

In Bergen's Attic

Greetings: The sky cleared on Sunday and the sun shone brightly through the dogwood blossoms, just in time for our celebration of the old Jersey Dutch vernal festival of Pinkster! This old-time holiday lent its name to the native azalea of fragrant salmon flowers, which were plenty in evidence on tables in the Steuben House, thanks to our curator **Andrew Anderson**.

President's Message

the dogwood blossoms, just

interesting interview with the head of our volunteer interpreters, **Denise Piccino**, brought out a wonderful crowd. As if that wasn't enough Denise was again extensively quoted in a *Record* article on the following day, headlined:

This issue recalls the events of 1780 in Bergen County as part of our ongoing commemoration of the 225th Anniversary of the Revolution.



“May begins with a Dutch treat at River Edge Pinkster Festival.”

The Art Center of Northern NJ presented a fine art show on the grounds. Thanks to all the volunteers who helped make this a successful event.

A special thanks to Past President **Tim Adriance** for the wealth of well-told historical information presented on his Bus Tour through Bergen County.

The outstanding coverage in the *Record*, which featured a color photo of our Maypole dancers on the front page of the *Living Section* and an

Thanks also to Vice-President **Deb Fisk** for the arrangements and publicity! Now it's all aboard for the Meerwald and some fine Hudson River sailing!

Our Treasurer, **Sherri-Lee Mix**, has moved away and we thank her for her valuable contribution of time and talent over the past year. Of course, we can not leave this office of great trust and responsibility unfilled, even briefly, so we will gratefully consider any and every offer of service, suggestion or recommendation. If you know someone who is willing and able (or are willing to serve yourself), then please contact us! It would be best to have a candidate by

BCHS Annual Luncheon
Limited Seating • Please See Insert
or Visit Our Website

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the time of our Annual Luncheon, for the approval of the membership.

With one more fascinating lecture to go, on May 19th, I want to thank Past-President **John Heffernan** for the ongoing excellence of our Lecture Series. We also thank those who contribute refreshments. Our last lecture of the season will feature **Glenn Corbett**, Captain of the Waldick Fire Department and Assistant Professor of Fire Science at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City. He will speak on the *Great Paterson Fire of 1902*.

We are presently planning our September lecture, to be held in the Steuben House to coincide with the 225th Anniversary of General Washington's Headquarters there during the Steenrapie Encampment. Past-President **Todd Braisted** is working up some of his outstanding research relevant to that event and we also will hear from our new curator, **Andrew Anderson**, who is working on Washington's correspondence from that period of time. We hope to coordinate the event with the County of Bergen's dedication of a historic marker at the Washington Spring in Van Saun and a restoration of the Soldiers Hill marker, which was lost some years ago from its post on Kinderkamack Road. We will keep you updated!

Thanks also to **Denise and Elizabeth Piccino** and her corps of interpreters, who keep New Bridge Landing alive! And to **Nancy Morrison** and our Library Committee for their tremendous efforts in keeping that valuable resource available to researchers! I also want to thank **Gail Morse** for her service as Membership Chairwoman. Fortunately, Trustee **Jack Goudsward** has agreed to take over the upkeep of our Membership Rolls. As we all know, **Marie and Bill Ruggerio**

are the pleasant faces and hard workers behind our gift shop counter! Indeed, thanks to everyone who gives of their time and energy to keep the good work of this organization moving forward.

We have our fingers crossed that summer will bring word of further developments to Historic



New BridgeLanding, so stay tuned. We are presently very grateful to **Assemblywoman Loretta Weinberg** for securing a \$75,000 Cultural Grant that will allow us to remove the former kitchen, make improvements to the bathroom, and to repair and restore some of the original interior fabric of the Steuben House, especially in the rear rooms. We are working towards the day when this part of the house, previously occupied by the

As you might expect nowadays, people often come into contact with our Society through the website. To date, our web page has received 62,000 hits!

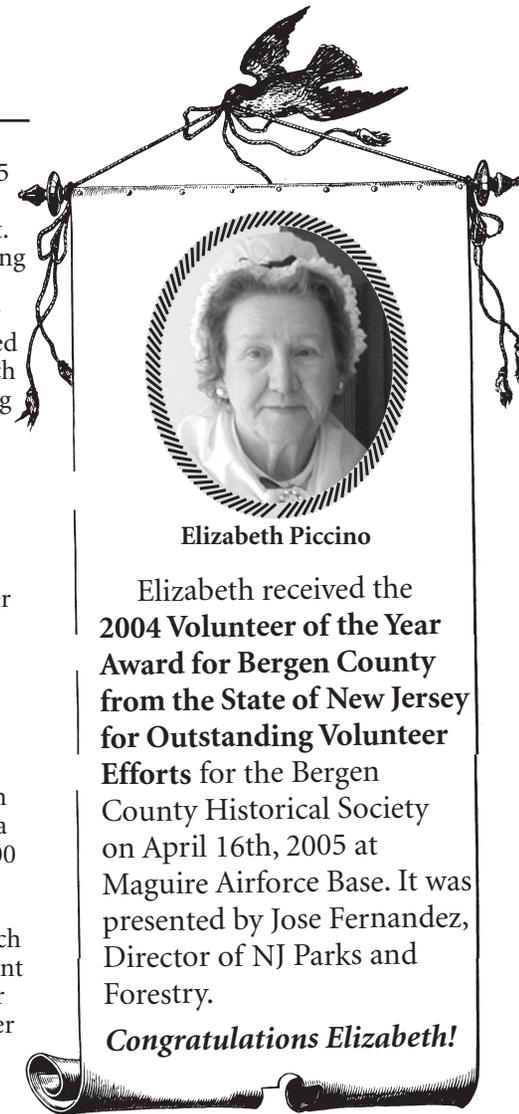
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A CENTURY AGO

