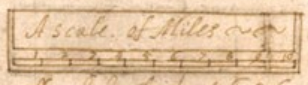
Van Harlingen Historical Society presents



Colonial Land Records:

When New Jersey was Split in Two!

with Joseph R. Klett,

Executive Director of NJ State Archives

November 20, 2025 at 6pm

Montgomery Library(co-sponsor) meeting room

Land ownership in early colonial times is fascinating - much of New Jersey was an uncharted, unsurveyed, unsettled wilderness. Property boundaries were bodies of water, trees, and rocks. Many property owners were prosperous absentee investors who had never set foot in New Jersey.

In 1664, the King of England, interested in re-establishing English dominance in the area, gave his brother New Netherlands (Cape Cod to Delmarva Penisula) and his brother, in turn, gave his friends Sir George Carteret and Lord John Berkeley, *"...all that tract of land adjacent to New-England, and lying and being to the westward of Long Island and Manhitas Island, and bounded by Hudson's River, and hath upon the West Delaware Bay or River, and extendth Southward to the Main Ocean as far as Cape-May at the mouth of the Delaware Bay; and to the Northward as far as the Northermost Branch of said Bay or River of Delaware, which is forty one Degrees and forty Minutes of Latitude, and crosseth over thence in a strait Line to Hudson's River in forty one Degrees of Latitude; which said Tract of Land is hereafter to be called by the Names or Names of New Ceasarea or New Jersey…"* and New Jersey as we know it today (with a few small adjustments) was born.

Soon afterwards, it was divided into the Provinces of East and West Jersey when the Quakers, who had purchased Berkeley's holdings to create a colony, and Carteret agreed to same. Each province had its own government and governor. It was all done without benefit of a survey. The governors making the decisions had never set foot here. Imagine the room for errors and misunderstandings!

The unclaimed land and land sales records were maintained by the proprietors – and the proprietors were also the ruling government. That governing part didn't suit them though, so in 1702, they relinquished that role to the British monarch, Queen Anne, while keeping the land part.

The story has continued all these years. In 1998, the East Jersey Proprietors disbanded while the West Jersey Proprietors continue to this day (although they finally turned their records over to the State Archives 20 years ago). Please join us. Register at https://sclsnj.libnet.info/event/14906504 and direct any questions to Candy at library@vanharlingen.org

Background map is 1686 *Manuscript map of East Jarsey* by John Reid
Courtesy of NJ State Archives