

THE STATE I'M IN #6

By Dorothy Kurtz

Welcome to the last issue of this column. Starting next year, 2012, I'll be including my New Jersey trips into a twice-a-year column called DOTTY'S DIMENSIONS: THE COLUMN. In it will be trips that I've made during a six-month period. The odd-numbered issues will cover trips from March through August, and the even-numbered issues will include those trips I made from September through February. In addition to the NJ trips, I will also write about trips to New York City; Philadelphia; Washington, DC; nearby states; science fiction conventions, etc.

During 2011, I visited Morris County, NJ. I have visited a few places in this county before: Jockey Hollow in Morristown National Park and Washington's Headquarters in the Ford Mansion in Morristown. Because I wrote about them in my past NJ columns, they won't be listed here. Nevertheless, there is plenty to see and do in this county. For more information, get in touch with the Morris County Tourism Bureau, 6 Court Street, Morristown, NJ 07960 (973-631-8181) or www.morristourism.org.

Thursday, May 19, 2011: I started this trip by seeing how the rich and famous lived in the early 19th century at Macculloch Hall, 45 Macculloch Ave., Morristown

(973-538-2404). Because I was a bit early for the house tour, a member of the staff invited me to walk around the backyard garden. Here, in the oldest garden in Morristown, I saw different varieties of roses, other flowers, and other plants in an English-styled landscaping. Afterward, I toured the 1810, Federal-styled home of George Macculloch, a self-made man who founded the Morris Canal. Our very informative tour guide, who taught history at a nearby college, told us the details about Macculloch, his family, and about everyday life in Morristown in the early 19th century--in between showing us furnished rooms from that period. This family was wealthy, but my favorite piece was a painting of Morristown in the mid-19th century. When the Morris Canal didn't prove to be as profitable as the Erie Canal, Macculloch turned his house into a boys' school. We also learned about the man responsible for the 1949 restoration of this house: W. Parsons Todd. Other sections of the house included a gallery of the cartoons that Thomas Nast drew in the 19th century. Thomas Nast created the donkey for the Democratic party, the elephant for the Republican party, and the image of Santa Clause as a jolly, fat, white-bearded man in a red suit. Nast also once lived across the street from Macculloch Hall. The rest of the rooms showed temporary exhibit themes. When I was there, I

saw 18th- and 19th-century silverware that different silversmiths made, such as Paul Revere, Myer Myers, and Joseph Richardson. Another room presented "Everyday Life in the 19th Century" via texts, drawings, and exhibit items. Overall, I thought it was a good introduction to the sights in this county.

Friday, May 20: For this day, I visited a place where I learned that agriculture and industry could coexist, and of how one man, Samuel F. B. Morse, could be a painter and a scientist. Historic Speedwell, 333 Speedwell Ave., Morristown (973-285-6550) included a village of eight buildings from the 18th and 19th centuries. (Although some of the buildings are original to this site, officials have moved some of the other buildings from different areas of Morristown.) Starting with the Visitors Center in an 1820s house, I looked at pictures and texts covering the construction and history of the first steamship to cross the Atlantic: the *SS Savannah*. The iron works at Speedwell made most of the machinery for this ship. Then our guide led us on a tour of a few more buildings. Inside the main house, the Vail House, she told us the history of the Vail family, starting with Stephen Vail, who, with two partners, founded the Speedwell Ironworks in 1807. By 1815, Vail bought out the other two partners and became the sole owner

of the ironworks. As the ironworks prospered, Vail purchased more adjoining property and wanted to start a cotton-weaving factory. He turned much of the rest of the grounds into a self-supporting farm, and he served as a judge as well. Later, his oldest son, Alfred, decided not to go into his father's business but to study for the ministry. While attending New York University, Alfred saw Samuel F. B. Morse demonstrate an early version of the telegraph. Afterward, Alfred offered Morse technical and financial assistance, and both men came to Speedwell to improve the telegraph. While he was there, Morse painted portraits of Stephen Vail and Stephen's wife, Bethiah. In 1838, the telegraph was in operation at Speedwell. Around this time, Stephen's younger son, George, took over the ironworks. Years later, the ironworks moved to Brooklyn in 1873, and the Vail descendants owned Speedwell into the 1950s. In 1966, Historic Speedwell became a non-profit, historical corporation, and in 2002, it became part of the Morris County Park Commission. During my visit, I noticed the 1820s Vail House restored to the way it would look for a wealthy family in the mid-1800s. The interior included Doric columns, fancy plasterwork, woodwork, and especially the portraits of Stephen and Bethiah Vail. In the second building, the Wheelhouse, our guide operated the 24-foot

