

THE TOP 5 ISSUES FACING THE NJ HISTORY COMMUNITY

by Gordon Bond

At the beginning of 2011, Garden State Legacy asked members of the NJ history community what they saw as the major issues challenging us these days. Some answers were unexpected, but five main themes emerged. This article will look at each in the context of specific “case study” examples. While presented as a “top five” list, they are not in any order of particular importance. As a NJ history magazine, GSL admits a natural bias, but has attempted to view each issue with fairness. Certainly some of this remains contentious and you may agree or disagree with the thoughts expressed here. But the real purpose of this piece is to provide grist for the kinds of dialogs we need to have in the New Jersey history world.

Issue One: Historic Preservation vs. Green Energy



An abandoned mortar battery installation at Fort Hancock on Sandy Hook, New Jersey, now part of the Gateway National Recreation Area.

Wikimedia Commons, image by Beyond My Ken



James Wassel

At first, it might seem like a natural partnership—historians and environmentalists together against the scourge of urban sprawl and strip malls that threaten old buildings and green spaces alike. Yet the two do sometimes find themselves at odds.

Among the more contentious situations has been over the fate of Fort Hancock at Sandy Hook, NJ. Sitting in what is a natural spot for the defense of New York Harbor, there is a long military history, significant to both New Jersey and the nation as a whole. When the base was decommissioned by the U.S. Army in 1974, it was turned over to the National Park Service (NPS) as part of the overall park. A combination of neglect and the harsh weather conspired to take a heavy toll on the buildings, leaving some unstable and at risk of collapse.

In 2000, the NPS held closed-door meetings with James Wassel, a developer from Rumsen, NJ, to explore options. The result was a controversial 60-year lease in 2004 that would permit Wassel to redevelop the Fort Hancock area. While the resulting Sandy Hook Partners stated that the plan included the stipulation “that we rehabilitate these buildings within the guidelines of the National Park Service’s requirements for historic structures and under the oversight of the State Historic Preservation Office,”¹ it was the fact that commercial development was part of the bargain that rubbed many the wrong way. Indeed, the criticism of the NPS and Wassel himself was as harsh as the weather that long lashed at the buildings.



Fort Hancock installed the nation's first "disappearing gun" battery in 1893. After firing, the carriage retracted down into a bunker, keeping it out of sight of an enemy while it was being reloaded. While effective, the mechanism was complex and by the 1920s the design was withdrawn from active service.



Fort Hancock was decommissioned in 1974 and made into an historic district.

"Why does the National Park Service profess now that it has responsibilities regarding the buildings? Why haven't they been taking 'responsibility' seriously for the past 30 years?"

- Patricia A. Stilwell
Atlantic Highlands Herald
2004

To environmentalists, the idea of commercially developing Fort Hancock represented as serious threat to the ecosystem of Sandy Hook. A group calling themselves Save Sandy Hook organized for the sole purpose of blocking the deal. They considered the commercial aspect a betrayal of the public trust by the NPS and an abandonment of the NPS mission. New Jersey Friends of Clearwater, an environmental group, had its offices at the Fort, until kicked out by the NPS under the Wassel plan. The two organizations mounted unsuccessful legal challenges to the granting of Wassel's lease.

Both groups also acknowledged the historic resource of the place, but not everyone saw it that way. "Yes Sandy Hook Proving Ground and Ft. Hancock are on the National Register of Historic Places and they are of some significance. That significance pales in comparison to the Liberty Bell, Gettysburg, The Old North Church and the like," asserted Patricia A. Stilwell in a 2004 commentary in the *Atlantic Highlands Herald*. "Why does the National Park Service profess now that it has responsibilities regarding the buildings? Why haven't they been taking 'responsibility' seriously for the past 30 years?"²

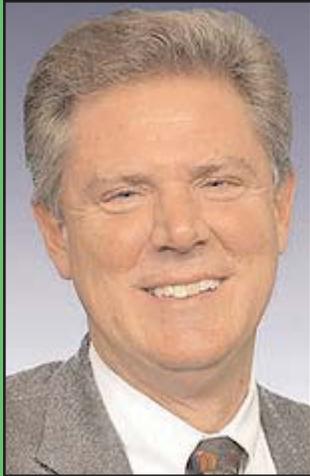
For the more ardent environmentalists, the goal has been to return Sandy Hook to a "natural state" ecosystem—and that definitely does not include a bunch of decrepit old army buildings that are hardhat areas.

Among those who stood in Wassel's way was Peter O'Such of Fair Haven who, in 2007, used documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act to prove the NPS had not received the \$15,000 in income Wassel was to provide for use of three of the buildings. These included the fort's chapel and theater, which were rented out for weddings and events, as well as the former park office which was Sandy Hook Partner's headquarters. As a result, he was asked to leave the properties.

By 2009, despite several extensions, Wassel was unable to provide the requisite proof that he had the financial wherewithal to actually perform what the lease required. In October of that year, the NPS terminated his lease.

The fate of the area remains up in the air, but a recent article in the *Atlanticville* reported that "[a] series of closeddoor meetings will be held by the National Park Service beginning this week to explore the future of historic Fort Hancock, according to Raina T. Williams, a spokesperson for the park service."³

Representative Frank Pallone (D-6th District) is concerned



Representative Frank Pallone



One of the many Victorian-style houses that have turned Cape May, New Jersey into a tourist destination for fans of the style.

about history repeating itself, calling for greater transparency to avoid a revisit of the “Wassel experience.”

Some hope may be found in the Sandy Hook Foundation, Inc., which has been encouraging cooperation between those who seek to protect the ecosystem of Sandy Hook and those who seek to protect the history embodied in Fort Hancock. Both Congressmen Pallone and Rush Holt have been supportive of this effort, though there is a long way to go. The NPS estimates it will take \$7.5 million just to do basic stabilization of the main structures.⁴

The situation, however, illustrates the sometimes toxic mixture of history, environmentalism (as embodied by the NPS) and commercial development.

Recently, battle lines are being drawn between in Cape May over how things like solar panels and wind turbines clash with the town’s identity as a heritage tourism destination.

Cape May has long been a Mecca for fans of Victorian architecture the world over. Within its borders, it boasts the largest collection of vintage and restored Victorian houses in the entire United States. Each summer, thousands of tourists—and their dollars—fill the quaint bed-n-breakfasts, dine at the restaurants, buy at the shops and stroll the beaches—all trying to get at least some whiff of the old seaside resort’s pleasant ambiance. It can be reasonably argued that the “painted ladies” that distinguish Cape May from its more raucous neighbors represent the economic lifeblood of the place. “This is our way of making money,” Mary Ann Gaffney, who heads the Cape May Historic Preservation Commission (CMHPC) was quoted in a recent newspaper article. “These historic buildings are our economy.”⁵

What threatens the tranquility of this marriage between history and commerce is the rise of interest in “green energy.” It’s the product of many concerns that seem to have been underscored by recent events in the world. The threat of climate change remains a hot topic. Then there is an uneasy dependence on oil from the unstable and sometimes unfriendly Middle East. But even drilling at home carries risks, as typified by the catastrophic BP “Deep Horizons” disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. With unemployment remaining a pernicious problem, some pin their hopes on an American vanguard in an emergent technology as a wellspring for new jobs. But for individual home and business owners, it often simply comes down to a cheaper energy bill at the end of the month.



Wind turbines have been a popular alternative energy source all over the world. For historical preservationists, however, their large, obvious presence interferes with the historic environment at the heart of Cape May's heritage tourism economy.



