

# QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

## Salem County Historical Society

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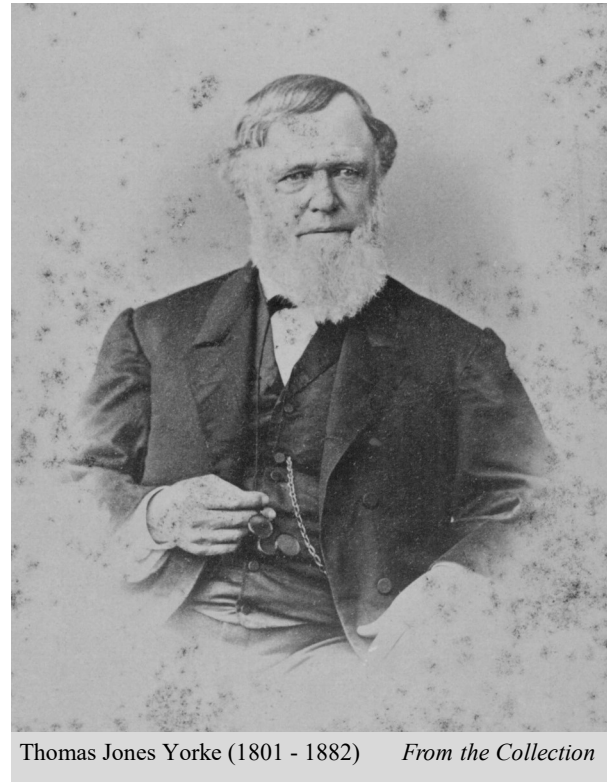
### THOMAS JONES YORKE—A SALEM COUNTY WHIG

By: Bruce Bendler

Born on March 25, 1801, at Hancock's Bridge, New Jersey, Thomas Jones Yorke attended the common schools in the vicinity, and then attended the Salem Academy. His introduction to public affairs came at an early age. Although barely a teenager, Yorke served as a scout for the United States military during the War of 1812. After his military service, Yorke went to work as a clerk in his grandfather Thomas Jones' dry goods store in Philadelphia; he then returned to Salem where he worked for his uncle Thomas Jones, Jr. The two evidently formed a partnership named Jones and Yorke. Although Yorke had prepared for a career practicing law, he instead engaged in such mercantile pursuits before turning to public service. Although he never formally practiced law, Yorke's legal training proved useful when he became a public servant.<sup>1</sup> After serving as county collector in 1830, Yorke became a judge of Salem County Court of Common Pleas in 1833, serving until 1834. Yorke returned to this position in 1845, serving until 1854. He served as the court's presiding judge for part of his second term of service.<sup>2</sup>

In 1835, Yorke sought, and won, election to the Assembly of New Jersey, representing Salem County. As a member of the Assembly for one term, his main concern was the condition of the state's prison. On October 21, 1835, Yorke was appointed to a committee to settle the accounts of the state prison. In January 1836, the "joint committee on the status of the state prison," which included four assemblymen and three members of the Council, reported its findings, focusing on the number of prisoners. One hundred seventeen prisoners were incarcerated, eighty-one whites and thirty-six "colored." All but eight of the prisoners were male. The two houses of the legislature "read, considered, and agreed to" the report.<sup>3</sup>

After a year's service in Trenton, Thomas Jones Yorke won election to the United States House of Representatives in 1836, running on the ticket of the Whig Party. Yorke's first term in the House coincided with the beginning of Martin Van Buren's presidency and the onset of the economic downturn known as the Panic of 1837. Whigs proposed the reinstatement of the Bank of the United States, the charter of which had expired because of



Thomas Jones Yorke (1801 - 1882) *From the Collection*

Andrew Jackson's veto in 1832. The Van Buren administration, on the other hand, proposed establishment of a "subtreasury," which essentially enabled the United States government to be its own banker.

On financial issues, Yorke voted faithfully in line with his party. On October 5, 1837, the House voted on a resolution calling the chartering of a new Bank of the United States "inconvenient." The House passed that resolution by a vote of 123 to 91, but Yorke joined his fellow Whigs to oppose it.<sup>4</sup>

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The *Quarterly Newsletter* is published by the Salem County Historical Society Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter.

