

## Scotch Plains Revolution And Evolution- Part Four

### A Quiet Community Evolves

By BROOKS CRANDALL

*Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*  
*Editor's Note: This is the final part of a four-part series on the history of Scotch Plains.*

One of the most interesting things I learned was that Scotch Plains was really the plains. There was not the abundance of trees that you see today across the town, or even on the Watchung Mountains. The Watchung Mountains stood proudly over the plains, stretching all the way to the Raritan Bay.

In most of the town, there is still the abundance of fauna. I have seen several wild turkeys on Cooper Road and a fox just a month ago looking as if he was a few minutes late for class heading for Coles Elementary School. After a deer fender bender and having the deer treat my flowers like a blue-plate special, perhaps we should have a nostalgic venison roast dinner. Let the south side hunt begin.

#### Planes, Trains and Automobiles

What must have been soothing a hundred years or so ago was the salubrious country quiet. It must have been wonderful to hear the mellifluous sounds of nature rather than the drone of Route 22, weekend lawn mowers and gas engine weed whackers, the westbound ascending jets from Newark Liberty, and that four blast horn of the freight train that has invaded our community in the last year.

Sometimes I wonder if living in Manhattan would be quieter. Ironically, I crank up the "sounds of nature" on my iPod as I sit out on my deck just to get away from the mechanized suburban noise.

#### Murder of Baltus Roll

Peter Davis, an innkeeper in 1831, and a nefarious friend were respon-

sible for one of the most infamous murders in the area. Hearing that a local farmer, Baltus Roll, kept a large sum of money in the house, they decided to go to his house in the middle of the night and rob him. They pulled "Baldy" out of his house, beat and robbed him, and left him to die in a puddle of ice water in the deep snow. His posthumous fame is that one of the most storied country clubs in the country is named after him: Baltusrol. Marion Rawson describes how she and a friend used to ride their bikes through Feltsville (the deserted village) to visit the Baltus Roll house before it was torn down and the land used for the private golf club.

Foundations of the buildings making up Seeley's Mill line the Green Brook.

#### A Landmark Lost

A great architectural treasure was lost in town when School #1 burned down in 1974. The most famous design firm in this country's history, McKim, Mead, and White designed the school, and it was symbolic of the prominence of a proud community. Charles McKim, William Rutherford Mead and Stanford White also designed the Boston Public Library, the Mead Library (NYC), the University Club (NYC), the Rhode Island State Capital, the old Pennsylvania Station in NY and the Newport Casino (Now the Tennis Hall of Fame). Contrast this architectural gem to the facade of today's Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School built in 1958. It is too bad we cannot change the drab exterior of our senior high school to match the endless and bountiful spirit of the bright students inside. The lifeless broken clock outside tells me it is time to do something to make this building a symbol of our proud towns.

#### Catch-22

The bucolic paradise of Marion Nicholl Rawson's youth is lost. Until Route 22 was finished, the town of Scotch Plains had a country feel much like towns further west like Liberty Corner and Oldwyck. Route 22 connected the town to the bigger cities to the east and a straight shot into the Big Apple. The road attracted builders and a flurry of suburban development in the 50's and 60's. Route 22 got "Plainsmen" closer to the big city,



FROM PAST TO PRESENT...This is one of the many colonial-era buildings in Scotch Plains that is still there today. Though these buildings have been modified, they are vivid reminders of the town's strong history.

But it also cut the body of the town off at the shoulders of the Watching Hills. The town's special connection to the hills was lost.

Although Scotch Plains does not have the rural beauty described in "Under the Blue Hills," Scotch Plains does have a rich history to savor with several historical sites in tact and an exciting restoration in progress with the Aunt Betty Frazee house. The irony is that a highway destroyed a rural New Jersey town and created a truly diverse American suburb. Scotch Plains is a true American melting pot where diversity can be embraced.

Explore and enjoy the history of our town.

#### The Central Railroad

When the Central Railroad was built between Elizabeth and Somerville in early part of the 1800's, the railroad proposed a stop in Scotch Plains and the townspeople refused. There was a stop in Westfield and the next stop then became Plainfield. This stop was instrumental in the development of Plainfield into the powerful Queen City, perhaps the most desired town in New Jersey of the day. Later, the Fanwood station was added and the homes that were built around it have become the Fanwood historic area.

#### Green Brook and Seeley's Pond

A great unspoiled area to hike is the land behind Seeley's Pond and just east of the dam on Green Brook. The area was referred to many times as "The Notch," where there was a natural break in the Watchung Mountains in which wagons could travel beyond the ridge in the days before mechanized transportation. It was also the sight of the Battle of Bloody Gulch in the Revolutionary War.

My son Grant and I easily traversed the low water creek by the dam and made our way up the hill. I was pleasantly surprised to find marked trails and impressive cliffs that rise about 75 feet straight up to the blue mountain ridge.

