



Volume 7, Issue 1

Raritan Millstone Heritage Alliance

February, 2005

## President's Message

- RMHA Website -

By the time you receive this newsletter the Alliance website should be up and running. With the Guidebook, the site will serve as a valuable tool for promoting our historic sites and providing links to the broader New Jersey history community. Look for us at [www.raritanmillstone.org](http://www.raritanmillstone.org).

- Guidebook -

Anyone interested in helping the Guidebook Committee in preparing for the March 2006 publication date, please contact Committee Chairman Peter Primavera at 732-247-8880. The committee meets on the Tuesday prior to the monthly Alliance Board meeting. And, of course, all are welcome to attend the monthly Alliance Board meetings, the next of which will be on February 17, 2005 at the Philip Van Horne House.

Please note the February 15, 2005 deadline for the New Jersey Cultural Trust Grant applications. Many of our member sites have been able to make significant capital improvements with the use of these funds. The New Jersey Historical Commission is offering workshops in February for their 2006 grant program. Contact information is on the Announcements page.

Welcome to new member site, the Nassau Inn, on Nassau Street in Princeton. I look forward to seeing all our members at our Annual Meeting at 5:00 p.m. on April 21, 2005 at the Cranbury Inn.

- Peter A. Primavera

## The Alliance Tours the Revolution

The Heritage Alliance has scheduled a series of Sunday mid-day programs keyed to the American Revolution in central New Jersey through this spring under its on-going Sunday Brunch Program Series. The series encompasses tours of sites featured by the National Park Service in its 2002 study on the feasibility of a Crossroads-of-the American-Revolution National Heritage Area in New Jersey, still pending before Congress.

The programs, which are organized by Christine Reitz and Marjorie Freeman, cost \$10 each, plus an additional restaurant charge for the brunch. Attendees are asked to mail payments at least 5 days in advance to Elyce Jennings, at 851 River Road, Piscataway 08854, in care of Raritan Millstone Heritage Alliance, Inc. All members will receive special advance notices for each event.

Up-coming programs in the series are as follows:

February 13: Drake House Museum, Plainfield (visited by George Washington and other American troops during the Battle of the Short Hills in 1777, following the British evacuation of New Brunswick); noon brunch at O'Connor's Restaurant, Watchung, 2 pm tour of Drake House (see enclosed flyer).

March 13: Washington Crossing State Park, Hopewell Twp., Mercer County (when George Washington and his Army crossed the Delaware on Christmas Day, 1776, iconic episode of the war); brunch at Washington Crossing Inn, 2 pm tour of the park and associated exhibits.

April 17: Morven, home of Richard Stockton, signer of the Declaration of Independence (and a former Governor's mansion); noon box lunch; 1 pm tour.

May 1: Morristown National Historical Park (American Army winter encampment site in 1777 and 1780, attacked by British-Hessian troops under General Wilhelm Knyphausen in June 1780, in last northern battle of the war); noon brunch at Olde Mill Inn, 2 pm park tour.

June 5: Monmouth Battlefield State Park (scene of turning-point battle between main American and British armies in 1778); noon brunch, Turning Point Restaurant, 2 pm battlefield tour.

**Raritan Millstone Heritage Alliance**

**P.O. Box 5583**

**Somerset, N.J. 08875-5583**

*an organization of individuals and  
historic sites working  
to promote and preserve the heritage of Central  
New Jersey*

**officers**

**President:** Peter A. Primavera  
**Vice President:** Ann Suydam  
**Secretary:** Sarah Israel  
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Marjorie Watson  
Betty Scott  
Kathleen Williamson  
John Allen  
Paula Henry

*The organization meets the  
third Thursday of each month, with the exception  
of July and August,  
at designated historic and museum sites  
in the region.*

Link editor: Catherine Bull  
732-247-8880

**2005 SCHEDULED BOARD MEETINGS**

**DATES & TIMES**

February 17

Philip Van Horne House  
Heritage Trail Association  
Main Street (near Patriots ball park)  
Finderne section, Bridgewater

The present Van Horne House probably dates back to the late 18th century and was extensively remodeled in the middle decades of the 19th and 20th centuries. The 1930s and 1940s remodeling was in the Colonial Revival style and is especially significant. The house was the site of numerous important events during the Revolutionary War including a portion of the fighting during the Battle of Bound Brook, when British troops captured three American cannons on the front lawn. It was used at various times by Generals Lincoln, Stirling, Lee and Cornwallis. Currently under restoration, the house is owned by the Heritage Trail Association and is now listed in the NJ State Register of Historic Sites.

