

# LIBERTY STATE PARK

## HISTORIC CONTEXT

The Historic Context includes the pre-history of the area, the events that shaped this area (physically and economically), and the conception, creation and development of the state park.

### INTRODUCTION

The land we know as Liberty State Park can be viewed as a retrospective of the interaction between humans and the environment of the harbor/estuary. The Eastern Woodland native people built a social structure based upon the abundant resources the harbor provided. Summer residents in Communipaw Cove lived on the fish and shellfish of this ecosystem. Early colonial settlers viewed the area as both a respite from the social oppression of European monarchies and a land rich in the resources needed to support their new life. Communipaw Cove became known as Oyster Bay as the Dutch, and later the English, harvested its resources. The clash of the native and European cultures, evidenced in many local stories, was symptomatic of dynamic change, which has become inherent to the area.

The Industrial Revolution saw a new type of dependency on the land and water. The harbor now supported a culture whose economic power dominated much of the nation and had a worldwide impact. It created a need for people, the cries for which were heard throughout the world. Approximately 37 million people immigrated to America within a span of 100 years, the largest immigration in history. Of this, 12 million came to their new homes through Ellis Island, only 100 meters off the shore of what is now Liberty State Park. It was the prosperity of the Industrial Revolution that invited these immigrants to their new country; however, it also distanced them from the resources upon which they depended. New technology allowed for the growth of large cities, and the waterfront, critical to the shipping of goods, became property of industries rather than the home of people. During the past 25 years, there has been substantial effort to reconnect the people with the land and its resources. The resulting revitalization of the resources represents a renewed awareness and knowledge of our dependency upon the harbor. The creation of Liberty State Park is an affirmation of that knowledge.

## **GEOLOGY & PRE-CONTACT**

New York Harbor owes much of its formation to the last ice age. During the 2 million years known as the Pleistocene Period (which ended approximately 10,000 years ago), a series of glaciers and ice sheets covered much of North America. The last of these advances, known as the Wisconsin Glaciation, covered the entire New York Harbor with a sheet of ice over one mile high. This glacier gouged a deep trench in the lower Hudson Valley. As temperatures increased, the ice melted and a fresh water glacial lake (Glacial Lake Hackensack) formed in the area. With the passing of time, sea levels rose and salt water flowed into the harbor changing the environment into an estuary.

Some time during this series of events, humans first appeared in the region (approximately 10,000 to 12,000 years ago). These first inhabitants are known in the archaeological record as the Paleo-Indians. These people have been characterized as nomadic bands of big game hunters. They roamed the continent following the herds of mammoths, mastodons, giant woolly bison, and other ice age animals.

The climate slowly changed; temperatures warmed and the glaciers receded. The tundra-like conditions were transformed into “modern conditions”. As the environment changed, so did the fauna. The prehistoric “mega-fauna” was gradually replaced by more modern species such as whitetail deer, bear, beaver, squirrel, turkey, pigeon, rabbit, and raccoon.

Around 8,000 years ago, a more sedentary culture, better adapted to this new environment, emerged. The people of this time (the Archaic Period) made advances in technology that allowed them to exploit the new conditions. While their forebears depended primarily on hunting, the Archaic people developed the technology needed to harvest the resources found in the New York Harbor such as shellfish and fish.

Approximately 2,000 years ago, at the onset of the Eastern Woodland Period, things started to change again. Technology evolved further. The people of this period were known to make and use pottery, bows and arrows. Signs of an agricultural society are first noticed in this period. These technological advances allowed for even greater utilization of the land and resources, leading to the growth of larger settlements. This tradition persisted into the Historic or Contact Period (late 16<sup>th</sup> to early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries).

## 17<sup>TH</sup> AND 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

### **CONTACT PERIOD**

When the first European explorers of this region (Henry Hudson in 1609) arrived, they encountered the native people. This is referred to as the Contact Period.

These indigenous people of this time were the first to be identified by “tribal names.” The people that lived on the New Jersey side of the harbor were known as the Lenape. They lived in villages along the shore where they could take full advantage of the estuaries rich plant and animal resources.

### **SETTLERS**

Arriving between 1610 and 1633, the Dutch were the first European settlers in the area. The primary goal of the early Dutch was to establish trade with the natives. They utilized the land for farming and the rivers and harbor for fishing and transportation. The Dutch established the first ferry between the area and New York City in 1661. As with all the previous groups of inhabitants, the early settlers saw in New York Harbor an abundant source of natural resources and a safe harborage.

