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 A Glimpse of Bayonne
 in the 1880's

HENRY R. SCHNITZER

THERE was a large gathering of ladies, gentlemen, children, tugs and rowboats at the docks at Elizabethport, N. J., on Thursday evening, August 21, to witness a boat race between two female aspirants for the championship of the Kills and neighboring waters. The bay was dotted with craft of every description. Mamie Mooney, the plump champion of Elizabethport, sat gracefully in one . . . her shapely arms were bare to the elbows. The other contained Mrs. Thomas Nolan, wife of a boathouse-keeper at Bergen Point. She was a little lighter in build than Miss Mooney. The prize for which the ladies rowed was a handsome gold bracelet The racecourse was one mile . . . straight to the buoy near Bergen Point, and the race was under the management of the Elizabeth Rowing Club. Members of the Alcyon Boat Club were out in shells, gigs and barges, and many of the boats were pulled by young women, anxious to see what their sex could do with the oars. . . . The two oarswomen put off from the dock . . . and took up their positions . . . word was given and the oars splashed musically into the water. Miss Mooney . . . took a straight course, while Mrs. Nolan went so near the New Jersey shore as to necessitate a sharp turn, and her course became a long curve. This action put her at some disadvantage, and a close race ensued . . . Both . . . spurted considerably in response to their friends' cries

THE WRITER, an Elizabeth industrialist, Bayonne resident, and from 1942 to 1955 secretary of the Bayonne Historical Society, is author of *Thy Goodly Tent: the First Fifty Years of Temple Emanuel, Bayonne, N. J.* (Bayonne, 1961.)

Miss Mooney finally reached the buoy three boat lengths ahead of her rival and was declared the winner."

This report appeared in the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic Journal*, September 6, 1884, and suggests the enthusiasm for sports which prevailed at that time in Bayonne and the adjacent waters and towns. It was a characteristic feature of the community, and the local press of the day reflected the spirit in all of its reporting and on all of its pages (*illus.*, p. 254).

Thirty to forty-five minutes from lower New York, a beautiful expanse of fields and woods several miles long and about half as wide, lying between two magnificent bodies of water which teemed with marine life and offered every possible inducement and advantage for water sports—not only a country town but a seashore resort, recognized by commuting New Yorkers locally and drawing guests nationally from almost every state in the Union—a population of about 15,000¹—incredible as it may seem today, that was Bayonne in the 1880s. While the whole city was known as Bayonne or Bayonne City, the names of the original villages that composed it (Centerville, Bergen Point, Constable Hook, Bayonne and Pamrapo) were still recognized.² A businessman advertising in the *Bayonne Times* or *Bayonne Herald* was just as likely to refer to the latter names as the former, and socially lines of cleavage were along the old village designations.

The entire city, generally, lived a dual life, and this was particularly true of Bergen Point. In the winter it was primarily a community made up of all-year residents, some of them commuters to New York while others had not only their homes but also their businesses in Bayonne. In the summer it was a resort town where people came for the season pleasure bent, and they certainly had their share of what they sought.

¹Royden Page Whitcomb, *History of Bayonne, N. J.* (1904), pp. 81, 86. Population 9,372 in 1880; 19,033 in 1890.

²These are names of villages which were consolidated in 1869 into the city of Bayonne. Until quite recently, reference to the different parts of the city by their original names was common. In the 1880s, the *Bayonne Herald* made constant reference to these designations. This was equally true of out-of-town publications at the time, and books pertaining to former residents of the village still do so to the

Clubs and Culture

As might be expected, the nucleus of all cultural and social activities was in the clubs of various kinds. Thus there were chess clubs, bowling clubs, shooting, dramatic, literary, debating and athletic clubs, and water sports. Activities of most of these were more or less conventional and of no particular interest today. One exception is the Bergen Point Debating Club, which began agitating for a free public library as far back as 1887 and succeeded in its efforts in 1890.³ Naturally, most of the activities of these organizations were in the winter. Bayonnites in those days, however, were anything but cold-dodgers, and they took advantage of the best in winter sports which any town could offer. For skaters, there were the Bays, Morris Canal, innumerable ponds and, for a time, even a skating rink.⁴ In 1887, New York Bay ice was reported a foot thick,⁵ in excellent condition and frozen solid from Constable Hook to Bedloes Island and beyond to Robbins Reef. When conditions were right, skaters were out in full force and iceboats were numerous; the Morris Canal was visited by hundreds daily. Straw and sleigh rides were nightly occurrences⁶ and are pictured delightfully in this excerpt from the *Bayonne Herald*:⁷

