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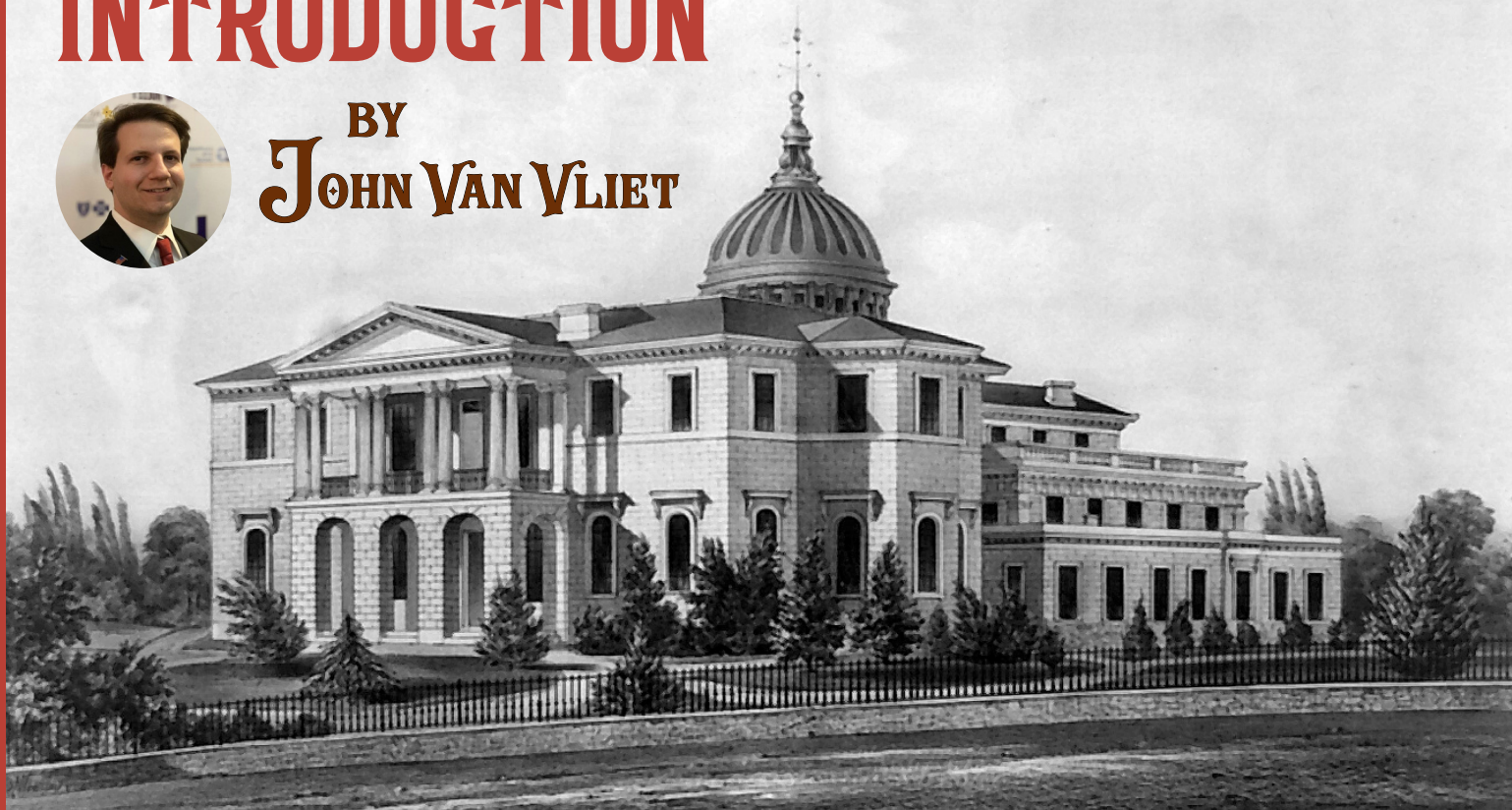
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# INTRODUCTION



BY  
**JOHN VAN VLIET**



In our second edition of the History and Heritage Spotlight, our readers will get another cross-section of some of the things that have made New Jersey what it is—whether for better or worse. Museums, cultural centers, and historical education in general boil down to a major theme: telling our story.

Pigeonholing is a common human habit. There is a certain comfort in knowing “things are in their place” and applying a label to X, Y, and Z to ease our understanding. “This is this and that is that” is a useful way of organizing if you’re dealing with a toolbox or a filing cabinet. But, as in life overall, the reality is that our human experience is not

so easily compartmentalized. So often, “black and white” are varying shades of grey. True absolutes and extremes are rare anomalies. This also applies to how we understand our history—a history which is, whether we realize it or not—a shared one, no matter what that subject may be, by virtue of living in a society of interactions.

Last year’s History and Heritage Spotlight tried to touch on a variety of places in New Jersey which hold special significance to understanding who we are and how we came to be so in our often-maligned Garden State. The purpose was simple, but, in the hopes of the author, a worthy one: to promote



a sense of unity at a time when divisions run so deep. This edition continues that mission.



For all our seemingly tribal (and sometimes baffling) rivalries, New Jerseyans are a strong people who have endured their share of hardships, both natural and man-made. Although our state has thankfully not known a battlefield since 1782, hurricanes and tropical storms such as Sandy (2012), Ida (2021), Irene (2011), and the Great Storms of 1806 and 1944 battered New Jersey, tragically taking lives and destroying property. Nevertheless, the same tenacity and stubbornness that out-of-staters ascribe, sometimes even comically, to New Jerseyans, is a very real fount of strength and perseverance that has carried us through trying times. The future will hold more such trials and challenges, without a doubt, but the shared willingness to lend a hand, sacrifice for others, and volunteer time, money, and energy,

is what assures our state's continued strength and endurance. When other countries or other states are likewise afflicted, whether from wildfires, hurricanes, or earthquakes, New Jersey governors, charitable organizations, and individuals have always been ready and willing to help.

We forgive them for their "Jersey Shore" zings when it is time to get serious.

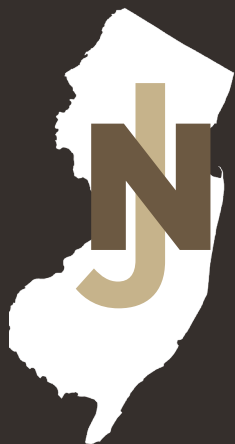
New Jersey has also found itself on the "wrong" side of history often enough, and no state can claim total innocence as far as miscarriages of justice, discrimination, corruption, or exploitation. But New Jersey is still a place where people are proud to call home and strive every day to make better for themselves, their families, and their neighbors. It is telling that, despite the exodus of New Jerseyans seeking new residency in other, more affordable states, the New Jersey population continues to grow. It is a grim reflection, therefore, that although millions make New Jersey their home, and countless more wish to live here—as there is a value and quality of life that makes New Jersey attractive—costs, housing, insurance, taxes, and utilities make it hard to "thrive", as opposed to merely "survive".