Solar panels may be smaller than turbines, but they still "spoil" the historic appearance of a building when mounted on roofs visible from the streets.

The quest for cleaner, cheaper energy sources has become a cornerstone of the Obama administration, helping its popularity. To environmentalists, it represents an important shift in national priorities that should be encouraged. Additionally, there is state-level legislation that prohibits municipalities from getting in the way of projects that promote this new paradigm.

However, when applying this new technology means cladding a 19th century roof with solar panels or erecting wind turbines in the background, historical preservationists start to cringe. It isn't that they are against the notion of cleaner, cheaper energy, but they see a slippery slope that could undermine the very financial foundations of their town. And, some on the other side of the argument have indeed already begun pointing to the concessions previously made to cell towers, trolleys and satellite dishes as justification for flexibility here as well.

It might be legitimately asked, will tourists really stop coming just because there is a wind turbine or a solar panel visible? Perhaps not at first, but once the precedent has been set, it may become increasingly difficult for the town to stem the loss of its cultural identity in the future—and it is that, albeit slowly, that can ultimately threaten the economy it supports.

But there is more than just tourist dollars at stake. There is also the Cape May Historic District's status on the State and National Register of Historic Places. Maintaining that status means also maintaining access to grants, loans and even advertising to the heritage tourism markets. The U.S. Department of the Interior sets the standards that must be maintained for eligibility. Let one resident threaten that status and they risk undermining the benefits for the whole.

And therein lies a curious dilemma. State and federal governments offer incentives to preserve historic integrity while, at the same time, also offering incentives to move towards energy efficiency. How can a community like Cape May reconcile the two imperatives, while possibly maintaining the resources of both to support their economy?

When it comes to the question wind turbines, the CMHPC has pretty much dug in its collective heels. By virtue of their size and height, they argue, they will naturally spoil the views and obscure things. So, a decided "no" to wind turbines. Solar panels, however, can be okay—but only if they are not visible from the street. What, at first blush anyway, seems like a reasonable compromise, hasn't pleased everyone. Since 2009, four solar



Being a “National Historic Landmark Resort” is obviously a source of pride—and income—for Cape May. But if historic preservationists and environmentalists can’t find some compromise, this sign will have to be changed.

“This is our way of making money.”

- Mary Ann Gaffney

Cape May Historic
Preservation Commission
The Press of Atlantic City
December 20, 2010

“...it drove a resident to leave Cape May altogether after battles over a planned 1996 solar panel system with what he called ‘the gingerbread police.’”

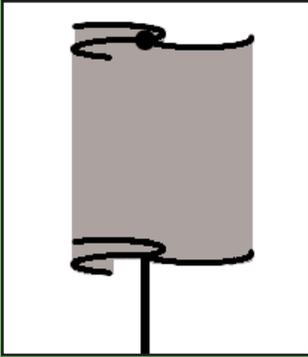
panel installation projects received the Commission’s blessings. A December 20, 2010 article in *The Press of Atlantic City*, however, also cited the case of Linda and Robert Steenrod. They received approval to put solar panels on the roof of their 1852 Enoch Hand House residence, but not their Billmae Cottage B&B right next door—all because of the differences in the line of site from the street. The couple complain that the CMHPC is “too restrictive” and essentially preventing people from doing what they see as a good thing to save the planet.

And it doesn’t end there. Windmills and solar panel arrays are big, obvious things. But the proverbial devil is also indeed in the details. Registry status is predicated on what types of materials are used when something needs to be replaced. The Department of the Interior standards operate on a “same for same” principle. If the original window, say, was a wood frame, any replacement must also be the same kind of wood and look the same as what it replaced. The Commission’s attorney, Robert Fineberg, was quoted in *The Press of Atlantic City* article as pointing out, “[t]here is a great distinction between historic preservation and replication.” The trouble this creates for energy efficiency advocates is that historical accuracy doesn’t come cheap when trying to replace drafty old windows and roofs.

It might seem like anyone who bought a home after the May 11, 1976 establishment of Cape May’s landmark status should have known what they were getting themselves into. But the standards have been changed since then, the last time in 2003. Back then, the Commission argues, alternative energy systems had yet to become a factor, which is why they’re asking the City Council to make another revision.

For some home owners, it all gets too much. There is a natural resistance to being dictated to about what they can do on their property that they pay the mortgages and taxes on—particularly when that requirement is either more costly than an alternative or denies them savings on their bills. In at least one instance, it drove a resident to leave Cape May altogether after battles over a planned 1996 solar panel system with what he called “the gingerbread police.”

The Sunday Star-Ledger reported on January 30, 2011 that Cape May’s landmark status was added to the National Park Service’s “watch list.” While not as dire as falling under the “threatened” or “emergency” headings, it does indicate that those responsible for Cape May’s place on the register are keeping an



While still imposing, creative approaches to turbine designs may make them smaller and less intrusive. Transparent photovoltaic glass offer a potential alternative allowing solar panels to be mounted without blocking the view.



The Hackensack Water Works is an example of how history and environmentalism can work together.

<http://www.hwwc.org/>

eye on what happens next. Think of it as a warning.⁶

It's hard to say how this one will resolve itself, but it is a blueprint for things to come as more owners of homes in historic neighborhoods embrace the savings promised by alternative energy technologies. It is to be hoped that Cape May will not slide into the same generic mediocrity eroding the unique Doo Wop architecture of nearby Wildwood's motel districts. Each year, as yet another motel falls to the wrecking ball, it loses a little more of its uniqueness—and its soul.

If Cape May can hold on, however, the technology itself that now seems so intrusive, may provide solutions. In 2008, Rainbow Solar unveiled a new line of photovoltaic glass, meaning solar cell arrays that are transparent.⁷ Japan's Taiyo Kaygo Corporation has already begun installing photovoltaic glass as power-generating windows in new buildings.⁸ Assuming this technology becomes affordable to the consumer market, an array could potentially be designed that might cover a roof without impeding the historic view as do their present counterparts.

Wind turbines, with their inherent size and height, will always be problematic—perhaps in the same way that cell towers gave historic resource firms a bump in business by doing the requisite impact studies. But even here, creative approaches have led to more compact blade forms compared to the necessarily long propellers most seen now.

In the meantime, though, all eyes are on Cape May as historic preservationists and environmentalists struggle to find some common ground.

An example of how such stories can have a happy ending is exemplified in the Hackensack Water Works. This building is a rare specimen indeed—a largely intact water filtration plant that has been described as a “time capsule” of 19th and 20th century engineering. It was built in 1881 by the Hackensack Water Company and was variously expanded into 1911. The 1882 pumping station as well as a filtration tower and vast underground infrastructure, covering 64 acres, sits on the manmade Van Buskirk Island in the Hackensack River in Oradell. The company, now called United Water, donated the whole thing to Bergen County in 1993. The desire to turn the island into a park, however, threatened the buildings with demolition.⁹

In 2002, the site was included on the National Trust for Historic Places' “11 Most Endangered Historic Places” list. In May of 2010, however, its status was upgraded to “Favorable” thanks

to a cooperative between Bergen County, local environmentalists and Rutgers University. According to the NTHP's website: "Through the efforts of Rutgers landscape architecture students, faculty members Wolfram Hofer and Beth Ravit and local officials, the island may find new life as a unique part of the Bergen County Parks system. Students and faculty have considered options for the site's historical architecture, while protecting the sensitive ecosystem of the Hackensack River riparian zone. They have also kept in mind the goals of local environmentalists and historical preservationists, as well as Bergen County's ongoing financial responsibilities related to the island's upkeep and maintenance."¹⁰

So, while Cape May presents some unique issues, the Waterworks demonstrate what can happen when historians and environmentalists work together.

