

*In the  
Terrace*



*Recollections of  
Joan Cunning*

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Joan Cunning*

*A chapbook from the "Vanishing Hoboken" series  
of the Hoboken Oral History Project*

## Vanishing Hoboken

The Hoboken Oral History Project

A Project of

The Hoboken Historical Museum  
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HOBOKEN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT COORDINATORS:  
Holly Metz (Chapbooks Editor)  
Melanie Best, Ruth Charnes

DESIGNER: Ann Marie Manca  
PROOFREADER: Paul Neshamkin

### PHOTO CREDITS:

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Joan Cunning. Contemporary photo of Joan Cunning in front of #27 Willow Terrace, Robert Foster 2011.

FRONT COVER: Joan Cunning holding Edward Cunning, Jr. in Willow Terrace South, 1957.

BACK COVER: Detail of photo by Caroline Carlson Redden circa 1970.



*In the Terrace, you put the baby*  
outside the door, in the carriage or playpen, and  
you went about your business. If anything  
happened, somebody knocked on the door and  
said [to my mother], "Helen, the baby's crying."  
Even my children were raised like that. [After I  
married, my husband and I bought 27.] Nobody  
came through there that didn't belong there.  
They just wouldn't do that. Nobody locked the  
door. We had screen doors in the summer. No  
air-conditioning. The door would be open.

—JOAN CUNNING, APRIL 6, 2011



## Introduction

UNTIL SHE MOVED A BLOCK AWAY TO Hoboken's Church Towers, Joan (Smith) Cunning lived for over fifty years in the "first Terrace"—the southernmost row of compact houses that sit between Sixth and Seventh Streets, bordered to the east by Willow Avenue and to the west by Clinton Street. Built in the 1880s to house workers at the Stevens estate and at the Hoboken Land & Improvement Company, the Terrace buildings continued to shelter working class families—often several generations of the same family—throughout most of the 20th century.

In 1937, Joan's Hoboken-born parents, firefighter John Smith and homemaker Helen (Roarty) Smith, moved their family—Joan, and six older siblings Eileen, James, John, Jerry, and Virginia—to the Terrace. The Smiths lived in number 17 for three years, then moved next door, to 15. Another child, Marietta, was born. Joan has vivid memories of growing up in that tightly knit community and of raising her own family in the Terrace. Neighbors watched each other's children and helped one another during hard times. Adults gathered for parties and children ran through the cobblestone street. Joan's three best friends lived in the first Terrace.

In fact, much of her life has been centered in just a few Hoboken blocks: The family church, Our Lady of Grace, and Joan's middle and high schools are only a block or two away; her children were all born at St. Mary Hospital on Willow Avenue.

There was one short absence from the Terrace, quickly remedied. After Joan married Eddie Cuning in 1955, the couple moved to Jersey City. But within a few years, they were back in Hoboken, in the first Terrace. The Cunnings moved into number 27, where they raised seven children—Edward Jr., Bernadette, Helen, John, Daniel, Janemarie, and Joaneileen.

For more than a generation, residents of the first Terrace were all of Irish descent—proud to be both Irish and American. (The Cunnings recently discovered French ancestors as well.) Joan's mother "stood" for many Irish neighbors who sought U.S. citizenship, and plans for Hoboken's own St. Patrick's Day parade began in the first Terrace, in the Cuning home.

*In the Terrace* is derived from interviews with Joan Cuning, conducted on April 6 and May 18, 2011 by Holly Metz and Robert Foster, at Joan's apartment in 5 Church Towers in Hoboken. Transcripts of these interviews have been deposited in the collections of the Hoboken Public Library and the Hoboken Historical Museum.

As this chapbook was going to press, Joan Cuning became a great-grandmother. A fourth generation Cuning, Edward IV, was born on August 16, 2011.



Cuning children in their home at 27 Willow Terrace, ca. 1970s. LEFT TO RIGHT: Edward, Bernadette, Joaneileen, Helen, John, Danny, and, in front, Janemarie.



