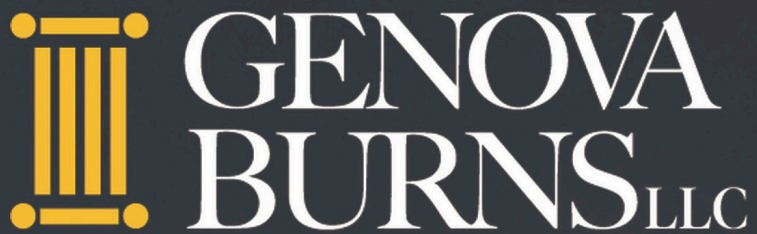


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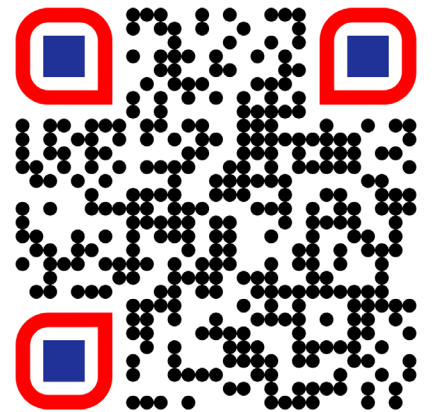
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INTRODUCTION

by John Van Vliet

Welcome to the third edition of the Insider NJ History and Heritage Spotlight! The previous two editions have offered a wide variety of subjects of interest to New Jerseyans and visitors to the Garden State. This issue will recognize the 250th anniversary of American independence, and as such will have a particular focus on the American Revolution.

New Jersey has always been torn in two since its earliest days. North and South (is Central Jersey really a thing? Massachusetts-born Gov. Phil Murphy thought so.) Yankees and Knicks territory to Sixers, Flyers, and Phillies territory. Taylor ham and pork roll. Subs and hoagies. Essentially, New Jersey has been caught between the influence of New York City and Philadelphia, with no comparable urban equivalent of its own. New Jersey's largest city, Newark, has a population of 326,000 compared to Philly's 1.5 million and New York's 8.5 million. There's just no contest. But this split is nothing new, either.

New Jersey seems to have had a less contentious relationship with Pennsylvania than New York, as readers will find later. Since the focus of this edition is the period of American independence, a look at the map shows very clearly why New Jersey was called the Crossroads of the Revolution. A fantastic map can be found online at the Crossroads of the American Revolution Association website, showing their catalog of over 150 Revolutionary War sites in New Jersey. Not surprisingly, the densest proliferation of these locations is found in the corridor between New York City and Philadelphia. This edition will explore some of that New Jersey Revolutionary history, as well as other elements which have made the Garden State and its people what we have today.

It is the writer's hope you will enjoy the material herein and, perhaps, learn something new.

—John Van Vliet





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New York, New Jersey, Old Claims, Old Grudges

When the English took New Netherland from the Dutch in 1664, what become known as New Jersey was divided into an ill-defined East Jersey and West Jersey. The exact boundaries of the two colonies were disputed, with several conflicting survey lines being drawn during the 17th Century. It was not until Queen Anne united East and West into one New Jersey that the political boundary came to an end and the shape was settled. Well, almost

settled. There remained a dispute between New York and New Jersey over New Jersey's northern border for some time.

More legend than established fact, New Jersey had another dispute to be settled with New York: possession of the islands within New York Harbor. Which colony did they belong to? The tales goes that James, the Duke of York (the brother of King Charles II and future King James II),

proposed that his namesake colony could claim any islands that could be sailed around within 24 hours and whatever was left over would go to New Jersey. The legend said Royal Navy Captain Christopher Billopp sailed his ship, the *Bentley*, around Staten Island in time and was rewarded with properties there. So, New Jersey lost out on Staten Island, but New Jersey's story with the island did not end altogether.



New York 1, New Jersey 0.

The future Garden State played a role in one of the most famous aspects of Staten Island's Revolutionary War history, however. On the island, the Billopp home of Bentley Manor is preserved as the Conference House museum. Shortly after the Battle of Long Island, which brought most of New York under British control, the home of a loyalist descendant, also named Christopher Billopp, hosted a

meeting on September 11, 1776, with Admiral Lord Howe, and delegates of the Continental Congress reluctantly agreeing to try to put an end to the hostilities. Neither Admiral Lord Howe nor the delegates, however, had any real authority to effect meaningful compromises from their respective governments. From Perth Amboy, just on the opposite shore of Bentley Manor across the Arthur Kill, Benjamin Franklin, Edward Rutledge, and John Adams were received cordially but the peace conference was, of course, unsuccessful from the start. The congressional delegation would accept nothing less than American independence, and Lord Howe could offer little more than pardons, his hands tied unless and until the hostilities ended and parliament's supremacy was acknowledged by the colonies.

Wine sipped, food eaten, and irritated jibes made, the delegation was rowed back to New Jersey and the rest is history. (After the British withdrew, like many loyalist families, the Billopps were forced from their home by the new government without compensation.)

Benjamin Franklin's connection with Perth Amboy is not limited to the affair of the ill-fated peace

conference, but was most notable in the form of his son, William Franklin. The younger Franklin is best known in the popular imagination as helping his father with experiments with electricity, but he was also New Jersey's last royal governor, and generally well liked up until the war. Though the Revolution began in New England, New Jersey was not isolated. Franklin was placed under house arrest in January of 1776, then detained in July of that year, held prisoner until 1778. The Proprietary House in Perth Amboy still stands, and it is the only remaining original Royal Governor's Mansion in the United States. More information about the Proprietary House and its role in the Revolutionary War can be found in the 2024 edition of the History and Heritage Spotlight.

Prior to the war, however, New York and New Jersey still had their issues to work out, following the territorial loss of Staten Island. If Insider NJ readers heard the term "Line War" today and are attuned to New Jersey politics (as readers of Insider NJ most certainly are), the first thing that came to mind might be the Andy Kim-led mission to disestablish the former ballot design, where a county endorsed line would give enormous advantage to their

preferred candidates rather than a fairer, more balanced design. But, in fact, the New Jersey Line War was something more dramatic. Even though Queen Anne had united the old East and West Jerseys in the early 18th Century, there remained the unfinished business of the northern border with New York. New Jersey claimed lands farther than the present boundary, well into today's Rockland and Orange counties, a claim New York colonists did not respect. An on-and-off conflict in the courts and even with violence existed between the two colonies until 1769, when King George III finalized the border (as ever, in New York's favor). The colonial legislatures ratified the agreement in the years just prior to the American Revolution. Port Jervis might have been part of Sussex County, but it was not to be.



Queen Anne united East and West Jersey in April of 1702

New York 2, New Jersey 0.

Bedloe's Island, is forever associated with New York, as the home of the Statue of Liberty. The Empire State even had Lady Liberty on its license plates. And yet, she hoists her torch up to the world within the boundary of Hudson County, New Jersey. During the colonial era, over a century before the colossal gift from France had been built, the island had been owned by the well-to-do. Archibald Kennedy, a Scottish earl living in the colony, sold it to New York to use it as a quarantine station in the 1750s. During the Revolution it was briefly used by the British to shelter loyalists under the protection of the Royal Navy until the housing structures burned down.



After independence, a series of court disputes between the states of New York and New Jersey sought to settle the matter of what was later renamed Liberty Island, an exclave

of New York in Jersey waters. Despite the efforts of Jersey City Mayor Gerald McCann and Congressman Frank Guarini, the courts maintained that New Jersey had the rights to the waters and submarine grounds around the island, but the exposed land of the island itself was New York's.

New York 3, New Jersey 0.

In 2026, the battle for New Jersey to get out from under New York's heavy shadow was seen with the hosting of the World Cup, and the (presumably) light-hearted jabs traded between Governor Mikie Sherrill and Governor Kathy Hochul. The Met Life Stadium was temporarily rebranded "New York New Jersey Stadium" during the games. "New York is the World Cup," Governor Hochul's office proclaimed online with a picture of the governor and NYC Mayor Mamdani watching the Brazil/Morocco game. The official New Jersey Twitter account replied with a re-tweet captioned, "Photo taken in Rutherford, New Jersey."

A rare win for the Garden State against her giant neighbor, even if only as a zinger. Let's say New York 3, New Jersey 1. This is a New Jersey publication, after all.



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New Jersey's Environment as Heritage: An Interview with Allison McLeod, Interim Executive Director of the League of Conservation Voters



When we talk about “history” and “heritage,” we discuss things held in common. The Oxford Dictionary defines heritage as the “history, traditions, buildings and objects that a country or society has had for many years and that are considered an important part of its character.”

The environment itself is the most fundamental and ubiquitous element of a state’s heritage. It is where everything gets its start and must be considered an essential part of our character by virtue of its influence on everything from resources, climate, construction, business, culture, entertainment, and more. Insider NJ spoke with Allison McLeod, the interim executive director of the League of Conservation Voters to discuss the environmental heritage of the Garden State.

When people talk about history and heritage, they are usually talking about groups of people or of specific individuals, or the products thereof. How would you describe the environmental aspect of New Jersey’s history and heritage, and what is something that people should be conscious of the environmental influence on what makes us unique amongst all the other states in the country?



When you talk about the environment, you can't separate people from it. People are part of our environment. Your community is part of your environment. For so many people, their first experience of the environment is when they're young and they get to go outside and go for a hike or a swim at the Jersey Shore. For a lot of people, that's their first experience, when they're very young. When you think about New Jersey's history specifically and what makes us unique, we were one of the first states that was founded. We were one of the original colonies, and so we've had a long history of development, and even in those hundreds of years, we've kept many of our precious open spaces and opportunities for people to still experience that environment. We're the most densely populated state in the union. I'm a Jersey Girl—I wasn't born here, but I got here when I was two—and what I love so much about New Jersey is that we have everything. We have mountains if you want to go hiking. We have beaches, we have access to some of the premier arts and culture in the world, but we also have farmland, mountain hikes, lakes, our shore regions, the Delaware Bay, the Water Gap. We even have the nation's oldest rodeo. I think people who

aren't from New Jersey don't know about all these wonderful outside spaces that we have, and so I think that's what makes New Jersey so unique. We've got everything.



Could you talk a little bit about what you think New Jersey's environmental stewardship should look like on a political level, but also as far as what individuals can do?

New Jersey has always been a leader in environmental protection, and I think it's critical that we continue that for our next 250 years. New Jersey was the first state to mandate recycling. That happened because the community educated kids about the importance of recycling and what it meant, and how you should keep things out of landfills, how you can reuse things, and then those kids went home,

and they were mini-lobbyists in their families. They said, “We have to recycle, we have to do this,” and that groundswell movement led to legislation. We were the first state to do that, but I think it just shows that change really happens because it’s something that people care about. When you educate people about the environment, about the importance of clean water and clean air, then it encourages people to demand action. At the end of the day, on the political level, we say the environment is not a partisan issue. The environment doesn’t know which way you voted, or who you supported. In a time when so many things are polarized, everyone agrees that we should have clean air to breathe and clean water to drink, and so individual action, educating someone and making them care about it, is what creates the political will to take bold action.



Unfortunately, New Jersey has more superfund sites than any other state in the union because of our history here. We did have a lot of industry, and there was a time when we didn’t know what was happening. For people who remember the inception of the Clean Water Act, it was because rivers were catching fire! You couldn’t fish, you couldn’t swim, and people on the individual level demanded action. You can continue to do that today. We passed the strongest single-use plastic bag ban in the nation. The more we learn about microplastics and the more we learn about some of these toxins and contaminants, we’re doing the right things. But the way that that happened was because people in individual towns and communities spoke up. That created an environment for the state to act, and so we continue to see that model. It really is the people who have the power to ask for environmental change.

