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Teaching NJ History

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The New Jersey Studies Academic Alliance: 30 Years of Promoting New Jersey Studies

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This brief piece acknowledges the work of the New Jersey Studies Academic Alliance as it marks its thirtieth anniversary.

This year, 2022, marks the thirtieth anniversary of the New Jersey Studies Academic Alliance (NJSAA). The Alliance started informally in 1992 as a small group of educators who met to discuss the teaching of New Jersey studies, broadly defined to include the state's history, culture, physical and life sciences, politics, and notable individuals. The group has grown to include educators from kindergarten teachers through college professors, historians, geographers, museum and historical organization personnel, archivists, and librarians. In the fall of 1993, the Alliance presented or co-sponsored several conferences to introduce people to New Jersey studies, and similar work continues today. Over the years, the Alliance has received generous support from the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, the New Jersey Historical Commission, and many individual donors. Even as the NJSAA has evolved, its goals have remained the same: to promote the teaching of New Jersey studies, to encourage collaborative efforts, and to share its collective knowledge.

Founding member Maxine N. Lurie recalls that in the early days of NJSAA, the founders sought advice from other states to discover what they were doing, only to find few models. They

forged ahead, experimented with a variety of programs, and gradually added awards, in the process becoming friends who shared ideas and materials.

In the years since, NJSAA members have presented sessions at the New Jersey Education Association conventions, New Jersey Council for the Social Studies conferences, the New Jersey History Issues Convention, and the New Jersey Historical Commission's annual conference. From 1998 to 1999, the Alliance organized a New Jersey Studies Film Festival, held at various venues around the state. They worked with the New Jersey County Cultural and Historic Agencies to present a series of county studies programs to introduce teachers to the historic resources of the counties. Programs were held in Ocean, Camden, Gloucester, and Atlantic Counties and related sessions in Bergen and Morris Counties. The Alliance has been a co-sponsor of the annual New Jersey History Issues Convention, the Monmouth County Archives and History Day celebration, and National History Day. The Alliance received an award of recognition for its role in promoting New Jersey history from the New Jersey Historical Commission in 1997. In addition, Alliance members have participated in efforts to strengthen the teaching of New Jersey studies in schools. For example, Harriet Sepinwall (College of Saint Elizabeth) and Maxine N. Lurie (Seton Hall University) testified publicly on the need for New Jersey studies before the Task Force on New Jersey History.

The work of the NJSAA continues. Business meetings held four times annually during the academic year (virtually, since the start of the pandemic) are followed by public programs in which award winners or invited speakers present on topics related to New Jersey. Awards and scholarships are presented annually to highlight and honor the work of those teaching and researching New Jersey. These awards include:

- [Author Awards](#), presented in the categories of edited works, nonfiction, popular, scholarly, reference, and reproduction of primary resources.
- [Teaching Awards](#), recognizing innovation and creativity in teaching New Jersey studies on the elementary, middle, secondary, and college level.
- [Paul A. Stelhorn Undergraduate Paper in New Jersey History Award](#), with [winners](#) published in *New Jersey Studies*.
- [Graduate Student Paper in New Jersey History Award](#), with [winners](#) published in *New Jersey Studies*.
- [Roger McDonough Librarianship Award](#), honoring a librarian, an archivist, or a manuscript curator for excellence in service to the New Jersey history research community and/or the general public.
- [Marc Mappen Student Research Scholarships](#), financially supporting research by high school and college students on any aspect of New Jersey studies.

In its 30-year history, the Alliance has always worked to bring together individuals involved in the study of New Jersey to further knowledge and act as a clearinghouse for information about teaching and research on New Jersey. By its very nature, *New Jersey Studies* is interdisciplinary and involves people at every level of teaching and research. Members are a diverse group of people passionate about teaching and preserving New Jersey's history, and anyone interested in the study of New Jersey is welcome to join. To learn more about the organization or to join, please visit njsaa.org.

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