Joan Cuning and her children in Our Lady of Grace Church Hall, Hoboken, May 20, 2011.  
LEFT TO RIGHT: Danny, Bernadette, Eddie, Joan, John, Helen, Janemarie, Joaneileen



Wedding portrait of Bridget (Connolly) Roarty  
and James L. Roarty, ca. 1889.

## ROOTS IN HOBOKEN, IRELAND... AND FRANCE!

[My maternal grandmother, Bridget Connolly, came to Hoboken in 1888] from Ireland, County Mayo. She always said that was the year of the big storm, the big blizzard. [Bridget] and her sister, Mary, came together. And they worked, really, as domestics. I think my grandmother worked at 732 Park Avenue. [Her employers] were very wealthy. My grandmother was what they called "the upstairs girl." [She] was supposed to have been a beautiful redhead. She happened to marry the man of the house—a big joke when we're all together, the family. James Roarty, [the man she married, was a widower with three children. He was an older man.] He was [about] sixty-five when my mother was born.

[My paternal grandmother] was Olinda Tostain. I think she was born here. She told me she was christened in Hoboken—St. Joseph's parish. She was from "downtown." (That's how they talked.) We only found out [recently] that her parents were from France! That's why my mother never talked about it. [*Laughs.*] Olinda married John Smith, from Hoboken. (His parents were born in Ireland.) He was born at 632 Willow.

FROM SIXTH STREET  
TO THE FIRST TERRACE

I was born in St. Mary's Hospital [in Hoboken] on May 20, 1936 [and] I was brought home to 256 Sixth Street. [I was born during the Great Depression, but] we didn't know [those hardships.] My father was a fireman. We thought we were rich [because he always had a job.]

I think I was eleven months old when we went to the Terrace. We went to 17 first. We lived in 17 for about eight years, then we moved next door, to 15. [Laughs] We moved because my mother loved the bathroom the lady had next door! She had a tile bathroom, and off-switches. Everybody else had pull-strings. And, I guess, the price was right.

[So how did my mother come to buy 27 and then sell it to me?] A woman [named Miss Cooper] came with her mother from New York City. [They bought 27.] Her father was a barber, and [before they even moved in,] he dropped dead. He never saw the house. Never lived in it. [Miss Cooper and her mother] lived there, and lived there, until there was no money left. Her mother died. My mother bought the house off [of Miss Cooper,] and let her stay until she had no money, and [then] made all the arrangements with the almshouse in Secaucus, which was run very nicely at the time. We'd go up once a week [to see Miss Cooper at the almshouse. We'd] get a whole list of what she wanted, and we'd bring it up. My father would drive us up. I didn't drive until I was twenty-five years old. (Girls didn't drive then.)

But that's how you got a house in the Terrace. [You knew someone or they were family.] It keeps the place nice. [And then you helped someone else move there. Like Jimmy English, who still lives in the Terrace.] Jimmy's father came here from Ireland, and was a boarder with my grandmother. [He was] married out of my grandmother's house—256 Sixth Street. And my mother got them the house in the Terrace, which they were looking for.



On the roof of the Smith home, #15 Willow Terrace, LEFT TO RIGHT: Virginia Smith, Joan Smith, and Marietta Smith, ca.1948.

LIFE AT 15 WILLOW TERRACE...  
AND AT 27

[When we were at 15] we had nine living in the house, and sometimes we had two grandmothers with us. You know, it's funny. I guess when we were little, we didn't notice it at all. The girls always had the top floor. That was another reason my mother bought the house: [The previous owners had] built out the back. But honest to God, there was never anyone laying on a couch or anything.

[Did we share a bed?] Oh, sure. Well, there were four girls, [and] we each had a bed. [But] the boys—the back bedroom had a big bed. Somebody was probably in my mother's [room.] There was always a crib [there.] They always had a crib. When I got married, there was a crib in the pictures, for God's sake. [We] lived in that house until [we] got married. Nobody left the house until they got married. That's the way it was.

[Were we the largest family on the block?] Yes, we were. I think Clancy had three, next door to my mother. Well, the Earls, next door to me—they had seven children. They were raised there. [And they had relatives in two other houses.] That was a whole little community. Everybody was related.

