

DOTTY'S DIMENSIONS: THE COLUMN Issue #5

Autumn 2014

by Dorothy M. Kurtz

c/o Dimensional Press, 230 Kings Highway East, #188,
Haddonfield, NJ 08033

dottymk@yahoo.com

http://lp_web4us.tripod.com

Facebook under Dotty Kurtz

© 2014

Hello. I hope 2014 is being good to you. This spring and summer, I spent my New Jersey short trips in Hunterdon County. (I visit 12 places in a different county in NJ each year, and I report on six of them per column.) In the past, I've visited two places in this county: Golden Nugget Antique Market and Red Mill Museum Village, and I wrote about them in my other publications. As for this year, although I didn't plan it this way, it's nice when things work out! In this case, it is the 300th anniversary for Hunterdon County. Therefore, if you would like more information, contact Hunterdon Tourism, 14 Mine Street, Flemington, NJ 08822 (908-782-7115). In addition, I also attended two science fiction conventions (SF cons): Lunacon at the Hilton Westchester, Rye Brook, New York; and Balticon at the Hunt Valley Inn, Hunt Valley, Maryland. Then, I took a day trip to New York City and an overnight trip to Washington, DC.

Friday, March 14, 2014: If it was time for Lunacon, it was the start of the year for me, and the first place I went to was the 1) Con Suite. Once again, I had the chance to snack and talk with other SF fans in a living-room setting. About an hour later, I sat in on my first panel, 2) Taking It to the Stage, where Kathy Draves, Heidi Hooper, and Abigail Rovner gave tips on how to best present your masquerade costume on stage, and they answered questions from the audience. I mentioned that it seemed as though most costumers now had to provide their own music, dialog, or both and request what kind of lighting they wanted. Years ago, I remembered when one could just go on the stage, use the house lights, and not need any music, dialog, or both. The panel replied that costumers could still do it that way, but they have other choices as well. Although the technical crew would have preferred that you provided your own music, they could also let you hear what they had available for background music. As for dialog, when you registered for the masquerade, and you haven't

provided a CD or taped commentary, the person who registered you, usually the masquerade director, would go over what you wanted the masquerade emcee to say about your presentation. This panel explained that the audience couldn't hear your voice beyond the first or second row. In addition, this panel advised the audience to keep the presentation from about 35 to 45 seconds, and not to wear their masquerade costume around the con floor before the contest--except to head to the green room just before the contest. The most important tip was to surprise the audience, but not to surprise the masquerade director. They also talked about taking your time while showing your costume on stage--as in a bridal procession, and they defined the differences between presentation judges and craftsman judges. (The first is interested in how you present your costume on stage, and the other is interested in the close-up details of your costume.) After I told the panel that I noticed more fantasy costumes than SF costumes in these last few years, the panel felt that the economy had a lot to do with the increase of fantasy costumes. It seemed that more costumers wore fantasy costumes when the economy became worst. Next, 3) Rumble at Lunacon, found Ian Randal Strock, Dr. James Prego, KT Pinto, Keith R.A. DeCandido, and a few other Lunacon guests taking part in different contests from SF trivia contests to hula hoop contests. Additional contests included a story creation contest where the contestants had to give a short story based on an opening line that the moderator gave them, and they took part in an improvisation contest loosely based on the TV show *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* That hour went from informative to funny. Finally, before heading to bed, I went to the 4) Meet the Pros party. As with other years, I didn't meet too many professional writers, artists, scientists, or other pros, but I did get to talk with other SF fans and eat some interesting snacks, especially lamb chops, cheeses, and vegetables.

