



# Sandy Shorts

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 South Jersey Culture & History Center

## Thinking Outside the Box

By Tricia Frechette

This is Linda Stanton, founder and president of a NJ non-profit charitable organization called “Lines on the Pines.” For the past nine years, Linda has gathered the people of South Jersey who explore, discover, foster, and create the Pine Barren culture. Yes, there is culture here, a unique culture, a valuable culture. After moving into area, Linda discovered it too; and through “Lines,” she has unveiled the Pines in ways never done before. She thinks outside the box.

Basket weavers, candle makers, jewelry makers, wood carvers, photographers, painters, musicians, writers, historians—the list goes on and on—through these mediums, people express and value different aspects of South Jersey culture. But what use is culture when largely hidden from the public eye? Linda realized the value of our local culture and has made it her mission to support and promote it. Since

2005, with the support of local sponsors, artists, and volunteers, Linda has convinced people to care and become involved in the culture around them.

But what is so special about the Pine Barrens? John McPhee, author of *The Pine Barrens* explains this question thoroughly, proving it with scientific

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evidence, too. He breaks the conventional stereotypes of New Jersey as smog-covered industrial suburbs by exposing a natural phenomenon that occurs in the often forgotten, large region, the Pine Barrens. In McPhee's exploration, he discovered natural, seemingly everlasting, potable aquifers and economic potential that derives from not harming the environment, but rather preserving the Pines natural ecosystem.

Linda, like McPhee and other Piney enthusiasts, is aware of this rare environment, but also that it is under constant threat. With this in mind, this year's "Lines on the Pines" took place on March 9, 2014, a bright, Sunday afternoon at Kerri Brooke Caterers in Hammonton, right off the White Horse Pike. It was 10 am when I arrived and the large parking lot was already halfway full; by noon it was completely packed. Inside, tables lined with white cloth formed spacious walkways throughout the venue that was filled with people, colors, and the sounds of the Pines.

Walking around the banquet room, I could see the enthusiasm. Each table was set up with a different project accompanied by stories of whom, what, where, and why; everyone wanted to share their piece of the Pines. By the time I reached the last table, there was a feeling of wholeness and unity contributed by each person.

Piney culture is based on the land. Its people truly value the unique biology and history of this place. Unfortunately, the Pines are threatened by modernization and deforestation. "Lines on the Pines" concentrates public attention on the area and voices the importance and connection that traces the Pines to the people. Linda ingeniously advocates for the preservation of this gem within New Jersey by presenting this event free to the public. Her involvement, with many others, generates positive change for New Jersey, an often misconstrued region.

## A Day in Prison

*By Megan Jeffery*

Imagine having to spend a day sleeping on a bunk in an overcrowded room, or working in a courtyard where people watched your every move. Imagine that your idea of entertainment was drawing graffiti on walls and reading the Bible just to keep some of your sanity. Imagine having to be confined

to one task for the rest of your life. In the early 1800s, this is how many lived as they were paying their dues in the Burlington County Prison, located on High Street in Mount Holly. Today, visitors can spend a day in the preserved prison to learn about the history behind the building. As a visitor, you can explore the three-floor jail for a mere \$4.00. For this small fee, you will be awed by the creepy feeling that the prison exudes as you walk through each cell and wonder about the criminals who lived there.

Examining the foundation of the prison, you can see original details that show the quality of the site at the time it was in operation. The massive front doors, the brick and stone walls, and even some of the cell doors have not been changed. The cell windows are still guarded by bars. You can walk through the passageway that is situated between the prison and the warden's house. In many of the cells, hair-raising sketches are still etched into the chipping walls. Stories, scriptures, calendars, drawings of Nazis, blacks, and an image of the perceived God are protected by the solid plexiglas hanging throughout the walls of the prison. Workplaces, such as blacksmith cells and kitchens, hold some of the equipment that the convicts used while employed during their confinement. As you walk through the hallways, you can imagine what it was like to be an inmate at the Burlington County Prison.

Walking through this historic place, you will learn many stories that deal with prison life. The prison was not escape-proof and there were prisoners that "punched" their way to freedom by punching a hole through the ceiling in one of the corridors. Some escapees were never recaptured. Other stories describe the lives of the prisoners that resided there. Some talk about escape attempts, while others describe the seven executions that occurred on site. Some share the views of certain prisoners, and others tell about the crimes that were committed. Learning these stories is what truly brings out the eerie ambience.

You will never be able to say you spent a day at a prison like this, that is, a prison filled with fun surprises, disturbing stories, and bone-chilling corridors. The site is a worthwhile adventure that will leave you amazed. Whether you go for educational purposes or just for a fun time, your experience will benefit you in more ways than one. Take a trip to Mount Holly and have a frightening yet entertaining time at the

Burlington County Prison Museum. Their hours of operation are Thursday through Saturday, 10 A.M. to 4 P.M., and Sunday from noon to 4 P.M. For more information, visit <http://www.prisonmuseum.net>.

## An Ol' Fashioned Bluegrass Jam-boree at Albert Music Hall

By Carmen Capoferri

Over time, certain musical genres rise and fall in popularity. Though genres like rock, country, and rap always seem to adapt and find ways to persist in any cultural climate, some genres become mostly lost to the past. For whatever reasons, certain genres go through periods of cultural relevance before eventually trailing off into obscurity. Even if you might occasionally hear someone blasting “Shake, Shake, Shake” or another old disco hit while driving down the street, the life of these genres is usually relegated to classic radio stations, and it is rare to hear these songs performed authentically in live settings.

While many people might not care whether these songs are lost to time, some people realize that music is just as valuable a cultural artifact as any historical site or document. They realize that some music is worth preserving because, at its most expressive, it serves as a window into understanding the yearnings, values, fears, and overall culture of a people at a particular time and place in history. The Pinelands Cultural Society realized the important role that music plays in preserving and celebrating culture and they built the Albert Music Hall in Waretown, NJ to give musicians a platform to perform bluegrass, classic country, and the folk music of the Pine Barrens.

The origins of the hall can be traced back to the 1950s, when weekly musical gatherings were held by piney brothers Joe and George Albert at their personal hunting lodge. Over time these gatherings grew from a few friends passing time picking classic and original tunes to full-scale community events that gained the attention of local television stations and newspapers. When these gatherings subsided, in part due to the death of George Albert, the Pinelands Cultural Society formed to make sure the tradition sparked by the Albert brothers would not fade away. In 1974, the Pinelands Cultural Society found an open location at the Waretown Auction Building that became the

first incarnation of Albert Music Hall. Albert Music Hall, as it stands today, was completed in 1996 as a stand-alone building with another smaller building to its side referred to as the Pickin’ Shed, where anyone with an instrument can go to play classic country and folk tunes or share their own original songs with other musicians.

When I arrived with my family at Albert Hall to attend one of their Saturday night concerts, the parking lot was so full that we had to park at the nearby elementary school. From the outside, Albert Music Hall looked like a small-town town hall, complete with an American flag hoisted high on the flag-pole on the front lawn. Once through the doors, the “town-hall” vibe that the building exuded from the outside proved an accurate representation of the sense of community that permeated the rest of the night’s proceedings.

