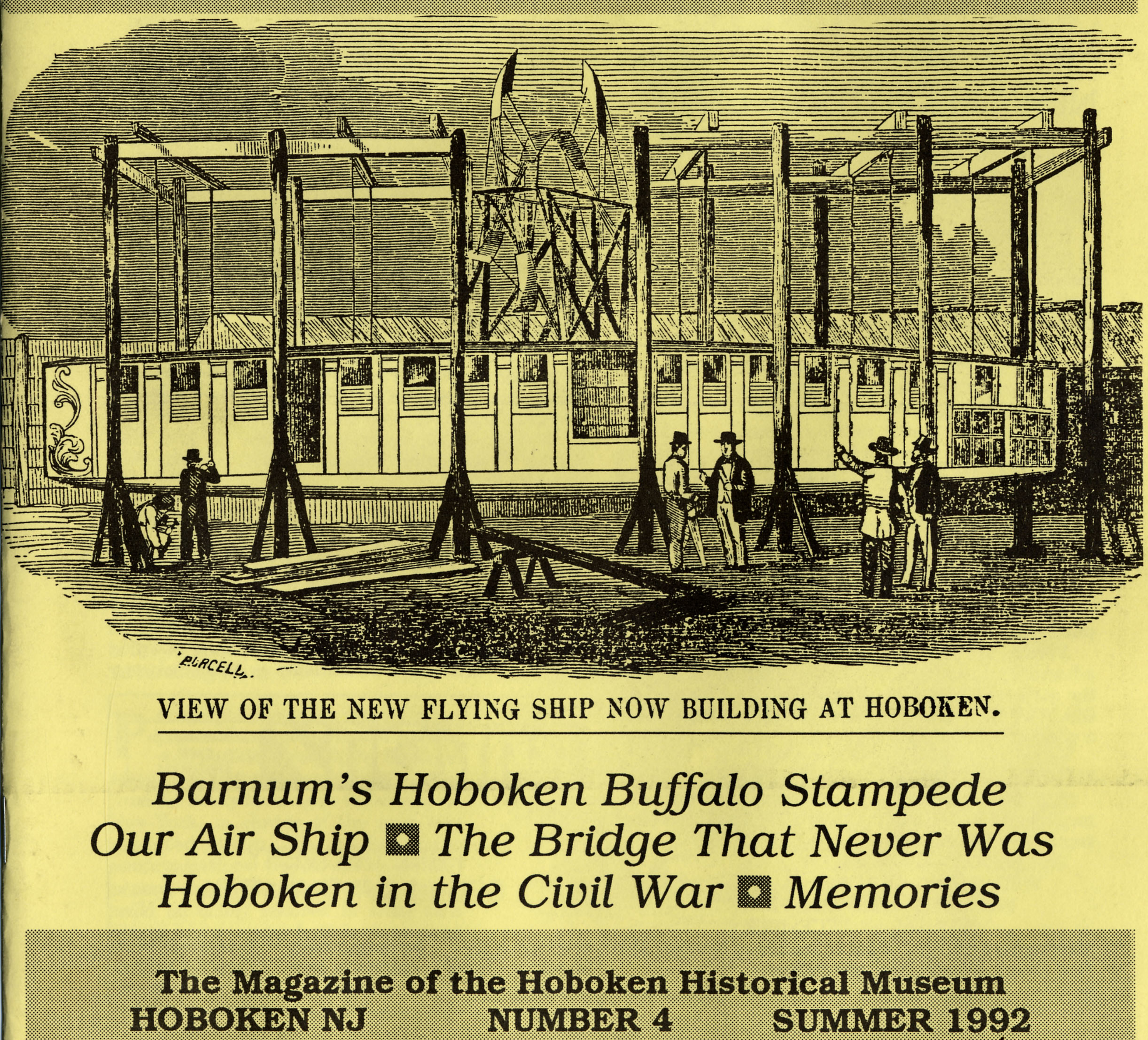
# HOBOKEN HISTORY




VIEW OF THE NEW FLYING SHIP NOW BUILDING AT HOBOKEN.

*Barnum's Hoboken Buffalo Stampede*
*Our Air Ship ◘ The Bridge That Never Was*
*Hoboken in the Civil War ◘ Memories*

**The Magazine of the Hoboken Historical Museum**
**HOBOKEN NJ NUMBER 4 SUMMER 1992**

# HOBOKEN HISTORY

Published by the Hoboken Historical Museum
President: John De Palma
Museum Founder: Jim Hans

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PO Box 707, Hoboken NJ 07030


# MUSEUM NEWS

News of the Hoboken Historical Museum

## NEW TELEPHONE NUMBER

The Museum has a new telephone number. You can telephone the authentic, original, and one-and-only Hoboken Historical Museum on its new authentic, original, and one-and-only telephone number! It's: (201) 656-2240.

If you have a "touch-tone" phone, press button "2" to hear a recorded message about Museum exhibits, meetings, and other activities. Then, to leave your message or inquiry, wait for an electronic beep and speak. We'll call you back.

If you have an old-style "pulse" phone, you won't be able to get the recorded message but can leave one of your own after you hear the beep.

*Hoboken History* can be reached at (201) 656-5278.

## FOR YOUR CALENDAR:

**TWO FLEA MARKETS**

Flea markets sponsored by the Museum will take place in Church Square Park on:

Saturday, September 19 (Raindate: Sunday 20th)
Saturday, October 3 (Raindate: Sunday 4th).

Income from the flea markets will be devoted to our 1992-1993 architecture exhibit in City Hall.

Vendor spaces are $15 for those who register in advance and $20 for those who register on the day of the market. To obtain a vendor contract, phone (201) 656-2240, leave your name and complete address, and a contract will be mailed to you.

**FUTURE MEETINGS**

For the remainder of this year the business meetings of the Museum's Board will take place on the second Wednesday of each month:

WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 9
WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 14
WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 11
WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 9

Meetings are held at 7:30pm at Traders of Babylon, 259 First Street. All members are welcome.

## Waterfront Photographic Show in Liberty State Park

On display now through Labor Day, is a new exhibit titled "Ferry Terminals on the Jersey Side" co-produced by the Museum and the Hudson Waterfront Museum. The exhibit showcases seven ferry terminals on the New Jersey shore of the lower Hudson River. Included are the historic 1907 Erie-Lackawanna Hoboken terminal and the Lackawanna Terminal that once stood at 14th Street in Hoboken on the site of the former Bethlehem Steel Yard.

Displayed in the exhibit, which was organized by Hoboken Historical Museum curator Bob Foster, are photos of the sites as they are today, alongside long-ago views of the same locations as they appear on old picture post cards.

"Ferry Terminals on the Jersey Side" is on display from noon to 5 PM seven days a week in the restored landmark Jersey Central Rail Road Terminal Building in Liberty State Park, Jersey City. Admission is free and there is ample parking.

## Hoboken Photo Project

The Hoboken Photo Project will premiere its work at the River City Fair on September 12 and 13. The Photo Project, sponsored by the Museum, has been awarded funding by the New Jersey Council on the Arts and the Hudson County Division of Cultural & Heritage Affairs.

The aim of the grant is to support the creation of new photographs of Hoboken as viewed by contemporary photographers to supplement the the pictures of Hoboken that have been taken in the past.

We thank Administrator William La Rosa and Grants Coordinator Suzanne McKernan for their support.

