

# Plainfield Public Library's Local History Collection

By Joan Marciniak Betancourt

The Plainfield Public Library's Local History Collection is a treasure trove of unique genealogical goodies. The collection, the largest of its kind in Union County, includes books, documents, photographs, blueprints, maps, newspapers, personal papers, and local organizations' records that are significant to Plainfield and the surrounding communities.

The highlights of the Local History Collection include local newspapers, blueprints, the Dime Savings Bank ledger, police logs, tax receipt books, New Jersey state census records for the Plainfields, and the *Courier News* obituary index.

The library's collection of local newspapers spans from 1837 to 1993. The newspapers from 1837 to 1918 are digitized and available online at [www.plainfieldlibrary.info/Departments/LH/LH\\_newspapers.html](http://www.plainfieldlibrary.info/Departments/LH/LH_newspapers.html). Local newspapers for 1919 to 1993 are available on microfilm and on paper. Issues of the *Courier News* published after 1999 can be accessed through the library's ProQuest subscription.

The Detwiller Blueprint Collection was created in 1982 and includes over 15,000 blueprints, mostly for the city of Plainfield. The Plainfield Public Library is the only New Jersey Public Library with such a collection. The collection can be accessed online and is useful for house research.

The Dime Savings Bank signature book for 1904 to 1906 is a transcribed ledger that contains personal details such as age, place of birth, occupation and personal description for account holders. The Plainfield police logs are a collection of police records, dating from 1884 to 1971, which include ledgers that recorded arrests, accident reports, criminal dockets, and stolen articles. The tax receipt books for 1883 to 1901 contain lists of residents

that paid taxes. Some of these collections are available digitally on the website.

Microfilm copies of the New Jersey state census are available for three towns—North Plainfield, Plainfield, and South Plainfield. The *Courier News* obituary index is in the process of being digitized. The indexes for surnames beginning with the letters A through R are available online. The index includes obituaries that were published in the *Courier News* from the mid-1920s to the mid-1980s.

Numerous other collections are available online ([www.plainfieldlibrary.info/Departments/LH/LH\\_main.html](http://www.plainfieldlibrary.info/Departments/LH/LH_main.html)), including:

- **Family Bible Records:** Many Bible records for families with connections to Middlesex, Somerset and Union counties have been scanned and digitized. The Bible records are available online for the purposes of sharing and disseminating information.
- **Local Records Index & Transcription:** The indexing of Plainfield records is an important part of the preservation of the city's history. Records date back to 1749.
- **Memorial Funeral Home Records:** The funeral home's records date from 1906 to 1996. Information included in the records varies, but records always provide funeral and burial information, and cause of death. They sometimes include other family details. The files are currently being processed and the collection is not yet open to the public, but library staff are happy to assist patrons with requests.
- **Surname Files List:** When research is performed for patrons, surname files are created by staff of the Plainfield Public Library. These files may contain only a single obituary, but are worth consulting.

Two images from the Plainfield Library's Local History Photo Archive: portrait of a young woman, 1983 [Irving Georges Collection, I51138], and a young boy with a horse and carriage, early 1900s [Lawrence Collection, L1487]. LOWER-RIGHT: Interior of the Plainfield Library.



The Local History Room contains research material about Plainfield that can't be found elsewhere, such as newspaper clippings dating back to the 1970s on various individuals and subjects; local church records, family Bibles, and obituary files; a listing of the ten most notable women of Plainfield; information about Plainfield mayors dating back to 1869, including terms of office and party affiliations; a listing of the founders of Plainfield Public Library; and instructions for researching homes in Plainfield.

The Local History Room has undertaken several new projects, including:

- indexing of the A. M. Runyon Funeral Home records from 1906 to 1990, which are useful in cases when an ancestor's date of death is not known and an obituary cannot be found in the *Courier News*;
- the personal papers of former Mayor Black;
- the Caffey collection; and
- development of an index of Civil War veterans in the Plainfield area.

The Local History Room also includes a photograph morgue, local photography collections, material for more than 100 local clubs, scrapbooks for local organizations, city directories as early as 1870, vintage postcards, and rare books and atlases.

The library has subscriptions to ProQuest, HeritageQuest, and *The American Genealogist* to assist researchers with material that is not located at the library. The Local History Department also offers a variety of hands-on workshops that teach basic and advanced techniques in genealogical research, as well as book repair and conservation.

The Plainfield Public Library is located at 800 Park Avenue in Plainfield, New Jersey. Parking is available in the library parking lot and on adjacent streets. The Local History Room is open Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Appointments are preferred. Visitors may contact the library by phone at (908) 757-1111 (extension 136) or via email at [localhistory@pfdpl.info](mailto:localhistory@pfdpl.info).