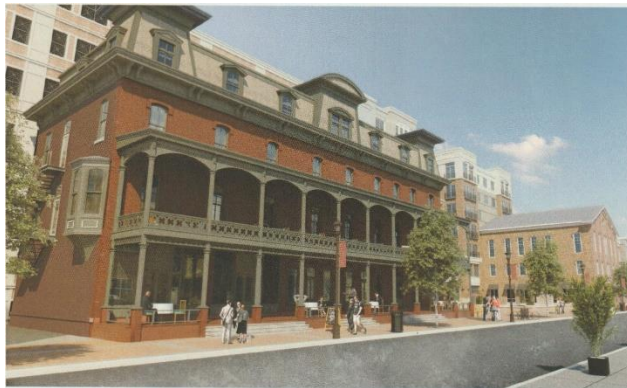


# THE MOUNT AMWELL NEWS

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## Union Hotel to take center stage in a revitalized Flemington downtown by fall 2022

By John Varoli

As one of the USA's oldest existing hotels, Flemington's Union Hotel is an iconic landmark and national treasure. But as every Hunterdon County resident knows, the past few decades have seen the hotel suffer a cruel fate, and almost destruction.

Salvation has finally arrived, however, and the Union Hotel looks guaranteed to live at least another 100 years. Thanks to local real estate developer, Jack Cust, the Union Hotel should be open for business by fall 2022. Renovation work has already commenced, the area properly cordoned off, and reinforcements placed into the windows.

"The Union Hotel is a great part of Flemington's history, and it was important to many people to preserve it," said Mr. Cust in an interview. "At first, it was thought it couldn't be preserved, but with lots of input from many different stakeholders a very complicated stabilization and restoration plan was developed. We

initiated this work in November and hope to have the original hotel restored within 18 months."

For over 200 years, the Union Hotel has stood in downtown Flemington, just off of a main road between New York and Philadelphia. Built in 1814, the hotel was a stopover for 19th century travelers. The current exterior dates to 1878. Little is known about the guests who stayed there, but we can safely assume they included the creme de la creme of Northeastern high society in the 19th century.

The Union Hotel might just be the oldest existing hotel in New Jersey; for example, beating Cape May's Congress Hall Hotel by two years. Still, the Union is younger than the Gettysburg Hotel in Gettysburg, PA, which was built in 1797. (Here, I make a distinction between a 'hotel' in the modern sense, as opposed to colonial and/or early American inn or tavern.)



Construction underway, photo D. Reading

Of course, every Hunterdon County resident knows what transpired here in early 1935, during the Lindbergh trial that saw Bruno Hauptman convicted and then executed for the Lindbergh baby kidnapping and murder. That trial took place across the street from the Union Hotel, in the Hunterdon County Courthouse. Shockingly,

both the journalists and jury members lived in the hotel for the duration of the trial.

In the late 20th century, the upper floors of the Hotel were abandoned, and only the Union Hotel Restaurant remained on the first floor. In February 2016, the Union Hotel was slated to be demolished and replaced with a new building. Those plans were challenged by local preservationists, and ownership of the Hotel changed hands until June 2020, when Jack Cust took it over, as well as nearby properties.

Objections were raised, however, by Friends of Historic Flemington, which was worried by certain aspects of the hotel project, namely that the restoration called for a new hotel that was outsized for the downtown. This led to litigation.

In response to those concerns, in September, Mr. Cust’s Urban Renewal LLC downsized, including reducing the height of the building, as well as curtailing the retail and parking space. (The building’s height shrank by two stories, while parking decreased from 820 to about 350 spaces.)

“The exterior of the Union Hotel is being restored to its original glory! The brick interior walls are also being restored however the rest of the interior is being renovated in its entirety,” said Mr. Cust. “We want to get Main Street back up, back online. A year from now, it’s conceivable that Main Street will be really vibrant.”

For its part, the Friends of Historic Flemington issued this statement to local media: “Instead of a sad replica of the Union Hotel and a series of high-rise structures incompatible with the scale and aesthetics of the historic district, the landmark Union Hotel, the Nevius building at 78 Main, and the Hunterdon County National Bank building at 90 Main have been saved. We will continue to strive to preserve our historic

district, recognized as the second largest in the state of New Jersey”.

Under the new redevelopment plan, the hotel will have 100 rooms, including 15 historical suites and a first-floor restaurant. There’ll also be 206 separate apartment units.

“We want to salvage as much of the hotel as possible and with an appropriate use that will justify preservation costs,” said Mr. Cust. “It’s hard to determine the total cost because there are always unforeseen items. As a rule of thumb, it’s 2 to 3 times more costly than new construction.”

In addition to the Hotel, two other historic buildings will be preserved and renovated. The Potting Shed building adjacent to the hotel, and the Hunterdon County National Bank Building, will have exteriors restored and interiors renovated.



**Readington Twp. signs agreement for Hankinson Cemetery**

The Mount Amwell Project signed a second amendment to the Historical Cemetery Maintenance Agreement with Readington Township on February 22 to clean up and maintain the Hankinson-Voorhees Cemetery, 154 West Woodchurch Road.

