

Two Books from Rivergate Attempt to Summarize the Complexity of Garden State History...

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 graphic/typography.

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

Mapping New Jersey - An Evolving Landscape

Edited by Maxine N. Lurie and Peter O. Wacker; Cartography by Michael Siegel

2009: Rivergate Books, An Imprint of Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ

ISBN: 978-0-8135-4584-1

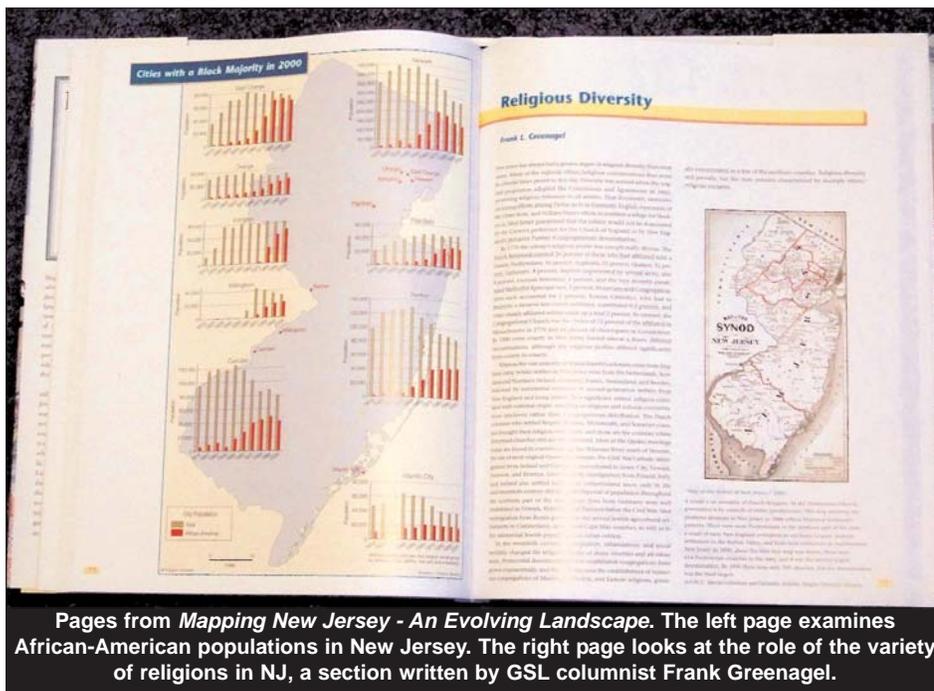
Hardcover, 240 pages full color.

★★★★★

Review by Gordon Bond

Did you know: In 2006, New Jersey ranked second in the nation for highest median family income, while at the same time ranking second for the highest median housing costs; that Essex County

has the highest incarceration rate in the state; that in addition to Menlo Park and West Orange, Thomas Edison had interests in Stewartsville or Ogdensburg; that the AIDS epidemic reached a peak in 1991; that Bergen County is NJ's most populous and Salem County its least; that the Underground Railroad cut across New Jersey; that life expectancy rose over ten years for NJ women between 1960 and 1980; suicides in NJ are greater in area of less population density; that NJ had 13 Nike missile silos between 1955 and 1974; that NJ contains 566 individual municipalities?



Pages from *Mapping New Jersey - An Evolving Landscape*. The left page examines African-American populations in New Jersey. The right page looks at the role of the variety of religions in NJ, a section written by GSL columnist Frank Greenagel.

And that was just a random sampling of the facts and statistics one can learn about the Garden State from *Mapping New Jersey - An Evolving Landscape*, edited by Maxine Lurie and Peter Wacker. But this coffee table size book is more than just a list of interesting stats—it presents the wide range of New Jersey’s historical, geographic, political, industrial and cultural variety within the spatial context of an atlas.

The concept such an inclusive historic atlas is nothing new—many states have had them long before us. New Jersey, however, proved more daunting. Throughout our history, for example, our population density has not only been the highest but encompasses the greatest diversity. For a relatively small state, even our geology and ecology present a complexity that makes it tough to characterize the state as a whole in any simple way.

Wading into this task is a host of contributors from a wide range

of disciplines (including Frank Greenagel, whose series on NJ’s religious architecture appears in GSL!), all led by editors Maxine N. Lurie and Peter O. Wacker. Lurie, a professor of history at Seton Hall University, will be recognized for her work as co-editor of the equally daunting *Encyclopedia of New Jersey*. Wacker considers the state his laboratory for studying historical cultural geography and is professor emeritus of geography at Rutgers University.

All the data was transformed into graphic form by Michael Siegel, the staff cartographer of Rutgers University’s Department of Geography. Many readers will know the Rutgers website he maintains of historic New Jersey maps. Interspersed with the modern maps created for the book, are many examples of earlier New Jersey cartography throughout history.

Mapping New Jersey is packed with information but presents it in a way that gives a clear spatial

and temporal context. Some (though not all) of this data can be found online or from other sources. But this book brings it all together in one place, making sense of a remarkably complicated place and its history.

