Hopewell Valley History Project

Case Study: Public Library in Hopewell

Douglas Dixon, May 17, 2020

A new volunteer effort to collect and organize the important sources of our local heritage in digital form, and share them online for open and convenient access.

An introduction to the Hopewell Valley History Project
Using a recent project on the Public Library in Hopewell as a case study in using the resources that we have collected

Thanks to:
Hopewell Valley Historical Society
Hopewell Museum
Pennington Library
These notes cover the overview and case study. Then go online to explore the websites. See the Help information under the About menu for more on using the sites.
We in Hopewell Valley are blessed to be surrounded by history, in the buildings and places. And we are blessed with local organizations and local people saving our history:

- Reference shelves in Hopewell Library
- Archives at Museum and Historical Society
- Community events like Heritage Weekend
- Hopewell Branch Library hosts the HVHS archives
- Pennington and other local libraries also [co-]sponsor talks on historical topics
- Trenton nearby for state, county, township, and borough materials
- Hunterdon nearby for pre-1838 archives (before Mercer Co.)
- Municipalities supporting historic preservation
- Volunteers including professionals working in the area
== Genesis of the Hopewell Valley History Project ==

**Interested in investigating historical questions**
- How do you get started? Where do you go?
- What are the key references? Where do you find them?

**Started collecting and organizing primary references**
- Building lists of sources and references
- Find online (Library of Congress, university libraries)
- Scan / photograph in municipal archives

**Shared online among ourselves ...**
- Digital

**So make a public site (!)**
- Open and convenient access to digital copies

The Project began last summer with interest in local history inspired by the Hopewell Library’s Architecture Tour and Garden Tour
- We went through the process of spinning up on local history
- Started keeping notes of things to know
- Started collecting materials – local, online, site visits
- Organized as digital files, shared among ourselves
- So … next step was to make into a public site
A Volunteer Effort
To Collect and Organize
The Important Sources of Our Local Heritage
In Digital Form to Share Online
For Open and Convenient Access

And Help Discover and Preserve
Save Rare Documents From Oblivion
Preserve Fragile Historical Documents

The Hopewell Valley History Project is:
- New, from this summer
- Volunteer, just friends and neighbors – no formal organization
- Purpose is to seek out, collect, organize primary documents of local history
- all as Digital files
- to Share online for all to access
- With the benefit of helping to re-discover old documents.
The three sites of the Hopewell Valley History Project
- Main site, with reference material
- Image site
- Interactive Map site
## Book & Map Archives

### Historical Books and Documents
- Historical Books (PDFs)
  - Atlas, History, Promotional, Industry, Suffrage
- Historical Booklets and Pamphlets (scans)
  - Fire Dept, Library, School, Church, Calendar
- Reports (municipal)
  - National Register Nomination
  - Cultural Resource Survey (1985)
- Municipal – Master Plans, Preservation Plans
- Research Projects / Notes

### Historical Maps and Aerials
- Atlases – County, Township (1850s)
- Towns – Buildings and owners
- Panoramic Birds-Eye View – Fowler (1887)
- Fire Insurance – Sanborn (1890)
- Municipal – Property, Tax
- Aerials – Surveys (1920s)

The kind of materials that we are collecting, from online, local archives, and scanning from local collectors.
== Image Archives ==

Image Archives
- Albums by Town: Hopewell Boro, Pennington Boro
  - Titusville / Washington's Crossing
  - Hopewell Township
  - Named by Street, number, date

Sources
- Books, Pamphlets, Booklets, Calendars [HPL]
- Photos and Postcards – Local collectors

Site Focus on Direct Access
- Assembled – Organized archive of primary materials
- Curated – Selected sources, scanned, text recognition, edited, TOC
  - Images identified by address & content
- Access – Reduced sizes for download (readability, not wall posters)
- Not Museum archive – Sharing digital copies & information

Plus images, with wonderful support from local postcard collectors

All with a focus on making materials accessible
Case study based on recent work for Library Week.
Typically progression from general idea to local research to using the resources on the site.
To end up with a solid understanding ... although always can dig further.
And there's more – Tantalizing references to other local libraries back to the early 1800s.
People really like books!
The definitive book on the history and geography of the Hopewell Valley is *Hopewell: A Historical Geography* by Hunter and Porter. This book is published through Hopewell Township, which uses the profits to fund historical restorations. The book is an extension on their work on the 1985 Cultural Resource Survey reports on over 1100 historic sites in Hopewell Valley (available on the site).
Blessed with two local newspapers:
- Hyper-local Hopewell Herald in the Boro
- The Trenton Evening / Sunday Times, which does a good job of covering regional communities, and includes photographs.

The good news is that you can find these on line, with text search, and read and download articles.