As this year has a gubernatorial election, where Democratic Congresswoman Mikie Sherrill and Republican former assemblyman Jack Ciattarelli seek to succeed outgoing Governor Phil Murphy, one of them will be challenged with addressing these critical concerns that face the nine-million people from High Point to Cape May. Whoever wins will have to find common ground to build consensus and solutions across the state. This might seem quaint or even naïve in these particularly cynical times, but it is no less than the people of the state deserve, whether they claim a red, blue, green, yellow, or other political affiliation. New Jersey is a New Jersey for all its residents, and leaders who are entrusted with that great and rich legacy become part of it

and must act responsibly and wisely while serving as the state's stewards on behalf of the people.

All "history" is the story of who we are. Whether it is art history, social history, technological, political, military, philosophical, labor history, etc. all are interconnected stories. As no human experience exists within an isolated vacuum, these stories weave together to form a complex tapestry which is sometimes bright, sometimes dark, but fundamentally reflective of who we are, once viewers take a step back. After 238 years of statehood, New Jerseyans can be proud of how much has been done, and how far they have come, as they harness their dreams to see how far they may go.



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## THOMAS EDISON NATIONAL HISTORIC PARK

Thomas Edison National Historic Park in West Orange is where Thomas Edison and his extensive team of workers helped create the modern lifestyle of the United States as we know it. The Wizard of Menlo Park, as he was known, is a controversial figure in many respects—and few who are so transformative are not. The ethics of his business methods and approaches to science are open to debate, although that is beyond the scope of this particular publication. What is certain, how-

ever, is that his Menlo Park and West Orange laboratory complex helped to advance and promote a transformation in technology that became accessible to American consumers in a way that had not existed before.

Thomas Alva Edison (1847–1931) had 1,093 patents to his name over the course of his lifetime, and was credited with producing the practical lightbulb filament, phonograph (first using foil, then wax cylinders, then disks readers



today would recognize as “records”), electrical batteries, motion picture cameras, and more. Edison’s company even helped electrify the White House in the administration of President Rutherford B. Hayes, although the president and First Lady were wary of touching the light switches, fearing electric shock.

The Ohio-born Edison was, by ancestry, Dutch with New Jersey roots, and the original spelling of the name was “Edeson.” His great-grandfather had remained loyal to the British during the Revolution and left New Jersey for Canada after the war in 1784. According to the National Park Service:

*\*Throughout his life Samuel changed work several times, from splitting shingles for roofs to tailoring to keeping a tavern. Sometime after his marriage, Samuel moved the family to Vienna, Ontario, where four of his seven children were born.*



*Ironically, Samuel Edison was not as loyal to the British crown as his grandfather. In 1837, he joined the Mackenzie Rebellion, a revolt inspired by democratic activist William Mackenzie in the south of Ontario. When the rebellion failed Samuel escaped to the United States, where he lived for the rest of his life. His wife and children later followed him to Milan, Ohio (pronounced MY-lan), where they had three more children including Thomas Alva Edison, their seventh and last child. (The other children were: Marion, William Pitt, Harriet Ann, Carlile, Samuel and Eliza. Carlile, Samuel and Eliza all died in childhood.)*



*American-born Nancy Mathews Elliott married Samuel on September 12, 1828. Her father had been a Revolutionary War hero. Unlike her husband, she was a devout Presbyterian with some formal education. She put that education to good use. When “Al” left school, she taught him at home. Thomas Edison*



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*later remembered, "My mother was the making of me. She was so true, so sure of me; and I felt I had something to live for, someone I must not disappoint."*

*Nancy suffered from symptoms of mental illness late in life. She died in 1871, when her son was 24. Samuel lived long enough to watch his youngest son succeed. He supervised the building of the Menlo Park laboratory. Three weeks after Nancy Edison's death, he started a new relationship with his 16-year-old housekeeper, Mary Sharlow. During their twenty years together they had three daughters. Samuel died in 1896 at the age of 92. "I am a master of smoking, drinking and gambling" he claimed. "I have smoked and drank whisky moderately when I needed it, and have known to let it alone."*

The complex in West Orange was built in 1887 and about a thousand feet away (as the crow flies) is Edison's stately home, Glenmont. Glenmont is also the final resting place of Thomas and his wife Mina Edison.

Visitors who arrive at the National Historical Park first come to the visitor center to get a ticket and see a film about the great inventor. Over the screen is a quote from Edison, "To invent, you need a good imagination and a pile of junk."

One cannot help but wonder what the mechanical mastermind would have thought of the digital age had he lived to see it.



Among the features of the laboratory complex is the massive museum, formerly production center, with its heavy machinery on the ground floor, and precision machinery on the second upper floor. This structure also houses Edison's research library, his desk, countless awards, and a small bed for him to sleep on, although the tour guides explained that it was rare for him to actually sleep in the library as opposed to his office in the workshop. Edison's work with cement is remembered with a model house, an early form of prefabricated home.



A statue of Edison on the grounds seems to greet the visitors when they arrive, ensuring his presence at his beloved production site continues. But the statue is, perhaps, the most arcane of monuments to the man, as a multitude of photographic, video, and audio recordings of Edison can be found within the museum.



In addition to the main laboratory structure, there is a reconstruction of the “Black Maria”—Edison’s early film studio. Designed to maximize the available sunlight with an open top, the studio is built on a track and can thus rotate as the sun crosses the sky.

The site does not house all the structures which originally occupied the park, but it does have a blacksmith’s workshop, chemistry laboratory, chemical storage, pattern shop, and others. To fully appreciate the complex, a guided tour is recommended, but casual daytrippers will nevertheless find plenty of things to keep themselves occupied for hours.

Thomas Edison was an innovator as an inventor, but also as a businessman. He understood the value and power that can be harnessed by working with teams of people, which are then focused on specialized tasks. By having all aspects of research and development, production, testing, and refinement on one physical site, Edison was able to oversee the entire production process of his ideas from conceptualization to completion.





As Edison was hard of hearing it is perhaps no wonder that he was infatuated with sound and music. The music recording facility in the main laboratory is a large room with several instruments as well as functional examples of Edison's playback equipment. A guide or ranger can play a cylinder or disk for visitors to listen to, and the connecting storage rooms house a plethora of horns of varying sizes, used to capture or project sound.

Along the walls are dozens of portraits of famous performers, singers, and musicians who recorded their works in the Edison facility. These celebrities from a century-and-more past are not lost to time since their voices and works have been preserved, thanks to Edison's technical marvels. By bringing the ability to record both audio and moving images, and the power to play them back, Edison brought a form of immortality to the world. Memory alone was no longer the only means by which a moment could be preserved but revisited—and even shared.

When Edison was born in 1847, he found himself in a world that was beginning to industrialize. The horse was still the primary means of transportation and coal-fired steam power moved the engines and machinery of the day. The night was illuminated by candles and

gas. The fastest messages were sent by telegraph wire with Morse code, a code he mastered as a youth. When he died in 1931, he departed a society that hummed with machinery, where cinemas captivated audiences, where recorded music sang out in homes, and where once dark, dour cities now glowed brilliantly all through the night, in large part because of his own genius, and those of his workers, who toiled and labored in the West Orange complex.

New Jerseyans can be rightly proud that the Garden State was where the seeds of such ideas for technological progress were planted, took root, and flourished.



