COURT HOUSE — "One grain of sand doesn't make a beach. One thread doesn't make a beautiful tapestry," Laurie Thomas, public records and archives clerk, began her presentation at the Oct. 21 Archives Day.

Throughout her presentation, "A History of Diversity," Thomas took attendees on a journey back in time, "putting flesh on the bones." By combining new technologies in preservation and an insatiable thirst for a good story, Thomas and County Clerk Rita Fulginiti, who is also county historian, sought to carry the stories of Cape May County's past to new generations.

As Jared Sparks, history professor to Gen. Lafayette, said, "Human events are transient, but history is immortal."

Archivist and Deputy County Clerk Diana Hevener, opened the program and welcomed all to the Archives Day celebration. "Rita has put a lovely program together as always," Hevener said.

Many members of local historical societies, Cape May County Chamber of Commerce, Leadership Committee of Cape May County, and some seeking more information about their own history filled the historic courthouse - a tapestry of ages, occupations, and backgrounds. "We all have a common interest: history," Hevener stated.

Hevener explained the purpose and meaning behind Archives Day. "We all have personal collections!" Hevener went on to explain a part of the process of "gauging what is worth maintaining," a decision made every day and not only by historians and archivists.

As technology takes further strides, documents are preserved digitally and also on microfilm. Temperatures are regulated in the archives as well as humidity control.

Cape May County Archives website, www.capemaycountyarchives.com, offers many services to county residents, launching the past into the present. "This is how we are moving into the future," said Hevener.
Fulginiti then took the floor, "This is a story that has never been completely told," Fulginiti said, referring to the central presentation yet to come. Fulginiti also spoke of the county's flourishing tourism industry: "Tourism is our bread and butter - it brought most of us here."

Fulginiti described the county as "a little piece of heaven."

Before introducing Thomas, Fulginiti took attendees on a short jaunt through time, parting the veil of time for a moment.

**Hudson’s Discovery**

Explorer Henry Hudson discovered the New Jersey peninsula in 1609, followed by Dutch explorer Cornelius Jacobson Mey in 1620-21.

Mey's influence remains in the city and region that bears a version of his name.

After Great Britain secured New Jersey, the colony was divided into two provinces: East and West Jersey. West Jersey's political seat became the city of Burlington and a governor was appointed by King Charles II.

**Royal Governor**

Dr. Daniel Coxe, an Anglican physician, rose in his influence and became royal governor from 1687-1688. Although Coxe never set foot on North American soil, his dream for a prosperous land bridged the Old World and the new.

Perhaps Dr. Jeffrey Dorwart, author of “Cape May County, New Jersey The Making of an American Resort Community,” put it best: "Coxe's interest in the Cape May peninsula was more than simple land speculation. A member of the Royal Society, Coxe fit the mold of John Locke and other late 17th century British social and constitutional architects who sought to rationalize their world, create an orderly society and experiment their environment...He held ideas about community planning, including the protection of the Cornwall Cape in Britain against beach erosion. He sought to blend the remnants of feudal organization with that of a vigorous landowning, merchant society free from feudal restrictions as part of what he called a 'New Empire in America'."

Fulginiti introduced Thomas’ presentation as "A movie you can't stop watching and a book you can't put down!"

Thomas grew up in Cape May County: "I thought I was related to everyone," she explained. Yet, when "teenage cynicism" set in, Thomas said she would ask people "Why would you come here?"

**Flesh on Bones**
However, as time passed, history "started to become people" or "flesh on the bones." Threads of stories, linked together, opened a new world to Thomas, prompting her to major in history and library science. Thomas compares the story of Cape May County to sand on a beach: every grain has a story.

Thomas began with the African American history in the county. Although prejudice and bigotry mars the page, freed slaves made up a significant part of the population as early as 1802. Benjamin Batteast, for example, registered an "earmark" for his cattle in 1802.

Descendants of Batteast still live in Lower Township, "They love who they are," Thomas said. George Batteast enlisted in the Union Army during the Civil War, marching into a world where slaves still suffered. In the early 1900s, Edward W. Dale owned a hotel and cafe on Jackson Street in Cape May, running a successful catering business.

The founding of Whitesboro also added another thread in the tapestry of African American contributions to the county.

Native Americans hunted, fished, and lived in the woods of Cape May County long before Europeans set foot on the shore. Their numbers dwindled in the 1700s due to disease and lack of land; yet descendants of the Lenni Lenape people still call Cape May County home.

**Flocked to New Jersey**

As America took its first steps as a nation, immigrants from all over Europe came to New Jersey. Scottish immigrant, Alexander McKean, helped begin the Fulling Mill and Bayshore Road schools. According to Thomas, the Scots contributed greatly to the county’s educational needs.

Irish immigrants, despite facing prejudice, came in the mid-1800s as poor economic, political, and farming conditions shook Ireland. "There was work in Cape May County," Thomas explained.

Many found jobs in the hotels or purchased land for farming.

Italian immigrants, fleeing the economic downturn, came to the Jersey shore as well. Many worked for the railroad and built the first streets on barrier islands. Camps of Italian workers existed in Cape May, Stone Harbor, and Sea Isle City. One of the first Sons of Italy organizations began in Wildwood in 1922.

Personal stories of hardship and perseverance marked every ethnic group, from African Americans and Germans to Jewish settlers in Woodbine.

"What a testimony to what you can do!" Thomas said. The immigrants contributed needed skills and trades to Cape May County, especially the Swedes who settled in Anglesea (North Wildwood). According to Thomas, the fishing industry in Anglesea went to new heights.
**Silent Swedes**

"They're (the Swedes) silent - you have to look," Thomas explained, referring the often overlooked immigrants. "Our communities are changing," Thomas said in reference to the Hispanic and Latino immigrants. "They are adding to our sand and impacting our communities."

The stories continued to unfold, and, before tours were given of the archives, Fulginiti shed light on the present Syrian refugee crisis. When asked how the stories of past immigrants could relate to the present, Fulginiti replied, "We need to be aware that we all come from somewhere." Fulginiti stressed the need for tolerance and understanding. "In the big things we are alike."

As tides in culture change, Cape May County can reflect on its rich past while moving forward. Difficulties and changes in economic structures have always been present, but the county archives stand as silent witness to the region's fortitude and open mindedness.

*Laurie Thomas' presentation is available online at www.capemaycountyarchives.com.*

*To contact Rachel Rogish, email rrogish@cmcherald.com.*