

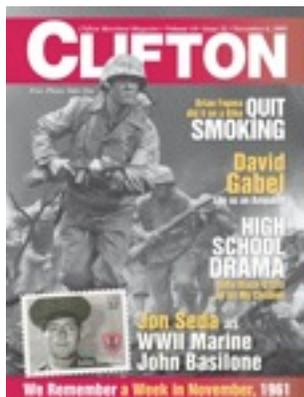


La Notizia Italiana

POINTers in Person: Lou Costello Chapter #15

In This Issue: "The Pacific"

***Jersey Natives Featured
Prominently in Series***



- ***New HBO Mini-Series***
- ***Clifton Native Stars as John Basilone***
- ***Rutherford Resident, Robert Leckie Featured***
- ***Calendar***



Clifton Native Portrays War Hero

Friday, March 12, 2010

*by Tony Gicas
Clifton Journal Staff Writer*

Clifton native Jon Seda, (pictured at right), a film and television star, will portray WWII Marine John Basilone in HBO's 10-part miniseries 'The Pacific' (photo courtesy of HBO)



CLIFTON – Premiering on Sunday, one of Clifton's native sons will portray a revered New Jersey military veteran as part of an epic World War II miniseries helmed by producers Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks.

Veteran film and television star Jon Seda, was born and bred in Clifton, faced the challenging task of depicting Raritan resident and legendary Marine John Basilone in HBO's 10-part miniseries "The Pacific."

"First and foremost I want to make it clear I could only wish I had an ounce of the courage that John Basilone had," Seda said during a phone interview last week.

Basilone became a war hero in the fall of 1942 while fighting on Guadalcanal during the Pacific Theater of World War II. He and his outnumbered unit, charged with protecting an important United States airfield, absorbed an unrelenting Japanese offensive over the course of a bloody two-day battle. When the dust finally settled only Gunnery Sgt. Basilone and two of his men had survived the onslaught. Amazingly, the Japanese forces had retreated. For his heroic actions, Basilone was awarded the Medal of Honor. Soon after, he was sent home, becoming a star of newsreels, books and the face of the war bond effort.

Basilone quickly became restless, however, and felt out of place in a world marked by praise and celebrity. He was spending nights with Hollywood stars and, as enjoyable as it must have seemed to the American public, it never sat quite well with Basilone.

(cont' on p. 2)

(cont' from p. 1)



Clifton native Jon Seda, a film and television star, portrays WWII Marine John Basilone in HBO's 10-part miniseries "The Pacific" Above a scene from the series.

Seda said he could relate because he never completely came to grips with the fame aspect of his occupation, likening it to a square peg being jammed into round hole. During his leave there was one idea which dominated Basilone's thoughts, the vision of himself back in battle and with his men. His decision was even more difficult because Basilone had fallen in love and married fellow Marine Lena Mae Riggi while state-side in 1944. He would quarrel with the top military brass until they relented, shipping him back to the South Pacific.

"So here he finds the woman of his dreams and he has a chance to stay with her, live the rest of his life with her and have a family and yet he still went back," Seda said. "It must have been such a struggle to decide to go back but I think, being a Marine herself, Lena got it because she knew John's heart. She knew that even she wasn't going to be able to fill the void in his heart - a need to be in the fight and a need to be with his men." Six months after their wedding Basilone was killed in action while fighting on Iwo Jima. He was 29 years old.

"This wasn't something made up, these decisions were real," Seda said. "While filming I would wrestle with it and ask myself 'would I demand to go back?' if I knew what kind of hell it was." Seda, who was a talented professional boxer after graduating from Clifton High School, said he could relate to Basilone's need to return to the fight because he considers boxing an "unfinished chapter" of his life.

"Even after all these years of being in the acting business, to this day I still wake up from dreams where I feel like I'm fighting again. I know it sounds crazy but once you have that in you, you know what would make you truly happy is being in the fight, like John," he said. The 37-year-old also called upon his arduous training regimen in order to survive what he called "the most physically and mentally demanding project" of his career.

"This wasn't some character that was just made up to be a part of a film, this was a real man," he said. "There were times where it would get to you mentally or physically and the easiest thing to do is to just quit or not give it your all, but I learned during my boxing training that what you can do when you're tired is what makes you stronger."