March 17

Nassau Presbyterian Church  
61 Nassau St., Princeton

The first Presbyterian Church of Princeton was founded in 1766 and met on the site where worship continues today. In 1768, John Witherspoon, president of the College, began 25 years of serving also as pastor to First Church. The church building was occupied by both British and American soldiers during the Revolution. The pews and galleries were stripped for firewood and burned in a makeshift fireplace inside the sanctuary. The original building burned in 1813. The original portion of the present building was designed by Charles Steadman and dedicated in 1836.

April 21

Cranbury Inn, Cranbury  
annual membership dinner meeting,  
details in special membership mailing  
Meeting begins at 5:00 p.m.

The speaker for this event will be Alexander B. Magoun, Ph.D., Executive Director of the David Sarnoff Library in Princeton. His topic will be Orson Wells' 1938 broadcast of *The War of the Worlds*, the fictional account of an alien invasion taking place in the village of Grovers Mill, New Jersey. He will also talk a bit about the development of color television. If anyone would like to visit the David Sarnoff Library and Museum, call for information at 609-734-2636.

The Cranbury Inn originated as a stagecoach stop in the mid-1700s, established to offer food and drink to travelers through the area. The present building comprises two of the three original taverns that were on this site, dating from the mid to late 1700s. These original taverns were built together by the Innkeeper's house in 1800. The current liquor store was once the office of the Cranbury Justice of the Peace and the telegraph office. In 1933 the Main Dining Room was built and the murals were painted in the Lafayette Tavern Room as part of a WPA work project.

*all meetings start at 1:30 pm  
unless otherwise announced*

# Washington's Valley

By George Dawson

George Washington famously marched across the Raritan Valley in his 2½-week "long retreat" through New Jersey in late 1776, spending three days and two nights at LaGrange's Tavern in New Brunswick, while Alexander Hamilton and his artillery company cannonaded British and Hessians on the opposite side of the river. The cannon fire fended off the approaching enemy long enough for Washington to plan his strategic withdrawal across the Delaware River, followed by counter-attack at Trenton in one of the celebrated "turning points" of the Revolution.

Washington returned to the upper tributaries of the valley the following spring, deploying his army along the east and west branches of the Middle Brook, on the far side of the First Watchung Ridge, a deployment site locally famous as Somerset County's Washington Valley, the better to watch the British then occupying New Brunswick.

Washington returned to the lower valley of the Raritan River several more times during the Revolutionary War, visits which are not so famous, even in local history books, but are about to receive important new attention.

Following his battlefield success in late June of 1778 near Freehold Court House in the Battle of Monmouth, Washington and the Continental Army returned to New Brunswick to give the troops rest and relaxation near the waters of the Raritan River; but also to mark the now important holiday of the Fourth of July. Washington, in this visit, stayed with his staff at the commodious (and elegant) home of the widow Sarah Ross, wife of a medical doctor who had died three years previously, situated in a 350-acre farm estate on the Raritan River in Piscataway, not far from the road to New Market.

The house was built in 1739 by Edward Antill, an importer and gentleman farmer, who was married to Anne Morris, the daughter of Lewis Morris, royal governor of New Jersey and lord of the manors of Morrisana and Tintern (in New York and New Jersey, respectively), and one of the wealthiest men in the colonies. The Antill house was a sister structure to the White house, built the same year by Anthony White, also a son-in-law of Lewis Morris, married to Morris' daughter Elizabeth.

The White house (called *Bucleuch* by a later owner) still stands in New Brunswick's Bucleuch Park. The Antill house, called Ross Hall by Dr. Ross and his wife, burned down about 40 years ago, its location today marked only by a street name, Ross Hall Boulevard.

Part of the house, however, was saved: an

elaborate paneled fireplace wall, with side cabinets, for which no comparable structure exists at Bucleuch Mansion. Rutgers history professor Richard P. McCormick and other university historians, managed to salvage the wall; and presented it to the New Jersey Historical Society for display at its museum in Newark.

