
◇ The General Store ◇

Ralston Recollection by Carolyn (Ralston Nesbitt) Wagenseller

Carolyn Wagenseller is a descendent of the original John Ralston and his business partner, Hugh Nesbitt who lived in Ralston in the late 1700s.

The Old Ralston Post Office

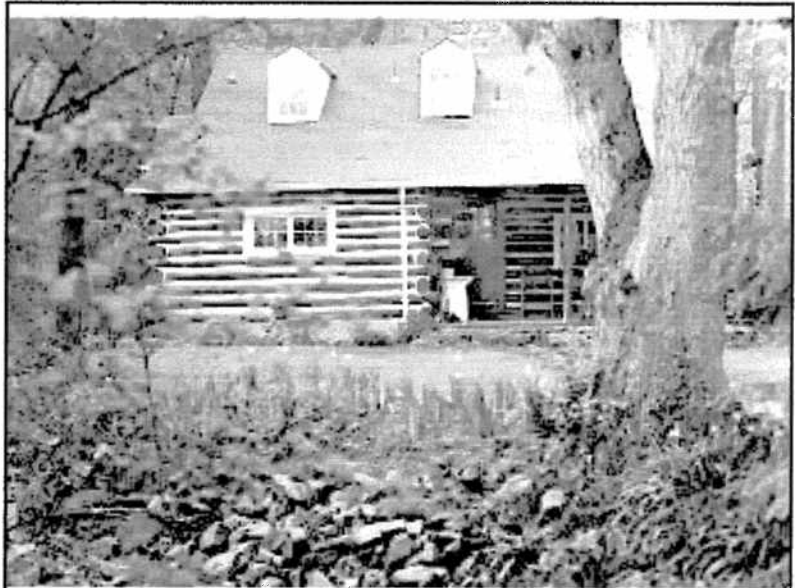
About 1945, the old building was opened for a Halloween party for the local children. The mix of children was Carolyn Backer, Elizabeth Groenewegen, Moira Callahan, Dolores Schaller, and maybe a few boys. It was the first time that we ever bobbed for apples. In a great big old wooden wash tub, we all tried to be the first to grasp an apple. I was so tiny that I couldn't open my mouth wide enough to get the prize. The old manor house had a cook by the name of Aunt Sue. She was big as a barrel and wore her hair wrapped in a bandana just like the Aunt on the maple syrup bottle. She helped comfort me while the frustration mounted.

While the parents talked to the neighbors, they probably had a cup of cider and maybe there was a plate of ginger snaps or chocolate cookies to share. At this neighborhood party the men like Doc Backer might have commented about his summer harvest, and he liked to talk about his bee keeping. Mrs. Backer knew how to cook, can, and preserve all the crops they grew.

Pepper Cases

Because we shared the same boundary line, I often paid Mrs. Backer a visit. I recall finding her sitting on the back porch churning butter. It seemed like very hard work pounding a stick up and down in a bucket. One of the dishes that she put down for winter was Pepper Cases.

She pickled them at the end of summer, and later stuffed them with cooked rice



Ralston family ownership in Mendham ended in 1995 when Carolyn R. N. Wagenseller sold the last three acres of property including the log cabin.

and ground beef. She smothered it in homemade tomato sauce. Even today, I think how delicious it was and how pretty it looked on the plate.

Log Cabin in the Woods

Judd Nesbitt, my father, had great respect for Doc Backer. He was a wealth of practical knowledge nearly lost by the college educated children of today. Judd obtained his engineering degree from Pratt in Brooklyn. He survived the Depression by driving his crops into the Newark market. About 1937, he decided to build the log cabin at the end of Nesbitt Drive. Since he was trained as an engineer, he drafted some floor plans of his dream home.

He walked the idea down to Doc Backer, and let his eyes wander over

the drawing. After thinking about it for a while, he told Judd that he'd better build a scale model first. He said something to the effect, "You know you have a life time of looking at your mistakes if you don't get right from the beginning." It was the same kind of logic I can recall hearing, "Marry in haste and repent in leisure."

Spring Cleaning

As part of the transition of winter to summer, the white organdy curtains were washed, thickly starched, and ironed to perfect crispness. This was nearly a full days job as they had to be taken off the rods, and washed. While the washing machine hummed away, the starch pot boiled on the stove. When the final rinse was over

Recollection Cont'd

and the drum came to a silent halt, it was my job to add some cold water and dip the curtains in the sticky mixture and gently squeeze out the excess moisture.

