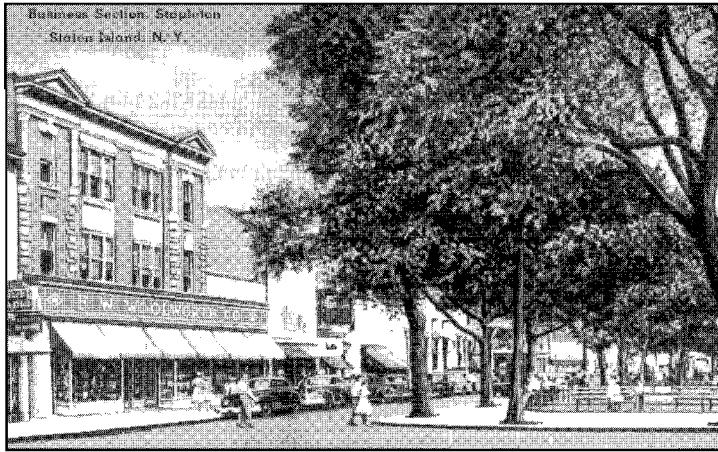


Stapleton

A Walking Tour



Prepared by Curator of History, Patricia M. Salmon
in conjunction with the
Staten Island Institute of Arts & Sciences exhibition,

Stapleton: A Community of Contrast & Change

February 20, 2002 - August 25, 2002



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Introduction

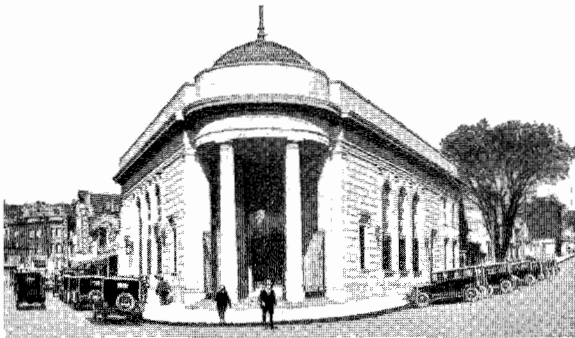
Once an independent community, Stapleton became part of the village of Edgewater when it was incorporated in 1866. Clifton and part of Tompkinsville, were also included within Edgewater. Unhappy with the charter and the way village business was being conducted, residents petitioned for a new charter and it was obtained in 1875. Final amendments were added in 1886. By 1898, Stapleton was the most important village on the northeast shore of Staten Island. It had gone by several names including Second Landing, Darby Doyle's and Cole's Ferry. Within the village certain locations had received nicknames. An area on Beach Street was referred to as "Merry's Well", since a Captain Merry had resided there. Owing to the Civil War Draft Riots that took place, McKeon Street became known as "Battle Row". At the corner of Vanderbilt Avenue and Bay Street a large field was given the adopted name of "The Lawn". Owing to the muddy road that occurred during rain storms in the 1800s, St. Paul's Avenue was, and is still, referred to as Mud Lane, while the hillside where it is located is called Stapleton Heights.



Bay Street, Stapleton, Staten Island. 1911. SHIAS Hugh Powell Postcard Collection

As with most Staten Island neighborhoods Stapleton's borders are not written in stone. Therefore, Stapleton is roughly considered to be bounded by St. Paul's Avenue, Van Duzer Street, Grant Street and Vanderbilt Avenue. Its only definite boundary is to the east where the New York Harbor lies.

1. Staten Island Bank & Trust, Beach & Water Streets - organized in Stapleton, the first deposit of \$100 was made by Josephine Thiery on June 8, 1867. The bank was originally in the Tynan Building, but then moved to what was formerly known as the Edgewater Village Hall at Bay and Dock Streets. It has been in this grand structure since 1925. The bank's new name is Staten Island Bank and Trust and its headquarters is around the corner at 15 Beach Street.



*Staten Island Savings Bank, Beach St.-circa late 1920s.
Hugh Powell Postcard Collection*

Stapleton was considered to be a financial center on Staten Island during the late 1800s. Other banks that operated in the village were the Edgewater Cooperative Exchange and Building & Loan Association of Staten Island opened 1887; the Stapleton National Bank, 1902 and the Richmond Borough National Bank of Stapleton, 1904. Currently, a Citibank and Chase bank operate in the community.

