

YESTERDAY'S
NEWS

JERSEY JOURNEYS

PUBLISHED BY NEW JERSEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY · 52 PARK PLACE, NEWARK, NEW JERSEY 07102

Two New Jersey Cities During the Revolutionary War

People living in New Jersey during the Revolutionary War had a difficult time. It was a time of decision—are you loyal to your king or a patriot fighting for an independent country? It was a time when your own town—the place you call home—might be the winter headquarters for the new American army or the site where a battle would be fought.

Because of its important geographic position between New York City and Philadelphia, both British and American forces wanted to gain control of New Jersey. The British thought that if they could control New Jersey, they could split the colonies in two. Because of this, more battles were fought in New Jersey than in any other state of the new country.

General George Washington spent a quarter of his time as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army in New Jersey and moved his army back and forth across the state four times. He won the first critical victories of



The Battle of Princeton, drawn by Alonzo Chappel, engraved by G.C. Finden. Photograph from the New Jersey Historical Society Collections.

the Revolution in Trenton and Princeton and spent the winters of 1777 and 1779–1780 in Morristown.

In 1776, with the situation looking bleak for the rebellion, and because British troops were in the state, many New Jerseyans remained loyal to the king. As victories for the Americans were achieved and American troops occupied towns and cities of New Jersey, townspeople now swore allegiance to the new nation and joined local militias.

This issue of *Jersey Jour-*

neys focuses on the tale of two cities of New Jersey (then just towns)—Princeton and Morristown—and how events that took place there were vital to the Revolution succeeding, and how life was changed for the residents of those towns. ★

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Morale is Boosted: Victory at Princeton

Princeton was settled in the late 17th century, and was named in honor of Prince William of Orange and Nassau. In 1756 the College of New Jersey—now Princeton University—was established. The college operated out of Nassau Hall, the largest academic building in the colonies.

Princeton was also the site of one of the first critical victories of the Revolution for George Washington and the American forces, and it couldn't have come a moment too soon. Support for the Revolution was at an all-time low and many people didn't think the undisciplined American army could ever match the British army.

The battle fought in Princeton on January 3, 1777 changed Americans' minds about its army. British forces under General Charles Cornwallis moved to attack General Washington's army. Washington, realizing what the British were planning, had his army move secretly around the enemy on January 2. The next morning Washington reached Princeton, where he defeated the British troops. Outmaneuvered, Cornwallis was now ordered to abandon New Jersey, except for a line from Perth Amboy to New Brunswick. For a few days after the battle there were no troops of either side in Princeton, then, in late January, a large group of American troops came to occupy the town.

Washington with his victories had changed the military and political landscape of New Jersey and the emerging nation. The Revolution could continue, morale

was improving, and people again began to believe in their ability to win their independence. Many New Jerseyans volunteered for the state militia and the new American authority issued orders about the conduct of private citizens with more confidence.

Earlier, when the British were chasing Washington's army, 2,703 New Jerseyans formally declared their loyalty to the King. But now with Washington in control of most of New Jersey, it was his turn to demand in the name of the United States that "those who had accepted the British protections should withdraw within the enemy's lines, or take the oath of allegiance to the United States of America." So the people of

Princeton as well as those of most of New Jersey had to decide which side to support. In Princeton, most people took the oath to America.

Princeton remained a military post for the rest of the war. The college and Presbyterian Church were used as barracks and as a hospital at different times during the war. Can you imagine what it would be like to have an army staying in your town? Later, during the summer of 1783, the Continental Congress met in Nassau Hall, making Princeton the country's capital for four months. ★

Source: *History of Princeton and Its Institutions* by John Frelinghuysen Hageman; J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1879.

LOYALISTS WRITE IN CODE

During the war, many people of New Jersey were loyalists—they were loyal to England. They wrote letters in cipher to protect themselves from the Revolutionaries. The following is a copy of a letter from a well-known Tory and its interpretation from the book *Lossing's Field Book of the Revolution*.

