

## **EAST RIVER BOOK REVIEW**

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Page 3  
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A couple of Astoria history buffs have published their second book about the borough's past, releasing an Images of America retrospective entitled the "East River."

Like other books in the Arcadia Publishing series, the 128-page read is light on text and explores the river's rich past through more than 200 photographs and paintings.

"We went through thousands of images," said Thomas Jackson, a self-employed consultant. His co-authors include Richard Melnick, a Manhattan doorman, and freelance writer Erik Baard. Jackson and Melnick, put out an Arcadia images book on Long Island City last year.

The authors, members of the Greater Astoria Historical Society, wanted to do something on the East River because they thought its history deserves more attention.

"We're not aware of any book that's been done that's devoted exclusively to the East River," Jackson said. "It's kind of an introduction. If someone is interested in the river, we give them some insight."

The book is filled with fascinating pictures and tidbits about how the city - and American history - has been shaped by the river, which is actually a tidal strait and a tidal estuary that connects the upper New York Bay to the Long Island Sound.

The river boasted the largest, pre-atomic man-made explosion in 1885 when civil engineer blasted away hazardous rocks and shoals in the treacherous Hell Gate off the Astoria Coast. A black-and-white photo depicts a volcanic thrust of smoke and debris from the explosion reportedly heard as far away as Trenton, NJ.

Hell Gate would gain further infamy a decade later with the General Slocum tragedy, the city's deadliest disaster before Sept 11, 2001. A painting of the flaming, three-deck steamship depicts the horror of women and children going overboard and plummeting to their deaths. On a lighter side, there is a photo of an anonymous couple sunning on a giant boulder some believe is the White Stone, the namesake of the northwest Queens community.

The book touches on the river's great ship building industry that had waned by the middle of the last century. World War II literally began and ended on the decks of locally built warships. More than 1,100 men died on one of them, the USS Arizona, when it was

destroyed at Pearl Harbor in 1941. The Japanese surrendered four years later on the deck of another, the USS Missouri.

And the book is a reminder of the grandeur of the city's transportation network, featuring work-in-progress stills of the Brooklyn, Williamsburg, Queensboro, Hell Gate and Whitestone Bridges.

The authors will be signing their book on Sept 12 at the Greater Astoria Historical Society in the Quinn Building at 35-20 Broadway on the fourth floor Visit the society's website at [www.astorialic.org](http://www.astorialic.org) for more information or to purchase a copy of the book.