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**Collection 368**  
**Dennis J. Starr (1946-1998)**  
**Collection**

**By Ellen R. Callahan**  
**January 2021**

## **Biography**

Dennis James Starr was born on October 27, 1946 in Trenton, New Jersey to Raymond Starr and Lucy Bendetti Starr. In 1966, he received an AA degree from Trenton Junior College (the precursor to Mercer County Community College) and a BA in history from Rider College in 1968. He continued his education at Rutgers University, obtaining a master's degree in history in 1970 and a PhD in history in 1979.

Except for a short time spent in New Mexico and North Dakota, Starr's home was in Trenton. From 1970 to 1973, he served as a Teaching Assistant in Rutgers University's History Department while studying for his doctorate there. In 1975, he began his teaching affiliation with Rider College, beginning as an adjunct instructor and finally becoming an adjunct Associate Professor in 1993 where he taught until his death in 1998.

He had diverse research interests in local and regional history as well as labor and immigration. These interests are reflected in his academic papers and projects. His 1979 dissertation, "The Nature and Uses of Economic, Political and Social Power in Trenton, NJ, 1890-1917," used Trenton as a way of exploring the changing relationships between the upper class who ran the city and the working class whose labor they depended on. A continued interest in this theme is shown in a variety of papers and projects he was involved in that centered on the John A. Roebling's Sons Company, including the "Roebling Oral History Project" of 1993. Also, a 1995 paper "Anatomy of a City: The Economic and Social History of Trenton, New Jersey since 1960" traces the rise and fall of Trenton as an industrial and commercial success to a poor and ailing city. This paper was the center piece of a 1995 Trenton Human Relations Commission program titled "Trenton: We've Come Too Far: Race, Class, and Ethnicity – How Alike, Different or Both?"

Starr's interest in his Italian heritage can also be seen through his academic writings and a variety of projects. Chief among these was the publication of *The Italians of New Jersey: A Historical Introduction*

*and Bibliography* in 1985. In addition, over several years he collaborated with Louis Presti of the New Jersey Network (NJN) in raising funds and developing a project that resulted in *La Festa* a television documentary about Italian-American saints festivals in New York and New Jersey, produced by NJN, 1996. His scholarship also provided resources in the further study of Trenton in his “History of Ethnic and Racial Groups in Trenton, New Jersey, 1900-1960,” in which he provides an abstract on events pertaining to ethnic and racial groups in Trenton as found in the newspapers of the day.

In addition to teaching, he was affiliated with several organizations including the Central Jersey Chapter of American Italian Historical Association, the Trenton Human Relations Commission, and the New Jersey Historical Commission to which he was appointed as a Commissioner in May of 1992. He was also active in the successful campaign to block the building of an incinerator on Duck Island just outside of Trenton.

In the summer of 1997, Starr was diagnosed with liver cancer and despite aggressive treatment, he succumbed to the disease on December 18, 1998 at the age of 52. Writing of him in the *Rider News*, Dr. Roderick McDonald described Starr as a “dedicated teacher, accomplished scholar and community activist” who was “immensely proud of his native city of Trenton.”

### **Scope and Contents Notes**

The collection includes some examples of Dr. Starr’s writings, grant applications to projects he was affiliated with, and material documenting his teaching career including correspondence, course syllabi, two student papers and his application for promotion at Rider College. There are also some miscellaneous materials related to his graduate education (grades, correspondence, etc.), some scattered personal correspondence and one photograph of him. Finally, there is a collection of academic papers dealing with immigration that were accumulated by Dr. Starr. The collection spans from 1969 to 1999 and consists of 3 boxes of material.

### **Series Description**

#### **Series 1. Biographical Information, ca. 1978-1999**

This series consists of copies of Starr’s curriculum vitae (academic resume), the one picture of him in the collection and copies of his obituaries.

#### **Series 2. Academic Papers and Projects, 1971-1994**

This series consist of a few academic papers as well as project-related files which are arranged below in chronological order. Most notably, this includes research note cards, drafts, partial drafts and what appears to be a complete draft of his dissertation, “The Nature and Uses of Economic, Political and Social Power in Trenton, New Jersey, 1890-1917.” There are also complete copies of his “History of Ethnic and Racial Groups in Trenton, New Jersey, 1900-1960,” and “Anatomy of a City: The Economic and Social History of Trenton, New Jersey Since 1960.” The most extensively detailed project in the series is on *La Festa* a television documentary about Italian-American saints’ festivals in New York and New Jersey, produced by New Jersey Network, 1996. The last item in this series [Box 2, Folder 10] is an incomplete paper on John Roebling that includes no title or author but might be the product of Dr. Starr’s research given his interest in the subject.