There was a considerable art to this phase as not to wring and wrinkle the gauzy material. Then my mother, Alma, hung out the curtains to dry on the pulley rope wash line in the yard, and it was my job to hand her the clothes pins.

Depending if it was a windy day, the curtains had to be plucked from the line at the perfect moment of no longer damp but not dry either. If they became overly dry, it was my job to sprinkle them back to the in-between state of dampness, and allow to rest in the bottom of the laundry basket.

The next challenge was to gauge the ideal temperature of the iron and get around all those ruffles. The tiebacks offered their own set of skills as not to set the rings on fire.

And so not all were survivors because the east windows took a beating from the sun, and the one that looked most threadbare became a toy.

Baby Ballerina

"Here, practice being a ballerina", Alma said as she handed the discarded panel. Out the door I flashed twirling like a fairy princess, and my feet barely touched the ground as I waltzed down the sandy lane towards the Backer farm. Dance, dance, dance and there I was on their back stoop again. With my audience found, I acted out the steps and hummed the music. Sis Backer clapped, and I sat exhausted after my debut. I waited in the shade for her to hitch up the horse to ride back to the log cabin. What a wonderful laundry day this had been! When my father came home that night, Alma reminded him to admire the freshly starched curtains that still had the scent of grass and sunshine. He would change from his business suit into chino pants for dinner, and there he might ask, "What has my princess been doing all day?" My mother answered for both of us. "After she helped hang up the wet curtains, she waltzed down to the Backers house. It seems your daughter is a child of nature and she shed her pinafore along the way and arrived at their house naked as a jay bird except for the curtain draped over her head and shoulders." Funny,

I don't remember it that way at all.

Dowsing

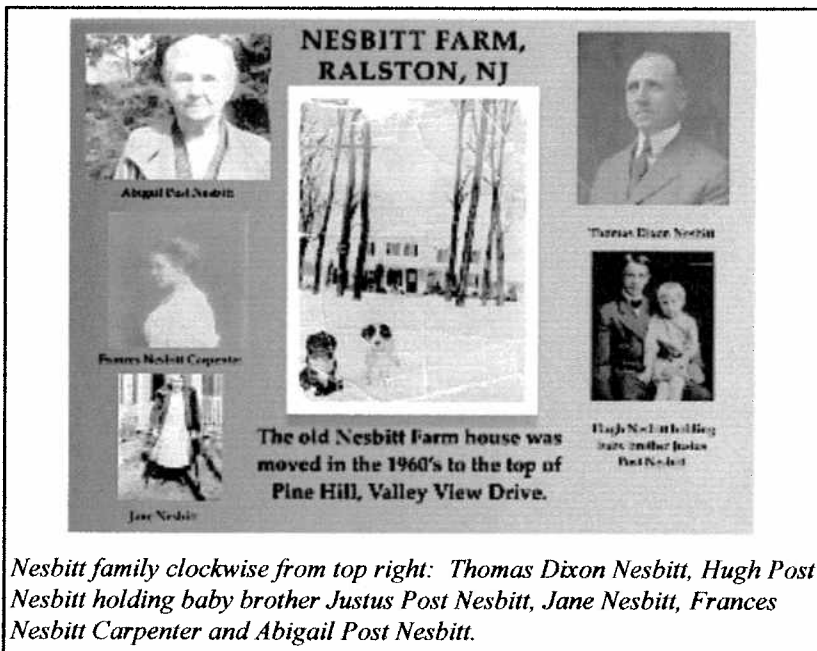
I laughed the notion off as some old farmer's tale, but Judd walked me down to the orchard to find the twig from a single pitted fruit. I recall holding it like a wish bone and walking over where the old hand dug well was at the log cabin near the front porch. As I walked over the underground water vein, the dowsing rod turned the up-turned inverted "Y" and nodded towards the earth. If I tried with every ounce of strength that I had, the twig could strip the back of my hands. There was a force beyond my control.

Judd had a new dowsing manual that said "water witches" could ask the direction on the main pool to the rod. You could ask how deep the vein was beneath the ground to the rod. An experienced water witch can ask the rod the rate of water flow the vein could produce. With a few more practice tries, I followed the underground water nearly up to the old green barn. If you are ever down on Patriots Path in the spring just beside the Nesbitt Brook, near where it turns and goes through the cinder bed for the old Rock-a-Bye railroad, there is a little 'bubbling up' where that vein comes to the surface. I once saw a bunch of six snakes wiggle out of that hole!!! Does that mean they were born underground and surfaced later?

