



Spring Lake Historical Society, Inc.

Newsletter

May 2025

Vol. 48, No 1

44th Annual

SPRING LAKE HISTORICAL SOCIETY *HOUSE TOUR*

Thursday, June 5 2025 • 10:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.



House Tour Ticket Donation: \$60.00

For Tickets on Tour Day

Spring Lake Railroad Station ~ Warren Avenue

(\$50 if tickets purchased prior to June 5, 2025)

For Tickets Prior to Tour Day

Kate & Co. ~ 1108 Third Avenue • Bain's SL Hardware ~ 1301 Third Avenue

J. McLaughlin ~ 1306 Third Avenue

For further information please call Spring Lake Historical Society (732) 449-0772

Find us on Facebook and www.springlakehistoricalsociety.org

Rain or Shine • No Refunds

Russell “Bunky” Hurden

A Family Oral History Compiled by Scott McMurray

The heart-warming scenes of children and adults skating on Spring Lake this past winter sparked associations with Norman Rockwell at his small-town Americana best. For Spring Lake residents who came of age in the 1960s and '70s, skating al fresco may conjure memories of a related seasonal ritual: A uniformed giant of a man nicknamed Bunky leads a gaggle of children pied piper fashion out onto the ice-covered lake, pulls out his revolver, points it at the ice and ... but we are getting ahead of ourselves.

Russell “Bunky” Hurden personified law enforcement for a generation of Spring Lake adults and children alike. Quite literally larger than life compared to most, the Spring Lake native towered over nearly everyone in town at six foot, six inches and 270 pounds. After decades in law enforcement, rising to become Spring Lake’s chief of police, Bunky passed away in 1998 at age 64. Two of Bunky and his wife Gail’s four children, Dana and Mike, often finishing each other’s sentences, shared their memories of their father in an interview with the Historical Society:

Bunky’s early years were all about trying to fit in. His nickname derived from a Depression-era newspaper cartoon character, Bunky Hurden was born and raised in Spring Lake at 8 Valandora Court. His bulky frame standing out from the crowd from an early age, Bunky was hard to miss as a teenager on the streets in town or on the football field as a lineman for Manasquan High School.

Wanting to serve his country, Bunky enlisted in the U.S. Navy after high school in 1951 and shipped out for Korea. An excellent athlete and marksman, he signed up to join the elite unit known as Navy Frogmen, predecessors to today’s Navy SEALs. “He wanted to be a Frogman in the worst way,” Mike said. “But they either didn’t have a wetsuit big enough to fit him, or they didn’t want to make him one.” Instead, Bunky piloted the small, high-speed boats that delivered the Frogmen from their destroyer to their drop points, often under cover of darkness. It’s likely that at least two Frogmen had to man the bow to keep the boat on an even keel with Bunky in the stern.

Leaving the Navy in 1954, Bunky’s aim was to follow in his father, Russell Sr.’s, footsteps and join the State Police, which then as now trained at the Army National Guard Camp in Sea Girt. Again, it wasn’t a good fit. “Believe it or not, if you couldn’t fit in their cars back then, you couldn’t join the State police,” Mike said. A brief stint with Jersey Central Power & Light that year proved that Bunky was an adept pole climber but did little to satisfy his hunger for public service.

In 1955, Bunky found his calling and joined the Spring Lake police force. His father had long since made the move from State Police to Spring Lake, having joined the town police force as chief in 1930, a few years before Bunky was born. To avoid any appearance of nepotism and to follow protocol, Bunky started at the bottom of the seniority rank as a patrolman. Being a plus-sized patrolman wasn’t an obstacle to success in the town where virtually everyone knew his name, or at least his nickname. And they managed to find patrol cars where he could slide in behind the wheel.

Bunky’s prowess as a marksman gained wide renown early in his career when he answered a call after hours for help from a retired gentleman who had a squirrel take up residence in his front parlor. Bunky loaded his service



Continued on page 3

Russell “Bunky” Hurden

Continued from page 2

revolver with a .38 round filled with bird shot, which covered a broader area than a single bullet. The old man gestured at the unwanted house guest posing on his fireplace mantel and Bunky downed the intruder with a single shot. “I’ve never seen a shot like that in my life,” the man was said to have exclaimed, after checking that he had not, as he feared, suffered a heart attack on the spot.