[There was always someone around to look after the children.] My mother never left the house. In the Terrace, you put the baby outside the door, in the carriage or playpen, and you went about your business. If anything happened, somebody knocked on the door and said [to my mother], "Helen, the baby's crying." Even my children were raised like that. [After I married, my husband and I bought 27.] Nobody came

through there that didn't belong there. They just wouldn't do that. Nobody locked the door. We had screen doors in the summer. No air-conditioning. The door would be open.

[We never needed a key for the house. We didn't lock the doors until the late 1980s.] My mother—I don't think they ever had [a key]—until she was selling the house. [People were all around.] We had that barricade up. I mean, in the street, everybody was out. On a nice day, everybody was out. You ran back and forth, and if a car came in, every mother got up, opened the gate, and got your own children in. It was a wonderful place.

[And of course,] they parked their car where it belonged, and you wouldn't dare—*dare*—even if they went away for a month, you would not take that spot.

[After I married, and moved to 27,] my neighbor across the street was a man [who wasn't well enough to work. I'd open the door with the baby in the carriage] and he'd say, "I got it, Joan," and he'd take that baby in the sun—because they were on the sunny side. When he'd come back, he'd say, "I think he needs a bottle." That's how people were. You could get a babysitter in a minute.

NEIGHBORS

The first Terrace was all Irish. The second was Irish and Italian. The third, we never even... It wasn't the same. Not that we didn't talk to you, but that's how it was. It had nothing to do with background. [The neighbors who lived closer socialized more. And they looked after each other.]





## Joan Cunning recalls neighbors

WHO LIVED IN WILLOW TERRACE SOUTH

IN THE 1940S AND 1950S, BEGINNING WITH THE  
SOUTHERNMOST ROW OF HOUSES.



Four generations of family. TOP ROW LEFT TO RIGHT: Eileen (Smith) Thiel and her mother Helen Smith. BOTTOM ROW: Billy Thiel (Eileen's son) and his great-grandmother, Bridget Roarty (Helen's mother.) in 15 Willow Terrace, Hoboken, circa 1948.

## Northern Row of the Terrace

- #2 **A shoemaker** lived here in the 1940s and 1950s. Joan remembers his name was "Dominic." right across the street), Virginia, and Kathy, who now lives of 7th Street; and one son, John.
- #4 Vacant for years.
- #5 **Van Neclan family?** They were "Hollanders" and had a few children.
- #8 **Mr. and Mrs. Watts.** The father was named Jimmy and was a longshoreman. The mother's name was Lillian. They had four children—three daughters, Janet, Agnes, and Pat; and one son, Jimmy.
- #10 Doesn't remember.
- #12 **Eileen (Kelly) Yannone** had two boys.
- #14 **The DeRoy family was replaced by the Gradys** in the 1950s: Agnes (nee Watts, from #8) Grady and Jim "Red" Grady, a long haul truck driver. Agnes had a daughter, Karen, from a previous marriage. Red and Agnes had two more daughters, Pat and Rita, and a son, Jimmy.
- #16 **The Lavin family.** Tommy and Sarah had a son, Tommy, and two daughters, Irene and Margaret. Irene Lavin married Sylvester "Sonny" Garrick and they lived in the house; they had two sons, Jimmy and Bobby.
- #18 **Arthur and Nellie Askw.** Mr. Askw was a businessman. They had two boys, Arthur and Ronald.
- #20 **Mr. and Mrs. Canning.** Mr. Canning's first name was John. They had three daughters, Veronica (a very popular babysitter who now lives on Willow Ave,
- #22 **Mr. and Mrs. Hitzler.** Ernie Hitzler worked as a longshoreman. Lucille Hitzler often babysat for Joan's children. Ernie had had children with his first wife and one of these children, Harold, lived with them. Lucille and Ernie had no children together.
- #24 **Eddie and Eileen Dumphy** lived at #24 after moving from #3. They had five children, Eileen, Regina, Mary, Ed, and Grace. Joan's sister, Virginia, ended up buying #24 in 1952 or so.
- #26 **Eddie and Margie Duff.** Mr. Duff was a trucker. They had one daughter Mary (now Mary Pendrick, Joan's good friend) and two sons, Eddie and Tommy. Joan was in the same grade as Mary, and two other Terrace girls, Catherine King (#23), and Noreen Kammerer (#32.) Mary and Noreen went to St. Michaels; Catherine and Joan went to Demarest.
- #28 **The Vann family.** They were "Hollanders." Mr. and Mrs. Vann had one son, Leon, who lived in Union City during his parents' old age. His parents died one day apart.
- #30 **The Swift family.** Mr. and Mrs. Swift owned a candy store on Willow Avenue. They had two sons, Joan recalls, and a daughter. One son became a priest and the daughter became a nun.
- #32 **Mr. and Mrs. Kammerer.** They had a son, "Buddy," and two daughters, Virginia and Noreen.