+##108C0 #*6 6708 * 67+078
CLINTON HAS SENT A SECRET

7Axc7±181C0 EX 8#7 #E±6C0 8C
EXPEDITION UP THE HUDSON TO

10870+7x8 X*6#10#8C0
INTERCEPT WASHINGTON.

A = *	F = L	K = V	P = X	U = E	Y = U
B = #	G = H	L = ##	Q = Z	V = 9	Z = a
C = +	H = #	M = 4	R = 0	W = X	? = =
D = ±	I = 1	N = 0	S = 6	X = Δ	
E = 7	J = ^	O = C	T = 8		

Can you figure out this message using the cipher alphabet?

8#767 *07 8#7 81476 8#*8
800 4706 6FE##6

Life in Morristown: The Military Capital of the Revolution

Prior to the Revolutionary War, Morristown was a village of only a few hundred residents, with some 51 buildings clustered around a typical green or square. Most of the residents were farmers descended from New Englanders. According to a German officer, Morristown also had “many families of free blacks who occupy good houses, have means, and live entirely in the style of the other inhabitants.” All these townspeople had no idea that during two different winters—1777 and 1779–1780—Morristown would be the “military capital of the Revolution.” They would share their home and sometimes their food, with the American army.

In a letter from Mrs. Martha Daingerfield Bland of Virginia to her sister-in-law, she describes her visit to Morristown in 1777: “I found Morris a very clever little village, situated in a most beautiful valley at the foot of 5 mountains. It has three houses with steeples which give it a consequential look. It has two families—refugees from New York in it otherwise it is inhabited by the errentest rusticks you ever beheld. . . . The most inhospitable mortals breathing you can get nothing from them but ‘dreadful good water’ as they term everything that is good . . . desperate and dreadfull are their favorite words . . . you’d laugh to hear them talk.”

Located only 30 miles away from New York—which from 1776 on was the main British stronghold in the North—Morristown was protected on the east by the



During the bitter winter of 1779–1780, General George Washington used the Ford Mansion as his headquarters. The Mansion is part of the Morristown National Historical Park. *New Jersey Historical Society Collections*

Watchung Mountains. George Washington knew that he could keep his lines of communication safely behind these hills, watch the British for any movement in New York, guard the roads that connected New England and Pennsylvania, and be ready to move troops with speed to any threatened point.

The British and their Hessian mercenaries who had entered New Jersey to put down the Revolution had been brutal. They destroyed homes, farms, and stole and looted wantonly; they saw little difference between loyalist and rebel and treated them the same. This harsh experience worked against the British later as New Jerseyans felt they’d be safer with local leaders than trust the British to protect them.

In the winter of 1779–1780 Washington made his headquarters at the Ford Mansion. Theodocia Ford, the widow of Colonel Jack Ford, and her five young chil-

dren stayed in two rooms of the mansion while Washington and his staff took over the rest. His wife Martha came from Virginia in late December. Washington and his wife often rode out around town. Mrs. Bland describes Washington as follows: “Now let me speak of our Noble and Agreeable Commander (for he commands both Sexes) one by his Excellent Skill in Military Matters the other by his ability politeness and attention we visit them twice or three times a week by particular invitation.” Dr. James Thacher, writing during the winter of 1779–1780 said, “The personal appearance of our commander in chief is that of the perfect gentleman and accomplished warrior.”

Balls were given to keep up the morale of soldiers and townspeople alike. Washington and 34 officers and a number of the town’s ladies and wives of officers would be in attendance, among

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them Governor Livingston's daughters. No doubt this was good for morale as Lt. James McMichael commented, "The young ladies here are very fond of the soldiers, but much more so of officers."

But for many soldiers the winter of 1779-1780 in Morristown was the most trying time of their lives. That winter may have been the most severe one of the 18th century, with 28 snowfalls recorded from November to April. The ice was so thick on the Hudson River that artillery could be driven across. Snow was 4 to 6 feet deep in camp. Food, blankets, and clothing were in even shorter supply than at Valley Forge.