by Kevin Wright

The Hackensack River brickyards slowly returned to life in late April 1905 and were soon ready to ship the first brick of the season's burning to market. Prices were still very good, though falling gradually.

Bergen County residents, especially those interested in real estate, applauded the progress of the tunnel system, which extended the railroads then terminating in Jersey City under the Hudson River and into New York City. William G. McAdoo, president of the New York & New Jersey Railroad Company and the Manhattan Railroad Company, succeeded in connecting the business centers of Manhattan by subways under the streets and by tunnels under the Hudson River to New Jersey. The first tunnel under the river, extending from the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad yards in Jersey City to the foot of Morton Street, New York, was completed on March 11, 1905, at which time a parallel tube had been built for a distance of 4,400 feet, leaving only 1,300 feet to be completed. The approach on the New York side was completed to a point near the intersection of Greenwich and Christopher Streets. From that point the line would cross under Christopher Street to Sixth Avenue and thence under Ninth Street to a connection with the subway at Astor Place. It would also be extended under Sixth Avenue from Eighth Street to Thirty-third Street, with stations at intermediate points. On the New Jersey side, the line was to be extended from the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad station in Hoboken into the Erie Railroad station at the foot of Pavonia Avenue. Work also began on two tunnels to be built by the Hudson & Manhattan Railroad Company, connecting the Pennsylvania Railroad station in Jersey City with a large terminal to be built on the west side of Church Street, between



Cortlandt and Fulton Streets, in New York. The shaft for these tunnels was being sunk on the Jersey side.

William Blair, of Kinderkamack Road in River Edge, one of Bergen County's oldest and best-known citizens, died May 8, 1905, aged 92 years. He was born July 4, 1812, at 47 Robinson Street (later known as Park Place), New York, while his father was an officer in the United States Artillery, stationed at Harlem Heights. William Blair served his time

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with the New York National Guard under Colonel Stevens. He was a sail maker by trade. He was very regular in his habits and ridiculed an afternoon nap, going to bed at sunset after arising at dawn. He was survived by two daughters and one son, James Blair, who conducted the sail making business in New York.

On May 8, 1905, the Riverside Board of Education conducted a public hearing in response to a petition signed by citizens of Cherry Hill, which raised charges against Miss Carolyn Welanitz, the school marm of the Cherry Hill School. Mr. Clark, Mrs. Burgess, Mr. and Mrs. Plaget and William Ehret gave testimony to support their charges of careless supervision of lesson papers. In her response, Miss Welanitz acknowledged that a thirteen-year-old scholar examined and graded the lesson papers. She also acknowledged that she thought that no one teacher could handle thirty pupils apportioned among eight grades and do justice to them all. In William Ehret's case, he withdrew his four children from the Cherry Hill School for lack of progress and sent them to River Edge, where they advanced in their studies. The defense against Ehret's charge was that the Ehret children did not attend school regularly, the citation being thirty times absent out of forty school days. When asked why she hadn't informed their parents, the school marm responded that she wasn't the truant officer and that "the children told me they were working." The Board concluded that the charges had not been sustained. The Board of Education re-engaged Miss Carolyn Welanitz as principal of the Cherry Hill School in May 1905.

As of June 1, 1905, every automobile had to display a State license number, in front and back, in figures four inches high and half an inch wide. Licenses were obtained by application to the Secretary of State with a registration fee of one dollar. Vehicles were allowed to maintain a rate of speed of a mile in three minutes.

BCHS High School Senior Scholarship

We have 2 high school seniors we are honoring this year for years of dedication as volunteer interpreters with the presentation of a \$100 scholarship award to each.

*Our Congratulations and Best Wishes for a Bright Future to
Meghan Azzaro
and
Sarah Oldfield.*

Van Orden, Hopper & Mueller, of Dumont, advertised as manufacturers of "Concrete Blocks" in *The Bergen Democrat* on June 2, 1905.