In this way Seda was determined to represent the WWII hero accurately and said he "felt Basilone's presence" pushing him throughout the filming of the series. He additionally credited the camaraderie forged during a mandatory pre-production boot camp as a turning point for the entire cast. Capt. Dale Dye, the production's military advisor who has also appeared in previous Spielberg works such as "Band of Brothers" and "Saving Private Ryan", made sure every second of the boot camp counted, Seda said. The actors were put through a grueling training process, experiencing combat scenarios as well as learning the weapons used during WWII and overcoming physical pain throughout the 10-day gauntlet.

"What we learned at boot camp became the foundation for building our characters," Seda said. "Captain Dye made sure it was embedded in our heads what our responsibility was from that first day of boot camp. Only soldiers really know what it is to have that second family but that's something that we had to come as close as we could to learning as castmates."

The hellish camp was just one facet of the show's search for authenticity. The producers of the show bombarded actors with documents, photographs, diaries and notes involving their characters in an attempt to personalize the endeavor. In addition, Seda spoke of books like "I'm Staying With My Boys" by Jim Proser and "Red Blood Black Sand" by Chuck Tatum which offered the actor first-hand accounts of Basilone's courageous actions.

"You can feel how important this is to Steven [Spielberg], Tom Hanks and [producers] Garry Goetzman, Bruce McKenna, Tony To, Graham Yoast," Seda said. "They poured so much into this to make sure they got it right because it's all about honoring these men."

John Pacifico, a Raritan resident who grew up idolizing Basilone and who oversees the annual town parade held in his honor, contributed a booklet which offered Seda a better feeling for the man behind the hero.

On Feb. 27, at the Raritan Valley Community College, HBO held a special screening of the first part of the miniseries which debuts on Sunday, March 14. Pacifico introduced the film. "Some people forget that we basically became a country by war and we've had to keep defending it ever since," Pacifico said.

(cont' on p. 3)

(cont' from p. 2)

"It doesn't just happen and that's why it's so important to preserve the memory of what these brave men did for us." Bruce Doorly, who oversees a Basilone tribute Web site - www.basiloneparade.com - said he could feel "excitement in the air" the day of the screening and recalled the packed nature of the 1,000 seat auditorium. Unfortunately, the recent blizzard conditions left Seda and his co-stars grounded at LAX airport and unable to attend the event. The City native said he was disappointed he missed the screening and also lamented he would not be able to enjoy an order of chili dogs and fries from the Hot Grill, a hometown favorite of his. Seda said he hopes, however, Basilone's friends, family, the people of Raritan as well as the man himself, are satisfied with his effort.

"At the end of the day I thought John was just a regular guy from New Jersey who found his niche with the Marines, had a special gift with machine guns, an innate ability to lead men and was willing to do whatever it took to get the job done," Seda said. "I just hope John's looking down on me and maybe saying something like 'hey, you're not me kid, but you did a pretty good job.'"

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'The Pacific' Miniseries Unfolds Through Rutherford Veteran's Eyes

Sunday, March 14, 2010

by Virginia Roban

THE RECORD Staff Writer



James Badge Dale, center, portraying Rutherford's Robert Leckie, who died in 2001, in HBO's follow-up to 2001's 'Band of Brothers.'

When his children were growing up, Robert Leckie never talked about what he went through as a Marine in the Pacific during World War II. He was, in that regard, a typically silent member of the Greatest Generation.

"My father was a military historian, so, we talked about many wars, but he never discussed his personal experiences with us," daughter Joan Leckie Salvias says. "With my sons, he would tell funny stories. They used to go and listen to Grandpa. But I'm sure he cleaned up his stories for them."

Leckie — who grew up in Rutherford — may not have spoken about the Pacific until later in his life, but he wrote volumes about it, including a powerful and unexpurgated memoir, "Helmet for My Pillow," his first book, published in 1957. It so impressed the producers of HBO's "The Pacific" that they made Leckie, who died in 2001, one of the three main characters in the 10-part miniseries.

"'Helmet for My Pillow' is a great book ... one of the first honest memoirs of the Second World War to ever be published," says head writer Bruce C. McKenna, an Englewood native. "It's about [Leckie's] own failings, his own struggles, and he really struggled to keep his sanity during the war. But he was also extraordinarily intelligent, and a bit of a poet. ... And so he gave us a great lens to focus on the Pacific."

