

Floral Park Historical Society The Docent's Digest

August/September 2021 Edition

The President's Message

The Floral Park Historical Society planned to resume its monthly program meetings in September. However, the idea is on hold due to the uncertainty of the Covid pandemic, particularly the Delta strain of the virus. So, the *Docent's Digest* will be the vehicle for satisfying our members and friends' curiosities about community history as history is made in the world. Over 100 years ago the Spanish Flu impacted the world. Yes, one could say history repeats itself.

One of the best ways to appreciate local history is to ask older folks to offer their recollections of growing up in the Village. Recently, I spoke to Jeanne Petta, founder of the FPHS and a long-time resident of Floral Park who now lives in New Hampshire. Below are some of the memories she shared.

Ann V. Corbett, President

Jeanne remembers ... “*watching the J. M. Rudiger lumberyard fire from my bedroom window. It was at the corner of Floral Blvd. and Carnation Avenue. Now an apartment building is there.*”

“*a farmhouse owned by the Suydam family and cows grazing near the corner of Zinnia and Plainfield Avenue.*”

“*crossing Plainfield Avenue with my mother to pick daisies in the field where Floral Park Memorial High School now stands.*”

“*sleigh riding from the top - Elm Ave.- down Mayfair Avenue hill.*”

“*going to the library above Victor Koenig's,*”

“*going to Girl Scout meetings.*”

“*Hi-Y selling peanuts at baseball games as a fund raiser.*”

“*walking home to Violet Avenue from Sewanhaka High School and stopping at Dick's (later Schaeffer's) to get a cherry coke. Some days I would stop at the bakery to get a black and white iced cookie. Home was 130 Violet Avenue.*”

“*on one Sunday afternoon I was at Dick's enjoying a cherry coke and I heard that the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor.*”

“*during the war there were air raid wardens-my father was one of them. There were blackouts.*”

“*several Sewanhaka classmates enlisted ...a plaque with the names of those killed is in Memorial Park in front of Our Lady of Victory Church.*”

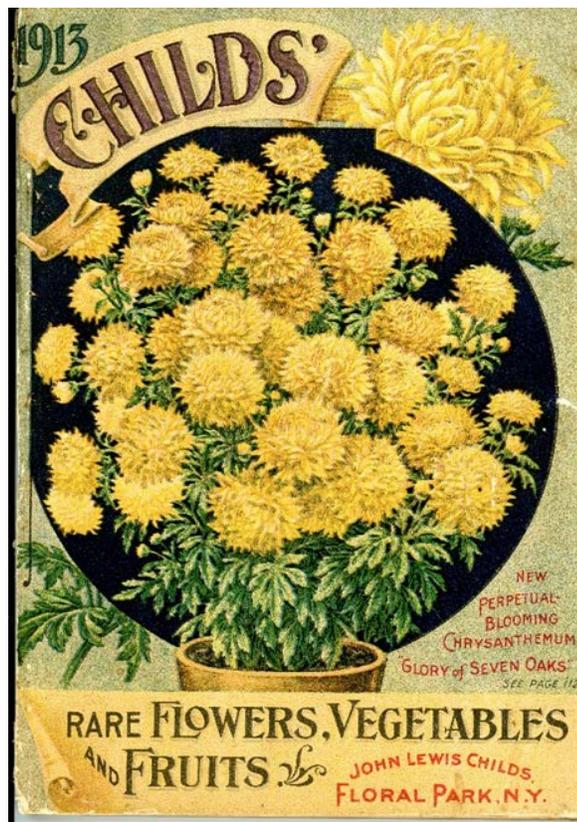
“*gasoline was rationed. Sugar and butter were rationed. The substitute for butter was margarine. A yellow tablet would turn the margarine yellow. No real taste.*”

FROM THE ARCHIVE: The museum-quality framed replica of a John Lewis Childs chromolithograph on the wall in the background was unveiled and dedicated to Jeanne Petta, Floral Park Library, May 2013. Pictured (lt. to rt.) F.P. Village Historian Walter Gosden, Former Mayor Tom Tweedy, FPHS Director Emeritus Jeanne Petta, Ann Corbett FPHS President.