On the other side of the rail bed is an old well that is faced with round field stones. The Backers used to grow watercress in this pool, and it put supermarket watercress to shame.

Winter Storm

The time is the terrible winter storm of 1948 (?) and the ice clung to all the trees. My mother, Alma, and I were home alone and we could hear the giant trees snap when the wind started to blow. For a child, it was very scary to see the giant trees in the woods snap like tooth picks and fall with a big bang to the ground with a big kerplunk. I was scared one would fall on the cabin, and we would be crushed to death. The woods behind the log cabin were particularly hard



Nesbitt family clockwise from top right: Thomas Dixon Nesbitt, Hugh Post Nesbitt holding baby brother Justus Post Nesbitt, Jane Nesbitt, Frances Nesbitt Carpenter and Abigail Post Nesbitt.

Recollection cont'd

hit, and the litter of the giant up rooted and broken trees were there for nearly 50 years.

Lime Stone Pits

Amid the rubble of the trees, there are two large lime stone pits back there near the log cabin to the north west of the house. Limestone was used in limestone paint, and ground as a mineral for the garden. There is another pit closer to Rt. 24 near where Donbert Nursery once was years ago. People who were spelunkers (cave explorers) asked permission to go down the hole, but I don't recall the final results.

Surviving with no water or Power for 2 Weeks

When Judd finally arrived home, he was thrilled to see us safe, but we had a long siege in front of us. Fairly soon after the storm moved in, Alma and I would go into storm survival mode. If you have no power, you have no pump to flow water through the tap. We filled the big pots that we used to make canned tomatoes and filled them to the brim. We need enough water to drink, rinse off the dishes, brush teeth, and to "force flush" the toilet. Do people even know this any-

RHA Receives a Bequest from Robert R. Crammer

We were fortunate this year to receive a bequest of \$5000 from the estate of Robert R. Crammer, late of Hagerstown, Maryland, but a native of Ralston. He was born at midnight on October 30, 1914, in the 'Widow Ralston House' on the Ralston Hill. Dr. DeGroot was the attending physician and Mrs. Willett was the midwife. When he was 5 he attended the Ralston School where Mary Horton was the teacher. In several notes attached to his donations to the Ralston Historical Association, he has provided an account of the Ralston area with a sketch showing property owners in an area surrounding our museum.

more?

We had a large freezer in the basement, it was filled with venison and other meats that were laid if such a catastrophe struck. One, two, three days were fun just like a winter picnic, but Alma wasn't very happy her good cast iron pots were encrusted with fire dust and grease spilled on

the hearth.

After the first few days, living by candle light also lost its charm.

Carolyn and her husband Jay live in Arizona. She is researching the paintings of Adelaide DeGroot – an artist and former resident of Ralston.

From the Collection – Miners Cap and Lamp



A small wick lamp with a spout resembling a tiny teapot was invented in Scotland in about 1850. These lamps burned lard type oil. They were dangerous with their open flame but saw use for many years. The small "pot" portion of the lamp (about 2 inches tall) held the fuel. A hinged cap sealed over the top and snapped it shut. A long spout of several inches contained the wick and extended up and out from one side of the pot. On the opposite side from the spout was a hook used to attach the lamp to the miner's leather or cloth cap. These little lamps found their way to the US when miners emigrating from the British Isles brought them with them.

A wick was used to bring the fuel from the pot to the tip of the spout where it burned with a very smoky flame. The fuel was usually some type of lard, bacon grease, or tallow compound. It was common for the miner to burn whatever was cheap or on hand. In later years the miners adapted their lamps to burn "sunshine" oil which was a mixture of paraffin wax and mineral oil.

Miners found advantages in the oil wick lamp. They were cheaper and longer burning than tallow candles and they were very light weight.

These tiny spout lamps were produced in many sizes by a number of manufacturers in the eastern United States and used primarily in the eastern coal mines. They did find their way west and they were used in the Mt Diablo Coal Fields in Northern California. These "teapot" lamps were phased out much like the candlestick with the advent of carbide lamps for mining use. *This article was published in the International California Mining Journal in December 1999.*

Lucille Hobbie Heimrod (1915-2008)

A former RHA Trustee, Lucille was a painter, printmaker, watercolorist, and lithographer. She was also a teacher, administrator, and winner of the Arts Council's Outstanding Professional in the Arts Award (2002). Her first love was watercolor, but she worked extensively in lithography and also used casein, acrylic, pen and ink, and pencil. History was a strong theme in her

work, which depicts farmsteads, fishing villages, and other elements of a vanishing American landscape. She is particularly well known for "Historic Morris County," a series of lithographs including the Wick House in Jockey Hollow, Hilltop Church in Mendham, and Acorn Hall. Born in Boonton, Lucille and her husband lived in Mendham for many years.

