

STORIES of New Jersey

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THE BONAPARTES IN NEW JERSEY

The defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815 sent his brother Joseph, the former King of Spain, fleeing across the Atlantic to exile. On the banks of the Delaware River in Bordentown, Joseph Bonaparte built a magnificent estate where he lived for 17 years. Relatives and sympathizers came to stay with him for long or short intervals, and together they watched the game of European politics and waited for the day when a Bonaparte would return to power and glory in France.

Eldest of eight children--five brothers and three sisters--Joseph Bonaparte was born in 1768 at Corte on the island of Corsica. He was only 19 months older than Napoleon--"The Little Corporal" who was to conquer western Europe and place himself on a throne as Napoleon I of France. Joseph, at the age of 20, began practicing law and entered at once into the political life of Corsica which long had been a hotbed of intrigue and revolt. With the coming of the French Revolution, the Bonapartes, even though they disliked the reign of terror, expressed sympathy for the people's cause and were driven from Corsica by the Royalists.

Settling in France in 1793, the two brothers became officers in the new



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Point Breeze, the estate in Bordentown as it was when owned by Joseph Bonaparte.

New Jersey Biography ... Bonaparte family MAY 31 1963 FEB 19 1970 1993

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Republican army which was struggling to oust foreign troops who were sent to stamp out the revolution. Soon Napoleon's genius as a military leader was recognized, and with his brother's gradual rise to power, Joseph gained prominence as a diplomat--a role for which he was well fitted by temperament and training. In 1800, a year after Napoleon became First Consul and virtual dictator of France, Joseph kept France at peace by making treaties with the United States, Austria and England. Then in 1804 Napoleon crowned himself Emperor of France, and two years later he made Joseph King of Naples and Sicily. With the conquest of Spain in 1808, Napoleon ordered Joseph to move on to the royal palace at Madrid. Their brother-in-law, General Joachim Murat, replaced Joseph on the throne at Naples. Twenty years afterward, the name of Murat, as well as Bonaparte, was to arouse excitement and gossip among the citizens of Bordentown.

Within 20 years the Bonaparte family rose to the greatest heights in the political and military life of Europe, and then swiftly they fell. In 1812 Napoleon retreated from Moscow. In June 1813 the British, after driving Joseph and the French army from Spain, prepared to invade France. Two months later Austria declared war on Napoleon and was joined by Russia, the German States and a Swedish army under Crown Prince Bernadotte. The Prince, afterward King of Sweden and Norway, had been one of Napoleon's ambitious generals and had married Joseph's sister-in-law who was resentful because Napoleon did not marry her. Today the royal house in Sweden is descended from Bernadotte and his Queen.

In October 1813 Napoleon was defeated at the decisive battle of Leipzig, and early in 1814 France was invaded by the allies. The Emperor, now desperately occupied at the front, made Joseph Lieutenant General of the Empire and instructed him to defend Paris and to protect the Empress Maria Louisa and Napoleon's little son, the King of Rome. The fall of Paris came on March 31, followed immediately by Napoleon's abdication and departure for the island of Elba. Here he was to be confined for life. Joseph meanwhile fled to live quietly with his wife and two daughters in Switzerland.

For one year all was calm in Europe. Then suddenly the world was startled to learn that the Emperor had escaped from Elba, had landed in France, was sweeping vigorously across the nation with a growing army of loyal followers. Joseph, after burying a casket of precious jewels, hastened back to France to be with his brother. Victory succeeded victory, but at the end of a hundred days, disaster crashed down upon Napoleon at Waterloo and once more nothing remained for the Bonapartes but exile.

At the town of Rochefort in June 1815 Joseph pleaded with the Emperor to flee to America. He reminded him of the day three years before when Napoleon, with a map in front of him, had determined that a point on the Delaware River, convenient to New York and Philadelphia, would be the best location for a refuge if escape became necessary. Joseph urged his brother, who resembled him, to exchange passports and go aboard the American brig *Commerce* which lay at anchor in the small port of Royan. Napoleon, after much deliberation, decided to place himself in the hands of the British, and Joseph, taking the name of Bouchard, sailed for the United States on July 25. The *Commerce*, after eluding patrolling British frigates, reached New York on August 28, 1815. Safe in America, the mysterious passenger no longer feared to reveal that he was Joseph Bonaparte. To the public he presented himself as the Count de Survilliers, using the name of a village on his former estate in France.