Saturday, March 15: One of the few space science events in the con program was a presentation by Anatoly Zak about his book, 5) *Russia in Space--the Past Explained, the Future Explored*. This writer/journalist wanted to make a point that the Russian space program hadn't gone away or diminished along with the former Soviet Union. By way of animated and still images on his Apple computer, I saw plans that the Russian Federation had, through the eyes of its engineers, for their space program. Some of those plans included parts for the *International Space Station*, designing spacecraft, and plans for manned missions to the moon, Mars, and the asteroids as well as building way stations for all three by around 2050. Russia also had plans for unmanned missions to go to those same places and beyond. After this, I entered the 6) Art Show room and noticed that around 85% of the art themes showed fantasy and the remainder presented SF and space. Up to about two-thirds of the art exhibited paintings and drawings, including 3-D pictures, paintings on feathers, Heidi Hooper's dryer-lint pictures, and art by children done earlier in the children's programming of drawings with glitter and other items glued on the paper. My favorite art show display, however, was a series of spacecraft paintings done by Jim Belfiore. The rest of the art mediums in this room showed sculptures, quilts, and jewelry as well as leatherwork, glassware, pottery, woodwork, and stuffed toys. Then it was back to the panels, and I listened in on the following: 7) Oh! That Again! Here, Saul Jaffe, Lee Gilliland, Dennis McCunney, Lynn E. Cohen Koehler, and a few others wondered how they could liven up a con that has been in the doldrums. During this panel, I learned that multi-track programming started at Philcon in the mid-1970s, but most of all, one of the most important things that con committees needed has been more marketing. The panel said that many con committees wrote con flyers for other literary-SF fans, but not too many of them wrote flyers for media-SF fans or people who have never been to SF cons. Others on the panel suggested passing flyers out at high schools and colleges, having the con committee volunteer for answering the phones at PBS pledge drives, appointing a marketing con committee member, and so forth. I also found out that the biggest reason general-SF cons cost less in

memberships than media-SF con memberships was because actors, who have been the guests-of-honor (GOHs) at media-SF cons, charged a speaking fee starting at around \$5,000, and it went up from there. Whereas the GOHs at general-SF cons, such as SF writers, SF artists, fan GOHs, and other GOHs, usually just had their expenses paid: membership, transportation, room, and food for themselves and a significant other traveling with them. (Regular guests only get free con membership for themselves and their traveling companion at both kinds of cons.) Overall, most general-SF cons have been looking to attract younger people to attend the con. Later, before going to dinner, I visited 8) the Dealers' Room where about half of the dealers sold reading materials of books, magazines, and fanzines. The rest sold other merchandise: jewelry, costume accessories, and sculptures as well as games, toys, dishware, coffee & tea, buttons, herbs & spices, pottery, etc.

That night, I wanted to take a closer look at the organization behind Lunacon, 9) the NYSFS (NY SF Society) aka The Lunarians. The panel, Robert Rosenberg, Joshua Goldberg, Stacy Helton McConnell, and Mr. Shirt (I forget his real name, but he wears bright-colored Hawaiian shirts to SF cons--hence, Mr. Shirt.), wondered what the future held for the Lunarians. This organization once had many members, but they currently have about 14 members, and they held their last monthly meeting in 2008. One of the reasons for the shutdown was because NYC has been a very expensive place to hold meetings. Meanwhile, having meetings in members' homes has been almost out of the question because a 501c3 non-profit club required so much space per person, handicap access, and other requirements, and most members had not had that kind of space, especially in NYC. On weekends, there has been the issue of the Jewish Sabbath from Friday night to Saturday night and the Christian Sabbath on Sunday. Therefore, that left the weeknights and Saturday nights for meetings. When it came to locations, many libraries found the Lunarian meetings "too spirited or too loud." They thought about meeting in the Westchester Hilton because the cost was less than most places in NYC. Somebody also mentioned having some Skype meetings and covered the pros and cons of that as well as pointing out how the most successful SF clubs have had their own clubhouses, and they could make extra money by renting the clubhouse to other groups. Thus, the Lunarians agreed that they had to take "baby steps" by meeting every year at Lunacon. Later, they would try for quarterly meetings, before hoping for monthly meetings again--and they would try to attract more members in the process. They could meet in any suitable place within 50 miles of the Empire State Building--even in Northern NJ. After this, the next panel was more entertaining, 10) Cinematic Visions. Edward McFadden, Dr. James Prego, Sara Grasberg, Steven Sawicki, and Kim Kindya discussed how children currently reacted to pre-computer generated special effects in older films; the panel mostly agreed that filmmakers back then had to be more creative. Then they talked about how "the future" looked in different eras in films: 1930s, '40s, '50s, and so forth. Somebody also pointed out that most SF films were optimistic until about the 1970s. For the rest of that hour, the panel gave examples of technology we have currently but we first saw in SF: moving sidewalks at airports, people texting to each other, video billboards, laptop computers, and so on. Somebody else mentioned the TV special *How Star Trek (ST) Changed the World*. Finally, I watched 11) the Masquerade. Well, the economy must have been in the doldrums, at least according to that masquerade panel I sat in on the day before because out of 12 entries, all of them were fantasy. One costume that stood out in my mind was a woman who was "Athena," Greek goddess for the city of Athens. She wore a gold lame, ancient-Greek-styled gown and posed with a model-sized column.

