



Seabrook Educational & Cultural Center Bulletin

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Hours: Monday - Thursday 9:00 am - 12:00 pm

Additional visiting hours by appointment



Summer 2026

In This Newsletter

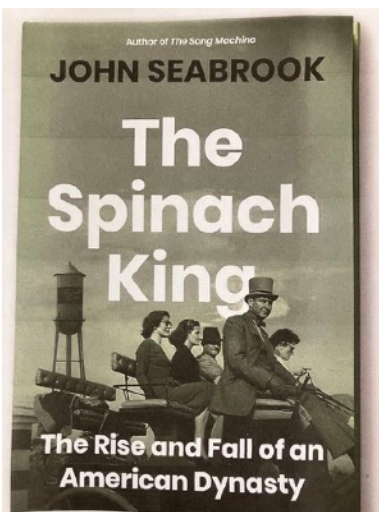
Welcome to the summer edition of the SECC newsletter, as a reflection on some of the many activities enabled by the SECC so far this year. The successes of these endeavors are predominately due to our many volunteers, facilitators, collaborators, and supporters.

Noteworthy are three developments that have propelled us into the regional and national spotlight: a film, a book, and a project. In this newsletter we cover (1) the film of Helga Merits called *The Paradox of Seabrook Farms*, (2) the book by John Seabrook entitled *The Spinach King*, and (3) the project on migrant labor funded by the Mellon Foundation with a mobile monument featuring a Sail Bus. For the most part, this newsletter offers recaps of many SECC activities, as identified in the table of contents below.

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|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Reflections on The Spinach King | 6. The Paradox of Seabrook Farms |
| 2. Save Dates for the Sail Bus | 7. University Visitations |
| 3. Arts and Crafts Exhibit | 8. Alumnae Interviews - Seabrookers |
| 4. Day of Remembrance | 9. Donations Appeal |

The Spinach King

Some Reflections by Mas Nakawatase



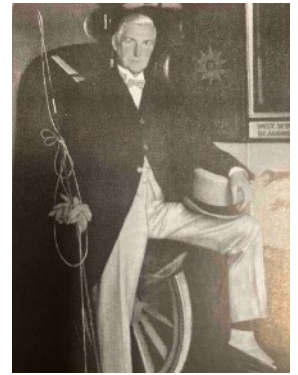
The Spinach King is a brave and honest book written with great narrative skill by a brave and honest man. It is the work of John Seabrook, staff writer for **The New Yorker** and grandson of Charles F. Seabrook, the founder of Seabrook Farms, or CF as he was known. The book is several things, among them: an autobiography; a family history; a glimpse into the development of industrial agriculture; a social history of a deeply conservative region; and a chronicle of one man's struggle with two patriarchs and his family's legacy.

To many who grew up in Seabrook Village, most of the details of the Seabrook family saga were veiled. That veil came off publicly and shockingly in 1959. Most of us understood, incompletely as it turned out, that CF, the nominal head of the company, would soon formally turn over the reins of the company to his three sons Belford, Courtney, and John, the author's father, known as Jack. Instead, as the majority shareholder, CF, in an action that combined fear, spite, and dementia, sold the company out from under his sons.

The Spinach King - reflections continued

Most of us did not know about the family turbulence. What we villagers didn't see was that major financiers of the company had lost confidence in CF's ability to run the company and they wouldn't continue to bankroll the company with CF in leadership. They maintained trust in the competency of the brothers to run the company as they had already been doing. (The last years of the company as a family enterprise with Jack as chief executive were among the company's most prosperous.)

CF had had a stroke previously, and a subsequent history of erratic behavior requiring some stints in mental institutions. He refused to yield control of the company. CF then proceeded to sell the company, disowning his sons. The subsequent damage to the company and the surrounding community was devastating. Within two decades, Seabrook Farms, once the largest frozen food producer in the world, was no more.



Jack and the Nimrod

However, much of the myth of CF Seabrook has persisted. To many Seabrookers, past and present, he remains a positive patriarchal figure; the man who provided jobs and housing for people who were part of the collateral damage of World War II, particularly the former Japanese American internees and Eastern European refugees, with a significant number from Estonia. There were also the Black exiles from Jim Crow in the American South; contract laborers from the West Indies; and others who were seeking economic opportunity in the postwar era.

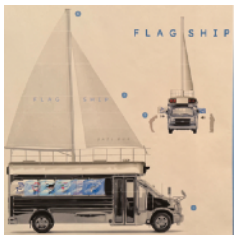
Much has been uncovered about CF since. In 1934, workers at Seabrook Farms went on strike, one of many strikes that year in the depth of the Great Depression. The Seabrook strike was nasty and bitter and CF had no hesitation in using local vigilantes (including his sons) and members of the Ku Klux Klan to break it. The strike as part of the struggle for better pay and working conditions as well as unionization wasn't part of the accepted narrative about the company, long after the demise of the company and the passing of CF Seabrook.

