

We Did Have Wonderful Times

Hoboken Girl Scouts and the Little House on Garden Street



Recollections of
Lee Raines and Catherine Ruchovansky

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THE HOBOKEN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Vanishing Hoboken
The Hoboken Oral History Project

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

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Cover photograph of Hoboken Girl Scout leader Anna Van Twisk and Girl Scouts preparing for cookie sales, 1950.

Contemporary photo of Catherine Ruchovansky by Robert Foster, 2007. Unless otherwise noted, all photographs are from the collection of the Hoboken Historical Museum. Thanks to David Webster for assistance with the archives.

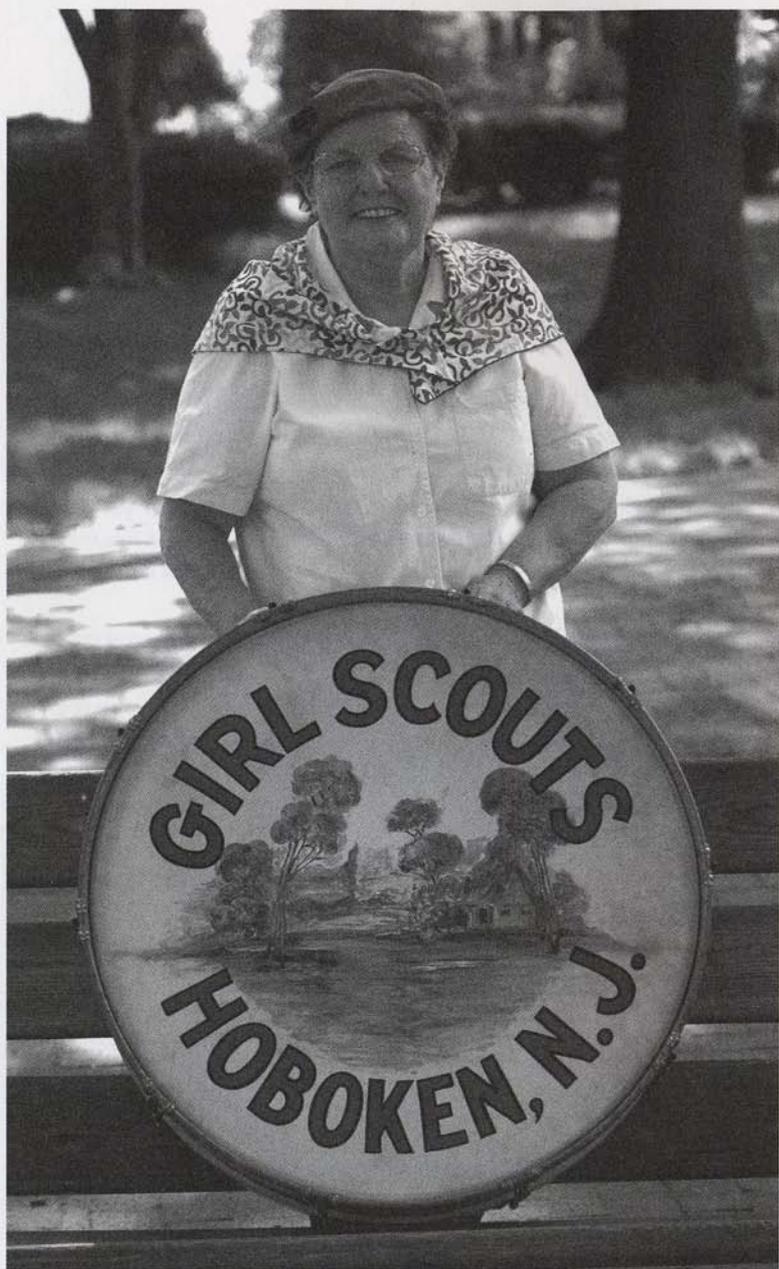
*But we did have wonderful times. The leaders I met—
Marian and Grace Spencer, Violet Davey, Mim [Miriam]
Rothschild—they were all wonderful, educated women,
and they tried to instill in us a feeling that we were very
good people, that we were worth something.*

CATHERINE RUCHOVANSKY

JUNE 19, 2006



*Hoboken Girl Scout leaders, 1958. (From left to right,
Janet Blenderman, Violet Davey, Dorothy (Dottie)
Von Seggern, Henrietta Siodlowski.)*



Catherine Richovansky, 2007.

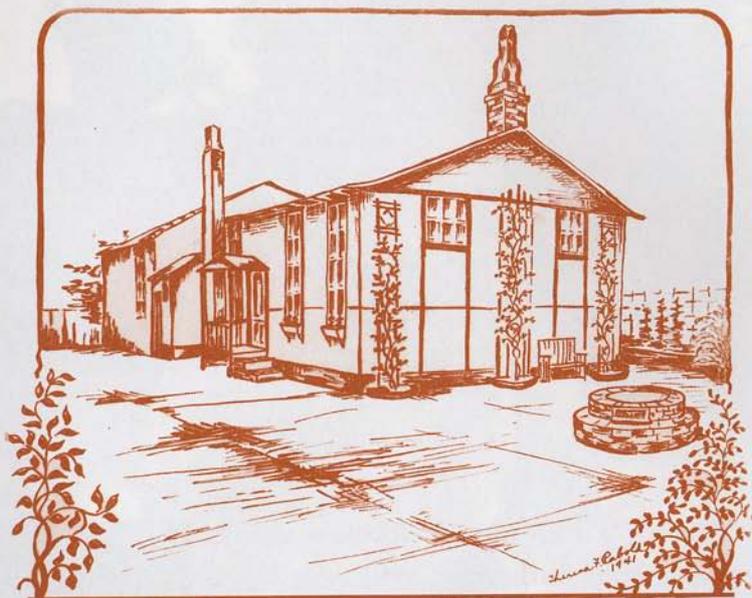
Image of Lee Raines on page one. COURTESY OF THE RAINES FAMILY

Introduction

Lee Raines, a semi-retired Hoboken school-teacher, and Catherine Ruchovansky, a Hoboken homemaker, had each enjoyed over 60 years of Hoboken Girl Scouting experience—as Girl Scouts and as adult leaders—when they were interviewed for this chapbook. Nearly all of their involvement centered around a modest, one-story building at 916A Garden Street. Positioned behind a grand community hall and theatre, the Stevens-Waldheim Forum, the much-loved “Little House” had been built in 1926 on land donated by the Stevens family, specifically to provide a home for Hoboken Girl Scouts. And so it did for generations—until the City of Hoboken sought the property, to build a robotic garage. The Little House was sold in April 1997 and demolished soon after, to allow the garage’s construction.