The \$200 million project — from Tom Hanks, Steven Spielberg and Gary Goetzman, the producing team behind HBO's 2001 miniseries "Band of Brothers" — abounds with Jersey connections. It also focuses on two other members of the 1st Marine Division, one of whom is John Basilone, a hero from Raritan, played by Clifton native Jon Seda.

Leckie is portrayed by James Badge Dale, who visited Leckie's family in Andover in July 2007, the month before he left to shoot the series in Australia.

"He pulled into the driveway, and as we were walking into the house, my mother just grabbed me by the arm and said, 'Oh, my God, he even looks like your father,' " says Salvias, citing a resemblance "in his coloring and deep-set eyes."

She has seen the first episode, which McKenna wrote, several times and says, "It's very good." Noting that whenever McKenna had a question, he would call her or her mom, Salvias says, "They really made every attempt to get the story accurately."

Well, with one, completely forgivable exception. Her dad is shown "writing letters to my mother all the time, which is interesting, since she's about the only one he never really wrote to," Salvias says. "They didn't really date until after the war, but in the series, it's really quite lovely the way they have him writing to her." Leckie and Vera Keller lived next door to each other in Rutherford. She was friendly with one of his sisters.

(cont' on p. 4)

(cont' from p. 3)

But Vera was three years younger than he, and she went to Rutherford High School, while he went to St. Mary's High School. Then, too, her mom used to call Leckie "that fresh kid next door," Salvas says.

Youngest of eight

The youngest of eight children, he was born Dec. 18, 1920, in Philadelphia, but his family moved to Rutherford two months later. "His whole life was Rutherford," Salvas says.

In school, Leckie was on a state championship basketball team, but he was "not particularly big and his dad would not allow him to play football," which he loved, Salvas says. And so, at age 16, "he got a job covering high school football games for the Bergen [Evening] Record," she says.

Shortly after Pearl Harbor, Leckie enlisted in the Marine Corps. Dubbed "Lucky" by his comrades, he was a machine gunner and an intelligence scout in the 1st Marine Division, participating in the battles of Guadalcanal, Cape Gloucester and Peleliu.

"I think he struggled very seriously with how to come to terms with what happened during the war, until he wrote that book," says McKenna, who believes "Helmet" (recently re-released in paperback) helped Leckie "come out of the war faster and better than a lot of his peers."

Wounded in 1944

Wounded on Peleliu, he was evacuated from the Pacific in 1944. Leckie married Vera two years later in the rectory of St. Mary's Church in Rutherford. The couple moved to Buffalo and stayed for five years, where Leckie had a job with The Associated Press, and in 1951, they moved back to Rutherford where they lived for eight years (he worked for several New York papers and produced newsreels), then moved to Mountain Lakes, where Salvas mainly grew up.

"He once described himself as having an unfortunate personality, which I thought was a very good way to describe it. He could be described as difficult," she says of her dad. "He always used to say, 'A lot of streets are named after me — one way.' He believed that whatever he thought was correct. And you had better come around to his way of thinking." But, she says, her dad was also "very, very funny," and "absolutely always writing." Leckie wrote more than 35 books, the first five of which largely dealt with World War II. Then, he expanded into all American wars.

"His really main opus, originally published in 1967, is called 'The Wars of America.' It starts with the Colonial wars and at that time, it ended mid-Vietnam," Salvas says.



Leckie was at the battles of Guadalcanal, Cape Gloucester and Peleliu.

Help from Mom

The updated edition that was released in 1992 included the Gulf War, and ran about 1,500 pages. And Vera Leckie typed "every one of those manuscripts," says Salvas. "She was the silent partner, the real trouper.

"The sound of my childhood is the sound of a manual typewriter," adds Salvas, who remembers coming home from school at lunchtime to hear it emanating from her father's third-floor study. "You could hear very quick, very clean type and that was my mother. She was retyping something that he had finished editing the day or so before. And then, she'd hear me come in and she'd say, 'I'll be right down. Just let me finish this page.' ... And when you got home from school in the afternoon, you heard a muffled, stronger typing sound and that was my father."

In 1976, Robert and Vera Leckie moved to Andover, to find some peace and quiet when he worked at home. "My father wrote all afternoon, and we were surrounded by people with barking dogs. So, the solution [was] to move into Sussex County, where you surround yourself with 10 acres and you don't hear so many barking dogs," says Salvas, who has two brothers, Geoffrey, an artist, and David, a history teacher.