Sunday, March 16: Before going home, I sat in on one more panel, 12) SF Invented it First. Thus, the panel, Robert Rosenberg, Ken Ernststein, Ben Parris, and Jeff Warner, discussed what science journals the early SF writers read as

well as what inventions resulted from stories that these early SF writers wrote. Jules Vern and H.G. Wells read popular science journals, and even Thomas Edison read some SF stories in some of the newspapers that he sold when he was a boy. Mark Twain wrote a story in 1904 where he conceived of something similar to the Internet that he called the "tel-electroscope," and he even predicted people being antisocial on it. Somebody mentioned the 1950s TV show *SF Theater* and said this show presented many good predictions of technology that we have currently. Someone else said that Gene Roddenberry of ST fame read SF books and magazines in the 1930s. Then, in Jules Vern's story, *From Earth to the Moon*, Vern placed the rocket-cannon launching area in Florida, about 10 miles from Cape Canaveral. Another person on the panel recommended watching *Profits of SF*, especially the episodes covering Vern and Wells. Finally, this panel concluded with telling us about how many inventors that developed our current high-tech gadgets were once SF fans.

Sunday, April 6: Although I've seen the space shuttle *Enterprise* before, and I have also been to the *Intrepid* Sea-Air-Space Museum, Pier 86, W.46th. St., NYC (877-957-SHIP), I have never seen the *Enterprise* at its current location. Back in 2005, on a visit to the Smithsonian Udvar/Hazy Air and Space Museum in Virginia, I first saw the space shuttle *Enterprise*. In that location, it was fenced off in the middle of a special pavilion. Nevertheless, until I saw it at its new location, the *Intrepid*, I never completely realized how big it was because, this time, I was free to walk very close to the space shuttle—and even under it! (Meanwhile, when the Udvar/Hazy Museum received the space shuttle *Discovery*, they donated the *Enterprise* to the *Intrepid* Museum.) The museum also provided a viewing platform to see the space shuttle. In addition, I noticed the *Soyuz TMA-6* space capsule, and surrounding the shuttle and underneath it, I viewed exhibit cases covering the history of the space shuttles from its concept to its influence on everyday life—including pop culture. Likewise, nearby videos, too, presented the history of the space shuttles, their different missions, and the *Enterprise* flight on top of a 747 jet over NYC while on its way to the *Intrepid*. I found my experience in this pavilion fascinating—despite the *Enterprise* never getting into space. Then there was the rest of the museum. This was also the first time that I've ever been on the flight deck level because on previous visits, the weather was either too cold and windy or too hot and humid. On this day, the weather was fine as I looked at military aircraft from different nations, especially an A-12 Blackbird, the fastest aircraft in the world. Down on the hanger deck level, after seeing a film about the history of the USS *Intrepid*, I saw that most of the museum's exhibit displays were located on this level, including more aircraft. Roughly, two-thirds of the hanger deck level displayed items, texts, pictures, and videos about the *Intrepid*, life in the Navy, and other subjects about sea, air, and space. When I was there, the temporary exhibit area presented The World of Camouflage. Meanwhile, The Exploreum, on the remaining third of this level, offered hands-on exhibits that were popular with children. Finally, out on the pier complex, the public could see the inside of a British Airways concord jet and tour the submarine *Growler*. Altogether, you should allow at least three hours covering most of this museum if it's your first visit here.