Nine years had passed since their House was destroyed, but Lee and Catherine still felt its loss. They spoke of their former home often during their interview by Robert Foster at the



*Drawing of the Hoboken Girl Scouts' Little House on Garden Street
by Theresa Rabold, Hoboken High School art teacher, 1941.*

Hoboken Historical Museum on June 19, 2006. They also spoke of their enduring Scout friendships and ongoing activities.

Lee Raines had just completed her 52nd year teaching when the interview was conducted. After her formal retirement, she had continued to teach part-time at Hoboken's Calabro School, instructing school children about religious, ethnic, and racial tolerance. At 82, she was still planning for her next year of teaching when she passed away in September 2006.

The transcript of the interview has been deposited in the History Collection of the Hoboken Public Library and in the archives of the Hoboken Historical Museum. The many images of the Little House and its joyful inhabitants, used in this chapbook, are derived from original Hoboken Girl Scout scrapbooks donated to the Museum.

Starting Out In Scouting

Lee Raines: I've been a Girl Scout for sixty-two years. I started in Hoboken Girl Scouts as a Brownie, in 1933, and my first leader was a very wonderful little person—Miriam Rothschild's sister. She read us stories every week in Brownies, and we were so thrilled. We were very young, then. We were seven, eight, nine. We could join Brownies, and the dues were only five cents a week—which, during the Depression, sounded like a lot, but right now it isn't.

We loved Brownies. Then, as soon as we were ten years old, we were allowed to enter Girl Scouts. So I entered Troop #9, [with] Girl Scout leader Betty Van Cleef. She took our Girl Scout troop to the Museum of Natural History. That was 1935. I was so, so thrilled, as a little, ten-year-old girl, to get out of Hoboken, and see a museum. I'll always remember that—how I could go from Hoboken to New York, and enjoy a wonderful trip. Because my parents rarely took me anywhere. We just stayed in Hoboken. So I was very grateful that the Girl Scouts would take us out on trips, and that's exactly what we did.

We would meet in front of Betty Van Cleef's house on Eighth



Cover of the Hoboken Girl Scout Council report for 1930-1931.



Troop #6 enjoys a party in the Little House after selling the most Girl Scout cookies, March 7, 1942.

and Washington Streets, and we'd all go together. We walked all the way to the "tubes" (we called [the subway linking Hoboken and New York] "the tubes"), to go to the museum.

There would be about fifteen Girl Scouts at that time, in Troop #9. We had such a wonderful time together. I said, "This scouting is wonderful. I'm so happy that I joined." Because I learned a lot. We had so many activities.

A year later, I joined Rosalind Homes' troop, Troop #2, and that had a lot of activities, too. There were at least eleven or twelve troops at that time, in Hoboken.

Then, in 1937, I joined my final troop, #1, which was Miss Violet Davey's troop, and I stayed with her what seems like forever, because she appointed me assistant leader. We did all the activities, so many things, together. She was also a school-teacher. We had a wonderful time. She used to take us, with

her car, on trips to Bear Mountain. She would take our troop traveling all over: Hyde Park, the zoo, Tallman Park. We went to places we had never gone before. And this is little Hoboken Troop #1! We were very, very happy with her. I stayed with her to the very end, until I became a Brownie leader myself.

Catherine Ruchovansky: I joined Girl Scouting in Hoboken in 1940; and, of course, by then, we did have our Hoboken Girl Scout House, which we called the “Little House.” It was such fun. The people I met, even at that time, some of them I still know, love, and correspond with. I telephone a lot more.

It was really fun. But I was not one of the great Scouts that they loved, at first, because I always did things different, or I laughed when I shouldn't. And they would say, “Maybe you'd better go home.” Or they said the dues were five cents, but there were six children in my family, and, like Lee said, five cents, at the time, was a lot of money.

The one thing I remember is going to the World's Fair, in 1940. The Girl Scout council hired the buses, we had to pay ten cents to get in, and we were told that if we got lost, to go back to the buses, and we would see no more of the World's Fair. I had fifty cents, and I spent my fifty cents, [so] I went back to the bus. They spent half a day looking for me. But I was back at the bus, having fun, just sitting there—me and Henrietta [Fromholz].

But we did have wonderful times. The leaders I met—Marian and Grace Spencer, Violet Davey, Mim [Miriam] Rothschild—they were all wonderful, educated women, and they



tried to instill in us a feeling that we were very good people, that we were worth something.

The Little House on Garden Street

Lee: The address of the Girl Scout House was 916A Garden Street. In the front was the [Stevens-Waldheim] Forum, [a meeting hall.] The Forum was big. In front of our Scout House was a little garden and trees [so the House was obscured], unless you walked the path to the back. Then you would see the Girl Scout House.

Catherine: You couldn't see the Girl Scout house from the street. [You would have to walk down a path] to see it. Originally, it was one large room, a bathroom and a kitchen,



Hoboken Girl Scouts in fancy dress pose with Santa during a Christmas Party at the Little House, circa 1927.

and a small room. When the Girl Scouts got the deed to the land from Stevens, we built on. Then from one end of an alley, you could see part of the Girl Scout house. But until then, you couldn't.

