

# The Roebling Wire

No. 32

News From  ROEBLING MUSEUM

Summer 2020

## Meet the New Executive Director of Roebling Museum



Roebling Museum's new executive director, Lynne Calamia, is jumping right in and getting to work. "I am honored to be joining Roebling Museum, which is such a community asset," Calamia said. "The organization has been distinguished by strong volunteer leadership, a dedicated staff, and a collaborative approach to community building. I look forward to working on

meaningful projects that enliven the museum and the town."

With more than a decade of hands-on experience in the field of public history, Lynne has held positions at museums, archives, and has worked to support historic preservation initiatives across the region. Most recently, Calamia served as the founding Executive Director of Arch Street Meeting House, a historic Quaker landmark in the popular tourist neighborhood of Old City, Philadelphia.

Her work experience and research interests have prepared her well for the role of Executive Director at Roebling Museum. Lynne has a PhD. from Penn State where she studied New Deal era labor history and museum administration. Additionally, she grew to love company towns as an archivist at Hershey Community Archives and was introduced to the impact of the Roebling family while working in the Education Department at the New Jersey State Museum.

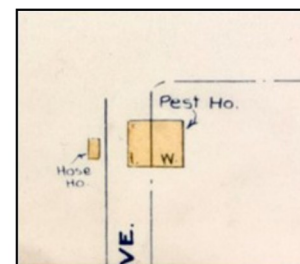
"We are very excited to have an experienced museum professional lead Roebling Museum and help us grow. And we know Lynne is excited to be part of our community dedicated to preserving and interpreting Roebling history. Lynne is full of good ideas, enthusiasm, and smarts, and I know you are all going to like her," said Martha Moore, President of Roebling Museum's board of directors.

Once the pandemic is over, we hope you'll stop by to meet Lynne. She would love to hear your stories about Roebling--the town, the family, and or the mill!

## Putting the Roebling Pest House on the Map

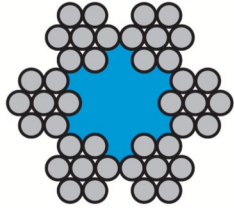
"On the outskirts of town," as remembered by Mary Yurcisin in a 2007 oral history interview, stood a building known as the Pest House. (Although it is no longer there, if you'd like to picture where it was or visit the site, it was located behind the VFW building which is on Tenth Avenue.) But what was the Pest House?

The Pest House was a hospital specifically for treating infectious diseases and quarantining contagious members of the community. As Lou Boldizar remembers it in a 2008 oral history interview, "[back] then there was a road that went down to the sewer plant. In between was this pest house they built. It was a building surrounded by a red picket fence and whenever a family in the village got a communicable disease like diphtheria or measles, the family was moved into this building and barricaded." Although it is unclear when it was built in Roebling, pest houses have been used to lessen the spread of illness since at least the 1590s as documented in England during the bubonic plague. There is evidence that Roebling's pest house was in use during the diphtheria outbreak in the early 1920s, and some of our oral history interviews suggest it may have also been available during the influenza outbreak in 1918.



October 26, 1944 map on display at Roebling Museum

*(Continued on page 3)*



## ROEBLING MUSEUM BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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## A Letter from the President

For the Roebbling Museum, 2020 began with much optimism: our new executive director Lynne Calamia came on board in February and under her leadership we were diving into preparations for the Museum's annual March opening, the April car show, a slate of interesting lectures in the media room and all the events that we think make the Museum special.

We all know what happened next. It was sad and frustrating to have to close the Museum due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Empty galleries and cancelled programs are no fun, but they had to take second place to keeping friends and families safe. Also, as a history museum, we try to remember to take the long view. The Roebbling story begins before the Civil War, when the nation tore itself apart over ending slavery. Construction of Roebbling's Cincinnati suspension bridge (now the John A. Roebbling Suspension Bridge), was put on "pause" for five years during the conflict, in which Washington A. Roebbling fought in the Union Army. The company town of Roebbling, built in 1905, has endured two world wars, the 1918 flu pandemic, the Great Depression, and the collapse of the U.S. steel industry in the 1970s that shuttered the Roebbling mills.

We also know that the Museum is more than a (locked) building. We are alive and well online, on our website, Instagram, Facebook and in our first-ever Zoom program, a talk with Roebbling authors Erica Wagner and Richard Haw, which we co-hosted with the Brooklyn Historical Society. An art project on the Museum fence is growing with the help of community members. Design for the interpretive signs in the Millyard is underway. Best of all, as of mid-July we are able to start up our outdoor walking tours to offer socially-distanced history and fun.

