

Like most states, New Jersey has been marking the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War. But amongst the Garden State's history community, a different sort of conflict has been brewing for some time between North and South...that is, North Jersey and South Jersey.

In short, South Jersey' historians are tired of being treated like a poor relation by a state history community that they see as being dominated by North Jersey interests.

NORTH SOUTH JERSEY

Is there really a disparity in how New Jersey's history community treats South Jersey?

by Gordon Bond

"Well, where do I begin?" replied Patricia Martinelli to my query as to why South Jerseyans feel this angst. A former reporter and now freelance author of six books, this South Jersey native has emerged as one of the stronger advocates for her part of the state. She serves as Southern Region trustee for The League of Historical Societies of New Jersey and administrator/curator for the Vineland Historical and Antiquarian Society. "Most of the people I've talked to over the past few months seem to feel that not only does South Jersey receive short shrift by way of funding but that there is a general lack of respect regarding our region's history and its preservation. I'm not saying that there aren't people who care, but the reality for most of us down here is that we are not provided with the resources we need to do our jobs in the manner that they need to be done."

Traditionally, New Jersey had been divided in colonial times into East and West, to make administration by the Proprietors easier. But it is along the north-south axis that may be found a more organic difference. Why? Well, in part, it must have something to do with the social and economic influences of the two major population centers of New York City and Philadelphia. While New Jersey has long fought to be recognized as more than just a suburb to either, there is no denying that North Jersey has had greater ties to Manhattan across the Hudson River, while South Jersey has more affinity for Philadelphia, across the Delaware River. A good gage of this

“Most of the people I’ve talked to over the past few months seem to feel that not only does South Jersey receive short shrift by way of funding but that there is a general lack of respect regarding our region’s history and its preservation.”

–Patricia Martinelli

might be in how sports fans’ loyalties tend to lean more towards those cities’ respective teams. Geographic, geologic and even ecological differences probably also account for some of it. More hilly and with fertile valleys, North Jersey’s economic and industrial evolution was naturally going to be different from those that emerged from the flatter, marshier South Jersey. Philadelphia’s and West Jersey’s Quaker populations settled to a greater degree in South Jersey, while the Dutch tended to be more prominent in the North. Certainly that would play a role in the evolution of slavery in the state.

Whatever the reasons, North and South Jerseys developed something of their own unique cultural flavors—with Central Jersey being a hard-to-define mass of indeterminate delineation in between. Such regionalism is certainly nothing unique to New Jersey. And, with equal certainty, as much important history happened in South Jersey as North. “As one of the first American states, New Jersey has a long, rich history that includes *South Jersey*,” Martinelli stresses. “For example, did you know that the women of Vineland voted in the 1869 presidential election even though they were not legally allowed to cast ballots? That symbolic gesture was what sparked interest in the issue and spread quickly throughout the United States. Thankfully, we have a lot of those records in the Vineland Historical Society but no money to re-house them in acid-free containers. Then...there’s the Bethel Othello AME Church in Springtown (dating to 1835), which may be the last church in New Jersey where the founder of African Methodism in America spoke. It is in an extreme state of disrepair and needs help now. I could go on and on but I’m sure you see my point.”

Disparity in Funding?

“The disparity must end now!!!” screamed an email from Rich Rowan, a member of the Maple Shade Historical Society. It was a message intended for New Jersey state legislators in advance of Appropriation Bills A4058 and S2898, which, at the time he sent his email, had been introduced and were coming up for votes in their respective chambers. According to the Legislature’s website, the full description for these bills was that it, “Appropriates \$10,250,780 from 2009 Historic Preservation Fund and 2007 Historic Preservation Fund to provide grants for certain historic preservation projects, and appropriates \$600,000 from ‘2009 Historic Preservation Fund’ for associated administrative expenses.” The bill passed and

“If this grant was based on population, South Jersey would have received \$1,250,735 more in funds in this grant round alone.”

—Rich Rowan

was signed into law by Governor Chris Christy at Paulsdale to the general approval of the history community.

But, at the time, Rowan was protesting what he saw from personal experience as an inequity in how the funding was to be distributed. “South Jersey not receiving a fair percentage of funds from The New Jersey Historic Preservation Grants,” he asserted in his email to legislators. “I have been involved over the past 10 years with preservation efforts in Maple Shade to save our little Chesterford School, built in 1811 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. We applied for a grant of \$241,264 to stabilize and restore the school, make it handicapped-accessible, reconstruct the privy (with a modern bathroom inside), and provide a parking lot off to the side. Needless to say we did not get an award. This was our second time applying for capital funds with the same results. The initial feedback from the Historic Trust is that Maple Shade was requesting too much money for our project.”

