

CONFLAGRATION

The War for Independence 1776 - 1783

Crossroads of major roads, waterways, proximity to enemy strongholds, local affluence and home to future military leaders, Woodbridge was more central to the battle for New Jersey than is commonly recognized. Both British and American forces crisscrossed the Township, often engaging in skirmishes and other military actions along the way. Particularly in its early years, Woodbridge's war experience affected every resident. This war took place on the doorsteps and even inside the homes of Woodbridge's families.

From the earliest days of the war, Woodbridge featured in the plans of both combatants. General Washington acknowledged this when he included Woodbridge in plans drafted on the very day the Declaration of Independence was signed.

1776

July 4 * *Writings of Washington, Vol. 5: To BRIGADIER GENERAL HUGH MERCER Head Quarters, 9:00 P.M. Dear Sir: "... Upon full Consideration of all Circumstances, I have concluded to send the Militia Home, except 500, to guard Bergen Neck... I am also of Opinion that a Body about Woodbridge and Amboy would be very useful..."*

July 22 * *From a letter written by an officer in the 2nd Battalion of Philadelphia: "We arrived here on Saturday morning from Woodbridge with our Battalion, except Captain Wilcox's company, who are stationed at Smith's farm on Woodbridge neck [Sewaren]. We are now in full view of the enemy only separated by the sound [Arthur Kill]; our men are in high spirits and longing for an opportunity to have a skirmish..."*

December 2 * While some of Trinity Episcopal Church's congregants supported or fought with the Americans, many members and clergy of New Jersey's "Churches of England" remained loyal British subjects and Anglican churches closed for the duration of the war. The British occupied Woodbridge from December 2, 1776 to June 22, 1777. Accounts suggest that the army moved onto Trinity's property, used the Jonathan Dunham house (the current rectory) as a fort and the Church as soldiers' barracks.

December 11 * *British soldiers commandeered about 400 head of cattle and 200 sheep for winter provisions, but on this night "a company of impudent, daring Colonial militia men" snuck into town and quietly herded the livestock to an American encampment.*

"During the war, women were thrown into hostilities; some served as medics, cooks, messengers, even combatants. In a war that involved their homes and children, survival itself was political as well as personal, and the domestic became heroic." (6.)

The winter of 1776 and early spring of 1777 has been called "The Forage War(s)." British raiding parties "foraged" for food, ransacked and plundered across Woodbridge and Central Jersey. Bands of local militia harassed the raiders as much as possible.

1777

Elizabeth Inslie barely avoided mutilation by a British soldier. He had caught sight of a ring and was about to brutally cut off her finger for it when an officer appeared and stopped the assault.

January 6 * Patriots seized 1000 bushels of salt (vital for food preservation) in an intense battle at Spantown. Realizing they were being beaten, the British sent to Woodbridge for help only to receive part of the assistance requested. Two regiments reported from Amboy but the Hessians landed

in Woodbridge, believing that the raiding force in Spantown was dauntingly large, defied orders and stayed in place.

Woodbridge residents, particularly the women, had to use every weapon at their disposal to protect their homes and families. Hessian mercenaries routinely forced their way into residences, plundering relentlessly. Presumably healthy Grace Lacky outsmarted the enemy when she painted "Small-pox!" in large letters on her door. Once the warning was translated, the Hessians stayed well clear of her home so that they would not catch the deadly, but in this case, imaginary, disease.

January 23 * "... we [Americans] trimmed two regiments near to Woodbridge."

February 24 *

Town elder Jonathan Inslie, captured by Royalists, was marched through the cold countryside and forced to wade through the river at a ford. Arriving in New Brunswick, Jonathan, still in his soaking-wet clothes, was shoved into a cold cell. His wife, Grace Moore Inslie, badgered the jailers until they released her husband. However, the damage was done. Jonathan died soon after because of this brutal treatment.

March 8 * Militia and British skirmish at Strawberry Hill.



Mary, wife of Samuel Dally, nearly was killed while she was leaning out of an upper window anxiously watching a

skirmish near her house. A musket shot came through the window, narrowly missing her and lodging in the wall opposite.

March 22 * British attempt to plunder provisions and belongings of the Barnes family, but local militia drive them off.

April 15 * At 2:00 AM, a detachment of Colonel Cook's 12th Pennsylvania Regiment, under Capt. Alexander Paterson, successfully attacked the British picket guard at the Bonhamtown area of Woodbridge. The entire guard of twenty-five soldiers were either killed or captured.

April 18 * The impact of the "Forage War" was of grave concern to the American leadership.