**Mission Statement:** The mission of the Salem County Historical Society is to seek, document, preserve, interpret and perpetuate Salem County's heritage, and to enhance the awareness and appreciation of that heritage, through its research, collections, functions, exhibits, educational programs and publications, for the benefit of future generations and for the betterment of the community.

### Research Library & Museum Hours

Tuesday through Saturday  
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[www.salemcountyhistoricalsociety.com](http://www.salemcountyhistoricalsociety.com)

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*This publication may include historical materials that contain language or stereotypes reflecting the culture or language of a particular period or place. These items are presented as part of the historical record.*

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**Message From the President**

Dear Reader:

As I write this in mid-September it's in the 70's with a breeze and low humidity. Sue and I have already been on our morning dog walk in Elsinboro's PSEG Estuary marsh trail. We also take the dog to historic Fort Mott which I'm glad has reopened. I constantly read on social media how much people love Salem County. Although 2020 could be viewed as an "annus horribilis", there are two anniversaries worth noting. A century ago women won the right to vote and two centuries ago Colonel Robert Gibbon Johnson publicly ate a tomato on the Courthouse steps. The Society had been contacted from outside the county for more information on this story which was provided.

The Society is humming with activity. Our Museum Collections Coordinator Alyssa Caltabiano and the Museum Committee are preparing an exhibition of Salem County's glass industry from colonial Wistarburg to Gayner and Anchor Hocking to present day Salem Community College's scientific glassblowing training. Our Administrator and Librarian Rich Guido and the Library Committee have continued progress on long-range projects such as reorganization of the Society's large photographic collection and rehousing/labeling the George Agnew Chamberlain collection by our Executive VP Barbara Dawson.

The museum has reopened for tours but requiring an appointment by telephone. The research library has remained closed. We greatly thank the staff and the volunteers for their work during these difficult times and for adapting to the best of their ability. Because the pandemic has curtailed the Society's fundraisers please consider a donation to our year end Annual Appeal which you'll be receiving in the mail shortly.

Sincerely,

Curtis W. Harker, President

**Gift Memberships**

### What a great gift idea for family or friends with ties to Salem County!

A gift membership to the Salem County Historical Society includes many special features available only through the end of the year.

Gift memberships come in a special gift package that can be sent to you, or directly to the recipient.

Simply fill in the membership form on the bottom of page 47 and attach a note with your contact information and the contact information for the individual or family receiving the gift.

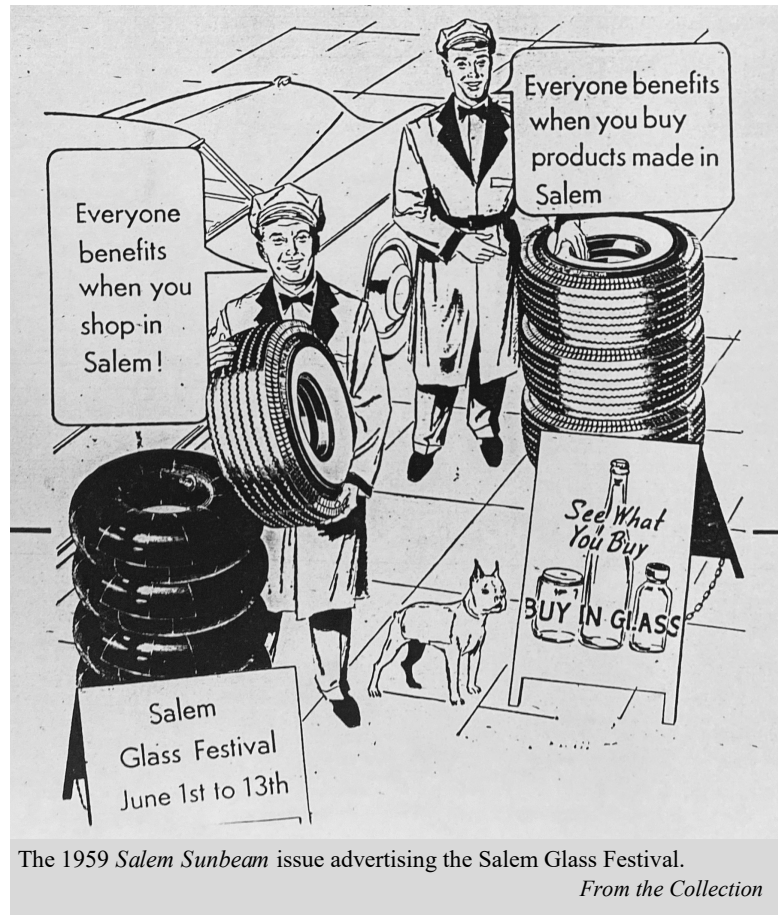
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- ◆ Charming personalized gift package
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- ◆ A set of 6 Grant House note cards
- ◆ 3 postcards of the Salem Oak