waterwheel that in the 19th century made bone into fertilizer and operated the adjoining factory. Although Stephen Vail wanted to turn the factory into a cotton mill, instead, it became a sawmill and a gristmill. When our guide took us there, we saw pictures, texts, and exhibit items, some of them hands-on exhibits, explaining how the telegraph worked. Later, I was free to enter some of the other buildings on my own: The Granary showed farming tools from the 19th century, and texts and pictures gave more details about the Vail farm. At the Homestead Carriage House, I got to know how Speedwell Ironworks began, prospered, and declined. In another room, via pictures and texts, I became informed about 19th century working conditions for the ironworkers. Throughout the year, Historic Speedwell offers many special events and demonstrations to entertain and educate the whole family.

Saturday, May 21: If you've ever dreamed of living in a log cabin or a log house, but you would settle for visiting one, The Stickley Museum at Craftsman Farms, 2352 Rt.10 West, Morris Plains (973-540-0311) should fill your desire. In the early 20th century, Gustav Stickley, a leader of the Arts and Crafts Movement (influenced by William Morris in England) reacted against the Victorian mass-produced furniture and items. He also disliked the

gingerbread-styled houses of the time with its elaborate, embellished interiors; he felt that people should go back to simpler designs and handmade craftsmanship. In the early 20th century, he bought property in Morris Plains and completed his log house in 1911 that he envisioned as a farm school for boys. Around the grounds, he planned a self-sufficient farm. At one time, his property had vegetable gardens, orchards, and livestock. He believed in whole foods long before the Whole Foods Movement of the 1970s. Once inside the log house, Stickley had his own ideas about furniture. Here, he designed many pieces using "clean, straight lines" with little or no ornamentation in mostly dark-wood colors. Although his place may currently look "quaint," back in 1911, he was an innovator and one of the first people in the area to have electric lighting (15 watts), indoor plumbing, and so on. Nevertheless, he borrowed ideas about joining pieces of furniture together by studying medieval furniture. He avoided using nails by carving wooden joints and pegs to hold up his furniture. Throughout the 1910s, Stickley's "Mission-styled" furniture and Craftman houses became popular, and he sold them through his catalog and magazine, *The Craftman*. By the time he moved out of his log house in 1917, his ideas about houses and furniture were going out of style. Other people

owned the house until the 1980s when the Township of Parsippany-Troy Hills became the owner. Later, the Craftsman Farms Foundation, Inc. restored the house, and nowadays, some people prefer the simple styles from Gustav Stickley's designs. Although I like to look at different styles of furniture, I too would prefer a simpler style of furniture in my own home.

Sunday, May 22: Before going home, I stopped at the Ralston Cider Mill, 336 Mendham Road West (Rt. 510), Mendham Township (973-326-7600). Built in 1848, and originally a gristmill, in the early 20th century, this converted cider mill produced apple cider, applejack, and "Jersey Lighting." After looking at pictures and texts covering the history of the mill and the local area at the Visitors Center, our guide took us into a room to see a DVD presentation. Here, we watched how this mill made beverages from the local apples. Inside the mill, our guide explained how the workers built the mill as well as how the machinery worked. In the meantime, he operated different conveyor belts, presses, and gears. He also said that although the mill was once operated by water power, because of local regulations regarding water, Ralston Cider Mill nowadays uses electricity. I also learned how big an industry cider once was to the local economy.

