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History Fair to Feature Film on Muskrat John, Witness to the Transformation of the Meadowlands

Johnny Rohweder, a native of Jersey City, starting hunting and trapping muskrats in the Hackensack Meadowlands as a young teenager some seventy years ago. Warner Wada, a professor of photography at Ramapo College, tells his story in a fascinating documentary to be shown at “Come Home to History,” a history fair scheduled for Saturday, October 9, at the Hudson County Community College Culinary Conference Center, 161 Newkirk Street, Jersey City.

Wada studied photography with Walker Evans at Yale and holds an MFA from the Art Institute of Chicago. Since the late 1970s, he has been working as a photographer in New York, mostly documenting the urban architectural evolution of the midtown Garment and Times Square districts. With a grant from the New Jersey Meadowlands Environmental Center, he began photographing the post-industrial landscape of the Meadowlands 5 years ago, using the large-format film medium. His documentary on Johnny Rohweder, a retired railroad yard master, grew out of landscape photographs used by the Hackensack Riverkeeper. *Muskrat John* has been screened at New York’s important Anthology Film Archive New Filmmakers Festival and the New Jersey International Film Festival held at Rutgers University in June, 2010.

The documentary is just one offering in a program of exhibits, speakers, films, a tour, and children’s activities to observe the 350th anniversary of the founding of the Dutch settlement of Bergen, in what is now Jersey City, as well as other key moments in Hudson County history. See www.hudsoncountynigenealogy.org/historyfair2010 for a complete schedule and updates.

“Come Home to History” is sponsored by Hudson County Executive Thomas A. DeGise; Hudson County Board of Chosen Freeholders; Hudson County Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs and Tourism; City of Jersey City, Jerramiah T. Healy, Mayor; Jersey City Municipal Council; Jersey City Division of Cultural Affairs; Hudson County Community College; Hudson County History Advocates; and the Jersey City Historical Project.

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