Leckie died on Dec. 24, 2001, of Alzheimer's disease, which was "particularly cruel for someone who had such a command of the language and such a wonderful mind," Salvas says.

One wonders what her dad would have thought about HBO's "The Pacific." "That one's a hard call," she says. "But I think he would be pleased that the story of the Marines in the Pacific is finally being told truthfully."

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New Jersey Hero John Basilone

submitted by Annita Zalenski



Sgt. John Basilone, US Marine Corps

As family trees grow, their boughs become forever entwined with branches of many others thereby adding another dimension to our descendants' rich heritage. In my immediate family, the unique and special "trees" of my daughter-in-law and three sons-in-law include families from Belgium, England, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia and Scotland. There are wonderful stories in all these lines, but none more compelling than the story of WWII Hero John Basilone. He is my son-in-law's granduncle and my grandchildren's great-granduncle. John is one of the U. S. Marines featured in the recent HBO series The Pacific.

John Basilone was born on November 4th, 1916, in Buffalo, New York. He was one of ten children. His father Salvatore, a tailor, was born in Colle Sannita, Benevento, Italy. His mother Theodora Bengivenga was born in Raritan. When John was very young, the Basilone family moved to Raritan where John attended St. Bernard Parochial School. In 1934, he joined the Army, and served in the Philippines at the U.S. base in Manila. It was there that John discovered his mechanical talent for guns. He became a champion boxer and acquired the nickname of "Manila John". After his 3-year enlistment ended, John returned home to Raritan; however, several years later he re-enlisted in the military and joined the Marines.

In August of 1942, John was sent to Guadalcanal. His bravery at Guadalcanal, while serving with the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, 1st Marine Division, is legendary. He held off 3,000 Japanese troops at Guadalcanal, after his 15-member unit was reduced to two men. John received a Medal of Honor for his valor. The citation signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, reads:

The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pride in presenting the

MEDAL OF HONOR to

SERGEANT

JOHN BASILONE

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

for service as set forth in the following CITATION:

For extraordinary heroism and conspicuous gallantry in action, against enemy Japanese forces, above and beyond the call of duty, while serving with the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, 1st Marine Division in the Lunga Area, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, on 24 and 25 October 1942. While the enemy was hammering at the Marines' defensive positions, Sgt. Basilone, in charge of 2 sections of heavy machine guns, fought valiantly to check the savage and determined assault. In a fierce frontal attack with the Japanese blasting his guns with grenades and mortar fire, one of Sgt. Basilone's sections, with its guncrews, was put out of action, leaving only 2 men able to carry on. Moving an extra gun into position, he placed it in action, then, under continual fire, repaired another and personally manned it, gallantly holding his line until replacements arrived. A little later, with ammunition critically low and the supply lines cut off, Sgt. Basilone, at great risk of his life and in the face of continued enemy attack, battled his way through hostile lines with urgently needed shells for his gunners, thereby contributing in large measure to the virtual annihilation of a Japanese regiment. His great personal valor and courageous initiative were in keeping with the highest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service.

As John prepared to return to the United States, he promised his fellow Marines that he would be back. On Sunday, September 19, 1943, John's home town of Raritan, NJ held a huge homecoming parade in his honor. Life Magazine ran a four page story about the parade and Fox Movietone News filmed the event. The news-reel was shown in movie theatres throughout the country. While in the United States John participated in nationwide War Bond Drives and was often photographed with celebrities. Although he appreciated all the attention and admiration, John was first and foremost a soldier and had given his word to his men that he would return.

Medal of Honor recipients are generally not allowed to return to combat. John's initial request to rejoin his men was denied. He was offered a commission and a job as a gunnery instructor, but turned them down. A few months later he asked again to return overseas and this time his request was approved. To prepare for his next assignment, John was sent to Camp Pendleton, California on December 27, 1943.