During the two years following his arrival in this country, the ex-king of Spain took up various residences in New York City and Philadelphia. During this time he was looking about for an estate where he could settle down with greater privacy in more spacious surroundings. His search brought him to Bordentown where in August 1816 he instructed his interpreter, James Carret, to pay \$17,500

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to Stephen Sayre for 211 acres of land known as Point Breeze. The following year New Jersey's legislature passed a special law permitting Joseph Bonaparte, an alien, to own property in his own name in this State. The exiled king used this privilege to enlarge Point Breeze until it consisted of 1,800 acres.

In the same year, 1817, his faithful secretary, Louis Mailliard, returned to Europe ostensibly on business for Stephen Girard, merchant and founder of Girard College, who was Joseph's wealthiest and most intimate American friend. In Switzerland, posing as a mining prospector, Mailliard hired a crew of laborers and dug up the hidden jewels which Joseph had carried away from Paris and Madrid. With these gems, valued at approximately five million francs, Mailliard returned to Bordentown. At Point Breeze the jewels were kept in a secret cabinet together with the crown and rings which the former monarch had worn as King of Spain.

In New Jersey Joseph was joined by his two daughters, Zenaide and Charlotte. His wife, Queen Julie, wealthy in her own right and loved by the poor for her generosity, did not come to America because physicians had warned her that the voyage would tax her health too much. After several years of separation from the Queen, Joseph selected as his consort a young Quaker woman named Annette Savage. They had one child, Pauline Joseph Ann Holton, whose descendants may be living in New Jersey today. She was buried in a Trenton churchyard.

Life for the Bonapartes was very pleasant at Point Breeze. The mansion built by Joseph on a high bluff above the meeting point of the Delaware River and Crosswicks Creek became the show place of the region. Visitors drove from miles around to see his art treasures and he enjoyed playing the part of guide. Statues of Napoleon and the entire Bonaparte family, tables and occasional pieces of mahogany and art objects of bronze and marble stood in all the rooms, and in the art gallery were master works by Rubens, Teniers and Vernet and a copy of Napoleon's "Passage of the Alps" by the great French Painter, David. A priceless possession was Raphael Mengs' "Nativity of our Savior," commissioned by a Spanish king for the royal altar.

Blue and silver satin covered windows and furniture, and in each room splendid mirrors gleamed from ceiling to floor. The walls of the dining room were decorated with four murals depicting Napoleonic victories in Italy. Beautiful Sevres porcelain was used for table service. Prominently displayed were two lovely porphyry vases, a gift from brother-in-law Bernadotte of Sweden and Norway. Joseph's uncle, Cardinal Fesch, sent him two white marble mantelpieces from Italy. Worth several thousand dollars, these are said to be in the gatehouse on the Point Breeze estate, now known as Bonaparte Park.

Joseph's grandniece, Princess Caroline Murat, wrote in her old age: "Although I have seen many beautiful estates in Europe, I have seen nothing on this side of the Atlantic that compares to Point Breeze." Twelve miles of roadway and bridle path ran between magnificent pine, beech and oak trees on the estate; statues posed on every knoll; deer roamed about in their own park; and here and there were arbors, rustic bridges, rain shelters, quiet retreats and cool springs. A small stream was dammed to form a lake half a mile long where swans and pleasure craft glided in the summertime. On Crosswicks Creek was a dock for the 16-oar barge presented to Joseph by Stephen Girard. The barge often traveled up and down the Delaware to transport famous guests from Trenton, Philadelphia and other river towns.

Joseph Bonaparte regulated his daily life at Point Breeze by a schedule. In the morning he had toast and coffee at seven; did his writing and reading till breakfast time at eleven; a tour of the estate preceded lunch at two; dinner came at eight and supper at ten. At meals he was often joined by his friend Joseph Hopkinson, of Bordentown and Philadelphia, who wrote the poem *Hail Co-*



Joseph Bonaparte

lumbia. Hopkinson's father had been a signer of the Declaration of Independence for New Jersey. Joseph had read widely and studied the arts in France, Spain and Italy. Victor Hugo and Bernardin St. Pierre, author of *Paul and Virginia*, had deep affection and respect for him, as did many others in the arts and sciences. In the first years of his exile in America he became acquainted with many of the political leaders. Later, some of them--Henry Clay, John Quincy Adams, Daniel Webster and Richard Stockton, a New Jersey signer of the Declaration of Independence, among others--were his good friends.

