails and the screws and stuff like that. We did the better work, the internal work.

I can remember Lord's Dry Dock, up in North Bergen, and one of the wet dock outfits had a job of converting a small freighter into a small passenger ship for the Venezuelan government. This was before I was working here steady. It was in the summertime and Arty, the foreman, took me up there to give him a hand measuring. They were going to put a full mahogany flight of stairs in the ship. It was one of those flights of stairs where you'd come up in the middle and stairs go on both sides and they meet up again at the top. Of course, working on a ship, there's nothing square. Everything is ship shape. So we measured everything. We didn't believe in rulers on a ship. We always had long sticks with us and we'd tape them together or tack them together until we'd get the right length where it's going to fit.

So the whole flight of mahogany stairs we built right down here in the shop. They were all taken up to Lord's Dry Dock, and we get up there, and get it on board the ship, and nothing fits. It just didn't fit no how. We just couldn't figure it out. The sticks didn't fit anymore even. So one of the engineers from the engineering company—we were down in the hold—he yells down: "Hey, Arty, you having trouble? You know what you can do with them stairs? Throw them overboard and go make another set. We moved the bulkhead to another location." In those days, you didn't care what went into the river, so all those mahogany stairs went in the river. Let them go adrift. Brand new.

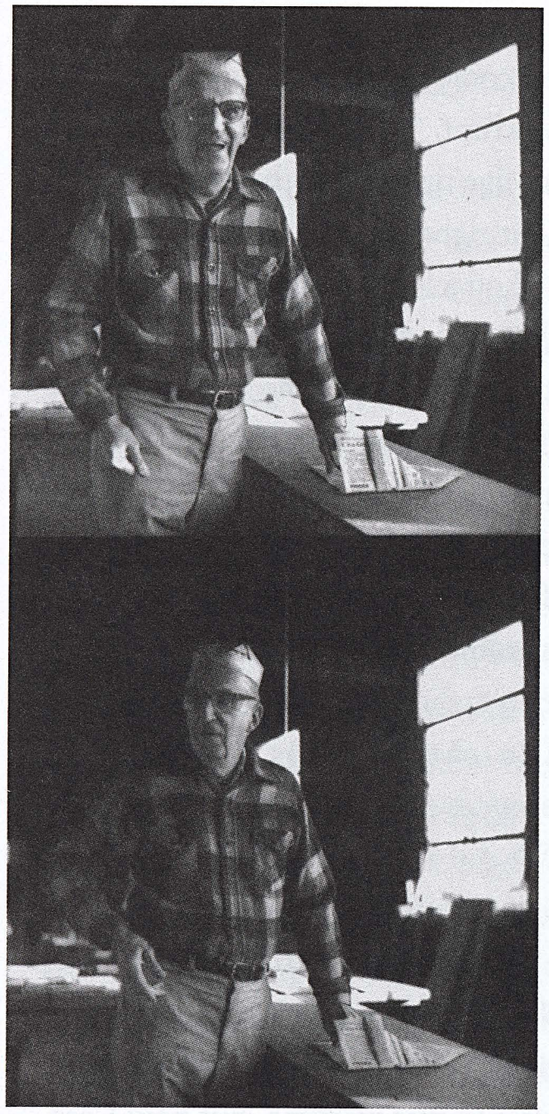
We made another flight of stairs and the wet dock people realized they were going bankrupt. So they come up there to my uncle and told him they were going to go bankrupt. "When you put your bills in, put them in for twenty or twenty-five times what they're supposed to be." So at least he came out about right.

During World War II, we worked on a lot of Polish ships, because they were at sea when the war broke out and they became part of our fleet. They were merchant ships, the Gdynia Line. The ships were not in the best shape and believe it or not, the crew didn't have a place to eat on them. They only had a tin plate and they had to go to the galley, stick their plate in there, get their drink and food, and eat along the deck, or wherever they could find space.

Of course the United States wouldn't stand for that. That ship wasn't sailable that way. So we had to make several dining quarters—tables and stuff—and they had to change things around. Even though they were Polish ships, they were American convoys and they had to come up to the standards. We did a lot of changing around on those things. All the metal work was done by the engineering companies. They made the room and we made the furniture, cutting blocks in the kitchen to cut meat on, stuff like that.

