



History Term Paper

Box 1273, Point Pleasant Beach, NJ

October 2020

Please note that the October 2020 meeting will not be held in accordance with guidance from local and state officials as a result of the current pandemic. However, We're hoping to go virtual sometime soon! Register your email address to stay in touch about virtual programming and PPHSM news. Visit the link below and register today!

http://bit.ly/pphs_emailreg

Pearl Harbor in Real Time

On December 7, 1941, a Japanese bomber led 360 warplanes in a surprise attack on the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor, which drew the United States into World War II. The two letters below were written to Point Pleasant Historical Society Museum Administrator Richard Morris' grandmother and grandfather during and immediately following the bombing. Ruth and Dorothy were nieces of Jennie and Wilson Speiden of Bloomfield, New Jersey. Their husbands both work for the Navy in and around Pearl Harbor. The letters are a glimpse into how the events developed on that fateful day, as well as the aftermath. All words are spelled as they were in the original letters to retain historical integrity.

Sunday, December 7, 1941

Dear Aunt Jennie and Uncle Wilson and all the kids,

Well, the excitement seems to have started...when I woke up at 8 o'clock, I heard planes then guns, but like all of Honolulu thought the Army was having practice. The planes came zooming over the valley but as there are many trees overhead, I didn't see any myself. At about 10 o'clock when the breakfast things had all been cleared away Walter called up and said that a bomb had landed at the garage station next to the office where he and the stenographer were working. He said it was war and we were being attacked. I couldn't believe it. He said we were being sabotaged....I had put the radio on as soon as Walter telephoned and learned we were being attacked by planes bearing the sign of the Rising Sun on the wing tips. They told us to keep tuned in but not to use the telephone. [Walter] says two ships at least have been sunk in Pearl Harbor. They were after the Mutual Telephone Company's building, down a few blocks from his office, when they hit the front of the gas station next to his place. The radio ordered everyone to stay at home. Then the emergency wardens were ordered to their stations...then they called a couple of dozen doctor's names out over the radio and they were ordered to Tripler Hospital at Schofield. Major Robinson called him [Walter] and asked him to report to his office. He says if anyone comes to the door and wants to get in to let them in and then scoot out the door. Imagine! When he returned later he brought along a quart of milk, then he went down to the store at the corner and stocked up with groceries but he was pretty well cleaned out. Shelves almost bare. Everybody had the same idea. The radio has announced there will be a blackout tonight. They have been making announcements all morning, first in English then in all the other languages which are spoken here telling people to be calm and obey orders...the Governor proclaimed a State of Emergency this morning and we are under Martial Law. His voice was so nervous it was hard to understand him. A bomb had exploded outside his window. MONDAY: Tonight the radio announced that no groceries will be sold tomorrow; so I guess we are in for ration cards pretty soon. The school kids have not been allowed to go to school and the schools are being used by the Army and hospitals...Tuesday: Had a very quiet night except that the neighbor across the stream hollered over to douse those lights. I tried covering it with a towel but he shouted across that he could still see it. Also, every time I opened the icebox door the refrigerator light reflected. So turned everything off, even the gas stove...this morning I joined the U.S. Engineers at Punahou Campus and we think we'll be working in 12 or 8 hour shifts...we are on the job and some planes loaded with ammunition finally arrived from the Coast. Ours had blanks only.

