



The Link

joining the sites along the rivers

Volume 10, Issue 1

The Raritan-Millstone Heritage Alliance

Summer 2008



Wallace House

SUNDAY SERIES LUNCHEON / LECTURE

Monique Rubens Krohn, Executive Director for the Heritage Trail Association, will address the RMHA on the topic **“The Second Middlebrook Encampment”** at our Sunday Series Luncheon / Lecture to be held Sunday, September 21, 2008 from 1:30 to 3:00 PM at Pheasants Landing Restaurant, Pub & Catering, 311 Amwell Road (Route 514), Hillsborough, NJ 08844 (Phone 908-281-1288). Reservations are required. The Luncheon cost is \$30.00. To reserve call Elyce Jennings after September 7 at 732-463-0767.

The Wallace House by Donald Johnstone Peck

During the Second Middlebrook Encampment, from December 11, 1778, to June 3, 1779, General George Washington leased the Wallace House for his headquarters. The Second Encampment at Middlebrook is the least known of the Revolutionary War campaigns in New Jersey. However, it was crucial to the outcome of the Revolution. Washington chose the area because it was a defensible one, with a good network of roads, plenty of timber for the soldiers' huts, and a sympathetic populace. Because of its mild winter and lesser hardships of a better fed, better clothed, and better trained army, this lower tension did not make it any less important to Washington's strategy and ultimate victory.

Following the Battle of Monmouth, Washington anticipated the next major thrust by the British from their New York stronghold would be northward. He positioned his army to repulse an advance, but nothing happened. There were

several British forays into war torn New Jersey, but Sir Henry Clinton did not attempt any decisive action. (Clinton would later determine Middlebrook too strong and Washington's 10,000 troops too numerous to be "rashly attempted" with his force of 22,000 in the New York and Rhode Island area.)

Late in November 1778, with winter coming on, Washington moved his army back to New Jersey. Some detachments were stationed at Pompton and Elizabethtown; the main body of the army came with him to the Raritan Valley.

The Continental Army of about 10,000 men was equal to the entire population of Somerset County. To minimize its impact, the brigades were assigned to locations several miles apart: Maryland to the east of Middlebrook, Virginia on the west, Pennsylvania across the Raritan on the west side of the Millstone River, and the

Artillery at Pluckemin.

Other encampments were garrisoned along a 75-mile-long line from Middlebrook to Ramapo, West Point, and Fishkill to Danbury in Western Connecticut. Under orders from Washington, a series of 23 bonfire signal-beacon sites were built to warn the American militia to arms in the event of any advance of British troops. These orders were carried out under the leadership of Major General William Alexander of Somerset County, generally known by his Scottish title of Lord Stirling. (George Washington referred to Alexander as "my Lord".)

John Wallace, a wealthy fabric importer and merchant from Philadelphia, had his house eight-room addition constructed in between 1775 and 1776 next to an earlier small farmhouse. It is one of the best and most original examples of Georgian architecture in New Jersey and was one of the largest houses constructed in the state

The next scheduled Meeting of the

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

(Alliance Sites are encouraged
to send their representatives)

September 18, 2008

From 1:30-3:00 PM

ABRAHAM STAATS HOUSE

17 Von Steuben Lane

South Bound Brook, NJ

To be excused Directors should contact

Carol Natarelli or Marilyn Rautio

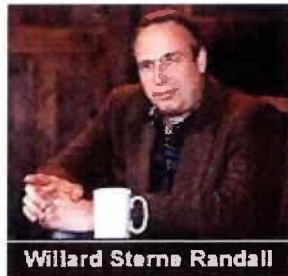
STANDING ROOM ONLY

The Sunday Series Lecture/Reception at historic **Proprietary House** last May 18 was the best-attended event the Alliance has held in recent years. Distinguished Scholar in History and Pulitzer Prize nominated author, **Willard Sterne Randall**, commanded the attention of

RMHA and Proprietary House Association members as well as students receiving awards from RMHA's first essay contest.