**The Laboratory Complex and Glenmont are open Thursday–Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The park is closed during the winter from January to the middle of March, as well as on certain major holidays. Tickets can be purchased for \$15 per person.**

*\*(<https://www.nps.gov/edis/learn/historyculture/samuel-and-nancy-elliott-edison.htm>)*





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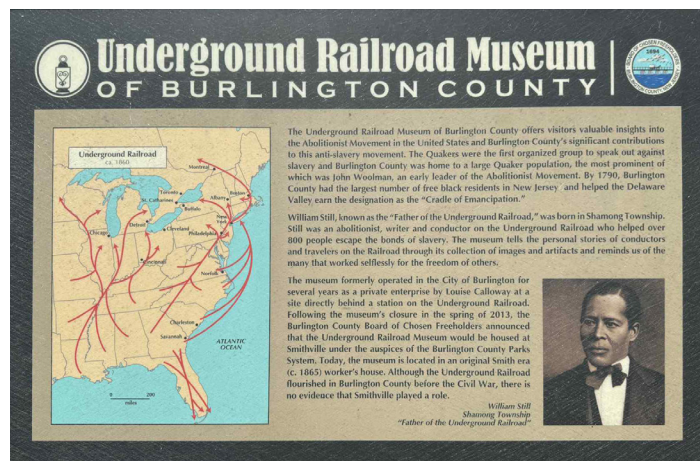
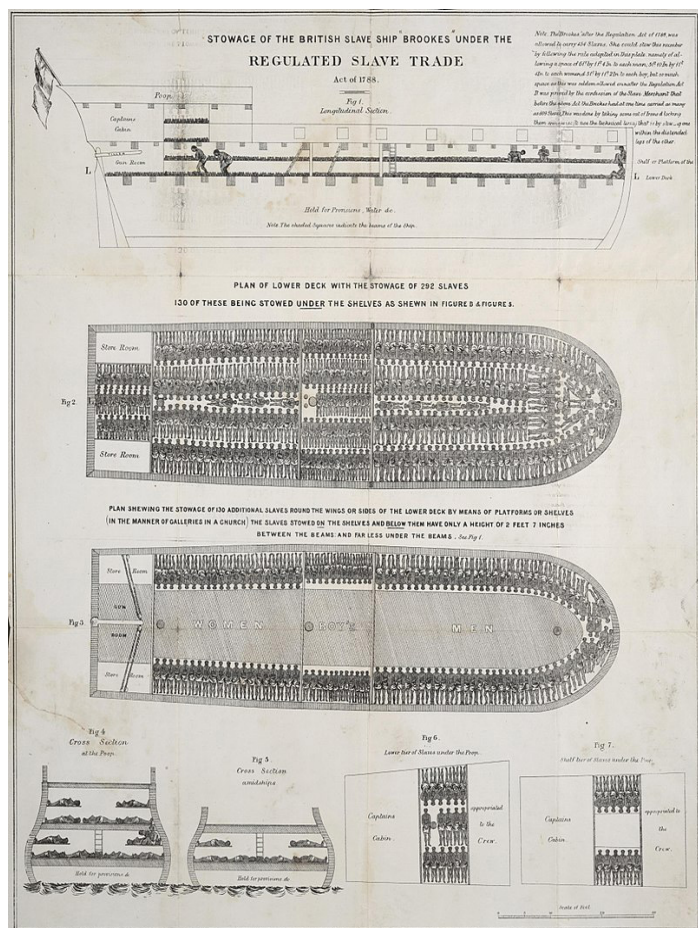
## THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD MUSEUM OF BURLINGTON COUNTY

The Underground Railroad Museum of Burlington County (UGRRMBC) occupies a white building just adjacent to Historic Smithville Park. Inside, however, are over five centuries of African diaspora stories waiting to be shared. The UGRRMBC can be found at 803 Smithville Road, Building #10, Historical Smithville Park, Eastampton, NJ 08060. The museum was founded by the late Louise Calloway as a private enterprise, with many of her own artifacts and items contributing to the exhibits.

Although the museum places a great focus on the Underground Railroad and the role both Burlington County and New Jersey played in the days leading up to and including the Civil War, the museum is far more contextualized and expansive in its historical interpretation. Visitors follow a timeline, starting with continental Africa itself before the Atlantic slave trade began, where some of the great civilizations had thrived and shaped the societies that would later be impact-



ed by the slave trade and the “triangular” system. The museum’s focus on Atlantic slavery begins pre-Columbus, with Pope Nicholas V setting the stage for race-based slavery as Portuguese and Spanish exploration of the Atlantic and African coasts began in earnest in the 15th Century. The process of dehumanization is explained with photos of the coastal castles that housed newly enslaved people awaiting the ships that would take them away to the Americas. Visitors can feel the heavy weight of iron chains which bind a mannequin representing an African man.



The rooms of the museum progress along the centuries, as the institution of slavery was a part of the fabric of the American colonies, and later the United States. The museum highlights the ways in which enslaved peoples held onto their culture, or, having been disconnected from it, incorporated their traditions with their circumstances, and created something distinctly their own. Communication was bound up in symbolism and song, passing along information which was concealed from their enslavers. But the museum does not exclusively tell the African and African-American perspectives as they relate to the cause of liberation and justice. The broader community, including abolitionist Quakers, sympathetic whites, and changing society makes sure that the experience of liberation itself is seen in a larger context. Divisiveness is not an object for the museum, and visitors of all backgrounds can find some part of





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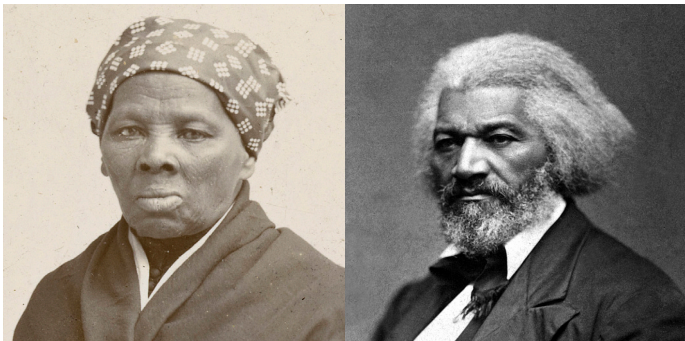
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the story that they can connect with directly on some level.

The Underground Railroad was not underground, nor was it a railroad (although some escaped from slavery by hiding in trains), and as far as New Jersey itself is concerned, the museum highlights the significant role the maritime aspects played—the nearby Delaware River, most notably, for Burlington County.