George Held, of River Edge, became the proud owner of a new phonograph in July 1905, which supposedly could be heard at a distance of two miles when weather conditions were favorable. An automobile invented by Walter Christie, who was born in the Campbell-Christie Homestead in New Milford, equaled the world's record for gasoline cars on a circular track at Morris Park in July 1905, doing a mile in 51.15 seconds. He also went a mile, timed by the same timers, in 49 seconds, driving his car only in the stretches and coasting around the turns. Walter Christie held the American record for an American car traveling on the straight-away and planned to go against the world's straight-away record very soon.

According to the 1905 State Census, the population of Bergen County reached 100,085, having risen by 30 percent from 78,441 in 1900. In September 1905, farmers reported a profitable harvest. September also brought an increase of 10¢ per ton in the price of coal. Harry L. Benedict, who took over the general store on the east side of the New Bridge, formerly occupied by the late Abram H. Leggett,

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When Was the Last Time You Visited the Steuben House?

Steuben House curator **Andrew Anderson** extends an open invitation to all Bergen County Historical Society members to stop by for a tour of the building and to revisit the museum collections of the Bergen County Historical Society.

The Steuben House, constructed by Jan Zabriskie in 1752 and named in honor of **Curator's Corner** Major General Baron von Steuben, Inspector General of the Continental Army, is furnished with artifacts from the collection of the Bergen County Historical Society. These artifacts represent items made and used in Bergen County during the 18th and 19th centuries. Three rooms are open to the public and arranged as a collection-based historic house museum. The Steuben House is located along the Hackensack River in New Bridge Landing Park, on the east end of Main Street in River Edge.

The Steuben House is a State Historic Site owned and staffed by the DEP Division of Parks and Forestry. Located in New Bridge Landing Park adjacent to the Cambell-Christie House, it displays the museum collection of the Bergen County Historical Society. As the Resource Interpretive Specialist assigned to the Steuben House, Andrew Anderson maintains the Steuben House and interprets the building and artifacts to visitors, schools groups and organizations.

Although the Steuben House is owned and operated by the State, its life-blood is the membership of the Bergen County Historical Society. Volunteers are always needed to assist with interpretation during events like Pinkster, the upcoming 225th Anniversary of Washington's Headquarters at New Bridge Landing, the Colonial Christmas Concerts and Tavern Nights, and Washington's Birthday Celebration.

The Steuben House is open Wednesday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to noon and 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., and Sunday afternoons from 2:00 to 5:00. It is advisable to call ahead at 201-487-1739 to confirm the museum is open or to schedule a group tour, as the building is occasionally closed for State holidays, meetings and training.

Submitted by **Andrew Anderson**, Steuben House Curator.



DAR visit to the Steuben House in 1922

A Revolutionary War Massacre at the Steuben House

by Kevin Wright

At the beginning of the Revolutionary War not every American was eager to break free from the British Empire or to overthrow a monarchical government with which they were long familiar. Many feared the confusion and lawlessness they thought would follow an attempt at colonial self-government. With the start of a shooting war, the two most prominent citizens of New Bridge in Bergen County decided to remain loyal to the British Crown and to help in putting down what they regarded as dangerous treason.

Doctor Abraham Van Buskirk resided in a house that stood in what is now Brett Park, Teaneck, on the opposite side of Old New Bridge Road from where the New Bridge Inn now stands. In 1775, with the consent of British agents, he apparently was chosen to represent Bergen County in the Provincial Congress of New Jersey, but soon resigned. After the British army climbed the Palisades on November 20, 1776, and marched on Fort Lee, Abraham Van Buskirk came out of hiding and accepted the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the New Jersey Volunteers, a Loyalist regiment. Across the river, in a twelve-room stone mansion on the west bank, lived Jan Zabriskie, a wealthy miller and merchant. He too opposed American independence and assisted the British army.

On December 14, 1776, General Heath led 600 American soldiers from Tappan to occupy the village of Hackensack. He captured fifty Tories and several boats loaded with household furnishings and supplies. The troops found fifty barrels of flour, several

casks of rum and other supplies at Colonel Van Buskirk's house at New Bridge. During the raid, John Zabriskie walked over from his residence and began writing down the names of the American officers on a piece of paper. He sent the information that evening to British headquarters in New York City, but his servant was recognized by a young student who had attended school in the Academy at New Bridge, located at the intersection of River Road and Riverview Avenue on the knoll overlooking Abraham Van Buskirk's house. On orders of the New Jersey Committee of Safety, Jan Zabriskie was arrested in July 1777 and accused of aiding the enemy. He fled to the protection of the British army in Manhattan and the State of New Jersey confiscated his house and lands in January 1780. Throughout the war, the Zabriskie mansion at New Bridge was used as a fort to defend the bridge, as a military headquarters, as an intelligence gathering post and a militia outpost to protect the neighborhood and to sound the alarm at the enemy's approach. The armies of both sides camped at New Bridge several times during the war and several skirmishes were fought in and around the dwelling.

Perhaps one of the most interesting and little known skirmishes of the Revolutionary War happened in the Zabriskie-Steuben House at New Bridge in May 1780. The correspondent who originally reported the event, mistakenly believed that Loyalist troops were involved in an incident of "friendly fire." An account of this incident was published in the *New-Jersey Journal* on June 14, 1780 (and is fully quoted in

Todd Braisted's article, page 8).

