

A Hundred and Fifty Characters from New Jersey's Civil War Experience

BOOK RATING SYSTEM

★ Poorly written, bad scholarship / factual errors.

★★ Factually correct but poorly written.

★★★ Interesting but nothing new or insightful.

★★★★ Strong scholarship, well written.

★★★★★ Excellent in scholarship writing style and / or graphics / typography.

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New Jersey Goes to War: Biographies of 150 New Jerseyans Caught Up in the Struggle of the Civil War, including Soldiers, Civilians, Men, Women, Heroes, Scoundrels - and a Heroic Horse

Edited by Joseph G. Bilby
2010: New Jersey Civil War Heritage Association
ISBN: 978-0-944413-75-3
Hardcover, 166 pages black and white.
★★★★★
Review by Gordon Bond

New Jersey occupies an interesting place in the national conception of "The North" and

"The South." While we may consider ourselves a northern state, a look at a map demonstrates that we actually occupy a sort of middle ground. High Point, NJ is more in the North than Stamford, Connecticut and Cape May, NJ is further in the South than Baltimore, Maryland. We were among the last of the northern states to do away with slavery and ratify the post-Civil War amendments guaranteeing civil rights. And, we voted against Abraham Lincoln's bids for the White House. Both of them. Yet, the Quaker influence in

Biographies of 150 New Jerseyans Caught Up in the Struggle of the Civil War

Solomon Andrews was born in Perth Amboy in 1806. A physician and inventor, Andrews served as long-time mayor and public health officer of his native city. In 1849 he converted a pre-Revolutionary War barracks to house "The Inventor's Institute," where he invented and produced a wide variety of useful products, including a burglarproof lock. Andrews made significant improvements to Perth Amboy's quality of life, including designing the city's first sewer system, which dramatically reduced its yellow fever toll. With the outbreak of the Civil War, he volunteered his services to the U.S. Sanitary Commission, a predecessor of the Red Cross, and accompanied Union forces during the Peninsula Campaign of 1862.



Solomon Andrews (Wikimedia Commons)

Andrews' greatest invention grew out of his lifelong obsession with manned flight, an interest spurred by the war. He developed a vehicle that could be self-propelled and steered through the air, even into the wind, using a ship-like rudder and harnessing the forces of gravity through mechanically contracting and expanding hydrogen gas-filled, cigar-shaped bags. The doctor offered his invention to the government, promising in a letter to President Lincoln to "sail the airship...5 to 10 miles into Secesia and back again."



Andrews' Aereon (Wikimedia Commons)

The "Aereon" measured 80 feet long and 20 feet wide. With Andrews at the controls, learning to fly as he went along, it first took to the sky over Perth Amboy on June 1, 1863. Despite some developmental setbacks, Andrews' theories seemed to work. Though it may well have proved useful for military purposes, the airship was so far ahead of its time that the inventor's letters to Lincoln, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and members of Congress went unanswered. No doubt many thought him a crank.

Actually, Andrews was closer to genius than crank. At war's end he formed the Aerial Navigation Company to advance his idea that passengers and mail could travel by air, and on June 6, 1866, flew his machine from Perth Amboy and over New York City on the way to Oyster Bay, Long Island. When he cruised above Broadway at 1,500 feet, "the commotion along that great thoroughfare was tremendous." Unfortunately, a bank failure ruined Aerial Navigation. Solomon Andrews died in Perth Amboy on October 19, 1872, ending the career of a brilliant, patriotic and far-seeing Jerseyman who always thought "outside the box." (McPhee, *Deltoid Pumpkin; Miers, Where the Raritan Flows; Miers, New Jersey and the Civil War*)

John W. Kuhl

Solomon Andrews from Perth Amboy and his steerable airship are among the more unusual characters who became part of New Jersey's experience of the Civil War.

South Jersey made it a stronghold of abolitionism and the first African-American to vote under the 15th Amendment did so in Perth Amboy, NJ.

This bipolar history is reflected in the 150 people profiled in "New Jersey Goes to War," a look at 150 folks from the Garden State who were (as the subtitle says) "caught up" in the trauma of the American Civil War.

The selection of 150 profiles is significant, since 2011 will begin the 150th anniversary of the start of the War Between the States.

Obviously, such a work will appeal to the Civil War buffs, but this isn't just about soldiers. "New Jersey Goes to War"

encompasses the wide range of humanity that was part of the conflict in a variety of ways—at least those with a New Jersey connection.