## Southern Row of the Terrace

- #1 **Mr. and Mrs. McLaughlin.**
- #3 **Eddie and Eileen Dumphy.** Mr. Dumphy was blind. He worked in the Mueller's factory in Jersey City. (See #24)
- #5 **O'Malley family.**
- #7 **Mr. and Mrs. Griffin** and their two children, Dorothy and Buddy, who were younger than Joan. The two Griffin children were closer with Joan's younger sister. Mr. Griffin was a businessman.
- #9 **Blauvelt family.**
- #11 In the 1950s, **Edna Frieda** lived in #11. She'd been a McLaughlin. She married Pat Frieda and had two boys. Joan thinks the boys were named Scott and Pat.
- #13 **Lorenzo family.** Mr. Lorenzo worked on the railroad. Eileen (Clancy) Lorenzo is a homemaker. They had three children: Audrey, Peter, and Kenny. (As of 2011, Eileen still lives at #13.)
- #19 **Mr. and Mrs. Clancy,** the parents of Eileen (who moved to #13). John, Tommy, "Buddy," and Bobby (who became a fireman.) All the sons went into the Navy, too.
- #21. **McDonough family.** Mr. McDonough was a longshoreman on the piers. Mrs. McDonough's first name may have been Maggie. They had three daughters, Mary, Ann, and Peggy.
- #23 **Mr. and Mrs. King.** Mr. King's first name was Eddie; he was a WWI veteran and a longshoreman. They had two daughters, Catherine and Lillian. Catherine was Joan's friend.
- #25 **Mr. and Mrs. Earl.** The father was Tom "Tommy" Earl; his wife was Anne. Tommy was a chauffeur for Con Edison. Tommy and Anne Earl had seven children: Arlene, Joan, Thomas, Rose ("Rosie"), Steve, Annie, and Billy. Steve Earl became Joan's brother-in-law when he married her sister, Marietta Smith.
- #29 **Sissy (Horan) Beasty** was born in this house. She had a son, Jimmy. She is the Earls' niece. She died in October 2010. She lived in the Terrace longer than anyone of Joan's generation.
- #31 **Anna Earl** (Sissy's aunt, by marriage). Her husband worked for a local furniture company. They had four sons: Jackie, Wilbur, Tommy, and Walter (who died at age 5); and five daughters: Gracie, Annie, Estelle, Helen, and Margaret.
- #17 **John and Kathleen Murphy.** Mr. Murphy worked on the Lackawanna Railroad. They had a daughter, Eleanor, and a son, Jackie, who became a policeman.

During the 1940s and 50s, **Joan Grace Smith** (later Cunning) lives here with her brothers James, John and Jerry; her sisters Virginia and Marietta; her parents John Smith and Helen (Roarty) Smith; and both maternal and paternal grandmothers, Bridget (Connelly) Roarty, and Olinda (Tostain) Smith.

## CLINTON STREET

	31		32	
	29		30	
	27		28	
	25		26	
	23		24	
	21		22	
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	7		8	
	5		6	
	3		4	
	1		2	

SOUTH

COURT

WILLOW

## WILLOW AVENUE

## Northern Row of the Terrace

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I can remember a man falling down the stairs and being killed. My father went over there, and they called everybody. Everything was taken care of. They brought [his wife] over to the house and we had tea. It was that way. Everybody got into everybody's business.

The Clancys were all cops and firemen. And their mother was sick. She used to be in a chair all the time. My mother did everything for them. Those boys thought she was their mother! They went into the service, they came back, and my mother would have their white hats all done for them. My mother's house was very open like that. Any kid in trouble came to my mother.