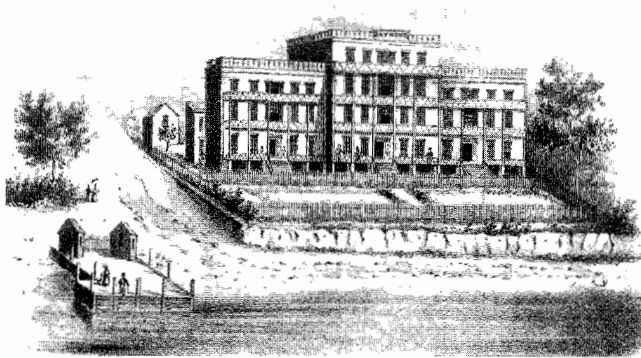
2. Walk east to the corner of Bay & Water Streets - The waterfront location with its accompanying flatland and steep neighboring hillside made for a perfect ferry landing. An advertisement in the "New York Gazette" of September 1752 noted a ferry service operating from William & Bay Streets by John Watson and Hannah Jones.

In 1774, Darby Doyle operated a service from the area. During the Revolutionary War British troops utilized the harbor as an embarkation point for the Battle of Long Island in 1777. They departed from Cole's Ferry, which was at the end of what we now call Dock Street. Subsequently, Abraham Van Duzer ran a ferry from 1788 to 1817, while from 1800 to 1817, the father of Cornelius Vanderbilt operated a rival line from Canal Street.

3. Turn left to the Paramount Theatre at the corner of Union Place and Beach Street - The Vanderbilt family farm was located in Stapleton at this site. On May 27, 1794 the man who would become known as Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt was born to Cornelius and Phoebe Vanderbilt. Historian Richard Bayles noted that "his boyhood and youth were spent very much after the manner of other farmers' sons, in the pursuit of amusement and the performance of minor tasks about the homestead. He did not love school, and early acquired a taste for a seafaring life".

The twenty five hundred seat, marble floored Paramount Theatre opened in 1930 to accommodate "talkies". Fourteen ushers were employed at any one time to assist movie goers. Its popular Art Deco style was the rage from around 1925 till 1945. Art Deco suggests movement and power through flowing lines and geometric patterns, including chevrons and zig zags used on stone and terra cotta facades. After years of lying dormant, the Paramount reopened in 1979 for disco dancers under the ownership of former soccer player Chris Agoliat. Today, the theater's glorious past is still imaginable as Egyptian-style ceiling paintings, gorgeous chandeliers, wall length decorative panels, a grand lobby staircase and the still present giant size movie screen are amongst a clutter of decaying debris inside. June of 2001 saw the theater for sale at a price of \$1.4 million. Owners Joel and Martin Gevarter estimate that the new owner will need a minimum of \$1 million to refurbish the site.

4. Back to the corner of Bay and Water Streets - In 1833, Minthorne Tompkins, son of Governor Daniel Tompkins, and William J. Staples purchased land from the Vanderbilt Family. The Vanderbilt land had once been part of a patent belonging to Cornelius Corsen. In order to celebrate the new village of Stapleton the founders announced "The Inhabitants of the vicinity of the New Ferry, Staten Island, having given the name of 'Stapleton' to that neighborhood; Messrs. Tompkins and Staples request the pleasure of the company of yourself and friends at 8 o'clock on Saturday Evening, the 23rd Inst. at the Bay House, in commemoration of the event. July 19th, 1836".



Bay House from the R. G. Smith Map, 1836. SIAS Map & Atlas Collection.

Stapleton prospered!!! By the end of the 19th century all trades and businesses needed to run an industrious community with enterprising manufacturing sites were found in Stapleton. It was a self-sufficient village and residents needed not go beyond their borders for any of their needs, wants or even employment.

5. Cross the street to Tappen Park - On February 25, 1867 a request was sent to the New York State Legislature asking that a commission of three disinterested free holders be chosen to layout a public park called Washington Square in Stapleton. Built in 1868, it was part of the post Civil War period that saw such parks as

Central and Prospect Parks developed. First referred to as Washington Park and then Washington Square, it was later called Stapleton Park. The park was originally 1.43 acres in size. After the triangle containing the comfort station was added, as well as a small portion of Wright Street, it grew to 1.777 acres. The park was renamed in 1934 for James J. Tappen (1891-1918), a Stapleton resident who was killed in the Battle of Argonne, France during World War I. Tappen Park resembles a New England town commons with its central green area and surrounding seats. The park offered respite for many a shopper who crowded Stapleton's downtown stores.