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Issue Two: NJ History in the New Social Studies Curriculum

“localized history is very much the ‘in thing’.”

- Clifford L. Lord
New Jersey History
December, 1978

“New Jersey history is supposed to be everywhere taught but is nowhere specifically addressed in its content.”

- David Cowell
First Vice President of
Advocates for
New Jersey History

Back at the close of 1978, the Director of the New Jersey Historical Society, Clifford L. Lord, had some interesting things to say in his “Now Hear This” column of the Society’s journal, *New Jersey History*. He saw “traditional history” as being in trouble in our schools, but “localized history is very much the ‘in thing’.” He went to answer his own question as to why, “[b]ecause students at all levels relate to the local scene.”

At the time Lord was writing, we were all likely still basking in the afterglow of the Bicentennial’s revival of interest in history. Thirty-three years later, however, it’s hard to tell if localized history is still the “in thing” for New Jersey schools. Sure, there are a lot of us history geeks out here. But teaching history is about more than adding to the historical society membership rolls—albeit that’s important too. While saying this to the readers of GSL may be preaching to the proverbial choir, understanding history is critical to creating a generation of citizens capable of making informed decisions when participating in the democratic process. How can we complain that we don’t learn from our history when we don’t properly teach it? Still, these days, local history seem to get short shrift.

“New Jersey history used to be taught in all public school 4th grades,” says a retired New Jersey public school teacher with an active personal interest in history who declined to be identified. “About four years ago the NJ Department of Education decided to take the 5th grade United States regions course and put that into 4th grade, minimizing coverage of New Jersey. Most 4th grade teachers objected, but had to follow state guidelines...Perhaps there were elective courses [in NJ history for secondary school grades], but my local high schools didn’t offer them.”

The framework for teaching history in our public schools—including local, New Jersey history—falls under the core Curriculum Social Studies Standards, created by the National Council for Social Studies. This advocacy group was founded in 1921 to support educators and guide policy. The most recent draft was released on September 16, 2010—the day before Constitution Day. “The revised curriculum standards are an essential tool that teachers, schools, districts and states, as well as parents and families, colleges and universities, textbook publishers, curriculum writers, community agencies, and policymakers

*“Does the
NJ Historical
Commission plan
to dictate the
curriculum for NJ
high schools?”*

- Anonymous NJ Public
School Teacher

can use to teach social studies every day to every student to help students build content knowledge, develop civic competency, improve academic literacy and other 21st century skills,” said the NCSS’s President, Steve Goldberg, in the accompanying press release.¹

The Standards includes history teaching, as part of the main themes of social studies:

Through a more formal study of history, students in the middle grades continue to expand their understanding of the past and are increasingly able to apply the research methods associated with historical inquiry. They develop a deeper understanding and appreciation for differences in perspectives on historical events and developments, recognizing that interpretations are influenced by individual experiences, sources selected, societal values, and cultural traditions. They are increasingly able to use multiple sources to build interpretations of past events and eras. High school students use historical methods of inquiry to engage in the examination of more sophisticated sources. They develop the skills needed to locate and analyze multiple sources, and to evaluate the historical accounts made by others. They build and defend interpretations that reconstruct the past, and draw on their knowledge of history to make informed choices and decisions in the present.²

Adopted by act of legislation—and laudable though all this may be—it remains up to the individual school districts to figure out just *how* to achieve those broader goals. “With the new core Curriculum Social Studies Standards becoming the operating guidelines,” asserted David Cowell to GSL, “New Jersey history is supposed to be everywhere taught but is nowhere specifically addressed in its content.”

Cowell is First Vice President of Advocates for New Jersey History. The group, founded in the 1990s, is exactly what its name implies. “As school boards and their advisors, as well as the social studies teachers and the history teachers begin to prepare the new courses to meet those requirements, [certain] issues must be addressed,” he says.

“The provisions in the law that require a two year instruction in New Jersey history for high school graduation must be maintained and enforced,” he states. But at the heart of any such

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- From the *Curriculum Social Studies Standards*
created by the National Council for Social Studies

effort must be a properly-devised New Jersey history textbook. “A way must be found to publish a good and accurate text on New Jersey history for secondary schools that meets scholarly standards and the themes and streams identified in the core curriculum standards,” he continues. “Such a text would require financial support to guarantee the publisher the recovery of the costs associated with the writing...for what is in the publishing field a niche market. Peer review, as used for example, by the NJ Historical Commission in its grants programs, would be an appropriate way to ensure the scholarly acceptance of the text. Decisions to adopt that text, or any other, should remain with the local boards of education.”

As any historic site knows, history isn’t just something to be gotten solely out of a book. And, what you *can* get out of a book is more fun to read from the actual source documents found in our state’s archives and libraries. “Supplementary materials, either about site visits to New Jersey historic museums, sites, houses, etc., primary source materials in the public domain, and archival materials in state repositories should be organized around the themes and streams in the core curriculum,” Cowell adds, “to support of the text[book] and placed on a web site maintained by the New Jersey Historical Commission and made available by subscription to school districts.”

Lastly, to see that all this is sustained for the long run, Cowell wants to see “[t]he Governor...appoint, and the legislature authorize and fund, a Task Force on New Jersey Public History to review the entire field of New Jersey public history education and lay the foundations for future legislative and gubernatorial initiatives.”

Mandating something is one thing but paying for it is another. “If the state requires two years of New Jersey history on the secondary level,” the teacher points out, “school districts must purchase the books, internet programs, or whatever materials are required. They will have to juggle their budgets to meet the requirements.” And that isn’t always easy.

“I believe in local decision making,” the teacher says. Not all education administrators may take to the notion of abrogating too much of their traditional responsibility for textbook creation. There might be some turf war to contend with. “Does the NJ Historical Commission plan to dictate the curriculum for NJ high schools?” asks the teacher. “Did the Governor give them this power? The New Jersey Education Association has committees

“These committees, comprised of early childhood, primary, and secondary level teachers, who are actually working with the courses of studies, work for months on a volunteer basis for free.”

- Anonymous NJ Public School Teacher

that review and make recommendations for all state core curriculum standards every five years. These committees, comprised of early childhood, primary, and secondary level teachers, who are actually working with the courses of studies, work for months on a volunteer basis for *free*. Each committee presents its findings to every district in the state for input. Then this material is given to the State Department of Education for their recommendations, changes, and/or approval. It is a very involved project.”

The New Jersey Historical Commission is an obvious body to guide the creation of a New Jersey history textbook. Nevertheless, they will likely need to work within the existing structures. And, that’s not necessarily a bad thing. Those in the trenches know by experience what tools work best and ought to be part of that process. An alliance makes a lot of sense.

Regardless of how the goal of improving NJ history education is achieved, part of the hurdles that must be overcome are more than local. There is a national emphasis on math and science in the face of a perceived lagging of American students behind those in other nations. Such intellectual deficits have economic implications, which explains the added attention of national testing standards. However, some see this emphasis as coming at the cost of the areas covered by social studies. “I personally think that social studies is not taken seriously by students,” the teacher asserts. “It is often slighted by administrators and considered a subject of little importance. If there are no national tests in this area, it’s not as important as reading, math, and science.”

“It has been two years since the last update to the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards,” says Aaron Zuckerman,³ a New Jersey Center for Science Technology and Math Education scholar at Kean University. “Since then there has been a movement building in New Jersey and the country for a national standard in all subjects, not just math and English.”