Slated to perform that night were six bands including the *Ditch Diggers*, *Acoustic Thunder*, and the *Kokomos*, which were a few of the more interesting band names among the batch. Once through the lobby, we made our way to find a spot in the 350-seat main room. On the right wall from our seats were instruments like a banjo, fiddle, and a wooden xylophone that were probably not that different from the ones played at the Alberts’ gatherings. Among these instruments were George and Joe’s very own wash-tub bass and fiddle. On the left wall was farming equipment and household tools like a scythe and washboard, along with a display dedicated to the history of the Pinelands Cultural Society. The most impressive aspect of the room was the stage, which was modeled to look like the front porch of a log cabin in the middle of the Pine Barrens. The design was a nod to the original Pine Barrens location where the Albert brothers first started this community event.

As for the music itself, on this night the bands played a mixture of traditional country and bluegrass interspersed with some more recent twentieth-century folk songs. While I preferred some bands over others, every band that played that night displayed a reverence for the songs that helped make every performance enjoyable. Additionally, the passion with which the bands played proved that their desire to perform these songs extended beyond simply trying to preserve them for historical purposes. It was evident that this music was still alive and pulsing within these musicians.

After the main performances, we stopped at the nearby Pickin' Shed to see what type of community gathered there. As soon as we entered the building we were overwhelmed by the large number of people in the room playing various instruments and singing together to the same country song. Out of a crowd that included some of the musicians that had performed earlier that night, it was nice to see other individuals that appeared inexperienced in playing that particular type of music, but nevertheless excited to be taking part in the group performance. Even though they were in the beginning stages of learning the songs, by showing interest in them they were taking part in keeping the spirit of the music of the Pinelands alive.

Albert Music Hall holds concerts every Saturday at 7:30 pm in honor of the Albert brothers' weekly musical gatherings. Like the amateur musicians that night who showed an interest in learning the classic songs of a bygone era, you too can be a part of the living history of Pinelands' music and support the cause of the Pinelands Cultural Society by attending one of Albert Music Hall's weekly concerts.

Albert Music Hall  
 GPS Address: 131 Wells Mills Road (Rt. 532)  
 Waretown, NJ 08758  
<http://www.alberthall.org/>

## Ancora's History

*By Lauren Goodfellow*

Ancora Psychiatric Hospital located in Winslow Township, New Jersey is surrounded by lush forest filled with deer, foxes, and groundhogs. There is a man-made lake with a very small island that offers an excellent fishing spot. There is a little farm on the same stretch of road that has a new litter of baby goats every spring. Despite the serene and lovely landscape, this land has been the source of urban legends, teenage games of chicken, and Weird New Jersey fodder for years. The land and the woods surrounding it have been described as haunted, a deserted ghost town, and a place where countless murders have taken place. However, this is not the Ancora Hospital that the patients who reside there and the employees who work there have come to know. Those who are familiar with Ancora and its history know the ghost stories and sensationalism are just that.

The land that would become Ancora Psychiatric Hospital was acquired by the State of New Jersey in February of 1951. The deed to the land, which is kept in the office of the CEO to this day, claims the land was purchased for one dollar, but the land was actually willingly turned over to the state by the county for the purpose of building a hospital. It was not the first time this land would be used as an asylum for those in need; the land was once the location of the Sunny Rest Tuberculosis Sanatorium. The peaceful land where Sunny Rest resided was considered therapeutic to the patients as there was an abundance of sunshine and fresh air. The ruins of the gates to this facility still stand in Winslow Township.

It would seem that the State also saw the therapeutic benefits of the beautiful land because the Ancora State Psychiatric Hospital opened its doors on April 4, 1955 and admitted its first clients. Ancora's symbol was an anchor, which adorned the sign, walls, and even the carpets of the hospital. It represented a mooring for those dealing with mental illnesses. The hospital even earned the nickname "The House of Hope" because of the good that was accomplished in its first years after opening.

Though Ancora was initially seen as a shining beacon of hope for those who could now receive desperately needed psychiatric therapy, the stigma surrounding mental illness bred countless urban legends. One of the most infamous legends surrounding Ancora is that the land off the main campus, which is now the Veteran's Haven, was once a village where patients lived unattended by medical professionals. This unfortunate rumor seems to have stemmed from the negative stigmas that surround mental illness and the idea that psychiatric patients were sent to live there so they would be separated from populated areas.

The legend also claims that the village was eventually abandoned due to numerous murderers perpetrated by patients against each other. This version of the village's history could not be further from the truth. The village was actually home to employees of the hospital. It stood for 45 years and offered housing to one hundred families. Housing was provided for dedicated doctors, administrators, and aides and their families so employees could easily get to the grounds quickly should an emergency arise. It is a mystery how this innocent, even benevolent truth morphed into terrifying rumor.

The children who lived in the village with their families are now adults and look back fondly on their time spent living in the village. There was a reunion held for these “Ancora kids” in September of 2012. Former residents of this village claim that living there was never seen as frightening or negative in their eyes. Holidays and barbecues were spent with the children of the now defunct youth ward of the hospital. Morgan Carney, a former resident, describes her experience living in the village:

“The patients were our neighbors in many ways. We swam, played and watched little league games, played tennis and basketball, explored, rode our bikes and hung out in general, often on the hospital grounds. We got to know different patients.”

Modern legal and safety considerations preclude allowing people on the grounds of the hospital who are not patients or staff. But even brief views of the history of Ancora reveal a beautiful community that was not affected by the fear or stereotypes that surround mental illness. It also reveals a truth that contradicts the rumors and ghost stories which pervade discussions of Ancora Psychiatric Hospital.

## A Lighthouse Misplaced

By *Samantha Levine*

On February 22nd, 2014 the sun was shining so brightly that it looked like a giant, neon yellow ball in the sky. It was the first day in a long time that the sun decided to show itself. The second I stepped outside of my apartment, I squinted due to its intense glow, and quickly felt its rays tingling on the surface of my skin, warming my entire body. This particular Saturday happened to be one of the warmest days during the bone-chilling winter of 2014, peaking at a high of 58 degrees. Realizing that this was a day where a winter jacket was unnecessary, Kaitlin Montague and I decided to take a trip to the Absecon Lighthouse. Neither of us are from South Jersey, so I met Katie at her apartment and we plugged the address into her iPhone GPS.

We turned left and right throughout many side streets in Galloway, finally reaching the White Horse Pike. The GPS instructed us to continue east bound toward Atlantic City. Knowing that Brigantine and Margate were close by, I became excited because the beaches adjacent to Atlantic City are breathtaking.

Katie and I discussed what the lighthouse might look like. We were patiently awaiting our arrival so we could put our toes in the sand and enjoy the beautiful views, accompanied with the abundant sunshine on this abnormally warm Saturday afternoon. The summertime reminiscing began. Talk of beaches, the ocean, water sports, vacations, dark tans, and summer fun commenced. Oh, how we wished that we could fast forward to July at that very moment.