The people of Bordentown accepted Napoleon's brother as a friend and neighbor. Joseph was fond of the children and permitted them to use his lake for swimming and ice-skating. They spoke of him as "the good Mr. Bonaparte" to distinguish him from the Emperor. Joseph went out of his way to find work on his estate for poorer members of the community, employing them for landscaping and woodchopping. Carved in Latin on the pavilion at Point Breeze were the words:

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"Familiar with misfortune, I have learned to help the wretched." His neighborliness was repaid when townspeople, in the winter of 1820, hastened to rescue his many priceless possessions which were endangered by a fire that destroyed the mansion. Another house was at once constructed about the elaborate stables which were remodeled and incorporated into the new 30-room dwelling.

It was in 1820, too, that a delegation came from Mexico--then in revolt against Spain--to ask Joseph to become king of that country. Dramatically he announced: "I have worn two crowns; I would not take a step to wear a third... Follow the example of the United States and seek among your fellow citizens a man more capable than I am of acting the great part of Washington." Napoleon, approaching the end of his lonely exile on an island in the Atlantic, disappointedly said: "He is too fond of the pleasures of life to bother himself again with the burden of a crown..." The following year brought news of Napoleon's death at St. Helena. Joseph, greatly moved, declared that his brother had "died a victim to the cruelty of his enemies."

The "Little Corporal's" death did not change life at Point Breeze. Bonapartes and Bonapartists still journeyed to Bordentown to plot and plan for restoration of their wealth and power in France. In 1822 Joseph's daughter Zenaide married her cousin Charles Bonaparte, and the young couple moved into the large 3-story brick house that was built for them at the lakeside. For their convenience in bad weather, a long shed starting from the house led along the side of the bluff and connected with a brick tunnel. The tunnel, 50 feet long and 10 feet wide, provided a direct passageway from the shore of Crosswicks Creek to the interior of the mansion on the bluff. Doors in the tunnel also gave access to the cellar of the mansion and to the ice house. A section still remains.

Joseph's second daughter, Charlotte, also married a first cousin, Napoleon Louis, who as a child had succeeded his father, Louis Bonaparte, on the throne of Holland for a very brief period. His mother was Napoleon's step-daughter Hortense, daughter of Josephine. Unlike Zenaide's husband Charles Bonaparte, who became famous as an ornithologist, Napoleon Louis had a short and fruitless career. In 1831, at the age of 27, he met his death in a political uprising in Italy where he and Charlotte had gone to live. Also to Italy went Charles and Zenaide in 1828, and there they raised eight children, one of whom became a cardinal in the Catholic Church. From Point Breeze they carried with them memories of Charles' early study of American birds--a study which resulted in the publication of his book, *Ornithology*, and in friendship with John James Audubon, the great American ornithologist.

Before they had left Bordentown, Zenaide and Charles had aided Joseph in entertaining Lafayette when he visited Bordentown twice during his tour as a guest of the nation in 1824. The Marquis was always friendly with Joseph Bonaparte though the two men differed politically. On his first visit, the Bonaparte family and their friends went down the Delaware on the large barge to meet the steamboat carrying Lafayette. They boarded the steamer and the barge was taken in tow. At Bordentown the party returned to the barge and sailed up Crosswicks Creek to Point Breeze. On both visits Lafayette and Joseph rode through the streets of Bordentown, bowing to the enthusiastic cheers of the inhabitants.

A year later, in 1825, when Lucien Murat, the son of Joseph's sister Catherine, came to live at Bordentown, he gave his cousins and his uncle Joseph someone to worry about. Lucien was 22 on his arrival and extremely fond of gambling, hunting and drinking. A constant drain on his uncle's purse, Lucien angered the aristocratic Bonapartes by carousing with the youths of the neighborhood and borrowing money from everyone he knew. He even borrowed from the sta-

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ble boy to pay the lad in town who held his horse. Typical of his escapades was the aftermath of a billiard game in the hotel in Bordentown one summer night. Faced with the prospect of walking home through a sudden rainstorm, Lucien calmly removed all his clothes, tied them in a bundle and started off. The other young men followed suit, and soon the incident was the talk of Bordentown. During the 20 years he lived in New Jersey, Lucien made three attempts at farming and failed each time. These ventures and his love for horses, dogs and boats cost him and his creditors more than \$70,000.

When he was 24, Lucien eloped with beautiful Carolina Fraser of Bordentown, formerly of Baltimore. This marriage to a woman who was not of royal blood was the last straw for Joseph Bonaparte. Thereafter his unprincipled nephew could get no money from him. Soon Lucien had spent all his wife's money, and her sister's too. Carolina then opened a fashionable boarding school at her Park Street home in Bordentown and young girls were sent from great distances to study the graceful arts in the home of Mme. Murat whose charming husband was a prince. A woman of nerve as well as accomplishment, Mme. Murat once led the way when the people of Bordentown hesitated to step aboard the first railroad train. As the locomotive, called the *John Bull*, stood roaring on the track and puffing sparks from its funnel, all those who had come to witness the run of the first commercial railroad in New Jersey stepped back in fear. With one hand on her bonnet and the other holding her full skirts tightly, Carolina Murat stepped forward and was helped to a seat. It was only then that the rest of the gathering followed.