Saturday, April 26: I learned something new on this day when I visited the Smithsonian Castle, 1000 Jefferson Dr., SW, Washington, DC (202-633-1000). The main thing I learned was that much of Washington, DC, was once land owned by David Burnes before Congress decided to put the new capital city on his land. His cottage was once on what has been currently 17th and C Sts., NW. How I learned this was in one of the temporary exhibit areas in the Castle. When I was there, this museum presented Souvenir Nation: Relics, Keepsakes, and

Curios. Here, I saw a piece from his cottage and other items: a fragment from the Berlin Wall, a piece from Plymouth Rock, and items from Mt. Vernon as well as items from the White House, a piece of the Bastille, etc. It was amazing what people collected in the 1700s, 1800s, and into the 20th century. Another temporary exhibit area showed pictures that photographers took from the Castle of the surrounding area of DC from 1863 and 2012. I especially found it interesting when I noticed how this area changed so much. A final temporary exhibit displayed a *Lego* model of the Castle. Nevertheless, the permanent areas alone made this place worth visiting. Therefore, if this was your first visit to DC and the Smithsonian, the Castle should be the first place for your visit because the staff at the information desk could answer your questions about the Smithsonian museums and about DC in general. In addition, the Castle provided a café, gift shop, and the crypt of James Smithson (1765-1829), benefactor for the Smithsonian museums. Meanwhile, the permanent collection included pictures and text covering the history of the Castle along with displays of 19th-century furniture. If you had only a short time to spend in DC, the main permanent exhibit room, America's Treasure Chest, showcased items from the different Smithsonian museums. Altogether, you could get a small taste of what has been available in the largest museum complex in the world as well as the Smithsonian museums in other areas of DC, Virginia, and NYC. Believe me, it would take weeks or even months to cover almost everything that the Smithsonian has to offer!

Saturday, May 24: As they have since 2001, Balticon held their four-day SF con on Memorial Day weekend, and since 2006, they have held it at the Hunt Valley Inn, Hunt Valley, MD. I arrived on the second day and entered the 1) Art Show room. The first thing I noticed was that there were less works of art on display than in previous years. I also observed that about 90% of the art displayed paintings and drawings, and the rest showed other mediums: jewelry, glassware, and sculptures as well as ironwork, woodwork, and other items. Fantasy also completely dominated the art themes, by about 99%, and the remaining one percent or less exhibited SF and space art. I especially looked at a few paintings about space by David Peacock. Then, I spent the next hour relaxing in the 2) Con Suite. Balticon still used the former 1950s-styled diner with all its chrome and neon lights. Along the side counters, the con committee supplied a few snacks and soft drinks. It gave me a chance to read part of my program book and pocket program as well as talk to a few other SF fans. Later, it was time for my next event, 3) Become a Rocket Scientist in Less Than an Hour. Here, Stephen Granade started his talk and presentation by showing clips from SF films and TV shows. Then he went on to explain why rocket science was both easy and hard while displaying charts and graphs with different equations. He also mentioned why the 1970s were just right for the *Voyager* spacecraft: The planets in our solar system aligned themselves just right for *Voyager* to use a slingshot effect to get from one planet to the other before heading out into interstellar space. In addition, he also compared chemical engines vs. ion engines, explained why NASA and others tried to launch as close to the Equator as they could, and talked about other facts in trying to make space travel easier. Overall, however, traveling in space has proven to be harder than we thought compared to 50 years ago. Finally, for that night, I saw 4) the Masquerade-In Honor of Marty Gear. Some of you may know that Marty Gear, the former masquerade emcee for many SF cons, especially Balticon, died last year, and the con committee dedicated this masquerade to him by presenting videos clips of Marty in his vampire costume emceeing past masquerades and telling his famous "groaner" vampire jokes. Then, the current emcee presented prizes to the Young Writers Contest Winners and explained the rules from the International Costumers Guild that applied to this masquerade. As for this masquerade, there were 25 entries and about four of them wore SF costumes; the rest wore fantasy

costumes. Two that stood out in my mind were a woman wearing a gown with tiny LED lights and another woman as a clockwork angel. In the front, the clockwork angel looked like she wore a gown with wings in the back, but during her routine on stage, she moved her wings and turned around to display her "wind-up apparatus."

