

[Slide 1 with NHS logo] on screen during first part of program

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[Slide 3, Pierson's Directory of Newark]

Historians, Civic Memory, and the Story of Newark

In October 1835, Benjamin Thompson Pierson, known as B.T., published his first *Directory of Newark* that included a 24-page, unsigned "Historical Sketch." At that point, Newark had existed for almost 170 years – nearly half of our city's 350-year history – but this "Sketch" is the earliest surviving narrative focused on the story of Newark. Whoever the author was – and I presume it was Pierson himself -- wrote during a period of enormous change for Newark, when citizens sensed a sharp break from their agricultural past even as they embraced an industrial future.¹

[Slide 4, with map of Newark]

The population of Newark had doubled in just five years, to about 18,000. The Morris Canal had been completed in 1832, the same year a Newark whaling company had fitted out a ship that returned 27 months later "with a full cargo of

¹ *Directory of Newark, for 1835-6*. (Newark: Published for the Compiler, 1835), 3-24. The author conducted research for his "Historical Sketch" in the sources available at the time, including the original town records, the 1747 *Bill in Chancery* that preserves Robert Treat's deposition about the town purchase in 1666, Samuel Smith's 1765 *History of the Colony of Nova-Caesaria*, and Alexander McWhorter's *Century Sermon* from 1801. He could have studied these sources at one of the subscription or association libraries that existed in Newark at that time. On early libraries in Newark, see Miriam Studley, "Old Library Days," *Newark Evening News*, September 4, 1949, one of her series of "When Newark Was Younger" articles for the paper. I suspect the author is Pierson himself, since he advertised himself as a "job writer" in his *Directory* for 1838 (p. 150). Thomas Frank Gordon included "a brief historical notice" in his entry for "Newark" in *Gazetteer of the State of New Jersey*, 1834, based on research conducted by a committee (A. Armstrong, C.H. Halsey, S.H. Pennington, D.A. Hays, and J.B. Conger) of the Young Men's Society; its nine paragraphs are focused primarily on the founding of Newark.

3,000 barrels of oil and 15,000 pounds of bone.”² Newark had been designated a port of entry in 1833, and nearly 100 vessels traded with New York City and other northern and eastern ports. The first railroad followed in 1834 and quickly gained acceptance; the number of monthly passengers doubled over the course of the first year, to more than 16,000 by August 1835.³

[Slide 5: statistics]

In 1836, three banks and three property insurance companies added to commercial vitality, as did the thirty dealers in Dry Goods, with their stores clustered on Broad, Market, and West Market streets. The great inventor Seth Boyden had moved to Newark and was living at 35 Bridge Street. There were ten coach manufacturers in Newark, fourteen boot and shoemakers, and three jewelry firms, along with 112 grocery stores, 26 attorneys, 23 doctors, and two sausage makers. The list goes on.⁴

Change was also happening in local politics. Newark had been governed by a town meeting from its founding in 1666, but just a couple months after Pierson published his first *Directory*, a new state law permitted Newark to incorporate as a city and for the first time elect a mayor and members of a city council.⁵

² B.T. Pierson, *Directory of the City of Newark, for 1837-8, With an Historical Sketch*. (Newark: 1837), 26.

³ *Directory of Newark, for 1835-6*, 23.

⁴ B.T. Pierson, *Directory of the City of Newark, for 1836-7, With an Historical Sketch*. (Newark: 1836), Appendix, p. 34 (“Statistics”).

⁵ *Ibid.* Pierson printed the enabling legislation and noted the newly elected officials in an appendix.

[Slide 6, estimated population]

The make-up of Newark's population in the 1830s was shifting as well. Even a decade before Ireland's Great Famine, the Irish had come to Newark to work on the Morris Canal and other projects in numbers large enough to stir nativist sentiment. Here we may have a clue to why Pierson included his "Historical Sketch" in that first City Directory. Yes, he wanted to spark interest in his new business venture and, yes, he was happy to engage in what Newark historian Paul Stellhorn later called "boosterism." But I suspect Pierson was also putting forward a narrative of Newark intended to give special place to those born in this country and indeed to the founding families. He himself was a direct descendant of Newark's founding minister Abraham Pierson and among the seventh generation of Piersons living in Newark and Morristown.⁶ The same sort of nativist sentiment would later shape Newark's 250th anniversary celebration in 1916. And of course we see similar nativist forces at work around the country in our own day.

