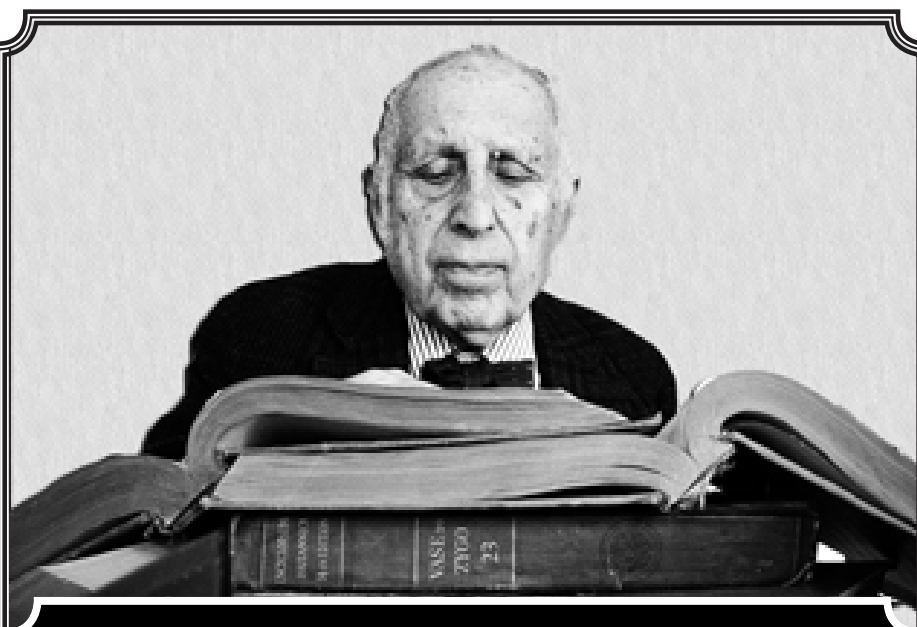


*Rocky Hollow Press invites you to the literary event of the century,  
a preview of Dr. D.I. Kniebocker's life's work—*

## THE FORGOTTEN HISTORY OF STATEN ISLAND

“In 1898, The year I was born,” notes Dr. D.I. Kniebocker in his introduction, “*Leslie's History of Greater New York* described the North Shore of Staten Island this way: ‘All the way from the forts through Clifton, Stapleton and then around the Heights and Fort George [sic] through New Brighton, Port Richmond and beyond, Staten Island has already the characteristics of one continuous city’ And yet 110 years later, I read in the Staten Island Museum Ferry Riders Guide that: ‘Staten Island never developed an urban center or gathering place.’ It was then that I realized my life’s work (done mainly for my own amusement and that of my friends and family) should be published. Otherwise *The Forgotten History Of Staten Island* would be forever lost.”

Now thanks to Rocky Hollow Press, his work will be remembered till time immemorial. And if anyone is qualified to write *The Forgotten History Of Staten Island*, it would be Dr. Diedrich Irving Kniebocker (known to his friends as “D.I.”) Dr. Kniebocker was born on Todt Hill in the back room of The Eagle’s Rest, the highest tavern south of Maine on the Eastern Seaboard. During prohibition, as his family abandoned the saloon business in favor of used books, he lived there in the back of The Open Book, the highest antiquarian bookstore on the Eastern



### Trade Secrets of Staten Island’s Greatest Historian!

Dr. Kniebocker, is pictured here hard at work consulting his favorite reference book, the 1911 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Although the good doctor has more than 12 different encyclopedias in his collection (numbering more than 200 volumes), none was published after 1917. “After that point they are totally useless,” he believes. “Too much information was lost. And it keeps getting worse and worse with every succeeding edition.”