Sunday, May 25: I started the busiest day at Balticon for me by attending the following panel: 5) How NOT to Break into Print—the Bad Advice Panel. Here, Keith DeCandido, Michelle D. Sonnier, and Joshua Bilmes told the audience not to copy certain styles in their writing because somebody else did, especially someone famous. While a new writer may learn from other writers, his or her writing should never be a carbon copy of that other writer. The panel also advised others not to try to follow the market because in addition to editors getting flooded with similar stories, by the time a writer finished his or her story, that market has most likely moved on. Writers should also accept that only one in several thousand authors would make enough money to live by writing alone. The majority of writers held other jobs to pay the bills, and the money they earned from writing has been supplemental earnings. This panel said that while many authors were promoting their published books, they were also writing or editing another book and coming up with ideas for future books. I also learned that one didn't have to write short stories first before attempting a novel because only about half of the published authors ever wrote short stories. Of course, good grammar, spelling, and punctuation were important along with letting your work speak for itself—without "bells & whistles." You shouldn't use cute-pastel colored paper, stickers, and other gimmicks. Some advice has changed because of technology—such as not self-publishing, but most of all, looking and acting professionally has been the best approach with editors. (Don't complain or insult an editor who rejected your story, and don't talk nasty about one editor to another editor because they most likely will be talking to one another—usually at SF cons and writers' conferences.) Finally, you should not act like a "jerk" because your favorite authors did. They have had plenty of published writing that also spoke for them; you haven't. Afterward, I walked around the 6) Dealers' Room where about half of the dealers sold reading materials of books, magazines, semi-pro-zines, and fanzines. The other half sold other merchandise: jewelry, buttons, and T-shirts as well as posters, pictures, games, glassware, DVDs, CDs, sculptures, etc. I also saw Jim Parsons as Sheldon Cooper from *The Big Bang Theory* in the form of a full-sized cutout. Back to the panels: 7) Well That Was Unexpected found Dr. Nicole Gugliucci talking about the history of radio astronomy while using videos and pictures in her presentation. She mentioned Karl Jansky, a radio engineer at Bell Labs, who, in the 1930s, discovered radio waves from the Milky Way Galaxy. Likewise, she covered other radio astronomers through the years to Frank Drake with his founding of SETI (Search for Extra Terrestrial Intelligence) and the "Drake Equation." She also explained the problems of building a 140 ft. radio telescope and transporting it to Green Bank, West Virginia, in 1964. Later, this telescope buckled and broke. Then she showed pictures of the *Robert C. Byrd Telescope*, the world's largest steerable radio telescope, also in Green Bank, WV. Next, she displayed pictures of small radio telescopes that she made and described the organization that she belonged to: Cosmoquest. The next event was 8) An Intimate Q&A Session About the Internet and Google with Dr. Vinton Cerf. Although Dr. Cerf started out talking about the founding of Google by two Stanford University students in their quest to access all kinds of information, a lot of his talk had to do with the FCC (Federal Communications Commission) and the issues with network neutrality and its anti-competitive behavior. He also explained that private sector labs have operated differently nowadays, compared to the days of Bell Labs. Nevertheless, he did mention the research arm of Google: Google X. Before going to dinner, I sat in on one more event, a presentation called 9) Our Solar System: Scales and Latest Discoveries. Using

her PowerPoint display, Inge Heyer showed us each of the planets and their moons from Mercury to Neptune and beyond to Pluto in the Kuiper Belt. Thus, I saw the topography of the planets and some of their moons. So far, I learned that Jupiter has 66 moons; Saturn has 50+ moons, and one of its moons, Titan, has a thick atmosphere; and Pluto has five moons. Meanwhile, I assumed that most of you knew the order of our solar system: Sun, Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, the asteroid belt, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, the Kuiper Belt containing Pluto, and the Oort Cloud. (I'm sure that I left out something, but I think I've covered the basics.) Anyway, I've always found Inge Heyer's presentations interesting and entertaining.