6. Walk to Edgewater Hall - In 1889 the Edgewater Village Hall was built. This two story red brick Victorian style building is a New York City Landmark and is on the National Register of Historic Places. Before consolidation the village supervisor and trustees, the local board of health and police courts were all housed in the building. The round-headed windows are indicative of its Romanesque features which also include a porch with distinct dormers that cuts through the cornice. Today, the Staten Island District Attorney, William Murphy has his offices here as does the New York City Children & Family Services and the Stapleton Child Health Clinic. The brick structure and its wooden trim were refurbished in the 1980s.

A fire bell was once located at the intersection of Canal and Brook (Water) Streets in Washington Park. After receiving a call regarding a fire, the police department on Beach Street sent an officer to ring a fire bell in order to summon the firemen. Pre-Civil War fire fighting companies in Stapleton included Protection Engine Co., No. 7, Enterprise Hook & Ladder Co., No. 1 and Excelsior Bucket Co., No. 1. In 1875 the Edgewater Fire Department was organized and eight of its companies were located in Stapleton. In addition to the three previously mentioned, the Benjamin Brown Hose No. 3, the Robinson Hose No. 9, the Peter Weidner Hose Co. No. 11 and the Relief Bucket Co. No. 2 were all operating in the community in 1875.

Putting out fires entailed pulling wagons with pumps, buckets and hoses to the scene. The leather buckets were used to fill the pump's tank while the hoses were readied. Cumbersome hooks were sometimes used to tear down the burning walls. It was not uncommon for buildings to burn to the ground while firefighters fought each other to combat a blaze. It was a matter of pride to fight the fire first.

7. Cross the street to the Stapleton Branch of the New York Public Library - The library system as we know it did not exist in the 19th century, but Stapleton had two similar facilities. J. C. Thompson's Reading Room on Bay Street was utilized in 1859. In the same year the Free Reading Room and Library was available and open from 7pm to 9:30pm every night. Gifts from Andrew Carnegie allowed for several libraries on Staten Island to be built and these included the Stapleton branch which opened on June 17, 1907. Today the Library is an important part of the community and features programs for children and adults, as well as the traditional supply of books.



Stapleton Fire Bell after 1907. Postcard on loan from Jacques & Marion Jacobsen.

8. Cross Canal Street and walk left to the empty lot on your right. The Victorian-style townhouse development you see beyond the lot is the former site of the Rubsam & Horrmann Brewery (R&H). In 1871 R&H's Atlantic Brewery opened. In 1896, the Chamber of Commerce noted that the brewery was making 100,000 barrels with 50 employees. By 1908, it was considered to be the most modern brewery in the country. William Horrmann took over the reigns of R&H in 1900 when his father August passed away. At this time R&H employed 125 individuals who were outputting 160,000 barrels of brew annually. During Prohibition R&H hung on by making ice and a near-beer. After repeal the brewery recovered and prospered. In 1930 a Renaissance style clock that topped the brewery was destroyed by fire. In 1936, at the height of the Depression, a new clock and tower were dedicated. Unfortunately, by the 1940s larger breweries with a national clout were hurting the smaller breweries. R&H attempted to lure the public back with such promos as the R&H blimp, R&H Light beer and Crown Premium beer, but poor sales and labor disputes caused the brewery to cease production in December 1953.

Piels Brothers bought the aging factory in 1954, but did not brew beer at the site. Instead they distributed Piels Light and Trommer's Red Letter. The firm spent \$3,000,000 modernizing the factory, but after Piels was bought by DREWERY'S LIMITED the brewery was closed in 1963. The R&H factory site was leveled in 1976 and the sight of the destruction was said to have caused many a teary eye in Stapleton.

9. Turn around and walk straight to Wright Street. Make a left and go to #59 Wright Street, The Central Family Life Center - There are many who still remember when this building was an ACME supermarket. Now it is owned by the First Central Baptist Church and the congregation hosts daycare services, computer classes, after school tutoring, senior programs and recreational activities for all. It is not uncommon to see clothing and other necessities available free of charge outside the Center for those in need.

10. Walk uphill to #117 Wright Street, The First Central Baptist Church. Organized in October 1978, the church has a membership of over 1,200 making it one of the largest on Staten Island. For his devotion to the church and the community, the street in front of the church has been renamed for Rev. Dr. Calvin Rice. He is the first living Staten Islander of African descent to have a city street named in his honor and has been Pastor of the Church since 1985.