#### **Series 3. Teaching Career and Affiliations, 1969-1992**

This series consist of correspondence regarding seeking teaching positions, two student papers, syllabi from his courses and his application for promotion at Rider College. Also included are some

materials from the Central Jersey Chapter of the American Italian Historical Association, for which he served as president and the New Jersey Historical Commission including his commission from Gov. Florio.

#### **Series 4. Miscellaneous, 1968-1991**

This includes some documents related to his graduate studies, miscellaneous correspondence and a few newspaper articles.

#### **Series 5. Collected Papers on Immigration, 1982-1987**

This consists of a collection of academic papers on immigration centering on the experience of immigrants to New Jersey found with Dr. Starr's papers.

### **Box List**

#### **Series 1. Biographical Information**

Box / Folder / Content

- |   |   |                                  |
|---|---|----------------------------------|
| 1 | 1 | Obituaries, February 1999        |
| 1 | 2 | Vitta, ca. 1978-1989             |
| 1 | 3 | Photograph, January 1986 or 1987 |

#### **Series 2. Academic Papers and Projects**

- |   |     |   |
|---|-----|---|
| 1 | 4   | "The Class Struggle and Strikes in the Progressive Era with Trenton, New Jersey as a Base of Operation," May 11, 1971   |
| 1 | 5   | Dissertation: Early Drafts, ca. 1970-1978   |
| 1 | 6   | Dissertation: Notes, undated and 1973   |
| 1 | 7   | Dissertation: Draft - Introduction, etc., Chapters I and II, January 1979   |
| 1 | 8   | Dissertation: Draft - Chapter III, ca. January 1979   |
| 1 | 9   | Dissertation: Draft - Chapters IV and V, January 1979   |
| 1 | 10  | Dissertation: Draft - Chapter VI and Bibliography, ca. January 1979   |
| 1 | 11  | Dissertation: Certificate of Copyright Registration, August 2, 1979   |
| 3 | --- | Dissertation: Research Note Cards, ca. 1970-1978  |
| 1 | 12  | Grant Application to the New Jersey Committee for the Humanities: "A Bibliography of Italians in New Jersey," 1981  |
| 1 | 13  | "History of Ethnic and Racial Groups in Trenton, New Jersey, 1900-1960," 1986 [copy 1 of 2]   |
| 1 | 14  | "History of Ethnic and Racial Groups in Trenton, New Jersey, 1900-1960," 1986 [copy 2 of 2, Accession 2016.10]  |
| 1 | 15  | "History of Ethnic and Racial Groups in Trenton, New Jersey, 1900-1960, an Index to Source Material in Trenton Library," 1986 [Accession 2016.10]                   |
| 1 | 16  | "History of Ethnic and Racial Groups in Trenton, New Jersey, 1900-1960, Chronology," 1986 [Accession 2016.10]   |
| 2 | 1   | La Festa: undated notes, ca 1988?   |
| 2 | 2   | La Festa: Notes to Lou [Presti] and Dennis [Starr] regarding development of project, ca. Spring [assumed to have been sent by Frank Capuzzi, project script writer. |

- 2 3 La Festa: New Jersey Network (NJN) grant proposal to the New Jersey Historical Commission (NJHC) for funding to develop documentary, ca. 1987-1988; Progress report to NJHC, 7/18/1988

## Series 2. Academic Papers and Projects (cont'd)

### Box / Folder / Content

- 2 4 La Festa: NJN grant proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities to fund the documentary, 9/15/1989; Response to NEH, 4/2/1989 from Dennis Starr [probably a result of NEH staff's technical review of proposal before it was submitted in September].
- 2 5 La Festa: Dennis Starr grant proposal to NJHC to fund an oral history project, 4/1/1990.
- 2 6 "Anatomy of a City: The Economic and Social History of Trenton, New Jersey Since 1960"; 2/2/1995; Program, etc. for Lawrenceville School panel discussion which centered on the paper's findings, May 1995
- 2 7 "The Rise and Fall of the Roebling Empire," NJN Grant Proposal to NEH; ca. 1993; Letter from Allis Wolfe [NEH] to Louis Presti [NJN] re: not funding project.
- 2 8 Roebling Oral History Project: Report to the New Jersey Committee for the Humanities, October 5, 1993
- 2 9 Roebling Oral History Project: Now You're Set for Life : Oral Histories of the John A. Roebling Son's Company, Trenton (N.J.) ed. by Judy L. Winkler and Clifford Zink, 1994.
- 2 10 Incomplete paper on John Roebling [author and date unknown]

