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Collection 369
Harry J. Podmore (1891-1962)
Research Collection

By Ellen R. Callahan
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Biography

Harry Jefferson Podmore was born on September 15, 1891 in Trenton, NJ, son of Arthur Jefferson Podmore and Mary Quinn Podmore. The Podmores were a family of potters. Harry's father, uncle William and grandfather Henry (sometimes called Harry) all worked at the Empire Potters of Trenton.

Census records show that after the death of Harry's mother in February of 1892¹ he and his father lived with his extended family in Trenton until his father married Florence Hall in 1908 and moved to Camden where he worked for the Camden Pottery Company. Harry, then 14 years old, remained in Trenton, living with his grandparents, uncle, and cousin.

By 1915, Harry was attending Rider Moore Business College² and lists his occupation as a clerk in the *Trenton City Directory*. Over the years, he is a reporter, works in real-estate, advertising and, at least in 1938, worked for the Works Progress Administration's Federal Writers' Project.³ On his 1942 draft registration card he lists himself as a self-employed book seller, book scout, reporter, and historical researcher.⁴

For over 50 years, Podmore researched and wrote about the history of Trenton in books, newspaper columns, and magazine articles. His newspaper columns included: "The Head of the Town" published in the 1920s in the *State Gazette*; "Jews in Trenton History," a 45-part series written from

¹ New Jersey Deaths and Burials, 1720–1971." Index. FamilySearch, Salt Lake City, Utah, 2009, 2010

² 1915 New Jersey State Census

³ As evidenced by scattered correspondence found in the Subject Files in this collection.

⁴ The National Archives at St. Louis; St. Louis, Missouri; World War II Draft Cards (Fourth Registration) for the State of New Jersey; Record Group Title: Records of the Selective Service System; Record Group Number: 147; Series Number: M1986

1925 to 1930 in *The Community Messenger*⁵; “Trenton in By-Gone Years” a column in the *Trenton Sunday Times Observer* written in the 1940s; and “Trenton, its place in the history of the pottery industry in the United States” published in *Ceramic Age*, from March to September 1948.

The one interest outside of history that can be documented for Podmore is magic and shadowgraphy (hand shadow puppets). He was a member of the Trenton Conjurers Club, serving as President in 1939⁶ and teamed with Trenton magician Richard Schmitter to form the Apollo Entertainers⁷. He also contributed articles to the *Sphinx*, a magazine for magicians.

From 1960 to 1962, Podmore served as an adviser to the Lawrence Tercentenary Committee and was instrumental in the creation of the Lawrence Historical Collection housed at the Lawrence Branch of the County Library. Harry Jefferson Podmore died on December 24, 1962 at the age of 71.

In 1964, as tribute to Podmore’s service to Trenton, the Trenton Tercentenary Commission republished *Trenton, Old and New* which had first been published in 1927. In her introduction to the new edition, editor Mary J. Messler wrote: “It is the hope of the Publications Committee that this revised edition of *Trenton, Old and New* will remain as a lasting memorial to the late Harry J. Podmore’s lifetime of devotion to Trenton’s historic past....”⁸ In 2005, a further tribute was made to Podmore and Bill Dwyer (another local journalist and historian) when Lawrence Township established the Harry J. Podmore and William M. Dwyer Historical Award. The award is given to individuals or community organizations that work to promote and/or preserve the history of the area.⁹

Scope and Content

This collection consists of the research notes on the history of Trenton and its surrounding area gathered by Harry J. Podmore until at least the late 1950s; correspondence sent to him from locals with recollections of the past, 1926-1959; and two of his published pamphlets and compiled copies of his newspaper column “Trenton in Bygone Days,” 1946-1949 and 1956. Formats include typed and handwritten notes and extracts of material he found written in a wide variety of sources including Trenton newspapers and the many existing histories of New Jersey and Trenton history such as the New Jersey Historical Society’s *New Jersey Archives* series, Francis B. Lee’s *History of Trenton*, Cooley’s *Genealogy of Early Settlers in Trenton and Ewing* and others. There are also original newspaper and magazine clippings as well as scattered correspondence providing further information on a variety of topics. The general date range of the information gathered by Podmore is from about 1769 to 1958. The collection consists of 8 boxes and two wrapped scrapbooks.

⁵ Interestingly, there are no extensive research notes in this collection that are related to the “Jews in Trenton History” articles.

⁶ *The Sphinx*. May 1938, p. 78

⁷ Undated letter found in “Magicians” folder of Series 1 of this collection.