Randall's book, "**A LITTLE REVENGE:**

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN AT WAR WITH HIS SON", according to Princeton University author and professor, Arthur Link, "is the major work about two of the most important men in American history". The suggestion donation of \$10.00 per person benefited the Alliance's **GUIDE TO HISTORIC SITES IN CENTRAL NEW JERSEY**.



Willard Sterne Randall

RARITAN-MILLSTONE HERITAGE
ALLIANCE

P. O. Box 5583
Somerset, NJ 08875-5583

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The Board of Directors meets the third Thursday of March, May, September, October and November at designated historic and museum member sites in the region.

YOUR LINK TO THE PUBLIC: *The Link* is on a quarterly publication schedule. News of major upcoming events for possible placement in the newsletter may be mailed, emailed or faxed to the address that follows.

Any questions please contact: Donald J. Peck, Editor at The Clausen Company, P. O. Box 140, Fords, NJ 08863 or phone 732-738-1165, fax 732-738-1618, or E-mail clausenco@aol.com.

during the Revolution. The Dutch-framed mansion fronted the Old York Road, one of the main highways across New Jersey, connecting New York and Philadelphia in the 18th century. Washington chose the Wallace House because of its strategic location and amenities. Generals and their aides were quartered in the homes of nearby residents. It became a New Jersey State historic site in 1947.

Washington spent six months here, except for a six-week trip to Philadelphia, where he addressed Congress. Martha Washington, as was her custom, joined her husband on February 5, 1779 after his return, and stayed there through the spring.

Through the assistant quartermaster at Philadelphia, the Washingtons ordered a new set of china and “six tolerably genteel but not expensive candle-sticks”. Here they enjoyed graciously entertaining. “Lady Kitty” Livingston and her sister, Mrs. John Jay, were frequent guests. Other distinguished visitors included the Marquis de Lafayette, Baron von Steuben, Alexander Hamilton and Benedict Arnold. The Washingtons also socialized with prominent citizens in the area, including the



Old Dutch Parsonage

Reverend Jacob R. Hardenburg, Pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church.

The Reverend Hardenburg had sold the farmstead, “Hope Farm,” of 107 acres near his parsonage (Old Dutch Parsonage, built of Holland brick for the Reverend

John Frelinghuysen) to John Wallace in 1775 to build a summer residence in the tranquility of Somerset County. Hardenburg was a strong supporter of independence and instrumental in the formation of Queens College, serving as its first president in 1785. The theological classes held at Old Dutch Parsonage were the beginning of Queen’s College. [Historic Rutgers was the eighth college established in the American colonies. Chartered in 1766 as Queens College, it was first named for the consort of Britain’s King George III. The College was renamed in 1825 to honor Colonel Henry Rutgers, a benefactor and Revolutionary War veteran. It became the State University in 1945.]

Sometimes at the end of the day when a low sun is streaming through the panes of the window in Washington’s small library at the southwest corner of Wallace House, one can see the shadowy figure of Major Caleb Gibbs, the commandant of an elite corps of about 144 men who served as the equivalent of Washington’s secret service, guarding him, his staff, and his papers.

It was at Wallace House that George Washington planned the successful Indian Campaign of 1779 against the Iroquois League, fierce allies of the British. With the war in the colonies at something of a standstill, Washington decided to dispatch troops to northern Pennsylvania and western New York State, where the Iroquois Indians’ Six Nations Confederation and Loyalist forces were attacking American frontier towns and outposts. Major General John Sullivan’s forces of about 4,000 Continental army troops drove the Iroquois to Fort Niagara, the British stronghold. Thus they allowed the American colonists to push westward and populate the region.

The winter and spring of 1779 passed quietly. The weather was mild and fine; the spirits of the troops were excellent. Except for endemic fighting along the Hackensack in Bergen County, there

was little military movement in New Jersey or elsewhere to the north.

