

**THE PASSAIC COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
AND
LAMBERT CASTLE**

***“A Capsule History of the Past
and a Vision for the Future”***

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Many visitors are often confused about what the Passaic County Historical Society is and its relationship to Lambert Castle. Its wider vision is often obscured by the immediate visual impact of its Castle headquarters. With the completion of the Lambert Castle renovations, a greater balance between the Castle and the Society’s County-wide mission will be achieved.

PCHS was founded in 1926 by a group of largely Patersonian volunteers to encourage the preservation and study of Passaic County’s past. Its first headquarters was in the Paterson Public Library at the Danforth Memorial Library building. From its founding, the Society sought to establish a history library/archives and a museum of local “historical relics.” Quickly, however, these new collections outgrew the space. As early as 1928, the members began looking for more spacious accommodations and eyed Lambert Castle as a possible location.

By the Great Depression, the Danforth Library was also anxious for the Society to find a new home. Rising library patronage during this era meant they needed all their rooms for library use. Into this problem came opportunity. The Castle had been bought from Paterson by the newly formed Passaic County Parks Commission (now the Parks Department) to be part of the Garret Mountain Reservation. Renovations to the structure were underway to update it for office use.

By luck, the first head of the Parks Commission was Garret Hobart, Jr., son of the Vice President. His mother, Jennie Tuttle Hobart, was interested in establishing a memorial to her husband’s career and used her influence on her son to obtain rooms at the Castle for the Society. She then donated documents, photographs, and objects so that the Society could, and did, set aside a room for their display. By 1934, PCHS had opened its new headquarters in a gala evening event and has been associated with the Castle ever since.

Over the decades, the Society increased its holding to include fine and decorative arts, archaeological materials, textiles, photographs, books, archival collections of records and papers, as well as a myriad of other things. During most of this time, the Society used its rooms on the first floor only as gallery and library space. The history of the building, if not ignored, was obscured by them.

In the early 1980’s, a landmark exhibit called “*Life and Times in Silk City*” began to change this trend. “Period Rooms” made their appearance. School tours were more encouraged to visit for the sake of the Castle’s past.

Though period rooms were enthusiastically received by visitors, the larger collections on County history and the library began to languish in neglect. Many items that had been on exhibit in the past were jammed into the basement storage. There the decaying pipes, dirt, infestations, and

dampness caused much damage and loss. Changing exhibits placed in the “Court” confused visitors by disrupting the period room tours. The library was tucked onto the third floor. Stairs, summer heat, and leaks made it an uncomfortable place to work in (and for many, inaccessible). The library became the hidden “step-child” of PCHS.

With the interior restoration/renovations nearing completion, a new opportunity has arrived for a better balance between interpretation of the Castle’s history and the County-wide history mission of PCHS. With more space than ever being granted, PCHS can divide its functions without neglect to any one of them.

The library’s new basement home will be a secure, modernized, environmentally controlled area. If current plans are realized, the best of PCHS’ thousands of books, documents, and photographs will be housed there for greater access to the public than ever before. New and long time volunteers will make it the full-sister of a trio of equalized Society functions. When funding permits, a Librarian/Archivist will be hired to supervise its progress.

The first floor of the Castle will be devoted to period rooms that will interpret the Castle’s unique past as before. By using original and other PCHS collection objects, these rooms will assume much of their original splendor. Volunteers will be able to show visitors all the most spectacular rooms and explain the Castle within the context of Paterson’s tangled social and industrial past.

Complementing the period areas, the second floor (visible from the first by the restored atrium) will be site of a distinct, permanent exhibit on wider Passaic County themes. “*An Agreeable Likeness; Portraits and Landscapes of Passaic County*” will depict the County’s rise through the eyes of the people who lived in each area. Supplementary photos, maps, and objects will seek to enrich this exhibit by representing average citizens and ethnic groups. The Society gift shop will also be on this floor, in a side suite, to free the main areas for gallery use. This exhibit will allow PCHS to fulfill its County-wide mission in the museum setting as well as in the library.

Lastly, the third floor gallery will be site of changing exhibitions. These exhibits will bring visitors back again and again for new learning experiences. It will also allow PCHS to display its reserve collections and attract other history organizations which lack display space of their own.

The reopening of Lambert Castle represents a new era of opportunity. Its long term success will depend on the involvement of many people, professional and volunteers, scholar and amateur. Thank you for becoming a part of this vision of a bright future!

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