New Jersey’s got a long history. We were one of the first states to regulate PFOS. I mentioned the superfund sites, but we have a licensed site remediation program for those sites. They’ve done thousands of remediations. We passed a constitutional amendment

in 2014 where people overwhelmingly voted for that to protect our open spaces. When you talk to people across all kinds of backgrounds and ideologies, people understand the importance of the environment, what it brings to them, and how much it matters. When you connect with people on that individual level, there's a lot of support for our environment because it's part of our heritage.

What do you feel are some of the benefits of historical preservation and conservation that can be made to communities which are almost universally feeling pressure that they need to keep developing, that they need to build more to meet their housing or commercial demands, and there's only so much space? How can New Jersey strike a balance between protecting and preserving what we can, but also accommodating the demands we have today?

I think there's for a long time there's been this false dichotomy that you can either have housing or you can have environmental protection. That's not true. With planning, community participation, and foresight, you can absolutely have both. In a state like New Jersey,

which has changed so much over time, where can we look at "redevelopment"? Everyone should have access to safe, dignified housing. I believe that's a right. A place like New Jersey allows us to innovate and to be creative. I grew up going to shopping malls. There really aren't many shopping malls anymore. Those can be amazing to use. During COVID there was a lot of change in how and where we shopped for things, and now there are a lot of vacant malls. They're already developed. They already have electricity and water. Why aren't we redeveloping those kind of spaces to give people homes? At the same time, when we look at the open spaces that we have, there are a lot of them where it wouldn't make sense to put developments. Let's preserve where we can, and let's be thoughtful and plan to make sure that we can balance housing, open space preservation, and our historic preservation.

Historic preservation helps tell the New Jersey story, and what a powerful thing it is to be able to take a kid somewhere where a historic event actually happened. Places such as where Washington actually crossed the Delaware at Washington Crossing. It makes the past come



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alive for people, and it makes them care in a different way. We have such a cool history in New Jersey. So many exciting things that have happened here and I think keeping those places preserved is so important to make that history real for people, and to make them have a tangible connection to the people who came before us.



In that sense, every single generation before us has experienced the same places, although not necessarily the same way. But there is continuity.

Yes, I live on the Raritan Bay shore, I'm raising my son here, and those are some of the things we do. We want to go kayaking where I went

when I was a kid. To your point, does it look a little different? Sure. Can you tap with a phone instead of paying with cash or a card? Yes. But you're still getting those same essential experiences, and I think that's so important.

New Jersey has a lot of brilliant and creative people in it. Are our elected leaders up to the task of actually harnessing that energy and creativity fast enough to meet some of the environmental issues of the moment?

We're the League of Conservation Voters, so we do work regarding voting and elections, and ultimately, people have the power to elect folks who care about these things. As you said, we have a lot of creative people, and I couldn't agree more. When you look at our history, so many innovations came from New Jersey, and when we're in a moment like this, where we need more housing and we need more clean, affordable power, this is such a moment for us to be able to innovate. We've done it many times before. So, how do we create an environment for those people who can innovate to find solutions? I think the idea that these things are mutually exclusive is just not true.

When I wrote last year's History and Heritage Spotlight, I went to the Thomas Edison National Historic Park in West Orange. He's a Jersey product right there. Seeing all the things that he came up with, I often thought, what would he think of the direction we're headed now with all these new innovations that are being rolled out, and the possibilities that we have?

I think New Jersey's ever-evolving, and we get the reputation that we're a scrappy state. But it's because we keep changing and evolving, and we're going to keep changing. That's the only way that you can continue to thrive, and I think we do that here in New Jersey. I don't know if the inventors of the past could have even imagined where we are today, and in a way, we probably can't imagine where we're going to be. But I do know that we have so many great innovators that'll be there.

We're also biased by our personal experiences, too. We might think that radio or phonographs are not necessarily pushing human boundaries, but that's only because we've lived with it. For someone who's never experienced that, it would have seemed like

magic to them. We would not be any different in another context.

I'm not a technical person, my background is in marine science, but I joke that radio, to me, when you stop and think about it, is just something of a miracle. You take waves and turn them into sound. That's incredible. I think for people who have never experienced sitting under Buttermilk Falls, or climbing to the top of the Delaware Water Gap, or being on the Appalachian Trail, when you take somebody who's always seen the more urban, developed part of New Jersey, and you put them in that environment, it's so new they get that sense of wonder, too.

What would you say are some of the greatest natural resources and assets that New Jersey has to offer?

That is a hard question because we have so many. I think our state park system and the history that we have here is incredible. There's a lot of work to be done to continue to connect that to our urban spaces. There's been work on that—on urban parks and things of that sort. But we want to make sure that everyone, regardless of your zip code, can access the outdoors and the benefits

it offers. Look at something like Liberty State Park, a jewel not only in our park system but to the country, in the most densely populated county, in the most densely populated state, and to have this beautiful open park for folks to go enjoy, I think that is really special.



Can you talk a bit about how environmental advocacy has affected New Jersey over the years? If there are any particular triumphs or misfires that come to your mind as far as New Jersey's environment goes?

Even in the past ten to fifteen years there has been much done. We had a 2014 ballot initiative that dedicated more than \$2 billion over the past ten-plus years for open space, farmland preservation, historic preservation, and parkland. That we in New Jersey passed landmark, nation-leading legislation to put us on a path towards 100% clean energy by 2050. We're addressing

stormwater issues to enable municipalities to take control of their own stormwater management and pass a utility if they're interested. New Jersey passed the first-in-the-nation cumulative impacts law to look at where we're putting facilities and to consider environmental justice. I would say, in terms of places where we should have done more, we talk about this wonderful history that we've had in advocacy, and that's true, but we also have to acknowledge the places where we have failed people in the environment and the issues of environmental justice that we have. If you live in certain cities, your children are four times more likely to have asthma than if you live in a suburban community. Those are also policy choices, and we need to do better. I think this is really a turning point now in New Jersey for us to be able to continue to lead on a path towards clean energy, clean air, clean water, and making sure that when people turn on the tap, or when they go outside and breathe, that they know that their health is protected.

New Jersey has a state recognized tribe, the Ramapo Lenape Nation. They are not federally recognized. Their ancestral lands are a Superfund

site. It's the only Superfund site in national history to be listed twice. It was listed, taken off, and then found to still be contaminated. This is some of the history that we must reckon with as a state, too, and as an environmental movement. When we look at all the good things that we do, we reckon with the places where we have not protected people's public health. What are the steps that we need to take going forward to make sure that environmental justice is realized as well?

Are you concerned about the rapid development of data centers in New Jersey and if that could be our next new form of Superfund site, our new cancer cluster possibility in the future? Do you feel that the governor's recent data center legislation does enough to protect our potential future health impacts from data centers that are popping up?

We're very concerned about the pace of development of something that is so big and so large, and frankly, we don't know that we're even going to need. I think about the rapid expansion of warehouse development, and a lot of those warehouses are vacant now. I think it's a concern about

much more than just land use. It's a concern about power consumption, heat, and changing the fabric of communities—and whether or not they have input. It's also a concern about water usage. But I would tie it back to what we talked about earlier is that we are a state that has been on the cutting edge and has innovated and has had a long history of industry. But that said, as we develop these things, we need to make sure that we are protecting our communities and that we are protecting public health. We were very supportive of what we called the Paying Fair Share legislation that the governor has signed into law. That is a first step. New Jersey's working families should not be shouldering the burden and the economic cost of this with higher power bills. In a time when we know the summers are getting hotter and we're seeing more frequent and intense storms, we also shouldn't be seeing the higher bills because of that, right? To protect New Jersey's working families, we think that legislation was a great first step. We don't think it's the only thing that we need to do by any means. Like we said, I'm very concerned about water consumption, about heat, and about community involvement in

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planning. We think there are several things that need to be done, and when we look back at various times in the past, we can point to places where New Jersey has seen a real need and has started to take steps to protect public health. I think this is one of those times. We're starting to take those steps now to ask, how can we best address these environmental issues before they kind of before they get too far down the road? We've done that before. When most people hadn't heard of PFOS yet, New Jersey was putting in drinking water standards. Like we've continued to do those things as we know better. We need to continue to take steps to protect public health and our environment.

How do you respond to arguments on short-term expense?

You really can't separate your environment from your communities and your public health. Humans, our wildlife, and everything around us are part of our environment. We're in our environment as people. Choices you make have cost, and for us, it's about asking "what do we value?" We value our environmental protections, our communities, and we value the health of our neighbors. Therefore, we're going

to make our policy choices accordingly. Regarding water infrastructure, you can pay for it now and invest in it, or you can pay for it later when you're trying to clean up after a flood. Somewhere along the way the bill is going to come through, and so for us it is about proactive investment.



What do you see as a top environmental priority for New Jersey leaders to address now, and what do you think are some of the struggles that we've been dealing with the longest, some of the more difficult long-term struggles that we've had to have?

I think it's sort of two sides of the same coin. For a long time, New Jersey's been facing the consequences of actions that were taken long ago, of course, in discussing climate change. The best time to have taken steps to address that would have been decades ago. But when we know better, we do better. The second-

best time is right now, so that we're protecting the people in ten, fifty, and a hundred years. One of the challenges, like we said, is that it is hard to make difficult choices where the impacts are going to be seen decades from now. But if we don't, we're going to keep ending up in these same situations. If we're not talking about the big umbrella of climate change, how do we talk about what people are facing? Look at flooding. In just the past few weeks, these catastrophic floods came out of nowhere with floodwaters rising in minutes. Even if you don't think about a big concept, like climate, people know what it means when it floods. I think the bold actions that we need to continue to take today are things like the NJ PACT [Protecting Against Climate Threats] and REAL [Resilient Environments and Landscapes] regulations, which will protect people from floodwaters and will keep people safe in their homes.

From the LCV: As the New Jersey League of Conservation Voters' Interim Executive Director, Allison McLeod directs the organization's lobbying efforts and campaign plans and works to build relationships with legislative and administrative officials, while managing the

organization's programs and coalitions. Allison is a lifelong resident of the Garden State. After getting her bachelor's degree in marine science and psychology from the University of San Diego, Allison began work offshore in the Gulf of Mexico as a Marine Mammal Observer. She then joined the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Office of Government Relations, where she worked for several years assisting New Jersey's diverse range of municipalities with their environmental concerns before serving as Director of Personnel and Strategic Operations in local government. Before serving as Interim Executive Director, Allison served as Senior Policy Director and then Deputy Director at New Jersey LCV. Allison is a member of her local Zoning Board, serves as an elected County Committeewoman, and was appointed by Governor Phil Murphy as an inaugural member of the State Parks and Open Space Foundation. She also served as a member of Governor Sherrill's Energy Affordability and Reliability Transition Action Team. In all her work, she is committed to combatting climate change, protecting our natural resources, and advancing justice. She currently resides in Monmouth County with her family.



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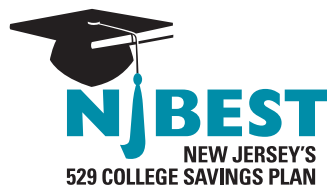
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Passaic County: Washington Didn't Just Sleep Here.

The Dey Mansion, the Revolution, and Whirlwind of County Progress



*Kelly C. Ruffel, Director of the
Department of Cultural & Historic
Affairs for Passaic County*

Passaic County is the 18th out of 21 New Jersey counties in terms of area, and 9th out of 21 for population. But in terms of Revolutionary pride, Passaic County would certainly rank itself among the very top. And yet, Passaic

County is the site of no major Revolutionary War battle, such as Monmouth, Mercer, Somerset, or Essex counties. Passaic County does have the Dey (pronounced “die”) Mansion and the Long Pond Iron Works (see the 2024 edition of the History and Heritage Spotlight), two major hubs of Revolutionary War history. Without Passaic County, which did not exist at the time of the

War of Independence, Washington might never have been successful.