## A Show Grant for 1992: Now You See It, Now You Don't

The Museum's annual November exhibit has run into a snag. The good news is that we were awarded

*Museum News continues on inside back cover*


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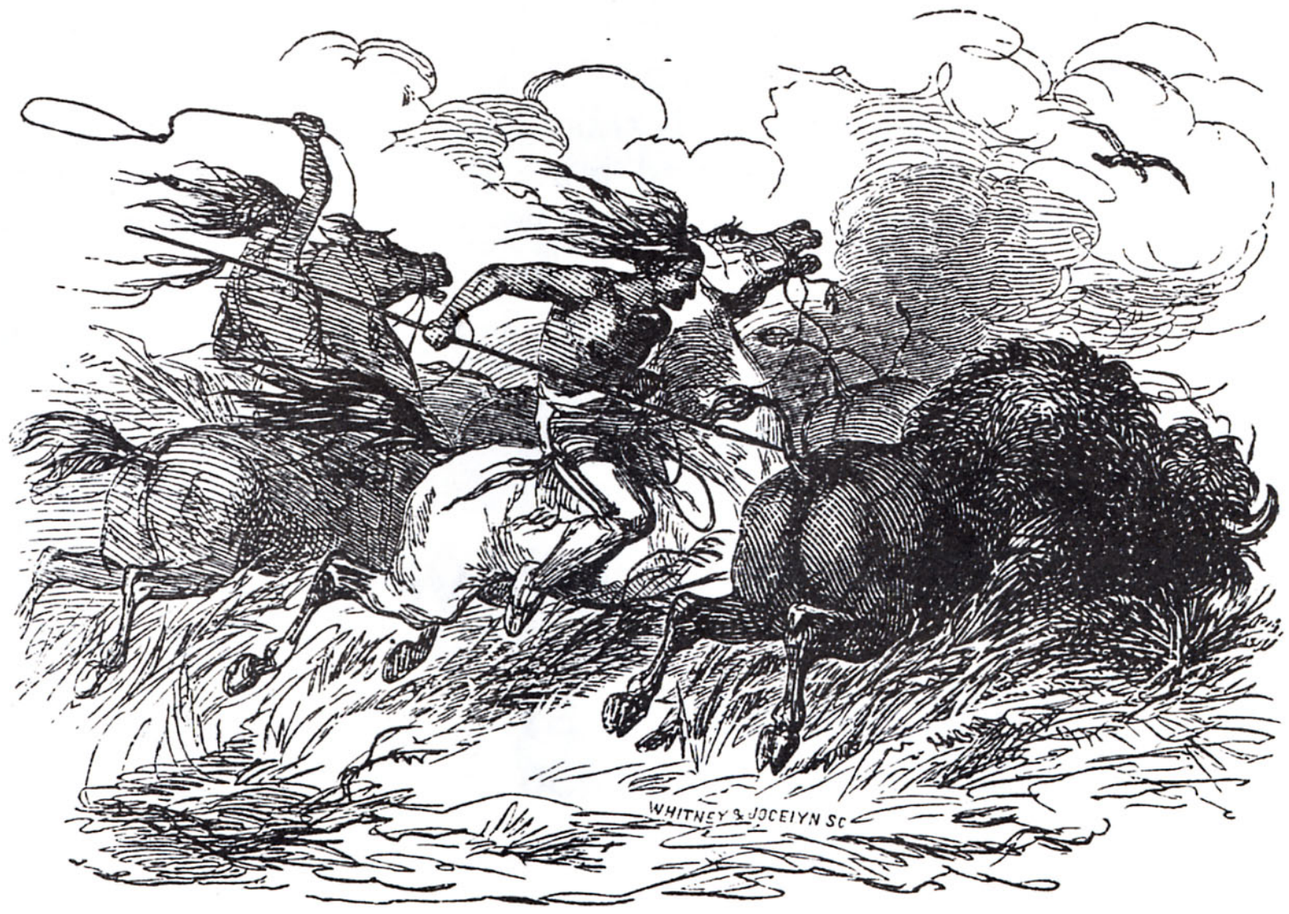
# *P.T. BARNUM'S*

# GREAT HOBOKEN BUFFALO STAMPEDE

**Phineas Taylor Barnum, (1810-1891), greatest of American showmen, was born in Bethel, Conn., and is renowned as the creator of the American circus. After his retirement in 1855 he served as mayor of Bridgeport, Ct. One of his greatest and cleverly profitable feats of showmanship was the "Buffalo hunt" he promoted in Hoboken in 1843. Admission was free but what Barnum did not publicize was that the round-trip ferryboat fare (12½ cents at the time) paid by the throngs who crossed the Hudson to Hoboken would go into Barnum's pocket. He had chartered all the boats and he would collect all the ferry receipts of the day.**
**Here, from Barnum's autobiography, *The Life of P.T. Barnum*, published in 1855 by Redfield, 110 Nassau Street, New York, is in Barnum's own words the story of the great Hoboken Buffalo Hunt (which turned into a stampede). Barnum was only 33 years old at the time, and it was one of his first feats of showmanship. The illustrations in this article are from the book.**

I attended the great Bunker Hill celebration, June 17, 1843, and heard Mr. [Daniel] Webster's oration. I found exhibiting near the monument, under an old canvas tent, a herd of calf buffaloes a year old. There were fifteen in number, and I purchased the lot for $700. I had an idea in my head which, if I could carry it out, would make the buffaloes a profitable investment and I was determined to try it. The animals were poor and remarkably docile, having been driven from the plains of the Great West. I had them brought to New-York, and placed in a farmer's barn in New-Jersey, near Hoboken. Mr. C.D. French, of whom I purchased them, understood throwing the lasso, and I hired him for $30 per month to take care of the buffaloes, until such time as I had matured my plans.

Paragraphs were soon started in the papers announcing that a herd of wild buffaloes, caught by the lasso when quite young, were now on their way from the Rocky Mountains to Europe, via New-York, in charge of the men who captured them. In a few days communications appeared in several papers, suggesting that if the buffaloes could be safely secured in some race course, and a regular buffalo chase given by their owners, showing the use of the lasso, etc., it would be a treat worth going many miles to see. One correspondent declared it would be worth a dollar to see it; another asserted that fifty thousand persons would gladly pay to witness it, etc. One suggested the Long Island Race Course; another thought a large plot of ground at Harlem, inclosed expressly for the purpose, would be better; and a third suggested Hoboken as just the place. In due time, the following advertisement



appeared in the public prints, and handbills and posters of the same purport, illustrated by the picture of wild buffaloes pursued by Indians on horseback, were simultaneously circulated, far and near, with a liberal hand:

**GRAND BUFFALO HUNT, FREE OF CHARGE.**

At Hoboken, on Thursday, August 31, at 3, 4, and 5 o'clock P.M.

☛ Mr. C.D.French, one of the most daring and experienced hunters of the West, has arrived thus far on his way to Europe, with a HERD OF BUFFALOES, captured by himself, near Santa Fé. He will exhibit the method of hunting the Wild Buffaloes, and throwing the lasso, by which the animals were captured in their most wild and untamed state. This is perhaps one of the most exciting and difficult feats that can be performed, requiring at the same time the most expert horsemanship and greatest skill and dexterity. Every man, woman and child can here witness *the wild sports of the Western prairies*, as the exhibition is to be free to all, and will take place on the extensive grounds and race course of the Messrs. Stevens, within a few rods of the Hoboken Ferry, where at least fifty thousand ladies and gentlemen can conveniently witness the interesting sport. The Grand Chase will be repeated at three distinct hours. At 3 o'clock P.M. from twelve to twenty buffaloes will be turned loose, and Mr. French will appear dressed as an Indian, mounted on a Prairie Horse and Mexican Saddle, chase the Buffaloes around the Race Course, and capture one with the lasso. At 4 and 5 o'clock, the race will be repeated, and the intervals of time will be occupied with various other sports. The City Brass Band is engaged.

No possible danger need be apprehended, as a double railing has been put around the whole course, to prevent the possibility of the Buffaloes approaching the multitude. Extra ferry-boats will be provided, to run from Barclay, Canal, and Christopher Streets. If the weather should be stormy, the sport will come off at the same hours the first fair day.

The mystery of a free exhibition of the sort, though not understood at the time, is readily explained. I had engaged all the ferry-boats to Hoboken, at a stipulated price, and all the receipts on the day specified were to be mine.

The assurance that no danger need be apprehended from the buffaloes was simply ridiculous. The poor creatures were so weak and tame that it was doubtful whether they would run at all, not withstanding my man French had been cramming them with oats to get a little extra life into them.

