

LIBRARIES & REPOSITORIES

The Charles F. Cummings New Jersey Information Center at the Newark Public Library

by Tom Ankner

One of the top repositories in New Jersey for genealogists is the **Charles F. Cummings New Jersey Information Center (NJIC)** at the Newark Public Library, 5 Washington Street, Newark. The NJIC holds historical and current materials related to New Jersey, with a focus on Essex County and Newark. Established in 1938, the center's collections include books, newspapers, documents, photographs and archives. Library staff handles a variety of requests from across the country, including recent inquiries about demographic information, the origin of a town's name, and even a request to help a woman track down her long lost father.

Library staff is most commonly asked to find obituaries on behalf of genealogists researching their family histories. The NJIC holds Newark newspapers dating back to the 1830s, as well as select newspapers from across the state that date back to the eighteenth century. The center holds microfilmed copies of the *Bergen Record*, beginning in 1962; the *Jersey Journal*, beginning in 1957; and the *Star-Ledger* and its predecessor newspapers from the nineteenth century.

The collections also include non-English newspapers published in New Jersey, community weekly newspapers from across the state, as well as select years of minority newspapers including the *New Jersey Afro-American* (1941 to 1988) and the *New Jersey Jewish News* (1946 to 1982). A full list of the center's newspaper holdings can be found at www.npl.org/Pages/Collections/njicnews1.html.

Shortly after the *Newark Evening News*, once the state's largest newspaper, folded in 1972, the NJIC came into possession of the newspaper's clippings and photo morgue. The clippings morgue is a collection of three million news items that have been indexed, arranged by subject and microfilmed. The photo morgue consists of 800,000 black and white images taken between the 1920s and 1970s. (These are stored off-site and available by appointment only, but can be scanned by library staff

for a fee.) The clippings and photo morgue collections contain items of local, state, national, and international interest, including many obituaries of prominent New Jerseyans. The NJIC also holds the *Newark Evening News* indexes for 1914 to 1972. The name indexes are the most useful for genealogists, but the center also holds subject indexes and indexes to news by town around the state.



Newark Public Library, 1912

The NJIC's collection of New Jersey city directories is also heavily used by genealogists. The holdings are focused on northern New Jersey, but the center holds some directories for areas in central and southern New Jersey as well. The NJIC's most extensive collection of city directories is, of course, for Newark. These directories are held in both hard copy and microfilm, and date back to the 1830s. For those researching individuals who lived in New Jersey more recently, the NJIC also has a large collection of New Jersey telephone books on microfilm, dating back to the early twentieth century. A full list of city directories can be found at www.npl.org/Pages/Collections/NJ_direct.html.

The NJIC's book collection, including both popular and scholarly items, theses, dissertations, New Jersey law books, hearings, reports and local histories, may also be of interest to genealogists. Enriching the materials are an author and imprint collection, a fiction set for New Jersey, technical reports, flood reports and cookbooks. A list of resources of interest to genealogists can be found at www.npl.org/Pages/Collections/njicgene.html.

The center's map collection includes 2,500 historical and current maps, both bound and on microfilm, including Sanborn maps for communities across the state. The Newark Public Library collects Newark, Essex County and quasi-official documents, and has been a depository library for state documents since 1968.

The center also holds several photo collections in addition to the *Newark Evening News* photo morgue. The *New Jersey Illustration Index*, which has been maintained since the New Deal era, provides an inventory of 35,000 photos in the NJIC's collection. Additionally, the center holds the Samuel Berg collection of street photos taken in the early 1960s, the Harry Dorer photos taken across the state in the mid-twentieth century, and the work of Al Henderson, an African American photographer during the second half of the twentieth century.

The center's archives and manuscript collection contain some of the most unique research materials in the state. Some of the collections available include:

- The personal papers of former Newark mayors Ralph Villani, who served from 1949 to 1953; and Kenneth Gibson, who served from 1970 to 1986 and was the city's first African American mayor.
- A microfilmed collection of papers from the owners of the Newark Eagles, the city's Negro Leagues baseball team in the twentieth century.
- The papers of John Cotton Dana, director of the Newark Public Library in the early twentieth century and a pioneer in shaping modern libraries.
- A large collection of scrapbooks from the Essex County Parks Department.
- Photos from the Newark public school system.
- The papers of Gus Heningburg, Newark community activist and consultant.
- The Librarians collection, including materials related to the history of the Newark Public Library.

The most recent addition to the NJIC's collections is the John T. Cunningham papers. Cunningham, who died in 2012, was the author of numerous historical works about New Jersey and is well known to generations of Garden State schoolchildren who read his books in elementary school. The papers are still being processed.

The Charles F. Cummings New Jersey Information Center is open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 10:30 am to 5:30 pm, and Wednesday from 10:30 am to 7:30 pm. An overview of the NJIC's collections, as well as several finding aids, is available at www.npl.org/Pages/Collections/njic.html#ant.

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