The question of district, state or national standards for textbooks has some unexpected implications for teaching NJ history and American history in general. While a structure that favors decision making at the district level hampers the idea of national standards, it does provide openings for local history. My book, as an example, “James Parker: A Printer on the Eve of Revolution,” has been used in Woodbridge Township history classes since Parker was from the town and established New

“New Jersey gets text books containing curriculum that is based upon what’s going on in Texas and other similar states.”

- Dr. Ronal Butcher
Vice President, New Jersey
State Board of Education

Jersey’s first permanent print shop there. That was a local decision by the Township’s Board of Education. The more classroom time where content is determined by national standards, the less room there is for such local initiatives.

The flip side of that, however, is that the lack of a national standard has, in effect, given an inordinate amount of influence to one state when it comes to textbook content. Namely, Texas. They buy textbooks as a state, not district by district. A salesperson from a textbook publisher can, in theory, have one meeting and sell a huge number of books, as opposed to pitching their product district by district. Other states do this too, but with a larger population, Texas wields the bigger market share—and, Zuckerman contends, publishers tend to cave in to whatever they want to see in the books as a result. The elephant in the room here, of course, is a concern by liberal and moderate educators that the largely more conservative Texas will introduce bias—but that can of worms, fortunately, isn’t really in the scope of this article.

Still, all this has gotten the attention of New Jersey’s teachers. “It was a full year ago that the New Jersey State Board of Education brought this very subject up,” Zuckerman told GSL, quoting from the Board’s public minutes from their March 17, 2010 monthly meeting in Trenton. According to those notes, Board Vice President, Dr. Ronald Butcher, “encouraged everyone to look at what is occurring in Texas in terms of its text books and assessments. He stated that textbook companies tend to favor those states where the State Board of Education adopts the text books to be used. As a result, New Jersey gets text books containing curriculum that is based upon what’s going on in Texas and other similar states.”

The New York Times reported on March 7, 2011 that a bipartisan group of educators and business and labor leaders plans to announce their support “a common curriculum that states could adopt for public schools across the nation.” Doing so would force textbook publishers to look closer at what the rest of the states are doing and, according to Dr. Butcher, “we will have curriculum and text books that are more aligned with what we want to accomplish in New Jersey.”

From the perspective of those who would like to see more local history in the classroom, it comes down to a question of balance. Where in the standards, regardless of who sets them, will there be room for state and local history to be taught? “This

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- Aaron Zuckerman

is an important step towards unification of standards but it may not solve the text book problem here in New Jersey,” Zuckerman asserts. “The bipartisan group is also leaving room for individual districts to make additions.” But, according to *The New York Times* report, the proposed curricular guides “would account for about 50 to 60 percent of a school’s available academic time, with the rest added by local communities, districts and states.” To someone outside the education system, 40 to 50% might seem like a lot, but this is across the board in all subjects. When all is said and done, how much resources will really be left for local history? And, as Zuckerman comments, “with up to 50% of academic time being determined by districts and states it seems likely that states like Texas will continue to have large buying power for books that cater to their additions to these curriculum. In light of the stagnation in moving towards a true national standards, states like Texas will continue to dominate the text book publishing industry and thus influence classrooms thousands of miles from Dallas.”

Introducing New Jersey and local history into the classroom in any meaningful way—i.e. a New Jersey history textbook—is not as straight forward as it might seem, as various bodies vie for the role of defining the standards that underpin it. Juggling all these interests and “turf wars” is not going to be easy. Local history groups and sites need to work with teachers and administrations to make sure students get at least some opportunities to appreciate the heritage right in their own backyards.

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1 http://www.socialstudies.org/about/media/standards_release

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3 For the record, Mr. Zuckerman is not any relation to Michael Zuckerman of New Jersey History Advocates.

Issue Three: NJ Municipal Historic Preservation Commissions



Mount Vernon is a preserved treasure thanks to Louisa Dalton Bird Cunningham, whose Mount Vernon Ladies Association helped establish the concept of “historic preservation.”



The destruction of New York City’s Pennsylvania Train Station in 1964 inspired the transitioning of historic preservation into a formal academic discipline.

Historic preservation exists in the United States largely because Louisa Dalton Bird Cunningham took a cruise up the Potomac River on a passenger steamer in 1853. She was appalled by the condition of George Washington’s former Mount Vernon estate—there was the house of the “Father of Our Country” in an embarrassingly derelict condition. Her Mount Vernon Ladies Association undertook the task of not only fixing the place up, but actually restoring it to something George himself would recognize as home. It’s a role the Association still has.¹

Not that this was the first attempt—Washington’s Newburgh, New York headquarters became the nation’s first publicly operated historic site in 1850.² But Mt. Vernon was among the first to receive national attention. It wouldn’t be until 1964, however, that historic preservation would become a discipline. In that year, New Yorkers were shocked by the demolition of the grand Pennsylvania Station—an event that still elicits laments from architectural historians around the country to this day. But it did grab the public’s attention and, thanks to the efforts of James Marston Fitch, that same year saw Columbia University include in its curriculum the world’s first advanced-degree historic preservation program.³

While places like Mt. Vernon and New York’s Penn Station had the aura of national sacred ground, local historians realized they too could work towards saving and preserving the gems in their own backyards. Thus was born the concept of the local historic preservation commission. While all are, ultimately, beholden to the rules established by the Department of the Interior, they often reflect the local flavors of how government works at that level. So how do New Jersey’s commissions compare? Preservationist Peter A. Primavera is President of Cultural Resources Consulting Group (CGRG) in Highland Park, NJ and offers the following assessment after working with numerous such commissions over his three decade career. (The rest of this section of the article is written by Primavera.)

New Jersey residents have become accustomed to the condition of most of New Jersey’s Historic Preservation Commissions (HPC), which is poor. There are certainly very well run and impressive HPCs. While they often have a sufficient number of



Peter Primavera

commissioners and alternates, I will describe what is lacking when compared to the many HPCs and HARBs (Historic Architectural Review Boards, rarely seen in NJ) I have worked with in other states. Let me be crystal clear, the commissioners are not the problem. The problem is the support and resources they are given.

Before we jump in, about 190 HPCs exist at this time. Which of course begs the question: what are the other 376 municipalities doing?

In over thirty years of working with, and for HPCs in the eastern states, I have had the opportunity to see every version, shape, size, and function of HPCs. Some of the most useful experiences have been working for HPCs and HARBs, being a commissioner on HPCs, and presenting many projects before them. Whether in Pennsylvania, New York City, Philadelphia, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, South Carolina, or Florida, they all have the same common responsibility and challenges.

At issue in this article are the challenges faced by the HPCs. The challenges are the result of funding, support, networking, and training. One must remember that these boards are composed of volunteer and their service and dedication must be the paramount consideration. Unlike many other municipal boards they are rarely provided with an attorney, town planner, or consultant. This is a very significant difference from what I have experienced in other states where a consultant or attorney is considered essential.

The Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL) provides the authority for towns and cities to create historic preservation ordinances, commissions, and the protection of historic properties. These commissions have a wide range of authority, which depends on the ordinance they adopt. Some are actually advisory to other municipal bodies such as the Planning Board, Zoning Board, Mayor and Town Council.

Here is a list of challenges typically encountered. No order of importance is intended.

- Budgets if they exist, are paltry, hardly enough to do anything but meet. Updating surveys, updating landmark nominations, educational outreach, and professional assistance all go wanting. Spend more time asking the mayor for money!
- Most of the HPCs do not have an expert consultant advising,

“Before we jump in, about 190 HPCs exist at this time. Which of course begs the question: what are the other 376 municipalities doing?”