The roads have been crowded with the gliding vehicles from the graceful cutter down to the packing box on runners. The wealthy gentleman, who owns a magnificent span of horses and elegant sleigh, has invited his lady friend to accompany him, and ensconced beneath costly buffalo robes they have glided over the frozen ground to the music of sleigh bells. The store clerk with the desire to emulate the example of his wealthy neighbor and to please his "best girl" spends half of his week's salary for a sleigh and treats the young lady to the sleigh ride he knows she has been expecting, and, oh! such fun do they have. No buffalo robes theirs, probably, but a nice warm lap robe answers the purpose just as well. Besides they are light hearted and gay, with mutual admiration, and this, together with the exhilaration of the ride, the rarity

³A meeting urging formation of the library was held under the joint auspices of the Land and Labor Club and the Bergen Point Debating Club on April 22, 1888; the library was established by popular vote April 8, 1890 (Whitcomb, p. 86).

⁴*Bayonne Herald*, Feb. 13, 1886.

⁵*Ibid.*, Jan. 22, 1887.

of the pleasure, and the moonlight streaming down upon them renders the sport all the more entertaining.

There have been straw rides where a happy, jovial party of young ladies and gentlemen crowded themselves into one large sleigh and made the night merry with song and hideous with the tooting of horns. The milkman, the butcher, the grocer have called to deliver their goods in sleighs, crude vehicles it may be, but answering the purpose just as well. Even the small boy has not missed the opportunity for he manages to hitch the rope of his sled onto some passing vehicle and thus secures a motive power free, gratis. It has been a gala, a very feast of fun and while it lasts it is being enjoyed to the utmost.

The cultural pursuits of Bayonnites were many and varied, including, as they did, art, the theatre, music, lectures and exhibits of various kinds. Art displays were held in the homes of those interested and, on an unusual occasion in 1886, at Arcanum Hall.⁸ Vases, busts, paintings, curios and the like were exhibited under loan from local owners, many of whom possessed examples of—and were familiar with—the best in the world of art. Interest in these matters led to the formation of a Bayonne Art Union which awarded a prize medal.⁹

The dramatic interests of the town were extensive. Being without movies, radio or television, its desire for theatricals was satisfied by amateur presentations, infrequent visits from traveling professional companies, and even kaleidoscope shows. Although entertainments were given in Schuyler Hall and elsewhere, especially prominent in amateur presentations were the members of the Young Men's Catholic Lyceum of St. Mary's Church. One possible reason for this was that they always had at their disposal St. Mary's Hall, where there was a stage with facilities that permitted not only amateur but professional performances. The Lyceum amateurs offered such tidbits as "The Irish Lion," "The Dutchman's Ghost,"¹⁰ "The Irish Patriot"¹¹ and "Robert Emmett."¹² Among the traveling shows which appeared were dramas, including the inevitable "Uncle Tom's

⁸*Ibid.*, Jan. 16, 1886.

⁹*Ibid.*, Jan. 30, 1886.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, Jan. 22, 1887.

Cabin,"¹³ comedies and minstrel shows. When "the famous" Excelsior Comedy Company in 1886 presented "the Madison Square success, 'Hazel Kirk,'" admission prices were 25¢ and 50¢ evenings and 10¢ and 20¢ matinees.¹⁴

Musically, nothing that could be designated as creative was accomplished. There was, however, the Till family, noted for their rock harmonicon throughout Europe and America.¹⁵ The Tills came here from England in 1885 for a short stay and remained to make Bayonne first their headquarters and eventually their home. The harmonicon¹⁶ was an instrument made of sixty pieces of blendenhorne rock taken from Mt. Skiddaw in England. These were arranged like the notes of the piano and were played on with leather-covered mallets. It was represented to be the only one in existence and was so popular an attraction that the Tills gave performances in thirty-one states and Canada, covering 100,000¹⁷ miles and playing to one-half million people.