In focusing on Newark's "early history," Pierson was helping to preserve Newark's New England Protestant culture against a surge of Irish Catholic immigration even as he cheered Newark's rapid economic growth that depended in part on the availability of cheap Irish labor. His nativist assumptions are perhaps most explicit in the categories he used to estimate Newark's population in 1835:

- Free White Americans, 10,542
- Irish Population, about 6,000

⁶ Richard E. Pierson and Jennifer Pierson, *Pierson Millenium* (Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 1997), 97.

- English and Scotch, about 1,000
- Germans, 300
- Free people of color 359
 - Total in 1835, 18,201⁷

Pierson doesn't mention slavery in his "Sketch," and his estimate of the number of free people of color turned out to be too low by half. In 1836, the newly established City Council commissioned a detailed city census that found 720 people of color in Newark, not including 10 others who had been enslaved when New Jersey abolished slavery in 1804 and still remained in bondage more than thirty years later.⁸

[Slide 7 about Indian rights]

While Pierson ignored slavery, he was fully tuned into the then-current controversy about the removal of Native Americans to Indian Territory in the west. As he prepared his first *Directory*, the U.S. War Department was taking a census of

⁷ *Directory of Newark, for 1835-6*, 22. Nativist reactions would metastasize a couple decades later in the Know Nothing rioters who attacked St. Mary's in Newark; see Augustine F. Curley, "Nativists in Newark: Radical Protestant Reaction to the Appointment of a Catholic Bishop," *New Jersey History* 127, no. 1 (2012). While Pierson notes in his essay that "A Catholic Church was commenced in 1824, and completed the year following," his list of the nineteen churches in Newark at the end of his *Directory* shows his pecking order for Christian denominations, starting with the Presbyterians (including an African Presbyterian congregation on Market Street) and then working down a non-alphabetical list through the Methodists (again including an African congregation on Academy Street, near Plane – today's University Avenue), Episcopalians, Universalists, Baptists, Reformed Dutch, a Bethel chapel at the dock, and finally the single Roman Catholic church at 12 Mulberry (St. John's). (*Directory...for 1835-6*, 18-20 noting the history of Newark churches and 102 for the full list of churches.)

⁸ B.T. Pierson, *Directory of the City of Newark, for 1837-8*, 24.

Cherokees in southern states. The infamous “Trail of Tears” had started with the removal of the Choctaw a few years earlier and would continue in 1838 with the Cherokees. Pierson was quick to assert that the original settlers of Newark were entirely blameless on this score. Early on in his essay, he protested too much when he declared:

However unjustly the aborigines may have been dealt with elsewhere, no act of our ancestors can be pointed to with the slightest reproach by the most jealous advocate of Indian rights.⁹

[Slide 8: outline may be filled up]

Pierson concluded his “Historical Sketch” with a hopeful comment that “At a future time, the outline may be filled up, and extended.”¹⁰ Although he made small changes over the next couple years, Pierson never got around to filling up his outline or extending the narrative. That was left to the historians who followed, and the task is by no means complete today.

[Slide 9: NHS logo]

I have talked at length about Pierson’s “Historical Sketch” not because it is such a valuable record of Newark’s early history, but rather because it incorporates elements that have characterized most efforts to tell Newark’s story. These include his limited use of archival resources, his unabashed boosterism, his effort to shape civic memory, and his unrecognized biases anchored in a particular time and place. He made little or no effort to step outside Newark’s story and place it in a larger

⁹ *Directory of Newark, for 1835-6*, 6.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 20.

context, or to compare and contrast Newark's early history with the New England experience or other towns in New Jersey.

Local history is often messy and parochial in these ways, which is why it sometimes doesn't get much respect. But democracy is messy, too.