As we traveled further down the White Horse Pike, we entered Atlantic City. I thought the GPS would tell us to turn left, toward Brigantine, or possibly right, toward Margate or Ventnor. Instead, the navigation system instructed us to continue straight, into the heart of the city. Katie and I both began to wonder where the GPS was taking us. Was the GPS providing us with bad directions? Did we plug the wrong address in? Both of us had an unsettling feeling in our stomachs at this moment, as we were just two women driving into a part of Atlantic City that was quite dilapidated.

We continued to follow the GPS directions, heading somewhat towards *Revel*, but far from the boardwalk and highly populated casinos. I locked Katie’s doors. We both giggled, out of fear and panic. The further the GPS instructed us, the more confused we became. We were not headed toward an area that appeared to be a beach. We began to ponder, was there even a lighthouse in Atlantic City? I began to look at the surrounding street signs for the next turn, and then, out of nowhere, I saw an immense tower that appeared to be a lighthouse. Seen from afar it was in fact the Absecon Lighthouse.

Our excitement was quickly quashed, as we made the final turn and approached the lighthouse. The enormous structure was sandwiched in between shabby and poorly maintained apartments, buildings, and condos. Immediately, we wondered if the trip was even worth the drive. The picturesque ocean-front lighthouse we had imagined was far from the structure we saw before us. Disappointed, we parked the car and began to walk toward the lighthouse.

The lighthouse had a small building attached to it, called the Keeper’s House. This building serves as a free museum for visitors. It consisted of three “rooms,” with open doorways separating the different displays. The first two rooms contained historical facts and images of the Absecon lighthouse. This

small, informative, and interesting museum was a fun way to learn about the lighthouse's past before ascending the structure itself.

After reading about the lighthouse's rich history, we entered the final room, the gift shop. Next to the shop, I noticed a further opening that led to a hallway with a door at the end, which was propped slightly open. It looked like a scene out of a horror movie. Wondering if this was the entrance to the lighthouse, Katie and I decided to walk towards the eerie door, one small step at a time.

## 228 Steps Later

*By Kaitlin Montague*

After walking towards the slightly creepy entrance to the lighthouse itself, Sam and I looked to our right at the sign which read, "\$7 to climb, \$5 for seniors 65+ to climb, \$4 for children to climb, \$3 for Atlantic City residents with ID to climb, active military and kids under 4 are free, and dogs are welcome!" So we turned around and headed towards the desk in the gift shop to purchase our tickets for the climb. Tickets in hand, we began our ascent up the 228 steps of the Absecon Lighthouse—the tallest lighthouse in New Jersey and the third tallest in the country. Once we climbed to step 34, the first landing, we quickly realized that a trip to the gym would be completely unnecessary because a total of 228 steps up and down would be considered a decent "leg day" workout. Together, we peered out of the window, set deep into the cement walls, staring east at the vast Atlantic Ocean.

A few landings later, we were standing in front of a window facing north, which gave us a perfect view of Brigantine. This view alone made me think the trip was worthwhile. The next landing came at step 72. This view was of the west side of the lighthouse—a parking garage, along with some decrepit homes and abandoned buildings. Clearly, this is the way Atlantic City attracts its visitors. Quickly after we left the west window, a celebration was in order at step 114. We were halfway to the top!

Advancing up the stairs, a bit more winded than we were a few landings before, at step 200, we were glancing out of the south window, studying the rows of casinos that line the boardwalk. Having the view

impeded by rooftops was a disappointment, but the sparkling ocean beyond along with the boardwalk gave the view a charming feel regardless of the abandoned buildings. As we continued our journey up the final 28 steps, chilling gusts of wind were spiraling down the lighthouse passage way and, unfortunately, we were in their way. Saturday, February 22, was one of the warmest days we've had all winter, but the breeze was still bone chilling at the beach.

When we tilted our heads upwards, the sunlight shone through the steel openings on the stairs, creating dancing circles printed across the cylindrical cement walls. We were almost at the top. A few steps later, we reached our destination—the top of the lighthouse where the First-Order Fresnel lens, made in Paris especially for Absecon Lighthouse, sits. This white light shines 19.5 nautical miles out to sea. The light itself resembles a giant disco ball glittering in the sunlight, spewing tiny rainbows around the small room in which it is mounted.

We stepped outside on the small, engaged ledge that surrounds the light, and came face to face with the bright sun and a clear blue sky. On the ride to the lighthouse, we pondered if the trip would be worth it, but the 228 steps were most definitely worth the beautiful scenery. Brigantine sat north, crystal clear, intertwining with the horizon where the ocean and the sky meet. Even the dingy buildings and ugly rooftops could not fatally flaw this breathtaking view.

The Absecon Lighthouse has been standing tall with impeccable posture for the last 157 years. Having undergone various renovations and restorations, the lighthouse remains in very good condition today. In 2001, the Keeper's House was opened to visitors as a museum of the lighthouse's history. It is well worth the visit—come and get your workout with a view!

## Day for the Dead

*By Erik Nelson*

I spent some time with the dead today. They didn't speak, but that doesn't mean they didn't have lessons to teach. It was a somber experience, visiting the four graveyards located within my hometown of Port Republic. There is a pervading silence in cemeteries that makes you more aware than ever of the everyday noises around you. The wind rustling fallen leaves, birds landing on twigs, the

muffled sound that snow flurries make as they softly alight on a tombstone, landing ever so gently as to not disturb the occupants.

My first visit was to the site of the Micajah Smith Meeting House. There is no longer any sign of the building; the only evidence of its existence is a fading historical signpost informing visitors that this is, indeed, the site of a chapel that was erected about 1800. What remains are the graves, the roughly 20 or so markers that acknowledge the presence of a community of families and friends who worked, lived and loved in this place nearly 200 years ago. It is a peaceful rest these folks have; situated atop a hillock, surrounded by trees, mere feet from Nacote Creek, the dead can't be seen from the road and are only rarely stumbled upon. You have to know where to find them.

I knew they were here. Twenty years of living in one town means exploring every inch of the woods, learning shortcuts and secrets paths, and daring to enter haunted dwellings of the long-deceased. This visit was different though. My purpose was not to prove bravery to my pals, but rather to learn about the lives of those who came before me, to think about who they were and what they were like, and even ponder the eternal fate of their souls. Other than myself, their only visitors in recent days seem to have been deer and other various woodland creatures—they left their marks with footprints and droppings. The bodies are guarded by flat stones protruding from the ground, stones that once held words that have long since become unreadable. Just as the person they were decays in the ground, so too does the last remnant of their earthly identity: a name and some numbers on a stone, worn away by years of wind and rain. Nature slowly reclaims what is hers. Two names, however, I could make out: James Bell and Rebecca Johnson, eternally lying side by side. I knew nothing else about them, but I wondered who they were, making up stories in my head of a tragic romance: Were they lovers, engaged to be married, whose passion was extinguished before it began by merciless Death? Maybe. But they didn't have much to say to me about their life, and I moved on, wondering if they were in another realm thinking about me, just as I in this one was thinking about them. Not far off, in an area surrounded by a rusted fence, lay Sarah and Micajah Smith, husband and wife. I jumped the

fence to get a closer look, to glean what information I could from their tombstones. The presence of the fence makes this area even more sacred, but I don't think the Smiths will be too upset about my intrusion. I think they'll appreciate someone taking the time to stop in and say hello, especially someone who's been here before and couldn't help being drawn back. I wonder if they remember my courageous nighttime forays into their burial ground, if they sit in heaven and laugh about boys who are terrified of some rotting bones and corroding stones. Sarah and Micajah were my last visit here. It was time to go. I took a last look at the graves and sent up a prayer, because I felt like I should. I walked out with a new appreciation for the lives that were lived and the bodies now at rest in the old secluded graveyard of Smith's Meeting House.