Aside from the Tills, most musical aspirations of the local residents were restricted to drum corps, banjo clubs and the like. The drum corps functioned at celebrations and serenaded popular citizens on special occasions. When Councilman Salter was elected in 1886, the Pamrapo Corps paraded in his honor.¹⁸

Parades, Fairs and Expensive Amusements

When it came to parades, people in the '80s seemed to take a great deal more pleasure in them than their modern descendants. On Decoration Day, 1886, when members of the G.A.R. paraded, they started at 8 o'clock in the morning, visited several schools of the city, were reviewed, and marched to Constable Hook cemetery for memorial services. Then, after visiting another school, they went to New York Bay Cemetery, joined in further services with G.A.R. members from Jersey City, and finished the day at headquarters in Wulf's Hall late in the afternoon. Conservatively reckoned, they must have marched five miles. This was a typical Memorial Day program.¹⁹ When

¹³*Ibid.*, Sept. 11, 1886.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, May 1, 1886.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, June 21, 1890.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, Jan. 22, 1887.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, June 21, 1890.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, April 18, 1886.

some organization held a picnic in Columbia Park, which was a popular resort at Avenue C and 28th Street, in the village of Bayonne, nothing was thought of marching from, say, Centerville to and around Bergen Point and back to Bayonne before entering upon the day's festivities. This is a distance of fifty-five blocks,²⁰ at least.

Election celebration parades included banners, colored torch lights and brooms to denote a "clean sweep" if all the candidates of a party were successful. The Democrat-sympathizing *Herald's* introduction to its account of the Cleveland-Thurman parade in 1888 creates this picture of the occasion:²¹

. . . they turned out in grand array to do honor to their candidates and their principles. . . . All along the line of march residents and places of business were decorated and all lit up. The Bayonne Herald Building was especially illuminated for the occasion. About 100 paraffine candles were used in the illumination and their lights twinkled from the windows like so many stars in the firmament. From basement to roof the building was all aglow with lights and lanterns of every color. The Stars and Stripes flowed gallantly from the flag staff with a tri-color streamer bearing the names of Cleveland and Thurman in bold letters of 'true blue'. People by the hundreds paused in promenades to gaze upon the scintillating scene. . . . Expressions of admiration were heard on every side.

In the meanwhile all Bayonne seemed to be out for a holiday, so to speak, and men and women, sweethearts and swains, were meandering towards the rendezvous named by the Grand Marshall in his orders. . . .

And so on, the story of the parade was continued for two solid columns of printed matter. The Republican parade was casually dismissed in three inches.

Being a country community, Bayonne took great interest in live stock. Favorite prizes at club and church fairs were cows, which evidently were quite plentiful. In 1888 a committee of citizens called on Mayor Newman to ask that cows be kept off the streets.²² Farm animals were shown at exhibits, and time and again Bayonnites took prizes at various shows. Their blooded,

²⁰*Ibid.*, Sept. 10, 1887.

²¹*Ibid.*, Oct. 27, 1888.

²²*Ibid.*, Feb. 28, 1888.

high-stepping horses were frequent winners at state fairs and exhibitions. Especially noteworthy were the successes of Rienze Cadugan's horses. His Bayonne Prince captured first prize for trotting stallions in 1888 at the state fair at Waverly,²³ near Newark; the year before, two of his other stallions had won first prizes in other classes.²⁴ Pride in the fine animals was backed by cash. Judge Coffee of Constable Hook did not hesitate to bet \$500 against \$250 that his trotter, Prince, could beat Mark Fleming's Tony in a match race.²⁵ This was run at West Side Driving Park, West Brighton, Staten Island, and was advertised as an outstanding event. The Judge's confidence was justified, his horse being the winner.

Betting, however, was not restricted to horse owners only. It seemed to be widespread among all classes. We read of a pool match in Lindsay's Saloon for \$50 between a Bayonnite and a representative from Elizabethport;²⁶ the latter won, and arrangements were made immediately for a return match in the Port. Foot races, billiard matches, wrestling bouts, boxing matches—all for side bets—were repeated occurrences. Dog fights and cock fights occurred frequently in back yards, barns and out of the way places.