That night, I listened to the following talk: 10) Avoiding Obvious Science Errors in SF. Thus, Andy Love pointed out errors in certain SF stories. For example: If an author wrote a story before 1960 that mentioned Mercury not rotating, he or she wasn't wrong at the time because it wasn't until 1960 that astronomers found out that Mercury did rotate—very slowly. On the other hand, on some errors in science, the author should have known better. Somebody wrote about having helicopters on the moon, while other authors mentioned their main characters being on an outpost on the moons of one of the outer planets and having the Sun look like “a point of light like any other star.” Andy Love compared the sizes of the Sun and the planets, and even took into account the distances of the outer planets. In conclusion, the Sun would look like a “disk” on those outer planet moons and not a “point of light like any other star.” One would have to travel to the outer Oort cloud before the Sun would look like “another star.” Of course, he had to mention FTL—faster than light, but he called this error inadvertent—or errors from common knowledge. He also said that spinning an asteroid too fast would destroy it because asteroids were not solid, and he recommended reading *How to Build a Planet* by Poul Anderson and *The Borderlands of Science* by Charles Sheffield. Then, the next event has been unique to Balticon or at least to the Northeastern USA SF cons: 11) Balticon Sunday Night Short Film Festival. Altogether, Balticon presented over 20 films, but I only stayed for the first half of the films, 11 total because these films had a G to PG rating. Some of the films Balticon showed during the second half of the presentation could go up to an R rating because of certain language, graphic violence, and sex. (I have no problem with certain words and sex, but I do with graphic violence.) Therefore, out of the 11 films I saw, six were animated and five had live action. I would call seven of them fantasy, three of them SF, and the final film was science fact about the solar system. Aside from the science fact film, the rest of the films ranged from amusing to boring. Moreover, the time range for each film went from about a few minutes to almost 15 minutes. Anyhow, it was an interesting night at the movies.

Monday, May 26: Thereupon, I attended this one event before going home: 12) Editor vs. Copyeditor. The panel, Holliann Russell Kim, James Daniel Ross, Brian Koscienski, John French, and Diane Weinstein, defined the differences between a copyeditor and an editor. Thus, a copyeditor checked for errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation or the mechanics of writing; editors looked for style, believability, consistency, and so forth or what made the story work. While many big press companies hired both kinds of editors, many small presses haven't, and therefore, the editors of small press companies usually did both jobs. Then, the panel talked about their pet peeves: words in a wrong context—for example—their/there, sew/so, know/no, and so on; too many commas or not enough; British English vs. American English; and inconsistency in a story. The editors also said that they were not always sure how an author would react to a rejection. In addition, some authors misunderstood a re-reading by an editor as an acceptance; sometimes it might be but not all the time. For many editors, if there were three or more errors per page or in the story, the editor would reject the story. Many editors also rejected stories or suggested a re-write when authors tried to put their research “facts” into a story, and

it stalled the story. Meanwhile, trying to put it into a conversation between two people in that story wouldn't work either. If the editor had been laboring to get to the end of the story, that editor would most likely reject the story. Some editors also said that they read the story as the author wrote it for the first time. Later, on the second reading, the editor started editing or rejected the story.

Saturday, June 7: After passing through Stockton, NJ, and passing the Stockton Inn, the "small hotel with the wishing well" ("There's a Small Hotel" is a song from the 1936 Broadway show *On Your Toes*; the song writing team of Rogers and Hart once stayed at the Stockton Inn.), I arrived at the Prallsville Mills Complex, 33 Risler Street, Stockton (609-397-3586). This village of 18th-, 19th-, and early 20th-century buildings once contained a working sawmill, gristmill, and grain silo as well as a linseed oil mill, the Prall House, and other buildings. Nowadays, while these buildings have been still standing, the staff used them for other purposes—mostly artistic. The day I was there, while in the former sawmill, I looked at photos that people took from Stockton's past from the late 1800s through the mid-20th century. Here, I noticed places, people, and events, especially of more than a few fires and floods in Stockton. Then, in the nearby former linseed oil mill, a local artist displayed what looked like impressionists paintings of farm life: farmhouses, barns, farm animals, and so forth while he was also in the process of painting another picture. Across Route 29, at the Prall House, I had a chance to tour the rooms on the ground floor that contained some reproductive furniture copied from designs from the last three centuries as well as the largest open hearth in the local area. This place, too, exhibited art painted by a local artist, Jerry Cable, who was on hand to answer questions about the house and its former owners as well as his detailed paintings of scenes from rural areas of Hunterdon County. His art also appeared on the covers of *Hunterdon County Town and Country Living*. Finally, I walked through the rest of the complex and saw some of the other buildings: a former gristmill, a grain silo, a feed storage, and a river house next to the Delaware and Raritan Canal.