To be honest, it is perhaps tempting to dismiss this as sour grapes over his pet project not being funded. However, Rowan tried to back up his accusations with hard numbers. He created a chart, comparing the number of grants made—both above and below the roughly \$250,000 his group had asked for—between North and South Jersey. He factored in percentages based on the populations of the two regions. “Again this shows even a more blatant disparity which needs to be corrected,” he claimed. “If this grant was based on population, South Jersey would have received \$1,250,735 more in funds in this grant round alone. Grant rounds between 2006-2011 South Jersey would have received \$4,360,560 more.”

Rowan advocates basing the distribution of funding on the percentage of the state’s population in the respective regions. Citing the 2009 U.S. Census Bureau’s data, he shows that counties in North Jersey accounted for 71.% of the total population, while South Jersey contained 29.4%. He then applied these percentages to the total amount of money allotted by the New Jersey Historic Trust for historic preservation in 2011. Out of the total \$10,250,770 allotted, Northern counties received 81% while Southern received 19%. If they had used Rowan’s criteria, North Jersey would have received 71.6% while South Jersey would have received 28.4%.

And, he took it a step farther, doing the same thing, going back to grant cycles as early as 2006. By his calculations, between 2006 and 2011, North Jersey received 80% of the funding to South Jersey’s 20%. Using population percentages,

“For either North Jersey or South Jersey, the percentage of award relative to request made is more or less equal.”

—Lisa Ryan
The New Jersey Historic Trust

he argued it should have looked more like the 71.6% / 28.4% split above.

“The criteria on the way the funds are distributed must be changed to be fair!!!” he argued to the state legislators, his passion about this evident even in print. “Please look into this for South Jersey Residents. The voters throughout the state passed the bond referendum that provided for these grants, and we all pay for the bonds equally, yet we are not benefiting equally.”

There is, of course, two sides to this story. GSL asked The Historic Trust to respond to Mr. Rowan’s comments. They point out that selection process is a little more complicated than he may be aware. “The Trust’s evaluation process is not based on population density, but rather on individual project merit,” wrote Lisa Ryan from their press office. “This is consistent with the statute and regulations that guide this program. Further, for each grant round, a team of independent professionals are assembled to review, evaluate and rank all of the applications the Trust receives. The professionals must sign a conflict of interest statement attesting to their lack of association with any of the projects they review. The evaluation process considers many facets of the project itself, none of which are geographically based. Broadly speaking, the criteria used to rank the projects focuses on public benefit, project concept and team, and significance of the resource.”

To back up their position, The Trust ran some numbers of their own. “The Trust tabulated the actual dollar amount of grant requests made against the actual dollar amount of grant awards for the state, North Jersey and South Jersey going back to 1990, the first year the Historic Trust made awards. [Rowan’s] chart shows that while the individual percentages vary from year to year, they do not overwhelmingly break for North Jersey each year. Looking at the total picture, on average, the Trust has been able to award 35-36% of the requests made statewide. For either North Jersey or South Jersey, the percentage of award relative to request made is more or less equal.”

If one is going to parse funding approvals by region, they are arguing, it isn’t the total number of respective projects that tells the full story. It is necessary to factor in the number of requests that are made from each region and then look at the respective percentages of approvals. In other words, let’s say that North Jersey history groups submitted ten applications for funding and The Trust approved six of them. That would translate into 60% of the projects receiving grants. Now, let’s

“The problem here in Salem County is our legislators do not reside here and many residents don’t feel they represent us wholeheartedly.”

—James Schulte

say South Jersey made applications for five projects in that same grant cycle and The Trust approved funding for three of them. In statewide terms, it appears that twice the number of projects are getting funding in North Jersey as in South. But when you look at it in terms of the percentage of approvals per region, each is having roughly 60% of their projects funded.

But how does that hold up in real-world dollars? Trust records for the 2010 round of grants show that North Jersey put in requests for \$18,880,028 worth of funding. What they actually received, however, was \$8,590,297—roughly 45% of the applications were approved. South Jersey put in requests for a total of \$4,435,695 and received \$1,660,483—roughly 38% of their applications were approved. The 7% difference is negligible and not necessarily indicative of an intentional disparity.