The eventful day arrived. Taking time by the forelock, multitudes of people crossed to Hoboken before ten o'clock, and by noon the ferry-boats were constantly crowded to their utmost capacity. An extra boat, the Passaic, was put on, and the rush of passengers continued until five o'clock. Twenty-four thousand persons went by the ferry-boats to Hoboken


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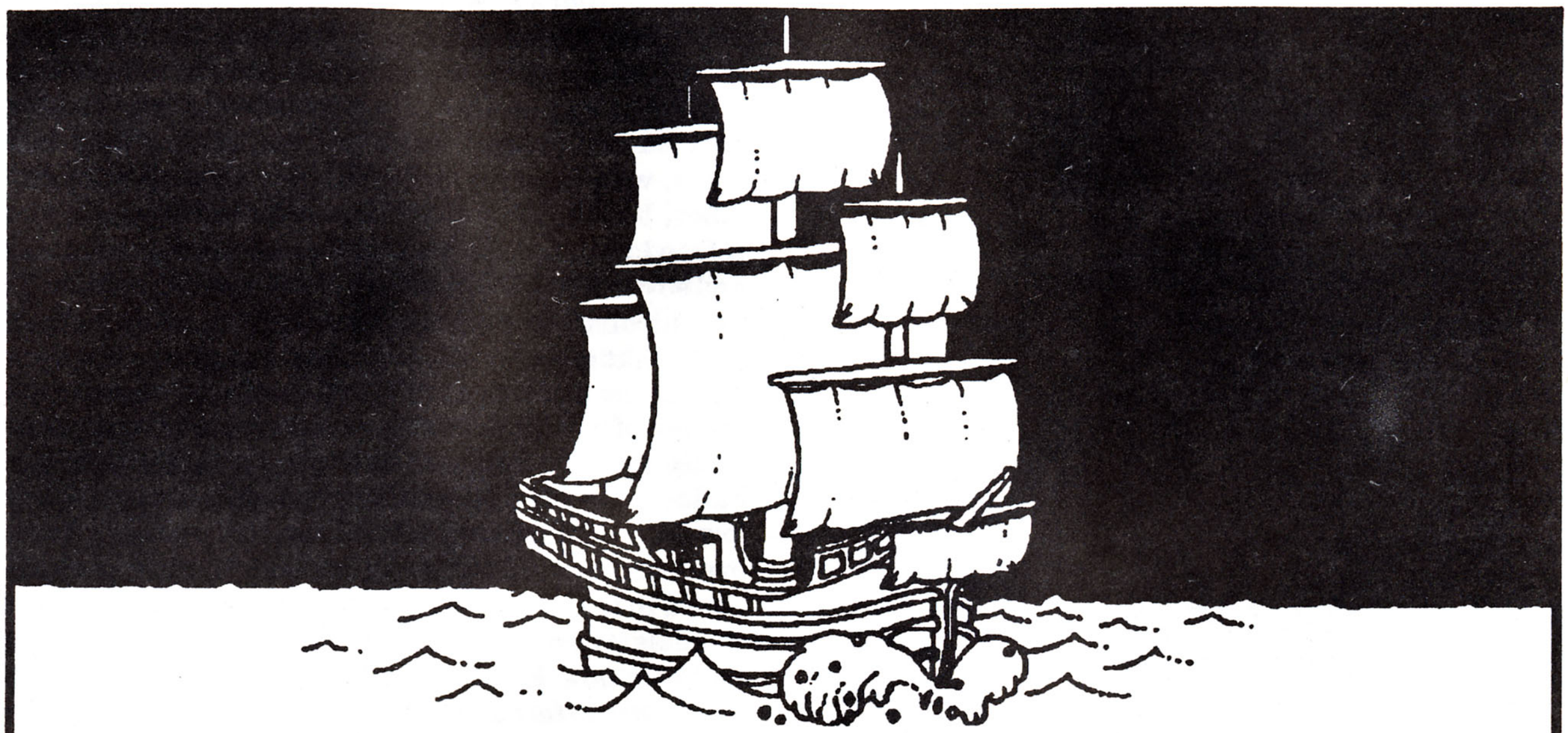
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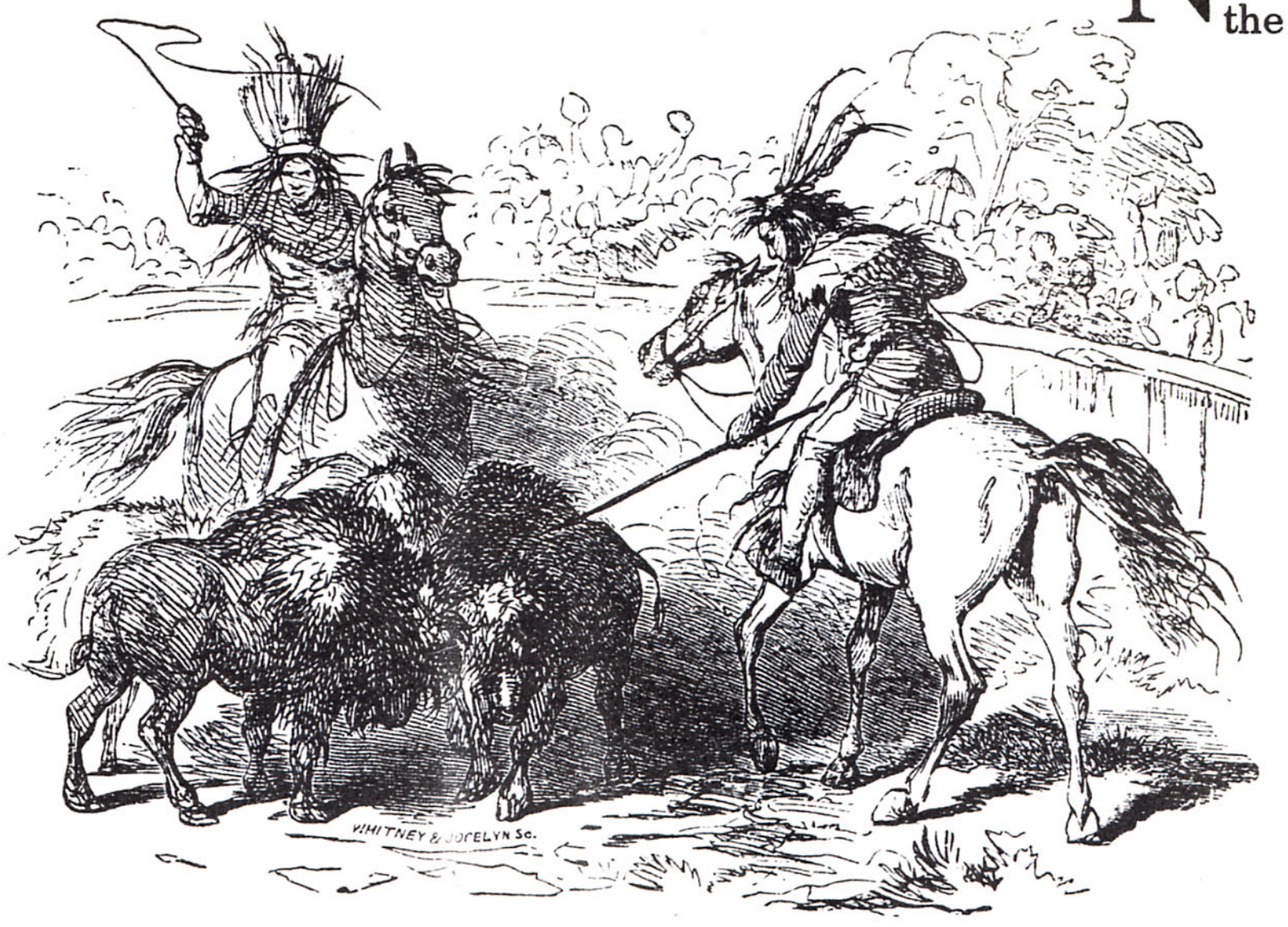
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P T Barnum

that day. Each paid six and a quarter cents going, and as much returning, and the aggregate receipts, including the ferriage of carts and carriages, and the hire for refreshment stands on the ground, were $3500. Many thousand persons were present from various parts of New-Jersey, and these, though bringing "grist to my mill," of course escaped my "toll" at the ferries.