Across the road, not a hundred yards away, was my next destination. The cemetery at St. Paul's United Methodist Church is a place I am quite familiar with. On more than one occasion as a nine-year student of Port Republic Elementary I would stare out the classroom window as I zoned out of a teacher's lecture and wonder if the people in the graves didn't have it better than me right now. Outside of school, we would pedal our bikes through the graveyard, a shortcut to reach the soccer fields, racing in and out of headstones, avoiding them at all costs lest we incur the wrath of the dead. This burial ground is still in use; loved ones grieve the deaths of brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers during occasional funerals. But there is a section where the ground has remained untouched for years, where no flowers beautify tombstones and no mourning relatives come to visit, because there are no more relatives. It is here that I met a ninety-five year old man and an eleven year old girl, both who died in the same year, 1837. One lived a long, full life—the other's had hardly begun. In this area, the graves are somewhat sporadically arranged. The disorganization makes me think that the townspeople never expected to have this many dead and weren't really sure where to place their bodies. Among this jumble of tombstones I found a monument erected in honor of Captain Jason S. Lee, a thirty-one-year-old naval officer whose body is buried in the West Indies. He lived until 1855 and never made it home to his family. As I examined the names and dates on the grave markers, I noticed a number of names that are still, to this day, prominent

in South Jersey and Port Republic—Leeds, Sooy, Endicott, Adams—all dead and gone, their last names continuing to carry the legacy of their life.

The next stop on my itinerary was the burial ground at what once was Clark's Mills Meeting House, where fifteen people lie dead from the Revolutionary War era. Situated in an open field off of the main roads, surrounded by a deteriorating wooden fence and kept watch over by ancient oak trees, this place looks like it could very easily be a Hollywood movie set. But everything about it is very real, from the names and dates on the stones to the unexplainable feeling that this is not a place for foolishness, but a place for thought and remembrance. As I entered the cemetery, there was a split-second of absolute eeriness that I will try to explain. I looked at the tombstones, all standing straight up with the names of the buried placed prominently for all to view, and it seemed like they were looking back at me. Not the markers, but the people they represented. The men, women, and children, young and old, bruised and broken, just staring right through me, like soldiers at attention. It was only a second and then it was gone, but in that second everything seemed to stop and it was made painfully clear that the graveyard at Clark's Mills is a place where the dead are to be honored. An examination of the names and dates on tombstones showed me that nearly all of those buried here were members of the Clark family. In life, this was their meeting house; I guess it still is even in death. Three of the graves are eternal resting places for soldiers of the Revolutionary War—their sacrifice should never be forgotten. Mary Clark, whose marker is the first one a visitor would see, died on Christmas Eve at the age of sixty-seven. Another, who is only identified by the letters "T C" lived for seventy-one years, dying on the 31st of October, 1793. I left there thinking about the Clark family, hoping that they were as close in life as they are in death.

The small burial ground at the intersection of Pomona and East Moss Mill Roads was my final destination. The Boling Cemetery has an interesting history. Henry Boling, the family's patriarch, settled in Port Republic and soon owned significant portions of land upon which he raised an important and progressive family. The Bolings are remembered not only for settling and farming land in Port Republic (which certainly was not uncommon in South Jersey), but for succeeding despite intense racial discrimina-

tion. Although New Jersey is technically considered a "Northern" state, black people, especially in Henry Boling's day, were not exempt from vitriol attributed to the color of their skin. Still, the Bolings were able to become great contributors to their community, establishing the Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church when fierce racism led to their ostracism from white churches. In addition, the Bolings were also quite possibly "conductors" of the Underground Railroad. Now, members of the family are buried on the often ignored triangle where Pomona meets Moss Mill Road. The only name that can clearly be read is that of William Lee, a friend of the family and member of the 24th US Colored Troops, who died in August of 1895. Perhaps the Bolings wanted to be buried here, as a family, in the place where they lived and worked and worshipped. But there is the possibility that they were buried here because of their race. Regardless of when they died, how they lived, how they served, even in death they were separate from the whites. This graveyard serves as a reminder of the great shame of our nation: that we failed for so long to recognize the merit of a man simply because his skin was a different hue. William Lee and the Bolings fought for this country, and they worked hard to support their families and improve the lives of their loved ones. For that, they should never be forgotten.

This journey to familiar sites left me thinking very unfamiliar thoughts. I saw these places with new eyes and insight today, and it made me wonder about all the other things I take for granted and fail to notice, simply passing by without a second glance or lingering thought. At each stop, I desperately wished to know the stories of the people I was thinking about. I wanted to know how they died, but far more importantly, I wanted to know how they lived. As I was thinking about the dead, my mind came back to the living. My greatest realization today was that I need to appreciate the living more ... After all, they can't answer our questions when they're gone.

## Smarter Than the Storm

*Kirsten Corley*

**T**hink back to major events that altered history and changed the lives of many forever. If you could go back in time and warn people of what is to come, would you? And if you would, the better

question is would they listen? So often in society things do not change until something catastrophic happens and only then do people reflect, wondering “Had I done this differently; had I prepared better—maybe just maybe we could have avoided this.”

One surfer from Long Beach Island had a sixth sense about the storm later known as “Super Storm Sandy.” As an experienced surfer, Chris Huch knew how to predict the waves, and two weeks prior to Hurricane Sandy making landfall, he knew it would be bad. A week prior, he acted accordingly, taking everything out of his office and bringing it to his parent’s house who lived off the island. He urged everyone to do the same but few listened. “I knew what the historical flood levels were and I knew we were about to top them.”

His parents’ house had little damage compared to others in the area. Shingles came off the roof, a tree landed in the house, but everyone was safe and the 200-year old house was still standing. Huch made his way onto Long Beach Island before many others, “It was bad,” he said. But he was not prepared for the severity of how bad it really was. “Boats were in the road. Houses were washed out. Debris, sand and mud were everywhere.” His office was destroyed and the things that were not destroyed were overtaken by mold. As the weeks went by, “The streets were lined up with personal belongings, furniture, carpet, walls, personal belongings everything.”