Important details of this fight were also supplied by those who had resided in the neighborhood and who passed their memories down through several generations. In 1868, when 88 years old, Reverend James D. Demarest related accounts of his father's Revolutionary experiences at New Bridge to his daughter, Mary Frances Bogert Secor. His narrative included a family account of the circumstances surrounding the dreadful massacre at the Steuben House in May 1780.

James D. Demarest was born March 9, 1780. His father, David Peterse Demarest, resided on the east side of the Hackensack River at New Bridge. Born in 1738, David was thirty-eight years old when the Declaration of Independence was signed. He married Hester Brower in 1760. In 1780, he served in Captain John Outwater's company of Bergen Militia. James' oldest brother, Petrus, born in June 1765, enlisted in the patriotic cause when only fourteen years old. Their story provides us with a local perspective on the war as a conflict that divided families as well as neighbors.

"The following incidents were related to me by my grandfather, the Rev. James D. Demarest, on the ninth of March, 1868, that being his eighty-eighth birthday, and are given as nearly as possible in his own words, which were entered in my note-book as he proceeded:

The house now occupied by James Ely, at the crossroads at New Bridge, in Bergen County, New Jersey, was formerly the homestead of Peter des Marest, who was the father of eighteen children, David. P., my father, being one of that number.¹

When, in 1778, the British held possession of that portion of New Jersey,

bordering on the Hudson, and the redcoats made their first appearance at New Bridge, my father was lying ill with a fever, and unable to flee or protect his family, which at that time comprised my mother and five children. Warned in time of their approach, Peter the eldest son, then thirteen, was dispatched with the horses and a wagon load of such household effects as could be most readily and hastily collected and loaded, without order or care, and was told to drive with all possible speed, in an opposite and safe direction, and not spare the horses. In his flight, the goods were falling off, but there was no time to be lost in their recovery, and Peter plied the whip while his tears fell thick and fast.

Meanwhile, two neighbors, David Demarest, better known as Fytje's Daff (Sophia's Dave)², and John Van Buskirk, familiarly known as 'Jockey John,' notorious Tories, both of them! — had gone to meet the enemy, carrying with them, as a present, several loaves of bread, which they presented with demonstrations and expressions of welcome, and in return for this favor, sought protection for their homes and property. They also sought to dissuade the invaders from their purpose of sacking those of their neighbors who were loyalists, but were active in pointing out the homes of those whom they designated as rebels, my father being described as 'one of the worst of them.' So grovelling was their demeanor, that instead of having the effect intended, it reacted unfavorably and they were threatened with the bayonet. This so intimidated them, that instead of returning by the highway, they skulked off, and making a wide detour, gained their homes.

When the British reached my father's

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An Excess Eagerness What Really Happened at New Bridge on May 30th, 1780?

Todd W. Braisted

6 January 2005

The year 2005 is the 225th Anniversary of many actions in Bergen County, a number of which involved the area of New Bridge Landing and even the Steuben House itself. After the British and Hessian raid on Hackensack and Paramus on March 23rd, 1780, a very hot skirmish took place between the rear guard of the Crown forces and the pursuing militia and Continentals, ending only when some British officers tossed the planks off the bridge, putting a halt to their pursuers. The April 16th, 1780 raid on Hopperstown saw Lt. Col. Abraham Van Buskirk of the Loyalist New Jersey Volunteers take three militia prisoners at the bridge after they fired a shot at the oncoming British, while Hessians likewise captured a Continental officer there.

But on May 30th, 1780, an anonymous Bergen County resident wrote of an incident at “the house of J. Zabriskie” resulting in “the ground round the house being in a measure covered with blood, and in some places the clotted gore remained in heaps.” The perpetrators of this action were reputed to be 300 men under the command of Lt. Col. Abraham Van Buskirk, the noted Loyalist leader who had lived across the river in Teaneck before the war. The only problem with the account was, no members of Van Buskirk’s unit, the Bergen County raised 4th Battalion, New Jersey Volunteers, were listed on the rolls as being killed or wounded that day. And there were not at that time

300 men present and fit for duty in the battalion. So what happened at the house of John Zabriskie and to whom?

The story stems from an article in one of the two New Jersey newspapers of the day, *The New Jersey Gazette*, published in Trenton by Isaac Collins. Carried in the June 14th, 1780 edition, it read in full:

Extract of a letter from New-Barbadoes, Bergen county, dated May 30, 1780.

“This morning a detachment of about 300 of the enemy, under the command of Col. Boskirk, made a descent into this county. Their object was professedly to murder and carry off the militia. They divided themselves into two parties, each going upon a scout. They met at the house of J. Zabriskie at about one o’clock, A.M. and mistaking each other for the rebel guard, (as they call it) fell upon each other in a most furious manner, and by the discharge of their muskets and use of the bayonet, they appear to have made a dreadful slaughter; the ground round the house being in a measure covered with blood, and in some places the clotted gore remained in heaps when I arrived at the spot, which was at five o’clock. After this, they finding their mistake, retreated over and took up the bridge to prevent our men pursuing them. ‘Tis said they had seven or eight killed on the spot, besides wounded. – All were carried off.”