Decades ago, Fernand Braudel challenged historians to look down not just up, at everyday life not just at the "vast plane of the market economy" or the grand level of government or great leaders.¹¹ "How can one," he asked, "understand the towns without understanding the countryside, money without barter, the varieties of poverty without the varieties of luxury, the white bread of the rich without the black bread of the poor?"¹²

Local history gets at the experience of everyday life in different periods, bringing the lives of ordinary and sometimes extraordinary people into the light. Its granularity provides both context and texture to larger narratives, and at its best it works to complicate and even challenge overarching theories and narratives.

Local history also shapes, and is shaped by, civic memory. Few things are messier -- or more important -- than private memories that evolve and coalesce into civic memory. But at the same time, local historians usually succeed most when they lead

¹¹Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century, Volume 1, The Structures of Everyday Life: The Limits of the Possible* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 24.

¹² *Ibid*, 29.

people to ask new questions while introducing complexity into an otherwise simple civic narrative. No one understood this better than the late Clement Price. In his essay, "History and Memory," which serves as the epilogue to a collection of essays by various authors called *Baltimore '68*, he explained how the "American city became contested territory, framed over time by more complicated memories by blacks, ethnic whites, and those entrusted with public policy." He added, "One's race, generation, social class, and civic vantage point all contribute to the making of civic memory. Civic memory emerges out of the social landscape of the community writ large."¹³

Civic memory has always been at work throughout Newark's long history, from how local citizens framed the land disputes in the 1740s, to Alexander McWhorter's *Century Sermon* in 1801 that recalled the hardships of the first settlers while getting much of the early history wrong, to the 250th anniversary celebration in 1916 and the 300th anniversary celebration in 1966, which both emphasized the old-fashioned purpose of using civic memory to foster patriotism and social order, while leaving out much of the story and many of the residents of Newark.

I think civic memory becomes more contested, and certainly more important, in transitional periods -- periods when one group is gaining power and another is finding its influence diminished, when a city or the country as a whole is looking honestly at past injustice, or when a city is going through a period of either dramatic

¹³ Clement Alexander Price, "History and Memory: Why It Matters That We Remember," in *Baltimore '68: Riots and Rebirth in an American City*, ed. Jessica L. Elfenbein, Thomas L. Hollowak, and Elizabeth M. Nix (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), 263.

growth or gut-wrenching decline. The stories of gain can be empowering, while the stories of loss and betrayal can be painful -- such as those by Newark residents recalling the destruction of their neighborhoods to make way for public housing and new highways.

The oral record can be most illuminating when it captures the memories and experiences of people long-ignored or left out. In recent decades, Newark's public memory has expanded to take on a much more democratic scope, through such projects as the Krueger Scott oral histories, the Latino Oral History collection here at the Newark Public Library, and the Queer Newark initiative at Rutgers Newark. And of course no topic has been more important to civic memory in Newark in recent years than the 1967 rebellion, as we saw again in July when we marked its 50th anniversary.

Writing in the *New Yorker* about Philip Roth, Adam Gopnik suggested that Roth's "patriotic" premise was, "You get America right by remembering Newark as it really was."¹⁴ Of course, Roth did that brilliantly through his fiction. But with the tools available to them, historians also need to remember Newark as it really was. There are of course different ways of doing this work of history. The historian Eric Foner reminded readers of *The Nation* a few years ago that Friedrich Nietzsche "identified three approaches to the writing of history: the monumental, the antiquarian and the

¹⁴ Adam Gopnik, "The Patriot." *The New Yorker*, November 13, 2017, 76.

critical.”¹⁵ I want to use that framework to suggest how the different approaches have played out among Newark historians as they attempted to remember Newark as it really was.

We have had our share of authors who have attempted monumental history, what you might call the school of “let us now praise famous men, and our fathers that begat us.” I put Joseph Atkinson in 1878 in that camp, along with Frank Urquhart in the early 20th century and even John Cunningham on occasion in our own day.¹⁶

We have also had those with an antiquarian bent, who brought hidden resources to light and were not afraid to tell small stories as well as large ones. These Newark historians include William Shaw in the 19th century, as well as Miriam Studley and Charles Cummings, both of the Newark Public Library, in the 20th century.