- Peter Primavera

unthinkable in Pennsylvania and Virginia. The consultants are trained professionals in historic preservation, specifically Architectural History. Often the consultants are from a firm or network where they can seek assistance with other professional historians, archaeologists, conservators, architects, and landscape architects.

- Rarely do they have an attorney present, leading to jurisdictional issues, proper procedures, and even capricious decisions. In complex or contentious reviews where an applicant is represented by an attorney the assistance of an attorney can prove to be invaluable.
- They rarely have handbooks for the commissioners. A handbook that the commissioners can study and refer to is critical. It should contain various documents that help them follow their ordinance, process, and inform their decision process.
- The commissioners not been trained in their ordinance and how to use it. A common sense approach is far too often substituted for the parameters of the ordinance and how the proceedings should be conducted.
- Rarely do they have the resources to update their survey, landmark designations, master plan, or ordinance. It is very common that the original surveys and designations from the 1970s are still being used, without any substantial updates.
- Education is needed about MLUL.
- Sorry American Planning Association, but the town planners are typically aloof, not engaged, and not informed about the ordinance. The township engineers are more involved, which is the wrong tool for the job.
- The liaison to Planning Board, Zoning Board, and Mayor and Council is often preoccupied with other matters and involved infrequently at best.
- They do not often have a library at hand which includes the documents they need to make decisions.

- I meet HPCs all the time that do not know about the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions (NAPC). This is an alliance that has a fantastic website, newsletter and very valuable networks to help commissions run well and learn from each other. The most frustrating thing that I see over and over is an HPC that reinvents the wheel over and over and is not communicating with other HPCs for guidance and experience.

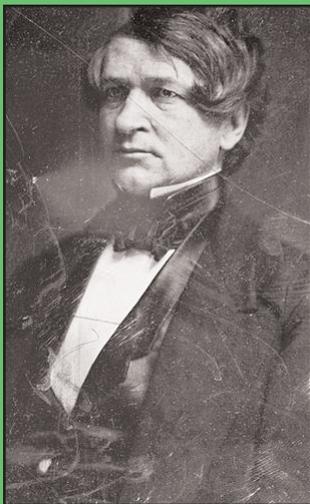
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Issue Four: Tough Choices in Bad Economic Times



*A New and Correct Map of
the United States of North
America...*



William L. Dayton

Few events in recent years have put into as sharp a focus the impact of budget cuts on New Jersey's history community as a sale that took place at Christie's Manhattan auction-house on December 3, 2010. That day, the New Jersey Historical Society parted with *A New and Correct Map of the United States of North America Laid Down from the Latest Observations and Best Authorities Agreeable to the Peace of 1783. Humbly Inscribed to his Excellency the Governor and Company of the State of Connecticut By their Most Obedient and Very Humble Servant Abel Buell.*

If the United States of America could have a baby picture, this Buell map may very well be it. This was the first map of the new nation as a whole, drawn up around a year following the Treaty of Paris that ended the Revolution. Created by Abel Buell (1742—1822), it is comprised of hand-colored engraved maps on four joined sheets. Each map measures 43 x 48¹/₄ inches on sheets 45¹/₄ x 50³/₄ inches.

How this particular copy found its way to the New Jersey Historical Society is rather interesting. Former New Jersey Senator William L. Dayton (1807—1864) had been appointed by the Lincoln administration as minister plenipotentiary to France. He was a fan of the Society, which had been formed at Trenton in 1845, and haunted the Parisian bookstalls hunting for treasures he could send home to fill its new collections. In 1862, according to the Christie's information, "William A. Whitefield, the Society's secretary, received word from Dayton that he was to receive 'some old foreign maps of the United States and other countries of North America.' Buell's map was sent to the society with an atlas by Antoine de Sartine, and since both were found in Paris, it is presumed Dayton took both to be foreign publications."

Ironically, though the selling of the map has caused a great deal of consternation among history and museum communities alike today, it had actually lain largely unappreciated—and never even exhibited—until 1961. Only then, almost a hundred years later, did scholars realize just what a gem they had. Yet, it was this benign neglect that may have actually saved it and even made it all the more valuable. Unexposed to harsh light and climates, it escaped the fate of many of the other examples. In a well-meaning but ultimately destructive attempt at preservation, some were assembled into one huge map and then covered in a varnish. But

“...they are violating the moral duty of a public institution to preserve its collection.”

- Stanley Katz
The Star-Ledger
January 13, 2011

“Successful completion of this plan will enable NJHS to operate on a break-even basis.”

- John Zinn

New Jersey’s print, being tucked away for so long, was in remarkably excellent condition. According to Christie’s, “[o]nly two copies of Buell’s map have been sold in the twentieth century: I.N. Phelps purchased his copy in 1915 (now in the New York Public Library) and the American Geographical Society sold its copy to Yale in 1952. Both of these copies were varnished at the time of publication, a treatment that has caused oxidation and the paper to become brittle. Only seven examples are now known.”

The fact that the NJHS sold off what may be the only example of the map in such condition stunned historians and brought a heap of criticism on the heads of the Society’s administration from other museum curators. It wasn’t so much that they sold it that has outraged some, but that they were openly doing to service a \$2.6 million debt. One of the ethical commandments of museums, libraries and historical societies is that while pieces from a collection may be sold in order to buy other pieces, they must never be sold to pay operating expenses or debt. In an article splashed across the front page of the January 13, 2011 edition of *The Star-Ledger*, Stanley Katz, director of the Princeton University Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies, called the sale “horrifying.” He added that while the sale was not illegal, “they are violating the moral duty of a public institution to preserve its collection.” As far as Katz is concerned, the action is “indefensible.”¹

But is it? What brought the NJHS to commit what the American Association of Museums considers a cardinal sin? The short answer—at least to the second question—is that they’re broke. The Society received over \$290,000 in state grants in 2009 and again in 2010. This fiscal year? None. Zero. Zilch. When you’re facing that kind of drastic shortfall, you have to make some equally drastic choices.

“Like many historical societies, NJHS has suffered a major decline in all sources of income,” John Zinn, Chairman of the Society’s Board, told GSL. “This reached the point that operating revenue was insufficient to cover fixed expenses especially mortgage debt service. After lengthy and careful consideration, the NJHS board decided to carry out a limited de-accessioning plan to repay all of its mortgage debt and other long term liabilities. Successful completion of this plan will enable NJHS to operate on a break-even basis. The board believes that the plan will be completed by the end of 2011.”

Still, some see the wound as being at least partially self-inflicted. They invested heavily in their exhibitions and programs



This building on Broadway in Newark served as the NJHS home from 1931 to 1997. It was paid for, in part, by philanthropist and department store merchant, Louis Bamberger.
J. Bennett,
www.newarkhistory.com



The opening of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) in 1997 was seen as heralding the revival of Newark's downtown and helped inspired the NJHS' decision to remain in the city and move into the same neighborhood.

in the 1980s, leaving the beginnings of a debt hole from which they are unable to climb out. Back then, they still called the colonial-style building on Broadway home. It had been paid for in 1931 (in part) by Newark philanthropist Louis Bamberger (anyone remember Bamberger's department stores?). In the 1930s, it seemed as if the cultural heart of the city was moving north, away from downtown, and the \$400,000 structure just east of Branch Brook Park, and designed by Society member Wilson C. Ely, was in the heart of the migration.² That trend started to end, however, in the 1950s, beginning a downward slide through the low point of the riots in the '60s.