Seaboard south of Maine and it was then that Dr. Kniebocker developed his lifelong love of history. After graduating from medical school,

Dr. Kniebocker was renowned throughout Staten Island for starting the highest phrenology practice south of Maine on the Eastern Seaboard. However, upon winning the Irish Sweepstakes in 1953, Dr. Kniebocker abandoned his medical practice to move to an undisclosed location and begin the grand enterprise that would

**The story of Charles Gustav Francis Maria Ignacio Heironymus Parnelli Hornblatt (Better Known as "Parnelli HornBlatt"), the brilliant young civil engineer who first introduced the sidewalk to Staten Island.**



**A** child prodigy who graduated from Columbia University at age 15 and later designed and built Staten Island's first sidewalks, Charles Gustav Francis Maria Ignacio Heironymus Parnelli Hornblatt, (better known as 'Parnelli Hornblatt') was also a prodigious author. His turn of the century, bestselling, pedestrian-oriented, books include his autobiography: *Walk A Mile in My Shoes, or Better Yet, Walk A Mile in Your Own*, and the self-help tract, *It's Never Too Late To Ambulate*.

Hornblatt's lifelong love of walking developed as a youngster growing up in what is now known as the East Village, but was then called "Kleindeutschland."

The product of a German Lutheran Father and a Catholic Italian mother who converted to her husband's faith, the young man's world was shattered when his mother and sisters perished during a tragic church outing aboard the excursion boat *The General Slocum*.

At that point, Parnelli Hornblatt was plunged, from a comfortable middle class existence, to abject poverty when his grief stricken father took to drink and never again held a steady job. Lacking funds to commute, Hornblatt (who was already attending Columbia University on full scholarship at the tender age of 13) was forced to walk from his home on East 10th street to Morningside Heights and back each day. He never thought that the experience was a hardship however. "Those walks cleared my mind and strengthened my heart and kidneys, and gave me the will to exceed," he would later recall in *Walk A Mile in My Shoes, or Better Yet, Walk A Mile In Your Own*.

Immediately following graduation, Parnelli Hornblatt was enlisted in the most ambitious civil engineering project in Staten island's history – the construction of a cross-island canal that would effectively link the island to the transportation hub of central New Jersey. Despite being all of 16 years old, Parnelli was made the project's chief engineer. But after initial dredging of mid-island swamps revealed what a local chemist ostensibly named Van Nostrand called "the richest shale oil deposits this side of Texas," – the project was abandoned in favor of drilling oil wells. At this point, Parnelli Hornblatt lost interest. "I didn't become a civil engineer to dig for black gold" he told a friend, "I want to build things."

Hornblatt had chosen to receive payment in shares of company stock which he then sold as he sought other employment. Due to the speculative fever around the oil discovery his stock fetched a fortune. He had become fabulously wealthy overnight, but the gain came at a price to his reputation. Because, before long, it emerged that the Staten Island Canal Company was nothing but a massive real estate swindle. There was in fact barely enough oil in the swamp lands of Staten Island to grease a horse carriage.

In the course of a series of trials, Hornblatt's partners all went to prison for fraud — with the largest sentenced handed out to the so-called chemist Van Nostrand, who turned out to be a deranged circus acrobat named Muggsy Parker and thus was convicted of the additional crime of impersonating a man of science.

However, Parnelli Hornblatt was found to be completely innocent of wrongdoing. Apparently, despite his brilliance, the innocence of his young age had been a factor in his hiring by the perpetrators of the fraud. Since Parnelli Hornblatt had divested himself of his investment without any knowledge of the swindle, or any criminal intent, he was spared further legal repercussions. With his these problems behind him, and fortune intact , Hornblatt set out to restore his reputation. While others in his position might be have considered this the moment to leave past troubles behind, Hornblatt had a passionate affection for the borough of Richmond that kept him Island bound. This affection was expressed in numerous passages in his diaries, such as the following: “It is breathtakingly beautiful here. There are all manner of glorious flora and fauna. The ladies are refined and elegant; the houses lovely; it lacks only one thing—sidewalks.” He would spend the rest of his life trying to fill this one gap in an otherwise perfect utopia.

Through a series of initiatives, Parnelli Hornblatt designed and (by local subscription) financed a series of sidewalks all around what is now referred to as “Downtown Staten Island” (the areas of St. George, Tompkins, and Stapleton). As important as that work was, he had an even grander idea. He conceived a plan to unite Tompkinsville, Stapleton and St.. George into a metropolis known as “Hyperpedia” via a three-tiered sidewalk (one tier for northern traffic, one for southern traffic and a third for strollers in either direction).