Lee: [Inside,] we had two large rooms, and in the middle was the kitchen. The two large rooms were where the troop meetings [were held]—Troop #1 would meet in one large room, and Troop #2 would meet in the other. We also had, around the rooms, built-in closets, where the band instruments were put. They were very large, so we really needed that space. Also, we had benches around the rooms; every room had, oh, I would say, at least eight or nine benches. You could open the top, and inside was equipment: the handbooks; arts and crafts; needlecraft. Each troop got its own bench, so we didn't lose any time finding our stuff.

I remember the walls were a light green, to resemble the Girl Scout colors. One room had a large fireplace. That was the room you entered [from] the main door. Miss Davey donated an old-fashioned [stove] from her house in Vermont. She brought it to Hoboken, and they had it built in. It was beautiful. We toasted marshmallows there, as part of our troop meeting. The girls loved it, because we never had the opportunity to do things like that.

Catherine: We had meetings at the Girl Scout House every night. We had a kitchen we learned to cook in. [Each troop had its own] troop chest, where we could put all our supplies. I remember we had cushions [that we'd take off the top of the chest] to put on the floor and sit. We had to take them outside every once in a while and beat them like crazy.



*Spring Garden at the
Girl Scout House,
April 14, 1951.*

And the gardens! Oh, we had beautiful gardens. Miss Davey would teach us how to take care of them. And we had an outdoor fireplace. We would have cookouts, when nobody, in the '40s, had cookouts. We could cook hotdogs and make S'mores and stuff like that. Our Girl Scout House was very precious to us.

The Stevens-Waldheim Forum

Lee: Every troop earned merit badges, and we'd get together [for rallies] in the Stevens-Waldheim Forum. It was wonderful, because you could see how you'd start from Brownies, Tenderfoots, Juniors—as you'd go up through the ranks, you'd earn more badges. It was fun.

Catherine: Most of the time the Stevens Forum was used to put on chamber music, any kind of play. But used to have our rallies there, to give out merit badges. [And] the Girl Scouts used it

every Christmas. We would give out gifts to underprivileged children and anyone we felt was needy. And we would have a play that was put on by Margaret Marnell from Demarest High School and Miss [Theresa] Rabold, the art teacher in Hoboken High. I was never a good actress, but Miss Rabold always made sure I had something to do.

[The Stevens Forum] was a big theatre. It had a beautiful stage and rows of seats. I wish it were there today, because today we could fill it like you wouldn't believe, with the people who are in this city. When Stevens gave it to the city, it became a health center.

Lee: It was used for community weddings, political rallies. I remember sneaking into one wedding, because I didn't know who was getting married. The music was so enthralling! I was so little then. I peeked in. It was a wonderful place then, beautiful.



-:- TRAVELOGUE -:-
HISTORY, ART and DRAMA
of
SCOTLAND and MARY QUEEN of SCOTS
Under the auspices of Girl Scout Council No. 44
to be held at the
PHILIP WALDHEIM-STEVENSONS FORUM
916 GARDEN STREET HOBOKEN, N. J.
Proceeds for the Girl Scout Sustaining Fund
Subscription - One Dollar
WEDNESDAY EVG., SEPTEMBER 25th, 1929 at 8:30

Card announcing a performance by the Hoboken Girl Scouts at the Philip Waldheim-Stevens Forum, 916 Garden Street, Hoboken, 1929.

Active Service

Catherine: Every week we would have our own troop meeting. There were about fifteen troops [in Hoboken] and there were troop meetings on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday evenings. There was only one troop that met right after school—that was Violet Davey's—and then there were two every evening except Thursday. Thursday was band. (We had a Girl Scout band.) And then there were three or four on Saturday morning.

[We did arts and crafts projects. And the Scout Leaders would teach us to make things—to be self-sufficient.] Like cooking. “How much did a cake cost, in a bakery?” Well, \$2.00. “But how much would it cost you to make it?” And this is what brought around badges and things. [There were lessons in] house cleaning. “How do you house clean?” Some of us had



Troop #10 in the Little House kitchen, April 20, 1942.



Hoboken Girl Scouts "Cookie Queen" Ride to Tallman Mountain Park, June 1950.

never cleaned a refrigerator. How do you do wooden floors? They showed us how to clean wooden floors.

Then, of course, when I joined, it was the [Second World] War, and we made curtains, because we had blackouts. We collected tin cans; we collected money at the U.S. Theatre and the Fabian Theatre in Hoboken, as girls, during the Second World War. I wasn't around for the first one! We raised money, mostly, at that time, for the Red Cross.

Lee: Also, [the leaders] served as hostesses for the USO soldiers, at the YMCA. Many of our Girl Scouts gave food, and they were so appreciative, the soldiers who came in from World War II, they didn't know how to thank us.

Many of our leaders immediately enlisted, as soon as the war started—Dorothy Van Seggern, Betty Wehr, Iona Stang, Lottie Balk. They immediately went, Hoboken girls. And many of them held ranks, like Captain. One girl could have been like

a Lieutenant General, because she was not only a college graduate and teacher, but she also was a registered nurse, and they needed nurses at the time. So they put her on top of the ranks. She was in the hospital, helping our World War II soldiers, and we were so proud. And they all came back safe.

They were very active in the community, too. The Girl Scouts were never dull.

