

Alan A. Siegel. *Disaster: Stories of Destruction and Death in Nineteenth-Century New Jersey* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014). 210 pp. Cloth. \$29.95.

Alan A. Siegel's *Disaster: Stories of Destruction and Death in Nineteenth-Century New Jersey*, is a fun book suitable for the young scholar or reader of popular history with an interest in New Jersey. It also provides a solid starting point for scholars interested in secondary sources pertinent to examinations of natural and manmade disasters in New Jersey, Philadelphia, and New York City.

Not a scholarly work—Siegel is an attorney with a strong interest in his state's history and has written several works of regional and county history—*Disaster* is a chronicle of many of New Jersey's worst "moment" disasters that captured the attention of contemporaries and, in some cases, spurred new regulations and innovations to avoid or ameliorate future catastrophes. Siegel writes with an eye toward the lay reader of history, someone interested in disaster or New Jersey history but not in need of an annotated scholarly work. The book's organization is rational with the chapters marked by type of disaster—train or steamship, for instance—and not by chronological occurrence, which would have made the manuscript choppier than it need be.

As Siegel suggests in his introduction, disasters provoke a macabre interest on the part of readers and his descriptions of victims' suffering and the efforts of unheralded heroes should prove attractive to a popular audience, especially the young reader whose imagination will be carried by Siegel's writing. The scholar or college reader may also find *Disaster* interesting because its use of extensive direct quotations from period newspapers highlights the different manner in which heroes, villains, and what in the nineteenth century might be considered simple bad luck, were described by reporters and understood by the public; in twenty-first-century America, two trains crashing because of poor signaling, or a ship's captain who runs his vessel aground and kills dozens because he retired to his bed at night and in a dense fog, would hardly pass without criminal charges and civil suits.

Siegel did not set himself to writing an academic piece and the finished work is compelling to a lay audience but scholars, beyond leads concerning newspaper accounts of various disasters, will find little of the contextualization and theory standard in academic works. Furthermore, Siegel decided to concentrate upon "moment" disasters: wrecks of various sorts, tornadoes, hurricanes, blizzards, and the like. The most serious disasters to befall New Jersey during the nineteenth century were not wrecks or weather events;

rather the greatest loss of life resulted from disease outbreaks and this omission is disappointing. For instance, the cholera epidemic of the early 1830s in virtually every town and city in the state killed more citizens in just its first visitation than all the deaths in all the disasters Siegel recalls combined. Outbreaks of smallpox, typhoid, and the influenza pandemic of the early 1890s should have at least received some mention as each of these medical disasters provoked awful suffering, opportunities for bad actors and heroes to emerge, and regulations to be passed. In short, epidemics fit seamlessly into just the sort of narrative Siegel compiled.

Siegel's *Disaster* is an outstanding addition to a young reader's library and the lay reader's bookshelf, its illustrations and descriptions of human suffering and the triumph of the human spirit gripping the reader to such an extent that, at times, the skin crawls. The academic will find source material, but little contextualization. Siegel did not set out to write a treatise, but rather a compilation of his beloved state's worst (with the exception of disease) travails and in this narrow field he succeeded.

JAMES HIGGINS

University of Houston—Victoria

Joseph F. Spillane. *Coxsackie: The Life and Death of Prison Reform* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014). Pp. 296. Notes, essay on sources, index. Cloth, \$44.95.

Joseph F. Spillane's study of the birth and death of prison reform begins with a gripping description of the December 1977 hostage crisis at New York's Coxsackie Correctional Facility. When Coxsackie opened as a reformatory for adolescent male offenders in 1935, liberal-minded staff members hoped that social-educational and vocational programs would transform young offenders into law-abiding men. However, external and internal factors made it almost impossible to implement the facility's initial mission. The inmates who took eleven staff members hostage may not have known the institution's initial goals, but they knew that racism and brutality defined its day-to-day life. The hostage takers felt that they had no other recourse to protest devastating cuts to the prison's educational and vocational programs. Although the crisis ended peacefully, it marked the end of the facility's focus on reforming offenders and ushered in an era