Insider NJ spoke with Kelly Ruffel, the Director of the Department of Cultural and Historic Affairs, on the significance of the 250th Anniversary, and the Dey Mansion in particular. Visitors who want to check out the Dey Mansion will find it at 199 Totowa Road in Wayne.



Ms. Ruffel explained what-would-become Passaic County's role in the American Revolution:

Many people think of the American Revolution in terms of famous battlefields such as Lexington, Trenton, Saratoga, and Yorktown. Passaic County was not the site of a major battle, but history teaches us that wars are won not

only on battlefields, but through logistics, supply lines, intelligence, leadership, and the resilience of our communities.

During the Revolution, Passaic County was one of the most strategically important landscapes in the new nation. Located just beyond British-controlled New York City, our roads, valleys, rivers, and mountain passes became the vital arteries connecting New England with the Mid-Atlantic colonies. Continental Army regiments, militia companies, supply wagons, political leaders, and messengers constantly traveled through these routes. Protecting these roads meant protecting the Revolution itself. The military supply route from West Point to Morristown ran through Passaic with Ringwood Manor and the iron forges as a main stopping point.



The geography of our county became one of America's greatest military assets. The Watchung Mountains, where Garret Mountain is, shielded Continental forces from British observation while providing commanding views across the Newark Basin of New York City, where the British were. The Highlands near Ringwood concealed critical ironworks that supplied the Continental Army with the tools of war: nails, horseshoes, cooking utensils, and munitions that kept the army in the field. Our rivers dictated where armies could move, which bridges had to be defended, and where supply lines remained secure.



General George Washington understood this better than anyone. Twice in 1780, Washington established his headquarters here at the Dey Mansion. From this remarkable home, he directed

military operations while the Continental Army spread across what are now Hawthorne, Totowa, Woodland Park, Paterson, Pompton, and Wayne. Decisions made here influenced campaigns far beyond New Jersey. Over 6,000 pages of orders and directives were given from Dey Mansion. It was also here that Washington received the news the French had finally arrived at Newport, Rhode Island.

In 1781, the combined American and French armies under General Washington and the Comte de Rochambeau marched through Passaic County on their way south to Virginia. Their journey would culminate in the victory at Yorktown, the battle that effectively secured American independence.

As it is today, Passaic County during the Revolution was a remarkably diverse place. Native Americans who were displaced from their ancestral lands lived alongside Dutch settlers whose families arrived generations earlier, Scots-Irish immigrants, English colonists, and enslaved men and women of African and Caribbean heritage. Many of them believed deeply in independence. Others remained loyal to the Crown and were uncertain which side

would prevail. Enslaved people faced the painful reality that promises of liberty offered no guarantee of freedom. These stories remind us that the American Revolution was experienced differently by those who were here. Understanding those diverse perspectives makes our history richer, more honest, and ultimately more meaningful as we commemorate 250 years of our nation's journey.

What was General Washington's primary purpose in setting up his headquarters at the Dey Mansion in 1780?

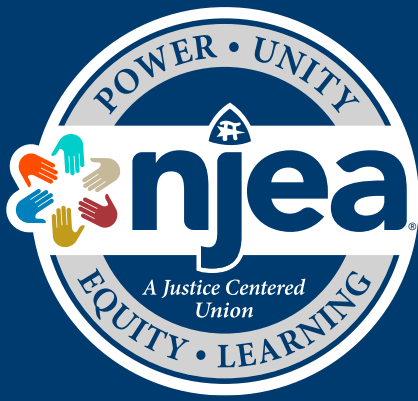
Picking Passaic County and Dey Mansion as his headquarters was a strategic place. He only left because he finally received news that the French arrived at Newport. He left at the end of July to head up to Newport, but then is foiled and ends up staying in New York and Connecticut and the Hudson River Valley. Following the hanging of British Major John Andre, he's back at Dey Mansion. The folklore behind it is that he was there for reprieve and sort of hiding based on everything which was going on with the betrayal that he felt with Benedict Arnold. Washington is also obsessed with New York. He's in the Watchung

Mountains as it overlooks New York Harbor, so he's able to keep an eye on the British who are occupying New York. He was also making use of the forges that are here. That is where we get Robert Erskine, who becomes a surveyor for Washington. He stopped here several times and used the forges of Ringwood to supply the Continental Army as well. The region had all this going for him.



Can you tell us a bit about the owner of the Dey Mansion at the time and his role?

Theunis Dey was quite an important local figure. He's sort of a politician and colonel of the Bergen County Militia. He went to the Proprietary House to sit on the first meetings of the legislature. Washington was comfortable with him and we would say he's a proud patriot, so he wants to open his home to Washington.



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Today we talk a lot about the Dey Mansion's preservation story. Today it is interpretive specifically to the time that Washington was there. We talk about the family, the enslaved persons who lived on site, and the women of the household. If you walk in the door, we want it to be as if you were visiting Washington in 1780.



The American Revolution is, naturally, an extremely famous chapter of the property's history. But what happened afterward?

Unfortunately, the family, specifically after Theunis' death, did not have a very good time with funding and financial resources. The property they had was about 600 acres. They also owned property in Manhattan. So, they had a wealth of land, but when Theunis died, he had divided it between his sons David and Richard, who ultimately couldn't keep up the estate and starting selling off

land, and then the mansion itself, too. Between about 1801 and the late 1920s, nineteen different owners would have this property, including Wayne's first mayor, William Hogan Camp, who is buried on the property.



What was the Mansion like at that time compared to how it had been during Washington's stay?

Changing hands obviously changed a lot of the house. The house as you see it today is a direct result from the county's two restoration projects on it. But prior to that, dormers were added. They added wallpaper. They changed all the window types. The kitchen had burned down, and then we, the county, rebuilt it. There were all these different things within that century or so span after the Deys left.

When we get to the 1920s, America is in its National Movement. We see the America the Beautiful movement

and the parks movement. There was a lot of interest, specifically to Passaic County, starting in 1926, when the state legislature passed a law for counties to create park commissions. Essex, Union, and Passaic were the first three in the state to do so. But they don't really start moving until 1927. At the same time, the Dey Mansion was under threat, and a lot of the sites that we have today were under threat of development. The U.S. government was interested in purchasing the property, leveling the home and turning it into an airport.

This spurred local people, and specifically, a women's preservation movement as well, a women's group that would rally together. They advocated for keeping the Dey Mansion and turning it into a museum. They advocated for the Passaic County Park Commission, which was newly established at the time, to save Dey Mansion, and that's exactly what happened. The Park Commission would purchase the property. Dey Mansion was not its first restoration project, because, at the time, they were also working on Lambert Castle. They were starting to provide parcels for Garrett Mountain, or what is now today Garrett Mountain Reservation, Rifle Camp Park.

They were very busy!

They were busy, and then when they finally got to Dey Mansion after its acquisition in 1928 they started working on the golf course. The golf course would open in July 1931, and the museum would open October 8th, 1934, for the first time.

What was the condition of the Dey Mansion once the county acquired it?

Deplorable. It was very bad. The Passaic County Park Commission acted as its own independent agency. When they dissolved in 1987, all of its property, which are mostly the parks, artifacts, and objects were transferred to the County of Passaic.

Passaic was fortunate because some of the first members of the board had Garret Hobart the Fourth, and his mother Jennie Tuttle Hobart, who was alive at the time, because some of the items and funding came from the Hobart family and other influential Patersonians. Mayor Benson of Passaic was also involved and became a trustee, and he also had quite a bit of wealth. These influential people in the community were giving back, both monetarily and by being on the board,

especially at the start of the park commission.

With the bicentennial of Washington's birth in 1932 there was this fever all about Washington. They employed people from the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the curator of the American Wing took on this project at Dey Mansion. They also relied heavily on the staff of the up-and-coming Colonial Williamsburg. The gardening, for example, was a direct colonial revival that you see today, which came out of influences from Williamsburg. They hired the Frederick Law Olmsted firm and put all the heavy hitters into making this garden. They did not do the research that we would do now, but they kept it in what they felt was the style or appropriate to what they thought.

Although the museum opened in 1935, they started to replace the windows which had 19th century modifications. Eventually, the dormers got removed. The Met curator had the wallpaper taken away and we were going back to just plaster. We needed furnishings in this building that weren't reflective of the late 19th century, early 20th century.

Granted, all of this is also happening in the midst of the Great Depression.

The Parks Commission was very fortunate. When we get to FDR and the programs that he puts in to keep people working, a lot of our parks system is developed with the Works Progress Administration. Dey Mansion is the same. They ended up getting grants from the federal government to do archeology and in the first round of archeology they uncovered the kitchen. That was rebuilt between 1937 and 1939 on the foundations that they found.



The next big phase of Revolutionary War interest would come about during the Bicentennial. How did that affect the Dey Mansion?

By the 1960s, there was a new vision and thinking. Another movement occurred at the site where they wanted to expand it. This is when we got the summer kitchen, the

forge, the spring house, and the smokehouse. There was a barn, a chicken coop, and a wagon shed. They were trying to create a living village. Eventually they even had animals. Prior to that, it was just the house. The historic Dey Barn was still on the property but was demolished, and they built a new barn.



After the fever of the Bicentennial, what became of the Mansion and grounds?

Sadly, by late '80s, a lot of this was defunct. The Park Commission was already on its way out. There was no stability in the workforce in funding. By the late 1980s, the [second] barn was gone, there was

overgrowth in the garden. Things were removed. The site had this very stagnant period all throughout the 90s and early 2000s. It was around 2006, when the late county historian spearheaded a cultural landscape report that really focused on the revival of the garden, the grounds, and the natural setting of the mansion.

It took another decade for the county to decide on serious intervention. Plans started getting set in motion for an interpretive plan and a furnishing plan. They had a conditions report—sort of a wish list of things that are going on with the building. They worked hard to get a grant from the state of New Jersey, the New Jersey Historic Trust, and in 2014 they closed the building for a restoration project. It was February of 2016 when the site was completed. That was the next chapter for Dey Mansion. Now, everything that's happened since 2016 is a direct result from the county investing in an office that would handle these resources. They updated the administrative code to add a new department, Cultural and Historic Affairs, and then they worked to hire somebody to kind of take on Dey Mansion. It was not getting a lot of visitation, there were issues with staffing there, and our



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Parks Department at the time was not structured to handle historic sites like that.

What caused the change around 2016? What was the impetus to make Passaic County invest heavily in this?

I attribute to several things. First and foremost, I think the administrators at the time, and now, were really invested in parks. There was a change in the thought on how to handle these sites. The Board of Commissioners truly support the growth of parks, and they support the historic sites. They've seen the value in them. Not just Dey Mansion, but the John W. Rea House is another perfect example. We turned it into the Passaic County Arts Center, and it's probably one of our busiest sites. The commissioners love to see the residents and visitors engaging in that way. The same with amenities in the parks. We just built a new playground in Camp Hope, which was a CCC project in the late 1930s, and it's turned around tremendously. I don't know if people would even have gone there or knew what it was ten years ago. This is good government. I can't speak for them at all, but I would say that they have been truly

supportive in this endeavor. I have colleagues throughout the state, and they don't get the same support for their historic sites. There's a cost to maintaining these parks. We have spent nearly \$50 million in the last 10 years, and that's just on historic preservation. That doesn't even include the parks investment, but they also generate ROI.



What kind of return on investment does Passaic County see?

We completed our heritage tourism master plan last year and we have some hard data. The state did an outlook on the impact of, specifically, heritage tourism. New Jersey gets \$44 billion a year in tourism dollars and, of that, about \$3.4 billion is in

heritage tourism. That's from the museums, historic sites, and cultural assets. It's not just going down the shore or the boardwalk.



