

HISTORY  
— OF THE —  
MUNICIPALITIES  
— OF —  
HUDSON COUNTY  
NEW JERSEY  
1630—1923

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF  
DANIEL VAN WINKLE  
President of the Hudson County Historical Society

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## CHAPTER V.

## JERSEY CITY IN HUDSON COUNTY.

In 1840, at the time when Jersey City passed out from under the jurisdiction of old Bergen county and became a very important part of the new organization of Hudson county, the change was gladly welcomed by its citizens, for no longer were the tedious and expensive journeys to the Halls of Justice necessary. Matters in litigation could be more conveniently settled at home. The City Fathers at once offered their hospitality to the rulers of the new county government and granted them the use of their Town Hall as long as it seemed necessary.

These changing conditions occurred at a time when the whole country was seething with political excitement. "The Log Cabin and Hard Cider" campaign was on, and the cry of "Tippecanoe and Tyler, too," resounded over hill and vale. Jersey City was not behind in the creation of a political atmosphere that has enveloped the city all these years. The importance of exercising the right of franchise was emphasized during those early days, and the theory has so permeated the minds of successive generations, that the duties and responsibilities of citizenship are still being periodically urged upon the body politic. The most astute politicians, the shrewdest political manipulators, have always found a home in Jersey City, and, as the years roll round, the tribe does not grow less.

At the time of the inauguration of Mayor Gregory, there had been expended during the previous five years for general improvements, such as grading and paving of streets, digging wells, building drains, etc., the sum of \$70,000, which amount had been levied and collected under the amendment to the charter passed in 1836. The problem of obtaining a sufficient supply of good potable water was becoming serious and, in view of the increasing population, demanded prompt action. The water supply was not only limited, but was of a very inferior quality. It was procured from wells dug in different parts of the city, the cost and maintenance of which was assessed on the property in the immediate neighborhood, contained within a circle the radius of which extended halfway to the next pump. So that the water should be kept free from pollution, a "keeper of the pump" was selected from among the nearby residents, and, while operating under no enacted ordinance, it was considered that the preservation of his own health would cause him to exercise due watchfulness to prevent contamination. Water procured from wells or springs on Bergen Hill was carted about the streets and sold for one penny per pail. An attempt to improve the supply was made by boring an artesian well at the corner of York and Henderson streets, but although a supply of water was reached at a depth of 270 feet, it was found to be so strongly impregnated with carbonate of magnesia as to be utterly unfit for household purposes. To relieve the situation, Mayor Gregory advocated "bringing water by aqueduct from the highlands of Bergen." The Jersey City and Harsimus Aqueduct Company was incorporated with authority "to search and bore for water, in Jersey City and Bergen, build necessary reservoirs, lay pipes," etc., but the project was abandoned and the city continued to suffer under the unfavorable conditions. Notwithstanding such inconveniences, the population of Jersey City increased from 2,084 in 1837, to 3,033 in 1840, and the adjoining village of Harsimus during the same time grew from 923 to 1,057. At the latter date (1840) the population of the whole of Hudson county was 9,436, showing that a very large proportion was located below the hill, or within the bounds of Jersey City and Harsimus. The disadvantage under which the people labored was thus voiced

in the "Jersey Sentinal" of November 20, 1846: "You would confer a great favor on the undersigned, if you would call the attention of the committee on pumps and wells to that section of our city west of Warren street. We have been sadly neglected all summer and fall. Our pumps are nearly always out of order, and most of us have to go to Van Vorst township for water, when by a little attention and expense we might have an abundant supply. We in reality pay a great deal more than our proportion of taxes, and have the least done for us. We, therefore, claim as a right, that our City Fathers take more care of their children in this community." (Signed) "Many Taxpayers."

John D. Ward, who was an engineer of some note and a prominent figure in the early history of the city, was particularly insistent that some provision should at once be made for a sufficient supply of good wholesome water. Time and again he urged upon the common council the necessity of immediate action. Several projects were submitted to improve the situation, but the inability to realize the future growth of the city and its increasing needs, is shown in the limited scope of the schemes presented. One was to locate a receiving reservoir at the foot of the western slope of Bergen Hill, and gathering the water there by a system of under drains and pump it to the top of the hill and thus supply the city by gravity. Another was to dam the Hackensack so as to prevent the inflow of salt water, and by pumping above the dam secure a supply of pure water. Several others were submitted, but the one that received the most favor was that submitted by John D. Ward, October 4, 1844. His plan included the erection of water works at Belleville, on the Passaic river, the waters of which at that point were clear and free from all impurities, and the supply abundant. This system was afterward inaugurated.

The public school that had been established in 1837 with twenty-three scholars, in 1840, reported an enrollment of two hundred twenty-four, and was reported in a most flourishing condition.