At the peak of Girl Scouting, we had 500 registered members in the Hoboken Girl Scouts. Our local was 500 Hoboken girls, on our roster. And everyone knew everybody. You would look—"Oh, I know her. I know her"—because we went to school in this small area. All the girls went to Brandt

(junior high school) at that

time; all the boys went to Rue School, and every-

body knew

everybody,

whether you

lived

on

Jackson Street or you

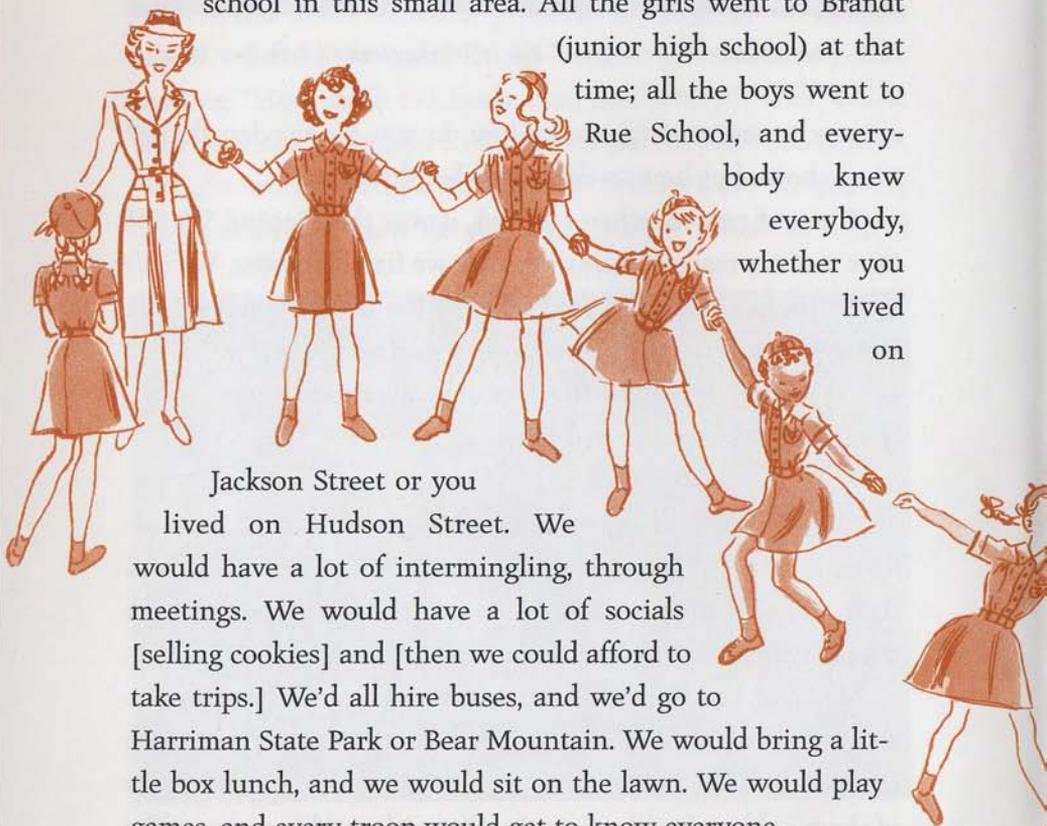
lived on Hudson Street. We

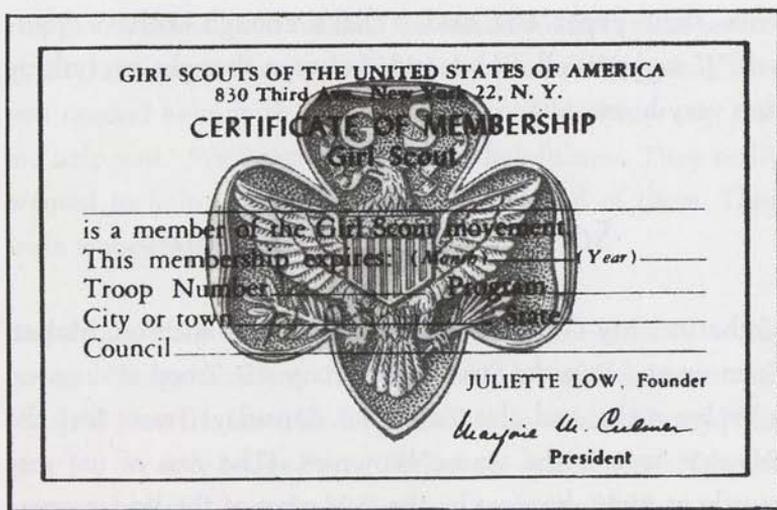
would have a lot of intermingling, through meetings. We would have a lot of socials

[selling cookies] and [then we could afford to take trips.] We'd all hire buses, and we'd go to

Harriman State Park or Bear Mountain. We would bring a little box lunch, and we would sit on the lawn. We would play

games, and every troop would get to know everyone.





Catherine: But we did have girls from all over the city, as far down as First and Jefferson, Jackson—and they walked (and we could walk anywhere in the city, in the '40s, day or night.) They were dedicated—children who just loved it.

We did a lot of walking. We'd go hiking. Like Lee said, we went places.

I remember we were supposed to go on a hike. You had to bring a box lunch, because at that time you didn't have all these backpacks and stuff. So you would pack a shoebox. And we were supposed to go up to Interstate Park. We would walk up to 22nd Street and get the 22—up to Cliffside, where Palisade Park was, and then walk down the hill to Interstate Park. That cost us like ten cents. I had my lunch and everything. And it started pouring rain. So they said, "Well, we're going to take you to the theatre, in New York."

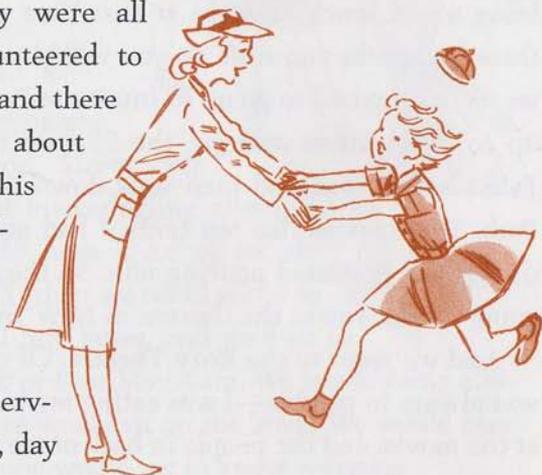
And we went to the Roxy Theatre. Of course, like I said, I was always in trouble—I was eating my hotdog and laughing at the movie, and the people in back of me hit me on the head

with their paper and said, "That's enough. Behave yourself!" [Laughs] Well, like I said, I always thought everything was very humorous.