Hunterdon County, for example, has wine trails and they have a massive balloon festival. What does Passaic County have to offer in terms of tourism? We have our historic sites and our parks—we have a national park [Great Falls National Park in Paterson], we have state parks, we have our county parks, and local parks. Ringwood is the third most visited park in this state. So, that really gives us a boost. I believe we see about 2.3 million visitors a year. We'll do another assessment in the next year or so. We are small but pretty mighty for one of the smallest counties in the state. There is an impact. We are known for day trippers and we want to create experiences. That's where I think our

office is going next. Now that we've built all this infrastructure and we're doing more programs, it will be about creating unique experiences for people who are visiting for the day. I always push people to go to www.seepassaiccounty.org. Lambert Castle is now open. The John W. Rea House is done. We just opened the archeology center in Vreeland.



Are there any more plans for development at Dey Mansion?

We are looking to the future of the site. Just last year we put in a new kitchen garden to do more hands-on demonstrations, for cooking and farming. We plan to invest another \$5 million in the site to rebuild the Dutch barn that was there.

This would be the third time the site has had a barn in its history?

Yes, this will be Barn #3. Third time's a charm! We plan on rebuilding the barn with an addition that will be an exhibit hall. The Dey Mansion has outgrown its space to accommodate for programs and school groups. There's a small expansion to our visitor center that we're hoping to complete as well. We also started putting out the encampment experience with tents. We are working to add more elements to the site that are appropriate to engage the visitors as though you visited in 1780. We expect to break ground hopefully next year on the barn and then complete it by 2028 or 2029. As you know, while we're all talking about 250th, Dey Mansion's 250th Anniversary is in 2030, and we are making plans to celebrate it then.



What are your thoughts on the present and future for the parks and your department?

We have big plans and we're grateful that the current administration and our Board of County Commissioners are truly supportive of the work that we're doing. I started with just myself and one other individual, and now I can say we are a department of 22 people, and we're all individuals who are passionate and love history. We all have a history background through education, and other organizations and partners that we've worked with. Our goal is to build an institution. We have collections, programming, a research and arts component. There's the tourism component. We have a vision and drive which really revolve around boosting the role of historic preservation and our sites.

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Profiles on Living Historians

Living historians, historical reenactors, experimental archeologists, there are many names for those people whose hobbies can be found at the intersection of public education and theater. Museums and historical venues have long included historical reenactors as a way to bridge the gap between inanimate objects in a display and present-day application. In other words, these enthusiastic people share their passion for history in a way that can tangibly make the stories of the past come alive through first- or third-person presentations, dressed in the clothes of the period while demonstrating the skills or crafts of the time. A few sites may have staff on hand as reenactor-interpreters for the public, in the style of Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia or Plimoth Plantation in Massachusetts. Most museums do not have full-time period interpreters, and your reenactor is typically a person who will take their time from their regular lives to do so, either as a paid contractor or volunteer.

Not strictly within the realm of theater, as most historical reenactors are not “actors” in the traditional sense,

reenactors add a special dimension, whether working at a blacksmith forge, giving tours, presenting a lecture, or even recreating historical battles including, but not limited, to New Bridge 1776, Trenton 1776, Princeton 1777, Bound Brook 1777, Red Bank 1777, Monmouth 1778, Simcoe’s Raritan Raid 1779, or Connecticut Farms 1780.

There are tens of thousands of these historical hobbyists around the world, and their own history is itself a long one. The ancient Romans often commemorated (and propagandized) their triumphal battles with costumed gladiators in the Colosseum. Opting for somewhat less sanguinary means, in the 18th and 19th Centuries, “sham battles” fought with blanks, were used as training and for commemorative purposes. Indeed, according to Mark Maloy, who wrote for *Emerging Revolutionary War* in 2021, sham battles were held in the 1840s and 1850s in the streets of Trenton. The 100th Anniversary of the Battles of Trenton and shortly after, Princeton, were fought again for spectators by Civil War veterans. Maloy notes, referencing old photos, that accuracy of clothing was not considered a priority at the time, with most of the participants wearing their

own contemporary uniforms. Reenactment in the 19th Century leaned more towards festivity than education, per se. Contrast this with today's historical reenactors strive for accuracy down to the smallest detail but are also not adverse to sharing food, laughter, drink, and singing.

Historical reenactment is an international hobby which has grown and diversified significantly over the last few decades. In the United States, the most popular periods are, perhaps unsurprisingly, the Civil War, World War Two, the American Revolution, and World War One. Generally, on a more regional level, history-minded tourists can step into live-action scenes from the French and Indian War in Pennsylvania and New York; the War of 1812 in New York, Great Lakes, and the Chesapeake; Seminole Wars in Florida; Texas Revolution in Texas; Little Bighorn in Montana; etc. While reenactments tend to be conflict-anchored in terms of time period, they are not exclusively of a military nature. It just so happens, sad to say, that the bulk of American history also overlaps with conflict.

The History and Heritage Spotlight has interviewed a small sample of New Jersey residents who sometimes

leave the 21st Century to spend a little time teaching others about the 18th Century, when the rebel colonies were struggling to shake off British rule and secure their independence.

Paul Doll, and I live in Wayne.



What made you interested in living history, and how did you get involved?

I always find myself reading about historic times. One day riding around, I saw reenactors at a historic site, and I was so intrigued by it that I stopped by and asked them some questions about how I could get involved in this hobby. So, from 1980 to the present day I'm still reenacting.

Who do you portray, and/or what is your primary interest or role within reenactment? Why did you choose it?

I portray a private soldier from New Jersey in the Continental Line, that's what I chose to represent. I have also been on artillery crews which fire cannons at battle events. At local history events I also bring out some of my collection of original Revolutionary War artifacts to show people and talk about them. People have said I have a "mini museum" of my own. I started collecting military artifacts back when I was in grade school, collecting more during high school when I was working part-time, and then ever since. I've picked up items from World War Two, the Civil War, and the Revolutionary War. When I bring some of my collection out to events, people get to see the real thing, they can handle an original musket from the Revolutionary War and feel the weight. It's not like what you would see in the movies or on TV. I tell them to imagine what it would be like carrying that around while marching for miles every day. It makes it more real for them, more than just reading about it in a book. The feedback has always been positive; people like to see the items up close in person.



Do you have a favorite New Jersey historic site or event? What makes it special for you?

My favorite historic site is the Dey Mansion in my town of Wayne. It is also special because it was the site of my first Revolutionary War event.

What is the significance of the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution for you, and what do you think it represents for the country as a whole?

For me, the 250th anniversary is an opportunity for us to pay tribute and honor the people who were here before us, that we never forget their legacy for what they sacrificed for this nation. To all the men, women, and children, let's keep American history alive for all to enjoy this fine nation in peace and harmony.

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Athena Wu, and I'm from Princeton.***What made you interested in living history, and how did you get involved?***

Growing up, I ended up reading a lot of *Little House on the Prairie* because *Harry Potter* was constantly checked out at my school library. I thought that the people living in historical times led such different lives and I often liked to contrast mine and theirs. It's possible that since I come from a bicultural background that the comparisons and contrasts are something I always noticed, but I enjoyed it. I had the privilege

of doing an entire unit in my third grade about local history in my town, and that has stuck with me since. (My town being the significant little village of Prince Town, New Jersey). That interest in history persists. For a while I had been interested in Victorian culture and fashion and started going to events. After a few events with the British 35th Regiment of Foot, I realized that I enjoyed talking to people, teaching them that people in history were still people, and not just the stuff of books. It's always magical when there's a large event like Monmouth where you have many reenactors and the ambiance they create together really does feel as if you stepped through time. I enjoy being part of that, and I enjoy encouraging people to be interested in history because STEM are not the only topics that we should learn about—and that is coming from someone who is in STEM.

Who do you portray, and/or what is your primary interest or role within reenactment? Why did you choose it?

I don't typically like to portray a certain person as it feels too constricting and there are too many details to remember and

keep straight. There also weren't as many records of people of color so I like to push imagination as being your "every man" or "every woman". Generally, when I fall in as a soldier for the Sixth Pennsylvania, I am a farm boy who decided he wanted to leave and fight for independence. As a camp follower, I typically am a lower middle class woman who may be following her husband, or sometimes a lady's maid. It's always prudent to ensure that the clothing you wear matches your persona and the historical basis of which also matches your standing. Clothes were everything, and decorating yourself wasn't just for aesthetics, it also signaled your wealth. This kind of thought into personal effects really makes a kit into a persona for me. Another example is when we do [First World War British Red Cross] VAD, typically those women were upper class, so we would have finer belongings than compared to a Revolutionary War camp follower or a young man with their musket and the clothes on his back. It's very fun to be a chameleon. And besides, there can only be so many George Washingtons, and most of the people who would have fought were just your everyday Joes, so there's merit in being completely average.

Do you have a favorite New Jersey historic site or event? What makes it special for you?

In New Jersey I do tend to favor large events like Monmouth simply because of having so many reenactors, it does feel like actual time travel. At events like those you are also not the single point of interaction, so visitors can ask around so many people and get so many different answers about what they're doing and who they're portraying and it's always very interesting to see how different people interpret the same kind of person. For example, there's a group that leans more Dutch and they will have different looking belongings, and they have slightly different clothes than those who lean more British or French. Not technically in New Jersey, but Washington's Crossing during Christmas is an event I would not miss for anything. It is special to me because there are not as many cold weather events, and it's just extremely unique to be rowing Washington and his crew across the Delaware River.

What is the significance of the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution for you, and what do you think it represents for the country as a whole?



I grew up in an extremely historically significant town and the scars of the Revolutionary War and colonial era are visible all over Princeton. They all shape the town. For example, the library stands on the site of the former physician's office, and it is right across the street from the old part of the cemetery. Things like that are never far from my view, so the Revolution is never far away, not only in US history books. What culminated was the manifestation of people's wish to live in peace unbothered by their government but also be fairly represented. They took their grievances against the British crown and turned around and said, "I can do better" and tried, and succeeded. It was quite a feat to organize even enough people to agree to declare independence, much less fight, and much less

win. It did not happen in a day. That sort of spirit is what should be remembered. Whether or not we can agree on civil rights, we must simply agree that it's amazing that people said, "let's change it" and they did. Nobody has the right to claim that any of this is, or was, perfect, or that America has achieved its final version, because this is a process. This is built into our preamble, which mentions of the goal of a "more perfect union," which is impossible as perfection cannot be achieved, and yet we can still aim for it, and do. I think that anybody who lives here should be celebrating the 250 years of progress because it's that progress that made other immigrants want to come over and grasp opportunities, just like my friends, teachers, parents, neighbors, etc., did. Personally, it is exciting to be able to celebrate such a major milestone anniversary of a revolutionary idea. It's an honor to be part of America's journey and to contribute to her position of being on the world stage. Reenacting helps me to explain and show people how the nation started, and hopefully this reminds them to keep making meaningful changes to themselves and the world around them to make our nation and our planet a better place.

Maxim Shumylo, and I am from Edison.



What made you interested in living history, and how did you get involved?

I've been a reenactor since 2018. I've always had a passion for history and am now a history teacher. When I was in high school, I saw some YouTube videos of first-person reenactment footage from people portraying British soldiers – it looked exciting! I was also intrigued by the opportunity to get a different perspective on the Revolutionary War by portraying the Crown forces, which we rarely discussed in school.

Therefore, I decided to visit the 2018 Battle of Monmouth reenactment to see what it was like in person. I talked to some of the reenactors, emailed a British Brigade recruiter, and the rest, as they say, is history!

Who do you portray, and/or what is your primary interest or role within reenactment? Why did you choose it?