But, refreshingly, Newark has also drawn critical historians who have paid close attention to original sources, showed a studious concern to get the details right, and been able to draw parallels and contrasts to events in other places or in other periods.

[Slide 10: Stearns’ First Church title page]

¹⁵ Eric Foner, “Zinn’s Critical History,” *The Nation*, February 22, 2010, <http://www.ericfoner.com/articles/02222010nation.html>.

¹⁶ Joseph Atkinson, *The History of Newark, New Jersey* (Newark: William B. Guild, 1878); Frank Urquhart, *A History of the City of Newark, New Jersey Embracing Practically Two and A Half Centuries, 1666-1913* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1913); John T. Cunningham, *Newark* (Newark: New Jersey Historical Society, 1966, revised and expanded 1988).

To name just a few, I think of Jonathan French Stearns' *First Church in Newark* from 1853,¹⁷

[Slide 11: Clem Price's dissertation title page]

or Clement Price's 1975 dissertation, "The Afro-American Community of Newark, 1917-1947,"¹⁸

[Slide 12: Susan Hirsch's Roots]

or Susan Hirsch's remarkable *Roots of the American Working Class* from 1978,¹⁹

[Slide 13: Paul Stellhorns thesis title page]

or Paul Stellhorn's PhD thesis, "Depression and Decline: Newark, New Jersey: 1929-1941," that he completed in 1982,²⁰

[Slide 14: Warren Grover's Nazis in Newark title page]

or Warren Grover's pathbreaking *Nazis in Newark*, published in 2003,²¹

[Slide 15: Mark Krasovic's Newark Frontier title page]

¹⁷ Jonathan F. Stearns, *First Church in Newark. Historical Discourses, Relating to the First Presbyterian Church in Newark* (Newark: Daily Advertiser, 1853)

¹⁸ Clement Alexander Price, "The Afro-American Community of Newark, 1917-1947: A Social History" (Rutgers PhD Thesis, 1975).

¹⁹ Susan E. Hirsch, *Roots of the American Working Class: The Industrialization of Crafts in Newark, 1800-1860* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978).

²⁰ Paul Anthony Stellhorn, "Depression and Decline: Newark, New Jersey: 1929-1941" (Rutgers PhD Thesis, 1982).

²¹ Warren Grover, *Nazis in Newark* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2003).

or Mark Krasovic's recent *The Newark Frontier: Community Action in the Great Society*.²² It is perhaps worth noting that with the exception of Warren Grover, these historians all grew up elsewhere and brought an outsider's perspective to Newark's story.

[Slide 16: Atkinson's History of Newark]

That was certainly the case for Joseph Atkinson, who wrote the first monumental history of Newark. He was born in Northern Ireland, served in the Union Navy while still a teenager, and became a correspondent in Newark for the *New York Herald* after the Civil War. He was only twenty-nine when he realized that, as he put it, "no complete History of Newark existed" and decided to fill the gap for a city that had pulled off the stupendous Industrial Exposition of 1872. He began research in late 1875 while continuing to write for two daily newspapers. He found what he later described as "abundant materials with which to weave a volume, not alone interesting, but instructive and valuable." In addition to his archival research, he tapped into the civic memory of Newark by interviewing descendants of the early settlers and a cross-section of the first generation of Irish and German immigrants to Newark, who by the mid-1870s were well-advanced in years. He included an account of slaveholding in Newark based on his review of early newspapers, and he was quick to give credit to the *Centinal of Freedom* newspaper for coming out strongly against slavery late in the 18th century. An immigrant himself, he also

²² Mark Krasovic, *The Newark Frontier: Community Action in the Great Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1916).

provided sympathetic accounts of the first Irish and German immigrants to Newark in the 1820s and 1830s.²³

[Slide 17: Urquhart's History of Newark]