Bunky engaged in the borough practice of policing that, then as now, emphasizes proactively keeping the peace. It helped that he was naturally good-natured, outgoing and always offering a helping hand, literally and figuratively. Dana started kindergarten in 1972 and remembers Bunky taking his turn as crossing guard. “His personality and who he was in town was larger than life,” she said. “He was always helping people, he was always there for people. People came to him for advice for the smallest things to the largest for help... maybe their child was going through a tough time and he could guide them a certain way.”

None of which meant that Bunky was a pushover when it came to the nuts and bolts, or perhaps knuckles and boots, of law enforcement back in the day. Mike and his friends received their share of kicks in the derriere from Bunky when he caught them acting out. Indeed, being on the receiving end of Bunky’s boot was a rite of passage for many a Spring Lake lad. “I can remember guys way older than I am coming up to me and saying, ‘your father kicked me in the butt one time,’” Mike said.

Most of the time Bunky was a benign presence in town, which brings us back to the frozen lake and the serpentine line of anxious young skaters. Bunky’s test for skate-ready ice was to fire his service revolver straight down into the ice. If the bullet didn’t pass through the ice and water spout through the hole, “skate!” was his command. “Are you sure? Shoot again!” some kids would often cry, hoping for more fireworks. Others recalled thinking that if a man that size could walk out onto the ice and it didn’t crack, surely it was safe for a bunch of kids to skate on.

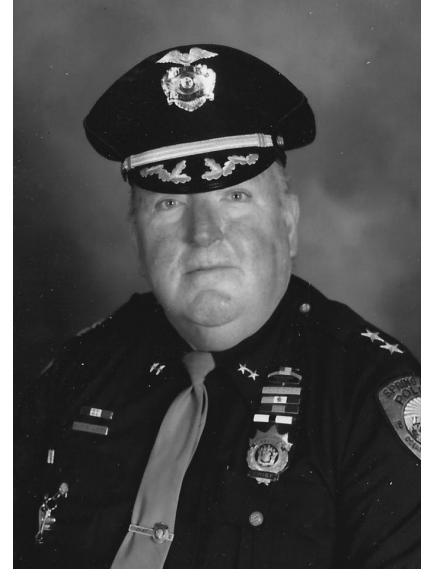
While remaining quick on his feet, Bunky suffered from adult-onset diabetes later in life. That led to a few amputations. Undaunted, he switched from giving young boys the boot to putting his prosthetic lower leg to good use in keeping the peace.

One evening the Spring Lake Police Department received a call that a man on the next train headed south from Newark was acting drunk and obstreperous and had identified Spring Lake as his last stop. Bunky met the train as it arrived and had no trouble identifying the passenger in question. The man spotted the towering officer and decided that he was a victim of police intimidation. Denying that he was drunk and incapable of driving home, the man squared off for a fight.

Bunky stood with his prosthetic extended in front of him, covered by his trousers and boot. He calmly told the man that if he could kick Bunky hard enough in the leg that he flinched, he could drive home.

Once the man’s foot bounced off the prosthetic without Bunky moving a muscle, the assailant surrendered and was driven home in Bunky’s squad car.

Bunky was named Spring Lake’s Chief of Police in May 1993 and retired for health reasons in July 1996, two years before his death. Spring Lake Mayor Thomas Byrne III, who swore Bunky in as chief, said his passing “will be a void for the community because he was such a well-liked guy as chief and as a human being.” Gone but not forgotten, Bunky and his father are memorialized by a plaque in the small triangle of green space at the intersections of 5th, Brighton and Washington Avenues, near the site of the home Bunky built for his family at 500 Brighton Avenue.