TWO NEW ACQUISITIONS NOW IN ARCHIVES

John Lewis Childs Spring 1913 Catalog Childs "Personal Word" about his business history



A PERSONAL WORD

The New York Newspapers report that "It is rumored that Mr. John Lewis Childs will within the course of a year or two retire from the retail seed and bulb business and devote all his time and energy to his immense bulb growing industry at Flowerfield, Long Island, where he has a thousand acres of rich land devoted to it. This is said to be by far the largest acreage of flowers, under one ownership, in the world. Mr. Childs has long been in the lead among the

Catalogue Mail Trade Seedsmen of the world, and his gardens and park situated at Floral Park, Long Island, have for many years been one of the show places near New York City. The large and thriving Village of Floral Park has been built up by this one industry. Mr. Childs' customers number more than half a million, and undoubtedly most of them will regret to see him give up the catalogue business."

Notwithstanding the fact that I have been in the active catalogue mail Seed and Bulb trade for thirty-nine years (beginning in 1875 at the age of eighteen) and have gained the distinction of doing the largest business in that line in the world, I am not ready to quit. Every year finds me better and better prepared to serve my customers, some of whom have stood by me more than thirty years. The development of Flowerfield, where I have hundreds of acres of Gladiolus, Dahlias, Cannas, Lilies and other bulbs, affords exceptional facilities for experimenting, testing and growing Flower and Vegetable seeds of many kinds, and I delight in raising and selling high-grade seeds as well as bulbs. My taste is naturally that of a grower rather than a merchant, for I have ideals to be striven for in beauty and perfection. My ambition as a grower has also been largely realized, for making summer-flowering bulbs a specialty I have built up a wholesale growing trade that is world-wide and knows little competition. Work of this kind is to me a pleasure, and I shall continue to retail my select stocks of seeds and plants as well as bulbs, cutting down all I can to the best varieties, most highly perfected strains and improved new sorts, and give my customers the best possible service.

JOHN LEWIS CHILDS.

COMMENTS ON AN ERA

by Walter Gosden, Village Historian

It is interesting to read the comments by J.L. Childs in the 1913 publication just added to our Historical Society's collection. They reflect upon what it was like to live in that era if one takes into consideration many factors that were "everyday life " at that time, that really don't exist in today's world over a century later.

Child's "Personal Word" notes the quantity of flowers, seeds, bulbs that were being produced. Flowerfield, which was located 50+ miles east of Floral Park, had to exist and be cultivated and productive to accommodate an incredible demand for flowers. The beauty of the shape and color as well as the fragrance of all the flowers mentioned were highly sought and purchased by a nearby population of thousands of people. It is why JLC was so successful and bought so many acres to expand his business.

It notes Childs' customers number "more than half a million" - this is in 1913! Orders were done by mail, not by phone or internet - there was no internet! A net was something you caught fish or butterflies with.

There was no air conditioning at that time. To make air flow you relied on hand held fans or fans powered by machines that were also powered by humans. Electricity was still very new, most homes and buildings, street lamps, etc. were lit by candles, heated by wood and coal stoves. Cars and trucks had gas powered headlamps or lamps fueled by kerosene.

The flowering plants grown from seeds and bulbs supplied by Childs as well as fresh cut quantities of flowers were supplied daily to established customers in N.Y. City and Brooklyn and Queens. The smell of the flowers took the place of the other odors generated that were not so pleasant to endure. The era of horse drawn transportation was still a huge factor in moving goods and people. Factories had large smoke stacks (pre-pollution awareness era) that smelled - all sorts of non-pleasant odors to deal with. Flowers and plants were the solution to avoid or counteract that as much as possible. This may be hard to fully comprehend. It was the same era when out houses were common- ashes from stoves were deposited at the curb each day for road crews to sweep up and haul away. Sidewalks and roads were paved, but mostly in cities and nearby towns.

It is why Childs for decades sent out thousands of sales catalogs offering what he grew and also a monthly magazine to interested customers worldwide. All of these were printed here in Floral Park in a plant next to the L. I. R. R. that for decades has been a parking lot for a restaurant.