Frank Urquhart wrote his massive *History of the City of Newark* for the Lewis Historical Publishing Company in 1913, building on the much shorter works he wrote years earlier for use in Newark's public schools. Urquhart was born in Toronto in 1865 and grew up in Leominster, Massachusetts. While he was a student at Dartmouth, his family moved to Newark so his Scottish-born father could take up a position as superintendent of one of the large celluloid manufacturing companies. He joined his family in Newark after graduating from Dartmouth in the class of 1887. He spent the rest of his life as a journalist in Newark, most of it with the *Sunday Call*. Urquhart could perhaps be considered the father of the preservation and landmarks movement in Newark, because he was the one who suggested to the Newark Schoolmen's Club the idea of marking historical spots with plaques and tablets, and later as a member of the Committee of 100 for the 250th anniversary he chaired the sub-committee to erect historical monuments and tablets.²⁴

²³ Atkinson, *History of Newark*, vii, 170-1 (*slavery*), 194-200 (*Irish*), 200-211 (*Germans*). Atkinson never published another book, but he always kept writing as editor of the *Newark Journal*, part founder of the *Orange Chronicle*, and editor for twenty-five years of Prudential's in-house organ, *The Weekly Record*. He served as city clerk of Newark from 1884 and clerk of the Board of Freeholders from 1890 to 1907. He died in 1924 at his home on Clifton Avenue, at the age of 84. Obituary, "Joseph Atkinson Dies; Editor, Once City Clerk," *Newark Evening News*, December 18, 1924; death notice in *Star-Ledger*, December 18, 1924, 22.

²⁴ "Work Closes for F.J. Urquhart, Editor on Sunday Call Staff," *Sunday Call*, February 27, 1921. He was just 56 when he died in 1921 at his home on Clifton Avenue following an extended illness.

[Slide 18: first two Urquhart pamphlets]

It was Urquhart's association with John Cotton Dana that led to his research into Newark's history. Urquhart and Dana had much in common; Dana was nine years older, but both grew up in New England, both went to Dartmouth, both wrote easily, and both shared the Progressive era's passion for public institutions, especially the public library and public schools. Dana met Urquhart soon after becoming director of the Library in 1902, and within two years he had persuaded him to write "Newark, the Story of its Early Days," a slim pamphlet that the Library published in May 1904 to meet the need that Dana saw for brief stories of Newark's history. This first pamphlet was followed in December 1905 with "Newark, the Story of its Awakening"

[Slide 19: Urquhart's third pamphlet and Short History]

and then in 1907 with "Newark, the Story of its Prosperity" which the Library sold for five cents and made available in large numbers for use in the schools.²⁵ Dana hoped the series would spur "a more rapid growth of the best kind of civic pride and patriotism, the kind that comes from knowledge, familiarity and respect."²⁶ In 1908, Urquhart recast and somewhat expanded the three pamphlets into "A Short History of Newark" with illustrations, a chronology, a list of historic places, and an index. Its simple style, numbered topics, few dates, and lack of footnotes all show its purpose for use in the Newark schools, but it was also popular among adult readers. The

²⁵ Frank J. Urquhart, *Newark, The Story of its Early Days* (Newark: The Free Public Library, 1904); *Newark, The Story of its Awakening, 1790-1840* (Newark: The Free Public Library, 1905); *Newark, The Story of its Prosperity, 1840-1907* (Newark: The Free Public Library, 1907).

²⁶ John Cotton Dana, "Preface" in Urquhart, *Newark, The Story of its Prosperity*, 5.

Board of Education adopted the book as a supplementary reader, and Urquhart and Dana believed that it was the first school history of a city published anywhere in America. It was reprinted in 1910, expanded in 1916, and republished as late as 1953.²⁷

Urquhart developed an expansive knowledge of Newark, which he conveyed in a highly readable, if uncritical narrative when he expanded the pamphlets and his “Short History” into the much longer “History of the City of Newark” in 1913. He reviewed old controversies with sympathy to all sides, but he avoided unpleasant topics like slavery almost entirely and used only a very light touch to discuss the arrival of the Irish and Germans in the 1830s and the Italians and other immigrants in the 1880s.