[And] if you had a party, you invited everybody. There was no such thing as you wouldn't invite your neighbor. [For us, that could include neighbors from the second Terrace.] You could pass the bottles of beer over the fence. [The beer probably came from] Mike D's on Sixth and Willow, around the corner.

[Oh, we had lots of celebrations.] I had friends from Ireland who got married out of my house. Then the whole block was out. Everybody came out. There was no trouble. If somebody got their load on, nobody cared. They didn't bother anybody. And the men sat out, and the women, too, sat out in the summer and drank beer, outside your door.

#### TERRACE KIDS

[What kind of games did kids play when I was growing up in the Terrace?] The girls were with dolls and doll carriages, and also played hopscotch and jump rope. The boys, they could wander a little bit. They



Mary Duff (LEFT) with Catherine King and Mary's brother, Eddie, circa 1942. Photo courtesy Mary (Duff) Pendrick.

played ball. And all the boys had bikes. Not the girls, but the boys mostly had bikes.

[And where the A&P is now, on Clinton Street, between Sixth and Seventh Streets, there was a silk mill.] We hung out there all the time. The silk mill had a loading dock, so that's where everybody sat at night. It wasn't a big dock, it was just that you had to boost up to [sit there.] Everybody would be over

there. It was the whole width of that parking lot [where the supermarket is now.] And everybody worked there, too—a lot of Italians. They had big bolts of fabrics, and the trucks would be picking it up, bringing stuff in, and bringing stuff out. [I'm not sure why they closed.] I think they just went out.

#### WORKING PEOPLE

In the Terrace, I don't know anybody who didn't work. We had a lot of policemen, [and men who worked] on the piers. A lot of them worked on the railroad. [And] a lot of people were working at City Hall—secretaries and [other clerical jobs. That was true for my family, too.] Everybody in my family worked for the City at one time. My father, my three brothers. My sister Eileen was a clerk in the school. We were all kind of City people.

[What other jobs did Terrace residents do?] Firemen [like my father. And Mr. Earl worked for Con Edison.] We had no professionals. We had no doctors that I can think of. But everybody worked. Everybody had a job.

[A lot of people worked for a while at the American Lead Pencil factory, the 500 block of Willow Avenue, where Church Towers is now.] My brother worked there as a kid, part-time. And a lot of women worked there. My girlfriend just emptied her aunt's house, and we were laughing. She said, "You need a pencil?" [Laughs.] They had every color! [When I was going to Our Lady of Grace School, the pencil factory was still there. It was loud during the day, especially] when you'd have to open a window. [Since it was] right next to the school, you heard it all the time.

#### OUR LADY OF GRACE SCHOOL

[I went to] Our Lady of Grace [for middle school. That was my church, too. And my best friend, Mary Duff, from the other side of the Terrace, also went there. Then] I went to Demarest for high school, and she went to St. Michael's, in Union City. She probably was the rich one. But I didn't really think that. [Laughs.]

[At Our Lady of Grace, we wore a kind of uniform]—navy blue skirts and white middy blouses. I think we had sixty in a class sometimes. I can remember when I received confirmation, I was 107, and that was [just] the girls. (The school was coeducational.) That was a big parish. Our Lady of Grace was the biggest parish in the whole diocese. And then they had commercial [instruction for] ninth and tenth grade—typing and shorthand and English. Anybody who came out of there was smart.

#### DANCING IN CRINOLINES

[By the time we were teenagers, we were going to dances.] We were at St. Michael's in Union City on Sunday, A.J. Demarest [High School] on Friday, Wednesday was CYO [Catholic Youth Organization] at Our Lady of Grace Hall, and now and then we went to St. Joe's [downtown.]

We went to dances at least three nights a week. The three girls from the Terrace I hung out with were Mary Duff (she became Mary Pendrick when she married), Catherine King (who became Catherine Langer; she's deceased now) and Noreen Kammerer.

We were all at each other's houses all the time, especially Mary and Catherine.