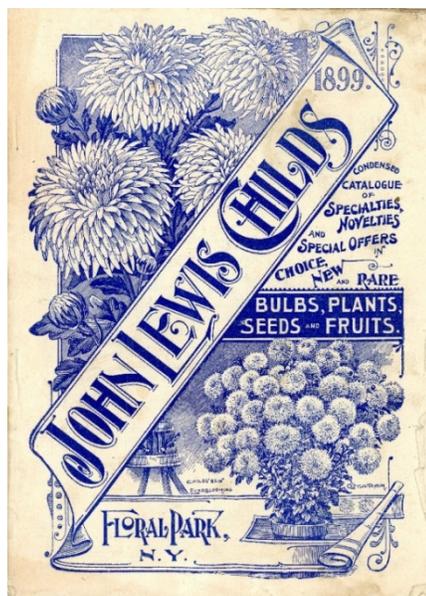
I hope this brief mention may get a few of you reading this to think of the "way it was" when these great publications were in print.

ACQUISITION # 2

This is the cover of a recently acquired 1899 Childs' catalog. While many of the Childs' catalogs in the FPHS collection have very colorful covers, there are many that have monochromatic covers such as this one.

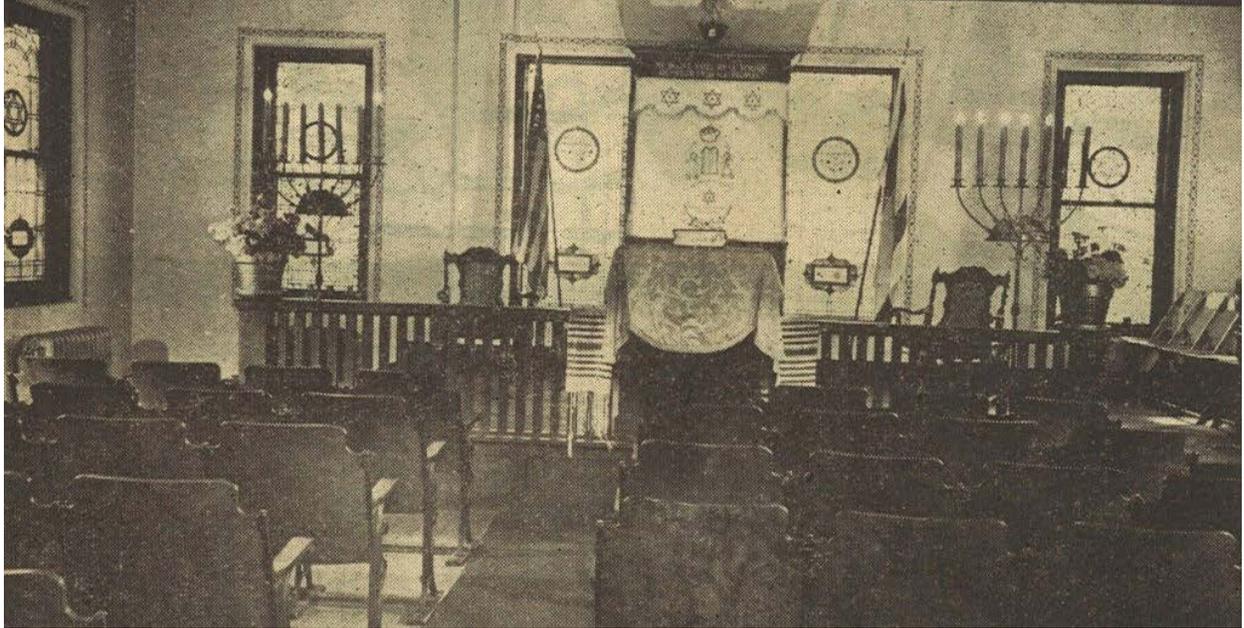
RECOGNIZING DONORS

A Donation Recognition plaque is on display in the FPHS Museum. Engraved plates reveal the names of the generous people whose donations of \$1,000 or more have supported the conservation, preservation and educational efforts of the FPHS. The donor names are as follows: The Pfizer Foundation; Peter & Jeanette Fleig; Henry W. Smith and John J. Kilbride; A Friend & Family; Joan Robertson; Floral Park Police Benevolent Association; Floral Terrace Catering -The Boulதாகის Family; Doris Lowe; Dr. Lynn Pombonyo; Harold Martin. We are very pleased to announce that we will be adding another name – Ann L. McCloskey. We are grateful for her recent generous donation of \$5,000. Funds such as these help us to acquire archival items, create exhibits, preserve documents and photos and much more.