Reported in Congress: The whole track of the British army is marked with desolation, and a wanton destruction of property, particular through...the towns of Newark, Elizabeth-Town, Woodbridge, Brunswick, Kingston, Princeton and Trenton, in New-Jersey. The fences destroyed, houses deserted, pulled in pieces, or consumed by fire, and the general face of waste and devastation spread over a rich and once well cultivated and well inhabited country... Places and things, which from their public nature and general utility should have been spared by a civilized people, have been destroyed or plundered or both."

April 19 * British capture Isaac Cotheal, a private in Capt. Christopher Marsh's Company of Light Horse.

Eunice Bloomfield's father, Timothy Bloomfield, was imprisoned in the notorious prison ship The Jersey and her brothers were serving in the Continental army. When raiders stole the family Bible and a brindle cow, Eunice and a female friend rowed to Staten Island and demanded an audience with the British commander. Impressed by her bravery, he ordered that her property be returned, arranging for an escort of British soldiers to protect them on their journey

home.

Battle of the Short Hills June 26, 1777

The Battle's name refers to a series of geographic rises: the "short hills" that mark the landscape to the east of the Watching Mountains. In late June, 1777, General Howe hoped to draw out, surround and eliminate the main Continental Army secured in these easily defensible mountains. The British had seized much of New York and New Jersey during the preceding year. When they moved troops towards their strongholds of Perth Amboy and Staten Island, General Washington believed the British were evacuating Jersey in preparation for a sea attack on the nation's capital, Philadelphia. As he moved his army down to the vicinity of Plainfield, he sent Major General William Alexander, Lord Stirling, with some 2,000 men, to harass the withdrawing British troops and to protect the Continental Army's northern flank. The British hoped to lure the main force of the Continental Army to terrain where they could surprise them in a pincer attack. The Crown's troops numbered approximately 16,000 British and Hessian troops. Only about 5,700 of Washington's 10,000 soldiers were able-bodied after illness swept through the ranks.

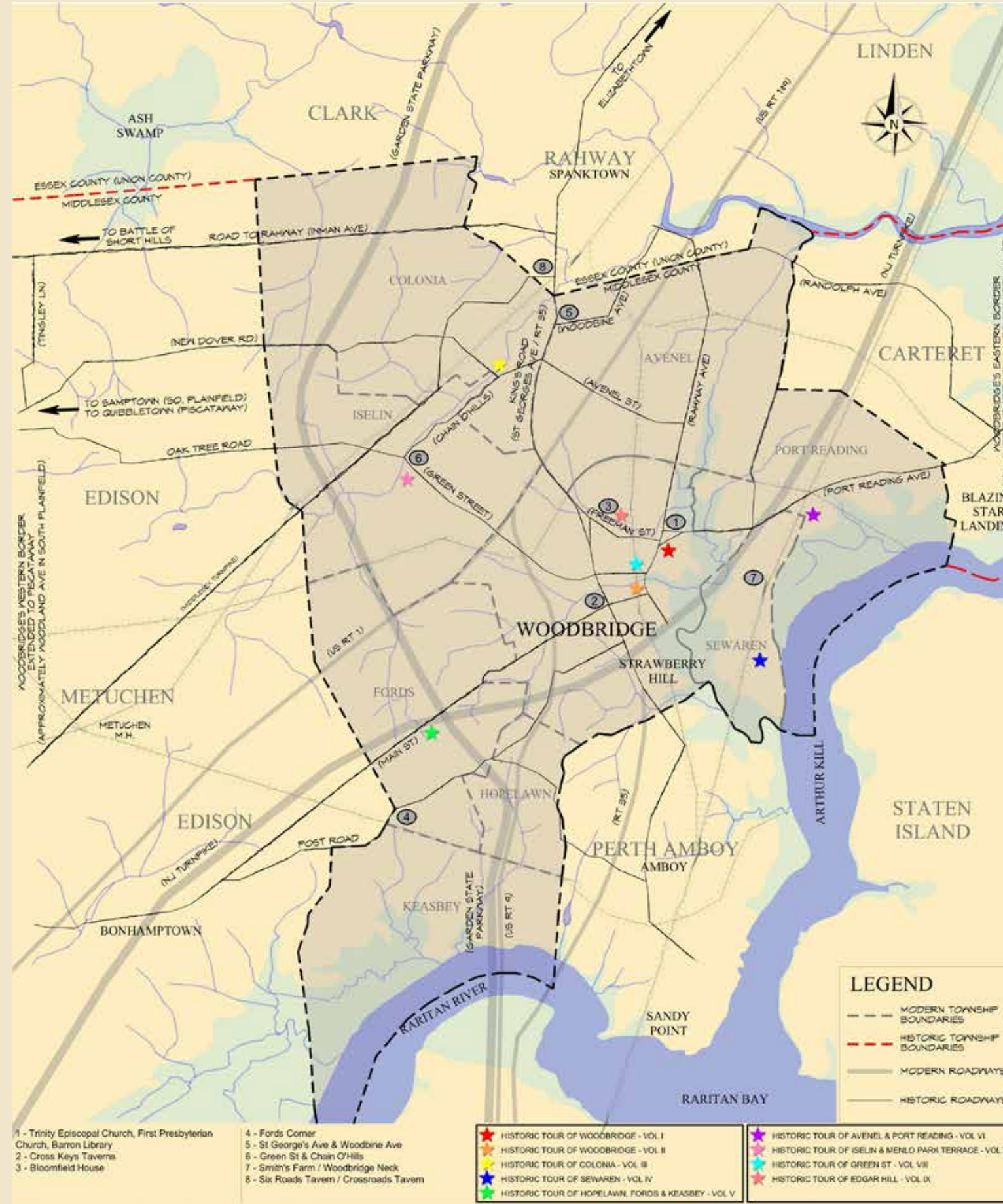
June 22 * The British headed for Perth Amboy. At nearly every crossroads local militia, employing the tactics of guerilla warfare, would fire into the well-equipped and organized Crown troops. Colonel Daniel Morgan's Raiders engaged them for more than a half-hour while the British were passing through Woodbridge, resulting in significant casualties.