11. Make a right and go to #393 Van Duzer Street, Ira's Auction Warehouse. Furniture, bric-a-brac, and a variety of other common and unusual items are included in Ira's auctions. The Warehouse is a throw back to the Antique Row that flourished in Stapleton circa the 1970s and early 1980s. Seventeen antique shops featuring Oriental rugs, French art glass, maps, books, crocks, lamps, toys, mirrors, oddities and more, were all to be found. Some shops specialized in Art Deco, some specialized in the Victorian Era. Some did refinishing, some did framing... They were a conglomeration that featured the castoffs of Stapleton's "tastemakers, trendsetters and upper crust". They went by such names as A Horse of a Different Color, Lizabeth's Passing



Rev. Dr. Calvin Rice, former Manhattan BP Ruth Messinger and retired Assemblywoman Elisabeth Connelly celebrate a renovated First Central Baptist Church. On loan from the First Central Baptist Church.

Fancies, Upjohn's Cornercopia, Old Curiosity Shop, Terry's Other Shop (at 643 Bay Street) and Terry's Other Shop (at 655 Bay Street). Rising rents did them in, but there are still many who remember them well.

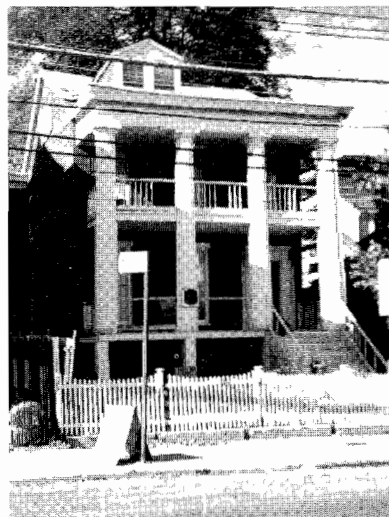
12. Cross the street (very carefully) to 396 Van Duzer Street, Karen Stanbrook's English Bed & Breakfast at the Manor. A former doctor's office, morgue and restaurant, this 1899 brick Victorian building was vacant for five years. According to the Mud Lane Society for the Renaissance of Stapleton the contrast in size of the first floor windows to the second story windows is characteristic of the Tuscan Renaissance Revival. Ms. Stanbrook also runs a bed and breakfast at 196 Vanderbilt Avenue in Clifton, Staten Island.

13. Turn right and walk to #390 Van Duzer Street - Stapleton is home to several sites on the National Register of Historic Places. These include #364 and #390 Van Duzer Street. Added to the list in 1982, both houses have Dutch roofs and two-story Greek Revival columned porches. They were built in the mid-1830s. The previously seen Edgewater Hall is also on the list, as are St. Paul's Memorial Church and Rectory. Located at 225 St. Paul's Avenue, the Church was constructed in 1870.

14. Walk towards Beach Streets and stop at #388 Van Duzer Street, Muddy Cup Coffee Shop - This site is an eclectic meeting place where all can relax and have a hot beverage and baked goods. As part of the cultural climate that has always permeated Stapleton the Muddy Cup features music, poetry readings and comedy performances. Customers can also peruse through a variety of books that spill over an old fashioned bathtub or go online to check their e-mail or surf the web. The Muddy Cup is gay owned and gay friendly as verified by the rainbow flag on the front window. It is one of several such establishments found in Stapleton which is welcoming of all individuals regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or gender. Today there are a variety of ethnic groups represented in Stapleton. People from Belgium, Puerto Rico, Yugoslavia, Liberia, Russia, the Caribbean, Mexico, Italy, Bangladesh, Senegal, Sri Lanka, and other locales live and work in the community.

15. Make a left and go to # 148 Beach Street. In the 1800s R.H. Macys used this building as a stable for the horses that delivered their goods. Items were shipped over from Manhattan and the horses met the boat at the ferry landing. The wares were then distributed to buyers on Staten Island. An antique shop now operates at the site.

16. Make a right on Jackson Street and go to #74, St. John Baptist de La Salle Church. In 1900 it was decided that the German immigrants of Stapleton needed an independent ministry, so Father Bernet, a native of Alsace-Lorraine, was given the assignment. Taken up by Prussian-born Rev. Frederic Wayrich, the cornerstone for St. John Baptist de la Salle was laid in 1901. In 1970 the archdiocese consolidated Immaculate Conception School and the school run by St. John Baptist. Later, it was decided that both churches would be overseen by one pastor, although both churches would be considered independent parishes. Immaculate Conception School still operates on Gordon Street.