Some Wonderful Women

Catherine: My Girl Scout leaders were Jo Smithson, Marian Spencer, and Dorothy Susselman, Troop #9. Troop #9 met on a Friday night, and also Troop #3. Saturdays [were for] the Brownie troops, the young Brownies. [The rest of us] met mostly at night, because by the '40s most of the leaders were working. I think the only leader who had free time in the afternoon was Miss Davey, who was a schoolteacher.

Lee: Most of the troop leaders, and council members, also, were women who were professional women. Ninety-nine percent, I'll say, were schoolteachers. Others were volunteers in the community, like a dean or a college professor would marry one of our local women, who would volunteer as a leader or council member. They were all women who volunteered to give their service, and there was no question about money, because this was a strictly volunteer organization. Nobody got paid, but we all volunteered our services—night troops, day



troops—whatever was needed, we would volunteer our services. And the women were very kind and good to the girls. If ever you needed help, with anything, they would always say, “Let me help you.” We loved that spirit of helpfulness. They really wanted to help us. And we were very proud of them. They were wonderful women.

Catherine: They also were nurses, bankers, executive secretaries, besides teachers. There were a lot of teachers. Nina Hatfield [was the librarian at the Hoboken Public Library.] She gave me my only badge I ever worked on—needlecraft. Oh, she was a wonderful, wonderful woman. And very kind.

Decoration Day

Catherine: We all wore uniforms. Not like today. You never went to a Girl Scout meeting without either your Girl Scout uniform, or what they called an alternate uniform—a white blouse with a collar, a black skirt (or blue), black stockings and shoes. And our kerchief—whatever color our troop was.

Lee: [Each troop had their own color neckerchiefs.] Ours—Troop #1—was gold.

Catherine: And we also had, on the uniforms, a badge. Our troop, #9, was daffodils. As we got older, and had to merge with different councils—Jersey City, East Orange, and all the others—we had to have numbers on our uniforms. But at first, we didn't. [We had symbols.]



Memorial Day Parade, 1951.

Lee: Our symbol was the purple pansy. Everyone wore a purple pansy on her uniform. It was embroidered and we were very proud of that.

Catherine: We were very competitive. Every year, on Decoration Day, when we would go into the parade, we had troop inspection, which every girl had to show up for. At that time—Decoration Day, or Memorial Day, as we [later] called it—every girl showed up, and every girl was inspected, to see how her uniform was; also, how clean and neat her nails were, and that they weren't bitten! They didn't like children to bite their nails. Then the troop that got the highest points got gold braids to wear in the parade, and they carried their flags on stage at the Girl Scout rallies we had in June.

Lee: It was a great honor.

Catherine: Oh, it was. We won once. Troop #9 won. I carried the American flag.



Troop #2 marching in Hoboken on Decoration Day, circa 1920s.

Lee: We won once, too. Brownies don't usually win. Once we did, because the other troops, apparently, didn't get very high points. So the inspector said, "Well, this time we'll let the Brownies win, because they scored the highest points." So we were very lucky that year only, that one year.

Memorial Day was the biggest parade. We all looked forward to it. The girls loved it, because they had a chance to wear their gold cords in the parade, hold the flag, and be color guards. This was their chance to shine. Their uniforms were spic and span. Everyone looked forward to it. "When are we going to march?" That was our big parade.

Catherine: I think that was the only parade in Hoboken. I can remember being in high school—of course, I was a Senior Girl Scout, I was marching, and, of course, who's a Girl Scout in high school? Only me, like I said! They would say, "Hey!" making remarks, as we walked up. And Miss Davey would say, "Don't worry. They know us." [*Laughs*] They always had a kind word of encouragement. In 1946, I was sixteen, marching in



Hoboken Girl Scouts band, Memorial Day, ca. 1953. From left to right: Girl Scout Alice Galmann holds the troop's drum, Elizabeth Mertz stands next to the band leaders at far right of the photo, Joan Fowler and Helen Kaufman. Other Scouts not yet identified.

the parade in a Girl Scout uniform. Today, there's nobody who would do that. [Laughs]

Lee: [We would march behind the band. The bandleader was] Anna Van Twisk. She was tall, and she had this giant baton and a uniform. She was our bandleader for many, many, many years. She was a kindergarten teacher at Brandt School, too.

Catherine: She was my kindergarten teacher, too. [Laughs] The drum I took out of the Girl Scout house, to bring up [to the Museum], we would march to it. Boom, boom, boom. Who was the one who had it? Roslyn was one of them [drummer]. And so was Jo [Josephine] Smithson.

Girl Scout Cookies

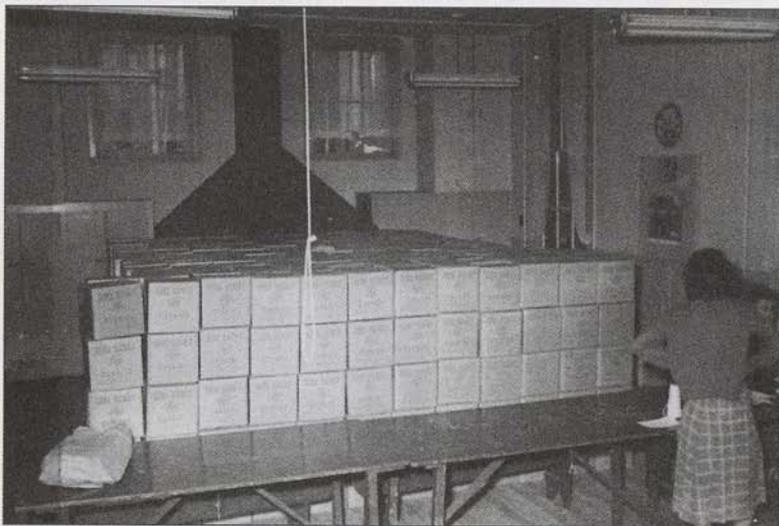
Catherine: Selling cookies? In the '40s, we had troops in Our Lady of Grace, and Mary O'Brien—

Lee:—and Mary Devereey—

Catherine:—and Mary Stevens--they sold, alone, one year, 25,000 boxes of cookies, just there. [Selling Girl Scout cookies has always been a big fundraiser.] And how! And it was fun.