Thursday, August 4: If you saw nothing else in Morris County, you should have seen this place: Morris Museum, 6 Normandy Heights Road, Morristown (973-971-3700). The most popular permanent exhibit area, Musical Machines & Living Dolls, found me spending over an hour in this section alone! Because it was a Thursday, a volunteer who collected music boxes, explained how these devices worked and did demonstrations on several animated figures as well as operated different musical machines. Many of these machines dated from the 1800s, and it was amazing how people and businesses provided music and entertainment in the days before records, CDs, and other forms of recorded music as well as before films and TV. Nearby videos showed many of those animated figures in motion. Other permanent exhibit rooms covered these smaller galleries: Rocks and Minerals, including a small florescent display of rocks under a black light. The Mammals Gallery showed animals in display cases and in a few dioramas. Then, the Dodge Room was a room furnished in mostly 1800s furniture and displayed portraits of people from the past. (Part of the museum included a mansion from the 1800s.) On the upper level, I noticed an American Indian Gallery exhibiting items that the different tribes of Native-Americans used, and a Dinosaur Gallery displayed pictures and models of

dinosaurs as well as dinosaur bones. Another room on this level, Model Railroad Gallery, showed several model trains circling what looked like Morristown, circa 1960. In the basement level, I glanced at more displays of the musical machines and animated figures that the museum didn't have room to show in the main gallery. About half of the museum's space included temporary exhibit rooms, and when I was there, the main temporary exhibit was Jersey Rocks: A History of Rock & Roll in the Garden State. Via pictures, texts, and videos as well as audio presentations, objects owned by different recording artists, and other items, I learned about how much NJ took part in the early years of rock music. This gallery covered the 1950s, 60s, and into the 70s and beyond. Some of the exhibits and information brought back memories to me, and some of it was new to me. Other temporary exhibit areas covered quilts, past clothing, and hats as well as purses, watercolor paintings, and student art in paintings. Although this museum didn't look large from the outside, inside it was a different story: I spent at least four hours here.

Friday, August 5: According to some sources, the Morris County park system has been the best in NJ and usually made the top-ten best county park systems in the USA. The Morris County Park Commission owned over 18,000

acres of several parklands. Because I liked to swim, I visited Lewis Morris Park, the oldest Morris County park, off Route 510, Morris Township (973-326-7616). As far as I knew, this was the only Morris County park that provided a swimming lake: Sunrise Lake. Compared to some private and state park lakes that I've swam in during past years, this lake looked smaller. While the water wasn't clear, it also wasn't cedar water either. It did have some tiny bits in it from the trees, but I still felt refreshed as I swam and later, ate my lunch at a picnic table. I noticed a few families, couples, and individuals swimming, sunning, and eating their lunches as well. For extra charges, the public could rent paddleboats, rowboats, and kayaks. Another extra attraction for an extra charge was an inflatable platform farther out in the lake called a "wibit." Meanwhile, a nearby snack bar sold food to those who didn't bring a picnic lunch. Anyway, entering the park was no problem, leaving, however, was a different story. There were few to no directional signs until after we drove a short while, and then I saw the Jockey Hollow entrance in Morristown National Park. Therefore, we entered Jockey Hollow, and the staff at the visitors center directed us to I-287. Nevertheless, I still recommend visiting Sunrise Lake at Lewis Morris Park for a relaxing and refreshing time.

Saturday, August 6: For those curious about farm life in the early 20th century, Fosterfields Living Historical Farm, 73 Kahdena Road, Morristown (973-326-7645) should enlighten them. This farm was not a replica farm but a real working farm since the 1700s. In 1854, General Joseph Revere, grandson of Paul Revere, bought the land and built the main house called "The Willows." Then in 1881, his widow sold the property to Charles Foster. Foster turned it into a gentleman's farm and called it "Fosterfields." While he was here, Foster pursued his hobbies of cattle raising and cattle breeding. When he died in 1927, his daughter, Caroline, took over operations of the farm. In addition to running Fosterfields, Caroline Foster was active in the social, cultural, and political life of Morristown society. In 1975, at the age of 98, Miss Foster donated Fosterfields to Morris County, and she died at 102 in 1979. Because Caroline lived in changing times, this place reflected those changes: the Transportation Room displayed the ways she traveled through the years from horse and buggy to a 1922 Ford Model T car to a 1929 Hupmobile. By way of a horse-drawn wagon, I got my orientation around this farm; then, I explored on my own. Here, the staff, dressed in farm clothing from the 1920s, explained what crops they planted, what farm animals they took care of, and what