Take the very first entry: Solomon Andrews, a physician and inventor from Perth Amboy who floated a steerable air ship over the town in 1866, across to Manhattan and on to Oyster Bay, Long Island. What did this have to do with the Civil War? Andrews offered his "Aereon" to the Lincoln administration for use in the war—after all, the army had already been using balloons for spotting the enemy. His letters went unanswered and he was ultimately ruined by a bank failure.

Even the more "traditional" military men provide curious histories. Henry Willis Barnes, for example, abandoned his wife and shoemaker trade in Boston, changed his name to Brown and ran off to Philadelphia to a new life in the army—and a new wife. After service as commander of Company A of the 3rd New Jersey Infantry, being wounded and being relieved of a later command for not moving quick enough, he was wounded again and mustered out. Brown fought with his second wife one night, broke up the furniture and stormed back to Boston where he had the gall to try and take up again with his first wife! When she rebuffed him, he took a third wife, all the while still technically married to the first two. It is the inclusion of these

extra details that flesh the people out as human beings—and sometimes rogues.

Women are also well-represented. Lilly Martin Spencer, for example, was a British artist who ended up in Newark, NJ where she painted *War Spirit at Home: Celebrating the Battle of Vicksburg*, which is featured on the book's cover.

George Ashby was an African-American born in Burlington who served in the 45th United States Colored Infantry, achieving the rank of first sergeant. Not only did he survive the war, but lived until 1946 to become the last surviving Civil War veteran at age 102. When interviewed in 1944 during World War II, he told the reporter he would "enlist all over again" if he could.

Assembling this massive collection was no small feat. Contributing to the effort are twenty-six contributors, all under the able editorship of Joseph Bilby (whose article on Sea Girt appears in this issue of GSL!).

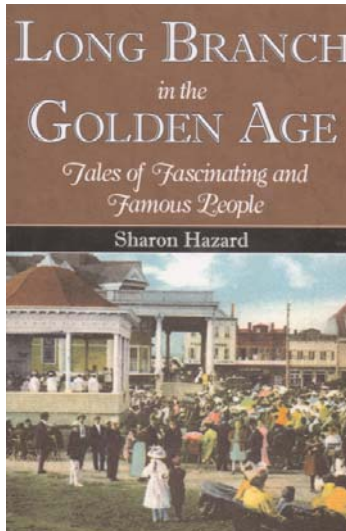
This book is so jam-packed with fascinating characters that it will entrain and enlighten even those who are not into the Civil War or military history. It's less about the battles and Generals and more a study of the varied human beings who participated in this national trauma, both directly and peripherally.

Local Offerings from The History Press

The local history landscape was changed when Arcadia Publishing started releasing its “Images of America” series in the 1990s—and offered a new business model for history publishers. Rather than shying from the traditionally limited markets of local history, they embraced it. These days, there is a new player in the business with the simple but descriptive title of The History Press. Aggressive author recruitment and

promotions, coupled with under-200-page books selling for around \$20 a pop, they have been carving out a successful niche in the local history marketplace. These are more text-oriented regional histories.

Below are a sampling of three titles from 2007, 2009 and 2010 featuring places in New Jersey.



Long Branch in the Golden Age: Tales of Fascinating and Famous People

by Sharon Hazard

2007: The History Press, Inc.,
Charleston, SC

ISBN: 978-1-59629-216-1

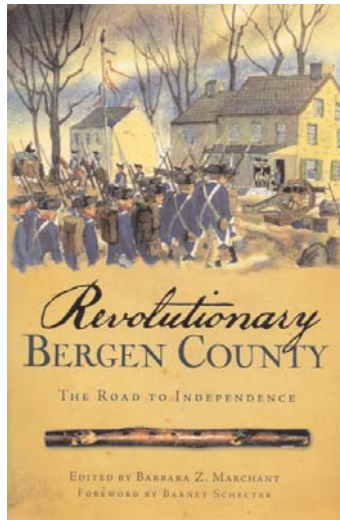
Softcover, 126 pages black and white.

★★★★

Review by Gordon Bond

Say “Jersey Shore” today and most people will think of the reprehensible reality show (and, for the record, those folks are from Staten Island, *not* the Garden State!). But the shore has been a staple of the region’s entertainment since the first Lenape hunted for seashells at the edges of the Atlantic.