FLORAL PARK JEWISH CENTER

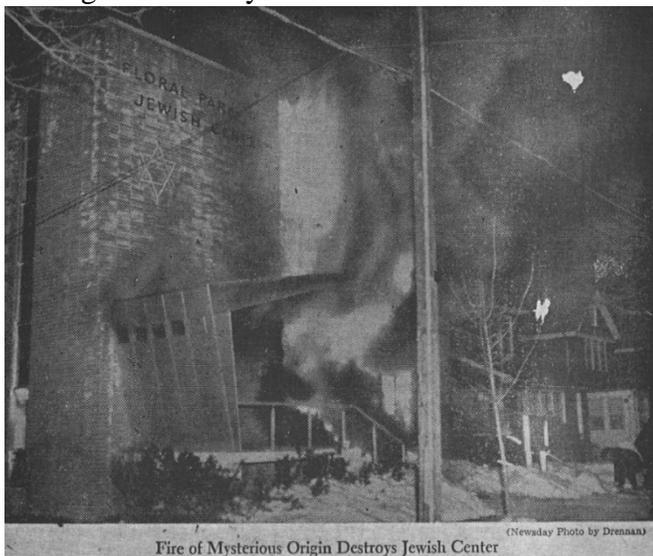
In 1928 the concept of establishing a Jewish Center in Floral Park was discussed at a meeting of eleven local citizens at the home of Dr. Aaron Brown. On November 3, officers were elected: Dr. Brown, president; Dr. Arthur E. Goldfarb, vice president; Judge Alfred J. Loew, vice-president; Jacob Oshansky, treasurer; and Herman P. Shanin, secretary. The former telephone building at 26 No. Tyson Ave. was purchased for \$22,500. On February 4, 1929 the Floral Park Jewish Center (FPJC) was dedicated by Rabbi Stephen S. Wise. The mortgage was paid in 1945.



During the depression, the Center fell on hard times. It is said that heavy coats were worn at services to conserve heating oil. Rabbis came out from NYC only on weekends and the number of families supporting the Center dwindled to 18.

Following WW II conditions improved. In 1945 a group of local Orthodox Jews met with the Center officials and agreed to merge as a Conservative Temple. By the late 50s the interior of the Temple was upgraded for social and cultural purposes.

Worship services were held on Fridays. Children ages five to fourteen attended Sunday School and Hebrew School classes were held three days a week from four to six. The Sisterhood and Junior League were very active.



Fire of Mysterious Origin Destroys Jewish Center
(Newspaper Photo by Drennan)

In February 1961, a fire of unknown origin, swept through the Floral Park Jewish Center, gutting the building and destroying religious artifacts. The Center was a total loss with damages estimated to be between \$65,000 and \$100,000. The Center had been renovated a few years before at a cost of about \$75,000. When Rabbi Maurice Lamm was taken to the Center and permitted to go in he came out holding charred pieces of a Torah, a precious religious artifact. Prayer books, the congregation of 200 Floral Park and Bellerose adults and children had just purchased, were destroyed.

According to an article in the February 15, 1961 edition of the *Gateway* several Floral Park and New Hyde Park firefighters had "narrow escapes when the complete front of the building collapsed, after a combination plastic stainless steel, and glass decorative wall, which reached from the ground two stories to the roof, had completely burned out." At the time, Stanley Grodski was the Floral Park Fire Chief."

FLORAL PARK JEWISH CENTER (CONT.)

Rabbi Lamm was thankful for the quick response of the firefighters. He later expressed his gratitude for the outpouring of offers from civic groups and other religious congregations to use their facilities as temporary quarters. The Center was rebuilt and once again served its congregation well.

Unfortunately, in the years leading up to 1992, the FPJC's membership declined and the decision was made to merge with the New Hyde Park Jewish Center. This meant that the sacred Torahs housed in the Center would need to be moved to the Temple in New Hyde Park. This would be an historic undertaking that would involve the Floral Park Village Mayor and Board of Trustees, the Fire Department and Police Department. The Torahs were ceremoniously removed from the FPJC, lifted up and carefully placed on a fire truck where the Rabbis and FPJC officials were seated. Harold Portnoy of New Hyde Park, coordinator of the sound systems for the day, explained that his eleven year old son, Michael, was invited to sit on the truck with the elders –it was a “thrill of a lifetime” for him.