other chores they did. Meanwhile, I noticed displays of old farm equipment, and I looked at a few rooms in a 1920s farmhouse that once housed the farm superintendent. For an extra charge, I toured The Willows, a Gothic-Revival home of wood arches. The arch theme followed throughout the rooms, many of which stayed the same as when the Reveres lived there. (Charles Foster also bought much of the furniture from Mrs. Revere.) I was especially impressed with the trompe l'oeil walls and ceilings that the interior designers painted to look like it had real wood with depth. Although the Fosters changed a few of the rooms to their liking, most of the interior of the house looked the way the Reveres left it. (Caroline Foster admired the Reveres.) Finally, I took another walk through the farm and glanced at the out buildings, animals, and fields before heading back to the Visitors Center. This Center displayed texts, pictures, and items explaining more about the history of this place and about 19th-century life in general.

Sunday, August 7: I ended my last day of this mini-trip by visiting the Cooper Gristmill, 66 Route 513, Chester (908-879-5463). Since the 1700s, there had been a mill here. In 1825, Nathan Cooper bought the property and had the current mill built in 1826. Shortly after, he died. Then his nephew, Nathan A. Cooper (1802-1879), owned the

mill until his own death. When I was there, our tour guide explained that there were many different kinds of mills in this area: gristmills, sawmills, cider mills, and so forth. Currently, only the gristmill remained standing. Then, she demonstrated how the mill turned grain into flour. This mill grounded many kinds of grains: wheat, corn (maize), oats, buckwheat, etc. Later, she showed us what kinds of maintenance the workers had to do to the equipment to keep this mill running smoothly. Once outside, she operated the big waterwheel, and she also took us to the mill's power source: a nearby pond. By the late 1800s, many of these mills became obsolete because of the big milling factories in the Midwest and the railroads that could ship larger quantities of grain cheaper over longer distances. Just the same, it was interesting to see how things operated in the not-too-distance past.

Thursday, November 3: This trip to Morris County made me realize how lucky I was because of the freak snow storm last week. Although our area (Camden County) only received a coating to an inch of snow, Northern NJ fared worst, especially Morris County. Many places lost power, and this led to overcrowding in nearby hotels. On the date above, the local power company restored the power to most places in the area, including the place that I visited: Acorn

Hall, 68 Morris Ave., Morristown (973-267-3465 or www.acornhall.org). Built in 1853, and remodeled in the Italianate-Villa style in 1860, it has been the headquarters for the Morris County Historical Society since 1971. Unlike many other older homes that the public may tour, most of the furniture here belonged to the former owners: the Schermerhorn and the Crane-Hone families. Therefore, I saw many elaborately carved and guided furnishings, interior moldings, and other items as well as artworks on the walls in the forms of 19th-century crafts, paintings, and family portraits. Even the carpeting belonged to the Crane-Hone families; in some places it looked threadbare, and in other places it had its full pile. I was especially impressed with the artificial 3-D molding and marbling effects painted on some of the walls and furniture. Because the Crane-Hone families didn't feel the need to change the interior of the house too much through the years, overall, it felt like I was observing a glittery-Victorian fantasy. A few of the rooms included changing exhibits, and when I was there, the Morris County Historical Society presented Over Here and Over There: Morris County's Role in World War II. Thus, via pictures, texts, and display items, I learned more about the people from Morris County who served both at home and overseas

during that war. In addition, I looked at displays of clothing from about 1941 to '45, both military uniforms and civilian clothing, especially a lovely, white, satin wedding gown. Outside, Acorn Hall had a nice garden of pleasant landscaping and seasonal flowers.