June 24 * British scouts from Perth Amboy spotted "some flying parties of the rebels Horse and Foot on Strawberry Hill." Later that day, 250 British riflemen, led by Captain Patrick Ferguson, set up a post at Strawberry Hill. Ferguson invented a new kind of breech-loading rifle that could be fired six times a minute. This rifle was first used in battle near Strawberry Hill the next day.

Lord Stirling set up his headquarters at the 120-acre farm of David Edgar, located on the edge of Ash Swamp on the Road to Rahway (Inman Avenue.) David Edgar was a Lieutenant under Captain Barnet of the Dragoons and served with Heard's Brigade. Described as a "spirited cavalryman," Edgar was promoted to captain of the light horse and served in the 2nd regiment of the Continental Army as well as in Captain Sheldon's Continental Dragoons. After peace graced the Township, David Edgar was numbered among Woodbridge's war heroes.

June 25 * A Large contingent of American light dragoons (1st, 2nd and 4th regiments) clashed with Hessian mercenaries and Ferguson's Riflemen in several skirmishes across Woodbridge. *Col. Benjamin Tallmadge, commander of one of the troops of American Light Dragoons, reported on an incident at Strawberry Hill: "...all the light horse...were ordered to parade and proceeded down to Woodbridge to reconnoiter the enemy. After we came in full view of them, they immediately got under arms. ...Soon some of their light troops appeared in our rear. Our next attempt was to pass through their corps, which we did, each squadron taking a separate course. Our loss was but small considering the fire we sustained."*

Lord Stirling sent some 150 men, Colonel Daniel



- 1 - Trinity Episcopal Church, First Presbyterian Church, Barron Library
- 2 - Cross Keys Taverns
- 3 - Bloomfield House

- 4 - Fords Corner
- 5 - St. George's Ave & Woodbine Ave
- 6 - Green St & Chain O'Hills
- 7 - Smith's Farm / Woodbridge Neck
- 8 - Six Roads Tavern / Crossroads Tavern

- ★ HISTORIC TOUR OF WOODBRIDGE - VOL. I
- ★ HISTORIC TOUR OF WOODBRIDGE - VOL. II
- ★ HISTORIC TOUR OF COLONIA - VOL. III
- ★ HISTORIC TOUR OF SEWARREN - VOL. IV
- ★ HISTORIC TOUR OF HOPELAWN, FORDS & KEASBEY - VOL. V

- ★ HISTORIC TOUR OF AVENEL & PORT READING - VOL. VI
- ★ HISTORIC TOUR OF ISELIN & MENLO PARK TERRACE - VOL. VII
- ★ HISTORIC TOUR OF GREEN ST. - VOL. VIII
- ★ HISTORIC TOUR OF EDGAR HILL - VOL. IX

CONFLAGRATION

delayed, thus influencing the remainder of the war. Jonathan Freeman, age 13, volunteered at Woodbridge as a post rider for the Continental Army, and concluded "the Americans were worsted."

June 29 * A detachment from the 37th Regiment surprises a party of Patriots in a tavern, killing two men including the commanding officer and taking several prisoners.