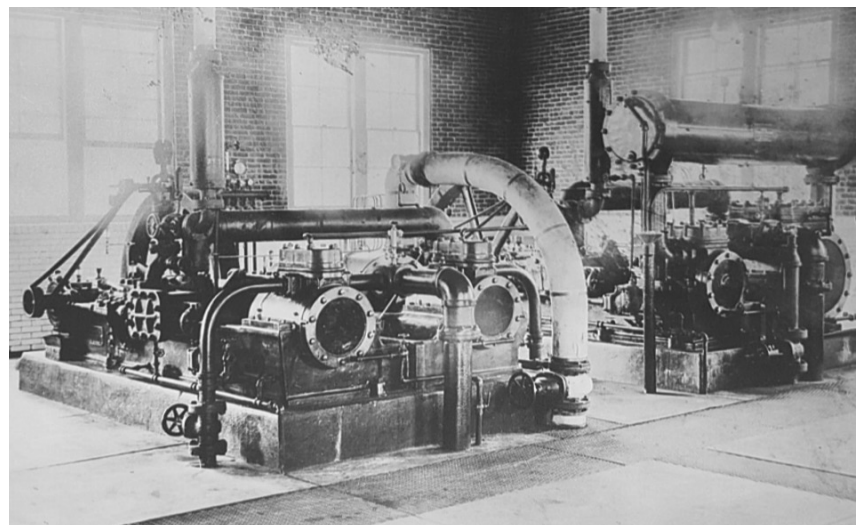


A Recent Acquisition and Some History of the Water Works

The Society recently received a new acquisition courtesy of the Spring Lake Borough Public Works Department. It is a Tabor Indicator, patented by Harris Tabor in 1878 and later manufactured by Ashcroft Manufacturing, a type of steam engine indicator used to graphically record pressure versus piston displacement during an engine stroke cycle, aiding engineers in evaluating engine design and performance. The newly donated device was probably acquired by the Borough around 1911 and is in impeccable condition. It is believed the device might have been used to service the steam powered pump engines for the Water Department at that time. According to DPW historian and Society Contributor Don Brahn, Jr., the water works building at Monmouth and the railroad was built in 1911. The Borough Council at the time awarded a contract for \$55,000 to Horace Moore to construct the new plant. The award consisted of the new building, steam pumps and boilers and the digging of new wells. The new building consisted of 2 perpendicular sections. The south section housed boilers which made steam. The steam would power water pumps in the north wing of the building thus supplying the town with water pressure. The boilers were coal fired. In early photos you can see a large smokestack next to the building that was used to exhaust the steam boilers. Around 1930 the engines were converted from steam to electric power with the smokestack eventually torn down.



*Photo of the Plant in 1923 courtesy of the Judge Family Collection;
photo of the steam pumps courtesy of Don Brahn, Jr.*



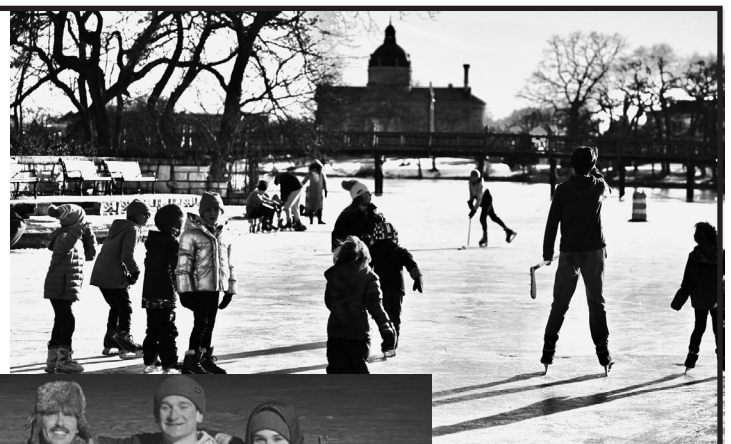
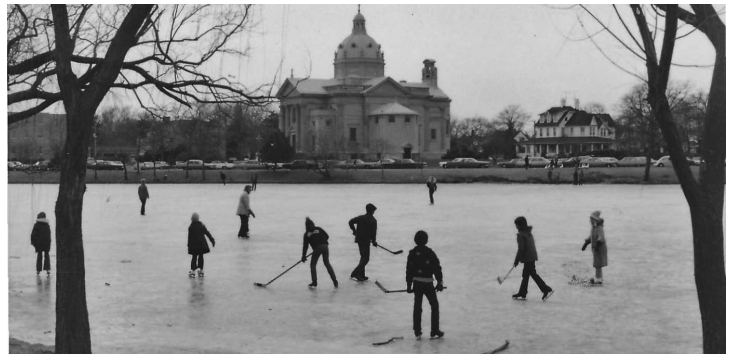
Enjoying Our Frozen Lake