⁸ Today, the 1964 edition is available in full text at <http://www.trentonhistory.org/Old&New.html> and the 1927 edition is available and indexed by Ancestry.com at <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/15109/>.

⁹ Immordino, Robert B. “The indelible imprints of Messrs. Podmore and Dwyer.” *Central Jersey*, 10/20/2005. <https://archive.centraljersey.com/>

Series Description

Series 1. Subject Files

This series consist of general subject files and a smaller subset of files on historic houses. The material includes typed and hand-written notes, newspaper clippings, pages from publications and drafts of articles. There is also correspondence scattered throughout the files, some answering specific queries from Podmore, others with information sent to him in response to reading one of his columns.

Series 2. Correspondence

This is a small series of letters written to Harry Podmore between 1929 and 1956, with the majority written in the 1940s and 1950s. Most of the letters are from people writing childhood memories of Trenton. Of particular interest is a letter from Hannah Hillman refuting the notion of the “good old days” with a description of how difficult life was because of daily chores. Another interesting correspondent was Pulitzer Prize winner Carl Van Doren, seeking information about the Pennsylvania Mutiny of 1781. These letters are arranged alphabetically by correspondent. The bracketed number at the end of each description [e.g., 2014-MS.1483] is a previously assigned manuscript number.

Series 3. Publications and Photograph

This is a small series of material added to the collection as part of Accession 2017.02. It includes two copies each of Podmore’s *Guide to Historic Trenton* and *Some Early Trenton Washington Celebrations*. In addition, there is a photograph of a schoolhouse which is marked as being the property of Harry J. Podmore.

Series 4. Record Books

This series contains 35 small notebooks Podmore used to record information he found or citations pointing to that information. Books 1-21, and 23-28 include personal name indexes in their front pages and are also indexed by book 31. The subject matter of book 22 is mills situated in the Trenton area. Book 29 is about Josiah Fithian and his mill. No. 30 is an A-Z tabbed notebook labeled “Reference Notes on Trenton and New Jersey” that includes information regarding the founding of counties and towns, construction of churches, court houses and other buildings. No. 32, “References to Scrap Books” is a subject index to four volumes of scrap books that do not correspond to anything in this collection. The whereabouts of those scrapbooks is unknown. Book No. 33 includes lists of marriages and deaths gleaned from published sources, and notes on genealogies found in *Genealogy of Early Settlers in Trenton and Ewing* by Elie Field Cooley and William Scudder Cooley. Each section includes a name index. No. 34 includes profiles on various individuals taken from published sources and No. 35 contains extracts from biographies of Zebulon Montgomery Pike and Mahlon Stacy.

Series 5. Source Book of Trenton History

This series was made up of a 3-volume set of post binders which have been dismantled, foldered and boxed. While a few sections within the books are numbered, most were not, so page numbers

written in pencil and in brackets have been added to help preserve the order of each volume and make referencing the books possible. It should be noted that the sections which were numbered by the creator were often found placed in the book in reverse order or completely out of order.

Because further analysis of the contents would be needed to determine the arrangement, the order of the pages has been kept as found. Materials include typed and hand-written notes and extracts from published sources, what appear to be drafts of articles, newspaper clippings and pages from a variety of publications.

Series 6

This series consist of two scrapbooks which hold copies of Podmore's "Trenton in Bygone Days," published in the *Trenton Sunday Times-Advertiser*, 1946-1949 and 1956.

Box List

Series 1. Research Subject Files, General

Box / Folder / Content

- 1 / 1 Animals
- 1 / 2 Artists
- 1 / 3 Assunpink & Second Battle [Second Battle of Trenton also knows as the Battle of Assunpink Creek, January 2, 1777]
- 1 / 4 Balloon Ascensions [Hot Air Balloons]
- 1 / 5 Banks
- 1 / 6 Barges
- 1 / 7 Bathtubs
- 1 / 8 Bloomsbury [neighborhood in South Trenton / Chambersburg area of Trenton]
- 1 / 9 Bonaparte, Joseph & Prince Murat
- 1 / 10 Bordentown
- 1 / 11 Boswell Baptists
- 1 / 12 Bromley [neighborhood in what is now Hamilton Township in the area of East State Street and Nottingham Way]
- 1 / 13 Calhoun Street Bridge
- 1 / 14 Camptown [neighborhood in the vicinity of Calhoun and West Hanover]
- 1 / 15 Canoe Clubs
- 1 / 16 Cemeteries [see also Box 3 below for Riverview Cemetery]
- 1 / 17 Chinese
- 1 / 18 Colonial History
- 1 / 19 Courts and Courthouses
- 1 / 20 Delaware and Raritan Canal
- 1 / 21 Delaware / Ships
- 1 / 22 Eating Houses [taverns, lunch wagons, etc.]
- 1 / 23 Fishing