The article raises more questions than it answers. Who was the author? Was he a witness to the event? If not,

how did he get his information and, most importantly, was it accurate?

To study the event from the Rebel side of events is nearly impossible, as the above newspaper article is the only reference known to exist. An examination of over sixty pension applications from Bergen County militiamen fails to uncover any mention of the incident. No mention of the excursion was reported to George Washington, as an examination of his papers reveals. The Governor of New Jersey, William Livingston, was likewise unapprised of the situation.

From the British perspective, there is a similar lack of written accounts. The muster rolls for the 4th Battalion, New Jersey Volunteers show no men killed or wounded on that date. If Van Buskirk’s unit had been involved in something that had resulted in casualties, it would have been recorded on these rolls, particularly if it had resulted in death. Muster rolls were used for the purpose of paying soldiers for the exact number of days they served, therefore if someone died the rolls would note the day so that his pay ceased starting the following day. It is reasonable to conclude therefore that the anonymous account is at least incorrect in identifying Van Buskirk, and presumably his men, as the participants.

There were three Loyalist newspapers being published at that time in New York City: the famous *Royal Gazette* by James Rivington; the just as popular *New-York Gazette* and the *Weekly Mercury* by Hugh Gaine; and the lesser known *Royal American Gazette* put out by Alexander and James Robertson. None of these

papers recorded any excursion by British troops on that day, instead reporting a raid on Newark for May 27th by 150 men of the 57th Regiment of Foot under the command of Major Charles Brownlow. This incident was also reported in the New Jersey papers.

The answer may have finally been found, within a letter between two officers of the British Adjutant General’s Department: Captain George Beckwith and Captain John André. Captain André had been away from the New York City area for the previous five months, off with the British Army on their successful capture of Charleston, South Carolina. As the Deputy Adjutant General of the British Army in America, André was the right hand man of the Commander in Chief, Lieutenant General Sir Henry Clinton. One of the functions of the job was to keep his boss informed on the day-to-day goings on of both the army and the war in general. To that end, he needed reports of his subordinates in the field and on the lines. This was even more important when the commander in chief was absent from the main seat of the war, the New York City area. During Clinton and André’s absence, numerous reports had been sent to them from New York, relating the different excursions made by detachments of the army, including the raids on Hackensack, Paramus and Hopperstown. Captain Beckwith was one of those people who supplied the information.

Sir Henry, André and a large number of the British forces arrived back at New York on the 18th of June. Beckwith would send one last report,

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two days later, to bring him up to date on recent actions and events. This was the key document in the search.

Beckwith related four excursions of British troops, two of which involved Bergen County. The first was sent from Staten Island, and was rather benign: “for Forage under the Command of Major Erskine of the 22nd Regt, to Sycocus [Secaucus] Island, which Service was performed without opposition.” Forage was of course necessary for the horses of the army, and was the principal reason for the Cornwallis’ excursion into Bergen County in 1778. The second expedition was into Westchester County, a detachment of the Brigade of Foot Guards under Lt. Col. Howard, which did not complete its intended (and unstated) mission by their intended target moving their position. The third incident was the raid on Newark by Major Brownlow and the 57th Regiment. The fourth incident related is almost certainly the mysterious incident at New Bridge:

“... a fourth [excursion,] under the command of Lt. Col. Norton of the Guards, which was meant for Paramus, a Detachment crossing the North River the night preceding the movement, and forming in Ambuscade in the English Neighbourhood, near the New Bridge where they remained concealed the following day; there is every reason to think the matter would have succeeded, but in taking possession of the New Bridge, where the Militia were supposed to have a small Guard; the Party from an excess eagerness entered the house at that place, in different Directions and mistaking each other for the militia, they fired

some shots & gave a general Alarm, which enduced Colonel Norton, to give up the Incursion.”

The above provides a number of details that bear closer examination, both confirming and contradicting the anonymous letter. The militia guard at New Bridge it would appear was not the intended target of the attack. This guard had been kept there off and on throughout much of the war, particularly from 1779-1782. The widow of James Kent many years afterwards recalled: “That she lived during the time said Company laid there between the Village of Hackensack and New Bridge, where said [Captain John Outwater’s] Companys picquet guard was kept, on the main road and that she distinctly recollects seeing the said picquets pass and repass every knight [sic] and morning during the whole time it laid there.” This guard provided sentries for the bridge, one of which was James Kent of Hackensack, as his friend William Lozier later stated: “That he being acquainted with the said James Kent, could cross the Bridge in the knight [sic] by Giving the said James Kent something to drink, which he recollects of having often done.” This guard apparently had withdrawn to Hackensack, probably by chance, as none of them recorded pursuing the British or having escaped a close encounter with a bayonet.