Urquhart and his contemporaries did not understand what has become so clear in the scholarship of recent decades – that the most revealing aspects of a culture take place at the margins, and that by focusing on the boundaries we can gain important insight not just about the margins but about the center as well.

[Slide 20: quotation from Urquhart’s History of Newark]

²⁷ Frank J. Urquhart, *A Short History of Newark* (Newark: Baker Printing Company, 1908, 1910, 1916 revised, 1953).

In contrast, Urquhart's larger civic purpose in writing his *History* was much more limited and conservative. That purpose is evident in his description of the founders of Newark:

If the founders of Newark were living to-day they would, many of them, hold positions of high responsibility and trust, not only in the affairs of the city, but in the State, and possibly in national affairs. It is essential that the readers of Newark's history should understand this at the beginning, if they are to grasp why and how it was that Newark became one of the leading communities of all New Jersey from its settlement and forged ahead of them all soon after the War for Independence.²⁸

[Slide 21: Urquhart title page, plus von Katzler's essay]

This is monumental history -- in style certainly, but also in heft since Urquhart expanded his *Short History* to encompass 845 pages! On top of that, the Lewis Publishing Company added to the scope and girth of the project by commissioning several additional articles on manufacturing, banking, churches, medicine, and -- perhaps most important today -- on "The Germans in Newark," a 105-page essay by William von Katzler, editor of the *New Jersey Freie Zeitung*. Still not content, the publisher tacked on a third volume with biographies of Newark worthies covering an additional 400 pages, intended no doubt to increase vanity sales.

[Slide 22: Cunningham's History; photo of him with Sharpe James]

John Cunningham's history of Newark, simply called *Newark* and first published in 1966 and significantly updated in a second edition in 1988, can also be placed in the category of monumental history. Like Atkinson and Urquhart, Cunningham spent

²⁸ Urquhart, *History of Newark*, 91.

years as a journalist, but unlike them he managed to earn his livelihood as an historian, writing commissioned studies as well as works that stemmed from his own interests. More than anything, Cunningham wanted to reach his audience. He wanted to get them excited about history, whether they were schoolchildren, college students, or the general public. That's why there is such a strong narrative thread in his work, and why he wrote film scripts and experimented with different media. And, that's why he made such extensive use of photographs and illustrations.

Following Cunningham's death five years ago – he died just days short of his 97th birthday -- we held a gathering on the fourth floor of the Library to remember him. Clement Price provided his assessment of Cunningham's *Newark* for that occasion.

Calling it Cunningham's "greatest book," Clem added:

[It] was essential reading back in the day. It became all the more essential some years later, when in 1988 the New Jersey Historical Society brought out a revised edition. In that revision, John had to take into consideration what he probably could not nearly a generation earlier—that Newark's infamous decline was ignored by seemingly all but that decline's most notable victims—its poor, black residents.

Clem concluded his assessment in this way:

It remains one of the most important books about Newark, and, for that matter, any American city.²⁹

[Slide 23: Studley and Cummings]

²⁹ Clement A. Price, "John Cunningham" in "Newark Remembers John T. Cunningham." <http://www.newarkhistorysociety.org/resources.html>.

In addition to supporting institutions that made his work possible – in particular the New Jersey Historical Society and the Newark Public Library – Cunningham made sure to thank the librarians and archivists who assisted his research, notably Miriam Studley and Charles Cummings, who both worked in the New Jersey room here at the Newark Public Library. As I noted earlier, Studley and Cummings are examples of historians with an antiquarian bent. They each developed an encyclopedic knowledge of Newark by immersing themselves in the details and byways of our long history. Each one made very important contributions to the study of Newark, not least by helping so many researchers with their own projects, but unfortunately neither one wrote an extended narrative about Newark.

Studley was an accidental historian, but she was one of those whippet-smart people who take to it naturally. Born in China and raised in the Philippines as the daughter of Episcopal missionaries from New Jersey, she attended Vassar and taught briefly before becoming a children’s librarian, first in New York and from 1931 in Newark. She started working with the Library’s New Jersey reference materials in 1944 and created the separate New Jersey room in 1951. In 1960, she played a key role on Newark’s Historic Sites and Buildings Committee, recording extensive information on important structures and laying the groundwork for later efforts to nominate buildings for landmark status.³⁰

[Slide 24: “First Shopping Centers”]

³⁰ Carolyn Zachary, “Miss Studley Leaves Library,” *Newark Evening News*, October 9, 1966.