Among the biggest gamblers of the times were the members of the Carteret Gun Club. These were New Yorkers, whose club was in Bergen Point. Sweepstakes were held repeatedly, and pigeon-shooting matches between individuals were regular occurrences. One marksman²⁷ won two wages of \$1,000 each from the same opponent within a period of two weeks. The club's drawing power may be judged from the attendance at a single day's shooting in 1889, which brought organizations from Tuxedo Park, Philadelphia, Babylon (Long Island) and Westchester County.²⁸ The prize for this particular shoot was a silver

²³*ibid.*, Sept. 22, 1888.

²⁴*ibid.*, Aug. 20, 1887.

²⁵*ibid.*, July 31, 1886.

²⁶*ibid.*, Feb. 27, 1886.

²⁷*ibid.*, Jan. 21, 1888, and Feb. 4, 1888. In the first match, out of 100 birds, the respective scores were 78 and 77 kills. In the second match, the scores were 83 and 81.

²⁸*ibid.*, Jan. 5, 1889.

cup, two feet high, valued at \$500. In 1889 dollars, that was a valuable trophy.

With the advent of spring, the great social and recreational season in town began. As summer residents flocked in, houses in Bergen Point were at a premium. These usually rented at \$10 to \$20²⁹ per month, although we find an advertisement for a ten-room house, "with all modern improvements," fully furnished for \$65 per month.³⁰

The hotels began registering arrivals in early May and at least two Bayonne hostleries drew guests from everywhere, the La Tourette and the Shore House. The former was originally the home of a branch of the Du Pont³¹ family and was built at the beginning of the century, wings being added later. The Shore House was established in 1850.

The La Tourette was so famous that reference to the guest lists over Decoration Day and the Fourth of July, 1886, reveals that people came from places as widely distant as Albany, Easton, New York, San Antonio, Boston, Topeka, Nantucket, San Francisco, Sante Fe, Cincinnati, Omaha and Chicago.³² The chief amusements the hotel provided were dances, which were known as hops³³ and were elaborate affairs; and, in the later '80s, bowling alleys.³⁴ The visitors, apparently, found other recreation in the fields and on the waters surrounding the town.

The Shore House, while popular, in no way approached the La Tourette. The Riverside House and the Shadyside were

²⁹*ibid.* This was in the summer of 1887.

³⁰*ibid.*, Nov. 3, 1888.

³¹The place was called "Goodstay" by Pierre Samuel du Pont, and Admiral Samuel Francis du Pont was born there, Sept. 27, 1803. H. A. du Pont, *Rear Admiral Samuel Francis du Pont* (New York, National American Society, 1926), p. 3; William S. Dutton, *Du Pont—One Hundred and Forty Years* (New York, Charles Schibner's Sons, 1942), p. 24.

The La Tourette was demolished about 1920. The only known relic remaining from this splendid establishment is a gavel made of wood from the hotel balustrade. It was presented to the Bayonne Historical Society by its original owner and is now in the possession of the Bayonne Public Library.

³²*Bayonne Herald*, June 5, 1886, and July 10, 1886.

³³*ibid.*, July 7, 1886, July 17, 1886, Sept. 4, 1886 and many others.

³⁴*ibid.*, July 3, 1886, July 10, 1886, among many others.

When the Bergen Points played on their Avenue S grounds, crowds of anywhere up to 2,500 turned out;⁴⁵ considering the town's population, one can appreciate the significance of the turnout. Their foremost rival was the Staten Island Athletic Club, and when the boys made a trip across the Kills, it was nothing unusual for them to be accompanied by as many as two hundred or more rooters.⁴⁶ As a result of its popularity, and with the idea of expanding its activities, the club was reorganized in 1888 and the name changed to New Jersey Athletic Club. Track, shooting, rowing and yachting were added to baseball, and ten acres of land on Newark Bay were acquired and developed.⁴⁷ The big days of the New Jersey A. C., however, did not dawn until the early 1890s. It disbanded about 1900, when the city began developing industrially.