Huch led an environmental cleanup that got everyone around the world involved. “This storm really showed who people were,” Huch recalled. Some people were garbage picking, taking valuables, while others came from out of state to help in any way they could. “The funding from the federal government has been too slow.” Huch still has friends who are not in their homes and who may never be again. The scariest part is that people who have come back think this can’t happen again. “The tagline stronger than the storm was the worst thing to come out of this because we weren’t stronger than the storm. We should be adapting and trying to be smarter than the next storm,” he said. Although Sandy has been called a 100-year storm, people should be acting as though the next one was coming soon.

As I drive along Long Beach Island or run from one side of the island to the other, I remember what the streets looked like immediately after the storm.

My heart still hurts for those who have abandoned their houses, wondering where they are now and what they lost during this ordeal. There are still businesses like Joey’s pizza, though the original building is destroyed. O’Maley’s pizza is being run out of the bagel shop next door. While we have come together as a community to rise above this, there is one lesson we should take away—and people have taken away as more and more houses are built higher now—mother nature is stronger than all of us. Huch concluded with “We took pride in going back, but we are doing the same things that got us in trouble the last time.”

## They Come from Miles Around... To Ride in Our Arenas

*Lauren Bork*

On a cold, rainy day, I drove across South Jersey to meet with Flossie Ale at the Dream Park of New Jersey. I pulled in through the iron gates and drove around to the front of the enormous indoor riding arena. I walked through the glass doors and shook the rain off my jacket. It was bright and airy inside. Horses were swirling around the arena and there were people watching them in the stands. I turned right, walking past the show office where registration at the shows takes place and walked into the main office where Flossie sat at her desk.

Flossie Ale is the administrator and director of operations at the Dream Park of New Jersey, a relatively new equestrian facility located at the foot of the Commodore Barry Bridge in Logan Township, Gloucester County. The park was first opened in 2008 and Flossie started in her position in July of 2012. She has been involved with horses her whole life. Currently, she also manages a show barn at home for her son Brian Ale, who is a leading trainer in the American Quarter Horse arena.

The Dream Park website, [dreamparknj.com](http://dreamparknj.com), explains the history of the land upon which the facility sits:

“The land on which this park is constructed was slated in 2000 by the Army Corps of Engineers to be a dredge spoil dumping site, but the Gloucester County Board of Freeholders felt strongly that there was a need for parkland in this area of the county, and a need for a world-class equestrian facility in our

region. Today we are proud to call this location home to the Gloucester County Dream Park.”

According to Flossie, “There is no other facility of this kind in New Jersey.” Before it was built, the majority of the higher level horse shows for registered breeds were held in the North and Central parts of the state and many were also held at the Gloucester County 4-H Fairgrounds in Mullica Hill. Since its opening in 2008, the amenities at the Dream Park have drawn shows from all over the state and even some from out of state. The main indoor arena, which is where the majority of the showing takes place, is 300 by 150 feet. It is climate controlled and has large fans that run during the summer months. “In July and August, it can get up to 90 degrees in there, but the fans keep it around 75 or 80,” Flossie said.

The park also has a second indoor riding arena. It is a small clear-span building and it is commonly referred to as the bubble. Its roof is white plastic and it can be seen glowing in the night sky from the nearby Commodore Barry Bridge when the lights are on. There are five additional large outdoor riding arenas that can be rented along with the main arena.

There are two barns that are located right next to the main indoor arena. They contain a total of 238 stalls. They are portable stalls made of metal and plastic, so they can easily be removed and replaced. The barns have roll-down fabric sides that shield the horses from the wind and rain when they are down and can be pulled up to allow the summer breeze to sweep through.

Behind the barns is a large camping area with plenty of electric and water hook ups for RVs and campers. There is a large bathhouse (that was added several years after the park was built) and a playground for children.

This facility has brought in many different breed associations and now about 22 horse events are held there each year. Breed organizations that have annual shows including Paints, Appaloosas, Quarter Horses, Paso Finos, Morgans, and Arabians. Some hunter jumper shows and reining shows are held there, as well. The Appaloosa Nationals are actually relocating to the Dream Park this year from Pennsylvania.

Currently, the horse events that are held at the park are mostly breed shows. There are very few open shows and no 4-H shows that are held there. Flossie said, “My hope for the future is to get more

open shows into the Dream Park. I want to make it affordable so that those people can show here as well.” Rodeos are also held on the grounds each month which draw hundreds of spectators. During the winter months, Dog Agility events are also held in the indoor arena.

Attached to the main arena is a large multipurpose room that has had many different uses. Many times it is used for additional stalls when the main barns fill. It has been home to weddings, birthday parties, and banquets.

When the main equine facility was built by the county, there was also a 40 stall boarding barn built a short distance away from the show area. There were also shed rows built with stalls for an additional 28 horses. “There were only five horses boarded a year and a half ago when I started. We lowered the prices to make them competitive in the region and now we have 48,” Flossie explained. The boarders have access to all of the amenities on the property including the main arena as long as an event is not taking place.

Flossie said, “For the breed shows, our numbers have gotten bigger. I think it can still improve. The bad state of the economy has kept people close to home. I think this has actually helped the numbers because people are staying in New Jersey instead of traveling out of state to bigger shows.” The Dream Park is a one of a kind facility that is an asset to South Jersey. Business is booming. Hopefully this state-of-the-art equestrian facility will continue to help the horse show industry grow back to what it once was in New Jersey. (Interview conducted February 19, 2014.)

Source Cited:

<http://www.dreamparknj.com/about-dream-park/about-the-dream-park.html>

## When a Grave Becomes a Movie Theatre

By *Eddie Horan*

If ever you find yourself driving on Route 1 South in New Brunswick; if ever you spot the Loews movie theatre—a long, gray building with red accenting—on this road; if ever you find yourself anywhere in or near New Brunswick: remember Mary Ellis, the woman whose grave is an anomaly in the

surface of the Loews parking lot—a seven-by-nine-foot plot of land jutting six feet above the rest of the parking lot, topped with an iron gate and—yes, there it is!—an old tombstone. Remember Mary Ellis.

Born in 1750 and died in 1828, Ellis came to New Brunswick to live with a younger sister, or so the version of the legend I learned as a teen goes. Shortly upon arriving in New Brunswick, she met a man—a sea captain—who charmed her and with whom she fell madly in love. The sea captain, however, had to sail away on business down the Raritan River. Before he left, he promised Ellis marriage and left her his horse to look after.

Daily, legend has it, Ellis rode her lover's horse from her sister's farm to the bank of the river, waiting for her lover, desiring his warm embrace; daily, Ellis left disappointed when her lover did not return. She didn't give up hope, however; in fact, she invested her entire life in the anticipated arrival of her lover: she bought her own plot of land overlooking the river so that she could be even closer to where her lover would return. He never came, though, and Ellis died a spinster—old and lonely. She was buried on her land near the river.

During the twentieth century, or perhaps earlier, Ellis's land was acquired as the location of the Route 1 Flea Market, and when the farmhouse was razed and the trees were leveled, Ellis's grave could not be exhumed, so it was left there, at this point only three or four feet above the rest of the lot, according to *Weird New Jersey*. Years later, when the flea market became the movie theatre, the parking lot was regraded, creating the difference of six feet that visitors see today.