By the end of the seventeenth century, the British had taken control of the region from the Dutch. The British allowed the Dutch settlers to remain and continued the pattern of settlement in this area. The number of colonists slowly grew during the late seventeenth and throughout the eighteenth centuries. As roads and ferries developed, Communipaw (a small village close to the border of what is now Liberty State Park) and Bergen (the original Dutch village now known as Jersey City) became stopping points on the route between the growing town at the southern tip of Manhattan and the settlements further west.

### **THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR PERIOD**

During the Revolutionary War, the Colonists built fortifications at Paulus Hook (near the current “Peninsula Park”). The site was a strategic location for defense of the harbor. The British bombarded the fortifications on July 12, 1776 and attacked again on September 15th. The Colonists abandoned the fort at this point and the British took over, subsequently strengthening the fortifications. A surprise attack by American forces on August 19, 1779 succeeded in recapturing the position. They could not hold the post, however, and had to retreat. The British regained control of the fort until they evacuated New York Harbor in 1783 at the end of the war.

**THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**  
**IMMIGRATION, THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION, AND TRANSPORTATION**

The Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century saw a new type of dependency on the land and water. As the efficiency of the new factories grew, so too did the volume of goods and raw materials to be transported. This increased volume of freight required improved modes of transportation. The new factories also needed a larger work force. Both these factors led to massive impacts on the harbor and surrounding lands.

In 1836, the Morris Canal was completed. From its origin at the Delaware River to its eastern terminus on the Jersey City waterfront (now in the northern portion of the Park), the canal cut across northern New Jersey. The canal connected the coalfields of Pennsylvania and the iron mines of New Jersey with the New York commercial markets. The canal, however, soon yielded to competition from the railroads, which could carry cargo faster and cheaper and also operate during the cold winter months.

By the latter part of the century, the Harbor supported a culture whose economic power dominated much of the new nation. Industrialization created a need for people, the cries for which were heard throughout the world. Approximately 37 million people immigrated to America within the span of 100 years.

**THE CENTRAL RAILROAD OF NEW JERSEY (CRRNJ)**

Originally chartered in 1838, “The Elizabeth and Somerville Railroad Company” operated a fledgling line in Elizabeth. Renamed the Central Railroad of New Jersey in 1849, the line reached Philipsburg, New Jersey by 1852. The Elizabeth terminus proved too distant, however, from points in the New York Harbor area, so in 1860 a waterfront location was chartered in Jersey City.

As the tidal salt marshes and mudflats of Communipaw Cove were too shallow for passenger and freight vessels, the Central Railroad used millions of cubic yards of construction debris, refuse from New York City and ballast from ocean-going vessels to fill the area out towards deeper waters.

In 1864, a wooden framed terminal was constructed on the newly filled “land”. Although there are few accounts of this structure, the 1887 Atlas of Jersey City has a plan of the “L”-shaped facility with three ferry slips and a covered pier. The facility and site provided easy routes across the Hudson via ferries for commuters and car floats for freight, and a gateway to the ocean.

Heavier transportation demands soon rendered the original terminal inadequate. By 1889, a new terminal had been designed and constructed by the Boston architectural firm of Peabody and Stearns. The three-story headhouse joined twelve train tracks with six platforms to the ferry slips at the water's edge. Service and repair facilities, float bridges, barges and thawing sheds combined to make this complex the largest in the New York Harbor at the turn of the century.

### **THE LEHIGH VALLEY RAILROAD (LVRR)**

The CRRNJ was not the only railroad to operate out of the area now comprising Liberty State Park. The Lehigh Valley Railroad began running in 1855, and by 1880 it was one of the four great railroad lines in New Jersey. LVRR trains transported most of the anthracite coal from the Lehigh Valley coalmines to the New York harbor markets.

Starting in the 1870s, LVRR leased property along the Morris Canal's border and built its own terminal and freight yard on the Jersey City waterfront. They later purchased the land, thereby increasing its profits because it no longer had to pay the CRRNJ for the use of its lines.

The eventual decline in the New York coal traffic forced LVRR into bankruptcy in 1968. When the CRRNJ terminal and ferry closed in 1967, LVRR tracks remained essential to commuters, bringing them from Cranford's Aldene Junction to Newark's Penn Station.