By the 1990s, the Society was recording only around 3,000 visitors a year and the building was in need of repair, which only added to the debt. Thus began a period of soul-searching—perhaps they should return to their roots in Trenton, where they had been founded? They were certainly not without suitors who offered inexpensive alternatives outside of Newark. It came down to taking on more debt to maintain a building in a bad neighborhood or take on the debt of moving into a more promising neighborhood by Military Park. At the time, the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) was scheduled to open nearby in October of 1997 and downtown was again viewed as the heart of the Newark cultural universe. By a narrow margin, they voted to remain in Newark, moving in 1997 to their present building on Park Place.³

It was a smaller space, but, at first, this too seemed like a good move. Within the first year, the number of visitors skyrocketed to some 15,000.⁴ And, a fine building it is. Designed by Guilbert & Betelle in 1926 and the former home of the Essex Club, it was added to the National Register of Historic Places on February 22, 1991.⁵ But, it could be argued that by remaining in Newark with a mortgage, the Society left itself vulnerable to the predations of budget cuts today. Stanley Katz, told *The Star-Ledger* that “[t]his must be an act of desperation,” adding how such an “unfortunate” situation might be a reason to question “if it’s a fully viable institution.”⁶ Of course, they couldn’t necessarily foresee this problem back in 1997 either.

The sales also signals what seems to be another period of soul-searching for the Society and a sea change as it seeks to redefine itself. “In the future, NJHS will concentrate on its library/archives and its educational programs,” Zinn says, identifying them as “the two areas that are most essential to the research, study, and teaching of our state’s history.” It’s more than just about servicing debt

“...if you go under,
nobody’s going to
give you anything
either.”

- Marc Mappen
The Star-Ledger
January 27, 2011

and, as they move away from the role of being a museum, there is at least a logic to disposing of at least some of the collections.

If, however, one accepts that there is some legitimacy to selling off some pieces, what kind of criteria is there for deciding which bits are open to sale and which are sacred?

“With this renewed focus,” Zinn explains, “the NJHS selected for de-accessioning a relatively small number of items with limited, if any, significant relationship to New Jersey history. The board understands and respects any concerns raised about this approach, and we wish to reiterate that all decisions in this matter have been undertaken with great caution.”

While the selling of the Buell map has caused the greatest outcry, it really isn’t an artifact specific to New Jersey’s history. As Zinn described it for *The Star-Ledger*, it’s better described as “Americana.”⁷ But, it’s only the beginning. Twenty other items are up for sale as well, including some which could be argued to have greater New Jersey significance. There’s a portrait of George Washington, for example, attributed to New Jersey artist, Charles B. Lawrence (1790—1864). The 120-piece dinner service used by a New Jersey Governor to entertain President Martin Van Buren might be stretching definitions, but such artifacts do not strictly fit the Society’s redefined roll as an archival research resource. “As responsible stewards of the NJHS collection, the board remains committed to preserving the historical society’s core assets for generations to come,” Zinn maintains.

And, truth be known, this isn’t the first time the Society has shed items that don’t strictly fit within their understandably Jersey-centric universe. Since the beginning of the debt issues in the 1980s, duplicate and non-New Jersey items have been sold to, in part, raise funds for new acquisitions. While one might quibble with the relevance of New York or Pennsylvania related materials, such sales are nothing unusual nor unethical. What seems to trouble museum professionals now is that the proceeds are going to service debts.

Regardless of how one feels about the specific sales of specific artifacts, however, it is certainly a sign of the times at large. “Things are so bad for museums right now, funds are low and fundraising so difficult,” Marc Mappen told *The Star-Ledger*. The retired Executive Director of the New Jersey Historical Commission feels some sympathy for the Society. He acknowledges how such a precedent might dampen the enthusiasm of donors but also points out that “if you go under, nobody’s going



The New Jersey Museum of Agriculture's website announcing the museum's last day open on February 14, 2011.

to give you anything either.”⁸

As troubling as the situation may be, an example of the alternative was announced on February 11, 2011 when The New Jersey Museum of Agriculture's trustees voted to close altogether and have begun disbanding the non-profit organization behind it. “The financial realities are so stark, there's really not any choice,” board head Cooper Morris told *The Star-Ledger*.

After struggling for some time, the last straw was when it's \$90,000 annual state appropriations was cut completely from last year's budget. Started in 1984 on Rutgers University's Cook Campus, the museum houses a collection reflecting the agricultural heritage of New Jersey as well as Native American artifacts. While they hope to donate them to other museums (the original core collection would go back to Rutgers University), the option of auctioning others off—just like the NJHS—remains on the table. Morris estimates it would take around \$100,000 to get the museum back on track—and they're not even in debt. Unless another source of funding is found, two fulltime and several part-time employees would be added to the roles of the unemployed.⁹

While there may be legitimate reasons to criticize the New Jersey Historical Society's selling off of artifacts to pay the bills, the Buell map alone did at least bring \$2.1 million that goes a long way towards keeping them solvent. Depending on how the other auctions go, they may at least still be around when the dust settles—which, unfortunately, may be more than can be said for other institutions. The NJHS museum has resumed regular hours, though the library is still by appointment and there is now an admission fee.

Difficult choices for the New Jersey history community seem to be a feature of New Jersey under the reign of Governor Chris Christie.

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Issue Five: The View from the State House...Literally



Governor Chris Christie



The Petty's Run site as seen from the State House. The Old Barracks are upper right and Thomas Edison College to the upper left.

Image from Paul Belford's <http://paulbelford.blogspot.com/>

When New Jersey's Governor, Chris Christie, pulled the plug on the proposed ARC transit tunnel under the Hudson River to Manhattan, it set off a political firestorm both in New Jersey and New York. Christie's supporters applauded what they see as his making a hardnosed choice in a time of deep deficits in the Garden State. His critics, however, decry what they see as a shortsighted decision that will ultimately do more harm than good. The story got heavy coverage in the media, but a rather similar battle is being waged much closer to the State House—right next door, in fact—involving an archeological site.

Over 280 years ago, an open stream ran through the sliver of parkland that separates the present-day State House from Thomas Edison College and the Old Barracks. It was known as Petty's Run, the name by which the site is again known today. These days the stream is encased within a culvert several feet below ground and serves as a part of the city's storm sewer system. But back in colonial times, it provided the power needed to run an iron plating mill and steel works and, later, in the 19th century, first a cotton mill and then a paper mill. The foundations of this industrial site and the culverted stream first came to light again in the mid-1980s, when new utility lines were run into the State House, and were encountered again during excavations for a Thomas Edison College expansion project. A partial study was made and then it was filled back in.

The historical significance of the site, however, goes beyond just some old foundations. It's the only colonial period steel mill to have been archeologically revealed in all of America and, in the early days of the Revolution, it supplied steel to the Continental Army for muskets and bayonets. The cotton mill was Trenton's first and the paper mill has ties to War of 1812 veteran and U.S. Senator, Garret D. Wall. Indeed, within a relatively small space are reminders of Trenton's role in both the sociopolitical revolution that gave birth to the nation and the industrial one by which it subsequently grew.

Petty's Run's remains may have been buried, but they were not forgotten. They would come to play an important part in an ambitious waterfront park project many saw as revitalizing



A map of the Capital Park project from the 2008 Master plan. A red circle is added around Petty's Run.



A rendering of what part of the park would look like.

the city—"Re-Casting Trenton," as the Master Plan calls it. The New Jersey Capital Park was to be a walkable complex of recreational open space, cultural attractions and eco-tourism, all designed to reconnect the city with its riparian roots along the Delaware River. It would incorporate existing monuments (War Memorial, etc.) and buildings (Old Barracks, State House, State Museum, State Archives, State Library, etc.), extending from West State Street to the water and from Calhoun Street to just beyond Assunpink Creek.