In 1949, the Newark Evening News asked her to write a series of articles on local history called “When Newark was Younger,” and over the next 21 months she prepared thirty-four essays, all gracefully written, copiously illustrated, and full of interesting information and anecdotes.

[Slide 25: First Shopping Centers, part 2]

These essays are perhaps a bit nostalgic, and they don’t explore social or political controversies, but they merit attention. Perhaps the Newark History Society or the Library could take on the project of putting them online so Studley’s contributions can reach a new generation.³¹

[Slide 26: Charles Cummings at file cabinet]

Unlike Studley, Charles Cummings was interested in history from the beginning and had undertaken graduate studies at Vanderbilt University, although he knew next to nothing about Newark when he arrived in the early 1960s to work in the Library’s New Jersey room. He learned quickly. One of his early projects was preparing the index to Newark’s *Town Records* for a new edition published in 1966 for the 300th anniversary, and for decades he maintained an index to New Jersey articles in the daily issues of the Star-Ledger. Cummings’ attention to detail and ever-growing knowledge of Newark’s history was matched by his extraordinary warmth of personality and graciousness in helping anyone with a genuine interest in learning about Newark. Philip Roth, who was first introduced to Cummings by John

³¹ References for “When Newark was Younger”

Cunningham in 1992, got it right when he called Cummings “the most generous of men” and added that for the people of Newark “he was their librarian, archivist, historian, recording journalist, teacher, lecturer and impassioned tour guide par excellence.”³² As you all know, Mayor Sharpe James honored Cummings in 1998 by naming him Newark’s official “City Historian,” a title that he loved and certainly deserved.

[Slide 27: Knowing Newark home page]

Newark is full of stories that explain our past and can inspire our future, and Cummings somehow knew most of them. He told those stories in many ways, but no way was more important than his weekly “Knowing Newark” columns for the *Star-Ledger* that ran for ten years, from March 1996 until his death at the end of 2005. I may be one of the few who has read all 498 columns, since I took on the task of formatting and lightly editing them for the “Knowing Newark” website that Bob Hartman designed so handsomely. Some of the columns are finely crafted essays, while others show the relentless pressure Cummings faced in meeting a weekly deadline; all demonstrate his commitment to local history as a discipline and his love and appreciation for Newark. There is no overarching narrative, no sustained and compelling argument, but together his “Knowing Newark” columns are a legacy that any city would value.³³

³² Philip Roth, “A Great Newark Hero,” *Star-Ledger*, December 25, 2005, reprinted in Charles Cummings, *Knowing Newark: Selected Star-Ledger Columns* (Newark: The Newark Public Library, 2016) 6.

³³ Charles Cummings, “Knowing Newark, The Star-Ledger Columns,” <http://knowingnewark.npl.org/>

I have talked about three Newark historians in the monumental camp -- Atkinson, Urquhart, and Cunningham -- and two others in the antiquarian category -- Studley and Cummings -- but I want to end by focusing on just one Newark historian whose work exemplifies critical history, and that is Warren Grover.

[Slide 27: Warren Grover; Nazis in Newark title page]

I noted earlier the interplay between history and civic memory, and how important it is for local historians to interrogate civic memory. Among historians of Newark, I think no one has done a better job of interrogating and amplifying Newark's civic memory than Warren Grover in his book *Nazis in Newark*.