Series 1. Research Subject Files, General (cont'd)

Box / Folder / Content

- 1 / 24 Fitch, John
- 2 / 1 Hamilton Square
- 2 / 2 Health and Health Care
- 2 / 3 Irish
- 2 / 4 Italians
- 2 / 5 Lambertton [shipping point / neighborhood along the Delaware in Trenton]
- 2 / 6 Lambertville [Hunterdon County]
- 2 / 7 Magicians / Other Acts
- 2 / 8 "Major Barnet" [Delaware River Steamboat, ca. 1850s]
- 2 / 9 Markets
- 2 / 10 Merchants
- 2 / 11 Mershon, Henry, Baker's Basin and Princessville
- 2 / 12 Millerites – reports of lectures given in Trenton [followers of William Miller who predicted the second coming would come on 3/21/1843]
- 2 / 13 Millham [area near Trenton – includes portions of entries from the Millham scrapbook published in the Sunday Times Advertiser in 1929]
- 2 / 14 Moreau, Gen. Jean Victor
- 2 / 15 Morris Island and Cochran Park
- 2 / 16 Morrisville, PA and Somerseate Mansion [colonial mansion which served as Washington's headquarters, December 8th to 14th, 1776]
- 2 / 17 Newspapers [history of newspapers and printing in Trenton]
- 2 / 18 Newspapers [history of newspapers and printing in Trenton]
- 2 / 19 Newspapers [history of newspapers and printing in Trenton]
- 3 / 1 Paine, Thomas
- 3 / 2 People
- 3 / 3 People
- 3 / 4 Petty's Run
- 3 / 5 Politics / Elections
- 3 / 6 Population
- 3 / 7 Post Office / Mail
- 3 / 8 Potteries
- 3 / 9 Railroads
- 3 / 10 Railroads – Frog Wars [war between two railroad lines]
- 3 / 11 Riverview Cemetery
- 3 / 12 Saturday Nights
- 3 / 13 Schools
- 3 / 14 Skating (roller and ice)
- 3 / 15 Sports (1 of 3)

Series 1. Research Subject Files, General (cont'd)

Box / Folder / Content

- 3 / 16 Sports (2 of 3)
- 4 / 1 Sports (3 of 3)
- 4 / 2 Sports – Boxing
- 4 / 3 Sports – Horse Racing and Riding
- 4 / 4 Spring Lake / Broad Street Park [Hamilton Twp.]
- 4 / 5 Streets
- 4 / 6 Taverns (1 of 2)
- 4 / 6.1 Taverns (2 of 2)
- 4 / 6.2 Note from Harry Podmore giving “Trenton Taverns” to the Trenton Free Public Library, June 23, 1962¹⁰
- 4 / 7 Transportation, general overview
- 4 / 8 Transportation – Street Railroad/Trolleys
- 4 / 9 Transportation – Toll Gates
- 4 / 10 Trenton Junction
- 4 / 11 Trenton Township
- 4 / 12 Trenton, Site of
- 4 / 13 Trenton, South
- 4 / 14 Washington’s Portrait by Kellog

Series 1. Research Subject Files., Historic Houses

- 4 / 15 Barnes, Capt. John
- 4 / 16 Bow House
- 4 / 17 Brearley, David
- 4 / 18 Breese, James
- 4 / 19 Chambers, John
- 4 / 20 The Cottages [East State Street]
- 4 / 21 Douglass, Alexander
- 4 / 22 Frazer, Dr. William
- 4 / 23 Higbee, Joseph
- 4 / 24 Hermitage
- 4 / 25 Hunt, Abraham
- 4 / 26 Magowan, Frank
- 4 / 27 McNeely, Robert

¹⁰ It has been confirmed that Podmore had no publication titled “Trenton Taverns” so it is assumed that his note refers to draft profiles of taverns found in these two folders. Similar notes and draft are also found in sections of the Source Book of Trenton History series.

