

The Roebling Wire

No. 33

News From  ROEBLING MUSEUM

Fall 2020

Roebling Museum Preserves Immigrant Worker Stories in a Historic House



Left: c1905 (photo from Roebling Museum collection)
Right: 2020

Roebling Museum is preserving an example of worker housing in our company town! When the property directly across from the museum went on sale, we took quick action to raise money for a down payment. To be successful, we need you to participate in creating a vision for the future of 101 Second Ave. Get in touch and visit roebblingmuseum.org/historyhouse to share feedback, stay in the loop, or get involved.

We want you to follow along as we learn about the house at 101 Second Ave. Today, we are taking a page out of Lou Borbi's book, *Roebling: Company Town: Steel, Immigrants, Moonshine and Crap Tables*. This part of the story begins in the 1930s and we hear from someone who grew up next door.

"The relief center for distribution of food and clothing in Roebling, which was a branch of the American Red Cross, was located in the corner house of Second Avenue and Main Street. It was known locally as the '101 Ranch.'

George Pukenas was a nine-year-old boy living with his family next door to the relief center at the time.

"I remember getting up early and seeing people gathering in front of the house. They were waiting for Mrs. Lippincott to open the door and

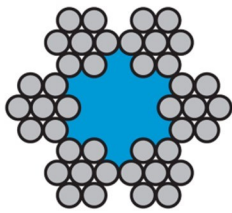
begin distributing the food. Men stood there unshaven, lethargic, talking quietly. The women all appeared to be immigrants by the babushkas and dark dresses they wore. They all looked much older than they probably were. Just a few years prior, they had too much pride to ask for handouts. It brought a feeling of shame and worthlessness.. but not anymore."

Mrs. Lippincott would begin allowing people inside around 8:00. She was in her mid-forties, short and stout, with graying hair tied in a bun. She handled her duties as relief agent with authority and strict guidelines.

Things usually went smoothly, but on occasion all hell broke out, George recalled with a laugh. "You could hear Mrs. Lippincott hollering right through the brick fire wall, 'How dare you come in here asking for handouts when you worked two days last week! Get out! Now!'" Anyone working two days or more was not eligible for relief.

"People could receive canned goods, a bag of potatoes, flour that came in large sacks marked with a big red X and wasn't very good... bugs and everything. On occasion, fresh vegetables from local farmers were available. Cotton yard goods would be passed out when available. The items might include dress print outing flannels, gingham, and shirting. In the winter, Army surplus clothing was handed out. The people living on Fifth and Sixth Avenues, however, were too embarrassed to come here and ask for help. Mr. Dennis would load food in a truck and deliver it to them."

(Lou Borbi, *Roebling: Company Town*, 246- 247.)



ROEBLING MUSEUM
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

MARTHA MOORE
PRESIDENT

ARTHUR SHETTLE
VICE PRESIDENT

TONY PASTORE
TREASURER

SALLY LANE
SECRETARY

DANA KOEPEL

PIERRE LACOMBE

GEORGE OTT

JIM PARKER

TRISH STRYJEWSKI

LYNNE CALAMIA
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

A Letter from the President

This is the time of year when the Roebling Museum looks to its members, visitors, and friends for support to propel us into a new season of exhibits, programming and events. As always, we find our friends are coming through with generous financial contributions to help us grow. This year of shutdowns and separation has shown all of us what we value. We value our community of members, friends, and supporters, and we're grateful that you value the Museum in return. The pandemic also has taught us what we can achieve in constrained times. We have learned how to continue the Museum's mission, despite everything that 2020 has thrown at us.

Under the leadership of Executive Director Lynne Calamia, the Museum has initiated creative activities like the community fence art project and the wreath decorating contest. We added new walking tours that focus on specific aspects of this unique company town. And we've led virtual "Roebling Roadtrips" with a series of Zoom talks focused on sites that are far from Roebling, New Jersey, but closely involved with the Roebling legacy, including Saxonburg, Pa., the town founded by John A. Roebling when he immigrated from Prussia in 1831, and the Allegheny Portage Railroad, where Roebling first tested his newly-invented wire rope.

The Museum's biggest venture, however, has taken us only as far as the other side of Second Avenue. In October, we purchased 101 Second Avenue, the house directly opposite the Museum, with the intention of one day incorporating into the Museum's public space. Adding a Roebling house has been a longtime goal for the Museum, and it's a bit ironic that we achieved it during such a tough year.

This new project gives us plenty to look forward to -- and to work on -- in 2021. We hope you'll stay tuned and stay in touch.

Thank you again for your support this year and in the future.

Martha Moore
President, Board of Directors

OUR MISSION

The mission of the Roebling Museum is to document, preserve, and exhibit the history of the John A. Roebling's Sons Company, the Roebling family and the village of Roebling. The focus of the museum is both the industrial and technological achievements of the company and the unique social history of its workforce and the town it created. The museum connects a storied past to the present while also serving as a valuable resource for school curriculum enhancement and academic research. It is the only museum in the world dedicated solely to the accomplishments of the Roebling family, its businesses and workers and the engineering innovations of the company in Trenton and Roebling, New Jersey.