Lee: One of the girls, she would sell so many—Laura Lynn Schwartz.

Catherine: Laura Lynn Schwartz. Her whole family. Her mother and father went around and sold cookies.



Boxes of Girl Scout cookies stacked inside the Little House and awaiting delivery, 1950.



Scouts deliver! Photos circa 1960s.

PHOTO ON LEFT: *Hoboken Girls Scouts, left to right: Madelyn Damus and two unidentified scouts.*

PHOTO BELOW: *Cathy Calligy.*

Lee: And they won beautiful gifts. They won the first prizes, always—the radio, something beautiful and very expensive. They sold thousands of cookies.

Catherine: They sold more cookies than anybody I know. I sold cookies all my life. I started selling them when they were twenty-five cents a box. I think they're \$3.50 now. At the time, we could knock on doors and just say, "Would you like to buy cookies?" and they bought them. Now you can't do that anymore. It's to friends and family that you sell. And of all the cookies we sold, I think there has only been a few times that a troop did not pay for all the cookies they received.



I think you could count on one hand. . . I think that's a fantastic thing, when it involved thousands and thousands of dollars. Even at fifty-cents a box, it was a lot. There were times when we sold 25,000 to 30,000 boxes of cookies!

My favorite Girl Scout cookie? Chocolate mint.

Lee: I love chocolate mint.

Catherine: But I still love the plain vanilla. [*Laughs*] The original.

Lee: The short bread. The short bread.

Catherine: They only had one kind of cookie when we started. Then they'd keep adding and adding and adding. They sell a lot of cookies, but I think one or two would be enough—or maybe three. But no matter where I go, if they're selling Girl Scout cookies. . . [*Laughs*]

Becoming Leaders

Catherine: I was never a Brownie. I was a Brownie leader, but many years later. I was only a Girl Scout—Intermediate Girl Scout, Senior Girl Scout, and then [I became] a Girl Scout leader. You had to be eighteen.

Lee: About 1940, I started [as a leader.] I was graduating high school. I came in and Miss Davey said, "Come on, be an Assistant Louie." That was her term for lieutenant.

Catherine: The troop leader was called the “captain.” Anybody else was a lieutenant. [*Laughs*] And they called us “Lieutenant Catherine” or “Lieutenant Lee.”

I was never really a troop leader. I was always an assistant. Lenore Schriefer, [who] worked for the Hudson United Bank—I went into her troop, Troop 13, as an assistant leader, or lieutenant.

Lee: Then I started my own Brownie troop, around 1950. I was twenty-four years old. Saturday morning I had my Brownie troops.

[I initiated certain projects.] The children loved to do arts and crafts. So I would invite a parent in who was very expert in something like knitting or [crafts]. She would come in and the troop would give her equipment—colored papers, glue, scissors—and she would show the children how to make arts and crafts. They loved it.

I always encouraged parent participation. Sometimes, surprisingly, they would also become leaders. They liked what we were doing, and they’d say, “Gee, I’d like to join the troop.” We had quite a number of parents joining us as assistant troop leaders. They did wonderful things—some fathers were policemen and firemen, and they came in to lecture on safety. One of





Hoboken Scout Leaders Meeting at the Little House, May 1950. Back row, from left to right, Grace Spence and her sister Marian, Ann Ciski, Millie Reese and her sister Florence, unidentified, Lee Raines, Alice Galmann (Sr.)

the merit badges was on safety, so they could earn it [that way.] Each child had a little notebook, and they would write down what was important at that time. At the end of the year, we would all discuss it. We would make a circle and ask, "What did we do this year? What did we learn?" And they would get beautiful merit badges, on the strength of what they did and what they learned.

Going to Camp, Going on Trips

Catherine: I was not [that] involved in camp. A couple years we went to Camp Lochbrae, down at Whitehouse Station, and we had two busloads of girls. That was a camp that was very modern, to an extent, because the buildings had electricity, as



Staff, Camp Hudsonia, undated photograph.

well as indoor bathrooms. It was great. We used to have two busloads of girls going, about eighty girls. I always took my car, because they always wanted a car there in case there was any type of emergency. So I drove, and everybody else went in two busloads.

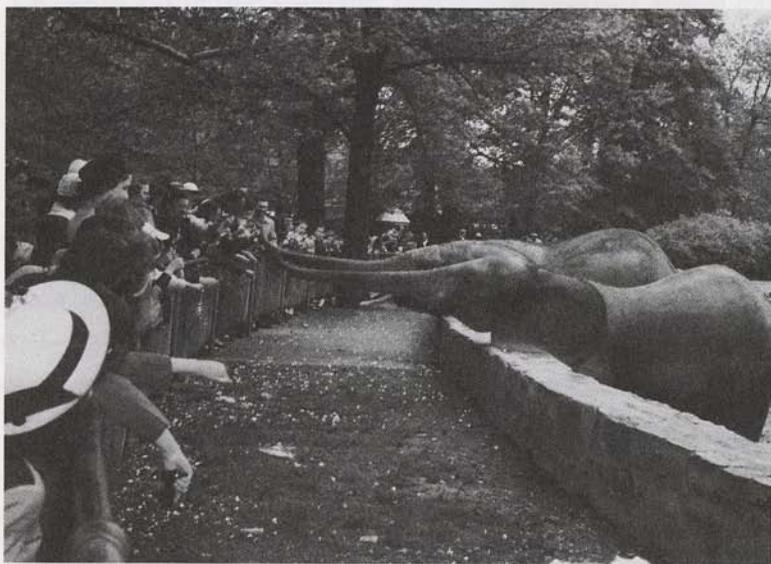
Camp Hudsonia we went to a few times, but that was a very primitive Girl Scout camp. There was no electricity in the cabins. There were outdoor latrines. I would go for the day. I was not a camper. Lenore Schriefer and Ann Ciski, Ruth Maus, Marian Spencer, they all—there were so many of them who were campers. As leaders, they went for the Pioneer badge, and had to do all these things at a camp. But I was not a camper.