It is a shame that the land is sandwiched between Route 22 and the heavily traveled and noisy New Providence Road. Unfortunately, the tall trees block the view eastward that was mentioned so often in accounts of yore. Marion Rawson spoke of a tower that was on the ridge for viewing towards the town center.

Seeley's Pond is so named now because a prominent businessman who had mills on the Greenbrook near the banks of the pond lived in a

#### Young Voices Sing for Charity in Cranford

CRANFORD - On Saturday, June 11, at St. Michael's Church in Cranford, youth from St. Michael's Parish and the Cranford community will put on the third annual spring concert.

A variety of songs will be performed including a selection from *Les Miserable*, *Jekyll & Hyde* and *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. This year we are also introducing several young singers from the area. The performance begins at 7:30 p.m. There will be a free will donation at the end of the evening to benefit Broadway Cares/Equity Fights Aids, Raphael's Life House and VH1 Save the Music Foundation.



ROCKING AGAINST CANCER...Who Invited You? plays one of its original pieces at the Second Annual Rock Against Cancer event, held at Westfield High School last Friday.

## WF High School Events Raise Money for Charities

By DON WILLIAMS

*Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times*

WESTFIELD - The halls of Westfield High School (WHS) were filled last Friday with music and cheering as the school hosted two charity events: the second annual Rock Against Cancer and the Charity Battle NJ breakdance competition. Both events featured local student talent while raising money with entrance fees.

Rock Against Cancer, hosted by the WHS Key Club, is a sort of battle-of-the-bands that looks to raise awareness about cancer. The event is held in the school's Cafeteria B, with bands performing on the room's stage. All proceeds from the event go to the American Cancer Society.

"Last year, we raised \$2,000, and we're hoping tonight is a success as well," said Key Club president and WHS senior Lindsay Elbaum. "We hope to make this an annual event."

Six bands participated in the evening's festivities, all including WHS students. They go by such names as: The Executives, The Sirkus, Who Invited You?, Southern Fried Funk, Waterdown Clockwise and The Great Schism. A student panel of judges, seated near the stage, judged the bands.

The nature of the event allowed for much interaction between the audience and performers, and the music fed off the energy of those who chose to move up in front of the stage to dance and cheer.

One of the groups, Who Invited You?, has been together for six months. Describing themselves as a cross between ska, reggae and alternative music, they feature such instruments as electric guitar and bass, trombone, flugelhorn and cello. Flugelhorn player and WHS sophomore Ben Klofta told *The Westfield Leader and The Times*, "We grew close through our experience together in marching band. We're all into music, and we love to play our original music."

While all bands played well, Southern Fried Funk left with first prize, a \$100 Best Buy gift certificate. The

band, made up of WHS freshmen and eighth graders, played a powerful rendition of the Allman Brothers' "Whipping Post."

At the end of the evening, it was announced that the event raised over \$2,200 for the American Cancer Society.

While the music played in the cafeteria, students filled the varsity gym's bleachers to watch eight breakdance crews from around the area compete for the Charity Battle NJ trophy.

The battle, organized by WHS student Michael Yee as his senior project, was organized almost entirely over the internet, where Michael discovered the breakdance crews and kept in contact with them via e-mail. The crews came from as far away as Maryland.

Michael's event raised money for the Boys and Girls Clubs of Newark. He told *The Leader/Times*, "I chose this organization because it does great work. I felt it was only fitting that the (breakdance event) benefit this organization, as breakdance was developed in an urban setting around New York."

In this way, the activity gives back to the culture that fostered it.

The competition consisted of two crews going "one-on-one" - the two crews make a circle and one member steps forward from one side and makes a display, seeking to impress the judges and the other team with intricate footwork (known as downrock), floats (balancing on one or two hands while the body is held mostly parallel to the floor), handstands and headspins, to name a few techniques.

After a period of time, a member of the opposing crew steps out to challenge the performer, "answering" the routine with a performance of his own. All members of a crew are given a turn to display within the time limit set by the DJ.

Music for the evening was provided by DJ SikRock, with opening music by WHS band The Great Schism.

At the end of the evening, Hidden Characters, a crew from Pennsylvania, walked away with the trophy after defeating Eclipse in a two-round final.

## POPCORN™



### The Da Vinci Code: Paints Its Puzzle Outside the Lines

One Popcorn, Poor • Two Popcorns, Fair • Three Popcorns, Good • Four Popcorns, Excellent

By MICHAEL S. GOLDBERGER

*3 popcorns*  
 The *Da Vinci Code* never says it outright. But the maxim is always there: More people are killed in the name of religion than for any other reason. It's one of our craziest, hypocritical phenomena. So you have to give those Founding Fathers credit. They saw the light.