Lucien had an older brother, Achille, who settled in Florida. This Murat, who disliked to drink water or to wash with it, was a friend of Ralph Waldo Emerson and wrote several books on American manners and institutions. He married a grandniece of George Washington and became an American citizen. His first visit to Bordentown occurred in 1823, on his arrival in this country. In 1827, the year of Lucien's marriage, he again came to New Jersey to see his relatives.

If nephew Lucien was a problem to Joseph Bonaparte, nephew Pierre was a curse. Pierre Bonaparte, brother of Joseph's son-in-law, Charles, the sober scientist, came to Bordentown in 1831 when he was 17. Already he had killed a man in Italy. During his stay of a year in this country he earned a reputation for his uncontrollable temper and immoderate ways.

Besides worrying about the young members of his family, Joseph Bonaparte was now troubled by the fact that he was growing old, and there was still no immediate sign of a Bonaparte restoration in France. In 1832 he wrote urgently to the King of Rome, known also as the Duke of Reichstadt, Napoleon's frail son, who lived under the guardianship of his grandfather, the Emperor of Austria. "Let his Imperial Majesty consent to entrust you to my care...I will quit my retreat to...restore to the love of the French the son of the man whom I have loved the most of anyone upon earth. My opinions are well known in France... If you enter France with me and a tricolor scarf, you will be received there as the son of Napoleon."

But it was too late for the young Duke to act. He was already dangerously ill. Joseph, learning this, left Point Breeze in 1832 and sailed for England, hoping to be permitted to go to Vienna to see his nephew. Arriving at Liverpool, he was notified that Napoleon II had died on July 22, aged 21. Joseph Bonaparte, the Count de Survilliers, was now first heir and claimant to the empire once ruled by his brother.

For five years, Joseph resided in England. His request that he be allowed to join his family in Italy was denied by the allied nations. In 1837 he came back to Point Breeze for two more years and then returned to England, leaving

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these shores forever. In 1841, seriously ill, Joseph Bonaparte was taken to Italy on an English ship. Soon afterward he was permitted to join his wife and daughters at Florence, where he died in 1844 at the age of 76.

