

Historical Society of Haddonfield

Greenfield Hall Virtual Tour Text

Introduction

We would like to welcome you to Greenfield Hall, which is the headquarters of the Historical Society of Haddonfield.

This house, Greenfield Hall, was built in 1841 by John Gill IV as a home for his future wife, Elizabeth French of Moorestown. The Gill family had been living here in Haddonfield for more than 200 years by the time this house was built. John Gill IV's great-great-grandfather was the first cousin of Elizabeth Haddon.

Elizabeth Haddon was 21 when she came here in 1701 from England. Her father, John Haddon, sent her to come and build a house on the land he bought here in West New Jersey, which was the last step required to claim the land. The year after she arrived, Elizabeth married John Estaugh, a Quaker minister.

In 1713, Elizabeth and John Estaugh built a large house that they called New Haddonfield, in honor of her father. A few years later, Elizabeth's father gave her land for a Quaker Meetinghouse nearby, and that helped grow our town. Haddonfield became an important community in the Philadelphia area.

Over the next 300 years, Haddonfield grew into the town you know today.

We are very lucky that the Historical Society has a large collection of museum objects that help tell the history of our town, and we're going to share a few of those objects with you today. We hope that you'll come visit Greenfield Hall in person sometime in the future and learn even more about our past.

Object Spotlight: Bonecrusher Bicycle

This is a very early bicycle in our collection. It's known as the "bonecrusher" and it's the first type of [bicycle](#) with [pedals](#), though if you take a good look, you'll see that the pedals turn only the front wheel. There's no chain going to the rear wheel, so these things were very difficult and not efficient to ride.

The "bonecrusher" bicycle was invented in France in the 1860s, and it had wooden wheels with [iron](#) tires and a frame of [wrought iron](#). As the name implied, it rattled your bones and was extremely uncomfortable to ride, made worse by the conditions of 19th century roads. Unlike today's smooth asphalt, Haddonfield roads in the late 1800s were dirt - full of mud and potholes. Later, cobblestones replaced some of the dirt roads, but these were perhaps worse. Can you imagine riding this bicycle down a cobblestone street?

The bonecrusher quickly fell out of favor and was replaced with a bicycle known as the penny farthing, with its large front wheel [show picture from web]. Few original boneshakers exist today, most having been melted for [scrap metal](#) during World War I. We are lucky to have this original bonecrusher in our collection!

Object Spotlight: Fire Buckets

Haddonfield has the second-oldest volunteer fire company in the whole country. A group of 26 Haddonfield men got together in 1764 and agreed that they would help each other if a fire broke out on a neighbor's property. About fifty years later, the fire company allowed women to become members too. Today, the fire company is known as Haddon Fire Company No. 1.

So how did you help fight fires before the invention of things like fire trucks and fire extinguishers? You used buckets of water!

To be a member of the fire company, you had to have two fire buckets like these. If a fire broke out somewhere nearby, you were expected to grab your buckets and help form a line from the fire to the closest pond, creek, or other waterway. You'd pass buckets full of water from person to person until the water could be thrown on the fire. This kind of teamwork to put out fires came to be known as a "bucket brigade."

The fire buckets in our collection are made of leather, and the owner's name is painted on the outside so you could tell whose is whose.

Object Spotlight: Hearth and Stove

A cast-iron stove like this was once considered to be cutting-edge technology for your kitchen. The earliest European settlers in the Haddonfield area, including Elizabeth Haddon, cooked on a hearth. The hearth is the area inside and in front of the fireplace, with all the bricks.

The good thing about open hearth cooking is that if you need another "burner," you just take a pile of hot coals from the fire in the fireplace, put it on an empty spot on the hearth, and put your pot on top of it! Some things could also be cooked in a pot hung from a swinging crane. The bad thing about an open hearth is that it's very dangerous if you're wearing a long dress. Many women were hurt or even died because their clothes caught fire while they were cooking.

This old-looking kitchen in Greenfield Hall was never really used as a kitchen. We think it exists because John Gill IV was building an exact copy of the much older French Family house in Moorestown so that Elizabeth French would marry John Gill IV and move into this new house.

Instead, Greenfield Hall had a “modern” 1841 kitchen that was in a room that no longer exists. It probably had a cast-iron stove like this one that’s now in the basement of Greenfield Hall.

This kind of stove was a wonderful improvement over open hearth cooking. It used coal instead of wood for fuel, and it had both a flat top for cooking and an oven for baking.

It would have been very hot in the kitchen when this stove was being used, because the whole stove would have gotten hot, but it was much easier to move pots around for cooking.

Object Spotlight: Potty Chair

Back in the 1800’s, Greenfield Hall did not have electricity or running water. The question always comes up - where did people go to the bathroom?

Most early houses had a building called an “out-house” or “necessary” that was built somewhere behind the house – but not TOO close. Like the latrines that can still be found at some campgrounds and sleep-away camps, the outhouse was basically a shed that had a seat that opened over a deep pit. This picture shows a seat from an outhouse that had three different options: big, medium, and small!

But going outside to an outhouse didn’t always work. What would you do in the middle of the night; or if it was very cold, dark or stormy out; or if there was an old or sick person in the household? You might want something like the “potty chair” that you see here.

The chair has a hole in the middle of the seat that is covered when not in use. Under the hole there is a wooden box that holds a ceramic bowl. During the night, or if you couldn’t go to the outhouse, you could walk over and use the potty chair and then put the cover back over the hole.

If you lived in a house with servants, they would empty the “chamber pot” each morning. If there were no servants in the house, it was generally the job of the youngest girl to empty the chamber pots. If there were no young girl in the family, it was the job of the youngest boy to empty the chamber pots.

Would that ever have been your job? I bet everyone was happy when indoor plumbing came to Greenfield Hall!

Object Spotlight: Samplers

School and learning was pretty different in the 1700s and 1800s, and girls and boys had very different roles.

Girls were expected to learn how to run a household. They needed to know about measuring and math for cooking and sewing. And they needed to learn different types of sewing stitches so they could make clothing, curtains, blankets, and anything else the family needed. Girls learned those stitches by making a “sampler,” like the one shown here. This is one of the oldest samplers at Greenfield Hall and it was made in NJ around 1700.

Samplers were also used to teach girls their letters and numbers.

What do you think happened with the sampler that has the ABC’s at the bottom? Do you think that the girl who made it started it on her own, without any help – she decided she could do it “all by herself”? She stuck with it and finished what is a unique and interesting sampler.

Some samplers tell about the family of the maker like Letitia Matlack’s sampler. She gives the names of her parents and when they were born, as well as the names of her sisters and brother. Letitia also uses a great variety of stitches in her sampler to show how much she has learned about sewing.

In the 1800s, when girls were allowed to go to schools, the schools tended to have a specific design for their samplers that all of the girls had to make. The teachers wanted to show that they had taught the girls how to sew, but did not let the girls be very creative!