

Does
North Jersey
Really Have
More History
Than South
Jersey?



NORTH vs SOUTH

Let the discussion begin...

by Dennis Rizzo

“New Jersey is a keg tapped at both ends.”
—Benjamin Franklin

It's an impasse played out seasonally.

Giants-Eagles (I'm not sure where the Jets fit into this since they're really from Long Island and should go back to Shea Stadium); Phillies-Yankees (Same for the Mets as the Jets, except they had the willpower to stay on Long Island); Flyers-Rangers (Islanders don't count—see comment on Mets); Knicks-Sixers.

See a pattern? I'm confused. So are many of my contemporaries. So are many who live in what they prefer to call “Central” Jersey, though these centrists can't seem to come to consensus on where that is.

To their credit, the Devils and the Nets are proud to be home grown. Apparently this resulted from an error on the part of management and will likely be corrected in the next decade or so as they demand newer and larger stadiums.

It's with some reason that these two teams are in North Jersey—the population hub of the state. The site of the state's largest “city” (the amorphous Newark Metropolitan Statistical Area)—the place that houses more New Yorkers than New York. By contrast, South Jersey residents have no alternative but the Philadelphia teams, though a lukewarm effort did loom a few years back to lure a team to Camden.

So what does all of this have to do with history and historical documentation?

In researching Jersey history, the neophyte seeks out the usual sources. These are helpful, but seem oddly skewed. The New Jersey Historical Society (based in Newark) archives far more material on North Jersey than on South Jersey. One of the best sources for early documents in South Jersey is the Pennsylvania Historical Society. If you're looking for items about North Jersey (or that independent region called “the Shore”), check the New York Historical Society's holdings.

Is this intentional? Is there a conspiracy? Does anyone care?

Regional consciousness and territorial bias has played havoc with the most densely populated state in the Union since Europeans resolved to set up camp here. The Dutch located a trading post at Manhattan Island in 1610. Immediately, real estate values across the Hudson skyrocketed. Within a few years many successful traders were living on vast plantations in “de Bergen” and rowed across the Hudson River to their work on the island—the beginnings of a commuter culture that survives to the present day.

The Swedes from modern-day Delaware and the Manhattan Dutch skirted the coast of Jersey to what they

**“I’m from
New
Jersey.
I don’t
expect
much.”**
—Anonymous

termed the South River (now the Delaware River). Both set up trading posts there. The Native Americans were somewhat accommodating, but the Europeans had not yet internalized the concept of sharing. “NIMBY” clashes began almost immediately and continue to this day.

Sweden and the Netherlands brawled like a dysfunctional condo association and, before they knew it, the English had moved in and picked up all the prime real estate. Being a bit more aggressive and better at real estate dealing, England soon took title to all of what is now New Jersey and, despite claims from several indigenous peoples, deeded it to two court favorites—Carteret and Berkeley.

For the next 28 years (between 1674 and 1702) the colony was split in two. East Jersey and West Jersey, each with a distinct Board of Proprietors, administrators and rules, set the benchmark for our present arrangement of school boards.¹

Squabbling over boundaries brought about the first official survey, which resulted in “the Province Line.” Aside from lending its name to roads (some of which are not even near the original line) this demarcation allowed for two, distinct jurisdictions, which eventually split into the more than five hundred and sixty municipalities in today’s Jersey. Bickering over taxes and boundaries began anew, keeping a constant state of uncertainty, which allowed the more stable cities of New York and Philadelphia to jump in and take the industry and finances.

We recently had this discussion at a reenactment (one of those well-accredited historical venues). Apparently, the line of “North” begins above the Raritan River. Those in Monmouth/Ocean/Mercer are “Central” and the rest are, well, minor relatives. As has occurred throughout the history of this bi-polar state, the backbiting began immediately—which allowed the enemy to sneak into camp and steal all of our apple pies.

What does this all have to do with “History” and the North-South Jersey war? Well, not much; but, at least you will now be able to articulate why you have trouble finding information about Cumberland County in the NJHS archives or about the Ramapo Mountain People in the archives of Gloucester County.

This is a phenomenon worth further study, since it is a sore spot for many South Jersey historians. Please email GSL with your experiences and we will publish more in future issues!

Oh yeah...and: *Go Giant Devil Eagle Flyer! Rah!*



1. www.westjersey.org/wj_consc.htm