Unfortunately, Parnelli did not live long enough to see his vision of a pedestrian-friendly urban utopia on Staten Island fulfilled. While surveying for this his most ambitious project –Parnelli Hornblatt was struck and fatally injured, by the Island’s first Model T Ford

**The now overgrown sidewalk that Parnelli Hornblatt was surveying when he met his tragic end on St. Pauls Avenue. Although his proposed 3-tiered sidewalk was never constructed here, the original slate sidewalk, that he built several years before his demise, remains un-**



Today Parnelli Hornblatt’s vision of a pedestrian utopia on Staten island is forgotten. His books are little read and his belief in the value of walking is thought of as nothing more than quaint by Staten Islanders. But that doesn’t mean that his great contribution to Island life is neglected. Whether they’re parking their cars on them, dumping garbage, using them as a receptacle for pet waste, or settling a contentious dispute with the aid of a baseball bat, a day does not go by where one of Parnelli Hornblatt’s sidewalks is not made good use of by Staten Islanders.

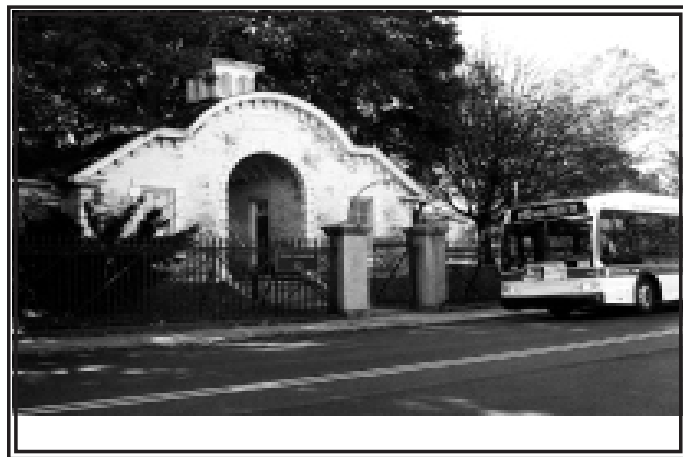
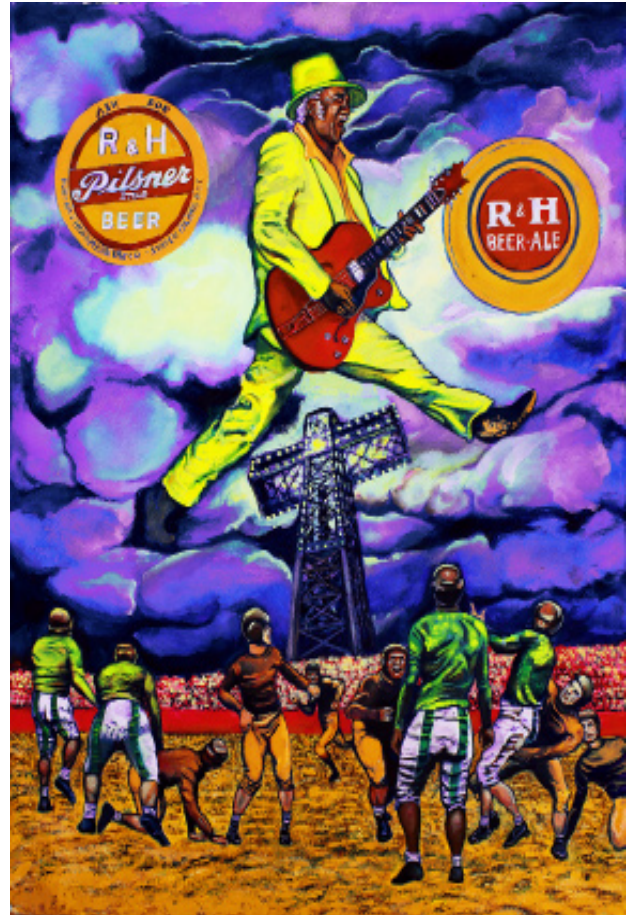
## **Herman Melville’s short, but life changing, experience on Staten Island.-**



Herman Melville was virtually destitute when his brother Thomas, governor of the old sailor’s home at Snug Harbor, took him in and found him a position in the scheduling department of the Staten Island Omnibus Company, the organization whose mammoth, horse-drawn buses (affectionately known as “white whales”), achieved a commuting time comparable to today’s mass transit. Immediately upon taking his post, Melville was confronted with a raucous crowd of concerned citizens who objected to the inadequate bus service that they felt was hindering the economic development of the island.

