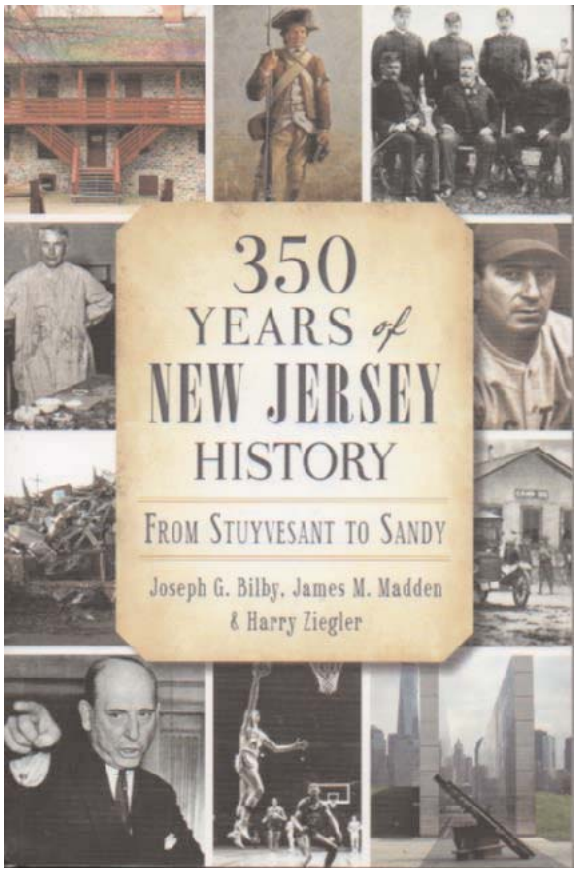


350 Years of New Jersey History in 200 Pages

350 Years of New Jersey History: From Stuyvesant to Sandy
Joseph G. Bilby, James M. Madden, Harry Ziegler

2014, The History Press
ISBN-978-1-62619-357-4
Softcover, 208 pages, Black and White, $19.99
Research: ★★★★
Writing Style: ★★★
Publishing: ★★
Review by Gordon Bond

How do you distill 350 years so that one can appreciate the grand sweep of history while not sacrificing the accuracy imparted by intimate details? *350 Years of New Jersey History: From Stuyvesant to Sandy* does a fine job of balancing the simultaneous macro and micro of Garden State history.

Compiled by Joseph G. Bilby, James M. Madden, and Harry Ziegler, *350 Years of New Jersey History* is a year-by-year compendium of the events that shaped our state from its initial European settlement by the Dutch West India Company in 1664 to the preparations in 2014 to celebrate our 350th birthday. Some entries are, perhaps necessarily,

BOOK RATING SYSTEM

RESEARCH
★ Inadequate research; factual errors; nothing original
★★ Well-researched but could have gone into greater depth
★★★ Excellent research; in-depth

WRITING STYLE
★ Poorly written; errors; amateur
★★ Good writing skills
★★★ Excellent style; engaging

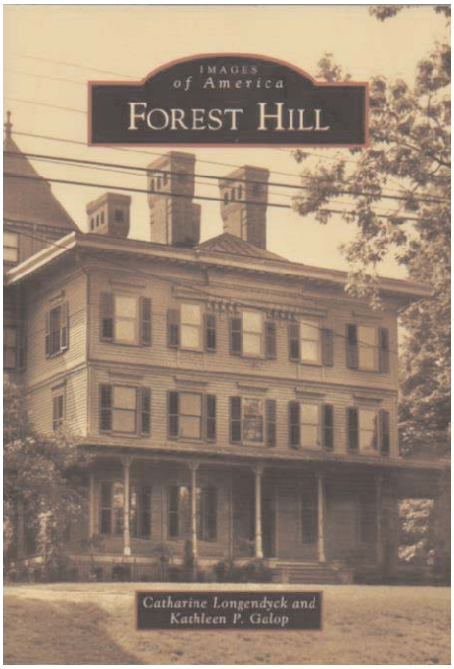
PUBLICATION
★ Amateurish layout; poor quality images
★★ Typical professional layout
★★★ Excellent layout, creative

To submit a review or suggest a book or exhibit for review, please email gordon@gardenstatelegacy.com

somewhat brief—"1721: William Trent formally established Trenton." Others, such as the 1967 Newark Riots or September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, go into a little more contextual detail.

It will come as no surprise to anyone familiar with the expertise of the authors (particularly Bilby and Madden) that New Jersey's military history is well-represented. But the range of topics included is as diverse as the state—everything from the well-known stories of Thomas Edison's work in New Jersey to the birth of the creator of the cartoon feline *Felix the Cat* to the establishment of Dickie Dee's Italian Hot Dog Emporium in Newark (and the debate whether they or Jimmy Buff's makes the best Italian-style hot dogs).

350 Years of New Jersey History is chock-full of such tidbits—some of which make me want to know more—and is informative and entertaining even for those of us who already knew the depth and diversity of Garden State history.



