Seabrook Educational & Cultural Center Bulletin

Upper Deerfield Township Municipal Building
1325 Highway 77
Seabrook, New Jersey 08302

Telephone: (856) 451-8393
Email: seabrookhistory@gmail.com
Website: www.seabrookeducation.org
Hours: Monday - Thursday 9:00 am - 12:00 noon
Additional visiting hours by appointment

Spring 2025

Issue on Immigration and Migration

Appreciation Luncheon

The Annual Volunteers Appreciation Luncheon took place on Sunday October 27, 2024 at the Green Olive Restaurant in Bridgeton, NJ. The new SECC Board of Trustees was introduced by the SECC Board President Masaru Nakawatase. Upper Deerfield Township Mayor Jim Crilley lead the flag salute and Advisory Board Member Darlene Mukoda gave the blessing. The SECC Executive Director Larry Ericksen was the event's Master of Ceremonies and described all of the numerous and exciting activities currently ongoing at the Seabrook Educational and Cultural Center.

SECC Board of Trustees at the Volunteers Appreciation Luncheon

The Mellon Foundation Initiative

With a three-year grant from the Mellon Foundation, the SECC is the lead organizer for events throughout South Jersey on Migrant and Immigrant Labor. We will be holding one public event focusing on African American labor and another on Japanese American labor at Seabrook Farms. The following is the press release for the project. The New Jersey Immigrant Laborers' Monument Project announces the launch of Monuments to Migration and Labor, a Mellon Foundation Monuments Project initiative dedicated to creating public art and monument installations that honor the contributions of immigrant and migrant laborers across New Jersey. At a time when federal policies have worked to marginalize migrants and diminish their visibility in public spaces, Monuments to Migration and Labor offers a public, creative response. Through participatory dialogues and events that engage historical and firsthand narratives of migrant labor, the project seeks to commemorate the place-based histories of diverse communities that have built and sustained New Jersey.

The following is the flyer for the upcoming dialogue at Gallery 50 in Bridgeton, NJ.

COMMEMORATING MIGRANT AND IMMIGRANT LABOR IN AGRICULTURE

A PUBLIC DIALOGUE

The New Jersey Monuments to Migration and Labor Project invites you to participate in a public conversation about the migrant and immigrant labor in agriculture. We will gather to share our stories.

What aspects of this history are most valuable to share and commemorate about the experiences at Seabrook Farms and agricultural labor at Seabrook and Bridgeton, NJ?

This dialogue explores the histories of Black laborers at Seabrook Farms, and the communities that migrant farmworkers formed. Stakeholders will present their stories from which artists will create art responses.

Dialogue Facilitators
Betty Brown-Pitts
Gloria Kates

Speaker
Dr. Andrew T. Urban

Artists
Kandice Fields
Kevin Quigley
Diane Rogers
Jacqueline Sandro

COMMUNITY FOCUS
AFRICAN AMERICAN MIGRATION

WHERE AND WHEN
GALLERY 50
50 E. COMMERCE STREET
BRIDGETON, NJ
SATURDAY, MAY 31, 2025
1 PM - 4 PM

FREE ADMISSION. REFRESHMENTS WILL BE PROVIDED.

Register by email at seabrookhistory@gmail.com
or by phone at (856) 451-8393
Check out the project website at https://njmml.com.

The dialogues are part of a Mellon Foundation Monuments Project and draw on collaborative initiatives involving public stakeholders, artists, scholars, and community organizations from across the state of New Jersey. In these dialogues taking place in 2025–2026, we will identify stories that document New Jersey's various histories of migration and labor, past and present. The public is invited to work with local and nationally recognized artists to commemorate and honor immigrant contributions to the state as laborers. Through this process, together we will work to make public art and monuments to migration and labor that are visible features of New Jersey's commemorative landscape, and that challenge audiences to reconsider what they know about migrants, immigrants, and their labor.

MONUMENTS TO MIGRATION AND LABOR NJ

Mellon Foundation

RUTGERS

Seabrook Educational and Cultural Center

Here is information about another dialogue at the Seabrook Buddhist Temple in Seabrook, NJ.

A SECOND PUBLIC DIALOGUE

In 1944, Seabrook Farms began recruiting incarcerated Japanese Americans from War Relocation Authority camps through a federal resettlement program. This dialogue explores Japanese American experiences of these relocated families working in the agricultural and food processing industries of South Jersey. Stakeholders will present their stories from which artists will create art responses.

COMMUNITY FOCUS

JAPANESE AMERICANS AT SEABROOK

WHERE AND WHEN

SEABROOK BUDDHIST TEMPLE
9 NORTHVILLE ROAD
SEABROOK, NJ
SATURDAY, JUNE 28, 2025
1 PM - 4 PM

FREE ADMISSION. REFRESHMENTS WILL BE PROVIDED.

Register by email at seabrookhistory@gmail.com
or by phone at (856) 451-8393.
Check out the project website at https://njmml.com.

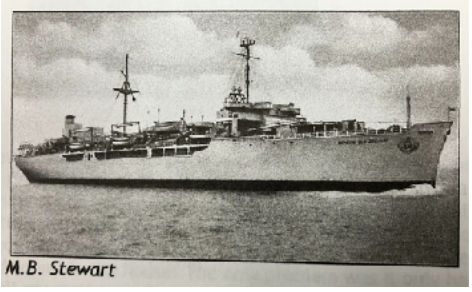
An Estonian Immigration Story

As a representative of the Estonians who immigrated to Seabrook Farms, Helle Gawrylewski gave a talk in May at Rowan University. Helle offered a short description of the Great Flight from Estonia in 1944. My family would be in the category of wartime refugees, escaping from the Soviet invasion of Estonia. They were housed in southern Germany in empty homes until the end of the war when the US army established the Geislingen Camp. The "camp" was in private homes, several families in a room, but there were social activities, work, and university classes. The Marshall Plan allowed companies to find displaced people to be assessed for their work force. My parents both graduated from Tartu University with agriculture degrees, so they were accepted for factory work at Seabrook Farms.