Diary of Edward B. Lewis – 1867

The following was transcribed by Wilma Sagurton, a granddaughter of Edward B. Lewis. He was a farmer who lived on Combs Hollow Rd. in what is now Randolph Township.

Tuesday, January 1, 1867

Forenoon spent looking for fox tracks, could not find one. Went to Dover after to learn the price of beef. 13 cents per lb. Gave William Anderman a \$2.00 bill in place of another that he says I gave him for husking corn.

Wednesday, 2

To day spent fox hunting, found plenty of tracks but could not find fox. Went to "River Swamp" Stephen came along. Joseph went to school of the first.

Thursday, 3

Killed the beef today, a two years old heifer. H. Pool helped. Sold S. B. Coe two quarters of beef weighing 172 lbs. 97 lbs. hind quarter, 75 front,. Went bait fishing with J. M. Clark caught about forty. Went to Father Merchant's with Mrs. Lewis.

Friday, 4

Went with Frank Merchant, J. M. Clark and Sylvester Hulbert to Green Pond fishing, no luck, only caught four small bass. Pickerel would not bite. About 20 miles to the pond, it is a natural lake of three miles in length. Went through Dover to Mount Hope and Denmark. Came home through Hibernia, Rockaway and Dover.

Saturday 5

Cut up beef this morning. Uncle Sammy Allen buried to day. Hauled stack of cornstalks from upper end of corn house, put three loads in upper cow house and one in lower one, upset the load in lower cow yard.

Sunday 6

Mr. Williamson preached from Matthew 18th chapter and 28th verse

Monday 7,

Sold pigs to Klotz for .11c per

pound. Took Stephen to Morris Plains, went on to town. Left my watch at Parker's to be cleaned. Got half a pound of pulverized sugar .10c, hair cut .20c, cigar .10c, oysters .25c. Sold beef to Madison Connet @ 61/2c. Balanced accts with them. \$3.00 for hides and \$3.00 acct. Dock came very near getting away from me coming home-- caught the sleigh to Clark's sled and upset me and broke shafts of sleigh. Did not hurt me or himself.

Tuesday, 8

Had Jared Coe mend shafts, .10c. Cramer mended the irons. Not much else done to day. Put manure on celery in the cellar. Mrs. John Carrol died yesterday in Waterville (Brookside.) Joseph goes to school.

Wednesday, 9

Attended the funeral, heard Mr. Williamson preach from Proverbs 16th Chapter and 16th verse. P. T. Cramer got his pot butter, 20 lbs. 4 oz. Rubbed salt on the beef. At night settled with P. Y. Cramer. He owes me \$21.83.

Thursday, 17

Found a storm of snow this morning. The wind changed east to North west and snowed and blowed all day terribly Took the shoats to Morristown this afternoon. Snow is banked badly, left the sled at S. D. Youngs. 324 lb. Pork.

Monday, 21

Found the roads filled with snow worse than they were last week. Nothing done to day except shovel snow from the road. R'cd \$2.25 for carting ore. Paid it to S. B. Coe on store bill.

Tuesday, 22

Forenoon spent shoveling snow from the road. Finished the road to DeHart's district. Had tooth ache afternoon.

Monday, July 1

To day spent ploughing corn. Sold Issac Clark a chicken for .50c. Went to McCainsville to night, bought 300 bushels lime of J. A. Uhler.

Tuesday, 2

To day spent ploughing corn. Isaac Clark had my market wagon to drive to Morristown.

Wednesday, 3

Forenoon spent ploughing corn.

Went to Dover this afternoon, brought David, his wife and child and J. Clark home.

Thursday, 4

Went to Morristown to celebrate the day. Saw the fastest two horses now living or that have ever lived ("Dexter and "Ethan Allen") trot on the rack of the Morris Co Agricultural Society. Dexter to sulky Ethan Allen and running mate to wagon. Time said to be -2-201/2, 2-201/4, 2-20.

Friday, 5

Ploughed a little buckwheat ground, very heavy rain last night and again to day.

Went to Dover after David. Rainy to night.

Saturday, 6

Finished ploughing the peach orchard. More rain this afternoon.

Sunday, 7

Heard Mr. Fairchild preach from Philippians 4th Chapter and 5th verse.