At battle reenactments, I portray a British sergeant in the 43rd Regiment of Foot as he appeared in the early years of the Revolutionary War. When I first joined, however, I portrayed a private soldier and eventually rose to the rank of corporal. I enjoy meeting new people and addressing common misconceptions about the 18th-century British army, such as that it was tactically inflexible or that all British soldiers were forced into service. While I am still finalizing my British sergeant's impression, I hope to have everything ready for the 250th Battle of White Plains reenactment in late October of this year. Finally, my group also interprets the 2nd Pennsylvania Regiment, where I appear as an American sergeant in the late war period. This has given me a unique opportunity to research

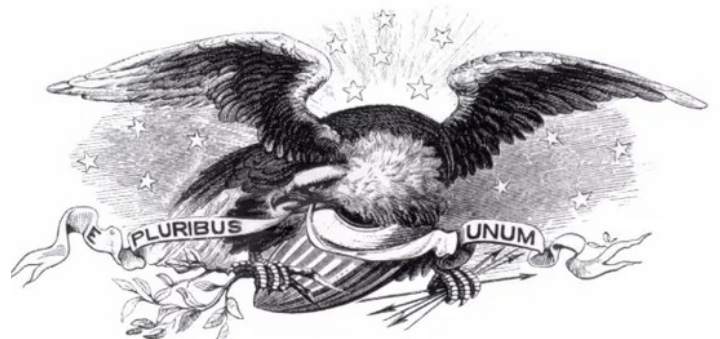
two separate portrayals and delve even deeper into the life of an 18th-century soldier!

Do you have a favorite New Jersey historic site or event? What makes it special for you?

I would say that Monmouth Battlefield (where I saw my first reenactment) or Princeton Battlefield (where I was promoted to Corporal) are especially meaningful historic sites to me in NJ. Both of those reenactments also take place on the original hallowed ground which makes it even more powerful to interpret what happened there for the public. Generally speaking, it's fascinating to participate in reenactments at sites that I and many others learned about as students. As an educator, I know that the way information is presented matters. By tangibly bringing history to life through public interaction, I hope I can spark an interest in it among people who might've previously thought it was a boring subject.

What is the significance of the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution for you, and what do you think it represents for the country as a whole?

I think that the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution is a time to not only reflect on the past but also create new scholarship advancing marginalized perspectives, such as those of African-Americans, women, loyalists, and Indigenous peoples. I believe considering such voices will help us get a better understanding of the Revolutionary era both on and off the battlefield. Also, even though July 4th has passed, there is still so much of the 250th left to commemorate! This presents an excellent opportunity to keep supporting historic sites and advocating for historic preservation so that future generations can appreciate them.



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Ari Lopez Wei, I was born in Englewood, but I've been living in Fair Lawn since I was a year old, so I'm a Jersey boy through and through.



What made you interested in living history, and how did you get involved?

Growing up, I originally had somewhat of an interest in Greco-Roman mythology and history, in particular military history. Over time that transformed into an interest in

medieval history, which lasted for a few years. By the time I was halfway through high school, I started to become interested in the American Civil War. My mother had taken me to a couple reenactments and I thought the uniforms were really cool. That made me want to get involved, and we started wondering how exactly I could do that. In 2011, my family was at a conference in Trenton, New Jersey, and when the conference let out we saw that something was going on at the Old Barracks Museum, which was right across the street. So, we walked across the street, and we saw that there was a military timeline event happening, specifically the Three Centuries of African-Americans in the US military timeline event. We went around, talked to some of the members, and told them that I was interested in getting involved. Eventually, they told us that I just needed to get myself a pair of black boots, and then they would loan me a uniform, let me carry a musket, and I could start coming out to events with them. So that's exactly what I did. Growing up, I was an extremely shy child, but my mother was always dragging me all kinds of events with her, willingly or not. And, really, if it weren't for her, taking me to that conference that

was across the street, and then bringing me to go check out what was happening at the Old Barracks Museum, I probably would have never gotten involved in living history. She's always been my biggest supporter in doing this work.

Who do you portray, and/or what is your primary interest or role within reenactment? Why did you choose it?

The group that I started with is a predominantly African-American group. We portray the 6th United States Colored Troops from the Civil War, and the First Rhode Island Regiment from the Revolutionary War. I mainly stuck with representing a member of the 6th USCT for the first few years of my living history journey. At some point, one of our members got me to start doing a World War I impression, so I started to portray a member of the 372nd Infantry Regiment from WWI, another segregated Black unit. And then, of course, with the country being in the middle of the 250th anniversary, my group, like a lot of others, has shifted our focus mainly to our Revolutionary War portrayals. I may or may not have recently done an event portraying a member of the British 35th Regiment. Over

the years I've had mixed reactions to my portraying a soldier from Black units. Being an ethnically and racially mixed person, I have never fit neatly into one identity. But I'm proud to be someone who can claim many different heritages, one of which is Colombian. My father is an Afro-Latino from Valle del Cauca, which is home to one of the highest concentrations of Afro-descendants in Colombia. So, for me, it always made sense to portray someone from the segregated units, being that I have a Black father. I feel that it's so important to tell the stories that are so often overlooked when it comes to talking about American history.

Do you have a favorite New Jersey historic site or event? What makes it special for you?

One of my favorite New Jersey historical sites is probably the Old Barracks Museum in Trenton, because that's where I got started doing living history. It holds a special place in my heart for being the place where this awesome journey started for me. My other favorite historic site in NJ is Fort Lee Historic Park. It really is such a nice park to walk around, some of the original features of the fort

are still preserved, and the views of the Hudson river, NYC, and the George Washington Bridge from there are amazing, especially during golden hour or at night. I've spent plenty of time there, either by myself or with friends, and it's always an enjoyable experience.

What is the significance of the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution for you, and what do you think it represents for the country as a whole?

For me the significance of the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution is in the abundance of opportunities that I have to talk to my fellow Americans and continue to have conversations and educate people about a more complete story of this country. As with the history of any country in the world, there are both good and bad things that we can see when we look at the past. You sometimes hear people say that if you look back on history and you're filled with good feelings, then you don't really know your history. The history of the United States is no different. I feel like one of the most patriotic things that we can do is the celebrate the good parts of our history, but also have honest conversations about bad

parts. It's so important to confront the bad parts of our history, because in doing so, we can see that all the conflict and division we're currently experiencing is nothing new. If we can really acknowledge everything that has happened before and reconcile it, we can figure out how to move forward together for another 250 years.



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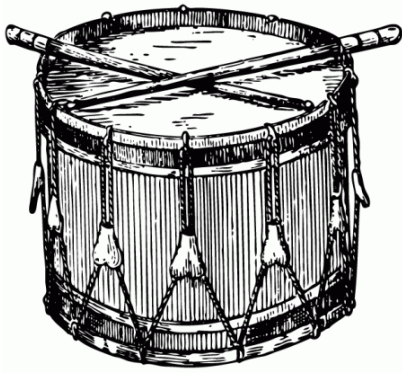
Meredith Barnes, from Hamilton.***What made you interested in living history, and how did you get involved?***

I've been involved in living history, historic sites, museums, and reenacting for more than 40 years. My parents and I love history. We all have our individual interests, but we can't help but include them in our story, too. (I know way too much history and lore about Bigfoot than one should know). Also living all over as an Army brat meant there was so much to explore.

We started out in Arizona with family friends, sharing the stories of Ft. Huachuca and the military cavalry unit. It was a complex history with the Apache Wars, territorial conflicts, and the expansion of the American West. I was even a tour guide in Tombstone, "the town too tough to die."

When we moved back to Washington, our focus shifted to the Oregon Trail and the establishment of European settlements on indigenous lands. We researched everything from the Gold Rush, trapping and trade routes, seafaring to mountaineering, and so much more. Then we shared those stories through our local museum, The Prairie House Museum, in Spanaway.

Although I majored in political science, I became an English and History teacher. I even lived as the caretaker of a historic 1890s mill pond house. So, for me, history is something I've lived, explored, and shared. My love of history has continued to evolve. Just when I think I've explored one area, I find another era, another person, or another story that sends me down a completely new rabbit hole. There is always another story waiting to be discovered.



Who do you portray, and/or what is your primary interest or role within reenactment? Why did you choose it?

I reenact from the 1770s through the 1940s. Right now, with the 250th anniversary, Revolutionary War reenacting and living history presentations are the priority. I portray both a soldier and a camp follower. Camp followers were women who traveled with the Continental Army, often as wives or relatives of soldiers. They cooked meals—mostly for officers, washed clothes (and clothes, and more clothes), mended uniforms, cared for children, and tended to sick and wounded soldiers. Thousands of women served in these roles, helping keep the Continental Army functioning on the march and in camp.

Do you have a favorite New Jersey historic site or event? What makes it special for you?

That's like choosing a favorite child. I greatly enjoy activities and programs that we have at Princeton Battlefield and Washington Crossing. The Battle of Monmouth is important as it was the first Revolutionary War reenactment I had visited. Fort Mott is where we have the military conflicts during the Victorian age, like the Boer War or Spanish-American War. And then there is... see? I like them all.



What is the significance of the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution for you, and what do you think it represents for the country as a whole?

That's a question that could probably have a hundred different answers. But for me, the 250th is really a chance to pause and think about where we came from, how we got here, and what it means to be part of this country today. Usually, we think about famous generals and politicians when we think of the Revolution. Instead, it was ordinary people making incredibly difficult choices. People had to decide what they believed in, what they were willing to risk, and how they were going to support their families and their communities.

I think those questions are still relevant today. What does it mean to be a good citizen? How can I make a difference? How do I stand up for someone else, especially when they may not have a voice? And really, what does it mean to be an American?

For me, it became even more personal when my mom started researching our Patriot ancestors for the DAR several years ago. We started digging through our family tree and found some great stories—family members who served, and others who supported the war effort in different ways. And the more we learned, the more curious I became.

I didn't just want to know their names or what they did. I wanted to know who they were. The name "Preserved Kellogg" is a whole story and line of history that ends with me. What was his everyday life like? What did he believe? And what must it have been like to make those choices when he had no idea of how everything was going to turn out?

That's really what I love about reenacting. It makes history personal. We can learn beyond what's in a textbook. We can tell those stories, connect them to our own families and communities, and hopefully get people to see that history isn't something that happened a long time ago to somebody else.

We're connected to it.

The 250th gives us a great opportunity to celebrate that history. But it's not just a matter of remembering, it's also a time that asks us to reflect on our future. Because we're not just celebrating the first 250 years. In our own way, we're helping write what comes next.

Stephen Pellegrini from Wyckoff.***What made you interested in living history, and how did you get involved?***

From an early age, history has inspired me. Peering into the past for answers about my identity, the society and world I live in, and a sense of meaning has always driven me as both a professional and an individual. My journey as a “living historian” is an important component of this passion for history and has allowed me to engage my historical interests

in novel and most importantly, tangible ways. The ability to hear, see, smell, and immerse myself in history typically confined to the black and white pages of a book is what makes reenacting so appealing as a hobby. Additionally, I see reenactment as a form of historical interpretation, a kind of scholarship that is, unfortunately, often dismissed or simply unnoticed by academic historians. While some of the nuance of historical reenactment may have been lost on me as a teenager, it was into this fascinating world that I first began to explore my budding interest in the history of the American War of Independence.

Who do you portray, and/or what is your primary interest or role within reenactment? Why did you choose it?

My introduction to the hobby was by means of a fellow classmate and his family. They had been long-time reenactors and had even made appearances in our middle school classrooms with musical and military demonstrations of the Revolution period. To say that these presentations made a lasting impression on me as a youngster would be an enormous

understatement! It wasn't long before I had "enlisted" in their reenactment group, the New Jersey Militia, Heard's Brigade. The unit's purpose is to portray and interpret the lives of Bergen County militiamen during the American Revolution, with impressions ranging from local civilians to military personnel. Being a Bergen County resident myself, the local focus of the group made my newfound hobby even more personal.

Do you have a favorite New Jersey historic site or event? What makes it special for you?