Sunday, June 8: It was fortunate for me that there was a Civil War re-enactment going on the day I visited the Holcombe-Jimison Farmstead, 1605 Daniel Bray Highway (Rt.29), Lambertville (609-397-2752). Therefore, I saw many men in military uniforms from both sides of the conflict as well as women and children dressed circa 1864. I also noticed that the Union Army camped within the complex while the Confederate Army camped in a field farther away. (Nevertheless, I suspect that when they do re-enactments in the Southern states, the Confederate Army gets to camp closer to the public, and the Union Army camps farther away.) The first thing I observed was that the re-enactors turned one of the buildings into a Civil War museum where I glanced at uniforms, badges, and metals as well as guns, ammunitions, and other items on display. Looking above these exhibits, however, I noticed farm equipment and farm vehicles from this farmstead's permanent collection. After touring this building, I stepped outside in time to see a dress parade of Union soldiers marching while other Union soldiers were playing horns, fife, and drums. Meanwhile, some of the Civil War tents showed different exhibits: a surgeon's tent with fake limbs lying about, a naval tent where I saw a re-enacted sailor from the Civil War, and a few other exhibit tents. My favorite areas and tents presented people demonstrating cooking and different crafts: candle making, rope making, yarn spinning, and so forth. As for the farmstead itself, the main barn/museum building comprised three floors of exhibit areas having to do with the different trades that people did on a farm by way of exhibit items, tools of the trade, and pictures as well as texts and some tableaus. Other areas displayed the different duties that a farm wife had to do in growing food in the kitchen garden, preserving the food, and cooking as well as making clothes,

cleaning, and other work via its share of exhibit items, pictures, and texts. One area recreated a 1910 doctor/dentist office, and another area had an exhibit about the Boy Scouts. (Maybe someday, they will include an exhibit about the Girl Scouts!) On the rest of the complex, in the other buildings, I looked at a circa 1900s general store, a post office, and a blacksmith's shop as well as a print shop, John Holcome's 18th-century farm house, and a few other structures from the 18th-, 19th-, and early 20th centuries. Overall, I learned about how important farming was to Hunterdon County and the surrounding areas in the last three centuries.

Saturday, July 19: For its 300th anniversary, Hunterdon County, in 2014, has been highlighting its different towns. So far, I've been to Stockton and Lambertville. Then, on the date above, I visited Whitehouse Station (Readington Township 908-534-9752 or 908-534-4051). While it doesn't have the fame of the first two towns that I've been to, Whitehouse Station proved to be a quiet (except for the traffic along its main street, Route 523) and a picturesque town with a downtown that contained some very pretty buildings. Along the way, I saw an interesting antique shop in a red building selling some collectables and country-styled crafts, a consignment shop selling mostly clothing and books, and an 1892 former railroad station that the town turned into a library. The rest of the main street contained a few other shops and restaurants--and private homes from the late 19th- and early 20th-centuries. Seeing this downtown only took about an hour or so of my time, but it was well worth it. (By the way, New Jersey Transit trains still operate from here to NY Penn Station.)

Sunday, July 20: Thus, I spent another quiet day in another quiet town: Oldwick (Tewksbury Township 908-439-0022). First, I entered a former 1862 church that currently served as an antique store. Unlike the antique store in Whitehouse Station, this antique store sold mostly upscale European and Asian antiques. Therefore, I browsed and dreamed! Some of these items looked like they could have been at home in the Victoria & Albert Museum in London. Later, I had lunch in a former general store that the owners turned into a deli; part of the building dated back to the 1700s. After lunch, I walked around Oldwick's historic district where I observed the Zion Lutheran Church. There has been a church here since 1714, but the present building dated back to the 1800s. On the back streets, I glimpsed at houses dating from 18th-century Colonial, early 19th-century Empire, and later 19th-century Victorian. I also noticed that many of the homeowners kept their houses in good repair and decorated their front yards with some lovely gardens. Thus, this whole weekend was quiet but interesting.