Monday, 8

Took David and family to Dover this morning, paid \$1.20 for beef. Finished the corn the second time through and commenced ploughing potatoes, a little rain.

Tuesday, 9

Finished ploughing potatoes this morning. Rest of the day nearly spent ploughing corn, a little more rain. Cool weather, mercury below 60.

Wednesday, 10

Ploughed corn this afternoon. Afternoon spent fixing wagon and hauling a load of lime from McCainsville.

Spread the lime in the peach orchard.

Saturday, 13

Spread a load of lime forenoon.

Spent about three hours with George Bonnel cutting wheat. Spread another load of lime after dinner.

Picked some cherries. Attended an electrical exhibition at the Gove to night.

Sunday, 14

Heard Mr. Fairchild preach from Ecclesiastes 7th Chapter first clause of 1st verse.

RALSTON HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION 2008-2009

JOHN RALSTON SOCIETY

John Paul and Jacelyn Botti
1772 Foundation
Drs Michael and Victoria Stewart

LIFE MEMBERS

Mr. and Mrs. E. W. Adams
Sheri and Steve Alexander
Thomas and Suzanne Andruskevich
Debbi and Ed Appel
Robert and Carla Barone
James and Patricia Barry
Fred Bartenstein
*Mr. Carl H. Bergelt
Thomas and Karen Berry
Mr. and Mrs. James Bigham
John and Kirsten Brady
Ernest and Debra Brito
Mrs. Wilson Britten
Sally and Gordon Brummer
Russell Buchanan
Elsa Buchner
* Rose and Owen Carlin
Frank and Jane Carotenuto
Robert and Frances Cavalero
Edward Claus
Kyle and Casey Conti
Mr. and Mrs. Laurence Cutler
*Judy and John Craig
*Tom and Kathy Day
*Anne Delaney and Chip Carver
Mr. and Mrs. J. Devine
Katherine DeVore
Mrs. Margery P. Dixon
* Bieme Donaldson & Wood
Huntley
Dr. Robert Dorian
Mr. and Mrs. John Drzik
*John Eade & Deborah Schemerler
* Don and Liz Eberhart
Isabelle and Algernon Ellien
*Mr. B. Danforth Ely
Mr. Louis Farrelly
Matthew and Teresa Finlay
Phyllis & Ken Florek
Mr. and Mrs. J. D. Forgatch
Mr. Sam Fornaro
Mr. and Mrs. Robert H. Fox
Steven and Elizabeth Freeman
Charles and Barbara Frost
Mr. and Mrs. Robert Gates
Mr. and Mrs. Richard E. Gillis
Mariben Glasscock
Mark Goggin
Joan and Gerald Gorman
Leslie Goryeb
Mr. and Mrs. Thor Gustafson

Mr. and Mrs. Sorer Haagensen
Dr. and Mrs. Joseph Harun
Dr. and Mrs. Vilas R. Herekar
Clelia C. Ilacqua
Jane Jenkins
* George and Linda Johnson
James and Theresa Julian
Jonathan and Kori Kalafer
Mr. and Mrs. J. Neil Kazan
Mrs. Patricia F. Kellog
Mr. Alan L. Kenwood
Tracy and Jamie Kinsel
A. P. Kirby, Jr.
Dr. and Mrs. David Knoop
Anne and Steve Koehler
* Gordon and Sarah Dean Link
Gloria and Patrick Lonergan
Agi and Charles Louria
Dominick and Heather Lovecchio
Ms. Valerie D. Lyle
Jane MacNeil
Mr. Ernest E. Maw
Gene and Pat Maynard
Bud and Sudy Mayo
James and Kathleen McAnally
Mr. and Mrs. Albert Merck
*Michael and Hilary Merritt
Joan Shearer Miller
Robert and Linda Montgomery
Linda and William Moran
* Morgan and Joanne Morton
Mr. and Mrs. Frank Mulcahy
Raymond and Nancy Nadasky
Mr. and Mrs. Raoul H. Nehr
John J. Nosta
Laurence Orloff and Deanne
Wilson
*Margaret Parker
Mr. and Mrs. J. L. Patten
* Mr. and Mrs. Robert Pierson
Dr. Rene Pigeon
Mrs. Duncan Pitney
Mr. and Mrs. James Porter
Mr. and Mrs. Mark Porto
Thomas and Carol Pugsley
Mr. Robert J. Purcell
* Mr. and Mrs. Fenn Putnam
Edward and Rhoda Radke
Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Rainis
* Ralph and Pat Rhodes
Maria and John Rice
Bierce Riley
Donald and Mary Robertson
Desmond and Marnie Robinson
Roxiticus Fund
Julie A. Rubinfeld
JoEllen Rubolotta
Celia Rulle
Wilma L. Sagurton