Paramus was a place where Continental troops had garrisoned since December of 1779, as many as 250 at a time sent from the main army at Morristown. These were the troops who had been attacked in March and April, and were most likely the intended target again. Their

purpose was primarily to cover the approaches to Morristown, protect the countryside, interdict illegal trade with the British at New York, and intercept deserters from Morristown. The post, and others like it, were generally too weak to accomplish these tasks, and were used by the troops as an easy means to desert to New York City.

Abraham Van Buskirk was often credited by his opponents as being at the head of every British incursion into the county, whether he was there or not. A number of pension applications written later by Bergen County militiamen recorded Van Buskirk as leading the British at the burning of the court house on March 23rd, when neither he nor any member of his battalion was present. He was at the battle at Hopperstown, but not in command, as was also reported. The troops under Lt. Col. Chapel Norton were from his own Brigade of Foot Guards, stationed at Kingsbridge, hence an easy passage across to Fort Lee. Any involvement of Van Buskirk’s battalion would have involved ferrying by boat from Staten Island up the Hudson River or across to Bergen Point and marching up the neck, or by boat up the Hackensack. For the raid on Hopperstown, they had crossed over to Bergen Point and marched. Interestingly, the uniforms of the Foot Guards and the New Jersey Volunteers were at this time very similar. Both wore red coats with blue lapels, cuffs and collars, and plain white lace. The minor differences of buttons, officer’s lace and lace pattern would probably have been indistinguishable to the casual observer, especially at a distance and/or at night.

Unfortunately, because of the unique nature of the Foot Guards serving in America by detachment, their muster rolls were kept by their parent regiments in London; consequently, casualties are impossible to ascertain and verify today. It is unlikely the casualties were quite as severe as related, similar incidents by both sides almost always being overstated, particularly at night. The British, for instance, reportedly killed fifty of Baylor’s Dragoons in their night attack in 1778 when perhaps only a third or less of that number were slain outright. The occurrence of “friendly fire” was known to both sides during the war. Just a few months previous to this incident, two detachments of British and Loyalist troops advancing from Savannah into South Carolina had an almost identical encounter to what happened above, killing and wounding several. During the Battle of Germantown, Pennsylvania in 1777, two American brigades took to firing upon one another in the smoke and fog of battle, throwing both into utter confusion and causing casualties.

We may never know all the details of exactly what happened that night, or who the mysterious author of the published letter was, but perhaps that too may one day change.

The letter from Beckwith to André may be found in the University of Michigan, William L. Clements Library, Sir Henry Clinton Papers, Volume 105, item 25. The quotes from James Kent’s pension application are in United States National Archives, Collection M-804, Pension and Bounty Land Application Files, No. W20313, James Kent, New Jersey. 🏠

Is Hackensack Burning? *Remembering the Hackensack Raid on its 225th Anniversary*

by Dr. Richard Lenk

In March 1780, the Courthouse at Hackensack was destroyed by Loyalist forces. What is the background of this event? In 1730 a new and larger Courthouse was built on the Green. By the start of the Revolutionary War, the County Clerk, Daniel Isaac Browne, removed all documents from the Courthouse to New York City. Since the documents were not returned to Hackensack until 1783, the court building remained vacant for most of the war.

Government activities were moved to Pond's Church (Oakland). Because New York was under English occupation, the patriot government arrested smugglers and the volume of arrests soon exceeded the size of the Pond's Church jail. So, Sheriff Adam Boyd decided to use the Hackensack Courthouse as the main jail for the County, even though the British were just across the Hackensack River.

In 1779 Adam Boyd needed troops to guard the building and he requested help from the local militia. The officers of the militia refused to guard the place. Boyd then requested troops from Erskine's Ringwood Ironworks, but General Erskine said his men were exempted from service. When Boyd asked for money for the guards, Erskine told A. Gordon, his second in command, to treat Boyd as a robber if he came again to ask for aid. Boyd was angry and got an indictment of Erskine, which the Court quashed.

Having lost face in this battle, Boyd went and arrested Nicausie Kip, the militia leader who has refused him assistance. Boyd picked the jury and the foreman of the jury was also the star witness for Boyd. Kip lost his property for twenty years!

So it was in March 1780, after a long and bitter winter, that the British set out on their raid. Two of Boyd's ardent

supporters were William Hammel, Senior, and William Hammel, Junior, the town constables. The British raid was a probing event, according to Dr. Albert Klyberg, and I agree. So Hackensack should not have been such a target. But two events made the raid important. A company of militia from Harrington Township were sleeping in the Courthouse, having brought with them the tax assessment lists for the township. These lists were very useful for the British because all horses and cattle, et cetera, were listed for the area. The Loyalists forced the militia to surrender. Several wealthy people in the town were also taken hostages, including, for example, former County Clerk William Provoost.