## **THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY TRANSPORTATION, IMMIGRATION, WORLD WAR I.**

Already a busy commuter hub, the volume of traffic increased dramatically with the opening of the Ellis Island Immigration Station in 1892. In the next few decades, between 12-17 million immigrants passed through Ellis' Great Hall. Half to two-thirds of these courageous newcomers, welcomed by the Statue of Liberty and processed on Ellis Island, started their new lives via the CRRNJ Terminal. Some of these new Americans settled in New Jersey while others continued on to other parts of the country.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the CRRNJ Terminal accommodated between 30,000-50,000 people per day on 128 ferry runs and 300 trains. To accommodate the growing numbers of commuters the train and ferry sheds were enlarged between 1912 and 1914. The new Bush train shed, housing twenty tracks, was the largest of its type ever built. It still remains today.

By the mid-1900s, the railroad industry was rapidly declining and the end of “The Age of the Railroad” was in sight. Better highways, competition from the trucking industry, and the shift from coal to oil and gas led to the demise of the railroads. Finally in 1967, the Aldene Plan called for the rerouting of all train traffic to the Pennsylvania Station in Newark. In April of that same year, the CRRNJ declared bankruptcy and the Terminal ceased passenger operations.

Following the bankruptcy of the CRRNJ and the LVRR in the 1960's, the railroad yards and buildings lay deserted and falling into ruin. In 1973, the CRRNJ Terminal and the adjacent acreage were bought through local, state and federal funds. A massive clean-up and restoration campaign was begun. By 1975, the terminal building was added to both the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

### **WORLD WAR I, “BLACK TOM”**

The section of Liberty State Park that currently contains the Park Office and the South Lawn was once a small offshore island known as “Black Tom”. Between 1860 and 1880, Black Tom was connected to the mainland by a causeway with rail lines and which connected to a freight facility with docks. The area between the island and the mainland was filled in sometime between 1905 and 1916 by the Lehigh Valley Railroad as part of their new Jersey City facility. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Black Tom was serving as a major munitions depot.

Before the United States entered the First World War, American businessmen sold their supplies to any buyer. However, the Allies established a blockade and the Germans were excluded from being able to buy from the American merchants.

On July 30, 1916, agents of the German government sabotaged the freight cars, loaded with munitions for the Allies, at Black Tom. A number of incendiary devices were placed in the cars containing tons of ammunition and explosives. According to a recent study, the resulting explosion was the equivalent of an earthquake measuring between 5.0 and 5.5 on the Richter Scale. Windows within a 25-mile radius were shattered, the outside wall of Jersey City Hall cracked, pieces of metal damaged the Statue of Liberty (it is because of this explosion that the Lady's torch was closed off to visitors) and immigrants on Ellis Island were evacuated. An estimated seven deaths and \$20 million in damage have been attributed to the incident.

**THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**  
**THE CREATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF LIBERTY STATE PARK**

In 1957, Jersey City businessman, Morris Pesin attempted to take his family to visit the Statue of Liberty. As the only way to reach the Statue was via a ferry from Battery Park, they had to travel through the Holland Tunnel into New York City. The trip took several hours, even though the Statue is located less than 2,000 feet away from the New Jersey waterfront. Shortly after his family outing, Mr. Pesin arranged a demonstration. He canoed from Black Tom (now part of Liberty State Park) to the Statue in 8 minutes with the press watching. The following year Mr. Pesin went to the Jersey City Commission to petition for the construction of a causeway from Black Tom to the Statue of Liberty. In 1962, New Jersey Governor, Robert Hughes assigned the Conservation Commission to study the causeway proposal. In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson declared Ellis Island a National Monument and promised \$6 million to beautify the island and the area of Jersey City behind it.

In 1965, the City of Jersey City gave the State of New Jersey 156 acres, including the area known as Black Tom. This acreage would become the nucleus of Liberty State Park. In 1976, Governor Brendan Byrne announced that \$1.2 million would be used to have Liberty State Park ready for the nation's bicentennial celebrations, and that the Park would be "New Jersey's gift to the Nation". Liberty State Park was dedicated on June 14, 1976.