On a windy day in March 2014, for the first time in four years, I took a drive up to North Brunswick to visit Mary Ellis once again. With The Beatles' "Two of Us" playing softly from my car stereo—an ironic song, given Ellis's heartbreak—I drove behind the theatre, ignoring the temporary traffic cones discouraging traffic along this path, approaching the strange concrete block rising up from the sea of tarmac. Some place to spend eternity, I thought sarcastically—or sardonically, I suppose—as I examined my surroundings. I tried to imagine the farmhouse in which Mary Ellis had once lived, surrounded by vast fields edged by thick woods growing up to the cliff above the river. It must have been beautiful then, I supposed,

but geez, what a place to spend eternity now. The sun reflected off the tarmac; that was pleasant, but the sounds of cars, trucks, and the occasional motorcycle zipping by on Route 1 overruled the pleasant warmth and created a grave far different from those of my ancestors, nestled in grass, neighbored among relatives, shaded by old oaks. All Mary Ellis has in the way of landscaping, if one does not count concrete and tarmac, is a wimpy Bradford pear tree, which promises a foul stench of fish when it blooms early every spring.

Climbing the dark grey landscaping blocks, watching my footing carefully, I made my way to the top of the plot. Just bones now, I thought, looking down at the patch of weeds under which a woman—and, as legend has it, her lover's horse as well—was buried, destined to become a famous mark of North Jersey by a series of historical accidents and land developments. I saw the broken remains of a vase—a vase that I had left there with flowers from my own garden nearly four years earlier.

I thought about this scene, this vast black nothingness with white lines, the utter lack of majestic trees, the sounds and smells of nearby traffic, the vandalism. I considered the circumstances under which Mary Ellis died—alone and heartbroken—and I couldn't help but feel bad for this woman, though she had died nearly two centuries earlier. I pitied her. I pitied Mary Ellis. I pitied her for her heartbreak. I pitied her for her rotten, awkward grave, covered with nothing but weeds. I pitied her for the obnoxious sounds of motorists and the stench of the tree beside her plot. I pitied her for her lack of peace and privacy—there I was, after all, standing above her—which her earthly remains will likely face until the end of time.

Most of all, I pitied her because there remains no one who knows just who she was; we know only of her heartbreak and her despair—no more. We know not what she looked like, what she liked to do with her time, what she thought about when she wasn't thinking of her lover. In short, she is no more than a sight to be seen and a symbol of the heartbroken—the deserted.

Still, if ever you find yourself in the area, stop by Mary Ellis's grave. Contemplate her death; contemplate your own mortality. Close your eyes; imagine the beauty of her grave in the past. Open your eyes;

remember the ugliness of her grave in the present. But most important of all, think of Mary Ellis not as just the resident of a creepy landmark of New Jersey, but as a person—a person who once had hopes and dreams and feelings. Visit Mary Ellis, but respect her, and listen carefully: you might just hear the rhythm of her horse's hooves along the Raritan or the sighing of her heart, mourning another day without her love.

## Chilling at the Flyers' Practice in Voorhees Skatezone

By *Carmen Capoferri*

Though it might not be obvious to area outsiders, the major Philadelphia-based sports teams have a large influence on South Jersey sports culture. From the perspective of a South Jersey resident, it is apparent that the big-market Philadelphia sports teams draw many of their fans from South Jersey, as evidenced by how mention of recent happenings in the Philadelphia sports landscape permeate local newspapers, television, and everyday chatter. This loving relationship that South Jersey has built with the Philadelphia sports organizations extends beyond fan support, and in many cases, is reciprocated by the owners, management, and players from these teams. Oftentimes these people take up residence in South Jersey during their seasons, and occasionally some decide to build permanent homes in the area after their careers come to an end.

A clear indication of the supportive bond between South Jersey and Philadelphia teams are these organizations' choices to hold certain events within South Jersey that are easily accessible for fans to take part in. The National Hockey League team the Philadelphia Flyers hold practices out of the Flyers Skate Zone in Voorhees, NJ that are free for the public to attend. As a Flyers fan myself, being able to see my favorite players practice at the expense of a measly twenty minute drive to their facility in Voorhees is an opportunity that always proves too good to pass up. My most recent chance to catch the Flyers came because of the extended break that the NHL entered as the result of its participation in this year's Winter Olympics. Because of this, the Flyers were holding practices every day to prepare their players for their upcoming games leading into the playoffs.

As soon as I entered the facility, from the front doors I could make out the players standing on the ice rink huddled around their coach receiving instruction about what was expected from them in the practice to follow. At this moment, I experienced the same bewilderment that I felt every other time I attended a Flyers' practice. This stemmed from the realization that I could simply walk over to the practice rink, unimpeded, and watch these multi-million dollar, world-class athletes practice for free. Adding to my astonishment was the fact that on this day, there were very few fans in the arena, meaning that I could stand as close to the ice as possible. The only thing separating me from the players and coaches were the thin plexiglass panels that surrounded the ice. From my vantage point, the speed and skills of these players were even more noticeable compared to what is seen on television, which fails to completely capture the subtle plays and decisions that these players make on the ice which set them apart as the best players in the world. Television broadcasts also fail to represent the sounds of the game, from the crisp hiss of a puck as it skips across the ice, to the heavy thud of a slap shot or a body check when they connect with the glass boards, which seem especially impactful when all of this is occurring just inches away from your face. Typically, seats this good at NHL games cost upwards of one hundred dollars. Once again, I would like to stress that access to these practices is free.

I also had the good fortune to be in attendance on a day when the practice was centered on full-ice scrimmages. On some practice days, the coaches will focus on skating or conditioning drills. While it is still interesting to see the players work on fine-tuning their skills, it is always much more exciting to watch the players go at it head-to-head in realistic game situations. A scuffle even broke out between two players, which is a rare occurrence at these practices. From a fan's perspective, this just added to the overall experience, though I am sure the coaching staff was not too thrilled by the hostility these teammates showed toward each other.

During the season, all Flyers' practices held at the Voorhees Skatezone are open to the public. If you are a hockey fan or even just a sports fan that appreciates watching athletes perform at the highest level, I highly recommend finding time to attend a Flyers' practice.

## A Personal History of Willingboro, New Jersey

By Allison Shegda

My grandmother lives in Willingboro, New Jersey, and has for as long as I can remember. I wanted to ask her about the town: what it was like when she first moved here, what it is like now, and her thoughts and feelings about it. I interviewed her to learn more about Willingboro and her experiences there.

Willingboro Township was established in the 1950s, but its name has changed several times since. The original name was Wellingborough, but in 1959, it was renamed Levittown after William Levitt, who developed the area by building schools and moderate income housing. The name reverted to Willingboro in 1968 due to the confusion with the nearby Levittown, Pennsylvania. My grandmother moved to Willingboro in February of 1959 from northeast Philadelphia because her landlady decided she no longer wanted to rent her house out. My grandmother says that she only paid \$1500 for the house—a \$500 down payment and \$101 per month for the mortgage. She has now lived in that house for 55 years.