The fire truck proceeded slowly east on Jericho Tpke. to the New Hyde Park Jewish Center on Lakeville Road. The event became a remarkable parade. Floral Park Fire Department and Floral Park Police Dept. vehicles, cars with dignitaries, and scores of people on foot headed for the New Hyde Park Jewish Center.

I was a Floral Park trustee at the time and Bill was Village Assoc. Justice. We became part of the entourage that walked to the NHP Jewish Center. The New Hyde Park Fire Department members lined the street as a welcoming gesture. Rabbi Greenstein stood by as the Torahs were lifted down off the fire truck. Everyone entered the synagogue and sat down. Tom Gullotta, the Nassau County Executive at the time, sat in front of us. Unbeknown to the gathering, he was suffering from a kidney stone; despite tremendous pain, he delivered a very inspiring message.

Music was in the air; people danced in the street. In a way it was a sad celebration because it marked the end of era.



Shelter Rock Jewish Center. Harold Portnoy confirmed that the Floral Park Torahs are now in the Shelter Rock Jewish Center's Chapel.

View the celebration on the day the Floral Park Jewish Center moved to New Hyde Park – Dec. 20, 1992:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?-BigoAqKsDac>

A special thank you to Floral Park Fire Dept. Ex-Chief Chuck Zuba for the photos, news clippings and information related to both the FPJC fire in 1961 and the FPJC celebratory move to New Hyde Park in 1992.

Many prominent Floral Park residents were members of the Center and were very generous in their support of local causes such as the then Community Chest, the American Red Cross; they always participated in Veterans Day and community events.

According to Marc Eiseman, president of the Lake Success Jewish Center, the New Hyde Park Jewish Center eventually merged with the



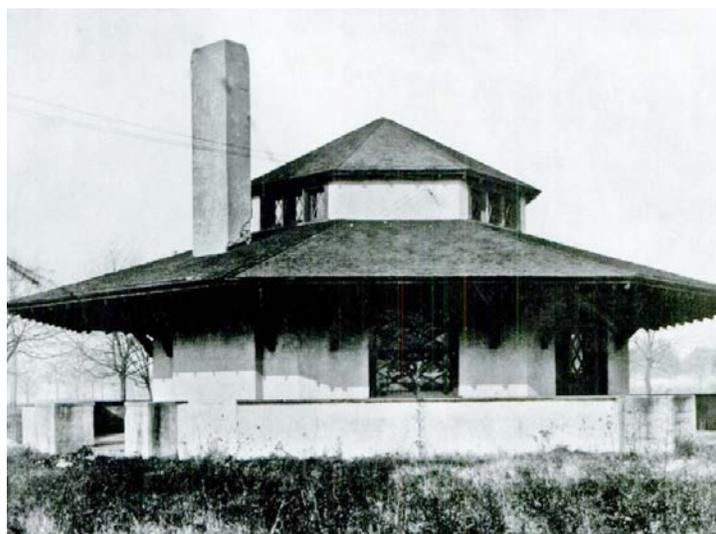
THE ROUND HOUSE (1908 photo-built 1905))

**Real Estate Office - Christian Science Church -Meeting Hall -Residence
Citizens Presbyterian Church (photo 2021)**

The “Round House” constructed in 1905 is one of the oldest buildings in Floral Park. It is located at 70 Floral Parkway, at the corner of Floral Parkway and Carnation Avenue. It was named Round House because it has six sides. Over the years extensions have been added to the original building. The black and white photo dates back to 1908.

The Round House served as the office of McCormack Real Estate and the Windsor Land Company. The First Church of Christ, Scientist, purchased and adapted the property for its use in 1948. The first church service was held on February 9, 1948; the church was dedicated in January 1949.

Over the years the Round House has been utilized as a meeting hall for groups such as the Floral Park American Legion. The building was also occupied as a home and currently used as the Citizens Presbyterian Church.



For information, or to receive the e-newsletter version of the *Docent's Digest* (seasonal or monthly versions), or to arrange a future FPHS Museum Docent Tour, or to donate funds, historic documents, photos, memorabilia or artifacts, please call: 516-775-6849, email: anncorbett@corbettpr.com or visit www.floralparkhistorical.org. Membership dues for the 2021-2022 FPHS year are due now. Tax-deductible monetary donations in support of our archival efforts are always welcomed. Address: FPHS, P.O. Box 802, Floral Park NY 11002.