During the war, the prime engineering firm that we worked with was with the Gdynia Line. Of course, it was wartime, but now I can talk about it because all of the companies I was working with are all gone. Believe it or not, I was ripe for draft age, and I got excused from the service, [based] on occupation. But at one time it was six weeks [until he would be called]. One time it was two weeks. I didn't know where I was as far as that was concerned, or depending on what we're doing here, what priorities we had.

Anyway, we worked quite a lot for Gdynia, for what I considered good, fair prices. Believe it or not, they come up here, twice they came up here, and wanted to know what's the matter with me. "You're not charging enough!" I always had in the back of my head,



well, I'm going to be drafted, if I don't keep going [with the work]. And as I say, I made a pretty good dollar. I was well pleased with the prices I was getting. As a matter of fact, I even felt that I was padding the bill a little bit. They come up here and told me right up and down that I had to charge at least ten times more than what I was charging, because they could charge a commission on it. If the price is too low, they're not making anything.

I lost several jobs through that because I didn't charge enough. It got to a point where it was ridiculous. I remember one particular incident. Just a little board to hang ten keys on, and at that time I charged, I think, ten or twelve dollars for it, which was, at the time, a damn good price. And they came up and told me they should be two hundred dollars apiece. So that's where your money went. At two hundred dollars, if they got ten percent, they got something, but on ten or twelve dollars, it was nothing. So that was a wartime problem that we had here. But I had enough work here to keep me out of the service.

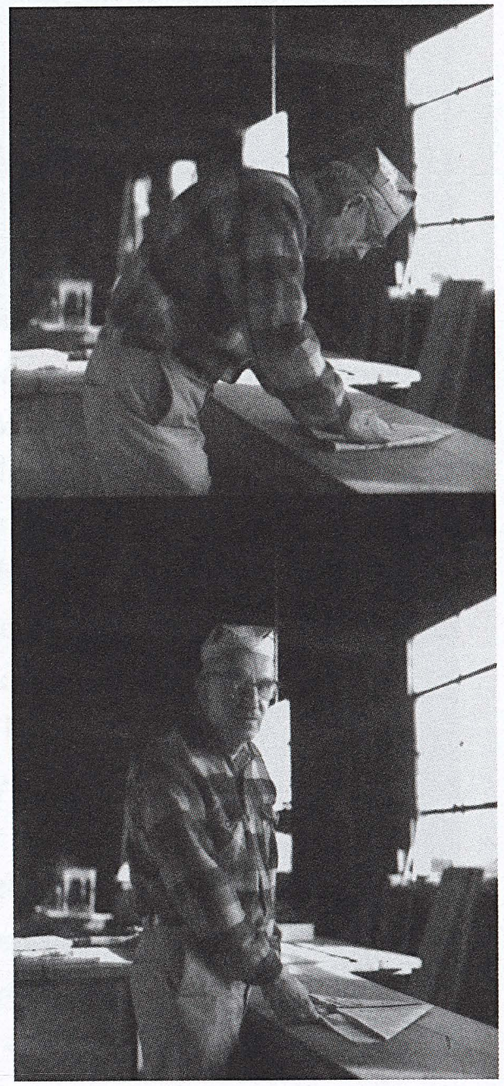
Then we had the Seatrain Line here. They were right up here in the north end of Hoboken, too, taking railroad cars down south to Texas City and so forth. They put a new ship in the fleet called the Seatrain Express, and they came over to the shop because the governor of

Texas at the time had given them a tremendous set of long horns. They must have been almost eight feet across! We had to mount them on a plaque in the dining area on the ship. That was the Seatrain Texas.

I was working here with three men, in the middle of the fifties. Three men and myself. Before that, I had seven men.

Heget's Paper Hat

You want to know about my hat. Well, I use a paper hat here all winter long because I can make a new one every day. Or, if it's slightly dirty, I just throw it away and make another one.



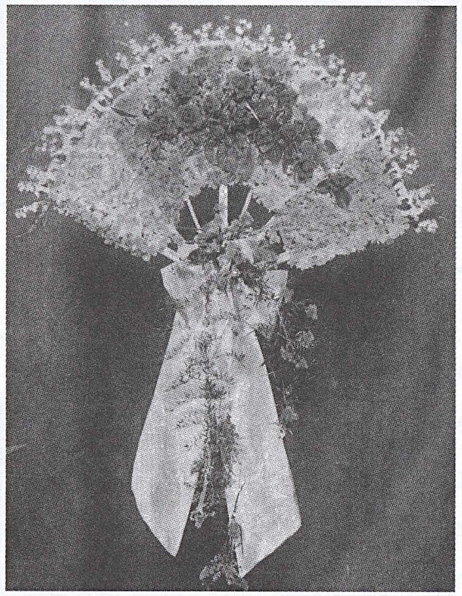
It's really a pressman's hat, what the newspaper people wear. Years ago, I was involved with the Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts, and I brought a bunch of Cub Scouts to the *Bergen Record* in Hackensack, on a tour. They saw these men with these hats on and of course they wanted a hat. Well, of course, the men were busy. They couldn't bother making a kid a hat. I spoke to the tour fellow that took us around and said: "Gee, they're great. The kids love those hats. Is there any way we could learn?" And he says: "Possibly we can publish a cut out." They had a section that was mostly for kids. I don't know if it was a Tuesday or a Monday.