The grass-root citizen movement that helped to form Liberty State Park did not end its efforts with the establishment of the park. The movement continued and evolved through the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s helping to guide the development of the park, serving as a watchdog ensuring that the park continued to stay true to the fundamental goal that called them to action, namely keeping Liberty State Park a free and open space for the residents of the area as well as for visitors from around the world. Today, there is a continued relationship with citizen groups who remain interested in the continued growth and development of the park.

At the time of its dedication, the only areas of Liberty State Park open to the public were the Visitors' Center and 35 acres around it. This included a row of flags along Morris Pesin Drive (the park entrance) consisting of the official state flag from each of the 50 states; and Flag Plaza, a circle of thirteen state flags representing the original thirteen colonies and the founding of the nation. The Park has since grown to encompass 1,212 acres, of which approximately half is water. In 1979, Governor Byrne established the Liberty State Park Advisory Commission to provide a forum for public participation in the development of the Park.

The first ferry connecting New Jersey to the Statue of Liberty began operating from the south end of the park in September of 1977. In 1978, a 36-acre area was set-aside as the Liberty State Park Natural Area. In 1980, the 235.9-acre Caven Point Peninsula and 63.3-acre Caven Point Pier were purchased by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection with Green Acres funds and added to the park's inventory.

In 1985, the Interpretive Center (IC), designed by noted architect Michael Graves was constructed and began offering interpretive and educational programs to the public. The IC's programs are primarily oriented towards the environmental aspects of the Park and the region.

Also in 1985, the Liberation Monument, located in the South Lawn, was dedicated. This statue was designed by noted sculptor Nathan Rapoport and depicts an American soldier carrying a World War II concentration camp survivor to freedom.

In 1989, in celebration of the Centennial of the CRRNJ Terminal, historical interpretive programs were introduced at the Terminal. The Terminal's programs are designed to educate the public about the various historical features of the Park and to show the role of these features in local, regional and national development.

Located in the northwest corner of the park, Liberty Science Center opened to the public in January 1993. The Science Center is a privately run family museum with three floors of interactive exhibits and the largest IMAX dome screen theater in the country.

Another privately owned and operated facility within the park is the Liberty Landing Marina. The Marina has over 500 slips and there is a ferry service to New York City, harbor cruises, and boat charters. In 2001, Liberty House Restaurant, a large-scale, multi-faceted facility opened adjacent to the Marina.

The area known as Morris Canal Peninsula Park has been part of Liberty State Park from the beginning. This area contains the Little Basin, the Big Basin, and the small peninsula of land between these two bodies of water associated with the terminus of the Morris Canal. In 1996, this area was developed into a public open space.

In 1998, construction of the Green Park, an 88-acre park within Liberty State Park, began. It contains lawns, a playground with restroom facilities and a parking lot, plazas and a network of paved pathways. Governor Christine Todd Whitman dedicated the Green Park in October 1999. Within the Green Park is the Columbus Monument, which



was dedicated on Columbus Day 1998 to celebrate the quincentennial of Columbus' voyage to the New World.

In 2000, the Terminal bus drop-off and passenger walkway and the section of Liberty Walk along the Morris Canal Big Basin were completed. Also, in September of that same year, Millennium Park, a 10-acre park located on the west side of the intersection of Audrey Zapp Drive and Freedom Way was dedicated. This area contains planted beds, lawns, seating areas and paved paths.

On September 11, 2001, Liberty State Park was witness to the greatest act of terrorism on American soil – the attack on the World Trade Center in New York City. Immediately following the attack, Liberty State Park became an integral part of the rescue and recovery process as several thousand victims were brought here from Manhattan and treated. Over the months that followed, the CRRNJ had an evolving role in New Jersey's response to this event. The building became a staging area, the New Jersey Command Center and the Family Assistant Center (aiding the families of victims with a variety of services).

In 2002, the Grove of Remembrance was dedicated. Along this stretch of Audrey Zapp Drive from Freedom Way to Phillip Drive, trees were planted in memory of New Jersey residents who lost their lives in the September 11, 2001 tragedy. The Grove serves as a living tribute and a quiet place for reflection. It also serves as a haven for wildlife and a seed source for new growth.

In 2005, renovations to the CRRNJ Terminal building were completed. This project included installing a Heating, Ventilating/Air Conditioning system for the entire building; an elevator; two additional staircases; and renovating rooms on the first, second and third floors.

The Interior nature Restoration with trails will begin late in 2009. For background information, please go to <http://folsp.org/interior/index.htm>