The band of music engaged for the occasion, did its best to amuse the immense crowd until three o'clock. At precisely that hour the buffaloes emerged from a shed in the centre of the inclosure – my man French having previously administered a punching with a sharp stick, hoping to excite them to a trot on their first appearance. He immediately followed them, painted and dressed as an Indian, mounted on a fiery steed, with lasso in one hand and a sharp stick in the other, but the poor little calves huddled together, and refused to move! This scene was so wholly unexpected, and so perfectly ludicrous, that the spectators burst into uncontrollable uproarious laughter. The shouting somewhat startled the buffaloes, and goaded by French and his assistants, they started off in a slow trot. The uproar of merriment was renewed, and the multitude swinging their hats and hallooing in wild disorder, the buffaloes broke into a gallop, ran against a panel of the low fence (consisting of two narrow boards) tumbled over, and scrambled away as fast as they could. The crowd in that quarter offered no obstruction. Seeing the animals approach, and not being sufficiently near to discover how harmless they were, men, women, and children scattered pell-mell! Such a scampering I never saw before. The buffaloes, which were as badly frightened as the people, found shelter in a neighboring swamp, and all efforts to disengage them proved ineffectual. French, however, captured one of them with his lasso, and afterwards amused the people by lassoing horses and riders – and good humor prevailed.




No one seemed to suspect the ferry-boat arrangement – the projector was incognito – the exhibition had been free to the public – there had been much amusement for twelve and a half cents each, and no one complained. It was however, nearly midnight before all the visitors found ferry accommodations to New-York.

N.P. Willis of the "Home Journal," wrote an article illustrating the perfect good-nature with which the American public submits to a clever humbug. He said that he went to Hoboken to witness the Buffalo Hunt. It was nearly four o'clock when the boat left the foot of Barclay Street, yet it was so densely crowded that many persons were obliged to stand upon the railings and hold on to the awning posts. When they reached the Hoboken side, a boat equally crowded was leaving the wharf. The passengers of the boat just arriving cried out to those in the boat just returning, "Is the Buffalo Hunt over?" To which came the reply, "Yes, and it was the biggest humbug you ever heard of!" Willis added, that the passengers on the boat with him were so delighted, that they instantly gave three cheers for the author of the humbug, whoever he might be.

The day after the chase at Hoboken, I met my friend Frederick West, of the "Sunday Atlas," who was not in the secret.

"That French," said he, "is almost as great a humbug as *you* are."

Thanking him for the honorable exception, I told him that I had been most amused at witnessing the scene.

"What amused me the most," said I, "was, to see the people running and screeching with fear, when the little harmless calves broke through the fence, and were scampering for the swamp."

"Where were you at the time?" asked West.

"Near the building, at the starting point," I replied.

"Well," answered West, with a smile of discontent, "as I happened to be among the party that fled in affright, I don't see the fun of the thing as *you* do."

The same experiment was subsequently tried unsuccessfully at Camden, N.J., opposite Philadelphia; after which a number of the buffaloes were sent to England and sold, and the rest were fattened and disposed of in steaks in Fulton Market at fifty cents per pound.

It is but justice to myself to remind the reader that, at the time of their occurrence, the public did not suspect that I had any connection whatever with the exhibition of the herd of Buffaloes. The entire facts in these cases came to light only through my own voluntary admissions.




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# Hoboken in the Civil War: *A Brilliant Record*

Our city is famed for being the port of embarkation for the AEF during World War I, and a ship repair center in World War II, but in one of the greatest battles of the Civil War 130 years ago, Hoboken played a heroic fighting role.



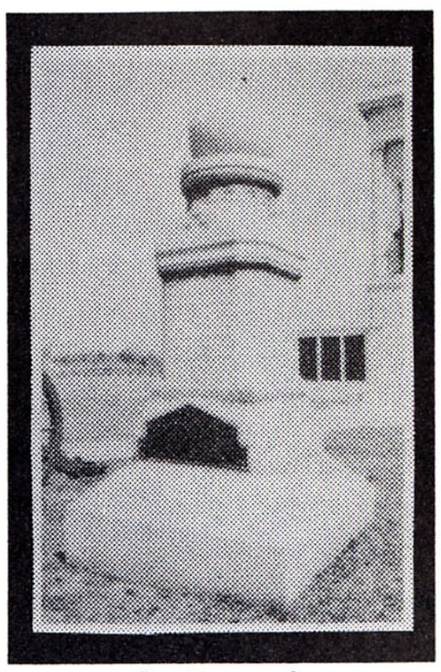
Battery A, 1st New Jersey Artillery, was from Hoboken. It was organized and commanded by Captain William Hexamer and affectionately known throughout the Army of the Potomac as: "Hexamer's Battery."

It had a brilliant battle record, serving in 30 major engagements, and was on the right of Brigadier General Phil Kearny's 1st New Jersey brigade at Chantilly, Virginia. That famous New Jersey general unknowingly entered enemy lines and was killed. Kearny, New Jersey is named for him. In the battle at Chantilly on September 1, 1862, Union troops, retreating after the second battle of Bull Run, checked Stonewall Jackson.

The 151 men and five officers of the battery were all volunteers, coming mostly from the many German families then living in Hoboken. The Battery in its four years of service was frequently mentioned in dispatches and in addition to Gettysburg was at Antietem, Petersburg, and at Lee's surrender at Appomatox.

Its first engagement with the enemy took place at West Point, Virginia in May 1861. Official dispatches report that the Battery displayed "great gallantry" that day. The Battery then went on to fight at Mechanicsville, then Gaines Mills, and later in the Battle of the Wilderness.

The first casualty was a private who was struck by lightning while manning the guns before Mechanicsville on May 30, 1862. Other battle casualties were suffered later as well, from the Civil War's greatest killers, exposure and disease.



Battery A monument

The Battery was organized in Hoboken by William Hexamer as a part of the militia of the State of New Jersey and was attached to the Third Regiment, Hudson Brigade. At full strength the unit consisted of five officers and 151 men but on the night before the battle of Gettysburg, only four officers and 112 men answered the roll call, due to sickness and casualties.

At the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 the services of the Battery were offered to the Governor of New Jersey, but because authority had not yet been granted by the Federal government, the offer was declined. However, its organization was continued and recruited up to full complement and the Battery waited only for an opportunity to enter the Federal service. Finally the Battery was accepted by an Act of Congress passed July 22, 1861 and by authority received by the Governor from the War Department on July 29, 1861.

The Battery was mustered into the service of the Union Army for three years or the duration of the war by Captain Frederick S. Larned of the 12th Infantry, US Army, on August 12, 1861 in Hoboken, The unit left New Jersey on August 20 to Washington, DC, where soon after its arrival it was equipped with guns and horses. The Battery was then assigned to the 1st New Jersey Brigade and ordered to Virginia to join the outfit in operations against Robert E. Lee's Confederate Army.

Battery A almost immediately began to build a reputation for skill and valor. One observer remarked that "from the time of Antietam forward, Hexamer's was one of the most famous artillery batteries during the War. It fought first to last with a heroism unsurpassed by any other volunteer organization."

To commemorate this heroism, the State

of New Jersey in 1888 had a monument erected in honor of the Battery on the battlefield at Gettysburg.

It is inscribed on its front face:

**Battery A 1st New Jersey Artillery from its position in reserve SW. of Power's Hill galloped into action at 3 P.M., July 3, 1863.**
**Fired 120 rounds shrapnel at Pickett's column and 80 shells at battery in left front.**
**Erected by the State of New Jersey, 1888.**

On the south side:

**Served August 12 1861 to June 22, 1865.**
**Engaged in 30 battles.**

On the north side:

**Losses: Killed 2, Wounded 7.**
**Position in action 45 yards east of stone.**

On the back:

**Parson's Battery**

Ironically Captain William Hexamer was absent at the time and its junior officer, Lieutenant A. N. Parsons, was in command.

However, Hexamer did receive credit on a monument commemorating his battery on the battlefield at Antietam, Maryland: It reads:

## BATTERY A
## FIRST NEW JERSEY ARTILLERY

### Captain William Hexamer, Commanding
### First Brigade, First Division, Sixth Corps

**After Engagement at Crampton's Pass September 14, 1862, the battery was engaged on September 17 at 3 different points on the field. From 3 to 6 o'clock the battery fired 280 shells, 200 shrapnel and 15 canisters forcing out of position two Confederate batteries and repelling an infantry force.**

During the Civil War, Company I of the 1st Regular New Jersey Volunteers was composed entirely of recruits from Hoboken. The Company was commanded by Captain D.P. Mount. At Gettysburg, Company I, as part of the New Jersey Brigade under General A.T.A. Torbert, reached the battlefield at 4 pm after making the last 35 miles of its 55-mile march in 18 hours.

The Company was warmly engaged by the Confederates on the third day of the battle but sustained light losses. The unit served out the rest of the War with distinction as part of the First Regiment, 1st New Jersey Brigade.