## New Exhibit Opening at the Society!

December 1st will mark the opening day for our new exhibit entitled: "Salem County – The Cradle of American Glass." Beginning in the 18th century with the establishment of the first successful glass factory in the new world, Salem County boasts a 300-year tradition of glass making. This local industry peaked in the mid-19th century with the establishment of Salem, Gayner, Quinton, and Elmer Glass Works, and continued through the 20th and 21st century with Anchor Hocking and Ardagh Group. While there are no longer any commercial glass manufacturers operating in Salem County, the trade still remains prevalent throughout the area. Salem Community College offers the nation's only degree program in Scientific Glass Technology, along with a program in Glass Art. This exhibit will highlight the local and global impact of the industry, showcasing a variety of glass bottles, containers, scientific and art glass, photographs, postcards, and tools from each one of the local glass factories. This industry provided thousands of jobs for local residents, as well as products and materials for foreign businesses and buyers. The Museum Committee has been working hard on the final stages of printing, mounting, and staging, and looks forward to sharing the history of the local glass industry and trade with the public.



The 1959 Salem Sunbeam issue advertising the Salem Glass Festival.

*From the Collection*

## NEW 2020 HOLIDAY ORNAMENT



### NOW AVAILIABLE!!

Our new 2020 ornament this year goes hand in hand with our upcoming Glass Industry Exhibit! This image depicts Wistarburg Glassworks, the first viable glass company in the country! Wistarburg Glassworks was located in Alloway Township, Salem County, NJ, and was in operation from 1738 through c. 1775. The cost for an ornament is \$25.00 plus tax for non-members, and \$20.00 plus tax for members!

*(continued from cover)*

Yorke also supported efforts to maintain the integrity of bonds issued by the “late” bank, voting for a motion to empower the Secretary of the Treasury to use those bonds in payment for demands on the United States Treasury, a proposal narrowly defeated by a vote of 112 to 104.<sup>5</sup> On October 9, 1837, Yorke unsuccessfully opposed the issuance of new U. S. Treasury notes before the sale of bonds backed by the stock in the “late” bank was complete.<sup>6</sup>

Yorke also cast votes on the infamous “Gag Rule.” Imposed in 1836 as a standing rule of the House of Representatives, the “Gag Rule” forbade the House from consideration of any petition opposing slavery, or in any way restricting it. Opponents of slavery saw this rule as a means to stifle all debate on slavery, a violation of the time-honored, and constitutional, right of constituents to petition their elected representatives for the redress of grievances. Proponents of slavery viewed anti-slavery petitions as nothing but an effort to interfere with, and in time eliminate, what they saw as the constitutionally-sanctioned right to own slaves. The only President to serve in Congress after his presidency, John Quincy Adams, led the efforts to rescind that rule.