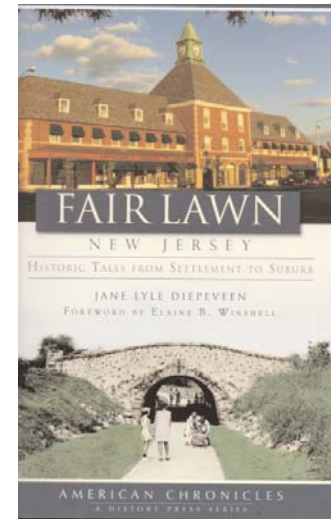
Many communities cashed in on the tourists in various ways—Wildwood is different from Cape May which is different from ocean Grove, etc. But Long Branch earned a reputation



during the Gilded Age as *the* seaside resort for the rich, famous and powerful.

Long Branch native Sharon Hazard’s “Long Branch in the Golden Age: Tales of Fascinating and Famous People,” tells the interesting tales. Much of the fame that would come could be attributed to Mary Todd Lincoln. The reception by the town during a visit in 1861 impressed her enough that she told her friends. The fastidious First Lady’s recommendations afforded the place a social standing beyond a quiet, pleasant place to take the sea air.

Among those who probably took her advice about the place would be General U.S. Grant, who took refuge at Long Branch as a General and President and as an invalid working on his memoirs. During his time in



office, Grant dubbed Long Branch as the “Summer Capital” (a distinction also given to Sea Girt - see the article in this issue!). Eight other Presidents also escaped to the Jersey Shore from Washington D.C. and its oppressive humidity. But the most dramatic arrival would be James A. Garfield.

Shot by Charles Julius Guiteau at a Washington train station in 1881, the wounded President lingered from June 2nd to September 19th with the bullet lodged in his torso. On September 6th, he had been moved from Washington D.C. to the Elberon section of Long Branch where his wife had recovered from malaria that summer. Concerned about the jostling of a carriage ride, the good citizens of Elberon built a temporary spur from the main rail line to the door of his

cottage. They moved the mortally wounded man on a Pullman car—George Pullman was a frequent Long Branch guest as well.

The excesses of the tycoons born of the post Civil War era were also on display at Long Branch. James “Diamond Jim” Buchanan Brady brought six automobiles with six chauffeurs each summer and department store mogul James A. Hearn built an exact replica of William Shakespeare’s Stratford-on-Avon, England, home as a guest cottage. Summers brought the Fisks, Goulds, Guggenheims and Vanderbilts and laundry list of lesser American capitalist nobility.

They could rub shoulders and be entertained by an equally long list of the era’s entertainers, from serious stage actors to burlesque queens. Most of the names will be little known today, but some enjoyed more long-lasting fame—and infamy. “Buffalo Bill” Cody and his sharpshooting star, Annie Oakley frequented Long Branch’s finest hotels, Lily Langtree summered (and scandalized with her one-piece bathing suit), and some might have noted the first brick house, built by Edwin Booth whose brother, John Wilkes, would murder Lincoln.

Added to the mix were writers and artists and the occasional ship wreck.

Hazard focuses on the rich and famous, but she doesn’t forget that while such people came and went, there were people who lived in Long Branch year round, forming the foundations of a community.

The last chapter is devoted to Anna Lenahan Brown whom she characterizes in the title as “The Salt of the Earth.”

It’s easy today when it’s “hip” to be snarky about New Jersey to forget that the Garden State for a long time was *the* place for trendy vacations.

Hazard makes use of historic images and contemporary letters and press to tell the story of Long Branch’s illustrious and historic past—the *real* Jersey Shore!

Revolutionary Bergen County: The Road to Independence

Edited by Barbara Z. Marchant
2009: The History Press, Inc.,
Charleston, SC
ISBN: 978-1-59629-748-7

★★★★★

Review by Gordon Bond

One of the things I enjoy about living in New Jersey is how often early American history is within walking distance of your front door. I can literally walk to the sites of the Battles of Connecticut Farms (now Union, NJ)—it’s hard to imagine artillery bombardments down the street, but sure enough, American troops came under British cannon fire there.

Pretty much every area has some kind of story to tell. When it comes to the Revolution, however, Bergen County doesn’t leap to mind—at least not ahead of such iconic places as Monmouth, Trenton, Princeton or even Union. And that’s the point behind “Revolutionary Bergen County: The Road to Independence,” a series of essays that demonstrate just how much the place, as Barnet

Schector asserts in the Foreword, “stood in the eye of the Revolutionary storm.”