Most of the renown of sporting Bayonne at this period was won on the Bays and Kills. How different these waters were from what they are now may be judged by fishing conditions alone. In April 1886 the *Herald* reports three young men catching in Newark Bay a tortoise which was eleven feet in length and

1886, Stagg received an offer of \$25 a game to pitch semi-professionally and refused. Instead he cut hay in the Newark meadows for \$5 a week and pitched for the Orange Athletic Club for nothing. On April 26, 1887, with Stagg pitching, Yale defeated the Boston Nationals 2 to 1. In the ninth inning he struck out Ten-Thousand-Dollar Kelly, the Babe Ruth of the time. "As Kelly returned to the bench, he is reported to have said in a tone of mingled surprise and disgust: 'Think of a son-of-a-gun who can pitch like that going to be a minister!'" During 1887 and the following year Stagg received offers from six National League teams, the New York Metropolitan wiring him an offer of \$3,000 for one season, something very generous for the time. His rejections of these bids were based on his loyalty to Yale and his conviction that "the professionals of his day were a hard bitten lot." The enthusiastic tributes to Stagg last August upon his 100th birthday testify to his lofty reputation in the world of sports.

Richard Finlay, a catcher who had played with Columbia College, quit the Bergen Points after signing a contract with New York (*Bayonne Herald*, May 8, 1886.)

⁴⁵*Bayonne Herald*, Sept. 3, 1887.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, Aug. 21, 1886.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, Nov. 19, 1887; Dec. 3, 1887; Jan. 28, 1888; Feb. 4, 1888; March 3, 1888; April 14, 1888; April 28, 1888; June 6, 1889, and many other references.

Amateur Athletic Union of U. S. Official Track and Field Hand Book, 1955-6 (pp. 174, 180, 181, 187, 188, 191, 200) lists eleven N.J.A.C. national champions in seven events. The program was restricted to fifteen events, including cross-country and all-around championships. Considering the short time the club existed the record speaks for itself. As late as 1899, *Spaulding's A.A.U. Almanac* lists fifteen American distance running records held by W. D. Day, its great runner and the proudest name in Bayonne running history.

weighed fully three hundred pounds.⁴⁸ In the spring of 1888 a Richard Cadmus is reported to have caught 50 shad on one trip, and a Garret Vreeland a 65-pound bass.⁴⁹ Later that summer, over 300 boats containing fishermen were counted in one day on Newark Bay.⁵⁰ Captain George Sniffen, who was evidently in the fishing business, is mentioned as having caught about 7,000 shad in the spring of 1889 with the season only partly on its way.⁵¹ Oyster fishing was a prosperous industry.

The yachting and boating clubs brought the greatest fame to Bayonne and Bayonnites. The leading yachting club with headquarters in Bayonne seems to have been the Newark Bay Yacht Club, but almost any Bayonnite would appear to have been a yachtsman and to have belonged to yachting clubs everywhere. During the summer scarcely a week passed without one or more regattas for canoes, oarsmen and sailing vessels, any one who possessed a boat being eligible.⁵² There was even an annual regatta for Newark Bay oyster boats.⁵³

So high was the standing of Bayonne yachtsmen that in a list of five names of the foremost builders and sailers of yachts of this period, as published in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the following four were those of local men:⁵⁴ "Pat" McGiehan, whose boatbuilding yard was here and who was widely known for the vessels he turned out; Joe Ellsworth, who piloted the *Puritan* to victory in the 1889 International Yacht Races over the British *Genesta*;⁵⁵ Captain E. E. Van Buskirk, ex-freeholder,

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, April 10, 1886.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, April 28, 1888.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, July 28, 1888.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, May 11, 1889.

⁵²*Ibid.*, Sept. 25, 1886. So many regattas were being held that the *Herald* made reference to the boating mania.

⁵³*Ibid.*, Oct. 1, 1887.

⁵⁴*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Fourteenth Edition, vol. 23, p. 869, section on Development and Design.

