

ART OF ESSEX By Kathy Gilligan, photo by Dan Epstein

A Local Legacy Revealed

Lawyer/Historian/FilmMaker Tells a Little Known Tale

Scandals involving political, community or church leaders are not particular to any time or place—history is generously peppered with them. While some fade with the passage of time and interest, others take on a more obscure form, becoming rumors passed down through the generations.

It was a rumor that first piqued the interest of Roseland resident Jack A Gordon, a lawyer and historian whose curiosity led him to investigate two of the area's more prominent families during the 18th to 20th centuries: the Bonds of Roseland and the Forces of Livingston. These families lived in what is now known as the Bond Force House, home to the current Livingston Historical Society. And in 1963, the last of the Force family line left a generous bequest to the town of Roseland.

"There is a nine-acre park on Eagle Rock Avenue, the Bond Force Memorial Park, that was bequeathed to the town by Annie Force," says Gordon. "With the exception of a few of the older residents, people know little about the history behind that park—there were only rumors."

What were the rumors? "there was talk of the excommunication of John Force II of Livingston—a prominent Republican assemblyman from a wealthy family, a Sunday school teacher, a docent—who 'married up' when he married Dorinda Bond of Centerville's (now Roseland) wealthy Bond Family," Gordon explains. "He was said to be excommunicated from the Livingston Baptist Church in 1882 for bigamy, then later welcomed back into the church."

Other rumors centered on the relationship

between the children of John Force II and Dorinda Bond, Annie—who left the land bequest—and Frank. As a member of the Roseland Historical Society, and a trustee of the Roseland Landmarks & Historic District Commission, Gordon decided to do some digging to determine the validity of the rumors. And what he found shocked him.

"I found that the rumors were true and the history was all but lost," Gordon states. "And I thought I should tell the story—especially since nearly every major historical tract or treatise contains a wealth of information about John Force III—but fails to mention any of this."

After five years, Gordon is now telling that story—via film. He recently released a DVD entitled *The Bond Force Legacy* that was produced by his own filmmaking company, Bumble Bee Productions. The documentary traces the history of these two families, along with a history of Roseland. The film premieres at Caldwell Clearview Cinema Four at 10am on Saturday, December 17 and Sunday, December, 18.

As the managing partner of Manhattan-based Kent, Beatty & Gordon LLP, Gordon is listed in *Who's Who in American Lawyers*. But just as law is a passion for him, so too is filmmaking. *The Bond Force Legacy* is the latest in a series of professionally produced films—mostly shorts—and is his first feature debut.

"Ten years ago, I left another law firm to start my own so that I could spend more time with my family and have more time for other pursuits," says



Gordon, who went to school for filmmaking as well as law. "When I learned about these families, my interests in history and filmmaking dovetailed—this film is the result."

Now the filmmaker not only gets to spend more time with his family, but his passion for history and filmmaking has caught on with family members, like his daughter, who plays a part in the documentary. The passion has even spread to members of his second family. "Both of my partners (in the law firm)," he adds, "do voice-overs."

Available for purchase, the proceeds from sales of the *The Bond Force Legacy* will preserve history, just as the film does, according to Gordon. "All proceeds go directly toward the 2008 Centennial Celebration Fund of the Roseland Historical Society," he notes. "We want to help Roseland properly welcome its second century."

For more information about the DVD, log on to www.BondForceLegacy.com.