Images of America: Forest Hill
Catharine Longendyke and Kathleen P. Galop
2014, Arcadia Publishing
ISBN-13 978-1-4671-2060-9
Softcover, 128 pages, Black and White, $21.99
Research: ★★★
Writing Style: ★★★
Publishing: ★★
Review by Gordon Bond

The sequence of events is nearly always the same for me. I mention that my wife and I recently moved and the natural response is to inquire where. I take a deep breath and say "Newark," knowing I will spend the next couple minutes justifying it.

The City of Newark has "a reputation" in the rest of the state and, indeed, in the world beyond. Those of a certain age almost instinctually feel a need to add the word "Riots" after the name—harkening back to the six long hot days in July of 1967 when the nation's racial tensions boiled over into violence that played out on news broadcasts and front pages across the nation, and cast a shadow over the City's reputation to this day.

Not that the reputation is entirely unfair or unearned. Like many urban areas, there are indeed neighborhoods best-known for their murder rate statistics. Yet, also like many urban areas, New Jersey's most-populous city is not easily-defined by any one neighborhood's stats. In the spirit of "if it bleeds, it leads," the positive aspects of Newark

rarely make the news, so community leaders labor against the same kinds of reactions I get when I say where I now live. Some take offense when that negative image is even acknowledged. When I put out my announcements promoting the release party event at the Newark Public Library for this book, my candor ruffled some feather—including those of the authors, who have worked so hard to change that perception.

Yet, as my personal experiences attest, the reputation can't be wishfully ignored—it must be seized and wrestled to the ground so it no longer dominates the conversation about what Newark is or what it can become. In that context, I feel that this book by Catharine Longendyk and Kathleen P. Galop is all the more important—perhaps in a way that similar Arcadia picture-books for other communities are not. Newark has something to prove, and there are few better neighborhoods to begin with than Forest Hill.

A recurring comment among the speakers who helped celebrate the release of *Forest Hill*—including the Deputy Mayor—was how outsiders who visited the neighborhood for the first time exclaimed with surprise "we're still in *Newark*!?" Indeed, Forest Hill is so unlike the expectations of non-Newarkers that it does come as a pleasant surprise. I know it did for my wife and I when an affordable condo with an awesome Manhattan skyline view became available on the eastern side of the neighborhood. Instead of the dilapidated row-houses and crime-ridden tenements that people imagine, Forest Hill offers tree-lined avenues flanked by older mansion-styled homes, evoking a pre-riots Newark with a vibrant history and lovely architecture.

Forest Hill reflected the industrial and economic powerhouse 19th century Newark had become.

The name "Forest Hill" is actually a later moniker for an 1890 real estate development company established by Elias Heller in what was originally known as Woodside. The Sydenham House, built around 1711 or 1712 (depending on who you ask), still stands as an example of the farmhouses that used to dot the landscape—and remains Newark's oldest surviving private residence. Forest Hill reflected the industrial and economic powerhouse 19th century Newark had become. The Heller, Ballentine, and Clark families, headed by the city's leading industrialists, built their personal mansions in the neighborhood as well as more modest but still substantial workers housing. Proximity to the factories and easy access to New York attracted wealthy professionals who built a wonderfully diverse number of houses, encompassing Richardsonian Romanesque, Craftsman, Beaux-Arts, Victorian, Colonial, Gothic, Spanish Revival, etc.

While some have fallen to the proverbial wrecking ball, enough of these houses have survived to the present day to form a 52-block National and State historic district with an active preservation community. *Forest Hill* acts as a sort of guidebook to the district,

Forest Hill is not just a place of faded glory, but remains a pleasant, vibrant community, quietly defying the stereotypes.

describing the history behind the houses, showing what they looked like in the past, and showing some of those now lost. But it is more than just fancy houses—*Forest Hill* includes the area churches, schools, industrial buildings, and so on that also make up the neighborhood and its history. Branch Brook Park is an obvious feature to include as well.

While Forest Hill as an historic district is obviously specifically defined, as a neighborhood, it sits within the context of important properties outside of the designation—Mount Pleasant Cemetery with its stunning gate and beautiful markers and mausoleums; Broad Street train station; the original Newark Penn Station; the Mutual Benefit Life Insurance Company building; the streetcar facilities; bridges; fire department; etc.

It is also striking to realize just how many well-known personalities called Forest Hill home—entertainers; suffragists; poets; inventors; engineers; a U.S. Supreme Court Justice (William J. Brennen, Jr.); a U.S. House of Representatives member (Peter J. Rodino, Jr. who oversaw the Richard M. Nixon impeachment hearings); even a dominatrix and a phony plastic surgeon who buried a dead patient in his front yard.

I am under no delusions about where I live or the shortcoming and problems my adopted city faces. But, at the same time, I am increasingly less-inclined to buy into the completely negative image those outside the city tend to have. Forest Hill is not just a place of faded glory, but remains a pleasant, vibrant community, quietly defying the stereotypes. It is an example of what Newark was, but also what it is and can become.

Forest Hill makes me proud to be part of this community and I would urge anyone who wants to see Newark beyond the sensational headlines to check it out.