Under present conditions it may seem somewhat improbable for Jersey City to have been at one time a whaling station, but in 1840 two vessels were fitted out and despatched on whaling voyages, "with good prospects of proving a remunerative venture." The advantages of Jersey City as a seaport are set forth in a petition of S. Cunard in 1846 for permission to erect suitable wharves for the accommodation of Atlantic steamships, as follows: "That your memorialist is convinced that Jersey City offers as great advantages for this purpose as any other place in the bay of New York. That he has entered into a provisional arrangement for the requisite accommodation for a terms of years." The New Jersey Railroad & Transportation Company, as the owner of such shore front, supplemented this petition, November 13, 1846, by an application for "consent to extend the dock and pier, and to erect the buildings required by S. Cunard for the accommodation of his Liverpool line of steamers." Such petition was granted, and as a result the Cunard line of steamers located at the foot of Grand street, December 20, 1846, the steamer "Hibernia" being the first steamer to dock.

The event was considered worthy of a special celebration. Her arrival was signalized by a salute of one hundred guns, and a formal greeting by the City Fathers. As narrated in an early publication, "The British and North American Mail Steamers have their principal American depot in this city. Their establishment, consisting of buildings for storage, officers' and crew's quarters, offices, piers, docks and sheds, are quite extensive, and must be of considerable pecuniary value. One of their steamers departs for Liverpool every second Wednesday, steamers of the line leaving from Boston on the alternate Wednesdays. There are also some half dozen small steamers belonging to this

City of New York, and also entertainment for them and horses, and hath erected convenient stables adjacent to the said ferry, for those who wish to bring them their own forage for teams or without."

Whether Budd's statement that he had received permission from the New York authorities "to take off from the same dock and ferry stairs" as specified in above advertisement was false or not, it is evident the ferry was in operation in May, 1803, for on that date one John Holdron, who was the lessee of the Powles Hook Ferry at that time, complained to the Corporation of the City of New York that the "new ferry" which had been in existence for ten months, had greatly injured the Jersey City ferry. The committee to whom the matter was referred for investigation, reported that the corporation was not aware of any permission having been given, and they recommended "that any unauthorized ferries be restrained." During this investigation, in May, 1803, Budd presented a petition to the Common Council of New York City "for liberty to establish a new ferry from the Barclay street wharf across the North River." This application was denied on the ground that "the public interest would not be promoted by erecting another ferry on the North river." Nevertheless, it appears that Budd's ferry was in operation in 1804, and that he maintained a ferry house in that year.

July 8, 1850, an agreement was entered into for the lighting and maintenance of street lamps, "to be lighted every night between the third night after and the fifth night before each full moon; trim the street lamps to the number of fifty or more; supply the best grade of camphene and keep the lamps in perfect order for the sum of \$15.50 per lamp." At the same time ten watchmen were appointed at \$15 per month.

With the exception of routine activities required in closing the governmental functions of the township of Van Vorst, its life as a separate entity is ended, and we now return to the Consolidated City, whose development we have somewhat followed. It was now enabled to establish a uniform system of government. Improvements now made possible by the unity of the whole section, heretofore separated, were instituted—streets were laid out and graded, and additional lamps were erected at suitable points; and, as the most important measure vitally affecting the whole community, the matter of securing an immediate supply of pure and wholesome water was determined upon. Hoboken was in a similar strait with Jersey City, consequently a quasi union between the two cities was formed to carry out such design. In March, 1851, a board of water commissioners was constituted, consisting of Edwin A. Stevens, Edward Cole, Abraham J. Van Buskirck and John D. Ward, to determine upon measures that would bring about the desired result. The plan finally adopted was, with few alterations, that previously suggested by John D. Ward, which was to erect a reservoir on the heights opposite Belleville, into which the water from the Passaic river, which at that time was pure as crystal, was to be pumped and from thence by pipe line conveyed into a distributing reservoir on Bergen Hill. In March, 1851, authority was given by the Legislature to undertake the work. One Whitwell was made chief engineer, and work was started in August, 1852, but the machinery for pumping the water to the required height was not completed until June 30, 1854, when the reservoir on Bergen Hill was filled and the water let into the distributing pipes. An event of such importance to the community demanded a special celebration, in which all the people joined. A procession was formed of leading citizens, escorted by fire and military companies, many of them from neighboring cities, which wended its way from the old Paules Hook section

through the principal streets to and around the reservoir at Central avenue on the Heights. The rejoicing was general, and the day was concluded with banquets and congratulations.

The City of Hoboken had meanwhile determined to secure an independent source of supply, and arranged therefor with the Hackensack Water Company, leaving the city of Jersey City the burden of financing the whole scheme. Although at the time of installing the water works at Belleville the purity of the water was not questioned, and for some years thereafter so remained, the growth of the towns and the establishment of factories along the banks of the Passaic river gradually caused great deterioration in the potable quality of the water, because of the increasing discharge into the river of sewage and other deleterious matter. The conditions were rapidly becoming worse, and an outbreak of typhoid, directly traceable to the growing impurity of the water, awakened public criticism. The city of Newark was likewise affected, and secured the Pequannock source of supply, but Jersey City still suffered, until Mayor Wanser, of Jersey City, in 1899, made a contract with the Jersey City Water Supply Company for a daily supply of good potable water from the Rockaway river, to be delivered by gravity, of from 50,000 to 70,000 gallons daily. An improvement in health conditions was at once manifest, and the cases of typhoid were reduced to a minimum. The new supply was available in 1904, and found eminently satisfactory. The source of supply from the Rockaway river at Boonton has been enlarged and larger distributing pipes furnished, so that at the present time Jersey City is receiving an abundant supply of pure water, the condition of which is under the continuous observation of Doctor George McLaughlin, an expert bacteriologist, so that the introduction of any foreign or deleterious matter into the water is practically impossible. In the December, 1922, Report of Health Conditions in Jersey City, we find that typhoid fever has been practically eliminated. As stated by the bacteriologist, the typhoid fever death rate in Jersey City has been reduced from 102 per 100,000 in 1891, to one and one-half per 100,000 in 1922.