When she first moved there, most of the residents were young couples and service people back from World War II. Coming from Philadelphia to Willingboro seemed to her “like coming from the city to the country”—there were many parks, each with its own swimming pool; what is now a major highway in the area, Route 130, was only a two-lane road; and there was apparently only one traffic light from the bridge to Philadelphia all the way into Burlington County. However, there were no trees, as they had been cut down to build the town, and hadn’t yet grown back. She says that now, however, there are too many trees and the township has had to cut some down. Back when Willingboro was new, it did not have its own shopping center, but it did provide free public transportation to the closest shopping center in Burlington City. Later on, Willingboro Plaza was built, which had all kinds of stores—the first big store was Sears, then Pomeroy’s and Boscov’s—and most places were within walking distance. It was also a very safe community: she never felt scared of walking anywhere.

Willingboro has changed in several ways since my grandmother moved there. Early on, African Americans could not buy homes in Willingboro, and when they were able to, many of the previous residents left—a phenomenon called white flight. My grandmother remained because she enjoys the diversity of the town. “We miss out when we don’t get to know other cultures,” she says. Also, she grew up in a multi-cultural household of Irish and Mexican-Americans. Her husband—my grandfather—was Ukrainian. There was still prejudice in the town, unfortunately. She recalled that when Willingboro resident Carl Lewis won four gold medals in the 1984 Olympics—he did not get much publicity in the local papers.

Overall, my grandmother says that Willingboro was and still is a family community. Her neighbors are very friendly and helpful. Although the practice of neighbors having lunch at each other’s houses to get to know each other is no longer prevalent, there are still strong community ties. The younger people in her area like to have block parties, and there are many church and rotary groups that hold community events.

## “Piney Power”

By Lauren Goodfellow

On one of the first warm Sunday afternoons in March, my family and I drove to the Kerri Brooke Banquet Hall in Hammonton, New Jersey for the annual *Lines on the Pines* gathering. We pulled into the crowded parking lot and drove past many vehicles with bumper stickers proclaiming their “Piney Power!” and made our way inside to find a packed room full of uniquely piney writers, historians, artists, and purveyors of homemade goods. For those unfamiliar with the piney culture, it evolved and still flourishes in the Pine Barrens of New Jersey. It is comprised of all types of woodsy New Jersey folk, young and old. The word “piney” is sometimes used in a derogatory sense as Pineys are sometimes thought of as uneducated “hillbillies,” but a short visit with any self-proclaimed Piney demonstrates that nothing could be further from the truth and the label is worn with pride and enthusiasm. Pineys are not only well educated about their history, but also talented in their crafts, clever in their storytelling, and amazingly kind.

Our first stop in the banquet room, which smelled

comfortingly like my grandmother's home, was the display table of two authors who wrote New Jersey historical fiction together named John Calu and Dave Hart. After briefly describing some of their books to me, which they claim to be something like the "Jersey Hardy Boys," they asked me what brought me to *Lines on the Pines* and what I liked to read. I answered that I was a college student and that Chuck Palahniuk was a favorite author of mine. One of the men gave a knowing chuckle, clearly familiar with stereotypically popular college authors, and wrote down his personal e-mail address. He told me, "If you ever need help editing or want any constructive criticism, feel free to e-mail me." I was pleasantly surprised by the man's kindness. I have attended many various conventions in New Jersey and have never been offered such help and friendliness from someone without first making a purchase. It was clear from that point on that most of the vendors at this particular event were more interested in making friends and conversation than money. I slipped the authors' card into my purse, thanked them and moved on through the hall.

As we walked towards the back of the room, some very beautiful pencil drawings of the Jersey Devil caught my eye. I excitedly made my way towards them until I also caught sight of the price tags which quickly changed my direction to the booth next door which sold handmade soaps under the name "Tawes Creek Soap Company." A friendly woman approached me and started explaining some of her products to me, which included a unique and wonderfully helpful product called "Flip Flop Healer" for anyone who has ever brought dry, sore feet home from the beach. She eventually displayed a bar called "Mullica River" and assured me, "I know it sounds bad being called 'Mullica River' but I promise it smells really good," and it did, I assure you.

My favorite part of my day at *Lines on the Pines* was meeting the women of the South Jersey Guild of Spinners and Handweavers. I stopped at their table and watched three women simultaneously spin yarn and was instantly fascinated as I had always wondered how yarn was made. The women were quick-witted and funny as they told me their stories of how they got started in yarn-spinning. The oldest member of the group informed me that not only did she spin yarn, but she raised and sheered the sheep from which she got the wool. I was kindly invited to a guild meet-

ing and promised I would be taught to spin yarn if I was ever interested. Before ending our day at *Lines on the Pines*, we visited many more booths and were welcomed to join historical societies, treated to local stories, and were even given a brief lesson on how to care for carnivorous plants; we had new experiences in a friendly and accepting atmosphere. It was clear to all in attendance why so many wear their "Piney Power!" badges with pride.

## Visit to Slabtown Road, NJ

By Taylor Coyle

When searching for "Slabtown Road, NJ" on Google, the first result is an article titled "Mysterious Lights of Slabtown Road / Weird NJ." If you're a South Jersey Native like me, the idea of South Jersey folklore probably tickles you pink, and you would have clicked this link, too.

This is not to say that you would be interested in actually visiting a place like Slabtown Road—a place surrounded by woods and swampland that is supposedly haunted, complete with footsteps that follow you on both sides and unidentified white lights that shine on the trees. Every legend has some truth and some fabrication attached to it. Call me crazy, but I felt the need to see the events that supposedly occur on Slabtown Road for myself. So, one frozen evening in February, I went.

I didn't go alone, of course. I brought a big, strong man with me in case I needed to fend off ghouls, goblins, and ghosts, or in our case, the people that lived on the road. What the online articles won't tell you is that Slabtown Road is not completely abandoned and isolated as one would think. Located in Salem County off Route 40 in Woodstown, there are plenty of houses scattered in the woods. These houses were lit up to indicate that people still live there. Obviously we stayed off their property, but it was hard to ignore the fact that those nearby houses lessened the possibility of an authentic experience of the sights and sounds on this road.

The main attraction on this road is the bridge that crosses Salem River. Legend has it that if you head from this bridge toward Route 40, you will hear the footsteps and see the lights. Slabtown Lake is right next to this bridge. There is a man-made waterfall by the bridge that is so deafening I doubt an observer

would be able to hear footsteps. I'm not sure where that legend stems from, especially considering I made this journey when there was snow on the ground and there should have been loud crunching accompanying these footsteps, although I suppose if the footsteps are of supernatural origin, they could sound however they wanted. I didn't hear anything—even when I moved away from the waterfall so that it was only a distant sound.

