

150 of New Jersey's Best Buildings and Places

...more or less.

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.

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

AIA New Jersey Guidebook: 150 Best Buildings and Place

Philip S. Kennedy-Grant, FAIA, Mark Hewitt, FAIA, and Michael J. Mills, FAIA, editors
2011, Rivergate Books an imprint of Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ
ISBN: 978-0-8135-5126-5

Softcover, 198 pages, full color

★★★★

Review by Stephanie M. Hoagland

Did you know that Mies van der Rohe designed several apartment buildings in Newark? I didn't. Or that there are three Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian homes in New Jersey? I knew of two, but as a fan of Wright's architecture three is even better. These are just a two of the things I learned from reading the new *AIA New Jersey Guidebook*.

The book was written in honor of the 150th anniversary of the New Jersey chapter of the American Institute of Architects, the preeminent professional organization of architects whose mission is to "elevate the standing of the profession as well as promote the scientific and practical perfection of its members." With hundreds of thousands of buildings to choose from the NJ AIA compiled a collection of 150 buildings and places that their members viewed as the best in the state. This could not have been an easy task and the introduction lays out the democratic process by which the buildings were chosen; acknowledging the difficulty in defining the "best."

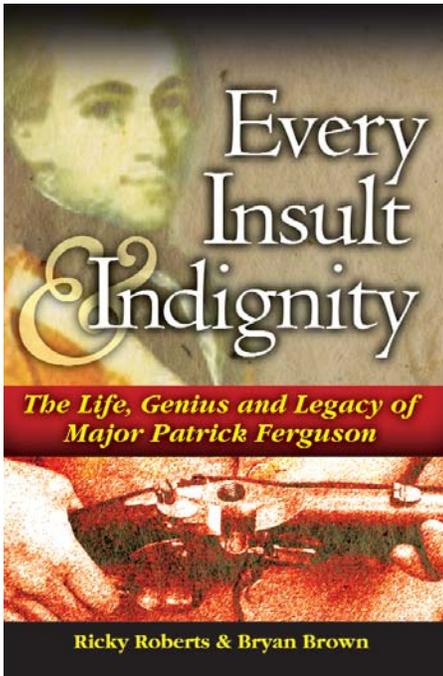
“A few of the descriptions veered towards the saccharine, which is not uncommon in architectural descriptions, but others included a greater analysis to help the reader better understand why that particular building was chosen over another.”

The collection includes a wide variety of building types, sizes and ages ranging from a brick and stone house dating to 1740, a White Manna diner from the 1940s, to the 42-storey Goldman Sachs Tower completed in 2004. In addition to buildings, it also includes places such as parks, marinas and boardwalks. The book covers the entire state which was divided into five zones running clockwise from the northeast corner; the Gateway Region, the Shore Region, Greater Atlantic City and Southern Shore Region, the Delaware River Region and the Skylands Region.

Each entry includes a written description of the building along with a color photograph. Some of the narratives are just a quick description of the building while others include a brief history of the site including important historic events or occupation by historic figures, discussion of the architect or changes to the building over time. A few of the descriptions veered towards the saccharine, which is not uncommon in architectural descriptions, but others included a greater analysis to help the reader better understand why that particular building was chosen over another. I found these deeper analyses were able to change my perception of several of the buildings that appeared to be nothing special when my judgment was made from just the photograph alone.

As an architectural historian and conservator, I didn't agree with all of the choices, such as the Senator Frank S. Farley State Marina in Atlantic City, and there were other buildings, such as the Hancock House, a patterned-end brick house, that I was surprised to find were not included. I felt that the buildings of Princeton University were over represented with 12 of the 150 buildings and was disappointed to see that entries such as the Barrier Islands, natural features that have nothing architectural about them, were included at the expense of other noteworthy buildings in the state. While the older buildings of the collection have proven their importance, it will be interesting to revisit some of the more modern entries, such as the townhouse development of Florham on the Fairways in Florham Park or the Lewis Thomas Laboratory of Princeton University, in 25–50 years to see if they are able to stand the test of time. Reading the “Closing Thoughts” chapter of the book put me at ease a bit in its acknowledgement that the list is missing “a number of important building types” including Revolutionary War-era structures and agricultural buildings such as Dutch barns that were so important to the “Garden State.”