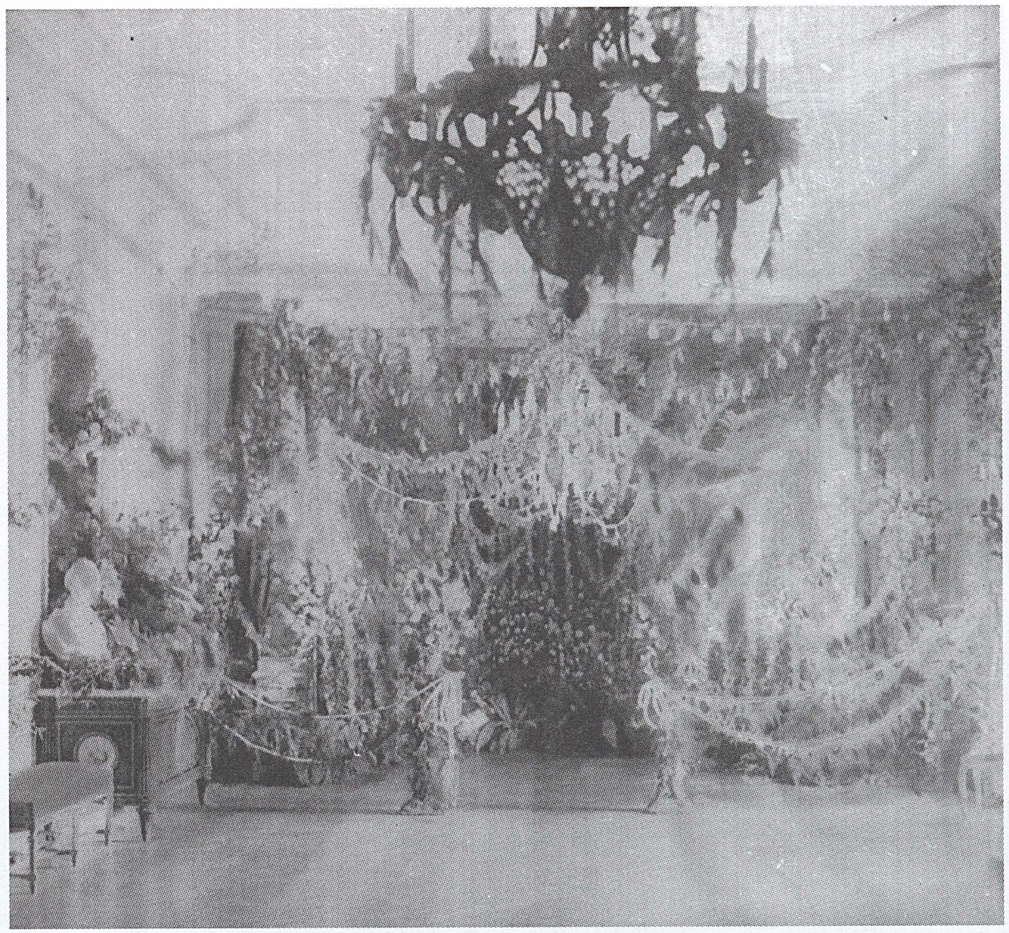
Weeks later, they put in [a cut out on] how to fold them. Then I practiced from that. They're strong, for a paper hat. Everybody seems to know me by the paper hat. The funny part about it, sometimes I get in the car and forget I have it on, and I stop to go to the store with a paper hat on. I don't realize I have it on, because I have it on all day long. The nice thing is, you can throw it away and have a clean one.

This Business of the Telephone and the Flowers

I had an uncle, my father's sister was married to him. A Mister Henberg, who had a florist on Washington Street. He must have started there in 1910.