The idea of a Capital Park is actually quite old. "The Petty's Run excavation is one element of the planned restoration of Mahlon Stacy Park, which once surrounded the Capitol building," wrote Kathleen Crotty in a December 15, 2010 editorial for *The Times of Trenton*. "The park's restoration was included in the Master Plan for the State House Complex commissioned by the bipartisan legislative leadership in 1981 and completed in 1986...As former chairwoman of the [State Capitol Joint Management Commission], I witnessed firsthand the cross-section of support for making our State House Complex a visitor-friendly destination. The New Jersey Capital Park Master Plan was developed through years of planning—led by the Department of Environmental Protection—and culminated in a highly competitive national design competition. The Legislature, the State Capitol Joint Management Commission, the state departments of Transportation and Treasury, the New Jersey Building Authority, the New Jersey State Police, the State Council on the Arts, the Capital City Redevelopment Corporation, Mercer County, the City of Trenton, and the Trenton Downtown Association all participated in the planning process."¹

The park concept was to provide pleasant relief from the urban setting for existing and potential residents and a center for various cultural tourism attractions.

According to the 2008 Master Plan:

Capital Park is a new type of park for 21st century New Jersey: an urban state park to be created with economic, recreational, and environmental motives. Capital Park will catalyze a process of regenerating downtown Trenton through tourism, new development, and an enhanced living and working environment. As an engine of urban regeneration, Capital Park differs both in focus and man-



“Trenton Makes...The World Takes.” Petty’s Run is a reminder of where that slogan came from.
Bob Jagendorf

“And what about Petty’s Run? The DEP proposed that it be reburied—a plan that passed the State Capitol Joint Management Commission on November 30, 2010 by a 5—2 vote along party lines.”

agement approach from the large number of state parks elsewhere in the state. Capital Park will be implemented and managed by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, at the direction of the Governor and in cooperation with the State Capitol Joint Management Commission, as well as a diverse group of public and private partners. The overarching goal of the plan is to use Capital Park to create a more sustainable, more lively and livable Trenton.²

Petty’s Run was to be a central feature of a section known as the Capital Core, encompassing both the State House and Old Barracks. The ruins would be stabilized and visitors would be greeted by a staff of interpreters who would explain what they were seeing, conduct school and civic group visits and so on.³ Indeed, archeology and history were to play a central role in the plan. There was even a section in the Master Plan specifically devoted to “Archeology and Heritage.”⁴ Other themes to be reflected in the park’s design included Trenton as a river city, as a crossing point and a port. In addition to the obvious role of Trenton in the American Revolution, visitors would learn about the colonial and Industrial Revolution periods that gave truth to the “Trenton Makes, The World Takes” motto on the bridge. Trenton-based historical consultants Hunter Research, Inc. were included on the park project’s consultant design team to handle the archeological work and to assist in developing the exhibit planning. In vision, anyway, the Capital Park project seemed to fully embrace the cultural and heritage tourism concept, incorporating it within a broader urban redevelopment scheme.

And then came the Christie administration. A million dollars had already been spent on the design and archeological work for the Petty’s Run portion of the park in 2008 and 2009, under the previous Corzine administration.⁵ But the \$87 million price tag to complete the whole of the project was too rich. The Capital Park would have to be put on indefinite hold. And what about Petty’s Run? The DEP proposed that it be reburied—a plan that passed the State Capitol Joint Management Commission on November 30, 2010 by a 5—2 vote, it needs to be pointed out, along party lines.

Reaction from historians, archeologists and preservationists was swift and angry. While that is not surprising, it was a com-



Lt. Governor
Kim Guadagno

*“The dig, which
sources say
Guadagno
considers an
eyesore...”*

- Tom Hester, Sr.
www.newsroomjersey.com

ment attributed to New Jersey’s Lieutenant Governor, Kim Guadagno, that really got people’s ire up. In a November 2010 article about the plan to rebury the site on www.newsroom-jersey.com, reporter Tom Hester, Sr. wrote how “[t]he dig, which sources say Guadagno considers an eyesore, does have the appearance of a construction site and has been surrounded by piles of weed-covered excavated dirt and a cyclone fence since the ruins were uncovered in 2008...Guadagno... can see the dig from her office window on the southside of the first floor of the Statehouse.”⁶ It was that one word—“eyesore”—that stuck in the historical community’s collective craw. A request by GSL for comment from the Lt. Governor and Governor was not returned. If we can, however, make the assumption this is an accurate reflection of the Lt. Governor’s attitudes, it is rather troubling. Her title also means she is Secretary of State in New Jersey and, as such, responsible for many state-level arts, cultural and heritage institutions. Some have seen little indication that she has been willing to reach out to the DEP or others invested in the design process.

But let’s look beyond the inflammatory nature of a single word which may or may not have even been uttered. The decision, after all, was more than just about a hole in the State House backyard. The \$87 million cost bandied about is a big, scary number and opponents of the plan use it as justification for pulling the plug on the project—to the presumed applause of overtaxed NJ residents. Using that figure, however, is a bit of a fudge in a couple of important ways. For starters, it assumes the project to be one complete, all-or-nothing package. “The Master Plan consists of four separate phases,” explained Crotty’s editorial. “Recognizing that even under ideal conditions the Master Plan could take many years to complete, it was designed to allow for each of the four phases to be implemented independently of one another. The \$87 million cost that has been cited in published reports is the estimated cost for all four phases.”⁷

So, the whole of the project has these built-in “seams” that permit it to be broken into parts that can be revised and timed to coincide with more auspicious opportunities but without hurting the entirety. It’s not a matter of having to spend \$87 million all at once in the middle of a huge deficit. And, Petty’s Run, in turn, is only a part of that first phase.

Phase 1a covers the area where parking lots used to be

“The Christie Administration used the deficit as an excuse.”

- Kathleen Crotty
Former chairwoman, State Capitol Joint Management Commission

“We’ve identified \$300 million in capital improvements to parks that are needed today...we only have about \$15 million available this year.”

- Lawrence Ragonese
DEP Spokesman
Downtowner
January 2011

between the State House and the War Memorial. As of 2009, it had been completed through the final design and the State began soliciting bids for construction. The winner came in at \$4.6 million, but the bid was never accepted after the Christie administration took office. And that’s an important point. By law, dedicated funding needed to be in place *before* the State could have solicited for those bids and, presumably, it was. “[T]he Department of Treasury solicited bids for Phase 1a of the park project, the Capital Green,” Crotty pointed out to GSL. “That means that the funding for the construction of Phase 1a was allocated from the dedicated funding sources.”

“Dedicated” is the key word here. “Funding for the park was provided from two dedicated funding sources,” Crotty told GSL, “Green Acres bond funds and constitutionally dedicated corporate business tax revenue. These revenues cannot be used to fund the state general fund budget.”

New Jersey faces a current budget deficit standing at \$2.2 billion and the gap in the budget projected for after June 30, 2011 is now understood to be as much as \$11 billion.⁸ In the face of such staggering figures, it is not unreasonable, on the surface of it, to question the wisdom of spending even the \$4.6 million on Phase 1a or an estimated four or five million dollars on Petty’s Run (Phase 1b), let alone ultimately \$87 million for a park, nice though the idea may be. Yet, the money saved from killing Phase 1 is already in the coffers and can’t really be spent to service the State’s debt. “While it is true that the state has a budget deficit, that is not a valid reason for blowing up the park project,” asserts Crotty. “The Christie Administration used the deficit as an excuse.”