The Loyalists' second goal was to remove Boyd and the Hammels. The Hammels had a woodworking shop and it was set afire! The Loyalists then knocked on the Dutch door of Adam Boyd's home. He opened the top leaf of the door while the Loyalists rammed the lower half with their bayonets! According to Boyd, he ran all the way to Paramus on bloody feet! All this in the time the British were supposedly hampered in capturing him because their bayonets were still stuck in the lower door. His house was burned to the ground.

Reverend Romeyn hid in his house behind the chimney, but thirty people were taken prisoner. Only one escaped, namely, Archibald Campbell, who hid under the New Bridge in freezing water. He's the same man who in November 1776 claimed that George Washington told him to stay "neutral" in the war! Of course our only source for that statement is Archibald Campbell himself!

For many years after the raid a blame game resulted. Some people said Peter

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house, an officer and several men entered, and seeing my father in bed, turned to my mother, who was wringing her hands in anguish, and asked 'What is the matter with that rebel?' 'He is very sick' she replied. 'No, he is not!' they shouted, 'He is a rebel, and has been shot.' Whereupon, with oaths and imprecations, several of them roughly turned and otherwise maltreated my poor sick father, in search of bullet wounds. Satisfying themselves that he was really ill, and not wounded, they finally desisted and then proceeded to demolish the furniture.

The dresser was thrown forward and its contents rendered worthless. The milk was poured from the pans, and by using the few remaining chairs as bludgeons, the rest of the effects were broken, thus wantonly destroying everything too heavy or cumbersome to be carried away. Among the articles taken was the lid which they wrenched from the silver cream pitcher. The pitcher is now in our closet. Why they left it and took only the lid, I am at a loss to know, but presume it was laid aside and forgotten. After their departure, my parents, grateful for their personal safety, united in rendering fervent praise to God.

For a number of weeks after this event, and after my father had recovered from his illness, those who were capable of bearing arms in the defense of liberty, feared to sleep at home; and consequently father, and my brother Peter, with a few of their neighbors, secreted themselves nightly in various places, not daring to occupy any of their lodgings two nights in succession.

On one occasion, the old stone house, then owned by Mr. Zabriskie, which stood a short distance from the Hackensack River,³ near the site of the

present 'New Bridge,' which at that time was a fording place, had been agreed upon as their place of refuge for the night. By some providential means the supposed secret reached the ears of the Tories, and the marauders who infested that locality, one of whom, a neighbor, not yet wholly depraved, fearing the awful consequences certain to follow this exposure, apprised them of their danger, and cautioned them to seek other and safer quarters for the night.

A barrack⁴ located not far from this house was accordingly occupied, whence the movements of the local enemy could be watched. Shortly after midnight they were heard cautiously approaching the house in two divisions; one having forded the river, and the other made a circuit intended to prevent escape. Their plan was to surround the house and then deliberately begin the work of slaughter. The night was intensely dark, and not being able to recognize each other, both divisions supposed they had encountered the 'rebels' and with a desperation and determination worthy of a better cause, opened and continued a fatal discharge of musketry, killing and wounding several of their own number. Daybreak revealed to them their mistake and terminated the conflict.

At a later hour the bodies were quietly removed, and were probably buried the following night, for there were no ceremonies or demonstrations of any kind that were publicly known.

In 1779, at the age of fourteen, Peter enlisted under his father, then Captain des Marest, as a private.

Father and sons were blacksmiths, and as occasion required, shod the horses of the American army, for which extra service they were paid in Continental currency. I have in my possession some of the currency which

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they then received.”⁵

¹ In August 1893, William Ely tore down the old James Ely Homestead, preparatory to erecting a fine modern residence (now #1141 River Road, New Milford) on the site. The old stone house had been a landmark in this section for many years.

Peter Demarest (1683-1763) had seven children by his first wife, Maretie Meet, whom he married in 1709, and eleven children by his second wife, Maria Batton, whom he married in 1722. David P. Demarest was his fourteen child and fourth son. Peter’s first son Petrus, born in 1715, was a tavern keeper and stagecoach driver at New Bridge in 1768. He married Altie VanHoorn in 1740 and had one daughter, Maria. She married Abraham Ely in September 1764 and had eight children.

² David Demarest, son of Guillaume and Feitje (VanderLinde) Demarest, was born September 26, 1739. He was a Tory who served in Captain Van Allen’s Company, 4th Battalion of New Jersey Volunteers. After the war, he removed to Canada, but supposedly returned home about 1800. David’s eldest son, Gilyam, born September 26, 1762, was a Patriot, despite his father’s urgings. He served with the Bergen Militia from 1777 through April 1781, when he was captured and confined at the notorious Sugar House Prison in New York City.

³ This is the Ackerman-Zabriskie-Steben House, 1209 Main Street, River Edge.

⁴ That is to say, a hay barrack, which was a covering for hay or grain consisting of a roof with four triangular sides which could be raised or lowered on four poles at its corners.