I had grown up down the road from The Hermitage in Ho-Ho-Kus, which is a site heavily imbued with Revolutionary War history. It was a frequent stop for General Washington throughout the War and was the marriage venue for none other than Aaron Burr. It continues to be one of my favorite New Jersey historical sites to this day.

What is the significance of the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution for you, and what do you think it represents for the country as a whole?

As with any historical anniversary, the 250th independence celebrations give us a renewed opportunity to reflect on where we have been as a country, where we are now, and where we wish to go. In and of itself, a date means little. However, when we consider history as the means by which we define our identity as a nation, contesting and interrogating the meaning of different people and events, such anniversaries take on an urgency and importance that we can't afford to ignore. History has always been manipulated for political or other ends. The world we live in now is overflowing with information and data, most of it meaningless noise. It is here that I believe history has the ability to insert substance and true understanding back into our national dialogue. We need to reengage in our "conversation" with the past and be open to the lessons it teaches us, especially if those lessons are uncomfortable or complex. The stakes are too high not to.

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The Battle of Trenton



It is not possible for this publication to serve as a thorough history of New Jersey in the American Revolution. Such an endeavor would fill a library and take several lifetimes. However, the Battle of Trenton could not go without particular recognition in this 250th Anniversary special of the “History and Heritage Spotlight” given that it represented the first significant victory General George

Washington had attained in the war so far. His greatest achievement up until this time had been to survive, keep the Continental Army intact, and maintain the resistance which had spread throughout the colonies south of the Canadian provinces, which remained loyal to the crown. In fact, they still do, to this day, and King Charles III made a historic state visit to the United States this year to

mark the occasion, meeting with the president, dignitaries, and addressing the Congress with the polish, good humor, wit, perspective, and respect for which the House of Windsor is internationally renowned.

It is a testament to how far our countries have come, and how history since independence has shaped international relations, that yesterday's foe is today's friend.



But back in 1776, today's friend was, indeed, the top worry of the commander in chief of the Continental Army. Even though the second year of the American Revolution had seen the publication of the Declaration of Independence, those words were just ink on parchment without military success

on the battlefield, as far as the rebel cause was concerned. The British had learned their painful lesson after the Battle of Bunker Hill just north of Boston in June of 1775. Their dear-bought victory had changed their tactics, adopting a more flexible posture compared to before. General Sir William Howe and his brother, Admiral Lord Howe, commanded the army and Royal Navy against their new target, New York.

The fleet which landed Crown forces on Staten Island for the invasion of Long Island was the largest expeditionary force Great Britain had yet dispatched in its history. Further, it was realized in 1775 that reinforcements would be needed from Europe. British agents were able to contract with the princes of several small Germanic states to lease their best regiments to serve the British. Originally, the Tsarina, Catherine the Great, had been approached to secure 20,000 Russian troops to send to the colonies, but the request was declined. Germany, however, had plenty of willing rulers. The majority of these troops were from Hesse-Cassel, and so all of these German-speaking troops—some 30,000 sent to America—came to be colloquially, if inaccurately, known as

"Hessians". In reality, these Germans were also from Hesse-Hanau, Brunswick, Ansbach, Anhalt-Zerbst, and Waldeck. But "Hessian" tended to cover them all. This force was principally commanded by Generals de Heister and von Knyphausen. The latter would assume command after the former's dismissal in 1777.

These troops were not "mercenaries" in the typical sense of the word. That is to say, they were not guns-for-hire in that they made a profit fighting for the highest bidder like the condottieri of Renaissance Italy or a modern private military contractor corporation today. These were, in fact, professional soldiers in their own regiments under their own flag who had been, as a unit, leased out to another country. In this case, Great Britain. They received the same pay as British soldiers and their government was to be compensated for the loss and replacement of any soldier. To label them as mercenaries, therefore, is inaccurate. The landgraf of Hesse-Cassel, one could say, was mercenary, but as far as his soldiers were concerned, it was business as usual but in a faraway campaign.

These Hessian forces joined the British in the invasion of Long Island

in the summer of 1776. Washington's forces made a dogged, but in the end, hopeless resistance against the re-trained, reinforced British army and their Hessian allies. Washington managed to escape capture only because of General Howe's slowness in following up on his victory. Moving north, into Westchester County, Washington made a stand at White Plains, where the British and Hessians once again defeated the Continental Army, but did not destroy it. Washington, again, had to flee.



Manhattan fell to the Hessians with the capture of Fort Washington near today's Fort Tryon. Across the Hudson River, Fort Lee was taken by the tenacious General Lord Cornwallis who chased after Washington through Bergen County. Skirmishes and delaying actions prevented Washington's army from being captured, and Washington himself who would have been arrested, and possibly hanged as a traitor.

Washington's retreat through New Jersey took him from Hackensack south-west to across the Delaware River into Pennsylvania as 1776 was drawing to a close. The British pursuit had ended and by the closing weeks of December, Hessian forces garrisoned the town of Trenton while another contingent of Hessians fought the New Jersey militia at Mount Holly.

For Washington, now surrounded by an army on the verge of implosion, with morale cratered after suffering a string of defeats and retreats since the summer, it seemed as though the war for independence might have ended almost as soon as it began. He knew that only a victory—some kind of victory—could restore faith in the cause and reassure the population that their endeavor was not, in fact, doomed. A plan of attack was formed for an audacious assault on Trenton which would take place on Christmas. If successful, Washington reasoned, then the gift of a battlefield victory would be crucial. Failure, however, could well spell the end of it all.

Trenton itself was not an especially important target. It was a small settlement, exposed, with only two major streets and an estimated 100 or so buildings. It was not strategically vital and, in fact, was very hard to

defend, having no walls or earthworks to speak of. Only the barracks, built in the 1750s during the French and Indian War, and now a functioning museum, was of any particular military note. What a successful attack would represent, however, was that victory was possible. The British and Hessians would not be invincible after all. The cause of independence would be reassured and legitimized through military victory, or snuffed out with defeat.

For a small town as an objective, the risk was enormous. This is why Washington used all possible stealth to achieve his crossing of the Delaware River, in the midst of a freezing winter, launching a two-pronged assault on the town under Generals Sullivan and Greene.

Contrary to popular myth—and the American Revolution is rife with myths, as it forms part of our national, founding mythos—the Hessian garrison was not drunk with Christmas revelry. Spies and defectors had made them aware that there was an attack coming. Reinforcements from the British deeper in New Jersey were unavailable. The commanding officer, Colonel Johann Rall, did not take advantage of the intelligence and consequently set up his garrison for disaster.

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The attack came the night of December 25th-26th. The well-planned assault cut off the avenues of escape the surprised Hessians could have taken, and cannons from the army wrought destruction on the German troops assembling in haste, making fighting retreats through the streets of Trenton. Attempts to dislodge the Americans failed and the three Hessian regiments present were shocked, battered, and surrendered. Colonel Rall, who had been in command, was fatally wounded in the fray and died the following day.

Washington and his men had rejoiced in their victory but did not stay long in Trenton, expecting a British counter-attack. After receiving the surrender of the Hessian forces, the Americans and their captives withdrew back into Pennsylvania. Spirits now surging, the moral effect of the news of Trenton would soon resound throughout the colonies. But the “Ten Crucial Days” as they came to be known were not yet done.



On January 2, 1777, Washington and the army returned to Trenton as General Cornwallis approached, as expected, from the direction of Princeton. A sharp and bloody action was fought at the Assunpink Creek and Cornwallis' force had been stymied. But Washington would not remain, choosing to advance to the north-east at night. To deceive his opponents, he left behind a small force with lit fires and making noise,

covering his withdrawal. When the British moved against Trenton the next morning, they found their enemy had given them the slip once again.

The Continental Army marched onto Princeton and encountered a small British force there on the morning of January 3. The redcoats, under the command of Lt. Colonel Mawhood, were met by General Mercer and his men. Mawhood's force broke the American contingent and Mercer was bayoneted multiple times. With militia faltering as Mercer's line began to fail, Washington was able to rally the force personally and bring more troops to bear.

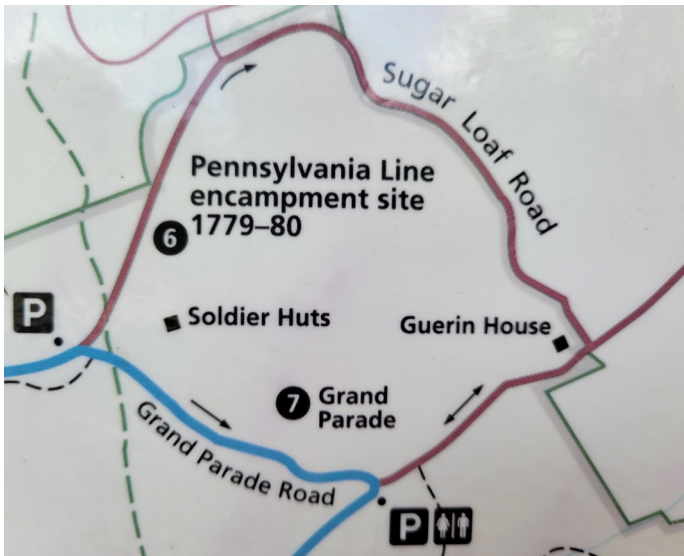
Mawhood's Britons put up a stiff fight but could not ultimately withstand the attack. British soldiers holding up in Nassau Hall were enticed to give up. The small but significant Battle of Princeton had been won.

After meeting defeat after defeat in 1776, with his army on the verge of disintegration, Washington had, within the span of a week and a half, scored three victories against the British and Hessians. As he moved into his winter quarters in Morristown, the American cause had surged. These were small battles in the grand scheme, with only a few thousand

troops on both sides deployed, but the effect was massive. The revolution had nearly been snuffed out in New Jersey, and in New Jersey, it was brought back from the brink. The war would continue until 1783, and the days ahead were without any guarantee of success for Washington. It would not be until 1781 in Virginia that American final victory was assured. But New Jersey, the Crossroads of the Revolution, had been and would continue to be the stage for some of the most dramatic and important scenes played out in the birth of the new nation.



The Hard Winter of 1779-1780 and British Invasion of New Jersey



One of Morris County's great Revolutionary War treasures can be found at Jockey Hollow. This expansive park of 1,300 acres actually encompasses the locations of two of George Washington's army encampments. The first was in 1777 following the Battle of Princeton. The second was during the "hard winter" of 1779-1780.

Most of the land in the area was owned by Henry Wick, whose house can be found in the park today. When the Continental Army encamped there in 1777, according to the National Parks Service, Washington forces were actually

quartered among the population with a storage depot built, dubbed Fort Nonsense. When they returned two years later, the situation was notably different from their first visitation, when they were riding high off their successes in defeating the Hessians at Trenton and the British at Princeton.



The Continental Army returned to Jockey Hollow because it was sufficiently far from British-controlled New York City that they would be safe from incursions, but also able to gather intelligence on the surrounding area. Today, the park has thick, verdant forests, but in 1779-1780, the ten-thousand-strong Continental Army was chopping

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down trees to build winter huts and keep warm during freezing conditions that pushed their endurance to the breaking point.

Morristown is often cited as a less famous but considerably harder experience than Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. The Continental Army faced privation with severe food shortages and a lack of adequate clothing. Officers also shared in the miseries of their men, quartered in cabins similar to the soldiers. About a hundred men died during that winter and are buried on the grounds. It is remarkable, to say the least, that the number was not higher, given the hardships these shivering, malnourished troops had to endure.

Morristown National Park Jockey Hollow is also historic in that it was the first national historic park in the National Parks Service, established as such in 1933.