Membership at Roebling Museum has its privileges! Become a member and enjoy free general admission for a year while supporting all that we do, from education programs for local schoolchildren to conservation of nationally important art and artifacts.

Join or renew your membership at roeblingmuseum.org today, and help keep history alive and enlightening in this unique village!

Board Member Spotlight—Tony Pastore



Tony Pastore has lived in Roebing since 1990, or as he puts it, “since the days when people gave you only four digits for their phone number.”

His house on Hornberger Avenue has been here a lot longer: since 1922, built when the Roebing company was putting the finishing touches on the

industrial village. “It has undergone several rounds of remodeling but it still has many original features-- the hardwood floors, moldings, and some of the doors.”

So it wasn’t surprising that when the Roebing Museum initiated the purchase of 101 Second Avenue, the rowhouse directly across from the Museum’s historic building, Tony took the lead in vetting the property. Tony joined the Roebing Museum board in 2019, and became its treasurer in January.

Overseeing the finances of a community organization is a skill he honed during more than two decades of involvement with youth sports in Florence Township. Tony has not only been a coach but helped to run leagues for softball, basketball, and soccer -- continuing on well after his three daughters moved on to college.

“After passing the torch for the last of the sports I was involved with I decided that helping with the Roebing Museum would be both a good fit for my skills and a chance to learn more about our local history,” Tony says.

He also chairs the Florence Township recreation committee.

Like the Roebing brothers who founded the company town, Tony is an engineer -- and so are all the members of his family: his wife Bernadette and daughters Brigitte, Kyra, and Sophie. His company, RDRTec, develops new radar technologies for commercial and government use.

As a result, he is interested in Roebing history not just from the viewpoint of a local resident but as a fellow engineer. “I’m impressed that the Roebing family not only had the wide range of engineering skills needed to be succeeding bridge builders but also had the skills and wherewithal to plan a town, plan the factory, and recruit the skilled and unskilled workers required to be successful,” he says.

Although the steel and wire mill was demolished decades ago, he points out, “there is so much history still to see when you know how to look for it. Revealing that vision is something that the Roebing Museum offers to everyone interested in experiencing our local history.”

During this year when the coronavirus pandemic forced the Roebing Museum to close its building, Tony joined the Museum’s outdoor walking tours of the company town. Each tour focuses on a different aspect of Roebing, whether it’s the brickwork on the houses, the location along the Delaware, or the Amboy Avenue neighborhood with history of speakeasies and gambling.

“Being involved with the museum has taught me a great deal about our history,” he says. “I have a lot more to learn and I’m grateful that the museum affords me the opportunity to do so.”

Recap of a busy year with all new programs!

As you know, Roebing Museum has been closed since March due to the pandemic and during this time the museum has quickly adapted to create brand new, relevant, and safe opportunities to give back to our supporters. Pay-what-you-wish programs have kept our gates open and I hope you’ve been able to take part in our community-led walking tours, yoga classes, the pop-up open house, and outdoor art programming, or our online offerings including yoga and the Roebing Roadtrip virtual lectures. Let us know if you have ideas for tours and online programs for the spring!



Virtual Lectures with folks from Roebing-related historic sites around the country



Community Art fence installations



Town talk and tours led by community historians



Scarecrow contest, October 2020



In person yoga classes at the museum as well as virtual yoga



ROEBLING MUSEUM

100 Second Ave.
PO Box 9
Roebling, NJ 08554
(609) 499-7200

NONPROFIT ORG.
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 301
TRENTON NJ

CURRENT RESIDENT OR

John A. Roebling and the rest of us at Roebling Museum want your help!

At Roebling Museum, we couldn't do what we do without the support and enthusiasm of our volunteers. They give tours, greet people at the front desk, work with the historical objects in our collections, and help our events run smoothly.

We are always looking for more folks to come and join us! If you or someone you know is interested in supporting the work of Roebling Museum through volunteer work, please be in touch—we'd love to hear from you!

Find more information at roeblingmuseum.org or by calling us at (609) 499-7200.



HOURS & ADMISSION

Due to COVID-19 our hours will vary. Check out our website or follow us on Facebook for the most up to date information about hours and upcoming events.

March through December:

Wednesday through Sunday 11:00 a.m.—4:00 p.m.

January and February:

Open by appointment for groups and researchers

Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Christmas, New Year's Day & Easter

\$7.00—Adults; **\$5.00**—Seniors and Children 6-12
Free for Members and Children under 6

Roebling Museum is supported by a grant from the New Jersey Council for the Humanities with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the federal CARES Act.

Roebling Museum received an operating support grant from the New Jersey Historical Commission, a division of the Department of State.



facebook.com/roeblingmuseum
www.roeblingmuseum.org