To all our members and friends who follow us virtually when we can't welcome you physically, we thank you for staying with us through these tough times. To the donors who supported our GoFundMe campaign to help offset the financial hit from our cancelled events, our deepest gratitude. To everyone who is more than eager to get out of the house and visit someplace other than their own back yard, we're getting ready to welcome you. It's great to be back.

Martha Moore  
President, Board of Directors

### OUR MISSION

The mission of the Roebbling Museum is to document, preserve, and exhibit the history of the John A. Roebbling's Sons Company, the Roebbling family and the village of Roebbling. 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 Roebbling family, its businesses and workers and the engineering innovations of the company in Trenton and Roebbling, New Jersey.



***Membership at Roebbling 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 [roebblingmuseum.org](http://roebblingmuseum.org) today, and help keep history alive and enlightening in this unique village!***



## Board Member Spotlight—Jim Parker



Jim Parker started tinkering early. Growing up near Princeton, N.J., he loved to build things from whatever materials he could find in his grandfather's barn, including a pony cart made from old bike frames with a harness of machine belting.

That's why he loves the Roebling Machine Shop building in Trenton, now

home to events like the Punk Rock Flea Market and Art All Night. "There are all those belts and pulleys there," he says. "It's just like my grandfather's barn—and it's fascinating."

At home, Jim and his wife Janice have a vintage computometer, a mechanical calculator from her father's many years as an accountant at the John A. Roebling's Sons Co.

"Our mechanical technology fascinates me," Jim says. "Thinking about how much we've grown as a society, how much we've learned as people. The explosion of technology is just mindboggling."

His ties to the Roebling company and his love of the history of technology led Jim to join the Roebling Museum board of directors in 2018. "We have to learn from our past," he says. "For me, it's going back and understanding some of these challenges: How did they do this? How did they build these bridges? I really like that kind of thing.

Parker's own career as a photographer and filmmaker has been one of dealing with technological transformation,

from a darkroom and chemicals to digital video and software. In college, he came home from a year's study abroad with hundreds of rolls of film – and no money to pay for developing them. He "hung out" at Moyers Photo Shop in Trenton until the owner taught him color slide processing, then he got a job making corporate slideshows and shooting commercial photography. Fast forward to 1990, and Parker founded Riverview Studios, a video production company in Bordentown.

Parker loves filmmaking because of the power of visual images. "I like to do something that will influence people," he says. "I want something that people will have an emotional connection to, and get a response that will achieve a goal, whether it's getting the viewer to make a donation or support an organization or whatever it may be."

The Roebling Museum board is only one of the causes to which Parker devotes time. He is a longtime board member of the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen, where his daughter Jaime is director of programs, and of New Jersey Policy Perspectives, a think tank focused on economic and health care issues. In 2006, after he traveled to Uganda to film a humanitarian mission by the Catholic Diocese of Trenton, Parker started a foundation to provide college scholarships for girls. The Parker Mother and Child Foundation has since funded higher education for more than two dozen Ugandan women.

Volunteering for the Museum, and his other nonprofit commitments, is a way for Parker to give back but also get back. "I feel more well rounded. I feel smarter," he says of his experiences as a volunteer. "I find strength, I find what I'm good at, what I'm not good at. I not only learn about things, but I learn about myself."

### "Pest House" Continued from page 1

When infectious disease calmed and it wasn't as much of an issue, the Pest House went on to serve the Roebling community in other ways. For example, according to Lou Borbi in his book *Roebling Company Town*, it was periodically used to house "men who were abusive to the family because of intoxication" (p223). Mary Yurcisin recounted in her 2007 oral history that it became a "boxing arena and people used to go out there and learn how to box and fight."

Rather than leaving it empty, the pest house was put to good use to meet the shifting needs of Roebling. Lou Boldizar remembered in his oral history that "at that time, we had a lot of people boxing so they made it for the town to use. It was still there in the 40's."

What happened to the Pest House? When was it built? Did your family stay there? There is more to learn about this interesting piece of Roebling's past. If you have any information about the Pest House or other lesser known bits of Roebling history, be in touch to share your story.



Pest House c. 1935-1941 (Courtesy Louis Borbi, Images of America)



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

At Roebing 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 Roebing Museum through volunteer work, please be in touch—we'd love to hear from you!

Find more information at [roebingmuseum.org](http://roebingmuseum.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

Roebing 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.

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



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