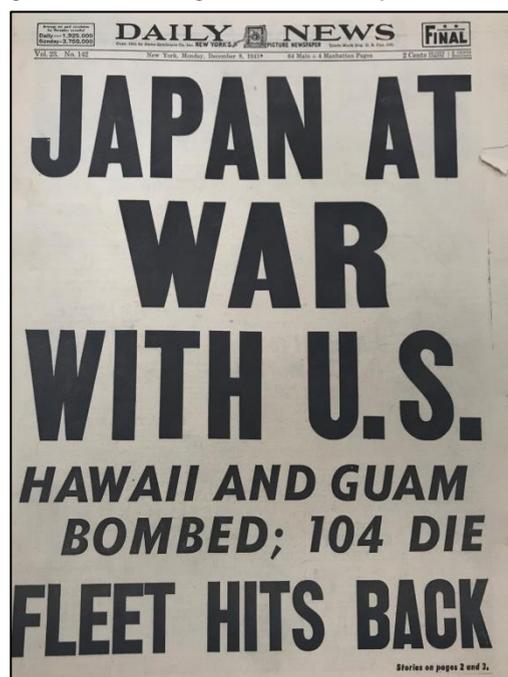
With much love from us all, Ruth

Sunday, December 14, 1941

Dear Aunt Jennie and Family,

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT THIS BEAUTIFUL SUNDAY MORNING!!!! We know our mail is to be censored, so will not try to make too many black spots appear in this letter. I didn't have a chance last week to drop a line as we are rushed as usual in the office and in the evening are blacked-out. Our office hours have been changed from 7:30 AM to 4:00 PM in order to allow us time to get home, prepare dinner, and eat it before sunset, which at present is 6:00 PM. It takes some rushing. The first few nights we ate mostly with our fingers in the dark as we couldn't seem to find our mouths. Now we are better organized and get along famously. About the middle of the week we got some tar paper and now have the bathroom and kitchen pretty well darkened, which enables us to get some of our household duties done before the room gets too hot from lack of ventilation...About 6:00 we heard rumbling, but thought the fleet was practicing. About 8:30 it started again, this time louder—I looked at Pat and said, "They sure sound angry to me—hope they are only fooling." About that time someone next door put their radio on and we heard them say – "We have been the subject of a sporadic attack-put your radios on LOUD." We turned ours immediately...it was a real attack. You can imagine how quickly we turned out of bed, donned our housecoats, and join the rest of the tenants on the lawn. We could see smoke at Pearl Harbor and could hear the anti-aircraft guns going off all around us...the radio was screaming for people to stay off the streets, but most of the tenants didn't believe that meant the lawn. After that we returned to our apartment and kept our ears pinned to the radio. Don't think I ever scrubbed the kitchen or bathroom so thoroughly (anything to keep moving while the news was so ghastly)...As usual, we were caught without food...Mrs. Pierce came forth with a carrot and a potato—we supplied the onions and made stew out of some roast beef from the Sunday before. Gosh that tasted wonderful... There is plenty of food in the island, but in order to restock the shelves and get home before dark, the stores close at 3:30 and do not open until 10:00. Everyone is making the best of an unhappy situation and hoping it will never happen again. Don't worry about us, we are as safe here as we would be anywhere. Margie – A cousin of the Forsythes stopped in to see us two weeks ago Sunday with another boy from Bay Head. Seemed good to talk to someone who knew the Jersey Shore. Here's hoping you are all together Xmas-I'll be thinking of you and hope the New Year will bring peace to all of us.

Lots of love, Dorothy



Front Page of the Monday, December 8, 1941 issue of the New York Daily News.



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Point Pleasant Historical Society
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*Vintage Halloween postcard from the Toronto Public library
 circa 1900 (Creative Commons)*

**Halloween Riddles from
 Reader's Digest**

1. I'm tall when I'm young, I'm short when I'm old, and every Halloween, I stand up inside Jack O'Lanterns. What am I?
2. How do you spell candy in 2 letters?
3. A zombie, a mummy, and a ghost bought a house. It has all of the usual rooms except for one. What room won't you find?

Answers will be in next month's newsletter.

Visit our website at pphsm.org!

The Jersey Devil – A Scare of a Tale

When I was a kid, I disliked that dusk arrived earlier as the calendar moved forward into autumn because that meant there wasn't as much time to play with my neighborhood friends between finishing my homework and supertime.

But maybe that wasn't such a bad thing.

One of the kids introduced me to the Jersey Devil when I was nine. I had never heard of the demon before, but the tales the boy spun about this flying creature who roamed the Pine Barrens and terrorized kids like me...well, suffice it to say I was terrified.

I believed in the Jersey Devil and knew he would try to get me.

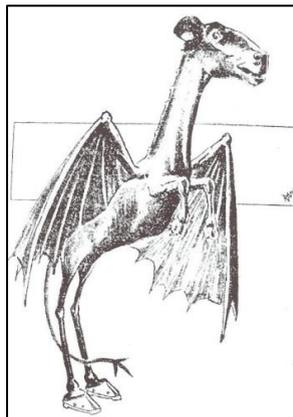
As the sun descended and the streetlights woke up, I'd pedal my banana-seat bicycle home as fast as I could with the handlebar streamers screaming. I'd hop off midway across the front lawn and let my bike careen into the bushes while I sprinted into my house just in time to outwit the beast who I knew was lurking in the shadows.

I doubted my parents' claim that there was no such thing as the Jersey Devil and trembled each night that autumn as my mind's double-feature starring the evil creature would inevitably keep me from falling asleep.

After the weight of my eyelids prevailed over my fear, I'd be summoned awake by a tormenting sound, a relentless scratching on the outside of my bedroom windows.

It was him. It had to be him.

Now, a combination of common sense and adult maturity attributes tree branches as the source of the noise. However, on one particular night, I mustered up the courage to peek outside through the gossamer curtains and



*Jersey Devil strip from 1909.
 Philadelphia Newspaper
 Public domain*

glimpsed a red glow bouncing in time with the scratches. Soon I was looking straight into his eyes on the other side of the pane. HIS EYES! He then leapt from branch to branch and flew away into the night, his path glowing red for a split second until it faded into nothing.

I scampered back to my bed and took refuge underneath my blanket, then I prayed for tomorrow's daylight to last forever. – Jill Ocone

In accordance with the guidance from state and local health officials and our concern for our museum patrons, the Point Pleasant Historical Museum is closed to visitors until further notice.

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