A Polish Immigration Story

Richard Zielinsky was part of a Polish immigrant community of about 20 or more families who immigrated to Seabrook, NJ. Here is an excerpt of his Seabrook memories. My family had spent the war in forced labor camps and concentration camps. After the war, DP camps were home until finally as displaced persons got processed, my father got a job as an MP with the Allied Occupation and acquired decent housing.

I was less than a year old when we arrived in NYC on the M.B. Stewart (an old repurposed troop ship) in February 1952 after a very rough crossing through severe winter storms in the North Atlantic. My mother said everyone was horribly ill during the 10 day crossing. We first lived in Hoover Annex, which was as dismal as the DP camps we left behind in Europe. To return to something as grim as Hoover Annex after the comforts of good housing and a good job in Germany was demoralizing. I lived in Seabrook until 1958.


M.B. Stewart

The following is a personal message by Mas Nakawatase on the timely subject of immigration in the United Sates.

IMMIGRATION: ONE SECC PERSPECTIVE

(*There are moments when the past experience of living in the Seabrook community touch on current issues and call out for drawing from the experience. We feel that this is one such moment. Other perspectives are welcome.)*

In the midst of the current ongoing discussion about immigrants, let us state a simple truth: Immigration in the United States is a good thing.

In this political season, we hear much about the presumed threats posed by immigration and immigrants. There are constant attacks, some made by political leaders in ignorance, and many made in bad faith, not just against so-called 'illegal immigrants' but against the real target: Immigration itself. Most of us have heard the xenophobic and racist attacks and their variants. We are told that "Immigrants are invading our country." 'Immigrants bring crime'. 'They take our jobs'. 'They don't speak English.' 'They have strange religions and religious ceremonies." 'They're dirty and unclean' and to hard core white supremacists, of course, the worst transgressions of current immigrants are that most of them are of the wrong race and color.

True, many immigrants don't speak English, just as our parents and grandparents didn't when they landed in this country, but their children learned it. Other attacks are betrayed by facts. Immigrants are much more likely to be the victims of crime, not its perpetrators. Immigrants boost the economy. They pay taxes, often out of proportion to the general population, paying more into the Social Security system than they receive, for example. They are the ones who do the work that non-immigrants don't or won't do: They pick our crops, serve our food, build our houses, clean our homes and streets, handle much of the caretaking of the youngest as well as the oldest and most infirm citizens. They do the many tasks that the poor and the formerly enslaved have historically done in our nation. Immigrants also help rebuild and transform our neighborhoods.

To those of us who grew up in Seabrook these ill-informed comments about immigration are not unfamiliar. If we hadn't heard them personally our parents or their parents did, probably accompanied by other attacks. Based on our historical experiences and speaking to the current mean-spirited times, the SECC community must speak out and defend immigration because we know better.

We should do so because attacks on immigrants are wrong, factually and morally. Defending immigration means defending ourselves and being true to our legacy. Our ancestors helped build this country. They came here seeking some greater measure of freedom and opportunity. For the most part they found it, and helped make this country a better, more democratic nation. The task continues.

Mas Nakawatase

President, SECC Board of Trustees.

2025 SPECIAL APPEAL

Due to a 600% cost increase to print envelopes we ask that you use this form.
Please mail this form to SECC, 1325 Highway 77, Seabrook, NJ 08302
If you prefer to make your gift online using a credit card or PayPal® please visit our website, seabrookeducation.org, and click on the Donate button.

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Individuals $35. Friends $125 Patrons $500.

Family $50. Sponsors $250. Benefactors $1000.

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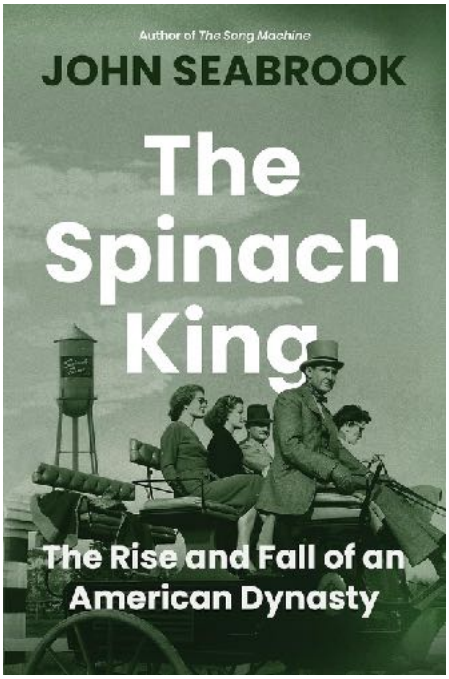

The Spinach King: The Rise and Fall of an American Dynasty

A new tell-all book by John Seabrook will launch on June 3, 2025. The SECC and the Seabrook Buddhist Temple will be selling them.

According to the publisher, it is a story of a forgotten American dynasty, a farming family from the bean fields of southern New Jersey who became as wealthy and powerful as aristocrats—only to implode in a storm of lies. The patriarch, C. F. Seabrook, was hailed as the "Henry Ford of Agriculture." His son Jack, a keen businessman, was poised to take over what *Life* called "the biggest vegetable factory on earth." But the carefully cultivated facade—glamorous outings by horse-drawn carriage, hidden wine cellars, and movie star girlfriends—hid dark secrets that led to the implosion of the family business. At Seabrook Farms, the troubling American histories of race, immigration, and exploitation arise like weeds from the soil.

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