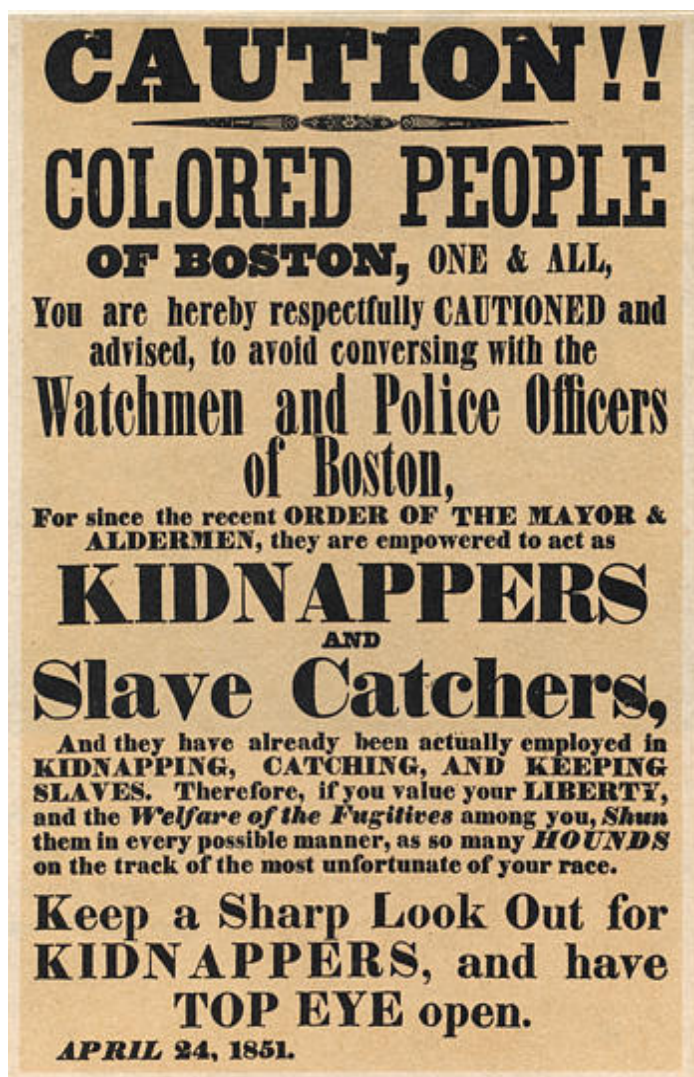
Visitors learn about Timbuctoo in nearby Westampton, New Jersey, one of the largest free antebellum settlements north of the Mason-Dixon line. This community was established in 1826 and physically fought off slave-trackers in 1860 who were looking to (per the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850) kidnap formerly enslaved people who had made their way north and take them back into bondage. The Mount Moriah Cemetery houses the remains of that early community, some with tombstones, but many more without. The exhibits continue from the post-Civil War era, from Re-

construction, into the 20th Century with the rise of the Civil Rights movement, up to the present-day struggles for equality and justice. The museum does not hide the often-graphic reality of what Black people endured, but the staff maintains their right to restrict younger visitors from some of the more unsettling images.



Countless names fill the museum, just a few among them: William Still, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Cathay Williams, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Nancy Henry, Carl Lewis, John Lewis, Franco Harris, Barack Obama—and part of the mission of the museum is to tell the stories of the people. Storytelling is an educational aspect that the museum embraces all around. Toward this end, they partner with other organizations





Black History Month, the museum says, is not just one month out of the year.

Executive Director Deborah R. Price said, "I think it's important for folks to draw their own conclusions based on facts. I'm finding that there are people who have said, 'I didn't learn this in history class. I did not know this. I did not know that.' You didn't know because you weren't taught by the teachers, and the teachers weren't taught. Not until you start research-

ing do you understand history—the good, bad, and ugly. We talk about the KKK. It happened. You can't go around like it didn't happen. Things like the promise of the '40 acres and a mule' and the Jim Crow laws—we have all these things we've talked about in history. The purpose of history is to learn, not to revisit. But we are revisiting it, because we've never learned. That's the difference."



Executive Director Deborah R. Price

Price emphasized that the museum touches on the social and cultural contributions and achievements of the African diaspora. Taking out some vinyl Duke Ellington albums, she said, "We are very proud of our music collection, because it goes back several years. We give you a history of music and dance because people need to understand what we bring, and the impact that it's had from the past to the present."





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The UGRRMBC hosts an annual “African Diaspora Festival” which will be held this year on September 13, from noon to 6 p.m. The festival invites visitors to learn and experience African culture, from music, fashion, food, genealogy, and more. They also host a Juneteenth celebration each year at Timbuctoo and Rancocas State Park, which encourages and welcomes families to come and share their own stories.

“We’ve opened up ourselves as a learning platform. That’s why, when you come to our museum, there is a lot of dialogue,” Price said. As a small, intimate museum, the method of talking with the staff and us-

ing a back-and-forth approach to interpretation opens up more understanding than simply reading a description card or sign and then moving on. In fact, it can force one to confront some unpleasant realities, even if, as in the case of the writer, it is recognition of how little one knew coming into the museum in the first place. But an intellectually honest visitor will welcome those challenges as learning experiences and make the most of the opportunities to hear the stories and see further than what is so often just a high school-level understanding.



Most readers are aware that white-only schools were compelled to admit students of all races when desegregation was imposed during the Eisenhower administration. But there was also an all-Black school, the Manual Training Industrial School for Colored Youth, also known as the Bordentown School, in New Jersey, which is featured in the museum. Desegregation spelled its end as an institution.



"This room is unique," Price said of the exhibit, "because people do not realize that there was a school for Black youth, established in 1886, and closed in 1955. It closed because of the Brown vs. Board of Education decision—a reverse impact. This was the only school for colored children north of the Mason-Dixon line." The school was established by the Rev. Walter Rice, who had been a slave in South Carolina. After serving in the Union army, Rice established the in-

stitution as a vocational school. Albert Einstein was among the lecturers who hosted classes there. Price was proud to honor Rev. Rice and pointed out that his descendant, Susan Rice, had served as US Ambassador to the United Nations and National Security Advisor to President Barack Obama.



When the United States entered World War Two, the army was still segregated and would remain so until 1948. The 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion is also recognized in the UGRRMBC, the only Black and multi-ethnic unit of the Women's Army Corps which was deployed overseas in the Second World War. Of the 855 women of the "Six-Triple-Eight," 28 were from New Jersey. Their unit was charged with cutting through a massive backlog of military mail—17 million pieces—and providing support services to the American army in Europe. When their duty was done following the Allied





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victory, the battalion returned to Fort Dix in 1946 and was disbanded with little notice. Seventy-six years later, in 2022, President Joseph Biden awarded the battalion the Congressional Gold Medal. On May 8, 2025, a joint resolution by Senators Shirley Turner and Renee Burgess was signed into law by Governor Murphy, establishing May 18 as "Six-Triple-Eight Day" in the state.



Senator Turner said at the time, "The signing of this resolution is not just a ceremonial act. It is a restoration of history and dignity long denied. The women of the 6888th Battalion served with distinction in the face of racism, sexism, and unimaginable pressure. By enshrining Six Triple Eight Day into law, we ensure that their courage, their labor, and their

legacy will never again be forgotten. Their patriotism shines as a beacon for all Americans."