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# OUR TOWN'S MEN OF BRONZE

## Photographed by Robert Foster



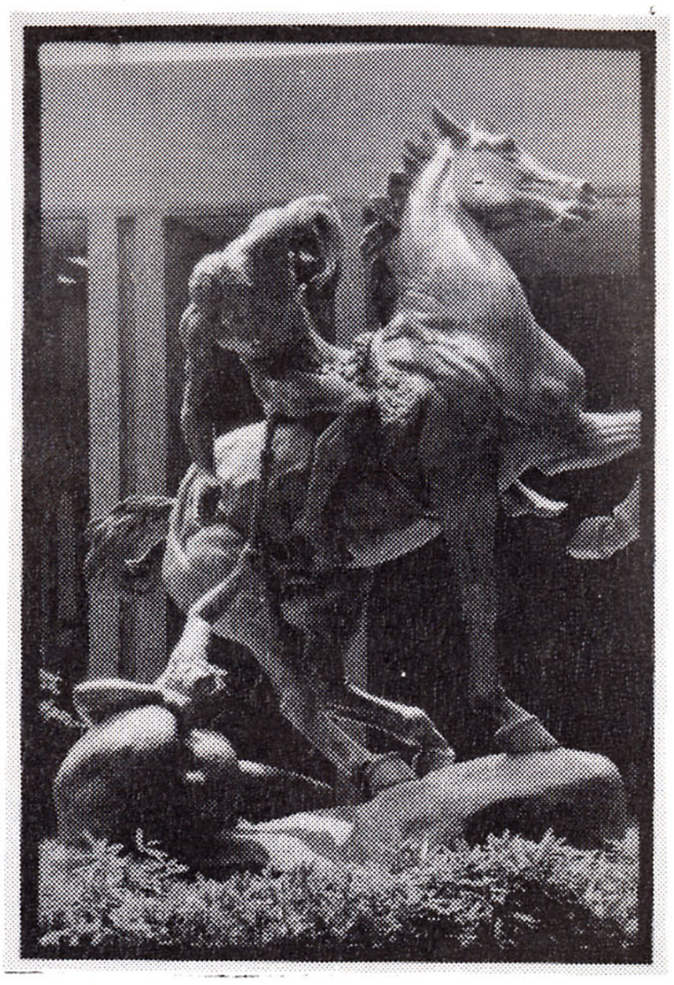
Striding forward confidentally in Elysian Park are members of the American Expeditionary Force that sailed to France from Hoboken in World War I. This memorial is inscribed with a statement by General John J. Pershing, its commander, and was erected May 30, 1922. ☛



☛ The citizens of Hoboken dedicated this statue in Church Square Park in honor of their Volunteer Fire Department, May 30, 1891.

A Union Army soldier stands sternly in Hudson Square Park to honor Hoboken's soldiers who fought in the Civil War. The memorial was erected May 30, 1888. ☛



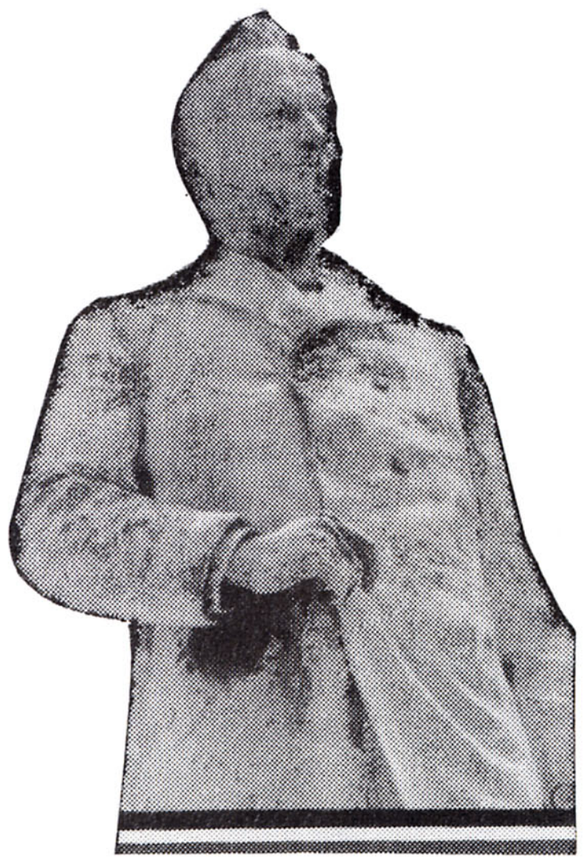


☛ The torch of learning is passed on to this equestrian figure before the Williams Library at Stevens Institute of Technology. "The Torch Bearer" was sculpted by Anna Hyatt Huntington and erected in 1964.

☛ Inscribed "Christopher Columbus, discoverer of America; erected by the people of this community under the auspices of the Italian Americans of Hoboken," the great explorer has scanned the horizon in Columbus Park since Oct. 12, 1937.



A closeup of the World War I memorial reveals a determined bulldog gazing up at its military master. Today throngs of happy Hoboken dogs romp in Elysian park. ☛



Sam Sloan, for 32 years president of the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad Co., watches over every Hoboken community festival in Lackawanna Plaza, rain or shine.



# THE HOBOKEN BRIDGE THAT NEVER WAS



Picture of Gustav Lindenthal's proposed North River Bridge, from *Scientific American*, May 23, 1891.

# The dream never got beyond a cornerstone in a back yard on 12th Street

In 1984, new owners of a Hoboken row house at the corner of Garden and 12th Streets moved in to a house with a granite cornerstone standing in their tiny back yard. Carved into the stone was this legend:

The NORTH RIVER BRIDGE CO.
GROUND BROKEN JUNE 8TH 1895
FIRST FOUNDATION MASONRY
LAID JUNE 18TH 1895

The previous owners had delighted in the stone in their yard, but the new ones had no interest in the history of Hoboken. They intended to destroy the stone to make garden space, but neighbors and the bridge-builder's family rescued the stone. It is now in storage at Stevens Institute awaiting a suitable new site.




## What it would mean

If the bridge had been built, trains of the Pennsylvania Railroad, which, back in the 1880s, terminated at Exchange Place in Jersey City, would have been able to cross the Hudson to Manhattan. Much of what is now uptown Hoboken would have been a noise-ridden, shadowed victim of a gigantic railroad viaduct. And many of today's most attractive Hoboken homes would have been either destroyed or never erected.

But the bridge never got beyond the cornerstone.

## How it all started

In the 1880s the Pennsylvania Railroad wanted a direct link to New York, hopefully via a tunnel beneath the Hudson. But the railroad owners feared that smoke and fumes from steam locomotives would asphyxiate passengers during a journey beneath the river. So they decided to build a bridge instead.

The job was assigned to Gustav Lindenthal, a bridge engineer born in Austria-Hungary in 1850 and working in Pittsburgh. By 1888 Lindenthal completed blueprints for a huge suspension bridge, bigger than any ever built before. It would link 12th Street in Hoboken to 23rd Street in Manhattan in one 3100-foot leap, and carry trains on ten tracks. The crossing would take trains to a new station at Sixth Avenue and 23rd Street.

## 40 million bucks

Lindenthal's great bridge would cost 15 million dollars to construct, plus another 25 million for buying rights-of-way and building the station, a total of 40 million, as much as it cost to run New York City in 1888!