Thomas Jones Yorke generally, but not invariably, supported Adams. On December 12, 1838, both Yorke and Adams opposed a resolution to stifle petitions favoring abolition and opposing the removal of slaves from one state to another. The resolutions called such petitions “part of a plan of operations” to “affect the institution of slavery in the several states and thus to destroy that institution within their limits.” The resolution passed the House by a vote of 136 to 65.<sup>7</sup> Later that same day, Adams and Yorke also opposed a resolution stating that “Congress has no right to do indirectly what it cannot do directly,” a subtle rebuke of any “indirect” action against slavery, a resolution that passed 170 to 30.<sup>8</sup>

Yorke then turned around and opposed Adams on several resolutions concerning the “Gag Rule.” He supported a resolution stating that “agitation” about slavery in the District of Columbia and the territories with “a view to disturbing or overthrowing it” was “against the Constitution and rights of the affected states,” a resolution that passed by an overwhelming vote of 168 to 39.<sup>9</sup> Yorke favored another resolution opposed by the former President, that Congress did not have the right to “discriminate between the institutions of one portion of the states and another with a view of abolishing the one and promoting the other,” adopted by a vote of 174 to 26.<sup>10</sup>

Even so, Yorke did oppose the “Gag Rule” itself and several resolutions adopted by the House to uphold it. Two more resolutions rejected on December 12 found Adams and Yorke again voting together. The two colleagues favored a motion to table a resolution to prevent “debate, printing, or referring [to committee]” petitions opposing slavery, defeated 77 to 135.<sup>11</sup> And Yorke supported a resolution sponsored by Adams upholding the constitutional power of the House to act as it saw fit, presumably including action on the issue of slavery, defeated 75 to 124.<sup>12</sup>

Yorke stood for a second term in the House in 1838, eventually being defeated in one of the most prolonged, bizarre, and contentious election disputes in New Jersey history. At this time New Jersey’s six members of the House of Representatives were elected on a “general,” or statewide, ticket. Initial statewide returns indicated that Yorke and his fellow Whigs had won by a narrow margin, but those “official” returns excluded results from two townships—South Amboy in Middlesex County and Millville in Cumberland County. Inclusion of those two jurisdictions gave a small majority to five of the six Democrats. Whig state officials justified their exclusion on the grounds that the township clerks had not properly sealed, or certified, the election returns.

Thus began the infamous “Broad Seal War.” The House of Representatives had a slim 119-118 Democratic majority without the New Jersey delegation seated. On March 10, 1840, taking action based on its constitutional power to judge of the elections of its members, the House voted to seat the five of the six New Jersey Democratic candidates by a vote of 111 to 81. Whig candidate Joseph Randolph was the only candidate whose election was not questioned or challenged. But it was not until July 16, 1840, that the House adopted the majority report of a committee that recommended seating five of the six Democrats by a vote of 102 to 22, a vote boycotted by most Whigs.

In Salem County itself, Thomas J. Yorke had expressed concerns about his own, and his party’s, prospects in 1838. In a letter to Samuel Southard, a long-time leader of New Jersey’s Whigs, Yorke stated his fear that “our friends and not our enemies will be to blame for any diminution that may occur.” From the “movements of our enemy,” Yorke and his fellow Whigs “have discovered nothing to alarm us.” Yorke reminded Southard of a recent letter from Salem lawyer Francis L. McCulloch, “informing you that we had reason to fear some disaffection.” But Yorke hoped, with Southard’s assistance, that his fellow partisans “will have that matter arranged.” Another matter that troubled Yorke was the presence of workers on Pea Patch Island, then the subject of a dispute between New Jersey and Delaware. Yorke feared that “the enemy may throw into one of our Whig townships 80 to 120 votes,” and wondered if Southard could suggest a plan to reject those votes if they were offered. In the meantime, Yorke stated that Salem County Whigs “do not allow our friends to speak of this subject, hoping it will not enter the minds of the Locos.”<sup>13</sup>

Yorke’s concerns also found expression in Salem’s Whig newspaper, the *Freeman’s Banner*. The writer forecast that “the Whigs of New Jersey have a struggle before them which will prove a hard one.” Opponents of Van Buren across the state “should be impressed with the truth that unless we do our duty in October,” New Jersey would elect the “Van Buren” candidates. Nevertheless, the writer expressed hope that New Jersey voters would reject “the fathers of shin-plastering” and “supporters of the Sub-Treasury” and elect the Whig ticket. Even so, Salem County’s Whig newspaper felt constrained to urge Whig voters in the county to avert a “libel on the judgment” of the state’s electorate.<sup>14</sup>

Such fears proved well grounded. The “Locos,” or Democrats, swept the elections in Salem County. They elected all three of their candidates for the Assembly and won the county’s one seat on the Council. All six of the Democratic candidates for Congress won in the county.