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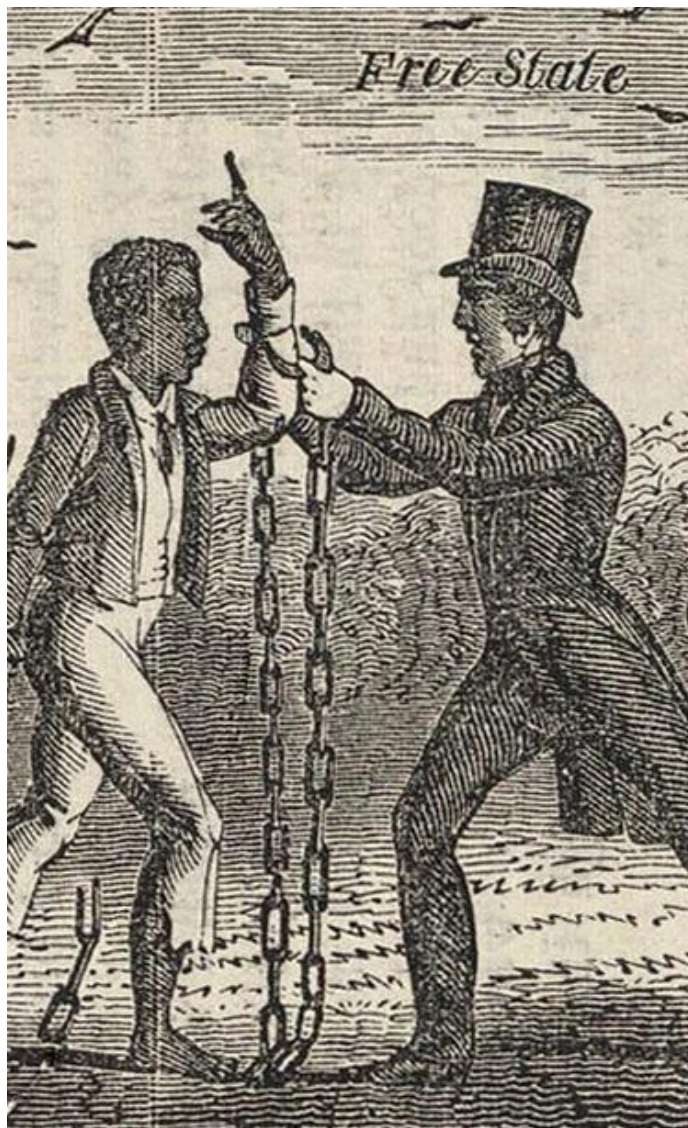
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Learn more about the Underground Railroad Museum of Burlington County by visiting our website located at:

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The Underground Railroad Museum also hosts an annual Black History Month Wall of Honors Award Program in February at Rowan College at Burlington County, where deserving figures may be named to the Wall of Honor or given the Louise M. Calloway Inspiration Award. The award, named for the museum's founder, "is presented to the individual(s) who inspire and continue to give voice to the silenced 'his' stories, 'her' stories, and 'their' stories as well as the un-found and the archivable."





Price said of the museum, “The reactions, the emotions, and everything that’s felt in here, it’s not a feeling of anger, but a feeling of ‘this is what happened.’ Everybody has history. Be proud of who you came from, understand the language, history, and our legacy, be able to talk about it, and pass it down effectively. Not with

hate—you don’t grow from that. You don’t have a sense of ‘all this is Black Power’. No, that’s not what this museum is. It is about learning. This is who we are. But do we need to move better? Yes, we do. We need to grow. That’s the whole purpose of planting the seed.”

The Underground Railroad Museum of Burlington County is free to the public, and does not charge for its events to ensure accessibility. The museum is a 501(c)3 organization and welcomes donations to maintain their operations.



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**Private tours are available by appointment on Fridays, noon to 4 pm, by calling 609-233-7969 or emailing [info@hugrrmbc.org](mailto:info@hugrrmbc.org), and open to the public on Saturdays and Sundays noon to 4 pm.**



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## PERSPECTIVES ON PASSAIC COUNTY'S CULTURAL AND HISTORIC AFFAIRS:

*A Discussion with Commissioner John W. Bartlett, Esq.*

John W. Bartlett, Esq., has served as Passaic County Commissioner (originally “freeholder”) since 2012. He has served on all of the county’s standing committees, and also as director. Just prior to becoming a freeholder, and briefly during his tenure, he served as the founding Chairman of the Board of Friends of Passaic County Parks. During this time, Bartlett oversaw a revitalization of county-wide parks programs, events, and development for the residents.

An avowed history buff, Bartlett is a key player in the county’s cultural and historical endeavors, and agreed to talk about how Passaic County has sought to serve its people in preserving and promoting the history of the county, bringing educational, environmental, and economic benefits in so doing.

While readers of a publication entitled the “History and Heritage Spotlight” might come with the default



view that history is something valuable and worth studying, sometimes educators and leaders may be faced with more mundane, if nevertheless pragmatic, questions such as, “Why should I care what happened in the past? Why should my tax money go toward such things?”

“With everything that’s going on right now,” Bartlett said, “that makes it so important for us to remember and continue to study all of this history. The emergence of American freedom and American industry all happened right here in Passaic County and northern New Jersey, and the things that those patriots stood for then are just as important today as we’re approaching the 250th anniversary of our nation. I’m a great lover of history because I always enjoyed reading about it growing up, and I also happen to be a Mayflower descendant. When I read American history, I always read it with a sense that somebody I’m related to was ‘there’, or nearby, and that gave me a neat sense of connection to it. What I really love about the work that I’ve gotten to do in Passaic County is how those stories resonate for even very recent immigrants. It’s not just my story of a Mayflower descendant and reading these stories and seeing myself and my family in it, but also the way

in which classes of kids from Clifton, Passaic, and Paterson come to the Dey Mansion in Wayne, and can see themselves in the stories of kids from the colonial era.”



New Jersey may be a small state, but it is no monolith. Far from it. (See John Taylor’s “pork roll” legacy!) Originally, the colony of New Jersey was split into East Jersey and West Jersey. Today, there is more of a North–South divide, with Gov. Phil Murphy controversially declaring that “Central Jersey” is a real thing. But, in fact, the New Jersey distinctions are more nuanced than just drawing a line through the state. Every county has its own character and flavor about it.

As far as Passaic County is concerned, shaped like a top-heavy peanut or robust turkey leg, it was born out of Bergen and Essex County territory in 1837, acquiring the City of





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Paterson in so doing. But what makes Passaic County unique?



"I think Passaic County is in a constant state of self-renewal," the commissioner said. "It is the place where the first planned industrial city was created, and it's also the place where the population of that city has turned over repeatedly through American immigration stories. It went from Hamilton and his cohorts meeting at the base of the Great Falls and envisioning an industrial city there, through generations of European immigrants, to the present day, where whole new waves of immigrants from India, Bangladesh, Peru, and Dominican Repub-

lic are renewing it all again. At each stage of this, you have all of these wonderful cultures and cuisines encountering one another."

Bartlett reflected on the changes that Paterson, in particular, has seen over the years, and the continuation of community which runs parallel to that experience. "My colleague, [Commissioner Cassandra] 'Sandi' Lazzara, is the daughter of the late State Senator Lazzara, who had a bakery in Paterson. To this day, people will come up to her remembering stories of her father's bakery. The same thing is going to happen two generations from now about a Peruvian, Palestinian, or Turkish place that somebody remembers from their childhood. I think one thing we could say about Passaic County is, if New Jersey's got it, we've got it. Except for the shore!" Bartlett conceded to geography.





"We've got a wonderful, vibrant, immigrant-fed urban core, beautiful suburban communities," he said, "and we've got this unspoiled nature up-county as you approach the New York border. We've got Native American communities whose history takes us back even further."