⁵ “Revolutionary War Days, Some Occurrences at New Bridge,” *Relics, Vol. 18 No. 103*, November 1974, (Park Ridge: Pascack Historical Society, 1974), pp. 2-3. 🏰

The following amendments to our by-laws were approved by the officers and trustees on February 13, 2005 and submitted for your consideration and to be voted on at our annual luncheon meeting on June 18th.

Article IV – Officers Part 2: The following change is proposed: “The Nominating Committee shall be appointed no less than three months prior to the election, that it shall present the slate to the Board at least a week prior to the election and annual meeting, and that the annual meeting shall be held between the middle of May and the middle of July as determined by the officers and trustees.”

Article IV – Officers Part 8: Change from “Trustees elected for a full term of three years shall not be eligible for election to an immediately following term” to “Trustees elected for a full term of three years may be reelected for one consecutive term.”

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met with great success.

Albert Z. Bogert, of River Edge, was nominated at the Republican District Convention on October 7, 1905, for a third term as Freeholder from Midland Township. About a week later, Mr. Bogert declined to run for re-election, citing his desire to devote more time to private business. The Democrats chose Richard W. Cooper, of New Milford, who previously came close twice to defeating Mr. Bogert.

Oswald Rosch’s residence, the old Francis F. Hill homestead at the corner of Madison Avenue and the Boulevard, East New Milford, burned at midnight on October 23, 1905. It was an ancient two-story frame building.

On November 1, 1905, the American Locomotive Company delivered to the Erie Railroad sixteen new passenger engines of what was known as the 2510 type, the largest locomotives ever built exclusively for passenger service. This completed the delivery of 159 locomotives ordered for the Erie system for 1905.

Admiral Evans’ flag lieutenant informed F. W. Bacon, general manager of the New Jersey & Hudson River Railway and Ferry Company that the United States fleet would escort a British squadron into the Hudson River on November 7th or 8th. The American fleet comprised the flagship *Maine*, the *Missouri*, the *Kentucky*, the *Kaersage*, the flagship *Alabama*, the *Illinois*, the *Iowa*, the *Massachusetts*, the flagship *West Virginia* (carrying President Theodore Roosevelt, who was returning to Washington from the South), the flagship *Pennsylvania*, the *Colorado* and the *Maryland*. The visiting British squadron, commanded by Prince Henry of Battenburg comprised the flagship *Drake*, the *Cornwall*, the *Berwick*, the *Essex* and the *Suffolk*. The American and British vessels were to anchor near the Jersey shore at Edgewater, so that the 130th Street Ferryboats could pass through the fleets in going to and from New York. 🏰

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curator, can be opened to public view.

The County of Bergen is beginning work on a Historic Structure Report for the Campbell-Christie House in anticipation of the eventual reconstruction of the 1835 frame kitchen wing, which we so desperately need to enable us to operate our recreated Christie tavernhouse. We also want to thank the County for their conscientious maintenance of the Campbell-Christie House, including its mechanical systems, porches and paint. They deserve a historic preservation commendation!

The Blauvelt-Demarest Foundation has completed carpentry repairs to the Demarest House, including roof repairs, removal of rotted gutters and replacement of the porch soffit. As soon as the weather permits, the exterior will be repainted. They then will begin to determine what artifacts to return and what artifacts would be better suited to display in our proposed museum on the former Pizza Town property (which will hopefully be a reconstruction of the 1819 Bergen County Court House, for which we have the original front step and steeple bell). This building will be separate and distinct from the Visitor Center, which will focus exclusively upon the story of Historic New Bridge and which will provide important visitor amenities, such as restrooms, gift shops, and possibly a small cafeteria.

Lastly, our membership dollars have refurbished the Christie Tavern, which so many of you enjoyed during our first Holiday Tavern Nights, at Twelfth Night and again for Washington’s Birthday. We also are paying nearly \$500 monthly for storage of part of our collections in anticipation of the building of our museum. We also recently spent \$1500 to cut down dead trees and to grind up the roots that tore up the paved pathway

to the rear of the Campbell-Christie House. There is so much more we need to do, so again let me express our gratitude for your donations. We put every membership dollar to good use, so thank you again for your continuing kindness and support!

Thanks to **Dave Whieldon** for long-time management of the Revolutionary War Roundtable.

Thanks to our Vice-President **Gail Goldstein**, we have finalized arrangements for our Annual Luncheon, which will be held at the Old Hook Inn in Westwood on June 18th. Please complete the enclosed form and join us. I will thank you in advance for renewing your membership, when notice arrives. To avoid confusion, we have separated membership renewal from the luncheon reservation. I hope all is well with you and I look forward to seeing you soon.

Remember, the past can’t save itself, so we must do our everyday best to keep it alive for the invaluable lessons it offers each and everyone of us.

Best regards, **Kevin Wright**

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Zabriskie brought on the raid (our source is a letter from Anna Zabriskie, his daughter, to her cousin Richard Varick, wherein she strongly defended her father’s loyalty to the American cause.

The three best sources for the Hackensack Raid are Albert Klyberg, Adrian Leiby and Dr. Richard Lenk. 🏰

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