And Mr. Henberg had the greatest business in connection with the waterfront—even though it was a florist. Way back in his day, he got involved with this business of the telephone and the flowers. So many of the people that came to this country, and who went out west and all over the country, came back to go to Europe for a visit. Whenever any foreigners were here and they got enough money together, and could afford it, they'd have to go back and show off what they made in the United States and how wonderful it was. Which it is, let's face it. Anyway, when they would leave, a lot of ships left from Hoboken. When you're out in a small town in the Midwest, or anywhere through-





Photos, left and above: A corsage and display created by Henberg Florist, circa 1920.

out the country, and you want to send bon voyage flowers, the man to look up in the telephone book when the ship says it's sailing from Hoboken, there's only one florist in the book. He was busy. He had a big business here. In fact, I have pictures. He had two wagons for delivery and later on he had two trucks. They were Model T Fords, delivering flowers to all the ships. He became a wealthy man with that florist's. Later on it was taken over by a Mr. Rogel, but that was quite a few years later. I believe that same building today has a plumbing company in it. He was way ahead in the florist business, there was no competition at all. He had quite a business.

He had, at one time, the largest glass window in Hoboken [415 Washington Street]. Nobody in this country made glass that big, so

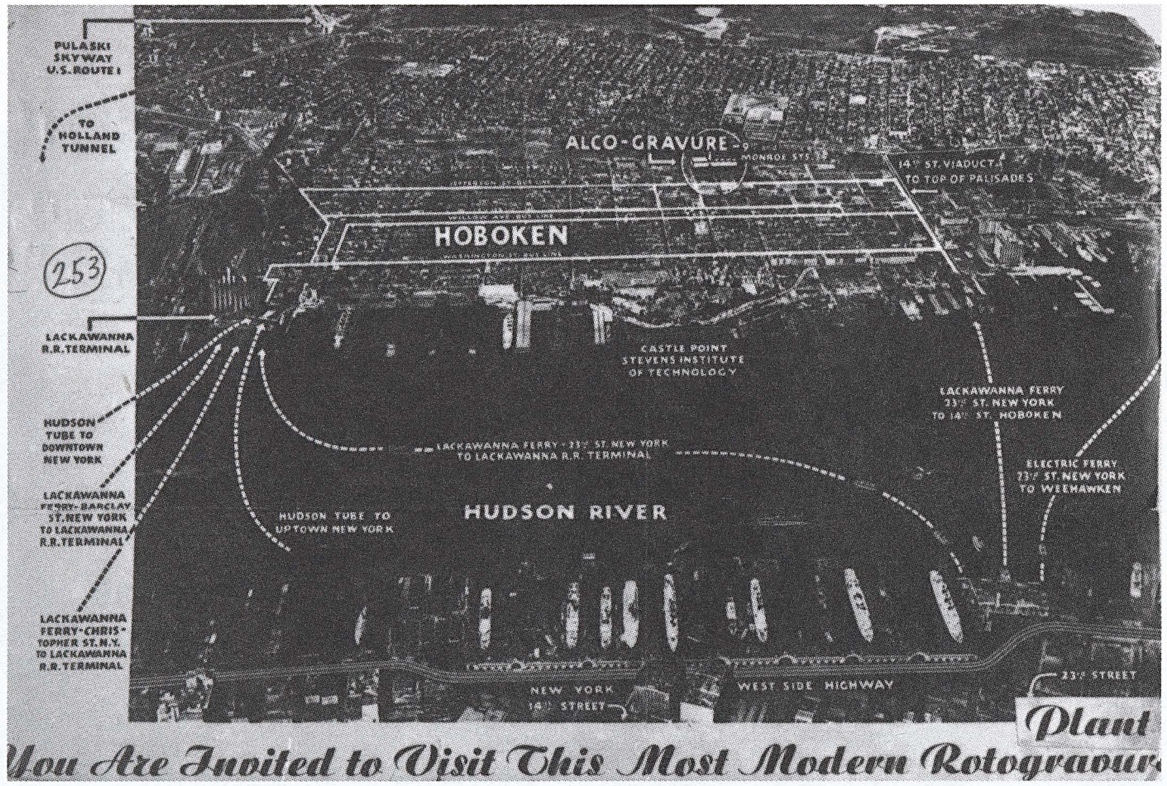


When Soborg Woodworking Company burned down, it was replaced by a contemporary industrial building.

he had to get it in France. It didn't come into Hoboken; it came in on the other side of the river. So they had to bring it over here. Now that was a problem, because they had to ride it on a flat, and it wouldn't fit through the ferry where the side-wheels were. It wouldn't go through. So he had to rent a ferry after the last trip at night, and a horse and wagon. The pane of glass went on to the ferry and the ferry turned around in the river and came in on the Jersey side, so the horse could back off the ferry with the pane of glass. It wouldn't pass through the side-wheels. I remember that.