While at Camp Pendleton, John met Marine Sergeant Lena Mae Riggi. After dating for several months, they married on July 10th, 1944 at St. Mary's Church in Oceanside, California. One month later, orders were given for the Marines to ship out of Camp Pendleton. John said good-bye to his new bride and sailed with the Marines for Iwo Jima. (*cont' on p.6*)

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On February 19th, 1945 the Marines arrived at Iwo Jima. The Navy had bombarded the island for 36 days. It was hoped that this intense bombing would allow the Marines to take the island with little resistance; however, there were 22,000 Japanese soldiers who were well dug in and heavily armed. The first U.S. invasion force landed on the beach at 9:05 a.m. John's group landed a short time later. They were surprised to find little opposition. Then, with the beach crowded with U.S. soldiers, the Japanese began their fierce counter attack. During the battle, John and his platoon were pinned down by enemy gunfire. He single-handedly destroyed an enemy blockhouse. He then led twenty men off the exposed beach area to a location where they could take cover and plan their next move. He ordered the men to stay put while he went back and gathered more men and weapons. As John was leading the second group across the beach to the waiting soldiers, a Japanese mortar shell exploded in their midst. John Basilone died from his wounds around thirty minutes later.

For his bravery on Iwo Jima, John Basilone was awarded The Navy Cross. His Navy Cross citation reads:

The President of the United States takes pride in presenting the NAVY CROSS posthumously to

GUNNERY SERGEANT

JOHN BASILONE
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

for service as set forth in the following CITATION:

For extraordinary heroism while serving as a Leader of a Machine-Gun Section, Company C, 1st Battalion, 27th Marines, 5th Marine Division, in action against enemy Japanese forces on Iwo Jima in the Volcano Islands, 19 February 1945. Shrewdly gauging the tactical situation shortly after landing when his company's advance was held up by the concentrated fire of a heavily fortified Japanese blockhouse, Gunnery Sergeant Basilone boldly defied the smashing bombardment of heavy caliber fire to work his way around the flank and up to a position directly on top of the blockhouse and then, attacking with grenades and demolitions, single handedly destroyed the entire hostile strong point and its defending garrison. Consistently daring and aggressive as he fought his way over the battle-torn beach and up the sloping, gun-studded terraces toward Airfield Number 1, he repeatedly exposed himself to the blasting fury of exploding shells and later in the day coolly proceeded to the aid of a friendly tank which had been trapped in an enemy mine field under intense mortar and artillery barrages, skillfully guiding the heavy vehicle over the hazardous terrain to safety, despite the overwhelming volume of hostile fire. In the forefront of the assault at all times, he pushed forward with dauntless courage and iron determination until, moving upon the edge of the airfield, he fell, instantly killed by a bursting mortar shell. Stouthearted and indomitable, Gunnery Sergeant Basilone, by his intrepid initiative, outstanding skill, and valiant spirit of self-sacrifice in the face of the fanatic opposition, contributed materially to the advance of his company

during the early critical period of the assault, and his unwavering devotion to duty throughout the bitter conflict was an inspiration to his comrades and reflects the highest credit upon Gunnery Sergeant Basilone and the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life in the service of his country.



Sgt. Lena Basilone ready to christen USS Basilone, 21 December 1945

The military paid tribute to John by naming a ship after him. An anti-submarine Navy Destroyer, the U.S. Basilone was commissioned on July 26th, 1949. His service to country and Corps was recognized again many years later on November 10, 2005 with the issuance of the "Distinguished Marines" U. S. Postal Service stamps.



The achievements of John Basilone, Daniel J. Daly, John A. Lejeune and Lewis B. Puller—four legendary Marines who served with bravery and distinction during the 20th century—are immortalized on postage stamps issued in 2005.

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A section of U.S. Interstate 5, through Camp Pendleton, California, is named the "Gunnery Sergeant John Basilone Memorial Highway". Basilone Road is an entry point into Camp Pendleton from Interstate 5, and Basilone Drop Zone on Camp Pendleton is named for John Basilone as well.

A memorial statue featuring a likeness of Sgt. Basilone holding a heavy machine gun is located at the intersections of Old York Road and Canal Street in Raritan, New Jersey. It was sculpted by a childhood friend, Philip Orlando. *(The statue, along with Phil Orlando, is pictured at bottom of page)* The football field at Bridgewater-Raritan Regional High School is named "Basilone Field", *(pictured bottom, right)* and on the wall of the field house next to the field is a mural honoring Basilone.