It is to John Seabrook's great credit that this little-known labor struggle receives the historical attention it deserves. It underscores the later efforts chronicled in the book to make the Black experiences at Seabrook more visible and to expand the scope and the analysis of the community overall.

But this is a personal story above all. John's relationship with his father had rough patches but the brutal part of the narrative is between his father and his grandfather. *(Here, the comparison of CF with Henry Ford seems quite apt. Like CF, Henry Ford was a brilliant industrialist but a poor and mostly absentee manager in his later years. Ford was also one of the most notorious anti-Semites in the country, and by many reports, a cruel father to his son, Edsel, who ran the company.)*

The Spinach King is not an exposé. It is really an archeological dig, uncovering layers of history, for better or worse. Incontestably, CF was a complex man. He was a racist and a segregationist, and John Seabrook deals with this part of the history in a straightforward fashion. But other personal dimensions are not slighted. The relationship with his father is drawn with love and honesty. There is also no ducking by John Seabrook about his own alcoholism and his adoption of a Black child from Haiti. I appreciate what John Seabrook has given us and honor his truth telling.

Save the dates for the Sail Bus



SECC is sponsoring a traveling Flagship museum at the upcoming public events.

- * September 18 at the UDT Nights Out program (5-8 PM) in Seabrook.
- * September 19 at the 48 Block Festival in Atlantic City.
- * October 3-4 at the WheatonArts & Folklife Center (10 AM-5 PM) in Millville.
- * October 9 at the Bayshore Center at Bivalve (5-8 PM) in Port Norris.
- * October 15-17 for an Immigrant Labor Conference at Rutgers University.



Arts and Craft Exhibit on Community Day

An exhibition of arts and craft was on display in the courtroom in the Upper Deerfield Township municipal building during the township's community day celebration. The exhibit, curated by Misono Miller, featured fine art and skilled workmanship related to the Japanese American community at Seabrook Farms.

Stanley Kaneshiki presented miniature bonsai trees which he constructed by twisting colored aluminum wires. Seashell jewelry was made by Stanley's mother Kiyoko Kaneshiki while at the Topaz incarceration camp in Utah. Paintings included those by Carol Nagao, Frances Ono, and Matsugoro Yoshida.

A painting by Kevin Quigley offered an empathic depiction of the Japanese American experience at Seabrook. A graphic design by Diane Rogers showed vignettes of enduring heritage and community spirit of Japanese American workers and children. A large print by Kandice Fields depicted stories from Seabrook Farms, where African American, Estonian, and Japanese American families worked and lived side by side.



Irene and Stanley Kaneshiki, with
Larry Ericksen and Sharon Yoshida



Display of Artwork in the UDT Courtroom



Visitors to the Arts and Craft Exhibit

Day of Remembrance - Tak Furumoto's Journey

On the Day of Remembrance, Tamiko Ooka brought Tak Furumoto to the Seabrook Buddhist Temple. Tak gave an inspirational presentation about his family history. The media, *SNJ Today*, wrote about Tak's Journey. The Seabrook JACL and SECC shared in the sponsorship of this well-attended event.



Tak Furumoto and Tamiko Ooka



Sharon Yoshida introduces Tak Furumoto



Newspaper coverage

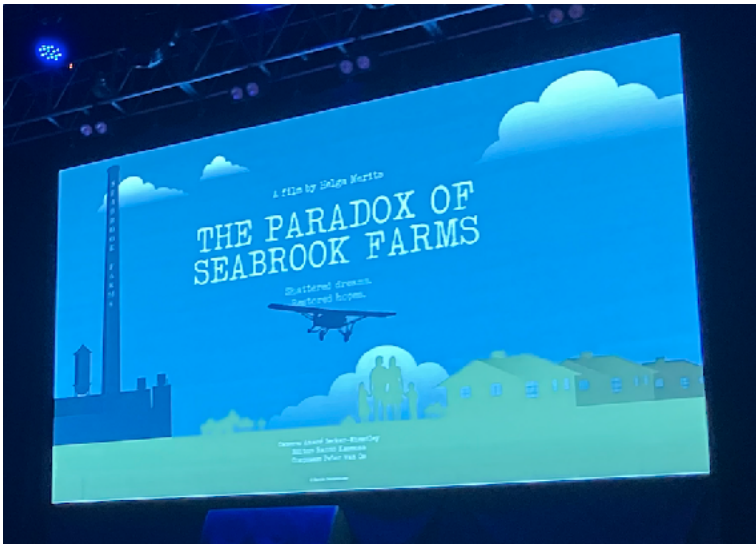


Audience at the Seabrook Buddhist Temple

The Paradox of Seabrook Farms

The Helga Merits film, *The Paradox of Seabrook Farms*, played at the Landis Theater in Vineland. After the film's screening, a panel discussion took place with panelists Helga Merits, Ivin Seabrook, Gloria Kates, Helle Gawrylewski, and Mas Nakawatase, as shown seated below on the theater's stage.