Warren ran to the ground the fragmented stories about Newark's New Minutemen: Jewish boxers from the old Third Ward, some of them enforcers for Newark's crime boss Longie Zwillman, who "used fists, clubs, and baseball bats to counter the Nazi threat" through much of the 1930s.³⁴ To capture and test memories from this period, Warren consulted more than seventy different manuscript archives, reviewed the files of two-dozen different newspapers, and conducted an astonishing seventy-two personal interviews. Often he was just in time: seventeen of the people he interviewed died in the few years between when he began his research and when he published his book in 2003. The result of all this research is his richly detailed

³⁴ Grover, *Nazis in Newark*, 39.

and compelling narrative about how Newark became what he calls “the first major battleground in America in the struggle against domestic Nazism.”³⁵ (p. 27)

One of the marks of good history is that it makes possible comparisons with events in other places and in other periods. In that way alone, Warren’s *Nazis in Newark* is good history. Who knew that Charlottesville, where neo-Nazi marchers chanted racist and anti-semitic slogans in August, would make Warren’s book so excruciatingly relevant in our own day? After those demonstrations, President Trump and others suggested an exculpatory notion of moral equivalence by noting there were “bad dudes” on both sides. In contrast, Warren’s book challenges us not to look away, while at the same time providing a thoughtful and nuanced analysis. In *Nazis in Newark*, he describes how Nat Arno and the other Minutemen confronted homegrown Nazis and disrupted their rallies, and he explains how they depended on Longie Zwillman’s corrupt ties to Newark politicians and judges to get them off easy when they were arrested. There is little question that these men could be considered bad dudes by some. But Warren takes his analysis much deeper by comparing what the Minutemen did to how other groups in Newark addressed the rise of Hitler and the threat of domestic Nazism. He examines the actions of rabbis and leaders of Jewish community groups; of liberal Protestants, Catholic priests, and business leaders; of Italians, Irish, and African Americans; of union leaders and communists, and of long established German American groups and the more recent German immigrants. His willingness to cast his net so wide, looking at those on the

³⁵ Ibid, 27, 345-49.

margins as well as those at the center of Newark life, adds critical depth and texture to his account, and makes it all the more important. Nobody gets off easy in his book. Nor should they. Nor should we.

[Slide 29: NHS logo]

In a way, Warren's research led to the formation of the Newark History Society. Doing historical research can be solitary, and it can be hard to tap into civic memory or find the relevant sources. John Cunningham told me early on how much he wished there had been a group like ours when he was doing his work. As we mark this 15th anniversary of the Newark History Society, we can take a measure of pride in what we have accomplished so far. Look around the room at the flyers for our public programs over the last decade and a half. We couldn't even fit all of them. The topics have spanned the full range of Newark's 350-year history, and by my count, 140 different people have participated as speakers or panelists, adding their insights and recollections to Newark's public memory. We have taped all the programs since 2008 and posted them on YouTube, so they will continue to reach a broader audience.

However, there is still much more work to do to fill in and extend the outline of Newark's history that B.T. Pierson began back in 1835. Fortunately, there has been a lot of emphasis in recent years on encouraging and recording Newark's civic memory through oral history projects, public history programs, and various online resources. A number of people have published their memoirs. The Library has

undertaken a massive project to digitize its materials related to the Great Migration of African Americans and the Latino immigrant experience. These efforts are critical not only to the formation of civic memory but also to using that memory to guide new initiatives in Newark. With the decline of daily newspapers, they will be even more important going forward. But it's crucial not to stop there. The job for historians of Newark, even if like me they are interested in earlier periods, is to review the secondary sources, interrogate our civic memory, and take a deep dive in the archives because memory is often incomplete and sometimes the work of prior historians is wrong or misdirected.

By finding new sources and asking new questions, we can develop a new understanding of what happened in Newark and how we got to where we are today. This is how our knowledge of Newark's history will keep changing. There is certainly no lack of topics to explore. The work of Gail Malmgreen and her colleagues with the Newark Archives Project is making that abundantly clear. If you have any doubt or indeed if you are searching for a good topic, pull Gail aside and you'll come away fully convinced and ready to get to work.

Tonight is our chance to pause and raise a glass. It's our chance to congratulate Warren Grover for his scholarship and thank him for his leadership. But I think our task tonight is also to look ahead. Tonight we can celebrate, but tomorrow it will be time to follow Warren's example and do the work of history: assessing civic

memory, scouring secondary sources, searching the archives, and doing the hard thinking that informs good history. Let's get to work!

Thank you.