There’s More to New Jersey Than the Sopranos

by Mark Mappen

2009: Rivergate Books, An Imprint of Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ

ISBN: 978-0-8135-4586-1

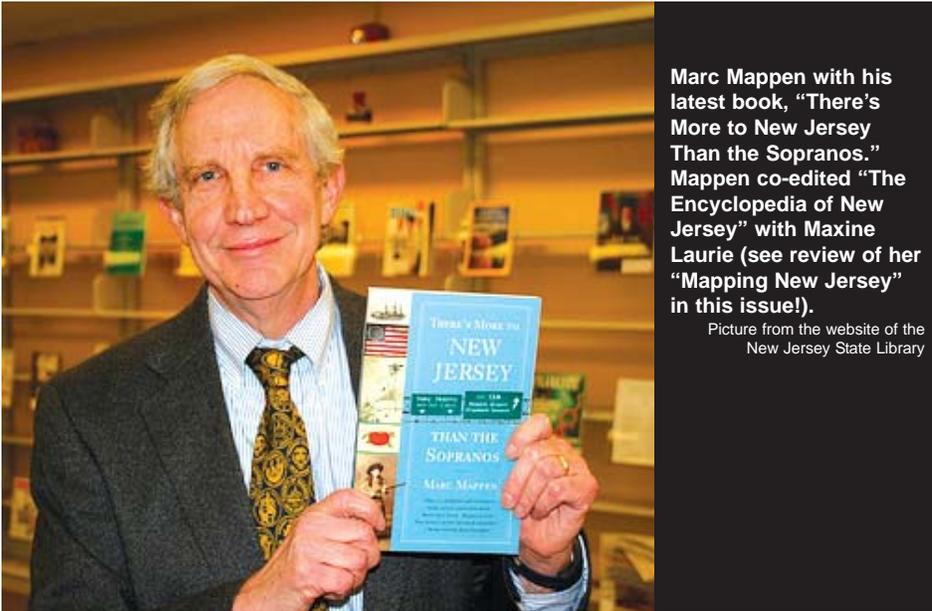
Softcover, 210 pages black and white.

★★★★★

Review by Gordon Bond

New Jersey is the Rodney Dangerfield of United States—it gets no respect. Perhaps having to fight for our reputation, however, inspires us to dip a little deeper into our history for a well-deserved sense of pride. And it’s a pretty deep well. It’s often said that for such relatively small state, New Jersey has some big history. That fact keeps NJ’s historians busy—not to mention keeping Garden State Legacy in business!

Marc Mappen is among the strongest champions of New Jersey and its history and his latest book, *There’s More to New Jersey Than the Sopranos* makes the point in a simple but effective format. He tells New Jersey’s story through a collection of forty short essays, examining everything from prehistoric elephants to modern corruption. Some are well-worn gems—Francis Hopkinson’s claim to the design of the American flag, for instance, or the tale of Molly Pitcher at the Battle of Monmouth. Certainly the classic



Marc Mappen with his latest book, "There's More to New Jersey Than the Sopranos." Mappen co-edited "The Encyclopedia of New Jersey" with Maxine Laurie (see review of her "Mapping New Jersey" in this issue!).

Picture from the website of the New Jersey State Library

New Jersey connection to Orson Welles' infamous radio adaptation of H.G. Wells' 1898 *The War of the Worlds* is a favorite.

But it is in the more obscure stories that the book shines. I never knew Annie Oakley—the sharpshooter of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show fame—lived in the Garden State or that expatriate American poet, Ezra Pound once insulted Newark.

I've always maintained that if history is boring, it's the fault of the person telling the story, not the history. Mappen's passion for his subject infuses the stories with all the life and humor they reflect, making for an easy but educational read. But it's not all fun. The story of two New Jersey Union soldiers in Confederate prisons, for example, is sober and poignant.

Perhaps most incisive is the last chapter, "The Serpent in the Garden State"—a brief but illuminating look at the history of political corruption that still sullies our reputation.

A final appendix gives

insightful commentary on the work that went into *The Encyclopedia of New Jersey*, which he co-edited with Maxine Lurie (see the review of her *Mapping New Jersey* above!).

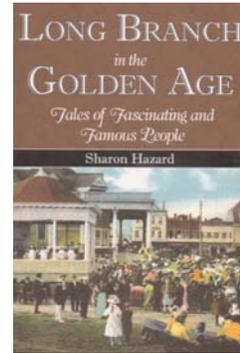
The title, *there's More to New Jersey Than the Sopranos*, derives from a New Jersey tourist's experience in Poland, where the eyes of a local from Gadansk lit up upon hearing where she was from—"Ah, Sopranos."

New Jersey has been fighting for its fair share of respect since colonial times—perhaps that's part of the New Jersey character. As Jersey son, Bruce Springsteen said at the opening of the New Jersey Hall of Fame in 2008, it's what drives our "naked ambition and the desire to not just do our best, but to stick it in your face."

Mappen's little book, brimming with page-turning tales of our funny, ironic, serious, tragic, heroic, shameful, endlessly fascinating history is proof enough that its title is indeed true.

UPCOMING REVIEWS:

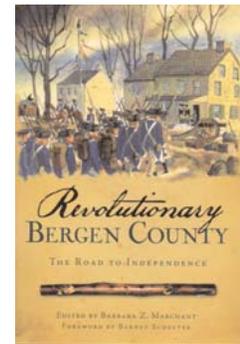
The following books were unable to be reviewed in time for this issue of GSL.



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

by Sharon Hazard

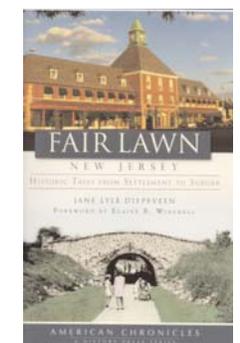
2007: The History Press, Inc., Charleston, SC
ISBN: 978-1-59629-216-1



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



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

WANT TO HELP REVIEW?

Are you well-read and qualified to review books about New Jersey history? Contact: Gordon@GardenStateLegacy.com