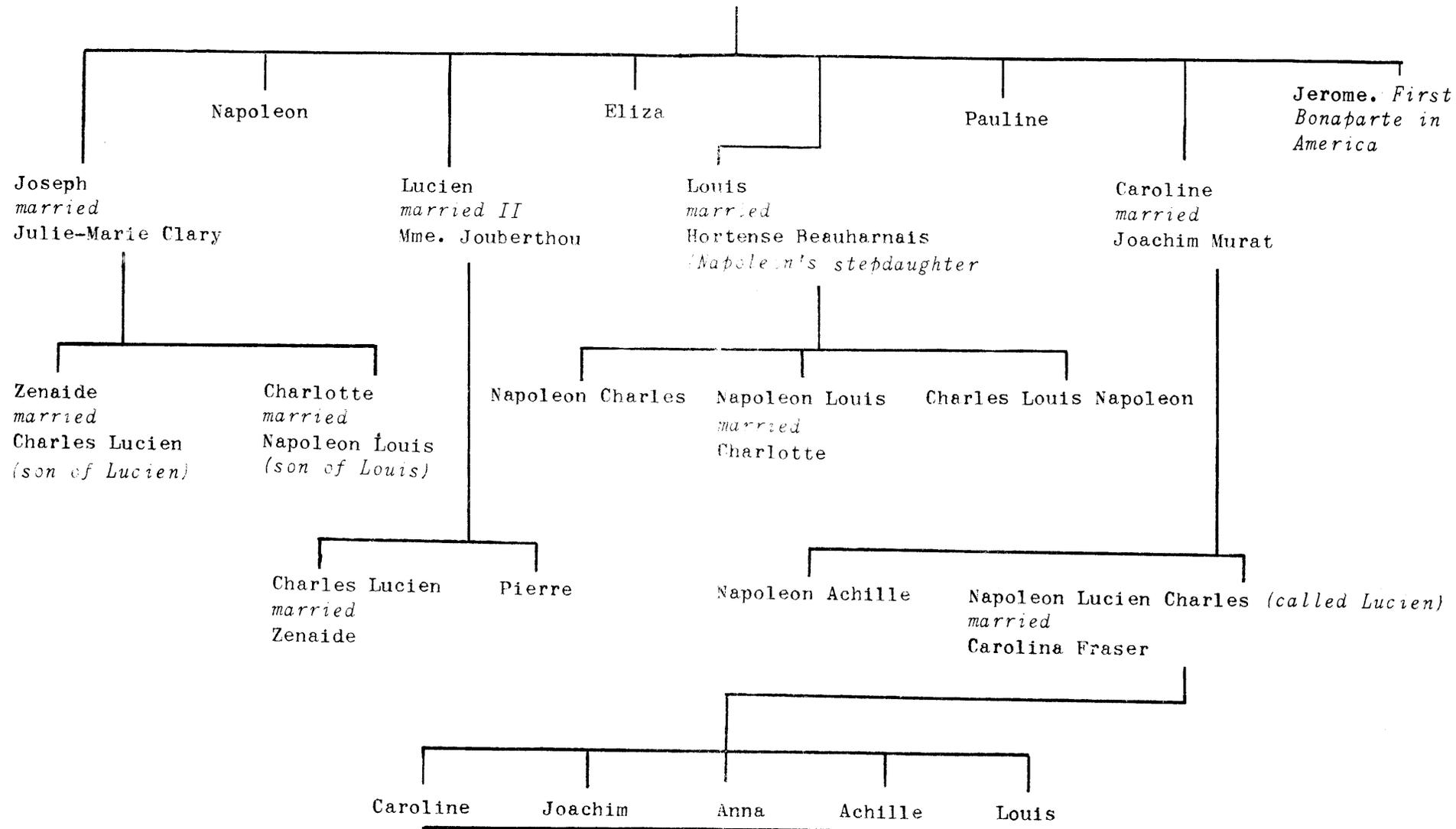
In Bordentown, Lucien Murat remained after his uncle's departure. But not for long. With the Revolution of 1848 in France, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, his first cousin and brother of Napoleon Louis, Joseph Bonaparte's second son-in-law, became President of the nation. This was the signal for Lucien to hurry abroad. His American wife and their four children followed later. Friends paid for their passage and some of the ladies of Bordentown made their clothes. There is a story that the two little boys were clad in suits made from a coachman's uniform. In France, Lucien became a member of the assemblies and Minister to Turin. When Louis Napoleon, who in 1837 had hunted at Point Breeze during Joseph's absence, was proclaimed Napoleon III, Emperor of France, his cousin Lucien became a Prince of the realm. A year after this event, in 1852, Lucien wrote to an old Bordentown crony: "I am president of three companies and Grand Master of the Masons...How different from the life...I enjoyed under my trees in Bordentown quietly smoking my cigar...However, my pride is satisfied...Pray remember me kindly to...old acquaintances who inquire after me. Tell them I am not changed, and that I often think of them all."

Such was Lucien Murat's farewell to the Bordentown he liked so well. Today his oldhome, Linden Hall, is known as 49-61 East Park Street, a row of attached houses remodeled in yellow stucco. Lucien belonged to Bordentown more than any of the Bonaparte clan. His children were born there; one was buried there in the graveyard of Christ Church. Lucien himself lived to be 75, but he never forgot the old town on the Delaware where he spent the richest and happiest years of his life.

Point Breeze was inherited by Zenaide's son, young Prince Joseph, who sold it in 1847. The property was later resold to Henry Beckett, an Englishman whom the Bordentown people called "the destroyer" because in 1850 he had the Bonaparte mansion demolished. The portion of the estate known today as Bonaparte Park, consisting of about 250 acres, was purchased in 1912 by Harris Hammond, son of John Hays Hammond, the famous mining engineer. After spending thousands of dollars to revive the splendor of what had once been the refuge of royalty, Hammond lost Bonaparte Park during the depression of the 1930's. In 1937 the company holding a mortgage on the property bought it for \$200. The old Point Breeze is gone forever. There remain only the original lodge house at the gate, the boxwood that Joseph planted and the beautiful old trees in the forest. Like the Bonaparte dynasty, Point Breeze had two periods of magnificence and glory and then decayed. It has long been forgotten that newspapers once called New Jerseymen "Spaniards" and New Jersey "Spain" because a former king of Spain found friendly exile on the eastern shore of the Delaware River.

Carlo Maria Bonaparte
married

Letizia Ramolino



This genealogical chart of the Bonaparte family is an incomplete outline to show the interrelationships of those who came to Bordentown. Jerome Bonaparte's family lived in Baltimore, New York and other cities; his last descendant is a resident of New York.