⁵⁵That Joe Ellsworth was the pilot of the *Puritan* in this race is in itself the measure of his standing as a yachtsman. The *Puritan* and the *Genesta* were, respectively, defender and challenger in the 1885 America's Cup races. (See *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 23, p. 870.)

whose sloop *Fonta* broke all records for sailing around Long Island in 1887;⁵⁶ and Phil Ellsworth, who was noted as a designer, and whose *Atlantic*⁵⁷ was beaten in the 1886 America's Cup trials only by the successful defender *Mayflower*.⁵⁸

One of the principal figures in American yachting in the '70s and '80s was Captain Robert Fish. He was born in 1812, and in 1850⁵⁹ he established himself in Pamrapo, where he lived and worked the remainder of his life. Captain Fish attained world-wide fame as a designer and builder of yachts. His first big success was in remodeling the yacht *Sappho*, which won three international races at Cowes in 1870.⁶⁰ From then on he designed and built vessels for some of America's outstanding yachtsmen,⁶¹ who won many famous races during the '70s. He died in 1883. Among his pallbearers were Joe Ellsworth, William Ellsworth, E. C. Allaire, Jr. and Daniel and Joseph Cadmus, all well-known old Bayonne names.⁶²

⁵⁶*Bayonne Herald*, Oct. 15, 1887.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, July 10, 1886.

⁵⁸*New York World*, Sept. 8, 1886. To understand the spirit of yachting which prevailed among Bayonne residents, one should read the *World's* account of the first race between the *Mayflower* and the *Galatea*. It occupied more than a full page of the issue. In the style of the time, the print was very small and the headlines relatively inconspicuous. The same story in a modern newspaper would have required three and perhaps four pages of type. The illustrations of the yachts and principal figures were also very small, while those giving technical details of the sail arrangements were comparatively large and couched in terms which mean nothing to a landlubber. It would seem that everyone was a shellback in those days.

The *World* mentions that among the ships bearing spectators who paid to watch the race were 21 steamboats and 35 tugs. "There were countless sloops and cutters . . . an armada of sailing vessels . . . the ocean steamer *Breakwater* kept up with the races . . . 12 steam yachts." It stated that the vessels witnessing the race were as numerous as "gnats."

Bayonnites were not missing. The steam yacht *Falcon* was chartered by the Ellsworth Club to witness the races and was to be away for two weeks. Also a number of other local yachts are mentioned as having gone out to join the spectators. (*Bayonne Herald*, Aug. 1, 1886; Sept. 11, 1886.)

⁵⁹J. F. Loubat, *Yachtsman's Scrap Book or The Ups and Downs of Yachting* (New York, Brentano's, 1887), p. 271.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 272.

⁶¹*Ibid.* One of Captain Fish's most noteworthy successes was Loubat's *Enchantress*, which sailed and won races all over the world (Chapter VII, pp. 140-145.)

⁶²*Ibid.*, pp. 270-274.

In addition to yachting associations, there were innumerable canoe and boat clubs which conducted one series of races after another. The more important rowing clubs were banded together in the Kill Van Kull Rowing Association.⁶³ This was the largest amateur organization of its kind in the country and included clubs from Elizabeth, Staten Island, and three from Bayonne, the Argonauts, Vikings and Bayonne Rowing Association. The Kill Van Kulls were organized in 1880 and included over 1,000 members.⁶⁴ When their annual regatta was held, spectators lined the shores of Bayonne and Staten Island, filled every kind of boat, canoe and yacht that was available, and went out in steamers (as many as four in 1888⁶⁵) that were hired for the purpose.

The Simpler Pleasures

There were simpler and more leisurely forms of amusement and entertainment, however. Bayonne was a favorite spot for picnic, basket and swimming parties. Being not only a country town but also a seashore resort, it offered the advantages of both at the same time. The *Herald* scribe gave this report of a beach party:⁶⁶

A very pleasant picnic and clambake was held on Sunday last on the bluff overlooking the boat house of the N. J. Boat Building Co. on the Newark Bay shore. In the morning hours the gentlemen 'went a fishing' and returned with a good string of weakfish which were prepared by the ladies, a la aborigine, and served on a sail covered table for breakfast. At noon there was a clam-bake and the delicious bivalves were greatly enjoyed. The elevated position of the ground together with the delightful shade afforded by the umbrageous trees, rendered an otherwise hot and sultry day one of great enjoyment to those who participated. Numerous hammocks were suspended between the trees, and one could enjoy a season of sweet rest and repose—were one fortunate enough to remain in them for the space of a minute. In the late afternoon the

⁶³*Bayonne Herald*, Aug. 21, 1886.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, Aug. 21, 1886.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, Aug. 4, 1888.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, July 28, 1888.