

## SADDLE BROOK FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY

### SADDLE BROOK HISTORICAL SOCIETY – NOVEMBER 2013

Let me begin by stating that the following account has less to do with Kevin Costner's *A Message in a Bottle* than it has to do with Sal Cusmano the principal of Franklin School here in Saddle Brook. As a friend and former fellow principal, I had come to know Sal as a person who does not overlook details. He is above average in seeing "the fly in every ointment and the worm in every rose." He is also an enthusiastic, dedicated administrator.



About a year ago, Sal gave me a rusted and deteriorated iron axe which he had found at Garret Mountain many years ago. Anyone seeing it would have passed it off as a somewhat rectangular rock sleeping among the normal debris that can be found along the side of any hiking trail. As a lifelong searcher of local Lenni Lenape and colonial artifacts, I quickly identified it as a trade axe, the kind that the early Dutch colonists traded for pelts, especially beaver. It had a telltale indentation on one side which would have left itself to having a wood handle (usually ash) secured by deer hide strips. The Indians or Native Americans as they are called would have immersed the strips in water, until they were elongated and swollen. They would then be tied to an object like a deer antler, flint, rock – or in this case a wood handle and a piece of iron. Once allowed to dry, the strings would shrink and harden, resulting in a strong marriage between the objects and the wood. The axe is on display at our library.



Most recently, Sal brought me three dirt-encrusted bottles which maintenance men had unearthed while working on a Franklin School project which required digging in the schoolyard. I made a fast connection between Henry Leswing who once had a house there before the school was built in the early thirties. The Coger family had also owned property there which they generously donated to the township. But it was Leswing who lived on the property long before municipal garbage collection was undertaken. Each family had a garbage heap on its property, and the bottles in questions had no threading. They would have been sealed with cork stops. One of the bottles had the word LISTERINE embossed on it and easily dates to before 1920. The past often surfaces into the present; so, like Mr. Cusmano, we should always be watchful for life's little, wonderful unexpected gifts.



Jack C. Wasdyke  
Township Historian