Robert and Elaine Santos
Leslie and Karen Schlessinger
Inge Schnee
Glenn Schulte
Janet M. Schurter
Darby Anne Scott
Charles A. Shiolo
Valerie Sinclair
*Hugh and Joy Smith
Kevin and Dawn Smith
Mary H. Smith
Mr. Thomas Spruth
Klaus and Ella Steiner
Richard and Alison Stewart
Al and Peggy Storer
Brian and Mary Ann Storms
Carlyn Taylor
Ms. Henrietta S. Thomas
Mr. and Mrs. John Thompson
William F. Thompson
Thomas and Robin Timpson
Sam and Diane Tolley
*Fred and Connie Vanacore
Christian and Laurie Van Pelt
Roxanna Wagner
Stephen and Janet Westaway
Richard and Rosemarie Whiting
Mr. and Mrs. Kevin Wilk
* Mr. Alan Willemsen
Mr. and Mrs. H. Wilmerding
John and Nancy Wilson
Mr. Robert D. Worley
Charlotte S. Wyman
Mr. and Mrs. Michael Yamashita
Mary K. Young
Faith Zimmer
* Patricia Zimmerman

SUSTAINING MEMBERS

Amelia Duarte
Robert and Cynthia Hamburger
Kevin and Michele James
Beatrice Mastracchio
Orlando and Paula Raimondo
John and Lynne Rathgeber

INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS

Andy Evans
G. Fava
Sarah Flaherty
Douglas Ford
Joan & Frank Goodhart
Virginia Nienstedt

Anita Simons
Charles Walker

FAMILY/INSTITUTIONS

Allen County Public Library
Kathy & Joseph Arvag
Nancy and David Bailin
Helen and Dick Brede
Michael Catania and Jan Rosenfeld
The Christmann Family
The Curtis Family
The DeSimone Family
Stephen and Lillian Fogle
John and Mary Hemmendinger
Margaret & Paul Hogan
Mr. & Mrs. Fred Huettig
Elisabeth and John MacDonald
Odd and Wenda Odds
The Picard Family
Thomas & Vera Roche
Beth and Steve Ruhle
Joan and Robert Scialla
Gene and Diane Scolamiero
Didi and David Sharky
Rob and Chris Strobel
Joann and Michael Trikouros
Richard Watson
* Bob and Ruth Willis

SENIOR CITIZEN MEMBERS

Robert Anderson
James Banko
* Celeste Bianco
Joan Buck
Glen and Ellie Counts
Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Daley
Frank DiPrimo
Peter & Jenny Flood
Mr. & Mrs. Fred Huettig
Phil Jaeger
Janet McMillen
Richard Mervin
Margaret Neill
Anne and Frank Nicastro
Peggy & Hank Oswald
Joseph Ollerenshaw
John Saenger
Marie Shepard
Carolyn Sutton
Joseph and Barbara Szoke

* Additional contribution

Ralston Historical Association
313 Mendham Road – West
Mendham, NJ 07945



Ralston Historical Association
Established in 1941

President – Jeff Purcell
Vice President – Tracy Kinsel
Secretary – Margaret Hogan
Treasurer – Judy Craig

Trustees
Judy Craig
Dolores Crammer
Paula Duer
Margaret Hogan
Valerie Horowitz
Tracy Kinsel
Jeff Purcell
Patricia Rhodes

RHA Annual Meeting – July 12, 2009
1 PM at the General Store
Visit our website: www.ralstonmuseum.org

2009-2010 Membership Renewal Form

Please indicate your membership information

New Member _____ Renewal _____ Corporate /Matching Gift _____

John Ralston Society (\$1,000.00 one time)
Life Member (\$250.00 one time)
Sustaining Member (\$100.00 per year)
Family/Institution Member (\$40.00 per year)
Individual Member (\$25.00 per year)
Senior citizen (\$15.00 per year)
Building/Collections Fund \$ _____

Name _____
Mailing Address _____
City/State/Zip _____
Email _____

The Ralston Historical Association is always looking for volunteers to help in a variety of ways. If interested, please include your name and phone number below or send an email to: rjp543@comcast.net

Name: _____
Phone: _____

We are a 501(C)3 organization. Please make your tax deductible check payable to:

Ralston Historical Association
313 Mendham Road – West
Mendham, NJ 07945