Shelving the Capital Park project won’t help the overall general fund debt. However, the argument is made it *can* help close a deficit within the DEP when it comes to the state’s many already existing parks. In a January 2011 article in Trenton’s *Downtowner* newspaper, reporter Diccon Hyatt spoke to Department of Environmental Protection spokesman, Lawrence Ragonese, who Hyatt reports as saying “the decision was purely a financial one.”⁹ Ragonese cites competition for resources from other existing parks and a very limited budget. “We’ve identified \$300 million in capital improvements to parks that are needed today...we only have about \$15 million available this year.”¹⁰

Kathleen Crotty understands the concern, but she also

*“The only urban
state park in which
the state has
invested in is
Liberty State Park
in Jersey City.”*

- Kathleen Crotty

Former chairwoman, State
Capitol Joint Management
Commission

points to a perceived inequity in how those funds are being distributed between suburban and urban New Jersey. While she concedes that it “is true that DEP has a very significant backlog of capital needs in other state parks, it is also true that the state has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on acquisition and development of recreational lands in rural and suburban New Jersey. The only urban state park in which the state has invested in is Liberty State Park in Jersey City. Coincidentally, it also happens to be the most heavily used park in New Jersey. So while DEP capital needs are significant, so are the recreational needs of New Jersey’s urban residents.”

While the money has already been allocated for Phase 1a and bids solicited, work on Phase 1b has already begun. This is the Petty’s Run part and was brought through the schematic design process by spring of 2010. It is estimated to cost about the same as Phase 1a to complete. This includes stabilizing the ruins and an interpretive plan incorporating both a free street-level view and a paid tour down in the interior of the site led by docents from the Old Barracks. Both the financial and labor resources are already in place to complete Phase 1, even if the other Phases need to be delayed.

But let’s go back to the matter of deficits—the issue that has everyone most worried. What impact would completing at least the Phase 1 portion of the park’s first phase have as compared with backfilling it? Deficits tend to be killed by one of three things—raising taxes, cutting spending (services) or a combination thereof. The problem, however, is that while such tactics may stabilize things in the short run, they do little to encourage long term economic growth. High taxes and fewer services do little to entice residents to settle or businesses to start up. Added to the above must be the counterintuitive idea of prudent investments. The question then becomes, what constitutes a “prudent” investment? What areas have historically meant greater financial returns for the state? Is investing in history any kind of engine for long term economic growth?

People in the history community will, of course, give a resounding “yes!” But firm numbers are hard to come by since there is often a lot of “collateral” benefits that are hard to quantify. Families who visit an historic or cultural site may stop at a nearby restaurant, for example, spending money that the eatery-owner will pay to the State in the form of that much more sales and income tax. The more such families who pass

“Does that kind of performance qualify as a prudent investment? Perhaps not, if you view an archeological site as an ‘eyesore.’ Well, maybe that’s a cheap shot...”

through thanks to a “heritage tourism” site, the better for both the business-owner and the State. The argument can be extended to include how, perhaps, that restaurant might need to hire extra staff, which eases unemployment and adds to the State’s coffers in more tax revenues and less unemployment benefit payouts. But this is all fuzzy, speculative and a difficult foundation on which to build sound economic policy. However, there have been some recent studies that produced harder numbers that back up the idea at least some investment in history can be part of New Jersey’s economic solution.

Following the budget-killing scares of the McGreevey administration (2002—2004), the history and arts communities pooled their interests under a combined cultural and heritage banner. Both communities have similar markets and are seen as easy targets in hard times. In fiscal year 2008, the New Jersey State Council on the Arts handed out \$21.5 million in grants to some 700 groups and projects. Over \$3.4 million in general operating support grants were made by the New Jersey Historical Commission to 83 historical organizations. The result? Over \$2 billion in economic activity and \$40 million in state tax revenues.¹¹ A combined investment by the state of \$24.9 million generated a profit of some \$15.1 million in tax revenues alone, not counting the more ambiguous “economic activity.”

Does that kind of performance qualify as a prudent investment? Perhaps not, if you view an archeological site as an “eyesore.” Well, maybe that’s a cheap shot; but even if one doesn’t see the point of saving old stuff, a cold cost-benefit analysis seems to show that it’s worth serious consideration anyway. Still, history remains an area where cuts are made along with much else. In the budget announced last February for fiscal year 2011, the Battleship New Jersey–Historical Commission Agency Grants was cut by \$1.24 million.¹² You can argue the appropriateness of that if you want to, but any inference that the Petty’s Run excavation is an \$87 million money pit, however, is as disingenuous as it is inaccurate. One can argue the timing of the overall park project—indeed, the Master Plan’s multi-phase structure anticipated just such situations, which are typical for such ambitious proposals. But does it make sense to not only stop the work already underway and paid for, but to *reverse* it almost back to square one?

Backfilling the site has proven rather controversial for sev-

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- Ron Emrich
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eral reasons. Not the least of these has been an economic argument. It may be many years before the Petty’s Run ruins can be re-exposed and, if past trends are anything to go by, the labor to do so certainly won’t get any cheaper. A figure of \$400,000 has been proffered by the DEP as the cost to at least analyze and report on the excavation to date and then fill it in properly. Others speculate it will ultimately cost more. Regardless, you could do some basic stabilization of the remains, put up some very nice interpretive signs and have money to spare—and, if you charge admission, it could at least be earning the State some kind of a long term income. Delaying the other phases could be viewed as the short term spending cut needed to help the DEP battle a deficit, while going ahead with Phase 1 is a “prudent investment” that makes better long term sense.

At the heart of all this, of course, are the artifacts and the ruins themselves. While it is true that there was a reburial in 1996, that was only involved backfilling a couple of small trenches. The current plan, by contrast, is potentially more risky. Ron Emrich, head of Preservation New Jersey, told *Downtowner*, “[e]very time you bury an archeological site, damage occurs. There will be, by definition, damage to the artifacts that are there.”¹³

Indeed, it is because the archeological work has progressed as far as it has that backfilling will cost at least as much as estimated. The DEP is at least committed to making sure the masonry of the ruins is properly conserved and stabilized before backfilling, in an effort to minimize damage. Under the New Jersey Register of Historic Places Act, the process must comply with the standards set by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior and National Park Service. That process of conservation and stabilization will need to be done regardless of whether the site is backfilled or not, leading many to believe it would make better sense to complete Phase 1 and leave the site open as a tourist attraction.

While supporters of the Capital Park obviously want to see it done, there is also an understanding that it may need to be placed on hold under the present economic circumstances. That’s not really the issue. What is, however, is the question of how backfilling Petty’s Run and delaying Phase 1 so late in the game would really help matters—and, possibly, how it might ultimately make things worse in the long run.

Unfortunately, Petty's Run is now caught up in the larger political and budget battles of the state—the proverbial political football. It has become a reluctant surrogate for the larger park project. There is, of course, still room for compromise. The plans for the Petty's Run phase can be scaled down to something more affordable while not risking the integrity of the site and still taking advantage of the educational and economic opportunities it could offer. And, there is certainly political advantage to be gained from this—at least in fixing the Governor's image (and certainly that of the Lt. Governor) in the eyes of many voters who care about the state's and Trenton's heritage.

The ultimate question which remains to be answered, however, is whether there is enough political will to seek a reasonable compromise for the future treatment of Petty's Run. Legislation reversing the DEP decision has been proffered. Pressure from the public may yet sway the outcome. 

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