

# A glimpse of turn-of-the-

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For a glimpse of Bayonne at the turn of the 20th Century, I would like to use excerpts from Gladys Mellor Sinclair's book, Bayonne Old and New, published in 1940.

The house, where the young Gladys Mellor grew up, still stands on the northwest corner of 41st Street and Avenue C. It was the former home of the Bayonne Visiting Nurses Association and was recently sold and converted back to a private residence.

The subject matter for today's column comes from Chapter 10 of Sinclair's book, "The Beginning of a New Century."

"The population of the city at the turn of the century was 32,722. On July 4, 1900, a destructive fire started at the Hook. It raged for five days consuming millions of gallons of oil.

"The homes in the vicinity, which were mostly poor, were threatened and many took their household belongings and camped on the meadows to escape danger. The local fire department worked heroically day and night, many being severely burned and taken to St. Luke's Hospital. Fire tugs from New York assisted the local forces. The fire was estimated to be the most devastating in the history of the nation.

'In 1901 the Democrats were

holding meetings in Gallagher's Hall on Avenue E and 21st Street, and also in Quinn's Hall at 418 Avenue D or Broadway. They were planning to build their own clubhouse and all wards were banding together to that end. The clubhouse, located on Broadway and 27th Street was erected in 1905. (Today, it is the Community Day Nursery.)

"Drakes Business College was started in Bayonne in 1901 with seven day students and six night school students. The school was started in Jersey City in 1886 and, at that time, was the largest organization of its kind in America and the largest private school buyer of commercial and text books.

"In 1901 smallpox broke out in the city and there were over 70 cases reported. Dr. Alvah Forman was the City Physician at the time and several other doctors were kept busy night and day vaccinating people.

"On January 1, 1902, Mayor Egbert Seymour began his fourth term as mayor. This year St. Luke's Hospital was totally destroyed by fire. Avenue C, from 54th to 25th Street, was a dirt road and the contract was awarded to have this section asphalted with the result that this improvement was made by the winter of



By Mayor  
Dennis P.  
Collins



1902-3 at the cost of \$88,661.

"When photographs were in their early stage and cameras a novelty, Dr. George Mellor (Gladys' father) who had one of the first, was invited to Wake's Hall to give a demonstration. The people marveled at the new wonder as much as we of recent years (remember it's 1940) have marveled at radio and television.

"Automobiles were also in their infancy at this time and about the newest things in town. William D. Salter, was, no doubt, the first one to

## 20th-century Bayonne

be seen riding around in this new gasoline contraption of which all horses and people were afraid.

"One got into the first automobiles through a door in the rear and they were very noisy. The majority of people vowed and declared they never would ride in one and felt pretty much about automobiles as some do today (1940) about flying.

"The City Park was laid out during 1903 on the Boulevard and Newark Bay from 16th to 19th Streets. Thomas Brady was elected mayor in 1903 on the Democratic ticket.

"The Public Service Company took over the operation of the North Jersey Street Railway Company and ran trolleys from Bayonne through to the Jersey City Ferry.

"By an ordinance passed January 19th and approved January 20th the first Police Trial Board was created to hear, try and determine charges preferred against members of the police force.

"At the end of January, 1904 Miss Phoebe Ketham reported that the Public Library had a total of 12,898 volumes with 7,027 voters. On the evening of October, 29, 1904, the new Carnegie Library building was formally opened with appropriate ceremonies, the event being recorded

as a most notable one in the history of the city.

"Owing to the increase in population at the City Hall, the City Fathers held a meeting in the early part of August for the purpose of obtaining a new building for Police Headquarters and a site was selected at the northeast corner of Avenue C and 26th Street where a four-story brick building was erected and which is used today (1940). (In 1984, Francis G. Fitzpatrick Park is on the site.)

"In 1904 there were 26 churches, representing many denominations; 17 Protestant, seven Catholic, two Hebrew and two Sisterhoods.

"One of the first moving picture theaters in the city was located at 467 Broadway (where Dee and Dee's stands today). John Byers Jr. equipped the building as a moving picture showhouse but it was unsuccessful and was operated only a short time.

"In 1905 Pierre Garven was elected Mayor and served two terms from 1905 to 1909."

That is just a sample of the interesting information contained in Sinclair's Bayonne Old and New, a reference book in the Bayonne Public Library. Should you ever get a chance to drop in the reference room, I recommend you ask for it.