Threats of an enemy attack on



West Point pulled the Americans out of Middlebrook on June 3, 1779, for a forced march to the Hudson, but attack never came. With Washington absent from New Jersey, Colonel John Graves Simcoe, Commander of the Queen’s Rangers, staged a terrifying raid in October 1779, pounding through the Raritan and Millstone Valleys in a dash that many historians have labeled the most daring single event of the war. He and his Rangers covered fifty-five miles in a single night. Simcoe was captured but most of the Rangers made it to safety.

With the close of an uneventful 1779 summer campaign, Washington again selected Morristown, New Jersey as the site for his winter encampment. There he could keep a watchful eye on the British in New York City and be in a position to move by well-guarded routes either to the Hudson or the Delaware. The several divisions of his army constructed the villages of huts in Jockey Hollow, three miles southwest of town while Washington and his official family occupied the Ford Mansion on the outskirts of Morristown.

The winter was the most severe since 1755 and much worse than that of 1778 at Valley Forge. The prospect of ultimate victory seemed distant.

MARTHA DANDRIDGE CUSTIS WASHINGTON

by Donald Johnstone Peck

Martha Washington is considered to be the First Lady of the United States. During her lifetime, she was simply known as “Lady Washington”. Born June 2, 1731 at Chestnut Grove Plantation, near Williamsburg, Virginia, she was first married to Daniel Parke Custis, two decades her senior. Custis’ death in 1757 left Martha a very wealthy widow. Subsequently she married Colonel George Washington on January 6, 1759.



Content to live a private life at Mount Vernon, Martha Washington nevertheless bravely followed Washington into the battlefield when he served as Commander in Chief of the American Army. She spent the infamous winters at Valley Forge and Morristown with the General but also the least known Second Middlebrook Encampment, Somerset County, New Jersey of December 11, 1778 to June 3, 1779.

Martha Washington arrived at the Wallace House, Somerville, on February 5, 1779 and stayed through the spring. For the first time since Cambridge, Massachusetts, December 11, 1775 to April 4, 1776, Martha and the aides had room to turn around without tripping over one another.

Social intercourse abounded in the military community scattered over the Raritan Valley that winter of 1779. The Vanderveer House at Pluckemin, “surrounded by the whole park of artillery,” the head-quarters of General Knox; the Van Horne House, Bridgewater, the head-quarters of Alexander “Lord” Stirling; the Van Veghten House (near what is now

Finderne), the head-quarters of General Greene; and the Staats House, at South Bound Brook, the head-quarters of Baron Von Steuben, all opened their portals to the flower of the army which met so often at the Wallace House.

Many were the impromptu dances after Mrs. Washington’s stately dinners. What a delight the winding Wallace staircase, overlooking the wide hall, was to flirting couples! Having dinner at the commander’s house was an honor prized by both officers and civilians. It certainly wasn’t the food – described by George Washington jocularly, but probably accurately, as ham and roast beef with a dab of greens or beans, finished up by an apple pie if the cook felt like obliging. It was Martha who enchanted all their guests with her ageless charm. As army surgeon James Thatcher recorded, “Mrs. Washington combines in an uncommon degree, great dignity of manner with the most pleasing affability.”

Perhaps the most notable social event occurring during the time the Washingtons occupied the Wallace House was the celebration in honor of the French Alliance. It was given at Pluckemin, by the officers of the army, under the direction of General Knox.

A lot was happening at home at Mount Vernon in Virginia, and Martha felt out of touch when her son “Jack” (John Parke Custis, 1754-1781) and her daughter-in-law “Nelly” (Eleanor Calvart Custis, 1757-1811) failed to write. Jack had finally bought his own home after five years of marriage, but he and Nelly hadn’t quite decided to move in. They were pleased with Abington, a fine house and nine hundred acres outside Alexandria, even though Washington considered it a bad bargain. Nelly was also expecting a new baby at any moment. Martha didn’t know where they were or what was happening to them, and she didn’t like it.

While the Washingtons were at Wallace House, Nelly gave birth to a third daughter on March 21 – Eleanor Parke Custis (1779-1852), another Nelly. Martha had again become a grandmother.