Series 1. Research Subject Files., Historic Houses (cont'd)

- 4 / 28 Oaklands [Trenton County Club]
- 4 / 29 Pine Grove
- 4 / 30 Potts, Stacy and William
- 4 / 31 Stelle, Pontius DeLare
- 4 / 32 Thropp's Iron Horse

Series 2. Correspondence, 1929-1956

- 5 / 1 Bellis, Ida G. [Mrs. Alfred P. S Bellis] (1883-1969) re: the first bridge and first Iron railroad bridge to Trenton, September 29, 1952. [1 p.] [2014-MS.1763]
- 5 / 2 Carey, Clarice B. re: allegation that Podmore told Roy, "Florence is mentally incompetent and should be institutionalized," April 1, 1947, 1 page; Podmore to Florence denying statement, April 5, 1947, 1 page; Florence¹¹ [written for her by Marian Watt] to Podmore with further clarification and a question, April 1947. [1 p.] [2014-MS.1959]
- 5 / 3 Cook, Lewis re: information about his father, David Sappington Cook, who installed electrical streetcar tracks in Cincinnati, OH, Rochester, NY, Wilkes-Barre, PA and Trenton, NJ, August 3, 1956. [1 p.] [2014-MS.1959]
- 5 / 4 Creely, Amos re: former "Iron Man of the Delaware Valley" known for canoeing prowess writes in response to a March 24, 1955 newspaper column about himself [attached to letter]. Creely had been paralyzed in a train accident in 1952 but was now recovering, March 29, 1955. [1 p.] [2013-MS.0501]
- 5 / 5 Hillman, Hannah [Mrs. Harry Hillman] (1887-1974) re: description of how difficult the "good old days" were because of household chores; memories of growing up in the Chambersburg Toll Gate house [between Broad Street Park and White Horse] and the many families she knew there, March 24, 1953.[5 pp.] [2014-MS.1632]
- 5 / 6 Hillman, Hannah [Mrs. Harry Hillman] (1887-1974) re: her childhood living at the tollhouse on the Wright farm in Chambersburg in the 1890's April 25, 1953. [10 pp.] [2014. MS. 1903]
- 5 / 7 Hillman, Hannah [Mrs. Harry Hillman] (1887-1974) re: letter to Trenton Evening Times referencing her previous letters to Podmore and inquiring about his health, January 22, 1958. [2 pp.] [2014. MS. 1955]

¹¹ It is possible that Florence is Harry Podmore's stepmother, Florence Hall Podmore. This speculation comes from Ms. Carey mentioning that her parents were good friends of Podmore's father and Florence.

Series 2. Correspondence, 1929-1956 (cont'd)

- 5 / 8 Howell, Robert Wilson (1869-1951) re: relating anecdotes and memories concerning Hand-In-Hand fire engine company, David Shaw's wallpaper store, Zouaves parade in Trenton, President Taft's visit, August 2, 1947 [1 pp.] [2014 MS. 1904]; Howell, Robert Wilson (1869-1951) re: more memories of old Trenton including a story about Philemon Dickenson, James Clemmer's singing group, November 6, 1950 [2 pp.] [2014-MS.1889]
- 5 / 9 Hutchinson, Elmer T. [Corresponding Secretary of the New Jersey Historical Society] re: story of Jacob R. Freese obtaining rails of black walnut split by Abraham Lincoln. Hutchinson's father then helped turn the rails into canes and gavels, June 8, 1943. [1 pp.] [2014. MS. 1483]
- 5 / 10 LaBreque, Harry E. re: life in Trenton and his days as a posing artist, 2 undated letters and September 12, 1955 [5 pp.]; Podmore's handwritten notes on newspaper stories about Harry's appearance in Trenton. [1 p.] [2014 MS. 1915]
- 5 / 11 Lanning, Mrs. F. C. re: Ewing history, including a church and "burying ground" at "what may be called a continuation of Stuyvesant Ave. and Fernwood Road, the Hopewell "burying ground" and information about the Revolutionary War, October 17, 1929. [4 pages] [2014-MS.1820]
- 5 / 12 Smith, G. Edward re: sharing his memories of membership in the Mercer County Wheelman [bicycle club] between 1889 and 1891, August 1950. [2 pp.] [2014-MS.1891]
- 5 / 12.5 Stretch, Carolyn Wood re: clockmakers, 1932.
- 5 / 13 Van Doren, Carl¹² re: inquiring about the Pennsylvania Mutiny of 1781, Colonel John Cox and questions about locations of roads and ferries in Trenton, October 25, 1842 [3 pp.], October 26, 1942 [2 pp.], November 4, 1942 [1 p.], and November 12, 1942 [1 p.] [2014-MS.1880]
- 5 / 14 Walker, Frederick A. re: the Thompson House, February 6, 1926 [1 pp.] [2014-MS. 1816]
- 5 / 15 Weller, George (1861-1955) re: boyhood memories of hunting and fishing, December 17, 1945 [3 pp.] [2013-MS. 0500]
- 5 / 16 Wimpenny, Arnold re: cloth manufacturing mills in Trenton - Titus Woolen Mills, Samuel K. Wilson's two mills, Princeton Worsted, and the Saxony (later renamed Colonial) Mill; also provides biographic sketch of Boothroyd Wimpenny, who took charge of Colonial Mills in 1896, February 20, 1951. [8 pp.] [2014-MS.1879]