Yorke could take small consolation in the fact that he led the Whig congressional ticket there; he trailed the lowest Democratic vote-getter by only fourteen votes. The close vote in Salem County reflected the even closer statewide totals. With the Democratic victory in the county confirmed, the pro-Whig Freeman’s Banner could only commend the “untiring, unceasing vigilance of the Van Buren party.”<sup>15</sup>

Whigs sought to avenge their defeat two years later. When the party held its convention in Salem in late August 1840, it passed a series of resolutions setting forth that aspiration. Reflecting on the outcome of the Broad Seal War, Salem County Whigs noted that “five-sixths of [New Jersey’s] voice is prohibited from entering the councils of the nation.” Whigs also pointed to the “deplorable condition of our country,” still mired in the economic contraction that began in 1837. But the convention delegates “mark[ed] with unfeigned and determined resolution our entire approval” of the party’s congressional ticket which included the same individuals presented to the voters in 1838, including Yorke. The convention also commended their candidates’ steadfast efforts to claim their seats in Congress during the hearings resulting from that election of 1838.<sup>16</sup>

New Jersey Whigs did make a comeback in the presidential and congressional elections of 1840. William Henry Harrison carried the state, and the six Whig congressional candidates, including Thomas Jones Yorke, easily won election. With Harrison as President and a Whig-controlled Congress, Whigs had high hopes of repealing the Van Buren Subtreasury and reinstating the Bank of the United States. Such plans fell apart when President Harrison died after only a month in office. His successor, John Tyler, proved no friend to the Whig agenda.

Thomas Jones Yorke served on two committees in the Twenty-seventh Congress: the Committee on Naval Expenditures and the Committee on Accounts. When that Congress convened, it moved quickly to enact the Whig proposals. The House of Representatives narrowly passed bills to repeal the Subtreasury Act and to increase tariff rates reduced by the Compromise Tariff of 1833, which had gradually reduced those rates in response to the Nullification Crisis of 1832. Both bills narrowly passed the House, with Yorke’s support, by votes of 103 to 102, and 116 to 101, respectively.<sup>17</sup> But President Tyler unexpectedly thwarted such efforts with his veto power.

In 1842, the Whigs redoubled their efforts to raise the tariff. The Whig-controlled New Jersey legislature encouraged its representatives in Congress to do just that. On January 28, 1842, the Assembly passed a resolution urging members of Congress “to use their utmost exertions to procure such a revision of the tariff laws as shall impose sufficient duties” to provide “adequate protection to the various branches of the manufactures of this state and the United States.” After thwarting efforts to water

down the resolution, the Assembly passed it by a vote of 31 to 13 and forwarded it to the Council, which approved it without amendment.<sup>18</sup>

Thomas Jones Yorke presented this resolution to the House of Representatives on February 19, 1842. Through the spring and into the summer of 1842, the House debated the Whig tariff proposals. The House passed a tariff bill which also included a provision for the distribution of the proceeds of federal land sales to the states. This bill passed the House on July 16, by a vote of 116 to 111. President Tyler vetoed it, after which the House passed another tariff bill by the even closer vote of 104 to 103. On both occasions, Yorke voted “Aye.”<sup>19</sup> John Tyler, objecting to both the tariff revisions and the distribution scheme, vetoed both bills.<sup>20</sup> After failing to override Tyler’s vetoes, Congress passed yet another tariff bill, again with Yorke’s support, by August 28, 1842.<sup>21</sup> This bill excluded the distribution proposal, and the President reluctantly signed it.