Pity is, freedom of religion, like the other three freedoms, is still a relatively new idea. Look around. It really hasn't captured everyone's fancy. And nowhere is that made clearer than in the wiles, stratagems and treacheries of Dan Brown's "The Da Vinci Code." The battle lines are again drawn. Oh, it's fiction all right: Library of Congress number B2006006956. But the aspersions are metaphorically powerful. And in light of the big bad historically scandalous secret that director Ron Howard nimbly transfers from novel to movie screen, considerations about the right to freely exercise one's beliefs would seem a coincidental byproduct. But not so.

True, Mr. Brown's story, faithfully adapted for the screen by Akiva Goldsman, does its Devil's advocate's best to abash, topple and send us home pondering. However, on a tacit level just beneath all the excitement, the integral message needs no decoding. It's the need for a dialogue of tolerance.

Yet don't try to tell that to most of the characters in Mr. Howard's film. They're playing a high stakes poker game. The cards are power, faith the chips. So it only figures that an outsider stumbles into the back room of conspiracy and takes a hand.

But it is truly chance that our man is suddenly thrust into the vortex of cataclysmic events when Jacques Saunier, curator of the Louvre, leaves several clues in and around the site of his murder? One scribbling reads, "P.S. Find Robert Langdon."

Tom Hanks is Robert Langdon, Harvard professor of symbology. Bet you didn't even know they had such a chair. No matter. In a work of such far-flung events and ideas, it's but a minor indulgence.

A major league scavenger hunt follows, its prize no less than the fate of

Western religion as we know it. Or, more appropriately, as we thought we knew it. Aside from the police, in hot pursuit of course, others vying for the mysterious treasure at the end of the trail include the Vatican and, if it exists, the secret association of The Priory.

Representing Opus Dei, a back-to-basics offshoot of the Church, Alfred Molina is Bishop Aringarosa. He'd like to suppress any information that could threaten not only what his order professes, but the kingdom on Earth said beliefs have helped create. He is aided and abetted by Silas (Paul Bettany), the albino monk he rescued and raised.

Alighting into this confluence of desperate pilgrims is Ian McKellen as Sir Leigh Teabing, knight of the realm and curmudgeonly expert in matters Priory. "Rubbish," contends Teabing when Langdon and Neveu, arriving at his country manse in search of answers, question The Priory's existence. Its main pursuit, he assures, is to guard the explosive secret everyone else in the movie is seeking. Labyrinthine thrills follow.

It's understandable why folks, particularly those who interpret the scriptures with a liberal bent, might be miffed by Mr. Brown's conclusions, fictitious or not. He is a theological gadfly. Leaving no convention unturned, no bit of heresy unstated, his adventure saga virtually rewrites the gospels. And while it never utters a single unkindness about faith itself, its potshots at organized religion are prevalent.

But here's the proverbial bottom line. Could *The Da Vinci Code* cut the mustard as a mystery movie if the implied consequences weren't so Earth shattering, if the apple of discord weren't shrouded in so many centuries of lore and mysticism? Probably not. But you can't separate it.

It's a package deal. The two go hand in hand, just like freedom of religion and freedom of speech.

*The Da Vinci Code*, rated PG-13, is a Columbia Pictures release directed by Ron Howard and stars Tom Hanks, Audrey Tautou and Ian McKellen. Running time: 149 minutes.

## Master Gardeners Host Annual Spring Garden Fair

By CHRISTIE STORMS

*Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times*

MOUNTAINSIDE - The Master Gardeners' Demonstration Garden at the Trailside Nature and Science Center in Mountainside was bustling with activity during the recent annual Spring Garden Fair and Plant Sale.

Attendees came well prepared, ready to fill their own wagons and wheeled carts with gardening purchases.

Master Gardeners' volunteers provided tours of their nine demonstration gardens and were on hand to answer questions.

The grounds showcased numerous annuals, perennials, houseplants, oriental grasses, vegetables, and herbs. Soil test kits were available along with information on a variety of garden pests, such as the Asian Longhorned Beetle, which destroys trees.

Various tables offered handcrafted items such as wreaths, birdhouses, pillows, and painted flowerpots. Gardening books, baked goods, donated glassware, crystal and gifts were also

for sale.

Bob Maisano, who arranged for the donation of glass and crystal gifts from a Millburn antique store, explained that the profits from the annual spring fair and plant sale go toward buying seeds and other materials for the vegetable gardens that are grown for charity.

"Last year, we donated 1,597 pounds of vegetables to local food banks," Mr. Maisano said.

Volunteer Louis Stiglitz said he was pleased with the large turnout of people at the fair, despite some intermittent rain showers. He spent his time working with children, helping them plant marigolds to take home and even advising them on how to pinch the "dead heads" off the flowers so that more would bloom. Children also enjoyed having their faces painted and making peanut butter bird feeders.

The Garden Fair and Plant Sale are held annually on the first Sunday after Mother's Day by the Rutgers Master Gardeners of Union County in cooperation with the Union County Freeholders.