The Paradox of Seabrook Farms was also presented in Port Norris at the Bayshore Center at Bivalve. The documentary film was introduced by Helle Gawrylewski with assistance by Mary Linda Lacotte, as shown below with Seabrookers: Indrek Ojamaa and Richard Zielinski.



Film at the Landis Theater



Helga, Ivin, Gloria, Helle, and Mas



Audience at the Bayshore Center at Bivalve



Helle, Indrek, Mary Linda, Richard

University Visitations

Rutgers University

Professor Haruko Wakabayashi brought 45 Rutgers University students to visit the SECC. Twenty of them were exchange students from Japan. Mas Nakawatase and Mae Hashimoto gave them a presentation in the Upper Deerfield Township courtroom. The group had lunch at the Edgar Joyce Senior Center and a tour of the SECC museum.



Mas Nakawatase and Mae Hashimoto,
with Sharon Yoshida



Prof. Wakabayashi and Mae Hashimoto,
with Rutgers students during luncheon

The College of New Jersey

Professor MinSoo Kim-Bossard from The College of New Jersey brought 35 of her students to visit the SECC museum. Mas Nakawatase and Darlene Mukoda gave a presentation in the Upper Deerfield Township courtroom. They also had lunch in the Edgar Joyce Senior Center.



Mas Nakawatase and Darlene Mukoda



Students from The College of New Jersey

Trenton State College - Alumnae Interviews

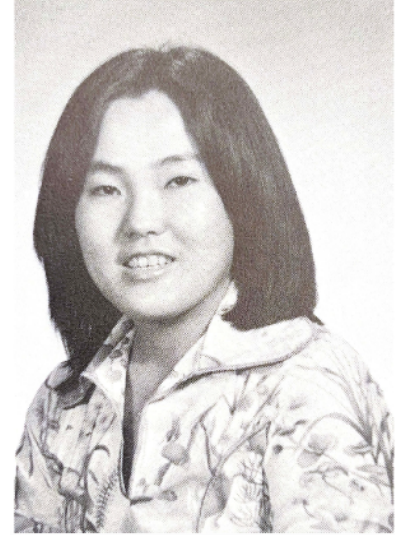
Professor MinSoo Kim-Bossard and her student Masooma Naqvi from The College of New Jersey came to the museum and conducted interviews with Emiko Kaneshiki and Louise Ogata as former Japanese American graduates who attended Trenton State College (now The College of New Jersey). They are obtaining oral histories from alumni who had become teachers after graduation. There were ten young women from Seabrook who graduated from Trenton State College between 1962 and 1977. The college yearbook photos for Emiko and Louise are shown below.



Clockwise: Prof. Kim-Bossard and Masooma Naqvi, Bonnie Bertram, Louise Ogata, and Emiko Kaneshiki



Emiko Kaneshik (Class of 1962)



Louise Ogata (Class of 1976)

Connecting with other Seabrookers

SECC had a visit by Steven Higashide from the Hudson Valley. His great grandfather, Seiichi Higashide, wrote the book, *Adios to Tears*, about their Japanese Peruvian family that came to Seabrook Farms from Crystal City, Texas.

Kevin Bano with his family (wife, two sons, and labradoodle Lily) came to visit from Florida. The Bano family came to Seabrook from Manzanar. Kevin's grandfather, Ray Bano, was in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team.

Before a Bridgeton high school reunion, Barney Sasaki saluted again next to the picture of him as a child at Seabrook.



Steven Higashide



Kevin Bano family



Barney Sasaki

Annual Appeal

Please mail this form to SECC, 1325 Highway 77, Seabrook, NJ 08302.
Your tax-deductible donation keeps stories like Tak's journey alive.



NAME _____ EMAIL _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____ AMOUNT \$ _____ CHECK NO. _____

Individuals \$35.

Friends \$125

Patrons \$500.

Family \$50.

Sponsors \$250.

Benefactors \$1000.

Other \$ _____

Thank you for your annual contribution!

Please check if your donation is made in memory of or in honor of someone.

☐ In Memory ☐ In Honor Name(s): _____

As we look toward the future, we want to ensure that the SECC can continue making a difference for generations to come. We invite you to join our future mission by considering a legacy gift in your will, trust, or estate plan.

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Treasurer: Stefanie Pierce
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