¹² Pulitzer Prize winner for his book, Benjamin Franklin. [Source: Ancestry.com. *U.S., World War II Draft Registration Cards, 1942* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Carl-Van-Doren>, accessed 12/20/2020.

Series 2. Correspondence, 1929-1956 (cont.)

5 / 17 Yates, Harry H. (1877-1967) re: autobiography and memories of growing up in Trenton, January 14th, 1959 [3 pp.] and January 20, 1959 [1p.]. [2014-MS.1953]

Series 3. Publications and Photograph [Acc. 2017.02]

Box / Folder / Content

5 / 18 *Guide to Historic Trenton* compiled by Harry J. Podmore, pub. By the North Trenton Improvement Association, ca. 1930s [2 copies]

5 / 19 *Some early Trenton Washington celebrations : an address delivered before the Trenton Historical Society, 1932.* by Podmore, Harry J., Trenton Historical Society. Trenton: Trenton Historical Society, 1933

5 / 20 Early photograph mounted on board, identified in accession as “3 Loe School; verso includes “Property of H. J. Podmore, please return to him.” [5”x6.5” print on 7”x9” board; depicts a wood and brick structure which is assumed to be a schoolhouse with children and a teacher posing in entryway

Series 4. Record Books

Box / Folder / Content

5 / 21 Books 1 & 2

5 / 22 Books 3 & 4

5 / 23 Books 5 & 6

5 / 24 Books 7 & 8

5 / 25 Books 9 & 10

5 / 26 Books 11 & 12

5 / 27 Books 13 & 14

5 / 28 Books 15 & 16

5 / 29 Books 17 & 18

6 / 1 Books 19 & 20

6 / 2 Books 21 & 22

6 / 3 Books 23 & 24

6 / 4 Books 25 & 26

6 / 5 Books 27 & 28

6 / 6 Books 29

6 / 7 Books 30 & 31

6 / 8 Books 32 & 33

6 / 9 Books 34 & 35

Series 5. Source Book of Trenton History Vols. 1-3 [dismantle and number]

Box / Folder / Content

- 7 / 1 Vol. 1, pp. 1-100
- 7 / 2 Vol. 1, pp. 101-177
- 7 / 3 Vol. 1, pp. 178-237
- 7 / 4 Vol. 1, loose material found in back
- 7 / 5 Vol. 2, pp. 1-100
- 7 / 6 Vol. 2, pp. 101-200
- 7 / 7 Vol. 2, pp. 201-300
- 7 / 8 Vol. 2, pp. 301-400
- 7 / 9 Vol. 2, pp. 401-499
- 8 / 1 Vol. 2, pp. 500-600
- 8 / 2 Vol. 2, pp. 601-658
- 8 / 3 Vol. 3, pp. 1 - 99
- 8 / 4 Vol. 3, pp. 100-200
- 8 / 5 Vol. 3, pp. 201-300
- 8 / 6 Vol. 3, pp. 301-400
- 8 / 7 Vol. 3, pp. 401-500
- 8 / 8 Vol. 3, pp. 501-572

Series 6 Scrap Books

Scrapbook 1. "Trenton in Bygone Days," 1946-1949 and 1956. [SB035]

Scrapbook 2. "Trenton in Bygone Days," 1956 [SB067]

Provenance

It is assumed that the material in the collection was gifted by Mr. Podmore or by his estate. Series 2 was part of accession 2017.02 given by the Hopewell Valley Historical Society.

Additional Reference Sources

New Jersey and Federal Census Record

Sphinx: An Independent Magazine for Magicians. October 1913 p. 153; December 1913 p. 119; April 1914, p. 35; April 1945, p. 117.

Trenton City Directories

Vertical File, Harry Podmore – Trentoniana, Trenton Free Public Library

Additional Podmore Material available at the Trenton Free Public Library

"Jews in Trenton History," a 45 part series written from 1925 to 1930 in *The Community Messenger* [T296 P75.46]

The Mayors of Trenton