The “Gag Rule” again became an issue, as John Quincy Adams renewed his efforts to secure its repeal. When the Twenty-seventh Congress convened for its final session in December 1842, Adams introduced a resolution to rescind the “21st rule for conducting business in the House.” A series of parliamentary maneuvers followed. Unlike in 1838, Yorke consistently voted with Adams through all of this parliamentary wrangling. For example, on December 12, 1842, Adams and Yorke opposed a motion to table the resolution, which nonetheless passed 106 to 102.<sup>22</sup> Significantly, the votes in the Twenty-Seventh Congress were much closer than those taken four years earlier in 1838. John Quincy Adams finally prevailed in his efforts to repeal the “Gag Rule” two years later, in 1844.

Thomas Jones Yorke did not seek a third term in Congress. Rather, he moved from the political world to the business world, making a name for himself in the transportation industry when his service on the Salem County Court of Common Pleas came to a conclusion. He served as a commissioner and incorporator of the West Jersey Railroad, when it received a charter on February 5, 1853. He also held the offices of secretary and treasurer from May 9, 1853, until November 24, 1866. On the latter date, the railroad’s directors elected him president, an office he held until 1878. In addition to his service with the West Jersey Railroad, Yorke served as a director for three other rail lines: the Salem Railroad Company, the Swedesboro Railroad Company, and the Cape May and Millville Railroad. He also served on the boards of the Camden and Philadelphia Ferry Company and the West Jersey Mail and Transportation Company.<sup>23</sup>

The New Jersey legislature had incorporated the West Jersey Railroad to link Camden and Cape May. Richard F. Stockton, already serving as president of the Camden and Amboy Railroad, served as its first president. Thomas Jones Yorke succeeded Stockton in that office. The other rail lines, for which Yorke served as a director, were closely linked to the West Jersey. Indeed, the Salem Railroad was constructed specifically to connect the city of Salem with that line.

*(continue to next page)*

Furthermore, all of these South Jersey rail lines were closely connected with the “joint companies,” the Camden and Amboy Railroad and the Delaware and Hudson Canal.<sup>24</sup> For example, the directors of those companies had, on September 10, 1860, approved the West Jersey’s subscription of stock in the Salem Railroad.

Yorke’s management of the West Jersey Railroad won praise. On April 12, 1870, the Daily Gazette of Trenton published a “gratifying account of the business and management of the road [the West Jersey Railroad] for the year ending December 31, 1869.” The rail line had reported profits of over 132,000 dollars on a total income of just over 652,000 dollars. The newspaper report attributed such success to “the able management of Judge Yorke” and his fellow corporate officers.<sup>25</sup>

Thomas Jones Yorke died on April 4, 1882, in Salem. He was buried in the cemetery of St. John’s Episcopal Church. Yorke’s career in many ways reflected the political and economic changes taking place in America in the early to middle years of the nineteenth century.

The Whig Party was a logical political home for someone such as Yorke whose concern with economic development was evident in both his political and business careers. The party of Henry Clay was the party of the “American System,” promoting economic development and growth. Yorke sought to encourage such growth, both as a member of Congress and as an officer and director of transportation companies in South Jersey.

#### End Notes:

<sup>1</sup>Thomas Cushing and Charles E. Sheppard, *History of the Counties of Gloucester, Salem, and Cumberland, New Jersey* (Philadelphia: Everts & Peck, 1883), 414-5.

<sup>2</sup>Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, accessible through the website of the United States House of Representatives, Washington, D. C.

<sup>3</sup>*Journal of the Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the State of New Jersey* (Somerville: Gove and Allison, 1836), 10 and 82.

<sup>4</sup>*Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States, 1st Session, 25th Congress, Commenced September 4, 1837* (Washington, D. C.: Thomas Allen, 1837), 147.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 151-2.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 167-8.

<sup>7</sup>*Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States, being the Third Session of the Twenty-fifth Congress* (Washington, D. C.: Thomas Allen, 1838), 61-2.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 62-3.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 63-4.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 66-7.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 68-9.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 72-3.