Saturday, August 23: It was still daylight when I arrived at the NJ Astronomical Association's (NJAA) Paul Robinson Observatory, NJ's largest observatory, at Voorhees State Park, High Bridge (908-638-8500), for my third Hunterdon County weekend. Because of this, I walked along part of the NJAA's Solar System Walk or trail in the nearby woods. Along the way, the NJAA placed plaques depicting the different planets in our solar system starting with a plaque describing the solar system via texts and pictures. This seemed easy enough at first, but the NJAA also placed these plaques on a much smaller scale in relation to the distance of the planets in the real solar system. Therefore, I had no trouble reading and walking to the plaques about the Sun, Mercury, Venus, Earth, and Mars--the inner solar system. Then, I noticed that it was a longer walk for me to get to the plaque about the Asteroid Belt, and it was even longer to get to the Jupiter plaque. At this point, I knew that it would start to get dark before I tried to get to all of the outer planet plaques--Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune. So I headed back to the observatory. (Pluto is no longer a planet, but a planetoid in the Kuiper Belt, and I suspect

that I might have had to travel a very long way to get to where that would be on this scale.) Once inside, I looked at the pictures, texts, and exhibit items. On one wall, I saw pictures explaining the birth and evolution of a star, and on the other wall, I observed pictures of other suns/stars in the Milky Way Galaxy. Among the exhibit items, I noticed scale models of spacecraft, suns and planets as well as pictures of astronauts, including a picture of Buzz Aldrin when he visited this observatory. Meanwhile, a small gift shop sold astronomy and space-exploration books, toys, and other souvenirs. Finally, it was time for the talk/presentation. For every fourth Saturday, the NJAA had a different guest speaker who talked about his or her special subject and often accompanied the talk with pictures, videos, or both. The night I was there, Alan Witzgall had a talk and PowerPoint presentation about "Lunar Geology: A History of the Moon and Why We Need to Go Back." With a degree in earth science, Mr. Witzgall said that he has been the senior technician for an optical company and that he made telescopes when he was in high school and college. Then he discussed such subjects as the birth of the moon and what materials composed the rocks and minerals on the moon, and he showed several maps of the moon's surface. He also talked about how craters formed on the moon, what future moon bases/colonies might be like, how nothing matched a human mission vs. a robotic mission, and other subjects. On the one hand, it was a fascinating hour's presentation; on the other hand, the skies above were too cloudy to see much of anything through a telescope that night.

Sunday, August 24: I pursued more earthly adventures on this day because I attended the Hunterdon County 4-H & Agricultural Fair, Ringoes (908-782-6809). The local 4-H organization played host to this fair for five days, every third week in August. When I was there, I saw different events involving horseback riding, dog relay games, sheep shearing, and musical groups singing mostly gospel and country & western songs. As for the display buildings and tents, I noticed plenty of animals: horses, cows, and sheep as well as goats, rabbits, alpacas, and llamas. Among the birds, I must have seen hundreds of chickens, ducks, and turkeys. For edible displays, I looked at plenty of prize-winning and non-prize-winning produce, baked goods, and jars (canning) of different food items. Non-edible displays showed drawings, paintings, and photos in the fine arts; decorative items on exhibit included quilts, knit & crochet clothing and blankets, and other needlework crafts. I also toured areas that highlighted antique tractors, vintage racecars, and robots—including a 3D printer. Rounding out the fair, one of the exhibit tents had different tables set up by several groups promoting their causes, and vendors on the midway sold food and souvenirs. Finally, I glanced at a beekeeping area as well as amusement rides, pony rides, a petting zoo, a calliope, and numerous other things that I didn't have time to see in one day. This whole experience proved to be very colorful, entertaining, and educational!

Before I sign off, I'd like to mention the passing of a friend of mine, Page Eileen Lewis, March 1, 2014. I first met Page at a ST con in 1981, called Starcon, in NJ. What I remembered was her wearing a pink gown for the masquerade, and I was behind her in line to show my costume for this same masquerade. We talked, and since then, I have seen her at other ST and SF cons, and she entered the masquerades at some of those cons. She also served for a time as the President of the George Takei Fan Club. In about the last decade and a half, she had to get around by a motorized scooter due to heart troubles, but I liked to remember her best during those times we had conversations at different SF cons. Goodbye, Page Eileen Lewis, 1955-2014.