[For the dances,] we wore full skirts with—what did you call them? Crinolines. The more crinolines you had, the better. And nice ballerina slippers—Capezios. Everybody looked the same; everybody came in with the full skirt, and danced all night. The girls mostly danced with the girls. [Laughs.] And the boys just watched.

But that was a ritual, every week—[the dances.] It was a lot of fun [getting ready, and going.] For my hair...it wasn't too long. I could do a ponytail, but it was kind of straight. It is kind of straight. [Laughs.] Later on, [when I was at] work, I had the "Italian Boy" [haircut]—very short—and I wore that, I guess, for ten years. But before you went to the hairdresser, you just did your own hair. When I'd curl mine, we'd put [the curling iron] on the stove, to get the bangs right. [It was dangerous,] sometimes, just picking it up, never mind getting it too close.

But as teenagers, we really met boys when my brother [who was in the Army], came home on leave. [One time, he] brought home five soldiers. [Laughs.] Everybody loved me. I got more friends that year. We'd be in the house with the party, everybody would be on the stairs, and there would be just nothing but crinolines. We had a lot of parties that we were allowed to go to, because they were [with] my brothers. You know what I mean? We had a lot of parties in that house. We were kids next to them, the soldiers, and they were very nice. They were from Florida, Georgia, Alabama, and Kentucky. And they were here a while, like a month. They sent them back here, and they were in an Army camp in Brooklyn, not far away.



Inside the Smith family home, #15 Willow Terrace, ca. late 1940s. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT, Virginia Smith, Jim Smith, Eileen Smith, Duke McCourt (a guess—may not be him) with Marietta Smith in his lap, Joan Smith (later Joan Cunning), and Jerry Smith in the front, sitting on the floor.

They came back every night. They stayed at my sister's house; they stayed at a cousin's house; and my father said, "Tell them to get the hell home." They were nice guys, but, you know—and they all had money.

We were running around Times Square. [I'd] go over—which I would never have been allowed to do—only [because] my brother was there. [I was] sixteen, seventeen. We were going to movies; [we'd] see a show. You'd go in those places, and for a dollar you'd get a big meal, with the macaroni. We went to places we would never have gone, because they wanted to see them—all the sights. They were [here] a couple of months. My father was so happy when they left.

WORKING FOR  
THE PHONE COMPANY

[I started work early, when I was still in high school.] I played hooky one day and got a job at the telephone company. I don't think I wanted anybody to know, but I was only seventeen when I got the job. Five girls went over to 140 West Street [in Manhattan].

When I got the job [our family got] free service. So the phone was always [listed under] "Joan Smith." [But] we had party lines [in the Terrace. That] was horrible, because you knew who was on. I had a boyfriend at camp, and Mary English had a boyfriend at camp, and she'd pick up the phone and say, "Get off the phone!" Or I'd be on there.

[But I loved my job at the phone company. I traveled to work on] the ferry. Oh, my goodness. Twenty-five cents. I think that was both ways. I loved the telephone. I worked there six years. Then I got married.

"HE FELL RIGHT INTO THE FAMILY"

[How did I meet my husband, Eddie Cunning?] At a dance in Jersey City, at St. Michael's. He called me every day after that. He was just out of the service, the Army. He worked at the A&P warehouse [in Jersey City.]

My mother loved him. She was always on the phone with him. I think she liked him better than me! [Laughs.] No, he was very easy-going, very nice. He worked nights, so he'd meet me at 5:00 and drive



ABOVE: Joan Smith Cuning in wedding dress with grandmother Olinda (Tostain) Smith, at 15 Willow Terrace, 1955.



ABOVE: Groom Edward Cuning and bride Joan Smith Cuning inside car after wedding ceremony, Hoboken, 1955.

OPPOSITE: Cunning family at Our Lady of Grace Church, Hoboken circa 2000.

BACK ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Helen Cunning, Bill Coughlin, John Cunning, Danny Cunning, Kaitlin Cunning, Cathy Cunning, Edward Cunning II, Catherine Cunning, Edward Cunning Jr., Patrick Cunning, Carl Pehson, Angelo Valente, John Coughlan, Danny Cunning.