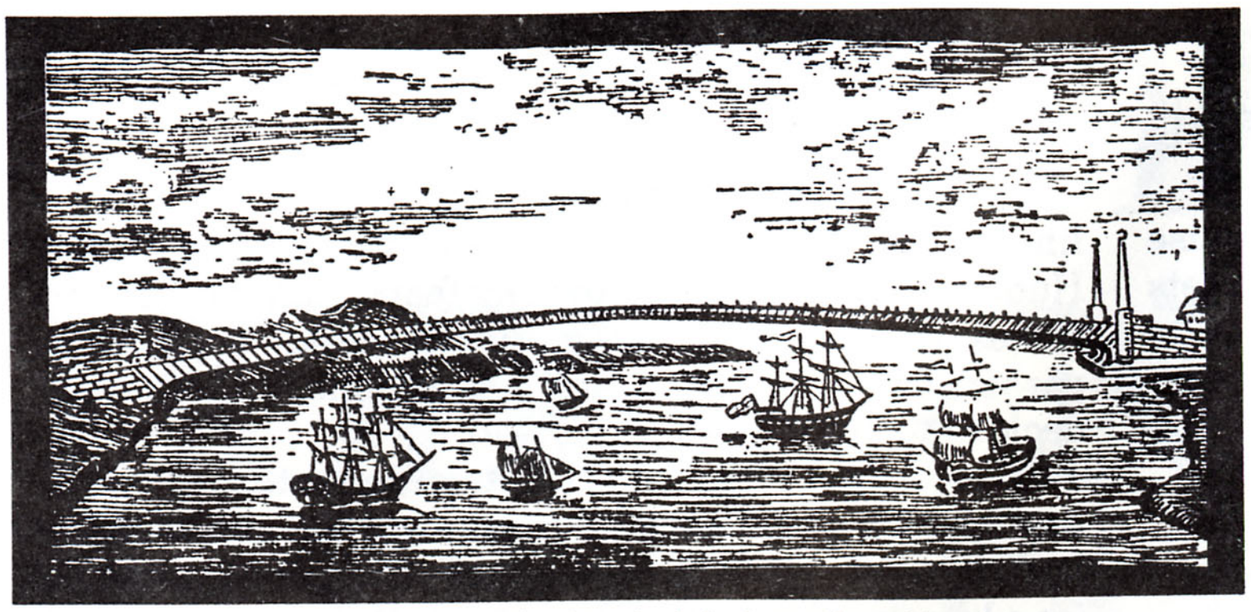
Before it could be started, Lindenthal's bridge plans had to have the approval of Congress. Washington reviewed all plans for structures built across federally controlled navigable waterways. By 1890, in its usual brisk fashion, Congress gave the proposal its okay and the North River Bridge Company was incorporated to begin building Lindenthal's bridge.

## Disagreement on the Waterfront

But even back then there was trouble and delay in doing something on Hoboken's waterfront. The New York and New Jersey Bridge Company, chartered in the

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One of the first proposals for bridging the Hudson was made in 1811 by architect and landscape gardener Thomas Pope of New York. His "flying lever" or "rainbow" bridge was designed to connect New York and Hoboken. Pope's ambitious scheme never got farther than the model stage and a few lines of verse that began: "Let the broad arc, the spacious Hudson stride..."

1860s, submitted plans for a cantilever bridge to carry trains over the Hudson River to West 70th Street, Manhattan. Congress did not accept the proposal, so about 1892 the North River Bridge Company began to condemn property in Hoboken for Lindenthal's bridge. But a financial panic in 1893 bankrupted some of the railroads that were going to pay for the new span, delaying its start until 1895. Ground was broken in Hoboken on June 18, 1895, and in a small ceremony ten days later the cornerstone of the bridge's anchorage was erected at 12th and Garden Streets. It is perhaps surprising that the houses now on the west side of the 1200 block had already been built.

## Midtown Bridge proposal

The activity in Hoboken stirred the rival New York and New Jersey Bridge Company to propose another bridge, this one across the Hudson to West 59th Street, Manhattan. The plan included a gigantic passenger station on 8th Avenue between 49th and 50th Streets,



Gustav Lindenthal, about 1885


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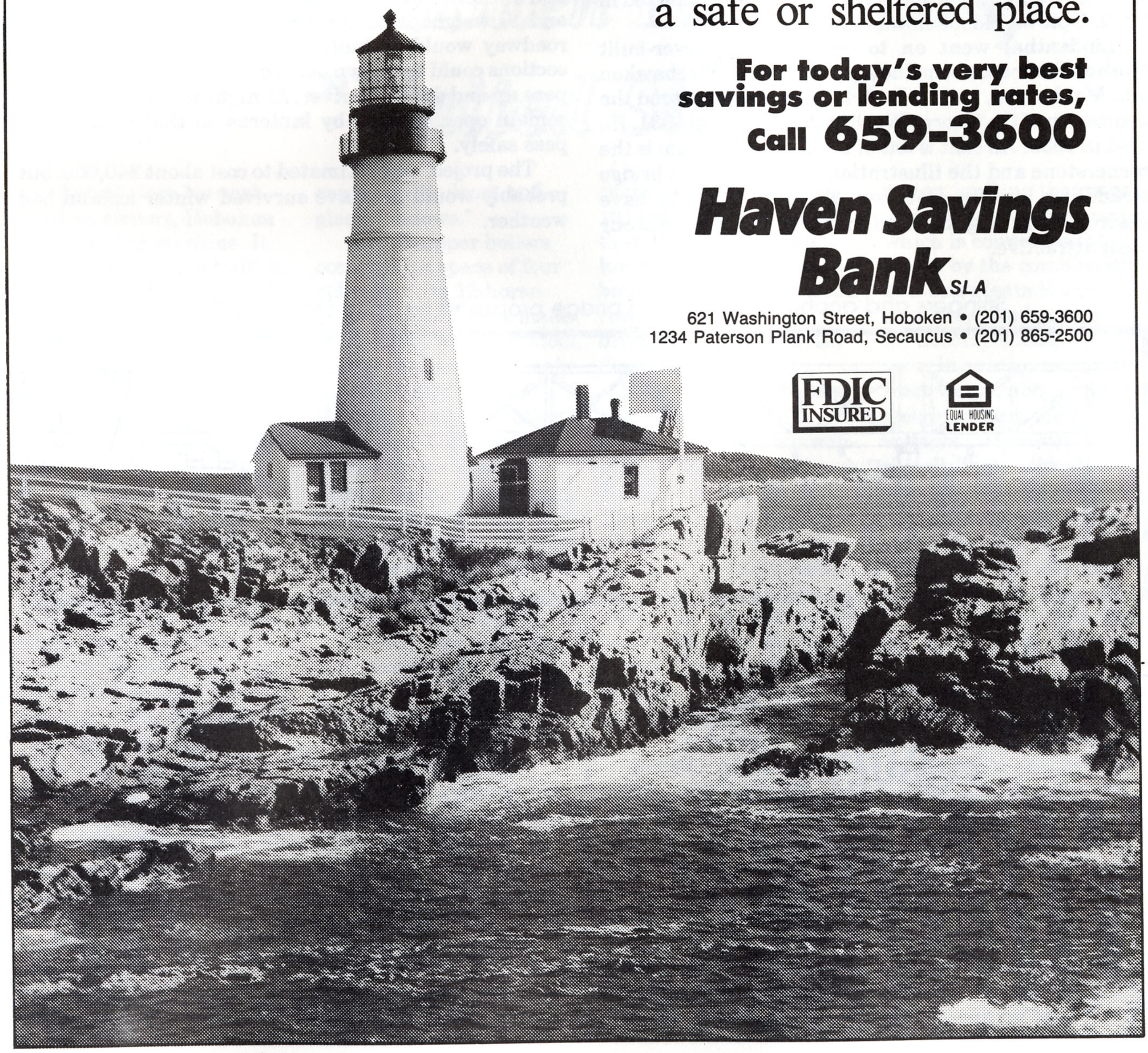
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connected to the bridge by a viaduct through the West Side of Manhattan.

The idea was approved by the Federal government in 1896 and it looked like there would be two new bridges across the Hudson, but the investors in the New York and New Jersey Bridge Company quarreled and nothing was done, allowing their charter to lapse.

## Not over – *under*

Work on the Hoboken bridge began off and on, but before the project got very far, construction of the Hudson and Manhattan tunnels (now PATH) was under way. With the development of electric trains, a tunnel under the river became safe and practical, so the Pennsylvania Railroad people abandoned the idea of a trans-Hudson bridge and in 1903 began building the present Pennsylvania tunnels beneath Weehawken to what is now Penn Station. This project was completed in 1910. Uptown Hoboken was saved.

Lindenthal went on to design other never-built Hudson River spans, including one between Weehawken and Manhattan, and he lived long enough to attend the dedication of the George Washington Bridge in 1931. He died in 1935. All that is left of Lindenthal's dream is the cornerstone and the illustration of an enormous bridge straddling uptown Hoboken. If built, it would have destroyed the neighborhood that is now rated one of our most attractive.