## Series 3. Teaching Career and Affiliations

- 2 11 Correspondence, 1969, 1970, 1976-1986
- 2 12 Student Papers for Starr's Interim Study Program Course: The Deindustrialization of Trenton, January 1985  
 "Interviews with Joseph Yuhas, Councilman, Trenton's Southward and Jim Popkin, Trenton Times Reporter," by Alan Merul, Bob Shapiro and Nick Malauga  
 "Employment Records for the Years 1901, 1915, 1927, 1931 and 1946 & Addresses of Company Officials for the Years 1915, 1927, and 1931," by Lisa Pellicano and Melissa Bonello [includes analysis of findings]
- 2 13 Course Syllabi, undated and 1987, 1989: *Colonial and Revolutionary America, History of New Jersey, History of the American West, The Industrial Revolution, The U.S in the Twentieth Century*
- 2 14 Application for promotion to Adjunct Associate Professor, Rider College, October 1992 to January 1993
- 2 15 Central Jersey Chapter of the American Italian Historical Association, 1985-1995
- 2 16 New Jersey Historical Commission, 1991-1992 [includes original commission from Gov. Jim Florio]

## Series 4. Miscellaneous

- 2 17 Notices, grades, correspondence regarding undergraduate and graduate education, undated and 1968-1979 [with gaps]

- 2 18 Correspondence, 1979-1997 [with gaps]
- 2 19 News clippings, press releases, ca. 1980s – 1991

### Series 5. Collected Papers on Immigration

#### Box / Folder / Content

- 2 20 “Reasons for Migrating,” by Giles R. Wright and Howard L. Green, New Jersey Historical Commission, 1982
- 2 21 “Afro-American History as Immigration History: The Anguillians of Perth Amboy – A Case Study,” by Lawrence Hogan, 1984-1985
- 2 22 “Count These Women in: American Immigration History through Family Photographs and Oral Interviews,” by Doris Friedensohn and Barbara Rubin, May 1985
- 2 23 “Data on New Jersey Urban Immigration and Migration: Maps, Statistics and Charts,” by Henry Bischoff, 1984-1985 [studies of Paterson, Trenton, Jersey City, Newark (including Harrison, Kearny and East Newark), Jersey City, Camden, Elizabeth, Passaic, Bayonne, and North Hudson (including Hoboken, Union, West New York, West Hoboken, Union City, and Secaucus)]
- 2 24 “Faces of Immigration: The Cubans of New Jersey,” by Philip C. Dolce, 1984-1985
- 2 25 “A Walking Tour of an Immigrant Neighborhood,” by Henry Bischoff [Dublin neighborhood of Paterson, NJ]
- 2 26 “An Annotated Bibliography of Immigrant and Ethnic Fiction by and about New Jerseyans,” by Sondra B. Fishinger, 1987

### Provenance

The bulk of this collection was donated by Dr. Starr’s sister, Jane Starr Stanley in January of 1999. Materials from the project titled “History of Ethnic and Racial Groups in Trenton was donated by the New Jersey Council on the Humanities in 2016 and accessioned as 2016.10.

### Processing Notes

During the processing of this collection, exact duplicates and drafts of materials that only included minor corrections (grammar, punctuations, spelling etc.) have not been retained. Incidental financial records (cancelled checks, pay stubs) were also not retained. The research note cards in Series 2 were found, for the most part, in no discernible order. They have been grouped into small bundles by cotton tying tape; the few that were found rubber banded or clipped together have been kept as a group and a note added to indicate they were found as such.

### Bibliography

Jennings, M. (1997, December 5). Burner forever snuffed. *Times, The (Trenton, NJ)*, p. A1HT. Available from NewsBank: America's News: <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=NewsBank&docref=news/11B7BBEA57CD8180>.

Leone, Anthony. "Campus deals with death of Starr: Well-known history professor succumbed to cancer on Dec. 18." *The Rider News*, February 5, 1999.

McDonald, Dr. Roderick. "Starr eulogized by colleague." *The Rider News*, February 5, 1999.

### **Related Material by Dennis J. Starr at Trenton Free Public Library**

*Nature and Uses of Economic, Political and Social Power in Trenton, New Jersey, 1890-1917*, 1979  
[Dissertation for PhD program, Rutgers, The State University]

*The Italians of New Jersey: A Historical Introduction and Bibliography*. Newark: New Jersey Historical Society. 1985

### **Related Collection**

Trenton Roebling Community Development Corporation Roebling Oral History Project [includes tapes, transcripts, and summary project booklet: "Now You're Set for Life: Oral histories of the John A. Roebling Son's Company, Trenton (N.J.)" ed. by Judy L. Winkler and Clifford Zink, 1994].