Herman Melville's response to the stream of antagonism he encountered was a creative one. He devised a plan, later known as "virtual scheduling," that was based on the concept of scheduling approximately twice the amount of buses that actually existed. This breakthrough diverted anger away from the Staten Island Omnibus Company's office, and towards the company's bus drivers who appeared to be perpetually late. Melville's innovation increased office efficiency by 38%, and virtual scheduling is employed today by most large mass transit systems, including the MTA. But despite this success, the author was forced to beat a somewhat hasty retreat to Manhattan, after a series of death threats from the local bus drivers union.

Before he left Staten Island however, Melville witnessed an event that burned itself into his psyche. He watched in disbelief, at the Snug Harbor bus stop, as a one-legged sailor chased fruitlessly for than a mile after one of the "white whale" omnibuses — an incident that would serve as the foundation for his greatest work, Moby Dick. Despite his travails, Melville had fond memories of his time here. "Oh yes, I had written novels, before I went to Staten Island," he recalled, "but it was in the scheduling office of the omnibus company there that I truly discovered the essence of fiction."



**The Snug Harbor bus stop that inspired Herman Melville's greatest novel.**

**The early founding of Stapleton as a religious community by Pops Staples (later of the Staple Singers), and his father Reverend Grandpops Staples.**

The story of the founding of Stapleton by Roebuck [Pops] Staples (later of the Staple Singers) and his father Rev. Sears [Grandpops] Staples could be considered a tragedy of biblical proportions, which is only fitting as their intentions were to create a religious community. As with many tragedies, the seeds of the Staples downfall were sewn by their greatest triumph. This occurred when the elder Staples successfully installed the island's first fully functioning electrical grid to fulfill the family's dream of making Stapleton a "shining city on a hill." This led Pops Staples to discover the electric guitar (or "devils instrument,"



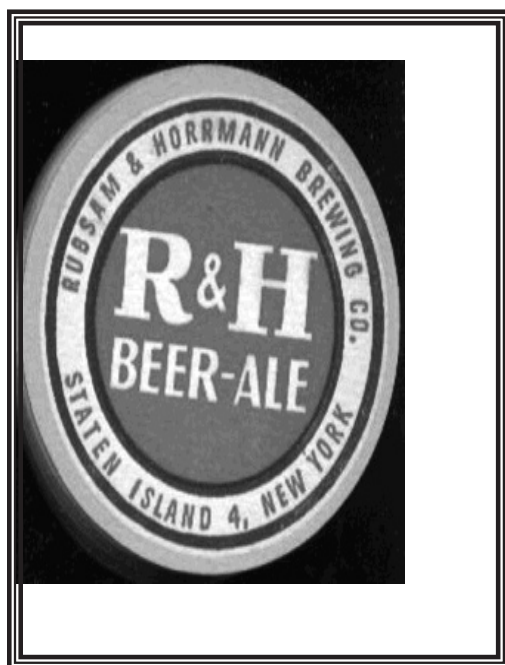
**THE ELECTRIC GUITAR — Technological advance or devil's instrument?**

The question that tore the Staples family apart is still unresolved in the minds of the American Public.

Thus a rift was created between Pops and Grandpops that resulted in the dissolution of Stapleton as a religious community, and its reinvention as the brewing capitol of Staten Island. Though not before Grandpops initiated an experiment that would forever change the course of American sports.

In an effort to attract more people to the Stapleton community, Grandpops acquired an NFL team, which he named somewhat prosaically “the Stapleton team.” Due to his religious background, and his belief that man was created in god’s image, Grandpops frowned on animal nicknames such as ‘Chicago Bears,’ or ‘Carolina Panthers.’ And a team general manager who proposed christening the team, ‘The Stapleton Rats,’ was summarily fired. In lieu of a more colorful name the Stapleton team was affectionately nicknamed “the Stapes” by the local community. This episode was just one example of Grandpops discomfort with professional sports marketing.