By VICTORIA MCCABE

*Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times*

In an ever-growing music world, many genres vie for our attention - pop punk and emo, garage rock, pop-hop fusions...and while neo-classical probably won't be taking possession of the popular spotlight any time soon, baritone phenom Josh Groban is an admirable pitch for the genre's appeal. The "boy wonder of voice" brings a gorgeous baritone to songs that sit right on the pop-classical border, offering a calming alternative to many of music's more popular acts.

His self-titled debut album, released in 2001, masterfully presents that talent through light-pop ballads and more traditional popular-classical repertoire.

The album's most majestic moments are the high notes that he soars to on "To Where You Are," a song about longing for an absent loved one.

Groban performs several Italian pieces, the best of which is "Gira Con Me," with its beautiful orchestral arrangement, lyrical and expansive chorus and Groban's smooth, easy delivery. An interpretation of Don McLean's "Vincent (Starry, Starry Night)" is much more instrumentally fleshed out than the original folk tune, but the arrangement is gentle enough that the song takes on a different tone without feeling too overproduced or popularized.

The album's only low point is a rendition of Johann Sebastian Bach's "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring." The liberal tempo Groban takes diminishes the beauty of the piece's instrumental melody; sporadic pauses break the easy flow of the piece. (And though I may peg myself as a true nerd when I lament his choice to use an English translation instead of the original German text, I will state it nonetheless).

Since his debut, Groban has released a pair of live albums and "Closer," a follow-up studio album. Comparatively, "Closer" was a supreme disappointment. The album could have provided Groban with the perfect opportunity to demonstrate an ever-increasing comfort level with his vocal talent. Unfortunately, superfluous production elements ultimately interfered with the singer's ability to reach his audience with the pure emotion that is his real forte.

The problem with "Closer" isn't Groban, it's the glaring presence of a whole slew of gratuitous production techniques obviously employed to squeeze every drop of emotional intensity out of an already impassioned voice.

The album's producers seemed so intent on creating musical scenes of grandiose sweeping emotion that they shamelessly sacrificed simplicity on numerous occasions, blind to the easily discernable fact that Groban doesn't need superfluous tricks to be affecting.

"You Raise Me Up" is the most tragic casualty. The first verse sets a gentle vocal line to a soft series of

piano chords - so far so good. The song doesn't have a second verse, and instead of ending gracefully or even adding a second climax, the chorus repeats four times, each invocation dripping with more and more artificial sensationalism. Do we really need that grand buildup to the grand key change? Do we really need a gospel choir to chime in for the last two choruses to remind us that the sentiments should be getting more and more powerful? Don't we think four times is more than a little bit excessive? The end returns to voice, strings and piano, but it's too late to save the track from becoming the kind of cheesy pop ballad that the songs on Groban's first effort had so successfully avoided.

It's a shame that as Groban became even more comfortable with his command over his gift, his producers seemed to become less comfortable with his audience's ability to recognize it.

Pass on "Closer," but pick up "Josh Groban." Once you fall in love with him, check out his stellar first live release. His intoxicating voice mesmerizes from start to finish, and virtually anyone who isn't turned off by pop will have a hard time resisting his spell.

## HAG

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 22

in chipped porcelain," he said.

In the kitchen, Ms. Lies recommended painting old kitchen cabinets, changing the hardware and even replacing countertops.

"A new Formica counter is only \$200-\$300, which is not a huge investment," she said. "And linoleum is one of the cheapest ways to redo a kitchen floor. If you buy individual tiles, you can stick them down yourself."

Ms. Houston recommended removing just two or four cabinet doors and replacing them with glass ones.

For living areas, Mr. Farber suggested hanging a mirror across from a window to make a room appear larger. He also cited replacing outdated switch plates and outlet covers.

Ms. Houston said that hardwood floors sometimes need only to be polished and buffed as opposed to being completely refinished.

"Reorganize your bookshelves so that it's not just six rows of books all standing like soldiers," she said. "Stack some horizontally and leave open spaces where you could display a pretty bowl or frame. Try painting just the back of the bookcase a pale blue or yellow to show off your things."

No matter what your budget, even the smallest changes can have big impact and add value.

"People think nothing of detailing their cars," Ms. Lies said. "But remember that your biggest investment is your home."

Do you have a home or garden question or topic you'd like to see covered in this column? Send your inquiries to [cstorms@goleader.com](mailto:cstorms@goleader.com).



HIGHFALUTING...Students pose with their teacher Clarissa Nolde, far right, following a flute recital. Students, from left to right, are: Alison Ricard, Nicole Spera, Hannah Markey, Yixao Wang, Brie Adamczyk, Rachel Friedman, Sara Birkenthal, Elizabeth McCabe, Melissa Riegel, and Annie Mylak.