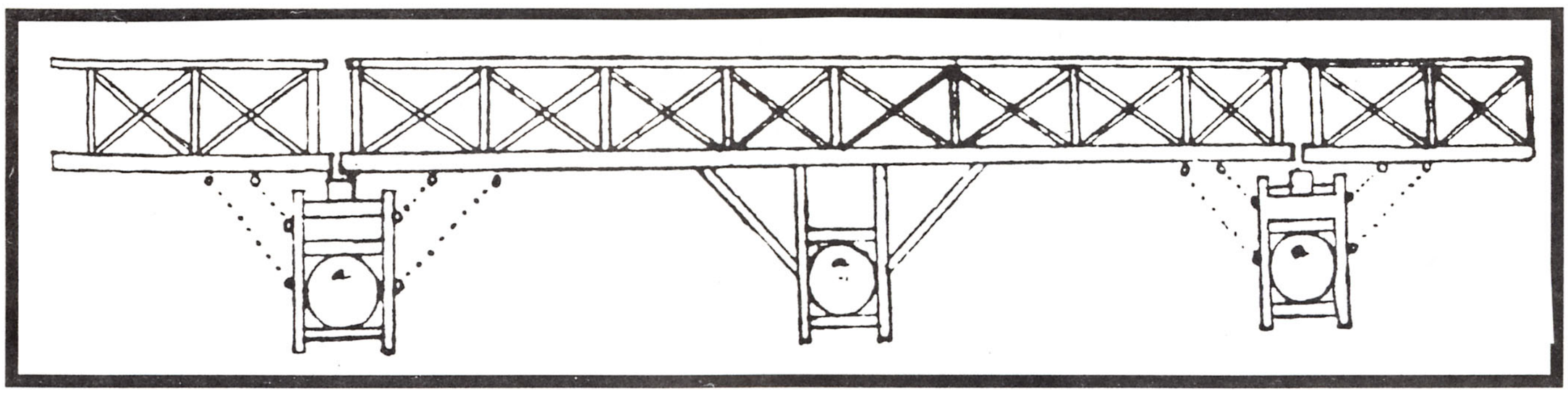
**As usual, John Stevens was first to propose a Hudson River bridge.**

The North River Bridge that Lindenthal designed is not the first one proposed to span the Hudson to New York. John Stevens, inevitably, had a plan for one first, back in 1805. His idea was a wooden pontoon bridge, 42 feet wide and more than a mile long, between his estate in Hoboken and West 11th Street, Manhattan.

Stevens worked it out in every detail: 30 pontoon sections, each consisting of three hollow wooden casks, connected to each other by iron chains, would be built on land and launched into the river. At the New York end and New Jersey end and at intervals between, cables and anchors would hold the structure to the riverbanks and to weight it to the riverbottom. Then a wooden roadway would be built on top of the pontoons. Two sections could be drawn aside quickly to permit boats to pass up and down the river. At night the sections would remain open, lighted by lanterns so that boats could pass safely.

The project was estimated to cost about $40,000. but probably would not have survived winter ice and bad weather.

Stringers and anchors of a floating bridge proposed by John Stevens in 1805.



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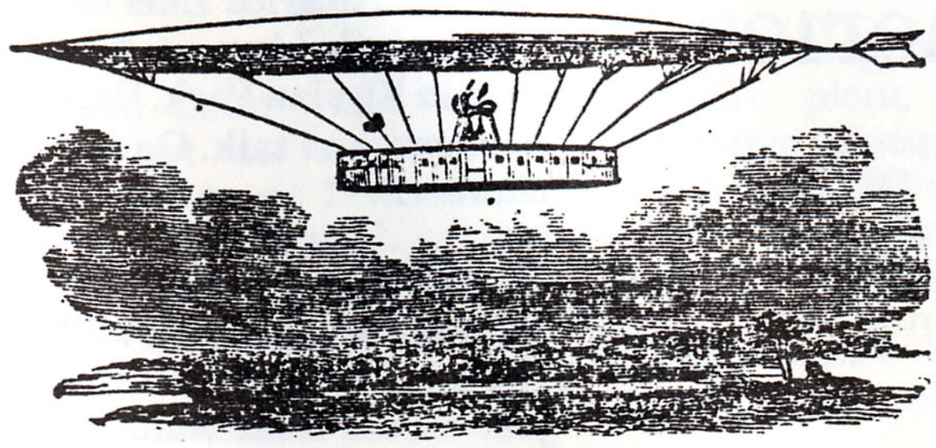
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# The Hoboken Flying Ship "United States"

Long before Newark had an airport, Hoboken had a flying machine. It was a contraption built in Hoboken in 1851 by a Mr. Robjohn of New York, and according to press reports of the time was planned to carry 25 passengers at a speed of 25 to 50 miles an hour at an altitude of 200 feet.

The aerial ship was described in *Gleason's Pictorial Drawing Room Companion*, August 30, 1851 (not "Gleaner's" as some Hoboken historians have written). Named "United States," the ship was built on open land "on the plain west of Hoboken village," a mile from Hoboken's present PATH station in a fenced enclosure about 290 by 275 feet. The machine was 64 feet long, six feet wide and six feet four inches high. Both ends came to a sharp point, and the aircraft's body was composed of "a strong, light, wooden frame, covered with canvas, with doors and glass windows."

It had copper boilers occupying a space of four cubic feet. Its 12-horse-power engines were made of gunmetal and cast steel, and were planned to make a 20-inch stroke at 66 times a minute, to rotate at a speed of 400 rpm "floats" (from existing illustrations, probably some kind of fan arrangement) atop the craft. The inventor expected the United States to carry fuel for 400 hours of flight.

To keep the machine aloft there was a cigar-shaped balloon above the gondola, 260 feet long, 24 feet in diameter, with a 95,000-cubic-foot gas capacity for a lifting power then reported to be about 6500 lbs. The entire weight of the gondola, "float," and fixtures was expected to be about 4000 lbs., leaving a surplus lifting capacity of 2500 lbs.

The engines, reported *Gleason's*, were "a curiosity," weighing only 181 lbs., "and so perfect that by the force of his lungs, Mr. Robjohn caused both pistons to work a full revolution, carrying a driving wheel of five feet diameter."

The rudder, continues the report of 1851, "is worthy of minute examination, and by it the ship is designed to run up or down, on in any required direction." The car was described as being "suspended by cords to the float, "and when the whole is inflated and suspended in mid-air under the estimated velocity, it will be a rare sight."

Robjohn had invested $5500 in his invention and according to *Gleason's* "required only a few hundred more to perfect and set afloat his air ship." Robjohn expected to power his craft by steam and to make fuel unnecessary, so claimed to have devised a plan "for decomposing water, igniting the gases, which again become water, which is converted into steam by the combustion, and this steam is again condensed and returned for decomposition, thus securing entire immunity from waste, and a uniform weight during the longest voyages." However, before this unlikely miracle of physics could be put into action, Robjohn expected the engines to be driven by steam generated from coke and spirits of wine.

The ship's first launching destroyed it and there is nothing further known about this pioneering aviation effort in Hoboken. It is not known if Robjohn was a Hoboken man, and his office was reported to have been at 166 Bowery, in New York. Hoboken historian John J. Heaney, in his *The Bicentennial Comes to Hoboken*, 1976, observes "Robjohn probably would have made out better if he powered his air ship to run on beer."

# Memories of Sybil's Cave

by Leonard A. Luizzi, Sr.



Intrepid cave explorer Lennie Luizzi poses beside the family Buick in front of the Wallace School.

Back in the late 1950s when Stevens castle stood majestically atop Castle Point and trucks rumbled along Shore Road to the Holland America Line or to the "Long Dock" which was the East Asiatic Line, my friends and I would spend our summer days in Elysian Park. Sometimes we would play games or just hang out and talk. One of our favorite games was "mountain climber."

To play we would have to walk along Shore Road from the Park to a path that is still visible today above Sinatra Drive. It leads to a point where the hill bends to the south. This is just across from where the "Long Dock" was. There in the hillside there is a pipe which leads down to the road and is where we would pretend that we were mountain climbers. South of the pipe was an opening in the cliff. This was the entrance to what we called "Dead Man's Cave."
*[Hoboken had several "Dead Man's Caves" in those days; another was in the face of the Palisades at the foot of the "Hundred Steps" in Hoboken's southwestern corner. See HOBOKEN HISTORY Issue No. 3. –Editor]*

Childhood legend had it that the body of a man was found in the cave and that his ghost still haunted it. To this day I don't know if there really had been a body found in the cave.