Martha Washington’s love of private life equaled her husband’s; but, as she wrote to her friend Mercy Otis Warren, “I cannot blame him for having acted according to his ideas of duty in obeying the voice of his country.” As for herself, “I am still determined to be cheerful and happy, in whatever situation I may be; for I have also learned from experience that the greater part of our happiness or misery depends upon our disposition, and not upon our circumstances.”

In 1797 the Washingtons said farewell to public life and returned to their beloved Mount Vernon. After George Washington died in 1799, Martha assured a final privacy by burning their letters; she died of “severe fever” on May 22, 1802.

GENIUS OF THOMAS EDISON



An exhibit of Thomas Edison inventions will be featured at the
Buccleuch Mansion

New Brunswick

from 1 to 4 PM on the fourth Sunday of every month through October. The mansion, which has been closed for the past four years because of staircase repair, dates back to 1739 and also features tours of its first-floor colonial, federal and Victorian furnishings.

More information is available by calling 908-625-2620.

Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission

and East Jersey Olde Towne Village,

FOUNDERS' DAY

Sunday, October 5, 2008, Beginning at 2 PM

will commemorate the founding of the Village with the annual Founders' Day celebration. The event will include remarks from members of East Jersey Olde Towne, Inc., and recognition of the volunteers that assist at the Village throughout the year.

Refreshments will be served.

NATIONAL HISTORIC SITES

Both the First Presbyterian Church (Old White Church) and its Burying Ground, Woodbridge, NJ, were recently officially listed on the National Register. Woodbridge is the oldest township in New Jersey, chartered in 1669, and the present church was built in 1803. The Woodbridge Historic Preservation Commission, a RMHA member, is preparing historic markers for both of these sites as well as markers for RMHA sites: Trinity Church, established 1698, and their Rectory, the historic Jonathan Dunham Homestead constructed in 1670. Dunham was the operator of the first gristmill in New Jersey. Other RMHA sites to receive historic markers include The Barron Arts Center, 1877 and Cross Keys Tavern, circa 1740 where George Washington spent his last night in New Jersey (April 22, 1789) before his inauguration as President.



MERCHANTS AND DROVERS TAVERN

Located on the route George Washington took after leaving Woodbridge on April 23, 1789 for lunch at **Boxwood Hall**, Elizabeth before boarding a barge for Manhattan, (Route 35, St. Georges Avenue and Westfield Avenue), this tavern is dedicated to interpreting early tavern life and stage-coach transportation and is restored to its 1820 appearance.

You may contact their association at www.merchantsanddrovers.org.

MORVEN MUSEUM & GARDENS



Through January 11, 2009 “**PICTURING PRINCETON 1783: THE NATION’S CAPITAL**” – Largest exhibition ever assembled at Morven and the anchor event of the 225th anniversary of Princeton’s service as the nation’s capital in 1783. More than 70 portraits, accompanied by archival documents, decorative arts, and historic artifacts, are gathered at Morven to tell the story of Congress’ five-month stay in the small town of Princeton. www.morven.org

November 6, 2008 – Liberty Lecture Series: Painting Princeton 1783

Morven Museum & Gardens 2:30 PM

Featured works of renowned artists of the period include **William Dunlap** of Perth Amboy whose original painting of George Washington at Rockingham in 1783 is now owned by the United States Senate. Dunlap, who was born in Perth Amboy in 1766, was interred in St. Peter’s Churchyard, Perth Amboy in 1839. Also included is one also painted at Rockingham (one of seven portraits of George Washington) by **Charles Willson Peale**. Born in 1741 in Chester, Maryland, he was interred in St. Peter’s Churchyard, Philadelphia in 1827.



George Washington at Princeton by Charles Willson Peale, 91 5/8" x 58 3/8"; Senate Wing, third floor, west corridor

George Washington by William Dunlap, 1783, from life, pastel, 25 1/2" x 19 1/2"; SB-16 (below)