*364 Van Duzer Street, Stapleton, 2001.
Photo by Patricia M. Salmon.
Stapleton Exhibition File Photo.*

17. Go back to Beach Street and walk up to the corner of St. Pauls Avenue, Trinity Lutheran Church. In 1856 the church was founded by a group of German immigrants and was known as the German Evangelical Lutheran Church. Originally they met in the Kingsley Methodist Church, but eight years later they obtained this property. After buying a former Unitarian Church and moving it to this site the congregation utilized the relocated church until 1913. With the arrival of Rev. Dr. Frederic Sutter in 1913, a new church was opened in 1914. The fabulous gothic structure features gargoyles (look up), German stained glass windows and a 53 rank organ manufactured by Cassavant Freres. In the 1960s, Pastor Carl Sutter founded the Trinity Lutheran School.

18. Cross Beach Street. Look around and take in the architecture. Stapleton is perhaps one of the most fascinating locales to view and appreciate architecture on Staten Island. Whether it's diversity of styles; renovated or dilapidated; or simply modern verses traditional, the architecture of the community offers an inviting glimpse into the community's evolution and renaissance. Among Stapleton's styles are Italianate, which was popular from 1860 - 1885. The "rowed" Italianate buildings have a square, sturdy look, and feature projecting bracketed cornices and arched windows. The windows may be different from row to row, while doors and windows sometimes feature cast iron columns.

Typical 20th Century Commercial styles are found in Stapleton. Erected from 1900 through 1930, the dark brick facades are usually accompanied by simple square windows. Prism glass transoms, single doors and slim metal sashes are found in storefronts from this period.

Stapleton boasts fine examples of the Federal Style which became popular after the American Revolution. Low pitched roofs, a square or rectangular building and doorways with pilasters, sidelights and transoms are all features of the Federal Style.

Mansard roofs that are double pitched with a steep lower slope and fancy dormers windows characterize the sturdy appearance of the French Second Empire style which was popular from the 1860s - 1880s.



This c1836 Greek Revival building at 92 Harrison Street is one of the many architectural beauties in Stapleton. SIAS Architectural Survey.

19. Walk south to #367 St. Pauls Avenue - As noted in the Mud Lane Society's 2001 "Spring House & Garden Tour" booklet this home has "Carpenter Gothic like details on the gable, original clapboard and trim. It is a true example of a late 1800s upper-middle class home". Interior features include "...floor-to-ceiling stained glass bay window. The ceilings throughout the house have beautiful plaster moldings, some garlanded, some egg-and-dart, and some with breaker-details... The carved gray marble fireplace has inlaid Germanic tile. The dining room has a coffered ceiling, but the piece-de-resistance is the wall treatment. Hunting scenes have been painted in oil on canvas on all four walls of the room above the wainscoting..." At the ground level a fountain occupies an area where an old cistern was placed. Enclosed by glass, it is used by the family and guests in bad weather

20. Proceed south to #387 St. Paul's Avenue - popular from 1874 - 1890 the Queen Anne Style resembles "layered, iced wedding cakes". Fanciful brick chimneys and turrets oftentimes accompany this style. Built by beer brewer George Bechtel in 1888, the beautiful home before you was designed by Kafka and Lindenmeyer of New York City and was constructed by Henry Spruck and Son of Stapleton. A turret, widow's walk, consumption porches and eye-catching stained glass windows adorn the structure. The main entrance hallway

has hand carved woodwork along with a hand carved arch, braided wood spandrels and pocket doors. Built as a wedding gift for George Bechtel's daughter, Annie, the house passed to her sister Agnes during the early part of the 20th century.

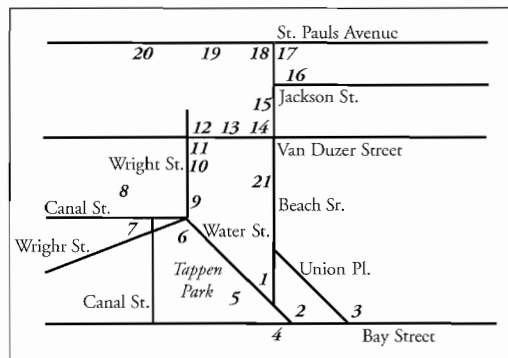
Bechtel's Brewery opened in 1853 at what was known as Richmond Road (now Van Duzer Street) across from Broad Street. By 1865 it was being run by George Bechtel. In 1886 the factory was known for its "refrigerating machine" which ran by the "direct ammonia process". Bechtel's had 17 fermenting rooms and a huge bottling operation. Supposedly, the other brewers of the area were "jealous" of Bechtel's water. In 1877 Bechtel's brew received a gold medal at the Paris Exposition, while a first prize award went to Bechtel brew at the Bambrinus Verein. In 1879 after the Japanese embassy visited the brewery 100,000 bottles of Bechtel beer was ordered for delivery back to the home country. By 1911 Bechtel's Brewery and Bachmann's Brewery of Clifton had merged. The union failed right after Prohibition was passed in 1919.