What we called Dead Man's Cave was what was then remained of Sybil's Cave, site of a reputedly medicinal spring and a noted Hoboken summer tourist attraction. Back in the 19th Century Sybil's Cave was a famous landmark and to we boys nearly a century later represented another world. It was hard for us kids to even imagine that once Hoboken had been a summer resort.

On one of our numerous summer climbs we decided to explore the cave. It opening was partially blocked and was only about 2½ feet high by about six feet across. We had to lie on our backs and slide in. Once inside the cave we could stand up but had to hunch over because the ceiling was so low.

The cave had a musty odor and its floor was covered with soil, damp but not wet. Empty wine bottles were scattered about. We suspected that hobos had been in there. The ceiling of the cave had graffiti on it, which appeared to have been traced with candle soot. I recall that the graffiti was mainly initials.

The cave was not as deep as we had thought and was only ten feet deep by about eight feet wide. We did not linger along in the cave on this first adventure, because we were afraid that the ghost of the dead man might pursue us.

On our next expedition we decided to see if we could make an echo in the cave, but even though we yelled as loud as we could, no echo sounded. This second time we stayed only about fifteen minutes and kept close together. None of us were brave enough to venture alone to the rear of the cave. Later that summer we returned several more times to prove that we were not scared, but no one would enter alone and our plans to spend a might in Dead Man's Cave never materialized. ❑

# MUSEUM NEWS

*continued from inside front cover*

a grant from the New Jersey Historical Commission for our next exhibit, entitled "Hudson County and World War II." The bad news is that the state legislature made massive cuts in the Governor's 1993 budget and all Commission grants have been erased.

Exhibit curator Bob Foster has decided that it would be best to change the show's theme in anticipation that the grant will be restored for next year, when a World War II exhibit could be presented. The replacement topic is Hoboken's Historic Architecture, an equally fascinating and less costly theme to display. Our plan is to exhibit specimens of surviving ironwork and signage from Hoboken's heritage of architectural gems of the past, in actual specimens of architectural artifacts, blueprints, architects' drawings, and photographs.

Owners and residents of Hoboken buildings who are interested in having them appear in the show, or have an interest in working on this exhibit, are asked to phone the Museum at 656-2240.

## Donations

The Hoboken Historical Museum thanks the donors of these artifacts to the Museum's holdings.

Seven original photographic negatives and prints of Hoboken Service Flag-raising ceremony, 1943, from Henry Brockman.

Political campaign button for City Council election, 1980s, from Roy Huelbig.

Medicine bottle of M. Aronoff Pharmacy, 233 Madison Street, circa 1930s, from Cory Watson.

Framed engineering water color sketch of Maxwell House Coffee plant, 21" x 36", circa 1939, and commemorative placque from the Maxwell House plant dated 1939-1992 with contemporary aerial view photograph, from Councilman Dick England and Friends of Maxwell House.

Union Club picture postcard, fold-out type, circa 1950s, from George and Dolores Kirshgessner.

Hoboken Centennial commemorative cachet postal envelope, 1955, from Paul Lippman.

## Purchases

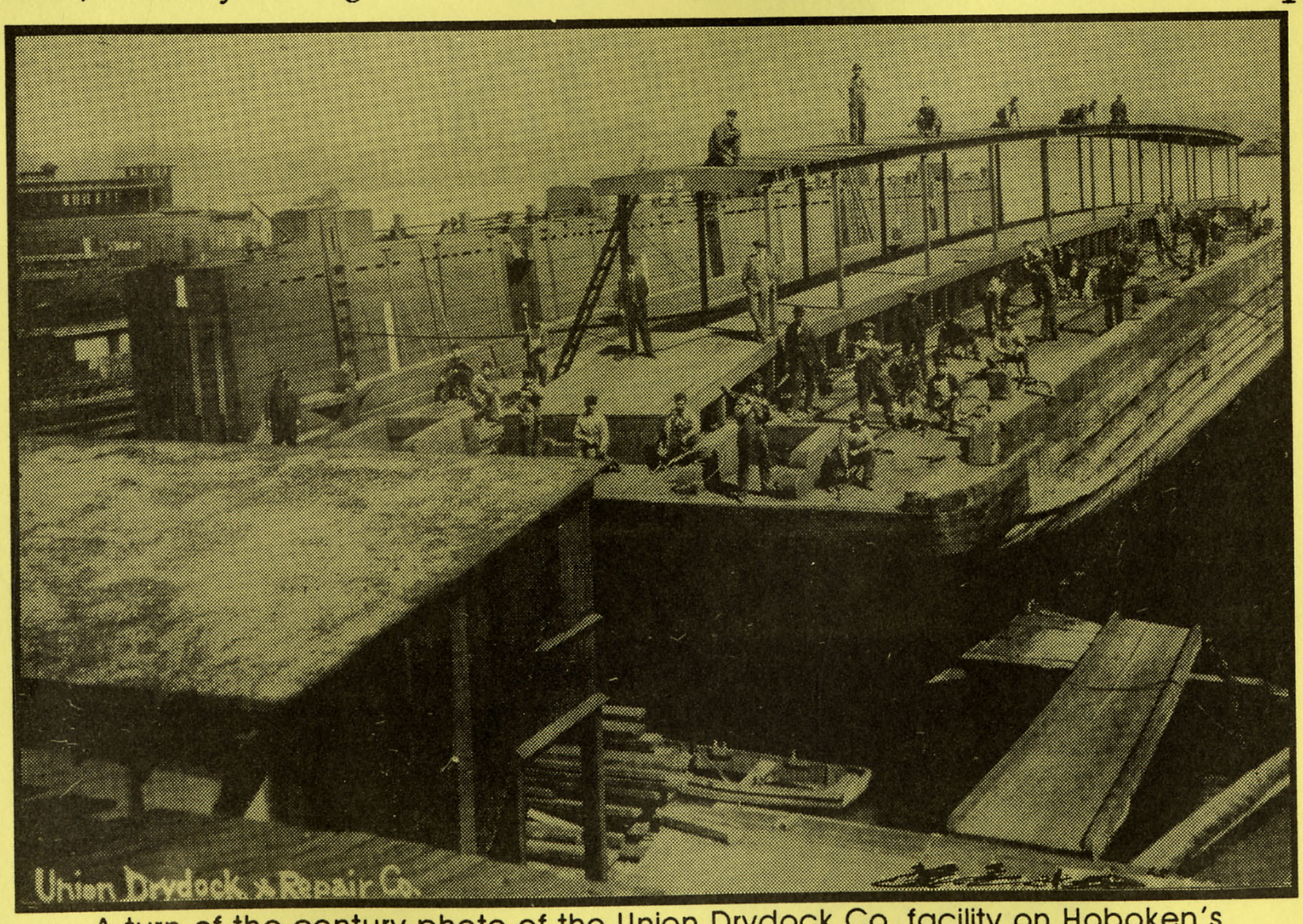
World War II home front posters, 10" x 20", circa 1943, unmounted: "I Am Counting On You" and "Can All You Can--It's a Real War Job."

*Fighting Planes of the U.S. Navy* by John Ray, circa 1942.

Two brochures, *The Port of New York Authority and Marine Inland Terminals* and *The Port of New York Authority Bridges and Tunnels*, circa 1955.

## Thanks, Vinny

The mineral water bottle shown in the Sybil's Cave article in our last issue is from the Hoboken historical memorabilia collection of Vinny Rossi, proprietor of Golden Age Books. We thank him for making the artifact available to *Hoboken History*.




A turn-of-the-century photo of the Union Drydock Co. facility on Hoboken's waterfront. Photo from the Hudson Waterfront Museum.

## Thanks, Helpers

The Museum has sponsored two flea markets since the last issue of *Hoboken History*: an indoor sale at Martha Institute on April 25, and an outdoor sale at Church Square Park on June 7. Bob Foster and John De Palma, organizers of the events, respectively, wish to thank the following members for their help in making both sales very successful: Maureen Allex, Gerri Fallo, Steve Hefler, Hugh Kilmer, Steve Kilnisan, George and Dolores Kirchgessner, Paul and Barbara Lippman, and Kathy Rogers.

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