Passaic County has seen sizeable investment and development for its cultural and historic resources over the 2010s and 2020s. Bartlett said that it had been a priority of his and the Board of Commissioners during that time. "It was right around then that we created the position of Director of Cultural and Historic Affairs with Kelly

Ruffel, who is a fantastic resource and font of knowledge. We really began prioritizing both our parks and our historic sites, and in terms of parks, that started in Hawthorne. One of our first major parks restoration projects was restoring Goffle Brook Park and all that riparian planting and stonework up near the pond dam, and restoring a lot of the Frederick Law Olmsted designs." Bartlett expressed his pride that Passaic County is home to more than one of Olmsted's landscape designs. Olmsted was the designer of Central Park in Manhattan as well as Prospect Park (that is, Prospect Park in Brooklyn, not the one in Passaic County).

"That is a huge part of the way in which our parks touch on that American history story," he said, "and the way in which the development and protection of urban and suburban open space has been such a priority. We've had a nice confluence on the opportunity to apply for state funding for some of this restoration, along with the establishment of the Friends of Passaic County Parks, and the re-establishment of our county fair as something that generates a bit of revenue that we're then able to invest in our parks and historic sites. Since 1996, thanks to the voters of Passaic County, we've had an open

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space and farmland preservation fund that we gave out as grants to municipalities and nonprofits. When we made the decision to invest some of those funds in our own parks, it was an opportunity to leverage that to get more state funding.”

Bartlett said that county governments were better positioned to get larger scale projects in motion, using resources and funds that individual municipalities simply couldn’t. “We’re in the middle of a multi-phase, multi-million-dollar restoration of Garrett Mountain and beginning a process with the Peckman Preserve in Little Falls to preserve and protect that as a suburban riparian park. Meanwhile, as the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution approaches, we’ve been investing more in our historic sites, developing

the professionalism, not just of Kelly, but of all her colleagues, the curators, and the docents at our historic sites. That has become one of the ways in which a county government can add value and create efficiencies.”

One of the examples Bartlett referenced was Passaic County’s partnership with Clifton and Wayne to manage their historic sites. One of the end products of that partnership will be the establishment of a military history museum at the Schuyler-Colfax House.



Passaic County has a motto of “Rich history, bright future,” and, at least for Commissioner Bartlett, he means to make the most of that for the residents of the county via the Department of Cultural and Historic Affairs. Their mission, he said, is “to preserve, interpret and promote the county’s cultural, artistic and historic resources. That’s all aimed at connecting our residents to the county’s past, but also attracting visitors. Destination marketing is a great economic driver.”



Bartlett thanked the late Congressman Bill Pascrell who helped get the Great Falls established as a National Historic Park in 2009. Visitors to Passaic County, he said, would inevitably patronize local businesses, be they restaurants, lodgings, or retail stores, further adding to the local economy. He also noted that next year, the World Cup will be coming to New Jersey, also bringing in visitors who will travel around North Jersey and patronize local businesses.

The United States Semiquincentennial, or 250th anniversary, is another opportunity which Passaic County has been planning on cultivating as far as historic and cultural activities are concerned. “We’re doing so much more programming now at our facilities,” Bartlett said. “Like I said, we’ve got this wonderful team in Cultural and Historic Affairs that are the storytellers and caretakers of the county heritage. We’ve got wonderful reenactors, folks from the Sons, Daughters, and Children of the American Revolution, and other history buffs who really make the place come alive with a sense of what it was like 200 plus years ago.”

The investment of millions of dollars over the years into Passaic County parks, recreation, cultural, and historical assets pays off economically, Bartlett said. “It is absolutely a driver of economic growth. We’ve got a lot of great things coming up that I think are going to be a surge moment for all of that.”

The investment, he said, has resulted in job creation and increased traffic for businesses thanks to the elevated tourism.

“Passaic County has been getting ready for the semiquincentennial for



years now,” he said. “We have been focused on capital investments and site readiness. We’ve spent roughly \$42 million in the last six years. Some of that is thanks to state and federal grants, some of it our own, for making all of these historic sites ready to be part of anybody’s north-east road trip to explore the history of the American Revolution. For folks coming here, whether they’re coming for the World Cup, on their way to Boston, because they heard about the statues on the Morristown Green, or going to the Great Falls National Historical Site—there is so much to see in Passaic County. There are so many different kinds of trips you can put together.”

Passaic County might be small, but it is very diverse both in people, but also in unique sites to visit. “If you love our industrial history, go to Paterson and visit the falls, see the raceways and the old mills. Go up to the Pompton Aquatic Park, which is one of our county parks, and see an old lock from the Morris Canal. Or go up to Ringwood, to the Long Pond Ironworks\*, and see rural American industrial history. If you love nature, hike through Apshawan Preserve. Visit Garret Mountain. We have acres and acres of forest that are now protected by a deer fence, and we’re seeing

the understory—all the low plants, shrubs, flowers, and tree seedlings that, unfortunately, deer destroy—springing back up. That’s an investment that we’ve made in making sure that we’re preserving and protecting all of this for generations to come.”



Whether it is parkland revitalization, or infrastructure and accessibility investment in historical interpretation and education at the county’s museum sites, Commissioner Bartlett wants to make sure all residents feel included in the story of their county, past and present. “We’re investing time, effort, and resources in making sure we tell all those stories.”

\*To read more about Long Pond Ironworks, see the 2024 History and Heritage Spotlight.

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NJ Gubernatorial Candidates Mikie Sherrill (left) and Jack Ciattarelli (right) with NJBIA President & CEO Michele Siekerka at the Blueprint unveiling at NJBIA's ELC Reception.

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## MORE THAN JUST THE SHORE:

*A Walk Through Time at Historic Cold Spring Village  
with COO John Ryan*

Historic Cold Spring Village in Cape May is the largest living history museum in the state. It is also a notable exception to the county's heavily shore-oriented tourism, making it particularly unique for the area, but also for the state itself. The site is run by a non-profit foundation which takes care of the historic buildings collected and preserved on site. With so much to offer and experience at Historic Cold Spring Village, Insider NJ spoke with Chief Operating Officer John Ryan.

The village, he said, was the product of Dr. Joseph and Patricia Anne Salvatore who enjoyed vacationing in the area with their children. Dr. Salvatore is an orthopedic surgeon and perhaps South Jersey's greatest lover of historical preservation. "They had seen a lot of the historic buildings in the area that were falling into disrepair, in danger of being lost. They had acquired the Grange meeting hall in Lower Township, the only building that's originally on the site itself, which



lies next to their properties. They had acquired that to preserve it, and then they decided they wanted to expand that.”

The Salvatores, he said, began acquiring and physically moving historic structures around Cape May County onto the property to save them and create a 19th Century style village. “Between 1973 and about 1981, when we first opened to the public, they moved several buildings here. Originally, there were 12 that they moved to preserve them, set up in the village style. It opened to the public in 1981 and they ran it for a few years, then turned it over to Cape May County. The county ran it until the early 90s, at which point they transferred it back to the Salvatores. They decided the best way to keep it running was to create a non-profit foundation. Today, the village operates under the auspices of the HCSV Foundation.” Ryan said that since 1981, more and more buildings were acquired and preserved on site. Thanks to their efforts, HCSV is now the largest living history museum in New Jersey and maintains a busy schedule of events for visitors who realize that Cape May has more than just the shore and boardwalks to offer.