There are 27 miles worth of trails built by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Depression. These trails cross through the park where outdoorsy visitors can check out the Visitor Center, replica soldiers' huts, the Wick House, where once stood Fort Nonsense, the Grand Parade grounds, and more. (There

are also parking lots if you'd prefer to drive!) Not far, one can also visit the Ford Mansion and Museum, which served as General Washington's Headquarters.



Morris County has a host of other historical and cultural gems worth spending time in. Macaulloch Hall Historical Museum and Gardens, Historic Speedwell, Fosterfields Living Historical Farm, Acorn Hall, The Morris Museum, the Schulyer-Hamilton House, the Frelinghuysen Arboretum, and Willow Hall to name a few.

The Continental Army returned to Jockey Hollow in December of 1779 and would stay until June 8, 1780. In the 18th Century, and prior, it was uncommon for armies to move during the winter months owing to the challenges of food and fuel supply as well as maneuvering in

bad weather. With no extensive network of paved roads, travel was not only difficult, but dangerous. This is partly why Washington's Christmas attack on Trenton in 1776 was such a surprise.

During the 1777 encampment, General Washington ordered his men and the people of the area to be inoculated against smallpox. Although they did not know what viruses were at the time, they did understand that smallpox presented a potentially devastating threat to soldier and civilian alike, a contagious, indiscriminate killer. Washington himself had suffered from smallpox when he was 19 and the experience possibly left him sterile. This may, in fact, be why the "Father of his Country" was never actually a father in the biological sense himself, although he had step-children from his wife, Martha.



In the 18th Century, there were only two known treatments for smallpox—quarantine or inoculation (which is different from vaccination, a science which would come about in the 1790s). Colonists were well aware of the dangers of smallpox for generations, and as it was, there was a smallpox epidemic ravaging the North American continent between 1775-1782, almost the whole scope of the American Revolution. From the British colonies of the Atlantic to the Spanish colonies along the Pacific, it is estimated that about 100,000 people died from smallpox during that time. Washington's decision to inoculate the army saved thousands of lives and prevented the disintegration of the Continental Army threatened not by British soldiers in red coats, but by microscopic enemies with no allegiance, principles, or ideology whatsoever.

The winter of 1779–1780 was a bitter cold one with heavy snowfalls. The harshness of the winter and the large number of soldiers meant that provisions quickly became scarce. Men fell unfit for duty. As mentioned, some died, many were discharged, some deserted. A log-cabin city was built, using the woods around them, to provide shelter against the elements.

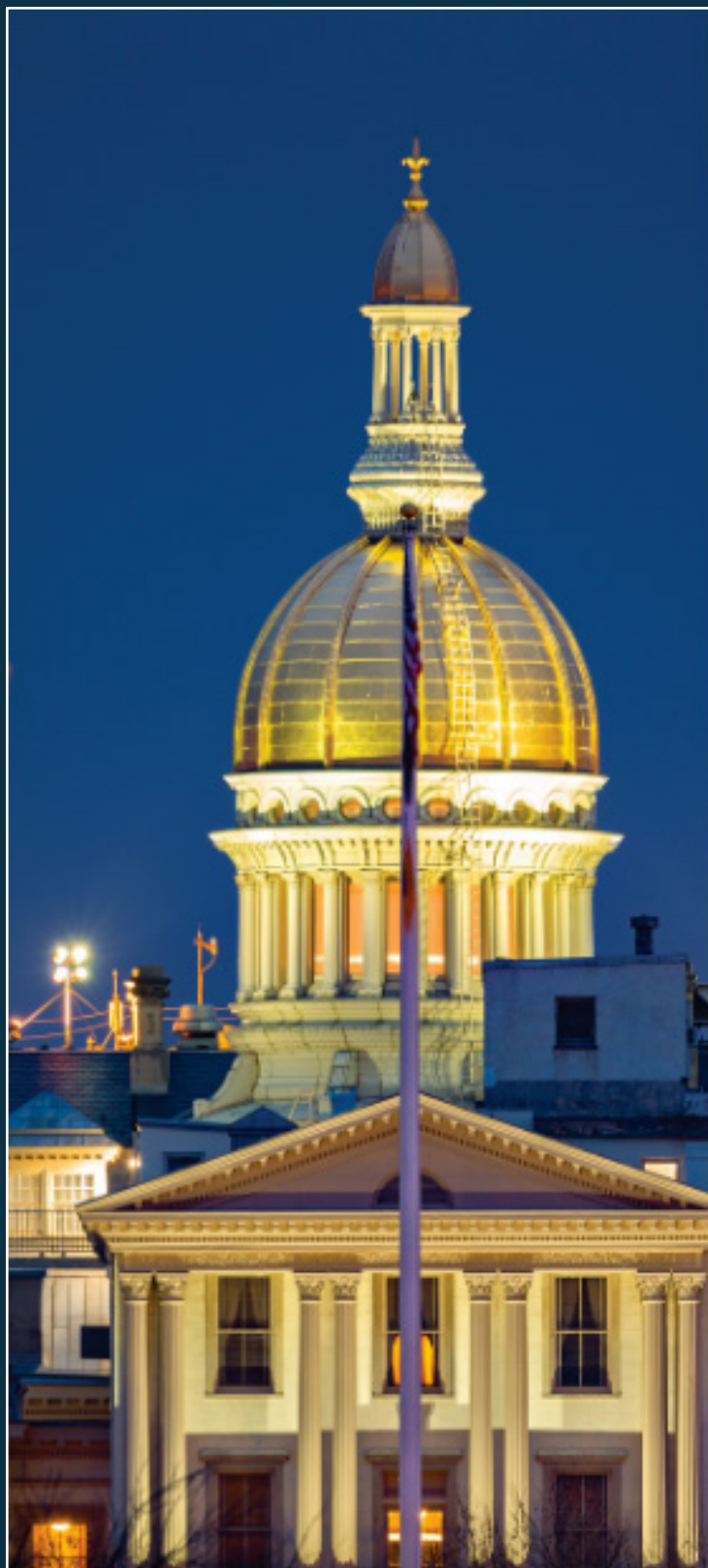


The National Parks Service made available a Christmas letter of December, 1779, General Nathanael Greene noted, “Many officers note their men are hutted by Christmas. The Army is quarter’d within three Miles of this place, in the usual way of hutting. Head Quarters is in this Town, at the Widow Fords, at the great white House at the North end of the place.... But there is a very different kind of Inhabitants in the place to what there was when you was here. They receive

us with coldness and provide for us with reluctance. The Army is in great distress for want of Provision and forage; owing to the great Departments of the Army being kept in a starvd condition for three or four Months past for want of money.”

Greene would note again, in January, that the snow was deep and the cold extreme. “Such weather as we have had, never did I feel. For six or eight days it has been so extremely cold, that there was no living abroad; the snow it is also very deep, and much drifted... the army has been cut off from its magazines, and been obliged to fast for several days together. We have been alternately out of meat and bread for eight or nine days past, and without either for three or four. The distress of the army has been exceedingly great from the weather, want of clothing and provisions. But the soldiers have borne it with great patience and fortitude.”





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From his Morristown position, Washington would learn of an unsuccessful winter raid against British-held Staten Island, whereafter discipline broke down resulting in looting by the New Jersey militiamen. Continental General Lord Stirling described their conduct as “shameful and merciless”.

In late January came the news that the British had successfully raided Elizabeth and Newark, crossing over from New York in a counter-attack.

On the verge of seeing the army collapse, Washington appealed to New Jersey public officials to implore locals to send provisions, a call which was answered and, at least temporarily, staved off disaster.

After the hard winter, Washington received the French ambassador at the Ford Mansion, as France had recognized and allied with the new United States in 1777. France had been slow to provide their troops and fleet, but had lent significant material and financial support. In May, Lafayette visited Washington, having returned from France, and brought news that French soldiers were on their way across the Atlantic. Conditions, however, remained dire at Jockey Hollow.



That same month, the Connecticut soldiers had reached their breaking point and mutinied. As one soldier noted in his diary, “We [were] venting our spleen at our country and government, then at our officers, and then at ourselves for our imbecility in staying there and starving for an ungrateful people who did not care what became of us, so they could enjoy themselves while we were keeping a cruel enemy from them... We were unwilling to desert the cause of our country, when in distress...”

Eleven mutineers were condemned to death, although all but one were pardoned in the end.

With the New York troops sent north, Washington and his staff considered an attack on the British. While they were planning, the British landed at Elizabeth and struck again at Connecticut Farms (Union). Washington rushed to oversee operations. With stiff fighting at the Rahway River, the British drive toward Morristown was ultimately stopped by a small but dogged resistance. They set fires within the town of Springfield and withdrew back to Staten Island.



Visiting the austere replica soldiers huts, originally built in the 1960s, gives a small sense of how brutal it must have been for the soldiers and officers of the Continental Army to survive the hard winter of 1779–1780. Morristown National Historic Park represents one of the most trying chapters of the American Revolution for the Continental Army, where weather, smallpox, starvation, and the British had nearly broken the then-five-year struggle for independence. But thanks to their strength, determination—and the people of New Jersey—they were able to survive and carry on with the cause, ultimately to victory.