Then, about 25 years ago, the Fellowship for Metlar House was formed, in the midst of a Route 18 construction project which threatened demolition of the 1728 Peter Bodine house, located on River Road near Metlar's Lane (the old New Market road), and one of the oldest homes still standing in Middlesex County. (The Mathias Smock house, further up-river in the River Road Historic District, is older.)



Metlar-Bodine House, with the planned new George Washington Education Wing to the right. (Artist's Sketch by Lawrence Schwin III)

The Fellowship for Metlar House saved the Peter Bodine house (called the Metlar-Bodine house, after 19<sup>th</sup> century owner George Metlar, who expanded it) from destruction. The state Department of Transportation, which still owns the house, allowed Piscataway

Township to arrange for its operation by the Fellowship as a museum.

In 2000, the New Jersey Historical Society offered the Ross Hall paneled wall to the Metlar House, feeling it better served if displayed near the place where it originally was. The Fellowship, overjoyed at this prospect, began making plans for an expansion wing in which to show it. The wall was brought back to New Brunswick and stored at Rutgers College.

Then 2003, and the fire of July 17 intervened, heavily damaging the 1870 wing of the Metlar-Bodine house where Fellowship offices and a storage and display area for 20<sup>th</sup> century artifacts were located. The museum was closed and attention focused on raising funds and insurance benefits for its repair and re-opening.

When George Washington visited Ross Hall in 1778, the 4<sup>th</sup> of July was not an official holiday. The Declaration, and the country to which it gave birth, was only two years old, and observances on its first anniversary in 1777 were sporadic and unofficial.

July 4, 1778, was different. Washington and the Continental Army had just triumphed in a major confrontation at Monmouth battlefield; and the national future, for the moment, looked bright. Washington, at Ross Hall on July 3, ordered his 12,000 troops, with sprigs of greenery in their hats, to line the New Brunswick waterfront on the following afternoon, for a wave-like firing of their muskets, in salute to the 2<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of national independence. This was the first official observance of the Fourth of July. That night, Washington invited his officers back to Ross Hall for a General's Ball on the newly minted national holiday.

The Fellowship for Metlar House is seeking a \$100,000 grant from the National Park Service's "Save America's Treasures" program for aid in construction of its special-exhibit wing, and the mounting of the Ross Hall wall within, as a Raritan Valley shrine to George Washington and the Fourth of July. Museum Executive Director June-lynn Sadlowski said:

"If this is not a national treasure, I don't know what is."

? ? ?

George Washington famously stayed at Rockingham, an 18<sup>th</sup>-century farmhouse near Rocky Hill, for 2½ months in the fall of 1783, while in attendance to Congress, then sitting at Nassau Hall in Princeton, and returning to his Newburgh head-quarters in the Hudson Highlands in mid-November. He presumably traveled to and from

Rocky Hill and Princeton by the back roads across the Watchungs, bypassing British-occupied New York and New Brunswick.

In early December, however, with the peace treaty signed and the British sailing home, Washington and the American Army re-occupied New York City; and Washington made his final trip in military uniform, riding to Congress (then sitting in Anapolis), for a final report, and then home to Mount Vernon. Military historian Stanley Weintraub wrote of this trip last year in a short book, General Washington's Christmas Farewell.

Retired teacher Philip Hubbard, of Dayton, Ohio, compiling a pictorial record of Washington's travels during the Revolution, recently wrote us in New Brunswick, about Washington's visit here in late 1783, inquiring:

"He was entertained at James Drake's Tavern. Did he spend the night there?"

1783 was also the year New Brunswick got its first newspaper, The Political Intelligencer and New Jersey Advertiser. We checked out the publication on micro-film in the city library for the week of December 9, 1783. The visit of General Washington and Baron von Steuben, (Washington's military training commander) to "Mr. Drake's tavern" is reported there, together with:

the names of 13 toasts;  
New Brunswick's official address to "His Excellency, General Washington"; and  
"His Excellency's Answer."

The story does not say where the General spent the night.

James Drake's Tavern, also known as the Indian Queen, stood in New Brunswick until the 1970s, when it was taken down for the Route 18 extension. Its pieces were bought by Dr. Joseph Kler for \$1, and re-assembled in replica form in Middlesex County's Johnson Park, as the first entry in the restored village of East Jersey Olde Towne.

The building has long been known as an important stop for 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century travellers on the King's Highway through New Brunswick, John Adams and Benjamin Franklin among the early celebrity visitors. The 1783 visit of George Washington, however, has failed to be noticed in the local histories.