Additionally, Historic Cold Spring Village is home to the state’s first

non-profit brewery. This was the product of a decision made in 2014 and has since come to fruition. Funds were raised to realize this project, and the sales go toward the preservation of the museum.



Dr. and Mrs. Salvatore, Ryan said, also acquired and established the Naval Air Station Wildwood Aviation Museum in the 1990s. That subject is worthy of its own future “History and Heritage Spotlight” feature.

As an outdoor living history museum village, HCSV is not like the standard museum, where most items are within a building behind glass. Interactivity is key to bringing the past to life, and building relevance in terms of experiences to visitors. “Our interpretation model is a little bit different



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than some places like Plymouth, Massachusetts, and Jamestown, Virginia, which will often do first-person interpretation, where the staff are in character as people from that time period. We are more third-person interpretation where we are 'ourselves', we're in costume, and we're there to relate the history of the buildings, the trades, and the life of the times. Not that first-person is overly intimidating, but we find it a little more approachable for people to be able to talk to us one-on-one and learn about the history, the trades, the buildings, and that kind of format, as opposed to interacting with someone who's playing a character from the time period. We are dressed period appropriate, talking about the lives and trades of the time, but we are just ourselves, 21st Century people." Doing so, he said, helps people connect visually with the context of the environment, without being restricted by first-person limitations.



Ryan did not dismiss the value of first-person interpretation outright, however. "We do sometimes have people come in and do that, with various interpreters and guest presentations and people will be in character. But, by and large, we find it more approachable for our visitors that we are in third-person, just being ourselves. It also opens up our interpreter staff to a wider range of people. You wouldn't only have to have, say, semiprofessional actors who are also steeped in the knowledge. We have people who are consistent here, who like a particular trade or skill, and want to do it as a summer job. They always come out and help us. We have volunteers, students, and teachers who come in, who just love history and love the different trades and crafts, and they can jump in fairly easily."

Whether checking out a historical timeline event, craft fair, car show, a Revolutionary War or Civil War encampment weekend, the Halloween transformation of "Ghoul Spring Village," or candle tours at night, the site interprets the past but is certainly not frozen in time. As a visitor walking along the crushed seashell pathways of the village, greeting the farm animals, having a refreshment before catching a presentation, or being part of one of the many sched-



uled special events on site, it is easy to see how Historic Cold Spring Village represents an economic benefit to the wider area as well. Tourism in Cape May, as has been mentioned, is largely oriented toward the shore and beach-related industries, but the village is part of the interconnected web of the local economy. “First and foremost,” Ryan said, “we provide employment. We provide summer jobs for interpreter staff, retail staff, or work in our food services operations, and more. Plus, just having a good, solid foundation on the historical knowledge of the area helps people understand how and why the tourism industry in Cape May has developed and where it came from. People may say you hear about Cape May being the nation’s oldest seashore resort, and through our interpretation and presentation, we help people understand why that is and how it came to be that way. So the village provides a good authentication of who we are as a people in Cape May, in South Jersey, as well as providing actual employment for the people in the area.”

Area hospitality and retail benefits from HCSV’s programming and, of course, wider businesses as tourists take advantage of what the area has to offer.

“When we have people who come down for interpretive weekends, that provides income for the hotel industry, restaurants, and other services,” Ryan said. One of the challenges is getting tourists to visit from the beaches, and come to the village. “When they spread out of Cape May and Wildwood to come to see us, they’re going to spread that economic benefit throughout the local community. They’ll stop here and, on the way back, maybe they will stop at a local restaurant or other place nearby. They’ll spend some money elsewhere in the community, where it’s otherwise going to stay on the island or at the beach. So, we help spread the economic benefit around the area a little.”

Locals and others who love the village can also take advantage of the site for special events. The Cold Spring Grange offers on-site catering for parties, weddings, birthdays, repasts, and more.

Ryan referred to one of their newsletters they hand out, which emphasizes the greater history of Cape May outside the beaches, and what the rest of the county has to offer to visitors. “Once you’ve experienced the beach, the boardwalk, and everything those

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have to offer, and maybe you are a little too sunburned, or maybe the weather isn't quite good, you can come down here, have a good time, and enjoy your vacation."

Synthesizing modern tech into a 19th Century agricultural/industrial museum might seem paradoxical, but it actually represents a challenge for the staff as they strike a balance between maintaining and preserving the overall appearance and experience of the village, while meeting new opportunities in the digital age. "People have smartphones and they want to experience history. We've installed QR codes on our buildings, so if there are aspects of a building you can't see or touch or look at, you can click on a QR code and get more information. You can see parts of the museum, or parts of a building that may not be accessible during the course of the day, like second or third floors and things like that. We have interactive displays on our website where you can take virtual tours. The more technology we can incorporate, the more that definitely seems to resonate with visitors."

But does that shatter the atmosphere of walking through a slice of the 19th Century? Not necessarily, but it does

require some awareness and finesse on the part of the site staff. "It's a balance because some people come to a museum like this and want to totally immerse themselves in the time period and feel like they are walking through 1840. But there's a certain limitation to that. Demographics change, and every generation that comes up has different ways of interacting with museums and history. You have to balance the kind of immersion. Yes, you're walking through the 1840s, but here's a little bit of technology hidden around the museum as well so you can also interact with that and enjoy."



Life in the 1840s was not an especially comfortable time, Ryan admits, and even less so in Cape May County, a

place he described as “rural, remote, and isolated” most of the year. It was not easily accessible in the 19th Century, and overland routes by coach represented rough journeys from other parts of the state, or by boat from elsewhere.

“We help people understand what the life was like while still letting them be comfortable while they’re enjoying their experience,” he said.



There are plenty of places to do so. Your writer is personally very appreciative of the site’s air-conditioned ice cream parlor as a nice refuge from the Jersey summer heat and humidity. Hot dogs, sandwiches, and other foods are also available throughout the village to satisfy one’s lunch.

“We are keeping an eye on what visitors are looking for,” Ryan said, in terms of pricing and demands. “We

try and make sure that people have options if they need a meal, especially with a family and small kids, maybe something quick and easy, as opposed to a big sit-down meal. We try to adapt.”

What makes Historic Cold Spring Village uniquely special as far as New Jersey is concerned? The COO offered his thoughts. “We are the largest outdoor living history museum in the state, and I think we’re unique because we’re one of the few places in South Jersey, especially if you are down at the shore, that isn’t solely focused on beach recreation and that kind of summertime fun. We offer an opportunity to take a step back from the normal vacation experience and learn about the history of the area you’re vacationing in. A lot of South Jersey tourism is heavily focused on beaches, boardwalks, amusement rides, and things like that. So, this gives them a little bit of an alternative, so once you’ve experienced all that, there’s still something else to do in the area and something more you can learn.”