<sup>13</sup>Thomas Jones Yorke to Samuel Southard, September 17, 1838, Samuel L. Southard Papers (C0250), Rare Books and Special Collections, Firestone Library, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey. “Locos,” or “Locofocos,” was the epithet bestowed upon more radical Democrats, applied by Whigs to all members of that party.

<sup>14</sup>*Freeman’s Banner*, Salem, New Jersey, September 4, 1838.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, October 16, 1838.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, September 3, 1840

<sup>17</sup>*Madisonian for the Country*, Washington, D. C., August 14, 1841.

<sup>18</sup>*Minutes of the Votes and Proceedings of the Sixty-sixth General Assembly of the State of New Jersey* (Trenton: Phillips and Boswell, 1842), 319-21, 396.

<sup>19</sup>*Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States, Second Session, Twenty-Seventh Congress* (Washington, D. C.: Gales and Seaton, 1842), 1104, 1385.

<sup>20</sup>*New Hampshire Sentinel*, Keene, New Hampshire, July 27, 1842.

<sup>21</sup>*Salem Register*, Salem, Massachusetts, August 28, 1842.

<sup>22</sup>*Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States, the Third Session of the Twenty-Seventh Congress* (Washington, D. C.: Gales and Seaton, 1843), 7, 37-8.

<sup>23</sup>Information on an attachment on the reverse side of a portrait of Yorke, Salem County Historical Society, Salem, New Jersey. For information on the history of the railroads, see “WJ & S Timeline,” on [www.sjrail.com](http://www.sjrail.com), accessed on April 22, 2019.

<sup>24</sup>The term “joint companies” refers to the Camden and Amboy Railroad and the Delaware Hudson Canal. The companies used their political clout to dominate transportation planning and policy in New Jersey throughout the antebellum era and even thereafter.

<sup>25</sup>*Daily State Gazette*, Trenton, New Jersey, April 12, 1870.



BRUCE BENDLER earned his Ph.D. at the University of Delaware in 2000. His dissertation was entitled The Emergence of Rural Federalism: Political Culture in Delaware 1760-1812. Bandler teaches history at the University of Delaware. He contributed two articles to a history of Newark, Delaware, published on the occasion of the city’s 250th anniversary in 2008. He has also published articles in *Delaware History*, *New Jersey History*, *The Journal of Presbyterian History*, and the *Quarterly Newsletter* of the Salem County (NJ) Historical Society. He is a contributing author to *New Jersey in the Revolution: Where the Battlefield Meets the Home Front*, published by Rutgers University Press (April 28, 2015). His current research interests focus on political history in Revolutionary and early Federal Delaware and New Jersey.



**A telegraph office** has been established at Yorketown by the Railroad Company, and Walter Mole has been installed as operator. This office will not only be an accommodation to the people of Yorketown, but to the residents of Woodstown, who have never enjoyed telegraphic facilities.

*National Standard*, Salem, NJ, May 15, 1878

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**Membership Report**

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**Individual Member:**

**Frank DeMaio**  
Vineland, NJ

**Deceased Members:**

**Robert F. Breslin, Jr.**  
Salem, NJ

—An excellent painting is on exhibition at Patterson's jewelry store. It is a representation of a violin backed by a piece of sheet music, hanging on the wall. It was executed by Miss **Minnie Patterson**, daughter of Dr. Theo. Patterson, and is universally admired.  
*The South Jerseyman*, Salem, NJ, February 25, 1890

*Yes, I would like to become a member of the* ✂  
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[www.salemcountyhistoricalsociety.com](http://www.salemcountyhistoricalsociety.com)

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# Photo I.D. Please!



Pictured above is a mid-20th century photograph of an annual Gayner Glass Works Christmas Party! If anyone can help us identify these men and women please let us know!  
*From the Collection*

*The Salem County Historical Society receives general operating support grants and project grants from the New Jersey Historical Commission, a division of the Department of the Department of the Salem County Board of Chosen Freeholders and the Salem County Cultural and Heritage Commission. Additional funding has been made possible in part by funds from the New Jersey Historical Commission, a division of the Department of the Department of the Salem County Board of Chosen Freeholders and the Salem County Cultural and Heritage Commission.*



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