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Picturing the Route to Newark Airport

Photographs by Random Ashlar

Randy Ashlar is a retired Navy man, trained first in navigation and then in photography, who lives in the New York City area and often flies out of Newark Airport on visits to his grandchildren in the Midwest. With time he has come especially to enjoy the Lincoln Tunnel-to-Newark leg of his trips. Last year he thought he would photograph it.

The essence of his pleasure in the drive, he decided, could be found in several structures and a hill, all of which were easily recognizable from the highway even though most lay some distance from it. They had become landmarks for him, though not, he thought, in the sense of older structures that should be preserved because of their historical role or architectural quality, but in the nautical sense, as recognizable forms, glimpses of which reassured him that he was on course.

But when Randy undertook to photograph his landmarks and in some instances approached them, he realized that some of them were indeed landmarks in the newer historical–architectural sense. The Hackensack Water Tower and the Monastery Church, he learned, were designed by the well-known architects Frederick Clarke Withers and Patrick Charles Keely. Part of their effectiveness was their quality as architecture.

And then he realized that another contribution to his experience was the landscape in which his landmarks were set. Condescended to by New Yorkers, who see Weehawken, Hackensack and Union City on the highlands as of no interest and the Meadowlands beyond as little better than wet versions of Jay Gatsby's Valley of Ashes, these, he decided, were very much pre-twentieth-century landscapes that appropriately complemented his landmarks. He also realized he was looking across this landscape from a roadway that, as it cut through highlands and hill and was elsewhere elevated above the land, reminded him of nothing so much as the Futurama exhibit at the 1939 New York World's Fair that he had seen just before he went into the Navy. The ultimate secret of his pleasure was a topography of the past seen from a roadway of the future.

—*Cervin Robinson*



Manhattan from Weehawken



Mile o: False front, Croatian Catholic Church
at Lincoln Tunnel entrance, Manhattan



2.4 miles: Water Tower, Hackensack Water Co.,
Weehawken seen across Lincoln Tunnel approach



4.4 miles: Monastery Church of Saint Michael
the Archangel, Union City, seen across
New Jersey Turnpike



6.5 miles: New Jersey Turnpike and Snake Hill
(Laurel Hill), Secaucus (taken before September 11)





7.7 miles: New Jersey Turnpike and WMCA transmitter building, Kearny, with Snake Hill in the distance



9.5 miles: Pulaski Skyway and New Jersey Turnpike,
Newark and Kearny

13.8 miles: first sight of Newark Airport