Lee: One of our Hoboken leaders was [an official] leader of the camp—Helen Kaufman, and her girlfriend, who was also a

schoolteacher, and also a leader of the band. She'd go to every troop and say, "Who would like to go to camp this summer? Have your parents fill this out. I'll collect it next week. We want people to go to camp." That's how she got our local Brownies to go to camp, because there was a special section. She would encourage that [and] the Girl Scout camp.

Catherine: At one time, to go to Girl Scout camp was a wonderful experience. We had girls, at that time, from all walks of life, from the poorest girl to well-to-do families, who went to Girl Scout camp.

[But camp could be too expensive for some children.] We started, in later years, when the children couldn't afford \$50, or \$25 a week, [for camp, to go on short trips.] What we would do in our troops—we would give the girls bankbooks, and they could save \$2.00 a week, or \$3.00 a week, until they had their



Hoboken Brownies at Bronx Zoo, 1951.



*(From left to right)
Sisters Katherine
Galmann (later Rohner)
and Alice Galmann
(later Genese) on a Girl
Scout trip to Corning,
New York, ca. 1950s.*

money to go on [a trip for] the weekend. We went to Disney World. We went to Williamsburg. We went to Boston.

Lee: Washington.

Catherine: Cape Cod. Many, many places, and it was wonderful. The children were great.

Lee: I'd never been to Philadelphia. I was with them. We would go to go places where we never went before. It was good, because I saw all the [places where history was made]—Ben Franklin, Betsy Ross, something we provided the children, who never had the opportunity.

Catherine: We took them to ice shows in New York, as well as the symphony in New York, and Madison Square Garden. We really worked hard.

Lee: But they enjoyed it, and we enjoyed seeing them happy—because that was really our motive in life, as Girl Scout leaders—to see that the children are happy.

Catherine: I enjoyed the girls, but I think I enjoyed the friendships I made through the years. That was very important to me, the friendships.

Lee: Yes, because we never had the opportunity of meeting. We lived blocks away. When we got together in a troop meeting, or a leaders' meeting, we got to know each other better and we all became friends. To this day we even get Christmas cards, from many, many people we met thirty, forty, fifty years ago.

Catherine: [There are still a few people in the community, now, who were in the Girl Scouts, that we had in our troops.] Alice Galmann, Catherine Culhane, Marilyn Schwartz. I would like to hear their reaction—or what they learned from Girl Scouts.

Lee: We had the Spencer girls—Grace.

Catherine: Grace is in assisted-living, in Pennsylvania. Marian died, Ann's gone, Ruth Maus is gone. All my friends are gone.

Lee: Many of them have passed away, because this was many years ago. But there are still a few living, and the younger girls

Catherine: Yes, but how many live in Hoboken?

Lee: A few still live here, but not that many. Most all of them moved out to the suburbs. We don't know many. Just us.



Lee: Marie Scholar and Lorraine Murphy were in troops.

Catherine: They're still here.

Lee: Not that many. Because most of the girls that we had in our troops moved out.

Catherine: And now they can't afford to live here. I've lived here all my life. I'm under rent control, so I'm still here. [But I don't feel as comfortable here] as I used to. Because there was a time when it would take me a good hour to walk from 11th and Washington to 1st Street. Now I can do it in fifteen minutes, because I don't think I meet three people I know.

Of course, the difference is, too—years ago, we were home by 11:00 or 12:00, even when we were adults. Now they only go out at 11:00-12:00. It's a different world. Outdoor dining is

something we never did. I don't think I'll ever be comfortable eating outdoors, because if I want to eat out, on a day like today, I want to go into a nice, air-conditioned restaurant. I don't want to sit outside, with bus smoke, motorcycles going by and everything else.

Lee: The community has changed a great deal.

The End of the Little House

Lee: What happened to the Girl Scout house? It's a very sad, sad story.

Catherine: Well, we merged with Essex County Girl Scouts in around 1967 [so they were the owners. And it was condemned] because Hoboken wanted to build a parking garage. There was absolutely nothing wrong with it. They just wanted the land. It was, "Either you can sell it, or we'll condemn it." The council sold it. But there was nothing wrong with it, at the time. I must say, it was the end of Hoboken Girl Scouting.

Lee: [After the property was sold in 1997, and the house was destroyed, membership went down], because there was no place to meet. The Girl Scouts in my troop and my school, we'd all meet together in the Scout House. But if you've got no place to meet, if they lock it down, the parents say, "Well, I can't take my girl to a locked door."

Catherine: When you have this huge room to meet in—with all these places where we could keep our arts and crafts, our



Contemporary photo of parking garage by Robert Foster.

books and everything—that one thing. But to meet in my apartment is not great. I didn't have a kitchen the kids could use. It's too small for two people, never mind a bunch of children.

When we first stopped meeting [at the Scout House], I did meet with Troop #8, with Irene O'Boyle, at St. Peter & Paul's. There was also a big room [there], where you could play games. That was part of girl scouting—games and songs and dancing—and you could do it there, because they had the big parish hall that we could use.

Then, when they had the after-school [program], we couldn't use St. Peter & Paul's anymore. They said, "Oh, you can go down to St. Ann's." We were meeting in a classroom. Now when you go from a 50-foot-by-100-foot room to a classroom, there is nothing you can really do.

[Now they're] meeting at St. Matthew's church. They have one troop.

Lee: There's only like ten Girl Scouts now.

Catherine: In [1997, when the property was sold], there were probably around 150. We met with [the mayor at the time, Anthony Russo, to appeal to him.] We met with the Parking Authority. We met in St. Matthew's with the Council. We had parades. We had petitions. And it meant absolutely nothing. They just absolutely wanted to build that garage.