An overpass at the Somerville Circle, Somerville, New Jersey is named after John. The New Jersey Turnpike bridge across the Raritan River is named the "Basilone Bridge," and a bridge that crosses the Raritan River in Raritan at First Avenue and Canal Street is also named in his honor. *(pictured at right)*

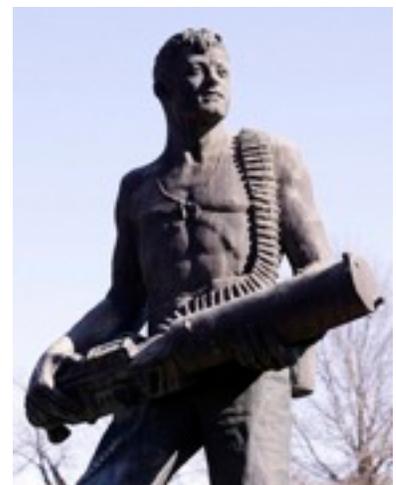
There is a plaque honoring John Basilone at the U.S. Navy Memorial in Washington, D.C. A bust of John can be found in Little Italy San Diego at Fir & India Streets. *(pictured at top of page)* This memorial is dedicated to residents of Little Italy San Diego who served in WWII & Korea. The area is called Piazza Basilone.

In Raritan, NJ the Knights of Columbus Council #13264 is named in honor of John Basilone as is the Order Sons of Italy In America Lodge #2442 in Bohemia, NY.

The California chapter of an international Italian genealogy group (P.O.I.N.T Pursuing Our Italian Names Together), is also named in honor of John Basilone.

John Basilone remains the only soldier (non-officer) in U.S. history to be awarded both The Congressional Medal of Honor and The Navy Cross. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia. His grave can be found in Section 12, Grave 384, grid Y/Z 23.5.

Photos of Memorials to Sgt. John Basilone



Photos from top: *Plaza Basilone, San Diego; bust of Sgt Basilone, Basilone Plaza; Canal Street & Basilone Bridge,, Raritan, Nj; Basilone Field, Raritan, Nj; Photos of sculpture of Sgt. Basilone, at bottom of page: sculpture in progress; Phil Orlando with sculpture in background; close up of sculpture in Raritan, Nj.*





POINTEr in Person

The POINTEr In Person program, an autonomous branch of **POINT - (Pursuing Our Italian Names Together)** was founded in 1992. Our group, Chapter 15, was organized in September 1996. The 21 nationwide chapters of POINTEr In Person provide genealogical researchers an opportunity to meet socially, and learn and share information pertinent to Italian research. Each chapter is independent and sets forth its own procedures and schedules of events.

We cordially invite Italian genealogical researchers to attend our quarterly meetings. Membership is open to all. In addition to regular meetings our group takes occasional field trips to genealogical research sites in the New Jersey/New York area.

Membership in our parent organization, POINT, is not a prerequisite to joining our group; however, it is highly recommended.

La Notizia Italiana

Volume 9, Number 1

The Lou Costello Chapter

POINTEr In Person
Chapter 15
Northern New Jersey
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Calendar

POINT Chapter 15 Future Meetings:

Elmwood Park Municipal Building, 10 AM

Future Meetings:

August 7, 2010

November 6, 2010

February 6, 2011

Passaic County Genealogical Society:

10 AM, Lambert Castle:

May 8: Meeting:

"Five Founding Families of Olde Pompton Township Region" - Richard Townsend, Presenter

June 12: Genealogy Club Bus Trip: Kingston, NY

Passaic County Historical Society:

May 5: Quarterly Meeting

7 PM, Lambert Castle

"Nj Mills: Whatever Happened to Them?"

PCHS Trustee Phil Jaeger Presenter

Lambert Castle Events:

June 4: Antique Show Preview Night -7PM

June 5 & 6, 10AM-5PM:

Fourth Annual Antique Show & Sale:

June 20 & 21:

Civil War Encampment & Candlelight Tour

PCHS Enrichment Series:

May 23, 2PM: *Classical Piano*

June 13, 2PM: *Classical Music Carousel*

For more information on PCHS & Lambert Castle Events:

973- 247-0085 ext 200

www.lambertcastle.org

Genealogy Society of Bergen County:

7PM, Ridgewood Library

May 24: Meeting:

"Genealogy Related Records in the Brooklyn Diocesan Archives" - Joseph Coen, Presenter

June 28: Meeting:

"Introduction to Genealogy Research in Germany":
Thilo C. Agthe, Presenter

Seminar:

June 5: 9AM - 1PM:

"Google Your Family Tree and More"

Dan Lynch, Presenter

Additional Information:

www.njgsbc.org