SECOND ROW: Pattie Cunning, Kristin Cunning, Marietta Cunning, Mia Cunning, Hannah Cunning, Joan Cunning (seated), Eddie Cunning, Janemarie Valente, Bernadette Pehson, Joaneileen Coughlan, Maggie Cunning.

me home. We'd talk in the car for hours, then he had to go to work at the A&P in Jersey City—the warehouse, right as you come down the turnpike. He was in the butter and cheese.

I met him in '53, and in '55 we were married. Everybody liked him. Everybody. I mean my brothers and sisters. He fell right into the family; his family fell right into ours. [He was also from a large family.] Eight redheads.

[He left A&P when they closed down.] They shut down the butter warehouse. I don't know what they did at that time. It was terrible. My brother-in-law was there twenty-eight years. It was a big mix-up. That was downtown. Everybody worked there. Everybody. Johnny Kenny [a Hudson County political leader who was mayor of Jersey City from 1949 to 1953] put everybody in there. That's how it went. They were all political. But they just closed down all the operations here. [My husband] was there a long time. He was there twenty-something years, when it shut down. Then he went into the Hoboken Board of Ed [and] to the Post Office. He wound up with the two jobs.



#### MOVING—A FEW BLOCKS

[When I moved out of the Terrace] I moved here, [to Church Towers.] When my husband died [in 1989,] my friend John put my name in here. He said, "I put your name in the Church Towers." I thought I could keep the house. I could have kept it, and not lived nice.

So when I sold the house, I didn't bring a thing out of that house. I bought everything brand new. I had everything done here—the floors, the bathroom, and all. And I love it. I really love it. Not only that, I'm in my same neighborhood. I can see my mother's house out the bedroom window.



## The Hoboken Oral History Project

"Vanishing Hoboken," an oral history project, was initiated in 2000 by members of the Friends of the Hoboken Public Library and the Hoboken Historical Museum in response to dramatic physical, social, and economic changes in the city of Hoboken over the preceding twenty years, and to the consequent "vanishing" of certain aspects of public life.

For much of the last century, Hoboken was a working-class town, home to many waves of immigrant families, and to families who journeyed from the southern regions of the U.S. and from Puerto Rico—all looking for work. Hoboken, close to ports of entry in New Jersey and New York, offered a working waterfront and many factories, as well as inexpensive housing. Each new wave of arrivals—from Germany, Ireland, Italy, Yugoslavia, Cuba, and Puerto Rico—found work on the waterfront, at the Bethlehem Steel Shipyards, Lipton Tea, Tootsie Roll, Maxwell House, or in numerous, smaller garment factories. Then the docks closed in the 1960s; and factory jobs dwindled as Hoboken's industrial base relocated over the 1970s and '80s. Maxwell House, once the largest coffee roasting plant in the world, was the last to leave, in 1992. In the go-go economy of the 1980s, Hoboken's row houses, just across the river from Manhattan, were targeted by developers to young professionals seeking an easy commute to New York City. Historically home to ever-changing waves of struggling families—who often left when they became prosperous—Hoboken began in the mid-1980s to experience a kind of reverse migration, where affluent condominium-buyers replaced poor and working class tenants, many of whom had been forced out by fire, through condo-conversion buy-outs, or through rising rents. More recently, building construction has further altered the face of Hoboken, as modern towers are rising up alongside the late-19th century row houses that once spatially defined our densely populated, mile-square city and provided its human scale.

The Hoboken Oral History Project was inaugurated with the goal of capturing, through the recollections of longtime residents, "Vanishing Hoboken"—especially its disappearing identity as a working-class city and its tradition of multi-ethnic living. In 2001, with the support of the New Jersey Historical Commission, a division of the Department of State, the Hoboken Oral History

Project transcribed and edited several oral histories to produce a series of chapbooks. Since 2002, twenty-three chapbooks (including this one) have been published with the support of the Historical Commission, the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, a state partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities, and, more recently, John Wiley & Sons.