1960

The very cold temperatures of this past winter brought one benefit to the younger residents of Spring Lake - a frozen lake as in days of old for skating and hockey games. Once the police department verified the ice was safe, the green flags went up and the fun began. Current photographs courtesy of Michael Scotto and Bob Dickert.

1970

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Students Visiting Museum



Students from the HW Mountz School Seventh Grade Class of Ms. Karen Detlinger visited the Museum in April along with Principal Dan Layton.



Students from the Sisters Academy Fourth Grade Class of Mrs. Intrabartolo visited the Museum in March.



Expanding Our Exhibits

The Society is in the process of creating a new exhibit space covering the years 1990 to the present. It will include artifacts and memorabilia from the many hurricanes the borough has lived through including the rebuilding of the boardwalk and the pool pavilions, as well as changes to our parks and public property to mention a few. If you would like to contribute any artifacts and memorabilia from this period, the Society would be happy to look at them and evaluate each piece for inclusion in our new exhibit. If you have anything interesting, you may contact us at 732 449-0772 or stop into the Museum any Tuesday or Thursday from 9 AM through 12 Noon.

Spring Lake Diary of Memories

The Spring Lake Historical Society is trying to increase their archives with short stories or memory blurbs of personal or witnessed happenings of events or moments in time in town. These events can be part of your childhood or as an adult, and not necessarily outstanding in any way. Some people do not wish to be interviewed which can be a long process and/or they feel they did nothing special. However, if one would just take the time to submit a short memory along with the time period, many memories by different individuals would add up to a good story. Nothing would have to be published or displayed without permission.

Some examples: A school memory; Halloween or other holiday memories; a family get together or reunion; a beach memory; a Third Avenue shop or business; an organization event; hotel or restaurant memory either as a guest, worker or a visitor; Little League; Spring Lake Five; Community House Theatre. There are many topics that can be written about as a memory and there's no age limit on a memory so don't be shy. We hope there is enthusiasm for this.

Please submit your memory(s) to either our email address (slhs703@optimum.net), mail in your submission to (PO Box 703, Spring Lake, NJ 07762), or drop it off at the (Museum, 2nd floor of Borough Hall.) Thank you!



Spring Lake resident John Szeliga gifting some of his historical memorabilia and memories to President Barbara Kolarsick Harrigan for inclusion in the Museum.

The Docent

What's a museum without docents? Take the Spring Lake Historical Society Museum, for instance. It's filled with facts, artifacts, exhibits, literature, folklore – truly an invaluable collection, a treasure! But what good would it be without its docents?

Who would open it up, and who would greet visitors as they arrived? Who would show them around and explain the two galleries? Who would invite them to enjoy the Spring Lake video? Who'd answer their questions, or offer to arrange for answers? Who would keep track of the number of visitors that stop in? Who would thank them for their interest in Spring Lake's history and for visiting the Museum?

Indeed, the Museum is a collection of important materials and sources, sitting there atop the Municipal Building on Warren Avenue, until the docents arrive to open it to the public every Sunday and Thursday (Tuesdays and Thursdays during the summer months) Our docents bring it to life and contribute personality. As someone famous once said, "Museum and Docent: perfect together!"

Become a Spring Lake Docent

The Spring Lake Historical Society has a few openings for the position of Docent. The work consists of welcoming visitors to the Museum, showing them what is available and how it is laid out, and offering a friendly, helpful presence as they explore. The Museum is open two hours each on Sunday afternoons and Thursday mornings.* A Docent is usually needed to serve once a month on either of those days. Please consider joining us in promoting and maintaining the history of a great town. Call the Museum at 732-449-0772 for more information.

*Please note: We are following a different schedule for the summer months (June, July, and August, 2021). During these months, the Museum will be open to visitors on Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10 – 12. Sunday openings will resume in the fall.