But, Mr. Rowan still isn’t buying it. “The point is maybe it should be done based on population density. We would get a fair share,” he responded to The Trust’s explanation. “You cannot tell me all the projects up North are consistently better choices than the South. I could see her point if a few years we received the majority of the money because we had some GREAT projects but it never happened and never came close. Politics and influence is a part of the process. My dad used to say ‘Don’t piss down my back and tell me it’s raining’.”

Rowan’s—and his dad’s—“colorful” way of putting things aside, however, he’s not the only one to smell the stench of politics in the pejorative sense of the word. James Schulte, of Preservation Salem County, certainly does and has no problems saying so. “The problem here in Salem County is our legislators do not reside here and many residents don’t feel they represent us wholeheartedly,” he told GSL in an August 29, 2011 email. “We normally don’t see them till election time. Well guess what last week, they held a town meeting, they opened up a District 3 headquarters in Pennsville, and I received a call from the District office about when our events are this year. Could this be the election year!? OK I best be quiet.”

Coalition?

Regardless of whose basis for calculations you agree with when it comes to the grants, the fact remains that there *is* still a feeling of disaffection among some in South Jersey’s history community. How serious is it? Well, in a manner of speaking,

“Although the consensus was that we did not need to create a new coalition at this time, I think we identified some key issues...”

–Patricia Martinelli

South Jersey historians were considering something of a “secession” from the Union of New Jersey.

Okay, so perhaps that’s something of a hyperbole, but according to Patricia Martinelli earlier in October, 2011, “we’re examining the possibility of helping ourselves; by banding together as a region, perhaps we’ll be able to attract the kind of positive public and political attention that we need. But more than that, if we open up the lines of communication within our region’s historical community, then we’ll perhaps be able to help one another meet our individual goals. In addition, if we do organize, we can assist local agencies or individuals find the resources they need to accomplish their goals.”

Martinelli had been a leading voice for a movement among her South Jersey colleagues to establish a formal South Jersey historical coalition—and the response had been positive. “It seems that the people I’ve spoken to share my desire that the coalition be very pro-active in a variety of areas, including addressing our legislators on the local, state and federal level, raising public awareness, fund-raising, and creating a ‘watch list’ of endangered sites in our region,” she told GSL.

So at 1:00 p.m., on Saturday, October 15th, a dozen people showed up at the Vineland Historical and Antiquarian Society Museum to discuss it. “In addition to Cynthia Lambert from the South Jersey Cultural Alliance, we had Tim Hart representing the New Jersey League of Historical Societies, Penny Watson representing Preservation New Jersey, folks from local historical societies and some concerned individuals. Although the consensus was that we did not need to create a new coalition at this time, I think we identified some key issues, such as the need for improved communication between those groups who are in a position to help and those in need, and the need for everyone to think on a regional level as opposed to individually. We also learned that Stockton College is building a history center in Hammonton that will hopefully fulfill the role that I saw for the coalition. And I was very pleased when one of the people there said she had information about a new foundation that might be able to assist the Bethel Othello AME Church in Springtown.”

The Stockton College center Martinelli mentions has been in the works since it was announced in December of 2010 that they were creating a “satellite center” in the town of Hammonton, NJ. The college had been offering classes there through St. Joseph’s High School, but wanted a spot closer to

“I came away
feeling optimistic
that we paved
the way for some
positive action
and I plan to do
my part”

–Patricia Martinelli

the train station and the amenities of downtown. Stockton’s President, Herman J. Saatkamp, even went so far as to express in their press release that they looked forward to “Hammonton becoming America’s next great college town.” In addition to classrooms, computer lab, faculty space, the Noyes Art Museum, and a bookstore/café, the renovations of the downtown building included possible space for a South Jersey Historical Center.

While she didn’t establish her coalition, Martinelli says “I came away feeling optimistic that we paved the way for some positive action and I plan to do my part.”

It’s hard to say for sure if there is a disparity here—even an unintended one. Perhaps it’s an illusion of statistical analysis or methodology. Maybe politics does play some role in things—this *is* New Jersey, after all. But whatever the case, perhaps that’s not really the point. If *any* group of New Jersey’s history community are feeling that disaffected, for whatever reasons, it is a very real problem. If nothing else, it should serve as a moment to pause and remember the deep and rich heritage of the Garden State—*all* of it.