No more. The lower Raritan is on its way to becoming Washington's Valley.

## Announcements

### AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY (AASLH) AWARD PROGRAM

Every year the AASLH solicits applications for their annual award program. Now in its 60th year, the Awards Program is the most prestigious national recognition for achievement in the preservation and interpretation of local, state, and regional history. Nominations are due to state award representatives on March 1, 2005.

For more information or to obtain nomination forms email Gail Stern ([gail@princetonhistory.org](mailto:gail@princetonhistory.org)) or Jim Turk ([James.Turk@sos.state.nj.us](mailto:James.Turk@sos.state.nj.us)). You may also visit the AASLH web site, [www.aaslh.org](http://www.aaslh.org), or by contacting the AASLH office by phone: (615) 320-3203; or e-mail: [history@aaslh.org](mailto:history@aaslh.org).

### NEW JERSEY HISTORICAL COMMISSION FY 2006 GRANT PROGRAM

Workshops for the General Operating Support Grant Program will be held February 23, 2005 and February 25, 2005.

To register contact Sue Cureton, Grants Assistant at (609) 943-3306 or email at [sara.cureton@sos.state.nj.us](mailto:sara.cureton@sos.state.nj.us). Registrations are due by February 18, 2005.

### 12<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL HISTORY ISSUES CONVENTION

Trenton War Memorial  
Friday, March 11, 2005

***Lifting Ourselves by Our Bootstraps:  
Building Healthy History Organizations***

The theme of this year's History Issues Convention is how history organizations can improve their operations in order to achieve their maximum potential. Distinguished experts in this field will provide a useful introduction to strategic planning, financial stabilization, and audience development. The keynote speaker will be David Grant, director of one of New Jersey's major philanthropic organizations, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation.

For more information, contact the New Jersey Historical Commission at [www.newjerseyhistory.org](http://www.newjerseyhistory.org) or phone 609-292-6062.

### MIDDLEBROOK HEADQUARTERS TOUR

Sunday February 20, 2005

Two major encampments of Washington's Continental Army were located at Middlebrook, the first in 1777, and the second during the winter of 1778-1779. The houses listed below served as headquarters. Buses will make the rounds of the five houses, all of which are members of the Alliance.

Van Horne (Heritage Trail)

Abraham Staats House

Jacobus Vanderveer House

Wallace House

Van Veghten House (Somerset County Historical Society)

For information call Jessie Havens, Middlebrook Coordinator 908-359-2415.

### 2005 CULTURAL TRUST GRANTS

Fiscal Year 2005 Cultural Trust Grant Applications are now available for Institutional and Financial Stabilization Projects and Capital Historic Preservation Projects at: [www.njculturaltrust.org](http://www.njculturaltrust.org) or by calling the Trust office at 609-984-6767. Organizations must be designated "qualified" by The New Jersey Cultural Trust prior to February 15 in order to be eligible to apply.

Application Deadline: February 15, 2005

### Your Link to the Public

The Link will be on a quarterly publication schedule, with copies out on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February, May, September, and November. News of major upcoming events for possible placement in the newsletter may be mailed, emailed or faxed to the address below. Notices should reach the editor by the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the month previous to the publication date.

Catherine Bull, Editor

CRCG

415 Cleveland Avenue

Highland Park, NJ 08904

[cbull@crcg.net](mailto:cbull@crcg.net), 732-247-2888 fax, 732-247-8880 phone

# Raritan-Millstone Heritage Alliance

## Membership Application

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact (if organization): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

\$30 \_\_\_\_ Individual      \$30 \_\_\_\_ Site

Please make check payable to Raritan-Millstone Heritage Alliance

Please return: Raritan-Millstone Heritage Alliance, P.O. Box 5583, Somerset, NJ 08875-5583

### The Raritan Millstone Heritage Alliance

The Raritan Millstone Heritage Alliance is a group of Middlesex, Somerset and Mercer County sites, historical and eventful, located along the Raritan and Millstone Rivers. The Alliance works to help these sites preserve and promote their rich and eventful heritage and culture through educational and interpretive activities and materials; to promote, publicize, develop tours and programs of the historic resources along the River trails.



Raritan-Millstone Heritage Alliance

P. O. Box 5583

Somerset, NJ 08875-5583