Harbor Memories

I remember seeing the *Woodrow Wilson* burning. That was during World War I. That was in Todd's for repair, a troop ship. I was living in an apartment right above the viaduct here and I remember at night watching those flames coming out of that ship. Of course, you had so many steamship companies here. You had the Danish or Scandinavian lines that went to most of the Scandinavian countries. I remember they had a big red stripe around the stack with a



Mid-20th century ad for Hoboken printing plant shows multiple ferry, train, and tunnel routes.

black stack. They were mostly named after kings from Denmark. They came in at about Sixteenth Street, I guess. And downtown you had the Holland America Line and all those ships down there.

The electric ferries, they were in Weehawken right over where the Lincoln Tunnel is now. There was a big long ramp from Boulevard East, a wooden structure that you go out to the water to get on the ferryboat. They only took automobiles; they didn't take passengers. They were run by motors that were diesel-electric. In other words, diesel-generated, motor-driven. The last of the electric ferries that I know of, they were running from Brooklyn to Staten Island. It's quite a few years back now, but that's about the last that I can remember.

The 42nd Street Ferry, leaving from Weehawken, there were two

different lines. One went directly across the river to 42nd Street—the 42nd Street Ferry—the other one was called the West Shore Ferry Company. It went from Weehawken to Cortland Street. It was a long, nice ride down the river. That was to bring people downtown.

The 125th Street ferry just crossed the river from 125th Street [in Manhattan] to Edgewater. The beauty of those times was that they ran all night. In the wee hours they were every half-hour, but there wasn't such a thing as any of them closing down. It ran all night long. All the ferries ran all night long. Most of the time, it was just one boat going back and forth in the wee hours. When you got on the Jersey side, whether for 42nd Street or the Edgewater one, the trolley cars met the ferry, and you could go anywhere in the State of New Jersey on trolley cars. Wherever you wanted to go. You could take the 125th Street ferry and got to Suffern, New York, by trolley car, by changes. You could go all through Hudson County, and the same with the 42nd Street ferry. They had all these places you could change and go elsewhere. So I mean transportation was terrific in the state, it really was terrific. Of course the ferryboats and the trolley cars all worked together. They pretty much met the boats.

On the 125th Street ferry, as well as further up on the Dyckman Street ferry and Yonkers ferry, on holiday weekends like Labor Day, Fourth of July—you've gotta remember there was no George Washington bridge, there was no Lincoln Tunnel, there was no Holland Tunnel. In fact, as far as the Holland Tunnel, my wife walked through it the day that it opened!—the ferryboats, anyway, on these holidays, it's unbelievable, the lines of cars. The cars would go up over the Palisades, and down over the other side of the Meadows. People waited for many hours to get on a ferryboat on a holiday, to get over to New York.

I recall going with a girl who lived on Coney Island, and I'd come home with my 1929 Essex roadster. I bought my ticket for the 125th

Street ferry and I sat there waiting for the next boat. I fell asleep. There was cars behind me, probably two o'clock in the morning, and nobody bumped me. I slept there all night. I got the six o'clock ferry. They just went around me and let me sleep there at 125th Street. It was a different world.

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, Lipton Tea, Tootsie Roll, Maxwell House, or in numerous, smaller garment factories. Then the docks closed in the 1960s; 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 close, 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 buy-outs, or through rising rents. More recently, building construction has further altered the face of Hoboken, as anonymous, 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 in the summer of 2000 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. The Project focuses on collecting the oral histories of residents who can evoke Hoboken's vanished industries through their recollections of employment in the city's many factories and on the waterfront, and those who can capture for present and future generations the ways in which Hoboken's rich ethnic and cultural diversity was once evident in the everyday life of the city: in traditional businesses and small Mom and Pop shops, in leisure and cultural activities, and political and civic activities (election campaigns and political/social clubs). In 2001, with the support of the New Jersey Historical Commission, a Division of Cultural Affairs in the Department of State, the Hoboken Oral History Project transcribed and edited seven oral histories to produce a series of "Vanishing Hoboken" chapbooks. A year later, the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, a state partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities, provided support for the publication of two chapbooks.