Although he played a fearsome left tackle at Elmira Bible College, Grandpops was generally unfamiliar with the newly emerging sport of professional football. And he was shocked to discover that professional games were played on Sunday, a complete anathema to this devout, but creative man. At the time a Saturday game would have been impossible, because it would have meant competing with the (then) much more popular sport of college football. So Grandpops devised a scheme to employ his newly developed electric grid, to shine lights on the football field, thereby creating an institution we all know today as Monday Night Football.



**Brewers such as Rubsam & Horman and Bechtel settled in Stapleton for the fine water and natural lagering caves. They were bitterly opposed to Grandpops Staples prohibitionist policies.**

Although one hurdle was cleared, another source of conflict developed relating to the team. Brewers, that made Stapleton their home, were outraged that Grandpops (who was a diehard prohibitionist) refused to sell beer at the Stapes football games. This led to heated conflicts with the Bechtel and Rubsam & Horman breweries, including a scene where Pops Staples had to face down an angry mob of beer



**The Village Hall in Stapleton’s Tappen Park. The hall was built on the site of Grandpops’ Staple’s Tabernacle, after it burned to the ground. (Rumors that the fire was set by brewing interests were never confirmed.)**

drinkers carrying counterfeit “free all the beer you can drink” coupons at a Stapes home game. As a last resort, this talented musician launched into a dazzling display of electric guitar work that soothed the savage beer drinkers. Soon after the coupon incident, Grandpops’ tabernacle caught fire and burned to the ground. Although it was never proven, both the fire and the counterfeit free beer coupons were believed to have been initiated by brewing interests diametrically opposed to Grandpops’ prohibitionist policies. But even more devastating to Grandpops Staples, than the loss of the Tabernacle, was Pops quelling of the potential beer riot with his electric guitar dexterity. Grandpops forbade his son from ever using an electric guitar (“devil’s instrument”) again. But Pops adamantly refused to put down his ax.

Thus their partnership ended, as did the future of Stapleton as a religious community. Soon Pops left town with his mellifluously-voiced off spring (Pervis, Cleotha, Yvonne and Mavis) in tow. However the Island’s loss was gospel’s gain, as Pop’s exile from Stapleton set the stage for not only the Staple Singers international success, but for the now widespread use of electric instruments in gospel music.

## The victory over New Jersey in the Hero Sandwich Wars (or “the food patent riots” or “food fights”) as the Island’s heroism was described in Manhattan Newspapers.



**F**ew Staten Islanders are aware of the incidents which are the source of the renaming of Richmond Turnpike as “Victory Boulevard,” coinciding with the creation of Hero Park to commemorate the site of the original invention of the hero sandwich by Armando Vespucci, as well as the astounding victory by Staten Island volunteers over the New Jersey Militia on that spot in a conflict known as The Hero Sandwich War (or “the food patent riots” or “food fights” as the Island’s heroism was described in Manhattan Newspapers).

The trouble started when Armando Vespucci, owner of a roadhouse and salumeria located on the current site of Hero Park, decided to patent the most popular item on

its menu, a large sandwich filled with cold cuts on a slab of Italian bread. Vespucci called the dish “a sandwich of heroic proportions.” Locals refer to it simply as “The Hero.” And it became something of a sensation in 19th century Staten Island. So much so that word spread to New Jersey, and before long (in nearby Bayonne) a local haggis purveyor by the name of Angus MacMurtry (who was also a captain in the New Jersey militia), added the very same item to his offerings. Though he referred to the new sandwich by its colloquial name “The Hero.”

It was MacMurtry that first conceived the idea of patenting the Hero. To do so, he dispatched emissaries to the patent and trademark office in New York City. Unbeknownst to MacMurtry however, the Venezia Clam House across the street from his establishment was operated by a cousin of Vespucci’s who kept an eye on his every move. MacMurtry emissaries never reached New York, and, in fact, were never seen again. But subsequently, representatives of Vespucci did indeed arrive at the patent office.