The book is aimed at the general population and hard-core architecture buffs will be left wanting more. But for the lay reader or architectural novice, it is an excellent introduction to some of the best architecture New Jersey has to offer. The quality of the photography is excellent. While I would have loved to see this as a large-format hard



cover book with additional photographs, I understand the cost limitations of such a book. Dividing the book into regions was a nice organizational tool as it will make the book easier to use during travels across the state. I'm looking forward to keeping our copy in the car so that we can see some of New Jersey's best architecture in person.

Every Insult & Indignity: The Life, Genius and Legacy of Major Patrick Ferguson

Ricky Roberts and Bryan Brown

2011, Self-Published

ISBN-13: 978-1461158578; ISBN-10 1461158575

Softcover, 235 pages, full color

★★★★

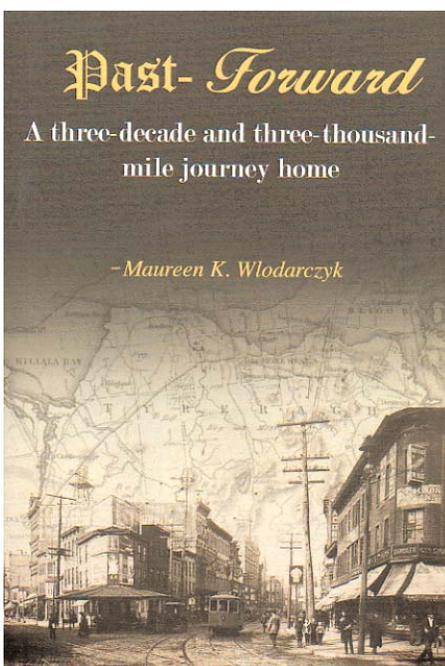
Review by Joseph Bilby

A little known aspect of New Jersey history is the fact that the state was the scene of the first combat use of a revolutionary firearm. The gun, a breech loading Ferguson rifle, was named for its inventor, Major Patrick "Pattie" Ferguson, a Scottish officer in the British army. Ferguson, then a captain, led a company of riflemen armed with his invention in skirmishes at Bonhamtown and Short Hills in the spring of 1777, and then at the battle of Brandywine, Pennsylvania in September, where he was badly wounded, never recovering full use of his right arm. Ferguson was not yet done with New Jersey, though, and, in October, 1778, promoted to major, he led a force of raiders from New York to Little Egg Harbor, burning privateer ships, salt works and the village of Chestnut Neck on the Mullica River. Pattie's career ended prematurely when he was killed leading a force of Loyalists at Kings Mountain, North Carolina in 1780. The story of Ferguson, his rifle and the brief bright arc of his career are the subjects of Ricky Roberts and Bryan Brown's *Every Insult and Indignity: The Life, Genius and Legacy of Major Patrick Ferguson*.

Born into a family in the minor gentry of Edinburgh, Scotland in 1744, Ferguson entered the British army as an officer when his father purchased him a commission, the usual procedure in the British army in those days. He subsequently served on the continent and in the West Indies and apparently gave a lot of thought over the years to the technology behind breech loading rifles, in an era when the most common infantry arms, muskets, were loaded from the muzzle and had smooth barrel interiors. Even though the ignition system, flint striking steel to create sparks, remained the same for both guns, breech loading increased a gun's rate of fire, and spiral-cut rifling grooves in its interior put a stabilizing spin on the ball, dramatically increasing accuracy.

The breech loading idea was not unique to Ferguson, and he never

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claimed it was. The clever Scot studied the previous designs of French arms designers like Isaac de la Chaumette, who, earlier in the 18th century, introduced the concept of a threaded circular screw breech that opened and closed by rotation of the trigger guard. Ferguson’s improvements, as the authors note, were subtle but significant. He changed the pitch of the threads so that one turn of the trigger guard, rather than several, opened and closed the breech, added transverse cuts across the threads to reduce powder fouling and tapered the breech and chamber, all modifications that increased the rifle’s rate of fire. Ferguson also adapted his gun to mount a bayonet, a standard feature with muskets, but rarely seen on rifles.