Dr. James Thacher, a Continental army surgeon, described

the conditions at Morristown as follows: "Dec. 1779: . . . on the 14th we reached this wilderness, where we are to build log-huts for winter-quarters. The snow of the ground is about two feet deep, and the weather is extremely cold; the soldiers are destitute of both tents and blankets, and some of them are actually barefooted and almost naked. . . . our only food is miserable fresh beef, without bread, salt or vegetables . . ."

With the situation growing worse and no food or other supplies arriving from the commissary general, Washington wrote to the New Jersey magistrates to ask the state's citizens to help the army in this time of need. Dr. Thacher writes of the response, "It is honorable to the magistrates

and people of Jersey, that they have cheerfully complied with the requisition, and furnished for the present an ample supply, and have thus probably saved the army from destruction."

The people of Morristown faced other difficulties that winter. Because of the miserable conditions under which the soldiers lived, some of them stole sheep, poultry, pigs and even cattle from nearby farmers. It no doubt embarrassed Washington that after the citizens had helped supply the army, he then had to deal with this behavior from some of his troops. He was severe in the punishments ordered, which included public whippings and even death. ★

DID YOU KNOW . . .

that the Society has a Hepplewhite-style mahogany side table on which it is said George Washington and Lafayette played cards? It belonged to Governor Mahlon Dickerson (1770-1853) and was donated by his grandnephew, Frederick A. Canfield, a trustee of the Society from 1897-1926.

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE SOCIETY

Come visit the New Jersey Historical Society at 52 Park Place in downtown Newark.

Sat., Nov. 6, 1999; 1:00 p.m. and 2:30 p.m.

Sounds of the Past—Visit the exhibition *History's Mysteries* and discover Thomas Edison's connections to music and CDs.

Sat., Nov. 13, 1999; 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Mystery Game Box: Self-Guided Activity—Discover the people and events of this building's mysterious past. Use the clues you uncover with the

help of the Society's collections and exhibitions.

Sat., Nov. 20, 1999; 1:00 p.m. and 2:30 p.m.

Exploring New Jersey Snapshots—Discover the past and present of one NJ industry. Draw a picture of an invention that you think will be manufactured in the new millennium.

Sat., Nov. 27, 1999; 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Mystery Game Box: Self-Guided Activity—Discover the people and events of this building's mysterious past. Use the clues you uncover with the help of the Society's collections and exhibitions.

Schedule subject to change; for updated information, call (973) 596-8500, and press "3."

NJHS Hours

Office hours: Mon.-Fri., 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

Public hours: Tues.-Sat., 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

Library hours: Tues.-Sat., 12 p.m.-5 p.m.

Closed Sunday and Monday

Admission to the Society is free.

For more information on Education Programs for grades Pre-K-12, after school and scout groups, family and adult programs, and Teachers' Services at the Society, please call the Education Department at (973) 596-8500.

READ ALL ABOUT IT!

The 18 Penny Goose. By Sally M. Walker, Harpercollins, 1999. In 1778 a young girl must flee her New Jersey farm as

British soldiers raid it for food. Based on a true story; watercolor illustrations help show life in a war town. Reading level: Grades 2 and up.

The New Jersey Colony. By Dennis Brindell Fradin. Children's Press, 1991. Primary sources such as maps and drawings are used to illustrate the early history of the state. Reading level: Grades 5 and up.

To order a subscription to *Jersey Journeys* call (973) 596-8500 and press "0."

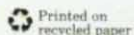
Costs: Large classroom subscription (35 copies per issue, one Teacher's Guide) \$65. Small classroom subscription (25 copies per issue, one Teacher's Guide) \$50. Annual resource packet (2 copies per issue, mailed at year-end) \$25. Individual subscription (1 copy) \$10.

REVOLUTIONARY RETORTS

Ci•pher	a message in code
Ma•gis•trate	an official entrusted with administration of the laws
Mer•ce•nar•ies	soldiers hired into foreign service
Mor•ale	a sense of common purpose with respect to a group
To•ry	an American upholding the cause of the British Crown against supporters of colonial independence during the American Revolution



Written by Susan Bernstein
Designed by
Font & Center Press
New Jersey Historical Society
52 Park Place
Newark, New Jersey 07102
973-596-8500



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