George Bechtel from Deutscher Staten Island, 1899. SIHAS Pamphlets Collection.

21. Go back to Beach Street and turn right. Pass Van Duzer Street. On your right is the former Liberty Theatre - note the beautiful cornucopia amongst its decorative details. Fred Allen, Georgie Jessel, Sophie Tucker and George Raft all performed at this venue. Built in the 1920s by The Isle Theatrical Corporation, it featured popular vaudeville shows. It went on to replace The Richmond as Stapleton's premier entertainment house. At Thompson and Wright Streets, The Richmond had its own resident acting company. All one needed was a dollar to buy one of the best seats in the house. Built in 1906, The Richmond was so popular that trains were added to the north shore train line in order to bring in all who wanted to see the shows. Time took a toll on The Richmond and The Liberty, by the early 1960s The Liberty had been converted to a bowling alley. Continue down Beach Street. The Staten Island Bank & Trust is on your right.

Stapleton Walking Tour



Recent History....

Who could now imagine that in 1977 the City of New York would decide to make Stapleton an area for legalized pornography in order to centralize X-rated businesses in each borough? That was exactly what the City proposed and the community would have none of it. Over three hundred citizens rallied together and the idea was halted. It was this coalesced group that formed the foundation of the Mud Lane Society for the Renaissance of Stapleton. Taking the nickname of St. Paul's Avenue, which became a muddy blob after rain storms in the 19th century, the thirty some odd members hoped to revitalize Stapleton. Addison and Merle Branch, Karl and Shirley Leone, Fred and Lita Nortenholt, Cynthia Mailman, Pearse and Mac O'Callaghan, Gordon and Barbara Ramsey, Father Paul Blassingame, Reverend William Merryman and Donald Sutherland were, and are, a few of the individuals instrumental in the group's success. One of their first efforts was to encourage potential home owners to buy one of Stapleton's fabulous houses. Ads were placed in the *Amsterdam News*, *the Village Voice* and *the Staten Island Advance*. "We welcomed gays and blacks here, which is kind of unusual for Staten Island," said Mac O'Callaghan in 1989. "And they helped us, because they upgraded the area". Known now for their phenomenal house tours that highlight the Victorian architecture of the area, the Mud Lane Society's first outing kicked off on October 23, 1977. The popular house tours continue today. In striving to invigorate Stapleton the Mud Lane Society has hosted a number of activities including Holiday Tree Lighting ceremonies, Pot Luck Dinners, Christmas caroling and the Stapleton Steeplechase. In addition, The Mud Lane Society has coordinated oral histories and street festivals. To learn more about the Mud Lane Society go to silive.com - local - local groups - search - type in Mud Lane Society.

The SIAS History Archives & Library

This walking tour is part of the exhibition, *Stapleton: A Community of Contrast & Change*. Open from February 20, 2002 through August 25, 2002, the show is part of a Community History Series sponsored by the History Archives & Library of the Staten Island Institute of Arts & Sciences.

Students, teachers, journalists, professors, environmentalists, scientists, writers, genealogists, historians, commercial interests, and anyone else interested in the history of Staten Island can utilize the educational resources of the History Archives & Library. Personal papers, manuscripts, business records, maps and atlases, local newspapers, census records, oral history interviews, videotapes, audio tapes, microfilm, over 50,000 photographs, family bibles, and an array of artifacts are available for reference and analysis. Researchers study such topics as: the Staten Island Ferry, Ferryboats of the New York Harbor, Churches & Cemeteries of Staten Island, Defenses of the New York Harbor, Movie Making on Staten Island, Staten Island Quarantine Station, Immigration, Archeology on Staten Island, Architecture, Immigration, Sports on Staten Island, Bridges & Tunnels, Landfills, Military Records, Staten Island Families, Women on Staten Island, Athletic Clubs, Resorts, Staten Island Business & Industry, Genealogy and a variety of Natural History topics. To make an appointment or for further information, please call Dorothy D'Eletto at 718/727-1135 x20.



1983 Mud Lane Society for the Renaissance of Stapleton walking tour booklet. Gift of Herb Malets, Mud Lane Society for the Renaissance of Stapleton.

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