## Vanishing Hoboken Chapbooks

The editor of this series chose to call these small booklets "chapbooks," a now rarely heard term for a once-common object. And so, a brief explanation is now required: A chapbook, states the most recent edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, is a

...small, inexpensive, stitched tract formerly sold by itinerant dealers, or chapmen, in Western Europe and in North America. Most chapbooks were 5 x 4 inches in size and were made up of four pages (or multiples of four), illustrated with woodcuts. They contained tales of popular heroes, legends and folklore, jests, reports of notorious crimes, ballads, almanacs, nursery rhymes, school lessons, farces, biblical tales, dream lore, and other popular matter. The texts were mostly rough and anonymous, but they formed the major parts of secular reading and now serve as a guide to the manners and morals of their times.

Chapbooks began to appear in France at the end of the 15th century. Colonial America imported them from England but also produced them locally. These small booklets of mostly secular material continued to be popular until inexpensive magazines began to appear during the early 19th century.

Although some of the chapbooks in our series are considerably longer than their earlier counterparts, others are nearly as brief. They are larger in size, to allow us to use a reader-friendly type size. But all resemble the chapbooks of yesteryear, as they contain the legends, dreams, crime reports, jokes, and folklore of our contemporaries. One day, perhaps, they might even serve as guides to the "manners and morals" of our city, during the 20th and early 21st centuries.





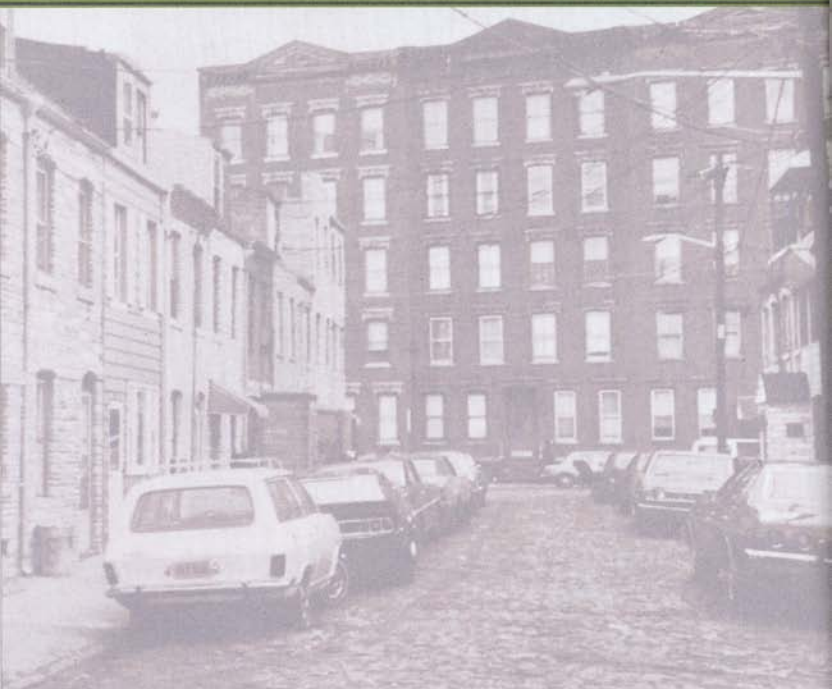
*Terrace children at a block party on V.J. Day  
("Victory over Japan") 1945. Photograph taken by Jack Smith.*

FRONT ROW, THIRD FROM LEFT: *Noreen Kammerer*  
FOURTH FROM LEFT: *Marietta Smith*  
FIFTH AND SIXTH FROM LEFT: *Anna May & Maureen McMullen (twins)*

SECOND ROW (KNEELING) FROM FRONT:  
FIRST FULL FACE FROM LEFT: *Catherine King*  
THIRD FROM LEFT: *Joan Smith (kneeling behind one of the McMullen  
twins)* FIRST FROM RIGHT: *Virginia Morley*

STANDING AT REAR, FROM RIGHT:  
THIRD FROM RIGHT: *Joan Earl*, FIFTH FROM RIGHT: *Virginia Smith*  
SIXTH FROM RIGHT: *Jerry Smith (arm leaning on head of boy in front  
of him)*, EIGHTH FROM RIGHT: *Joe Aurora (between Jerry Smith  
and Joe Aurora is an unidentified boy)*

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*A Project of the  
Friends of the Hoboken Public Library  
and the  
Hoboken Historical Museum*