Indeed. The stories coming from Bergen at that time are remarkably compelling and various—something of a microcosm of the attitudes and dramas of the Colonies as a whole. A random sampling:

We think of the war in terms of battles. We give some thought to the civilians who cast their lots with this side or that and sometimes had their homes burned to the ground as a result. But it’s an abstract concept, how much these people really risked by their decisions. The memories of 63 year old Helen Kortright Brasher in 1802, however, give a visceral taste of life in a refuge family in Paramus. Where her stories could be verified, they have rung true—lending a credibility to her narrative of how a wounded British Major of the troops pillaging her home remained on his bed though the house was burning and declared that if the “dm^d rebels” concealed in the house didn’t “make their appearance we should all be consumed in the flames.”

Douwe Talema (Tallman) was the first to be born in America of his Netherlander family but died of a bayonet wound suffered from a British raiding party at Closter Landing. The *New Jersey Gazette* mentioned how neighbors banded together to fight back and were joined by “a party of negroes” but said in sarcasm, “I should have mentioned the negroes first in order to grace the British arms.”

You may not have heard of General Robert Erskine, yet his service as a cartographer was as critical as any man's who wielded a musket. Maps were vital to armies marching in unfamiliar territories. Indeed, George Washington carried pocket versions of his maps in his coat pocket throughout the war.

And so on.

A lot of histories like this suffer from a somewhat bland, straight forward narrative style that, while perfectly serviceable and factually correct, tends to be uninspired. In contrast, the authors of "Revolutionary Bergen County" use a more engaging style with good hooks that make the stories interesting even to those not familiar with the area.

Fair Lawn New Jersey: Historic Tales from Settlement to Suburb

by Jane Lyle Diepeveen
2010: The History Press, Inc.,
Charleston, SC
ISBN: 978-1-59629-698-5

★★★★

Review by Gordon Bond

The one constant in this life, so the conventional wisdom goes, is change. As historians and preservationists, we're in a constant battle with change—at least the change that seems for change's sake and threatens the artifacts of our favorite bits of the past. It is, of course, perhaps even necessarily, a losing battle. Yet the story of that change *is* history.

This is particularly true of Fair Lawn, New Jersey. Beginning as a handful of farm settlements

and mills, it was transformed by the latest modern definitions of an American community into the planned suburbs and developments that were also transforming many other such communities in the nation. "Fair Lawn, New Jersey: Historic Tales from Settlement to Suburb," by Jane Lyle Diepeveen is an aptly named celebration of that American story.

Much of the early history of the area is told by the Dutch homes, built on lands purchased from the Lenape. Six out of the ten structures standing as late as 1950 have since been torn down, though Diepeveen makes use of old photos and HABS drawings from the WPA projects of the 1930s.

By the late 19th century, the area was being divided up into lots looking a lot like the coming suburban developments to come. The greatest change, however, was ushered in by the transformative influence of the automobile culture. Radburn was hawked to would-be homeowners as a "Town for the Motor Age."

Up until 1924, Fair Lawn was a neighborhood in Saddle River Township. But a referendum proposing five new schools put only one in Fair Lawn—something the growing community of Fair Lawn resented. After a bitter fight, its residents approved a referendum on April 5, 1924 calling for their secession.

Typical town histories of this genera are often organized into broad categories, tracing the development of industry, fire and police departments, schools,

etc. "Fair Lawn" follows this pattern, but intersperses chapters of more specific stories, such as the mysterious disappearance of George Morlot, part owner of a Paterson dye works. Some say he fell or was pushed into the Passaic River while someone claimed to have received a letter from him from Cuba a decade after he disappeared. He was last seen on a train to New York in 1894.

The development of Radburn is given special attention as well as a chapter offering a more intimate glimpse through the author's personal memories of growing up there.

This "patchwork" thematic quality actually works well given the equally patchwork evolution of the town itself.

One thing that is apparent is how Diepeveen did her homework. Local histories can suffer from regurgitated legends and hearsay. On several occasions here, however, the author gets to the bottom of such tales. This is most evident in her treatment of the Dunkerhook area's claimed status as a stop on the Underground Railroad and one house having been visited by General Lafayette after the Revolution.

"Fair Lawn" is a compendium of interesting facts tracing the place's evolution and even a couple good mysteries.

WANT TO HELP REVIEW?

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