When MacMurtry learned of the familial connection between the owner of the Venezia Clam House and Vespucci — and the fact that his patent had not reached Washington, while Vespucci’s had — he put on his militia uniform and went to work. After employing interrogation methods on the cousin, similar to those being debated today in regards to counter terrorism, MacMurtry became convinced that his emissaries had met with foul play. He resolved to arrest Vespucci. To do so, MacMurtry rallied his local militia members and they embarked to Staten Island via ferry with the express purpose of bringing Vespucci to justice.

As they marched down Richmond Turnpike (the current Victory Boulevard), word went out around the island of the invasion by New Jersey. Citizens of all the Staten Island townships flocked to the defense of Vespucci and his culinary creation (which rightly, or wrongly, was perceived as the source of the conflict). Out-gunned (some Staten islanders had nothing but dried Salamis which they used as clubs), but superior in numbers, they were able to drive back the invaders from New Jersey after a horrific battle.

The question about the rights to the hero sandwich patent would go through a series of litigation and finally be decided by the Supreme Court. In a split decision, authored by Chief Justice Roger Tanney, the court ruled that no one could patent a sandwich, thus rendering ownership moot. So the Hero Sandwich Wars, although ultimately indeterminate in establishing ownership of the patent rights to the hero sandwich, proved a turning point in Staten Island history. Volunteers from throughout the island, who had previously identified themselves with various townships, (as opposed to Staten Island as a whole), had converged on the site of the current Hero Park and driven out the invading New Jersey Militia. From that point on Staten Islanders *would have* a collective identity — albeit a fractious one.

Interestingly, a recently published volume by the University of Texas at Austin Press, called *Tortas, Tacos, and Gringos, The Diaries of a 19th Century Mexican Chef on Staten Island*, raises new questions about the origin of the hero sandwich. This book is a collection of the never before translated diaries of Bernardo Blanco, General Santa Anna's personal chef. Blanco accompanied Santa Anna (the former dictator of Mexico and winner of the Battle of the Alamo) to Staten Island on his mission to further the cause of chicle's use as a rubber substitute. This effort failed, but in doing so it led to the creation of chewing gum (unbeknownst to General Santa Anna who soon returned to Mexico).

Bernardo Blanco, however, married a local girl and stayed for many years on Staten Island. He found work in the kitchen of Vespucci's roadhouse and recounts in his diaries how some of his dishes became a local favorites. The most popular, he recalled, "was a sandwich I used to make for the General. I called it the 'Torta Heroica' in honor of the Presidente's valor in his many War against the Gringos. I used to serve it to him before battles, when there was no opportunity to set up a proper field kitchen. I put in so much cold cuts and cheese that it was enough to sustain him for a whole day of fighting, and when Senor Vespucci put it on the menu of his roadhouse, it caused a quite a stir. The Staten Islanders had huge appetites and they loved the Heroica."

This new discovery of General Santa Anna's seminal role in the Hero Sandwich War (which he otherwise did not participate in) is an ironic contrast to his experience in the similarly named Pastry War (also known as Guerra de los Pasteles and Guerre des Pâtisseries) which pitted Mexico against France. General Santa Anna had no role in the starting of that conflict and in fact had only recently returned from exile when it began. But in contrast to his non-combat role in the Hero Sandwich War General Santa Anna fought valiantly in the Pastry War, losing a leg in the process.





After numerous archaeological expeditions, Dr. Kniebocker has compiled an amazing collection of local artifacts. Here he's returned with a terrific find from his latest adventure, characteristically dressed in his trademark deerstalker hat. Dr. Kniebocker is frankly befuddled by the number of people that prefer baseball caps during outdoor activity. "Without a visor in the back," he points out, "you'll burn your neck. A hat with only a visor on the front is sheer madness for the great outdoors. And you can quote me on that," he adds.

More Trade Secrets of Staten Island's Greatest Historian!

In addition to his vast library, Dr. Kniebocker has (through direct contact with the spirit world) supplemented his research with interviews of past Staten Islanders. To improve his occult vision he makes use of an Optivisor modified with a special refractory Zeiss lens and a Motorola computer chip. His constant companion in these forays into the past is his cat Brutus (a reincarnation of the Roman statesman). Here Dr. Kniebocker and Brutus are having an intense conversation with former U.S. Vice President and Staten Island land developer, Daniel D. Tompkins. Some of Dr. Kniebocker's most important discoveries have come via this