Marie Curry

Condolences....

The Spring Lake Historical Society
extends condolences to the families
of the following:

Members

Joyce Keane

Robert Wade

Barbara Reilly

John Francis Brisco

Irene Megill Finnegan

Barbara Bailey Elliot

Elizabeth W. Naughton

Mary Sue Nesnay

Life Members

Dr. John William Ferrante, Sr

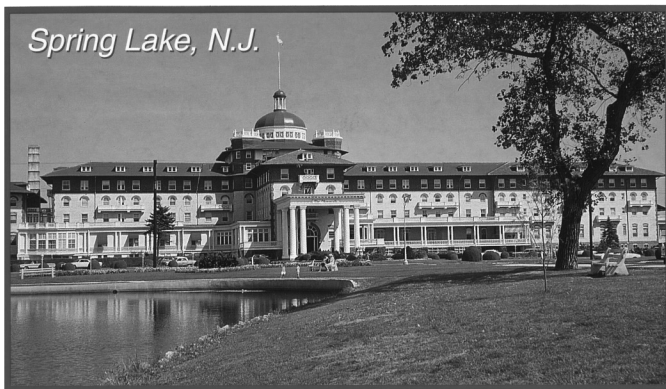
Patricia "Paddy" Hamilton

Eileen Loretta Ryan

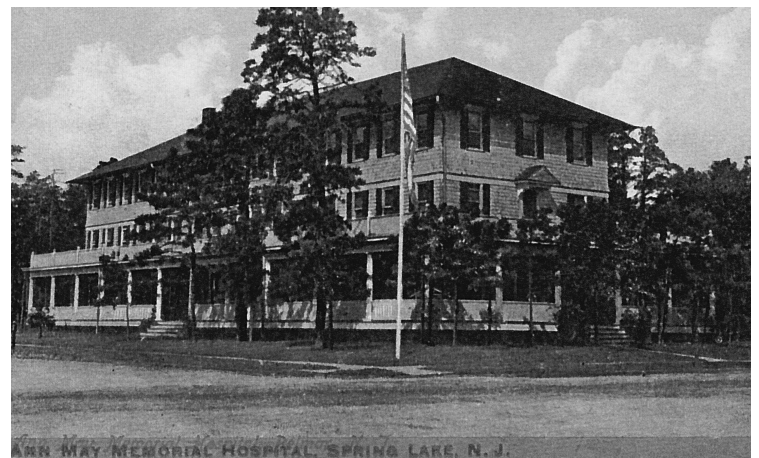
Harry Zarb

THE ANNUAL MEETING FOR THE ELECTION OF VICE PRESIDENT, TREASURER, AND TWO TRUSTEES WILL BE HELD ON THURSDAY, JUNE 26 AT 7:00 PM IN BOROUGH HALL. THE MEETING WILL ALSO INCLUDE THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE, AND PRESENTATION OF THE SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS. ALL SOCIETY MEMBERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO ATTEND.

Lost To Time But Not Forgotten



MONMOUTH HOTEL



OFFICERS

President..... Barbara Kolarsick-Harrigan
Vice President..... John McGlinchy
Treasurer Robert Drasheff
Corresponding Secretary..... Stephanie McMurray
Recording Secretary Priscilla Reilly
Trustees..... Bonnie DuBois, Carole Morris and Marie Curry
Newsletter..... Marie Curry, John McGlinchy, Bonnie DuBois,
Barbara Kolarsick-Harrigan, Stephanie and Scott McMurray

Spring Lake Historical Society, Inc.

P.O. Box 703, Spring Lake, New Jersey 07762

☐ New **MEMBERSHIP** ☐ Renewal

Name _____

Address _____

_____ Zip _____

Telephone _____

E-mail _____

General: \$35 Date _____ Life: \$500

For Current Members:

Please update your e-mail address with the Society and send to slhs703@optimum.net



MUSEUM HOURS

Tuesdays 10 a.m. - 12 Noon

Thursdays 10 a.m. - 12 Noon

423 Warren Ave., Spring Lake, NJ
(Second Floor)

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