The authors have produced a unique book on Pattie’s career and the technical aspects of his invention. They not only consulted primary and secondary sources and archeological studies, but actually test fired a high quality reproduction of Ferguson’s invention—few original guns survive and they are far too valuable to shoot. The firing tests included a live fire re-creation of Ferguson’s famous firing demonstration before King George III at Woolwich, where he was able to fire six shots in less than two minutes, changing positions while firing. The authors’ conclusions on the effectiveness of the Ferguson rifle, the reasons it did not see greatly increased production, and whether any of the breech loaders made it to Kings Mountain, are of great interest to the student of military tactics and small arms, and the inventive major’s unique relationship to New Jersey adds interest to the book for those of us who immerse ourselves in obscure Jerseyana.

Past-Forward: A three-decade and three-thousand-mile journey home

Maureen Wlodarczyk

2010, Outskirt Press, Inc., self-published

ISBN: 987-1-4327-5225-5

Hardcover with Dustjacket, 156 pages, black and white

★★★★★

Review by Gordon Bond

“I am a DNA dead-end.” With that stark declaration, Maureen Wlodarczyk unflinchingly begins to make peace with the fact that tens of thousands of years of mitochondrial DNA—genetic material passed down solely through the females of our species—will come to an end with her. Not that she is unique in this—all it takes is for a woman to either not have children or have only boys. As she explains in the introduction, she probably wouldn’t have even been aware of her

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genetically terminal status, had it not been for the relatively recent discovery of mitochondrial DNA (MtDNA for short). She holds an appreciation of such a fate as only a good genealogist could have. “The universe is full of twinkling MtDNA stars,” she explains, as matter-of-fact as poetic, “and every day some of them burn out.”

Indeed, it is not this realization that drives *Past-Forward*, but rather a promise Wlodarczyk had made to her maternal grandmother, Kate. Whatever Maureen Wlodarczyk’s genes might lack in MtDNA propagation, they are infused by a love of genealogy. She is one of those historians who relishes rummaging through old records, chasing down lineages and pinning them like a prize butterfly collector to a family-tree chart. We are all, in a sense, genealogists, from the first time we ask who that person is in old family photographs. Listening to the stories of Kate’s life inspired Maureen to promise she would piece together the family’s story, from Ireland to Jersey City. For the next 30 years, she would work to keep that promise, though Kate passed away before she was done. The full title of the resulting book reflects the span of space and time it took to assemble: *Past-Forward: A three-decade and three-thousand-mile journey home*.

Such family histories are often more record-keeping than storytelling. The shelves of town-history rooms in local libraries are full of such perfunctory tomes, squeezing the lives of local citizens between born-died dates or in short summaries, in the biblical tradition of who begat whom. Elderly relatives with the genealogy-bug will sometimes write more detailed accounts, but the results are often only of any real interest to that family. What makes *Past-Forward* engaging—even to someone who never knew any of the people—is it is deeply personal and intimate. Wlodarczyk approaches the subject as if she were writing a long letter to Kate, acting as a guide as she leads her ghost through the story in which both their lives bear context. Reading those “letters,” one is left with an almost voyeuristic feeling—as if you are being let in on private things.

But more than that is *Past-Forward*’s compelling story. It is the classic Irish immigrant tale, replete with poverty, illness, misery, and death, balanced by the inspirational Irish art of survival. (I love the Daniel Moynihan quote from the introduction, “To be Irish is to know that in the end the world will break your heart.”) There is a whiff of Frank McCourt at times. There are passages where the lack of surviving information can only result in a straightforward recitation of Federal Census statistics. But others combine an engaging element of storytelling with Wlodarczyk’s own thought processes as each new piece fell into place. It is a marvelous bit of vernacular history.

The New Jersey connection—aside from how Wlodarczyk now

writes GSL's new genealogy column—is how the family settled in Jersey City. The story is supported by contextual information about the places and times, including anti-Irish discrimination in pre-Civil War Jersey City and the place of the Catholic community.

The only thing wanting are photographs. The characters exist only in your mind—which may not be the worst place for them to be. By the time one finishes *Past-Forward*, you feel like you know these people, though they are not your own kin. When Wlodarczyk sent the copy for review, she included a bookmark that has Kate's photo. It is the kind of sturdy Irish face that I imagined. Whereas before, it would have just been an old picture of some woman, now it's the face of someone with a history—a childhood described as “sad and turbulent” that Wlodarczyk sought to “dilute...with a broad tale of the generations that defined us.”

Past-Forward is a promise kept and we are fortunate to have been permitted the privilege of sharing the journey.

