

LOCAL HISTORY

Smithville Mansion celebrates Burlco women.

# Honoring 6 inspiring lives

By Jan Hefler  
INQUIRER SUBURBAN STAFF

We have to thank Elizabeth Coleman White for the scrumptious, fat Jersey blueberries that we sprinkle over our cereal or ice cream.

Born in 1871, the oldest of four daughters, White was working on her family's cranberry plantation at Whitesbog in New Lisbon when she became interested in the wild blueberry.

"We used to go around sampling these fruits and one would be too sour and one would be too flat, one would be too skinny and finally, we would come to one that father would call 'peachy,' but we didn't know to propagate the plant," White said in a taped interview in 1953. "At that time, it was said among the farmers of New Jersey that blueberries could not be cultivated."

White set about to change that.

She is one of six notable women in history — all Burlington County residents at one time or other — who will be discussed during a lecture and slide show today at the Smithville Mansion in Eastampton in honor of Women's History month.

Burlington County historian Joseph M. Laufer, who will present the program, said White was his favorite. "The plants she cultivated are still being sold internationally," he said. Among them are the Rubels, the Hardings and the Adamses, all named after the local farmworkers who discovered the bushes that had the "plumpest and sweetest blueberries" in the Pinelands, Laufer said.

Laufer will also discuss the role of five other women: Patience Wright, Clara Barton, Alice Paul, Mary Irick Drexel and "Indian Ann Roberts." Each of them, he said, had to battle discrimination.

"These are names that people know, but many people don't know these women have all lived in our own backyard," said Joyce Goldsmith, who heads the county's Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs.

Alice Paul was the author of the Equal Rights Amendment and founder of the National Woman's Party in 1913. Born in Mount Laurel, she was jailed for her civil-disobedience activities in pushing for women's suffrage.

Clara Barton, known as the founder of the American Red Cross, first made history when she was a young teacher residing in Bordentown. Hired by a private school in 1851, she spent her spare time teaching other local children at the local Friends Meeting House, Laufer said. In 1852, she founded the state's first free school, the result of overcrowding



**Elizabeth Coleman White** of New Lisbon was the first to cultivate blueberries. She won renown in horticulture, helping to change the Pine Barrens economy.



NATIONAL ARCHIVES / Associated Press  
**Clara Barton** is known for her service on Civil War battlefields and in founding the Red Cross. In 1852, she founded the first free school in New Jersey.



**Mary Irick Drexel** of Vincentown through marriage would become a philanthropist and arts patron. She also directed the Philadelphia Red Cross.

at the meeting house.

But state officials hired a man to be the first principal of the school, Laufer said. Dismayed over the discrimination, she left Bordentown.

Patience Wright also lived in Bordentown. A wax sculptor, Wright moved to London during the time of the American Revolution because of the greater demand for carved busts in that city. Wright then began spying on generals and dignitaries under King George III and channeled the information to her friend Benjamin Franklin, Laufer said.

Mary Irick Drexel, a Vincentown native, advanced the arts as a patron and became the director of the Philadelphia Red Cross at about the turn of the century. After she married George W. Childs Drexel, from the Philadelphia banking family, she used her clout to promote her causes.

Laufer includes in his lecture a lesser known figure, local legend

## If You Go

**What:** Lecture on "Notable Women in the History of Burlington County" by Joseph Laufer. Featured as part of the *Women's History... The Fabric of Life* celebration.

**When:** Today. Lecture at 12:30 p.m.; other events from noon to 4 p.m.

**Where:** Smithville Mansion, Smithville Road, Eastampton

**Admission:** Free

**Information:** 609-265-5068 or [www.lauferworld.com](http://www.lauferworld.com).

"Indian Ann Roberts." He said she was a colorful character, a basket weaver who was believed to be the last of the Delaware tribe to live in the county.

"She was known in the county and part of the folklore," Laufer said. She lived all of her 90 years in Indian Mills, where the state had established an American Indian reservation.

Laufer said his presentation about the six women is a spin-off of other lectures he has given on the county's history over the last 300 years. He compiled the list based on how notable and interesting the women's lives were.

"Their contributions parallel the rich history of Burlington County from the movement for independence, through the Civil War, and on through World Wars I and II into the modern period," Laufer said.

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