Also, could we not attribute the lights to bioluminescence? It is a well-known fact that South Jersey is full of swampland. Citizens have claimed to witness “Devil's Fire,” also known as “foxfire,” over the years. This natural phenomenon is the result of swamp wood decaying: a strange, greenish glow produced by the fungi in the wood. This glowing is known as “bioluminescence.” The easiest way to relate to this is to think about the way fireflies light up the night sky. The light comes from within the living organism. The description on the *WeirdNJ* website states, “lights appear in the trees . . . and on the grass, but not in midair.” If the lights are only present on living organisms, it is certainly possible that the explanation for these lights can be attributed to the glow of foxfire.

But the legends say the lights are a white color, not green, like foxfire. To this, I say bioluminescence is not always green in color. Bioluminescence that takes place in the ocean is often light blue, sometimes so light that it appears white. Why this particular kind of life would be present in South Jersey, I am not sure. However, it certainly seems like the most logical explanation. Perhaps someone witnessed this phenomenon while walking down Slabtown Road on a hot, moist summer night and, perplexed, shared his or her experience with another local. I'm sure the rumors spiraled from there.

I thought about all of these ideas while exploring the road. I walked one way, then the other, tried turning off the flashlight, tried walking in the woods instead of next to them, all to no avail. I was mostly put off by the fact that the waterfall was so loud.

My bodyguard and I went too far into the swamps when we tried moving farther into the woods. As we turned around to call it a night and return to the car, I saw a faint glow in the distance and stopped moving. I wanted to focus on it better to be sure I was actually seeing something, not just a corner-of-the-eye phantom.

“What is it?” he asked.

“I thought I saw something,” I told him.

He watched my face to see which direction I was looking in, peered farther into the woods, then looked back at me. “I think you just want to see something,” he said.

Was he right? Of course. I definitely wanted there to be some kind of truth to the rumors about Slabtown Road, NJ. The fact was, we were walking around on a cold winter night when everything, including Slabtown Lake and the surrounding swamps, was snow-covered. I realized a few hours later that a tall tree branch had probably swayed in the wind, causing a ray of moonlight to reflect off the snow.

Quite honestly, however, it was already so cold that I can't recall if there was a lick of wind whipping around that night.

## The Bridge to Nowhere

By *Tricia Frechette*

It was here again, the best two days of the week when I could do whatever I wanted within the boundaries of a teenage lifestyle—no license and a part-time minimum wage budget. This weekend seemed doomed to be just another in a long line of weekends, one that would flash by quicker than light itself. Usually, I was content with such thoughts, but the familiarity of the buzzing voices, the smell of Windex, and fried food that filled the lunchroom reeked of boredom.

I sat in my usual seat at the lunch table next to my friend who had an odd smirk on her face when she abruptly asked, “Have you ever heard of The Bridge to Nowhere?” Puzzled, I answered “no” and anticipated a story about some weird, far off place that she read about in a book. But this was not the case.

Later on that evening, after dinner, a car pulled up my driveway. I grabbed my winter coat and piled into the car with my friends. A rainy mist started to sprinkle just as the sun was setting behind the Pine Barrens, and we drove off onto route 72 in Manahawkin towards Hilliard Boulevard. In the car, we shared our suspicions about this “Bridge to Nowhere” and its existence. Our one friend had lived here all her life, never once hearing of such an obscure place, especially here, in Manahawkin. The mastermind of this adventure and our older friend who was driving,

had only passed by the secret dirt road but had never dared to venture it alone. We were instructed to keep our eyes peeled for the graveled, earthy road that would appear on the left.

Tucked between the trees and pines, a sandy path suddenly emerged through the dark shadows. As we turned slowly onto the road, the car's high beams illuminated daunting potholes that countered our every maneuver, slowing our speed to 10 mph, at most. As we cautiously progressed, telephone poles marked our success about every 30 yards or so. Finally, after two miles of anticipation, a small, deserted wooden bridge loomed at the end of the dirt road. Parking at the foot of the bridge, we all sat quietly in the humming car. The headlights of the car beamed forward ominously, illuminating the way, but we hesitated. It was just a bridge; we could have easily driven across safely, but we didn't. Something prevented us from driving to the other side.

Disorientated by the eeriness and the fact that we could be trespassing, we glared at each other hesitantly for a moment. Our curiosity was far too powerful, private property or not; we needed to know where the bridge would lead us. My friend and I were voted out of the car like an episode of *Survivor*, so we braced ourselves and stepped out into the cold. Walking close together toward the dark wooden bridge, the smell of salty hard-boiled eggs seeped from the marshy water. Shaking mostly from the freezing weather, I peered over the narrow bridge. To the side a two foot high wooden fence provided a barrier from a ten foot fall into the dark lagoon that flowed under the arch. I quickly glanced outwards and over the lagoon to see that the marsh met a second bridge footing, and that the telephone poles continued on into the marsh about a hundred yards towards the open bay, and then without reason, stopped.

This bridge, if it were whole again as we assumed it once was, led to absolutely, and evidently, nowhere. My friend and I retreated briskly back to the car with this evidence, but before we reached the car my friend gasped and stood still. I quickly followed her eyes and off to the left side I saw what was a small gray cement rectangle engraved with the name Jennifer. We traded flummoxed expressions, but eeriness soon crept up our backs leaving no time for further comment. We

carried our suspicions into the car.

Given the name of the bridge, we should have known what to expect, but more meaningful was the question, why? Nobody knew. As time passed, knowledge of the place quickly spread, especially among the younger crowd. Myths surrounding the bridge and the girl's memorial started to snowball. Fellow cohorts described ghostly sightings of a girl and unexplained noises at the site. My friend and I never experienced such events, but the mysteriousness of the area was haunting.

After some time, the myth of the gravesite was partially dispelled by elders who had known Jennifer who had died in a fatal car accident by the marsh. Later, local newspapers reported acts of vandalism, and graffiti marked the bridge's sides. Shortly afterwards it was purposely set on fire, twice. The damage caused half of the bridge to collapse, and I started to see irony in the situation. Did other visitors feel the same about crossing this bridge? Were they too defeated by some stirring ache that told them to stay back? At one time the bridge had been whole, allowing access to the other side, but now it was disconnected from the main road, leaving the other half standing as a sign that it was never meant to be crossed. The township has surprisingly left the bridge alone and instead paved the once narrow and dangerous road.

Five years have passed since my first encounter with The Bridge to Nowhere and after a brief revisit, my questions remain the same. Determined to find some historical background, I spoke with the local librarian and tried digging up articles or references about the notorious bridge; nothing came up. The librarian had also visited the site before it was vandalized, but her experience was all she could offer like the rest of the locals. She proposed that the bridge may have been built in order to install the telephone poles on the other side of the marsh, which was the common theory. But even that doesn't suggest why the telephone polls would lead onto a deserted marshy island in the bay. As the Bridge to Nowhere ebbs each year, so will its myths and curiosity, ultimately evolving into the uncertain, Road to Nowhere.

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*Sandy Shorts* is the occasional newsletter of the South Jersey Culture & History Center, based at Stockton College.

For more information about the Center, see [blogs.stockton.edu/sjchc/](http://blogs.stockton.edu/sjchc/) or contact the director, [Thomas.Kinsella@stockton.edu](mailto:Thomas.Kinsella@stockton.edu).