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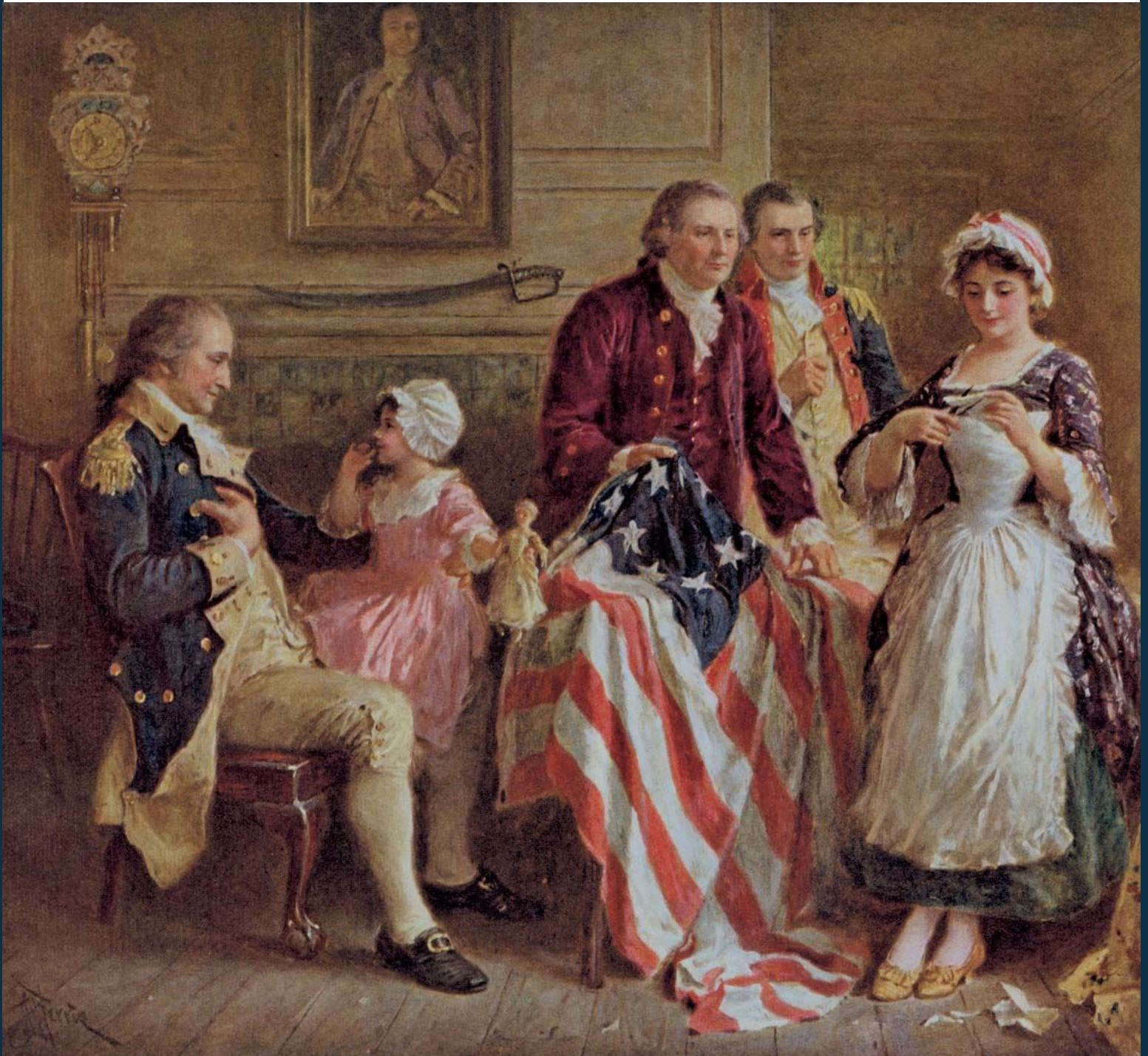
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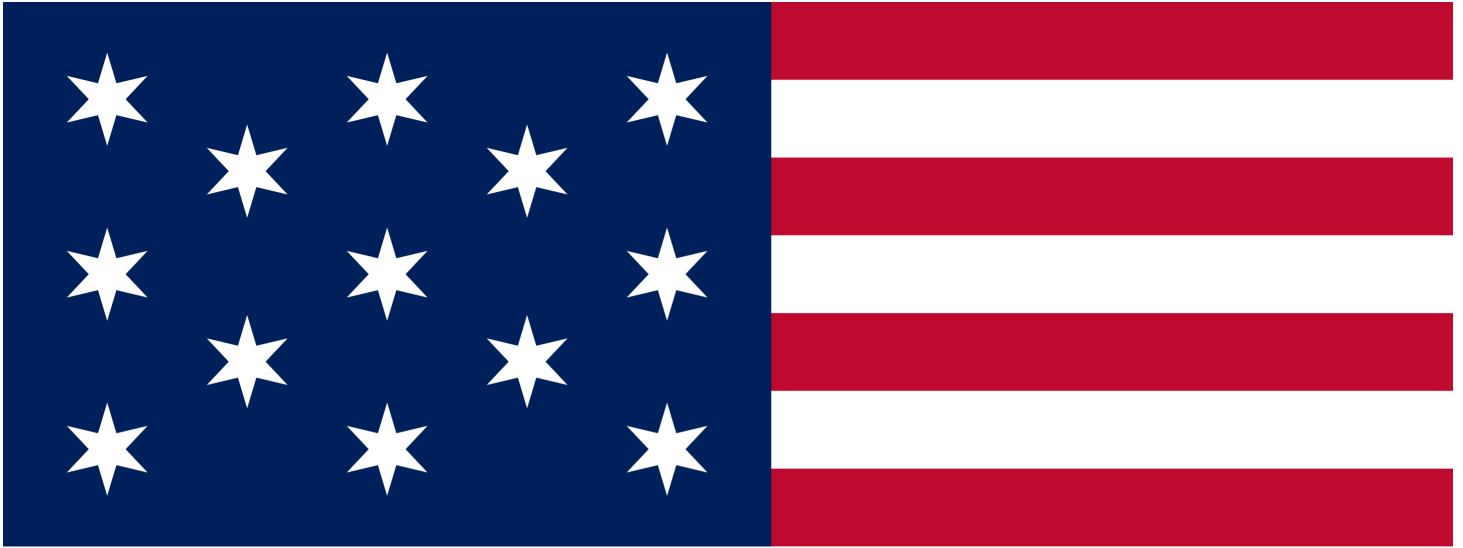
“You’re a Grand Old Flag, You’re a... Jersey-Made Flag?”





New Jersey's signers of the Declaration of Independence were Richard Stockton and John Witherspoon from Princeton, Francis Hopkinson from Bordentown, John Hart from Hopewell Township, and Abraham Clark from Rahway. But you may not have been aware that one of these men also is credited with designing one of first flags of these new United States. This person was Francis Hopkinson, a revolutionary Founder with an impressive resume, not the least of which included being an artist. With all due respect to Betsy Ross, the flag she purportedly made with its 13-stars in a circle within the blue canton is, according to historians, apocryphal at best—the stuff of 19th Century legend. She was contracted

to sew U.S. flags, but there's no documented evidence that she created that exact flag. The case for Hopkinson, however, is a little stronger. He helped design the Great Seal of the State of New Jersey and the Great Seal of the United States, among other things. Hopkinson submitted an invoice to Congress for designing a flag for the country and the navy, one which featured 13 white six-pointed stars on a blue canton, arranged in four rows, with 13 alternating red and white stripes. Previously, there was no universally acknowledged American flag. The Grand Union flag is believed to be the first "American Flag" as such, with 13 white and red horizontal stripes and the British Union in the upper canton. (Recall that outright independence from Great Britain was not necessarily an objective during the start of the revolution, with colonists demanding to assert their rights as Englishmen under Crown and Parliament. Full separation would come later.) The new American flag had been authorized by the Continental Congress in 1777, calling for the 13 stripes to remain and replace the British Union with 13 stars, representing the new states. But there were no specifications as to how the stars should be arranged or exactly what the stars should



look like. Therefore, many variations can be found during this early period. Historically, the closest known flag to Mrs. Ross' legendary design is the so-called Cowpens Flag, which has 12 stars in a circle with one in the center—and that flag is also of disputed authenticity to the period. To add further vexillological vexation, John Paul Jones' flag for his ship, the *Serapis*, even had blue stripes among the white and red. Hopkinson's bill listed charges for his drawings for several government and military designs, including the national flag and a flag for the navy. To his chagrin, his princely fee, purportedly in the amount of £2,700, was denied by Congress in 1780, with the justification that he was not the only person to submit such designs.

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Greenwich Tea Burning Monument

Most people would be surprised to know that South Jersey had its own version of the Boston Tea Party in 1774. A marker built in 1908 stands in this Cumberland County municipality as a memorial to a pre-revolutionary act of violence—or, one could say, burglary, theft and vandalism. When a British ship, the *Greyhound*,

sailed up the Cohansey River and had dropped off a large cargo of tea to be stored in the basement of a local loyalist, rebel-minded neighbors took notice. In short order, a group of angry colonists, in the style of the Bostonian Sons of Liberty dressed like Indians, broke into the basement, and carried off the tea. Rather than dump it in the water, as was done in Boston, the Greenwich men set the luxurious tea ablaze in protest of the tax.



The Hermitage

A prosperous 18th Century home which has multiple later additions found in Ho-Ho-Kus hosted notable figures such as George Washington, Aaron Burr, Alexander Hamilton, the Marquis de Lafayette, and future-president James Monroe. Home of Jacques Marcus Prevost, a Geneva-born officer in the British Army, and his wife, Theodosia Prevost, during the American Revolution, the Hermitage straddled contested territory between revolutionaries and loyalists. Thanks to Theodosia's skill in handling the ever-changing situation which affected Bergen County, she was able to protect her estate from both sides. Indeed, her own family had split loyalties during the war. At her invitation, Washington stayed at Mrs. Prevost's home for four days while the army was encamped in Paramus in June of 1778. Today, the home is a mix of 18th Century and 19th Century Gothic architecture, offering tours and a number of interactive programs throughout the year.



Monmouth Battlefield State Park

Just off State Route 33 in Manalapan, Monmouth Battlefield is preserved and an excellent visitors center offers a fantastic experience for those who want to learn more about the June 28, 1778, battle, where stifling Jersey summer heat and humidity were as much a danger to both sides as musketballs and cannons. While the battle itself might be considered tactically inconclusive, it was the last large battle fought in the north, and the Continental Army, having been trained by the Baron de Steuben while at Valley Forge, had proven itself a worthy and capable fighting force. Some 600 or more casualties littered the field by the end of the battle, where both sides were battered and bloodied, broiling in the summer sun. The British decided to withdraw their force toward New York, essentially leaving New Jersey to Washington for the first time. The battlefield today is a peaceful and tranquil place, with actively cultivated farmland, trails for hikers and equestrians, and nature watchers. Each June, the 1778 battle is recreated by historical reenactors for visitors to get an idea of what the clash could have looked like. Expect a big show for their 250th anniversary in 2028.



Washington Rock State Park

Found in Watchung, Somerset County, this little park tucked into suburbia offers a sweeping view from the Watchung Mountains. With a short trail and pleasant picnicking today, this position served a strategic purpose in the Revolution. When Washington left Morristown in May of '77 to the Watchung Mountains, he was able to monitor the British base at New Brunswick, where General Howe was building up a force to try to draw Washington in a general battle. From here, Washington could also observe Perth Amboy and the Hudson, where the Royal Navy was anchored, and see whether or not the British were going to make a move up the river, or invade further into New Jersey. His goal was to protect Philadelphia, and from his mountain vantage point, Washington could sweep down on the British in response to whichever movements they made. The park itself is a historic one, maintained by Somerset County, because is also one of the earliest New Jersey State Parks, established in 1913.



New Bridge Landing and Fort Lee Historical Park

These two are listed together because, in many ways, their stories are entwined. When the British had secured New York City and pursued Washington across New Jersey, they ascended the palisades. Fort Lee was taken and the advance continued across Bergen County. The armies needed to cross the Hackensack River and did so at New Bridge. It was here that the Continental Army fought a delaying action in November of 1776, allowing Washington to get away with his force and head south-west toward safety. Fort Lee Historic Park today features a top-tier museum and visitor center, with a recreated blockhouse and heavy cannons overlooking the Hudson River. New Bridge Landing, at the junction of Hackensack, Teaneck, and New Milford, is the seat of the Bergen County Historical Society and features several period structures which were collected and are preserved on site. The largest of the buildings was gifted to General the Baron de Steuben, who lived there for a time. The other structures include the Campbell-Christie House (built just before the revolution) with a working out-kitchen in the rear, the late 18th Century Demarest House, and the late 19th Century Westervelt-Thomas Barn. There are plans in place to build a new, up-to-date museum and visitor center on the property to care for, exhibit, and interpret the site's many artifacts. Each November, both Fort Lee and New Bridge Landing host a reenactment of the British invasion and subsequent "Retreat to Victory" including a skirmish over "The Bridge That Saved a Nation." When visiting, one must bear in mind that the original mid-18th Century bridge is gone, the current steel and wood bridge being built in the late 19th Century.



Clarke House at Princeton Battlefield

If you start your 10 Crucial Days tour with the Old Barracks Museum in Trenton (touched on in the 2024 History and Heritage Spotlight), leave 1776 behind and enter 1777 at Princeton Battlefield State Park maintained by the Princeton Battlefield Society. The home of Thomas Clarke, a Quaker farmer whose home served as a makeshift hospital after the battle, still stands, preserved. Dr. Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and military surgeon, organized the locals to attend to the wounded American, British, and Hessian soldiers without discrimination. It was in the Clarke House that General Hugh Mercer died of his wounds, and it is in his memory Mercer County is named. Today, the house and the surrounding battlefield remain witnesses to the battle which ensured that the warring colonies knew victory over the British was possible.

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Author's Note

As mentioned before, it is impossible to cover even a meaningful fraction of everything related to the American Revolution in New Jersey in this 3rd edition of the History and Heritage Spotlight. This publication serves only to offer a sample of the rich history and heritage of the Garden State. The 250th anniversary of the American Revolution neither begins nor ends in 2026. What started last year will continue to 2033, and future Spotlights will continue to shine some light on New Jersey during the Revolution, along with the state's other historical eras and cultural treasures. It is the writer's hope that this publication may inspire its readers to reflect upon and visit some of the wonderful New Jersey sites and learn the stories which helped write our past, build our present, and shape our future.

—John Van Vliet

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