The great dam at Boonton is the product of marvelous engineering skill. It is over 3,000 feet in length, 114 feet in height, with a base of 77 feet, tapering to seventeen feet wide at the top. A lake is thereby impounded over two miles long and a half mile wide, the depth of water reaching one hundred feet in some places. A pipe line composed of about four miles of reinforced concrete and about eighteen miles of six-foot steel pipe, making a continuous conduit of over twenty-two miles, carries the water to Jersey City. The cost of the new supply was \$7,598,000.

The New York & Erie railroad, which had its terminus at Piermont, on the west bank of the Hudson, from whence its passengers and freight were transferred to New York by boat, desired a more direct and closer connection than by such a long and tedious route. In its endeavor to do so, it leased the Paterson & Hudson River railroad, which gave it connection with the New Jersey Railroad and Transportation Company at West End (present Marion), and arranged with the latter road for the use of its rails to tidewater at Jersey City. In the meantime it was determined by the Erie to secure, if possible, their own route to New York harbor. In 1855 there were two charters granted by the New Jersey Legislature, both of which were of considerable importance to the Erie—one, to empower the Erie to complete the Paterson & Hudson River railroad and the right to purchase and hold land; and the other, incorporating "The Long Dock Company with the right to construct a railroad to

of the city, 305 having been admitted to the alms house during the year, but at the close ninety-four remaining.

In 1859 the people began to realize the advisability of combining the different sections of the county under one government, and the following preamble and resolution was adopted by the Common Council:

WHEREAS, The rapid growth of Jersey City and suburbs renders it necessary to provide for the extension of the city limits at no remote period to the Hackensack river, and

WHEREAS, There is no other adequate supply of fresh water for the cities of Jersey City, Hoboken and Hudson, and the rapidly growing settlements in the township of Bergen and North Bergen, but that furnished by the authorities of Jersey City, and such supply will, with the present pipes, be soon inadequate for all the wants of the inhabitants—shipping, mechanical, engineering, and other uses;

*Be It Enacted*, That John D. Ward, Abraham O. Zabriskie, Edward Cole, Samuel Westcott, Dudley S. Gregory, Andrew Clerk, William Pearsall, John D. Walker and E. B. Wake-man be appointed a Board of Commissioners \* \* \* to recommend a map and plan for the extension of the limits of Jersey City by the Legislature, etc.

**The Civil War**—The year 1861 was momentous in the annals of our whole country. The breaking out of the Civil War stirred all sections. Jersey City, from its position as the outlet of the country, was given an exceptional opportunity to prove its patriotism. Troops were continually passing through her borders, and her help was given without stint whenever and wherever it was needed. From the very first her citizens responded with alacrity to every call of the government, and during the continuance of the war were first and foremost in its support.

April 15, 1861, Simon Cameron, then Secretary of War of the United States, wired Governor Olden of New Jersey that he had sent a despatch calling on him for four regiments of men for immediate service. The Governor, anticipating the receipt of the official call, communicated at once with all sections of the State, and on the following day, April 16, 1861, a meeting was held in the City Hall, Jersey City, for the purpose of aiding in the enlistment of troops, and, volunteers being called for, general and immediate response was made.

On the Sunday following, patriotic sermons were preached in all the churches, and the patriotism of the people was excited to a white heat. Captain Edwin Babcock established a recruiting station in Park Hall (the old Town Hall on Grand street) and there formed the Communipaw Zouaves. That evening the famous Seventh Regiment of New York passed through the city on their way to the front, and were greeted at the depot with great acclaim by a crowd of citizens. As a number of well-known citizens of Jersey City were members of this famous regiment, the actuality of war was brought very near home. On April 23, Mayor Van Vorst appointed a war committee of five citizens, viz., Henry Traphagen, John Griffith, Benjamin C. Clark and David Smith, who with the mayor were to act as advisory committee and controlling agent of the city's war activities. The response to the call for volunteers was so generous and the action of the committee so vigorous, that only three days later, on the 26th, the Second New Jersey Regiment was encamped at Trenton and were there sworn in for three months' duty, on the supposition that before the expiration of that time the war would be ended, but succeeding events proved the fallacy of that belief. Before the end of that term, other calls were made and enlistments continued.

John B. Romar, who succeeded Van Vorst as mayor, thus addressed the Common Council: "We are now entering upon a year of the municipal affairs of our city which we have every reason to expect will stand unparalleled in the history of our country for its consequences. \* \* \* The anxiety and gloom