I would say that Lee and I were the last troop leaders associated with the Girl Scout House.

[The property sold for] \$125,000. And that went to the Essex Girl Scout Council. They owned it, the Greater Essex and Hudson Scout Council. Hoboken troops, or Girl Scouts in Hoboken, received nothing.

It was very difficult, and it gets more and more difficult. You see, if you have a place to meet, people will come and you can get adults to help.

The adults we had, in the '40s, '50s, '60s, and '70s and '80s, they're still such friends, it's unbelievable. They've been friends for forty-fifty years.

The Future of Hoboken Scouting

Catherine: I don't see anyone in the last ten years showing any interest in Girl Scouting. The mothers I meet or see today are more career-minded. Girl Scouting always took a lot of energy and a lot of time. I was one of the few leaders, I think, who did-



*Hoboken Girl Scouts in fancy dress dancing "on the green"
at Stevens Institute, May 12, 1925.*

n't work, and I was the go-fer. "We're going to have a meeting." "Will you get this ready? Will you get that ready? Will you do this?" I did all that.

And my husband, Steve, was very involved with scouting. From the time we were married, in the '50s. He would fix things in the Girl Scout House—when the toilet didn't work, and the heat didn't go on, and all the million and one things that went wrong. And so did Mr. O'Boyle; Pat O'Boyle was very good with coming in to Girl Scouting. The men we had on the council—Al Stein—he was wonderful. He was a Boy Scout leader, and gave a lot of time to Girl Scouting.

[Why isn't scouting big any more?] If I could come in and say, "Hey, come on. Look at this room. You could meet in this room, here," okay, maybe they would be interested. You've got a big room. You've got a place to put a cabinet and all your junk in. But when you say you've got to meet in a classroom, or

you've got to meet in your home, it's not very appealing. It's not like having your own key.

You see, if you have a place to meet, people will come and you can get adults to help. The adults we had, in the '40s, '50s, '60s, and '70s and '80s, they're still such friends, it's unbelievable. They've been friends for forty-fifty years.

Lee: If we had a Girl Scout House, I think they would come. Not as many as 500, as we had in the 1920s and '30s, but enough to start a nice Girl Scout troop. We really need that. But it's not happening, and we don't have a place. And since real estate is so precious in Hoboken, I don't think anybody is going to donate a place for us to meet. So we have to be honest and practical.

Catherine: Well, maybe we should get after some of the developers to give us a community room. Right?

Lee: If it's centrally located. That would be very nice. I wish they would. But that's not happening. I think people are more interested now in money instead of girls.

Catherine: Well, I think they're still interested in girls. I think they're very interested in their children, in a different way. When I grew up in Girl Scouting, in the '40s, when I was ten years old, up until I retired a few years ago, it was different. Our families didn't have a lot of education or a lot of money. It was something, like Lee says, that we could do. We didn't have to spend a lot of money.

You had the Women's Club in Hoboken, [which] for many years met in the YMCA, before it was such a health club—



Hoboken Girl Scouts visiting Washington, D.C., April 1983. Back row, from left to right: five unidentified Scouts, top Hoboken Girl Scout cookie-seller Laura Lynn Schwarz, Eileen Huelbig, Margaret Wallace, Scout Leader Lucy Truglio, Scout Leader Catherine Ruchovansky, Scout Leader Steve Ruchovansky, Scout Leader Irene O'Boyle, the bus driver's wife (unnamed), Scout Leader Lenore Schriefer, Scout Leader Carrie Perry, Scout Leader Christine Wallace, three unidentified Girl Scouts, Michele Kiely. First row, from left to right: eight unidentified Scouts, Scout Leader Joan Seikendick. The remaining Hoboken Girl Scouts have not yet been identified.

when it was just the YMCA. A lot of women who were interested in Girl Scouting, belonged to the Women's Club, but at the Women's Club you always had to be better educated; you had to have money. It always cost a lot of money to belong to the Women's Club. It didn't cost [a lot] to belong to Girl Scouting.

And like Lee said, you would have girls from well-to-do families as well as poor, underprivileged families.

Lee: [We were always volunteers. And] we also refused money. A parent would come in and, “Here’s—” “No, we can’t accept money.” Only the dues, what we gave to the children, for their trips. If they would pay dues, it would either go for a party or their trips. It was totally volunteer work, all these years. If you compare our organization, though, with others, we still have the most volunteer years. We’ve been here thirty, forty, fifty, sixty—

Catherine: We’re dinosaurs. [*Laughs*]

Lee: The same girls, who are still living, in Pennsylvania or Ohio, were with us, sixty, seventy years ago. This is what we did. We “bonded.” This is Hoboken Girl Scouts.

Catherine: In fact, the few years we had reunions, at St. Peter & Paul’s, and all the girls we could we sent out letters to, that we knew—we advertised it—and we had all these people come, from all over. Linda Volkemer and Helen Delaney—they had coats on when they walked into the auditorium, and all of a sudden they said, “Ta-da!” They took off their coats, and they had their full Girl Scout uniforms on, with their sashes. The two girls—they belonged to Troop #10, with Ann Ciski, when they were growing up—they must have had forty badges. They had badges from one end to the other!

The Girl Scout Promise

Catherine: Do I remember the Girl Scout promise? Of course! “I will try to do my duty, to God and my country, to help other

people at all times, and to obey the Girl Scout laws." But, they've changed it three times since then. That's the only one we remember. That's the original one.

Lee: This is the one we both knew, from over sixty years ago.



Hoboken Brownies "Fly Up" rally, June 4, 1953.

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; and 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 leave, 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 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 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. In 2001, with the support of the New Jersey Historical Commission, a division of the Department of State, the Hoboken Oral History Project transcribed and edited several oral histories to produce a series of “Vanishing Hoboken” chapbooks. Since 2002, fourteen chapbooks have been published in the series, with the support of the Historical Commission and the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, a state partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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 Encyclopedia 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, legends 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.