The bad news is that these charge for access (although check for free trial periods), and the coverage can be spotty.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 14, 1914</td>
<td>[1] Hopewell Public Library is founded at Broad and Mercer Streets, formerly a harness shop, now Vincenzo’s Pizza.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922 - 1923</td>
<td>1924 Hopewell Public Library tries unsuccessfully to buy 13 East Broad Street.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>Hopewell Public Library moves to 28 East Broad Street and shares building with the Hopewell Museum.</td>
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Every project has a starting point, with some names and places and dates. In this case, we have the story of the Hopewell Public Library, as passed down at the library, and summarized on the old website. But we’re missing precise locations, exact dates, and explanatory details.
Or your project may have multiple starting points, perhaps with conflicting information, as happens here.

And, for fun, notice the fascinating parallels with the history of the Pennington Library, including association with a National Bank, fire house, phone company, and even a harness shop!
So here the first library location, where we can use the newspapers to confirm the chronology.
And we can use the Sanborn fire map posted on the website to precisely locate it.
And we can use the Fowler map of Hopewell from the website to confirm our understanding, augmented by a photo.
Cultural Resource Survey, 1984:
“Blackwell House / Harness Shop, 64 West Broad Street
The original c. 1865 building was (in 1875) a harness shop owned by B. Blackwell. The c. 1880 expansion added a residential unit to the earlier commercial structure -- further expansion occurred c. 1905. The commercial section of the building continued to serve as a harness shop into the 20th century.”

Hopewell’s Past, Betty Gantz, 1987:
“The first harness shop was run by Stephen Blackwell, then Thomas Skillman, Wm. Pittenger, C.W. Sheppard, in 1872 J.C. Harrison, I have the deed showing Harrison’s living at 64-68 W. Broad St.; Vol. 277, P491, 1898 J.M. Phillips estate, by Louis Labaw exec., Vol. 465, P111 to Mary V. Harrison, Joseph C. Jr., Ann V. Armstrong.” (p 113, 114)

“There was a People’s Building and Loan; its meetings were held in Harrison’s Harness Shop (Mercer Street, old Eagle Bakery), March 9, 1893-1905.” (p 181)

“#14 J.C. Harrison Harness Manufactury, was at 62-64 West Broad. He rented this house because J.M. Phillips owned the house in 1891. The Harrisons bought it from his estate in 1898. This house has always been a ‘thorn’, many claiming it to be older than it seems to be. The house was on the property in 1898.” (p 197)

Less visually, we can dig into the books and document archives on the website. These provide more details on dates, places, businesses, and names. Note the confusion with the pizza shop has been ongoing.
For the second library site, the newspapers confirm the details, and provide the “boys with wagons” story.
And another Sanborn fire map confirms the location, next to where we know Schanck’s Market was.
And we have pictures from the website, including the fire engine at the side of the building, and even the front of the building with the sign.
## Site #3 Chronology (Museum)

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<td>May 1921</td>
<td>Library Week fund raiser, including Historical Pageant with 100 participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb. 1922</td>
<td>“Hopewell Free Public Library and Museum Funding and Building Association” incorporated, separate from library, to solicit funds for combined library and museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1922</td>
<td>Library and Museum Association purchases National Bank building for $6000 (13 E Broad). Building occupied by post office and phone company.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct. 1923</td>
<td>Hugh A. Smith open letter offering to sell his residence (Stout House, 28 E Broad) for the library / museum. Offered to take ownership of the National Bank building.</td>
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The story of the third site is more convoluted, so we’ll outline the timeline, staring with information from the fundraising pamphlet that’s posted on the website. This took multiple years of discussions around town to resolve.
### Site #3 (1925) == Stout House, 28 East Broad

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<tr>
<td>April 1924</td>
<td>Library and Museum Association purchases Stout House (current Museum, 28 E Broad)</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 1924</td>
<td>Hopewell Museum opens to visitors in Stout House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 22, 1925</td>
<td>Hopewell Free Public Library moves to Stout House with museum. Uses 2 rooms on west side of ground floor. [Board minutes]</td>
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And here’s a more detailed timeline of moving in with the Museum. Photos from the website show the addition and removal of the front porch on the building.
“Back in 1965, the library was moving to 13 E. Broad St. and a February 18 story related that "the dream of many years came true in Hopewell last Saturday [Feb. 13] when the Free Public Library opened the door of its new headquarters. ... Only a few years before, the museum had become a separate organization supported by donations and the library dependent upon tax money and collections from its subscribers. Each has its own board of trustees. The quarters occupied by the library were rented from the museum with the rent paid by the borough." [Hopewell Valley News, April 20, 1989].

And the final site is much more straightforward. Photos from the website show the evolution of the building, and the growth of the ivy.
So now we have a solid understanding of the story of the public library. See the full document on the website for more details.
To conclude: The Project has been active for about a year. We started last summer with a focus on collecting books and map, then added images later last year. The first quarter of this year was focused on the History Map and current-day images (before the tree leaves filled in). And now we are able to take advantage of this material to do some of our own explorations.
So we welcome contributions to this work, starting with preserving materials that you may have or know of around the area. And we need help in properly identifying and organizing materials. Or take advantage of these resources to start your own history project!