**Historic Cold Spring Village is found at 720 Route 9, Cape May, NJ 08204. The village is open seasonally, with hours, admission fees, virtual tours, and an event schedule available online at [www.hcsv.org](http://www.hcsv.org)**



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# VAN VLIET'S VISITS

## THE COHANZICK ZOO



Lions, tigers, and bears, oh my! And, wow, so many more than that. Whether four-footed, feathered, or flippered, the Cohanzick Zoo, found in Bridgeton, Cumberland County, is an opportunity for the public to see and learn about nature's wonders. This facility was established in 1934 and lays claim to the title of "New Jersey's Oldest Zoo." It is also the only municipally operated zoo in the state which, according to the Cohanzick Zoological Society, means it can be subject to budgetary woes on the local level. The zoo also does not charge any admission for visitors. With that in mind, then, the zoo relies heavily on the generous patronage of donors to ensure that they can keep their animals well cared for and their public programming in operation. "The Cohanzick Zoo prides itself on being a resource for our local youth and communities to learn about more than just the animals we house, but about our local ecosystems and wildlife, as well. We offer a variety of programs for all ages throughout the year, many of which are free or low-cost."

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45 Mayor Aitkin Drive, Bridgeton, NJ 08302, open seven days a week, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. in the spring and summer, and closing at 4 p.m. in the autumn and winter.



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# VAN VLIET'S VISITS

## NAVESINK TWIN LIGHTS



A beautiful beacon awaits visitors to this Monmouth County treasure. As one of the first English colonies, and US states, New Jersey's position on the Atlantic was instrumental in shaping and building up the state's economy and shaping its culture as a cosmopolitan place to live and work. With New York City just across the bay from Sandy Hook, a lighthouse was constructed at the present site of the architecturally striking Navesink Twin Lights in 1828. The current

structure dates to 1862, during the US Civil War. While the lights may be twins, they are not identical twins. One light would pulse while the other was steady, and this allowed for ready discernment by mariners at sea. The NJ DEP said in 2006, "The light station has the distinction of being the first in the United States to test several important lighthouse technologies, including the revolutionary Fresnel lens, the use of mineral oil for lamps, and an electric-arc bivalve lens that was nine feet in diameter. In 1899, Guglielmo Marconi used the light station for the first demonstration of the wireless telegraph and it became the nation's first wireless station capable of transmitting and receiving messages on a regular commercial basis. Radar and other electronic technologies developed at nearby Fort Monmouth and used to fight World War II were tested at the light station." The lighthouse ceased operations in 1949 and is run by NJ State Park Service and supported by the Twin Lights Historical Society.

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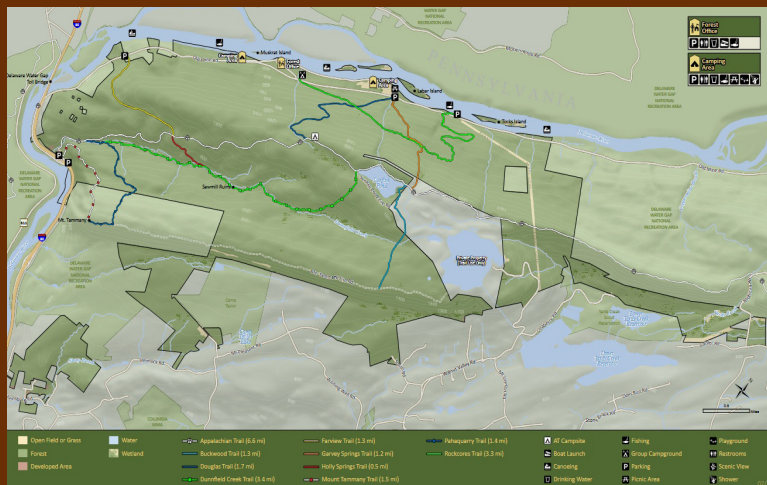
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# VAN VLIET'S VISITS

## WORTHINGTON STATE FOREST



Located at the north-western edge of New Jersey in Warren County, Worthington State Forest offers hikers and nature lovers a spectacular view of some of the best that New Jersey's rugged beauty can offer. Out-of-staters might associate New Jersey with just the Garden State Parkway, or even describe the Turnpike exits as "scratch and

sniff" destinations, but New Jerseyans know the reality is anything-but. Worthington State Forest is an ecological treasure that features hiking trails, fishing, canoeing, bird watching, and camping opportunities. The adventurous sort can climb Mt. Tammany, which is a bit over 1,500 feet high. The mountain is named for Chief Tamanend of the Lenni-Lenape. He was a revered diplomat who had learned English and signed treaties with William Penn who was establishing the colony of Pennsylvania. The State Forest straddles the Kittatinny Mountains up to the Delaware River and twenty-two miles of trails line the forest. "The Appalachian Trail crosses the Delaware River from Pennsylvania just above the Delaware Water Gap and ascends through 6.6 miles of the mountain ridge in Worthington State Forest to the forest's upper boundary," the NJ DEP said. "From this point the trail continues on National Park Service land to and through Stokes State Forest and High Point State Park. This trail is restricted to hiking only for its entire length from Maine to Georgia." The trail is marked by white blazes to indicate it is narrow and very rocky in some places, so only seasoned hikers should undertake it. Worthington State Forest is also where majestic Sunfish Pond can be found. This is a 41-acre lake created by glaciers, and it is listed in the National Registry of Historic Landmarks. The pond was named one of the "Seven Natural Wonders" of New Jersey with a 1.5-mile-long trail looping around it. Bring your cameras, folks, and don't let anyone tell you New Jersey doesn't have jaw-dropping natural beauty.

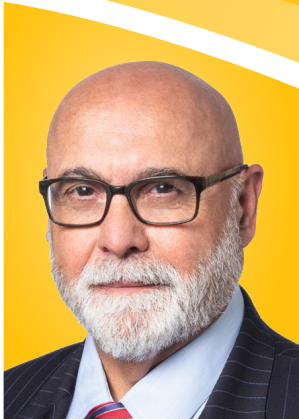




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# VAN VLIET'S VISITS

## RED MILL MUSEUM VILLAGE



Located in Clinton, NJ, the village speaks to the agricultural and industrial history of early New Jersey. Believed to have been built sometime around 1810 by Ralph Hunt, he started the mill as a wool processing plant, but his fortunes took a downturn when the fabric market declined about ten years later, unable to compete with cheaper imported wools. Unfortunately, his prospects did not

brighten, and new owners took over the property. More successful and prosperous at first, the Taylor family diversified the mill operations, but they, too, saw their fortunes plunge and had to sell. The mill operation passed through other families and continued operations during the 19th Century, advancing with the times technologically and adapting to new commercial applications, until it was finally sold in 1928. Its fate was uncertain. Fortunately, the museum's founders—hard-working visionaries who laid out their money to acquire and preserve the site, known locally as the Red Mill Five—worked to save the buildings from collapse and created the museum. The Mulligan Quarry was donated to the museum in 1964. Today, tours are conducted, including living history programs, for schools, civic groups, and other visitors looking to learn about the industrial and evolving social history of the Garden State, particularly looking at the 18th and 19th Centuries. The site features a reproduction 18th Century log cabin, blacksmith shop, schoolhouse, and more. In addition to hosting historical reenactment events, their colonial life tour allows students to get a hands-on grasp of history learning period crafts and basic industrial arts. The staff and volunteers at Red Mill also have an award-winning, very popular annual "Haunted Red Mill" experience each Halloween which, this author can personally attest to saying, will get your heart racing.

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Red Mill Museum Village is located at 56 Main St, Clinton, NJ 08809  
Open Wednesday–Friday 10:00–4:00 and 11:00–5:00 on weekends.





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