This amendment prescribes that the responsibilities of the original agreement (for the Haypress) remain in full force. They are: 1) Management of the preservation activities; 2) Providing the expertise to repair and reset headstones; 3) Acquiring and placement of signage; and 4) Performing periodic cleanup.

## Dr. Oliver Barnet's Cemetery



*Elizabeth Ogden's stone in foreground; Dr. Barnet's in background.*

The grave site markers of Dr. Oliver Barnet and Elizabeth Ogden, his wife and several of her relatives was recently brought to my attention by Fred Katnack, Archivist at the Tewksbury Historical Society in Oldwick.

According to Mr. Katnack, The site is on property that use to be the Barnet Family farm about 0.3 mile east on Church Street, Oldwick. The markers are lying in the extreme north west corner of the Barnet property lines. There are no other headstones, cemetery wall, or any indications of a cemetery. This condition may be explained in an article by Samuel Harden Stille in the Plainfield Courier News published in 1933.<sup>1</sup> According to Mr. Stille, the cemetery was destroyed after the Civil War. To quote,

“The Civil War brought financial reverses, compelling the family to leave the home so endeared by association, and Barnet Hall<sup>2</sup>

became the property of a vandal who tore down the wall about the cemetery, and placed some of the tombstones in his door-yard as paving-stones. This though the cemetery had been reserved when the estate was sold. To complete his ghoulish work the new owner ploughed up the ground formerly enclosed by the cemetery wall. Dr. Barnet's stone may still be seen, but not in its proper place.”

IN MEMORY  
DOCT. OLIVER BARNET ESQR  
WHO DEPARTED HIS LIFE  
DECEMBDR 25TH, 1809 IN  
THE 66TH YEAR OF HIS AGE

The engraving on the Dr. Barnet 's stone is worn and degraded indicating this might be the original headstone. His wife's stone has clearer engravings suggesting it was placed there long afterward to memorialize the people whose headstones had been vandalized.

IN MEMORY OF  
ELIZABETH OGDEN 1751-1825  
WIFE OF DR. OLIVER BARNET  
DR. OLIVER WAYNE OGDEN 1779-1839  
HIS WIFE MARY WISNER 1785-1844  
THEIR DAUGHTER  
LAURA E. OGDEN 1821- 1864 WIFE OF  
COL. JOHN C. RAFFERTY  
ELIZA B. OGDEN 1796-1821 WIFE OF  
THE REV. DAVID B. HENDRICKS  
DR. WILLIAM BARNET 1787-1823  
CAPTAIN IN THE WAR OF 1812  
THESE AND OTHERS ARE BURIED HERE

However, a search of the names on the stone found that Col. Rafferty and his wife, Laura B. Ogden. are both buried in the Flemington Presbyterian Church cemetery<sup>3</sup> and Dr. William Barnet is buried in the First Presbyterian Church cemetery in Elizabeth, N.J.<sup>4</sup> Were these people's graves moved or were they never buried in the Barnet cemetery? Investigation continues.

Dr. Oliver Barnet came to New Germantown 1765, at age twenty-two and began his medical career. He bought Smith's Mill, using it to give poor patients a way to pay off their medical bills.

Another of his investment properties was a tavern located on Hill Street, built in 1800, now in service as the Tewksbury Inn.<sup>5</sup>

The doctor built what is today the Oldwick Community Center as a schoolhouse for community use, then named Barnet Hall Academy. Today it is the home of the Tewksbury Township library. Dr. Barnet died on Christmas day 1809 and was reportedly buried in the aforementioned missing family cemetery.

The Mount Amwell Project will attempt to contact the current property owners for permission to clear and preserve the site.

1. Samuel Hardin Stille, "Historic Guide Posts, #41, Barnet Hall," *Plainfield, N.J., Courier-News*, June 5, 1933, p 5.
2. Around 1800, Dr. Barnet purchased property from Tunis Melick and built a 20-room mansion he called "Barnet Hall".
3. Flemington Presbyterian Church Cemetery, (Flemington, Hunterdon County, N.J), *Inscriptions of Col. John C. Rafferty and Laura B. Ogdon*, photographed by Beverly Kirby McDonough, 26 March 2021.
4. Application for Headstone or Marker for William B. Barnet, 4 April 1960. National Archives at Washington DC; Washington DC, USA; Applications for Headstones for U.S. Military Veterans, 1925-1941.
5. James P. Snell, compiler, *History of Hunterdon and Somerset Counties, New Jersey*. (Philadelphia, Everts and Peck, 1881), 230, 447.

## High School student writes article on the Mount Amwell project



Jordan Oldenburg, a senior at Delaware Valley Regional High School, and a first-year journalist for the school newspaper has written an article on entitled the "Mount Amwell Project preserves Hunterdon cemeteries" for her school newspaper, The Delphi. It was published on the school's website <https://sno.dvrhs.org/> on March 5, 2021. Jordon is also a member of the Hunterdon County Cemetery Committee, and enjoys researching local history and drawing during her free time.

We're on the Web  
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by John Varoli



The Mount Amwell News

The newsletter of the Mount Amwell Project

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The year-end fundraising was very successful thanks to the generosity of all of you donors. Your gifts will enable us to continue our mission of protecting the memory of our heritage during the coming year.

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