Friday, November 4: Some towns in New Jersey still have active downtowns, including the above mentioned Morristown and the town that I visited on the date above, Madison. On my way to and from my destination, I noticed both upscale and practical businesses along Madison's Main Street or Route 124. In the center of town, where the two main commercial streets met, Main and Central, I saw a prominent tall clock. As interesting as the downtown was for me, the highlight included visiting the following place: the Museum of Early Trades & Crafts, 9 Main St., Madison (973-377-2982 or www.metc.org). Housed in a building that looked liked a church (but it never served as a church), this place once served as the Free Public Library of Madison. Since 1969, this Romanesque-Revival building has been the home of the Museum of Early Trades & Crafts. Once inside, I found the interior looking as interesting as the exhibits, especially the arched ceilings, stained-glass windows, and the stenciled-brick walls as well as the chandeliers, the fireplaces, and other

Romanesque touches. As to the exhibits, on the main floor, the museum showed everyday life for a farm family, circa 1830, by way of texts, pictures, and display items of tools, clothing, and building materials. Downstairs, the lower level displayed the tools and finished products of over a dozen trades that men and women practiced in the 18th and early 19th centuries, before the days of the Industrial Revolution and mass production. Some of those trades included the blacksmith, cooper (barrel maker), and shoemaker as well as a cabinetmaker, printer, and so forth. Back on the main floor, I observed the temporary exhibit area. When I was there, the museum presented Whimsies: Ken Olsen & the American Folk Art Tradition. This current resident of Madison specialized in humorist, contemporary, and folk art. At first, his objects and paintings looked similar to 18th- and 19th-century folk art. However, on a closer look, I realized that folk art back then didn't go quite this far. I especially noticed this in his portrayals of certain American historical icons: George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Abraham Lincoln, etc. Nevertheless, it all proved to be a good day in this charming town.

Saturday, November 5: Located in the NJ Firemen's Home, the NJ Firemen's Museum, 565 Lathrop Ave., Boonton (973-334-0024 or

www.njstatefiremenrelief.com/nj_firesmens_home/museum.htm) has been a museum devoted to fire fighting in the past. This two-story museum comprised early fire fighting vehicles from the horse-drawn fire engines in the 1800s and early 1900s to motorized fire engines of the mid-20th century. In addition, I saw fire-engine models, fire-engine toys, and fire hats as well as many memorabilia. This last category included pictures of fires and fire fighters, badges, and patches as well as texts, prizes, and other items honoring the different fire companies throughout the state of NJ. Although this place mainly covered NJ fire fighters, a few other sections of this museum exhibited some badges, patches, and other items from fire companies in different parts of the USA. Later, I looked at Boonton's downtown. Here, on a hilly, winding street, Main Street has been the commercial center. Indeed, I saw much retail and eating establishments located in 19th- and 20th-century buildings. Meanwhile, the merchandise ranged from antique stores to shops selling 21st-century artworks, clothing, gifts, and so forth. This hilly downtown reminded me of across between the Manayunk section of Philadelphia and parts of San Francisco.

Sunday, November 6: I spent this day at a flea market. Nevertheless, what made this flea market unique was unlike

many flea markets that took place in empty parking lots (car parks) or in some out-of-the-way place, this flea market took place on the downtown streets. Dover Flea Market, West Blackwell St., Dover (973-989-7870 or www.doverfleamarket.com) has been around since 1998. On Sundays from April to December, the police roped off a few of the downtown streets from traffic, and vendors reigned supreme. Here, the vendors sold jewelry, clothes, and collectibles as well as household equipment, accessories, and other merchandise. Other vendors sold pretzels, kettle corn, and produce. Likewise, some of the nearby stores and restaurants were opened for business. I have not been much of a shopper; I usually bought something if I thought I needed it. At the Dover Flea Market, however, I found a few items that I've been looking for in other places. Even if you don't buy much here, a walk through this flea market is worth it, especially with the views of the nearby hills as a backdrop. (You can take the NJ Transit train to Dover; the station is only a few blocks from the market. If you drive here, the nearby parking lots [car parks] are free on Sundays.)