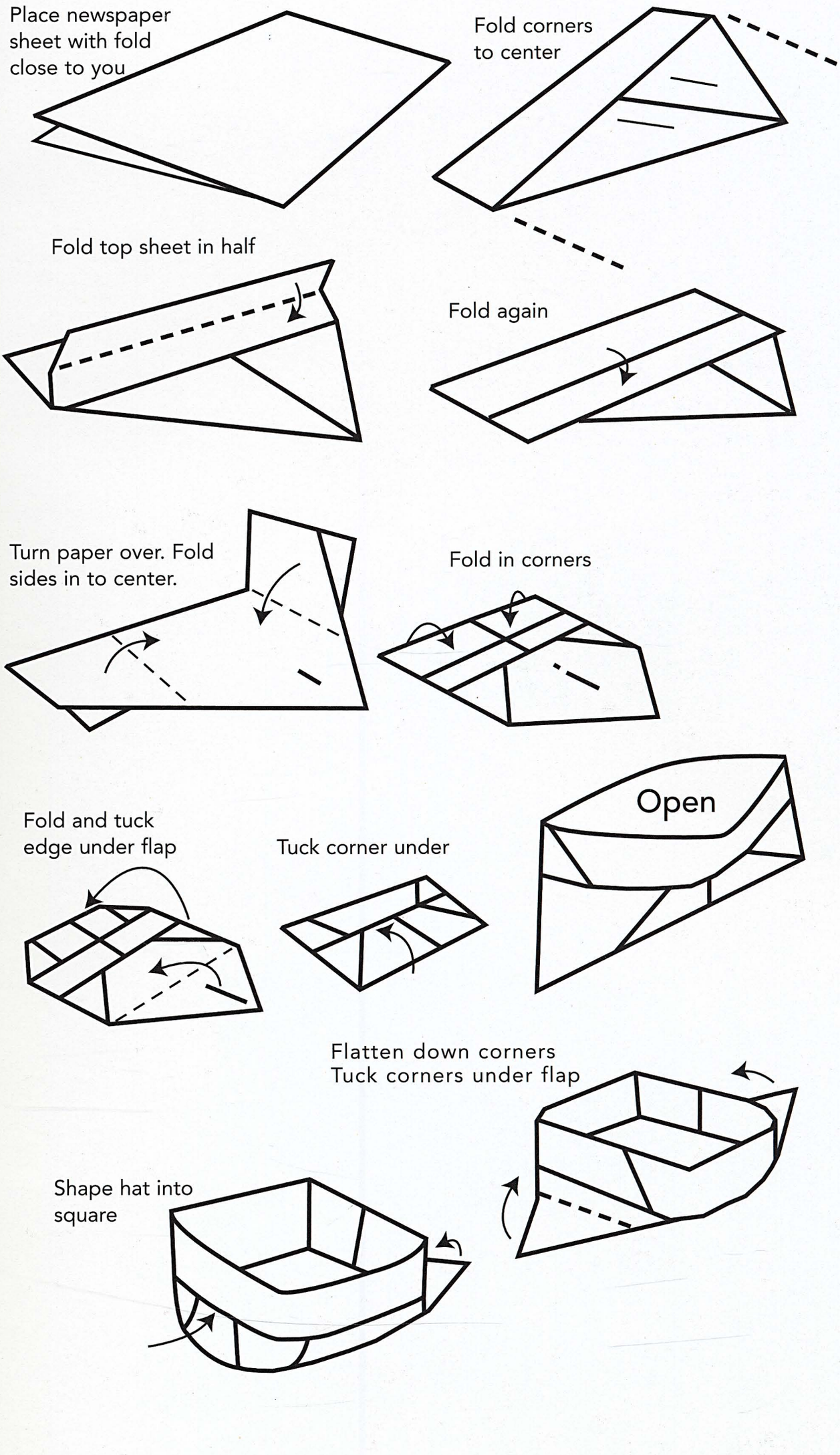
Vanishing Hoboken Chapbooks

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 *Encyclopaedia 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, legend 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.


Place newspaper sheet with fold close to you
Fold corners to center
Fold top sheet in half
Fold again
Turn paper over. Fold sides in to center.
Fold in corners
Open
Fold and tuck edge under flap
Tuck corner under
Flatten down corners
Tuck corners under flap
Shape hat into square



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