

Arts & Entertainment

Story of Woman Behind Construction of Brooklyn Bridge Told at WML

By MARYLOU MORANO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD –Thousands of people cross the Brooklyn Bridge each day, yet few realize that without the efforts of Emily Warren Roebling, the structure, which connects the boroughs of Brooklyn and Manhattan, would never have been constructed.

Wanting to remedy this situation, librarian and author, Carol Simon Levin created a narration of the life of Emily Warren Roebling, "Building a Legend: Emily Roebling and the Brooklyn Bridge," which she presented at the Westfield Memorial (WML) Library on August 14.

"I don't know why her story has been obscured," commented Ms. Levin of the woman whose obituaries praised as "the most famous woman in New Jersey" and "one of

the most distinguished women in the country," she continued.

Dressed in character for bridge-building in a long, denim overdress and simple black bowler hat, Ms. Levin guided the audience through Emily's life, from her birth in Cold Spring, N.Y. to her death in Trenton at age 59 in 1903.

It was Emily's older brother, Gouverneur Kemble Warren – who later became a Civil War general – who saw to it that she received a solid education at the Georgetown Visitation Convent in Washington D.C.

Emily also met her future husband, Washington Roebling, the son of the famous bridge builder, John Augustus Roebling, through her brother as well. The couple married in 1865 and made their home in Trenton.

Shortly after work on the Brooklyn Bridge began in 1870, both father and son became incapacitated. John eventually died, while Washington, suffering the effects of "the bends" was confined to his bed.

In order to maintain Washington's position as chief engineer of the project, Emily became a liaison between her husband and the construction engineers.

Over the next 11 years, Emily studied the physics and mathematics needed to communicate fluently with the engineers and supervise the construction of the bridge.

"What most people don't realize is that the Brooklyn Bridge might never have been built without Emily Warren Roebling," said Ms. Levin. "This remarkable woman might very well be considered the world's first female engineer."

After the Brooklyn Bridge opened in 1883, Emily returned to Trenton where she supervised the construction of a mansion, earned a law degree and was active in the community until her untimely death.

It is at this point that she seems to have disappeared from history.

Ms. Levin, who resides in Bedminster, is the Youth's Services Librarian at the Bridgewater Library. She has a background in women's history and the history of technology.

As a librarian, she was particularly upset to learn of lack of information on Emily Warren Roebling. "When I found out that the only book on Emily was a 30-year-old Ph.D. thesis, I decided to write one," she explained, adding that she is currently working on two biographies of Emily – one for children and one for adults.

She is also working on a presentation on the lives of female aviatrixes, which she hopes to present at libraries as well.

Ms. Levin enjoyed speaking at the WML.

"The capacity audience was very engaged and asked interesting questions afterwards," she said.

Ms. Levin maintains the website, bridgebuilderinpetticoats.com where those interested in the life of Emily Warren Roebling can find more information.



Marylou Morano for The Westfield Leader and The Times
BUILDING A BRIDGE... Carol Simon Levin spoke about the role Emily Warren Roebling played in the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge at the Westfield Memorial Library on August 14. Here, Ms. Levin stands next to an enlarged photo of the New Jersey woman who may very well be the world's first female engineer.

A Dozen Things To Do — All Less Than An Hour Away

By FRED T. ROSSI
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times
Summer Travel Series

Whether it is a rainy afternoon with a houseful of restless kids, or one of those sunny days when some place other than the pool or the beach holds more appeal or, perhaps, an evening with no plans, there are plenty of things to do right here at home in these waning days of summer—rain or shine, kids or adults. All are within an hour's drive.

Closest is the Sperry Observatory at Union County College, just past the college parking lot off Gallows Hill Road. Dedicated 46 years ago, the observatory is the home of Amateur Astronomers, Inc. and contains two of the largest telescopes on the East Coast for amateur use. It's open to the public every Friday evening throughout the year, and on many Friday evenings, there are informal talks that are followed, weather permitting, by viewing of celestial objects through the two telescopes. Visit the group's website at www.asterism.org.

I always wonder whether we locals fully appreciate the gem right in our own backyard, namely, the Watchung Reservation. Its nearly 2,000 acres is home to the Trailside Nature and Science Center, the wonderful Lake Surprise, the "deserted village" of Feltville, Watchung Stables, Seeley's Pond, playgrounds, picnic areas and vast forests with 13 miles of trails that make for great hiking excursions.

Not too far away are two other great spots for nature lovers. The 12 square miles of the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge in Morris County are federally-protected land and home to nearly 250 species of birds and a wide variety of animals, including, periodically, bears. The Great Swamp is actually the remnant of a lake bottom of a glacial lake from more than 10,000 years ago. In Essex County, near the Oranges, is South Mountain Reservation, a 2,000-acre nature reserve with pretty waterfalls and overlooks providing sweeping views of the New York skyline. It is also the home of the Turtle Back Zoo.

And as long as you are up near northern New Jersey, why not stop to see the Great Falls in Paterson? Set amongst some of the neighborhoods where the nation's manufacturing industry essentially started two centuries ago, the 77-foot high falls are part of the Paterson Great Falls National Historical Park.



Fred T. Rossi for The Westfield Leader and The Times
GREAT FALLS...Set amongst some of the neighborhoods where the nation's manufacturing industry essentially started two centuries ago, the 77-foot high falls are part of the Paterson Great Falls National Historical Park.

With the Yankees floundering and the Mets yet again looking ahead to next year, there is no shortage of minor league baseball to keep you occupied in these final days of summer. The Somerset Patriots have games scheduled at their TD Bank Ballpark in Bridgewater into mid-September. The Newark Bears finish up their season at Bears and Eagles Riverfront Stadium next week while the New Jersey Jackals wrap up their season next week at Yogi Berra Stadium in Montclair. If you are already down at the shore, the Lakewood Blue Claws finish up their 2013 season with four games over Labor Day weekend.

Taking a leisurely drive along the oceanfront in Monmouth County is a wonderful way to pass a summer afternoon. Start in Sea Girt and work your way up Ocean Avenue through elegant Spring Lake and then into Belmar and Bradley Beach. Take a quick detour into Ocean Grove and then make your way through the bustling downtown of Asbury Park and then on to its reborn oceanfront. From there, head north on Ocean Avenue through the opulence of Deal and then into Long Branch, whose oceanfront today is a far cry from its honky-tonk past. From there, you can continue up through the beach communities of Monmouth Beach and Sea Bright before deciding whether to continue on to Sandy Hook or turn left

and cross the bridge into Highlands. There, you can stop at the Navesink Twin Lights, a non-operational lighthouse and museum that overlooks Sandy Hook Bay, the entrance to the New York Harbor and the Atlantic Ocean.

An afternoon in one of New Jersey's prettiest towns is worth the 40-minute drive. Besides being home to one of the nation's most prestigious universities, Princeton is home to the renowned McCarter Theater; a charming downtown filled with shops and eateries; Morven, the former governor's mansion that's now a museum; Nassau Hall, which briefly served as the U.S. Capitol building in 1783; and, just beyond the downtown area, several places where you can rent a canoe and spend some lazy time on the water.

And, staying within our "no more than an hour's drive away" policy, head out to Hillsborough and see the 2,700 acres at Duke Farms, former home to tobacco heiress Doris Duke. About half the property, which was fully opened to the public just last year, is walkable, with trails and waterfalls and hundreds of bird species on the premises, which also features 11 international-themed gardens and a grand mansion.

We'll wrap up this year's travel series next week with a look at one of Europe's more unique and relaxing cities, the Danish capital of Copenhagen.

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