A contemporary newspaper account tells of an unnamed Woodbridge woman who spotted a drunken Hessian mercenary in an abandoned house. She raced home, changed into her brother's clothes and grabbed an old flintlock. The woman returned to the house, captured the soldier and delivered him to a patrol from a New Jersey regiment stationed near Woodbridge. This incident is sometimes attributed to the intrepid Grace Lacky or Janet Pike Gage.



While the British occupied New Jersey and seemed destined for victory, local Tories were comfortable with their loyalty to the Crown and support of the King's troops. After the British withdrawal, the New Jersey Council of Safety

...ordered the wives and children of John Heard, Ellis Barron, Wm. Smith, Isaac Freeman and Saml. Moores, late inhabitants of the Township of Woodbridge but now with the Enemy, be immediately apprehended & sent over to Staten Island..." (3.)

January 10 * A petition was received by the Council from inhabitants of Woodbridge asking that Mrs. William Smith, wife to an affirmed and absent loyalist, be permitted to remain in the town. The petition was granted on the condition that she should remain with her father's family who stood firmly with the patriots.

February 9 * Tories under Capt. Joseph Ryerson raid the house of tavern-keeper Charles Jackson and take captive Captain Nathaniel Fitz Randolph who was just returning from a raid on Staten Island.

*February 15 * Writings of Washington, Vol. 14: To BRIGADIER GENERAL WILLIAM MAXWELL, Head Quarters. Sir: I have just now received a letter from Capt. Stokes stationed at Bonum Town, informing me that the enemy on Staten Island appear to be in motion, and have been collecting boats both at New York and the Island. You will therefore redouble your vigilance and be ready to oppose any attempt they may make near you. I am informed, there are a considerable number of fat cattle between Woodbridge and the blazing star. If this be true, which you will ascertain, you will immediately have them removed to a place of security... (The draft is in the writing of Alexander Hamilton.)*

Spring * Major Potter escorted several wives of men serving with British forces from Woodbridge to Elizabethtown; then sent under a flag of truce to Staten Island.

British command proposed capturing Patriot leaders to suppress the rebellion in New Jersey resulting in loyalist spies leading raids throughout Middlesex and Monmouth counties seizing their neighbors from

their homes. Many were sent to the prison ships where disease and death awaited.

1779

June 29 * Blazing Star Landing - Raiding party from Staten Island captures fifteen inhabitants and militia.

July 1 * (or June 29) Woodbridge native, Captain Richard Skinner, commanding officer of a troop of light horse of the Middlesex Militia, was killed by a sniper. Raiders from Staten Island surprised Skinner and others, holding a 'Public Safety Committee' meeting at the Crossroads Tavern, aka Six Roads Tavern. A small group of British soldiers and 'refugees' killed two and took thirteen as prisoners.

August 16 * Blazing Star Landing - An exchange of gunfire between local militia and "people unknown" resulted in a rout of the militia men.

1780

June 1 * Some thirty "refugees" (Tories) landed at Sandy Point on the Raritan, proceeded to Woodbridge and captured Justice Freeman, Mr. Edgar, and eight other patriots, returning with them to NY.

June 23 * A month after the Battle of Springfield, Capt. Nathaniel "Natty" Fitz Randolph died at age 32 of wounds suffered during the battle. Born in Woodbridge, Natty's exploits were the stuff of legend. Captain Fitz Randolph of the Middlesex Militia, refused a commission to Colonel as it would separate him from his men.

Once on patrol, Fitz Randolph and his men were surrounded by a larger British force. Rather than surrender, they stood their ground and fought until all save a bloody and defiant "Natty," lay dead or dying. The British officer begged him to surrender. Weakened by his wounds, Fitz Randolph surrendered and was exchanged after a month although later he suffered through a longer imprisonment after a second capture. Fitz Randolph's gravestone, at the First Presbyterian Church, is pockmarked with musket ball holes allegedly fired by Crown soldiers who found him a formidable enemy, even in death.

August * Dr. Moses Bloomfield, captured by marauders from Staten Island, was exchanged a month later for Hessian Surgeon Dr. de Bass. Dr. Bloomfield was a Middlesex County delegate to New Jersey's State Constitutional Convention in 1776 and commissioned in 1777 as Hospital Surgeon of the Continental Army. The Bloomfield homestead was ransacked and vandalized multiple times. Dr. Moses Bloomfield resigned from the Army in December, 1780. His son, Joseph Bloomfield, served in Third New Jersey Regiment and later as State Attorney General then Governor of New Jersey in 1801 and 1803-1812.

While fewer military actions took place in Woodbridge in the later years of the war, the Township's denizens were not spared, as fathers, husband and sons served in regiments far from home, rations were scarce and Tory refugees continued to terrorize their former neighbors.

General Washington and his troops won a resounding victory after the Siege of Yorktown in the fall of 1781. British Lieutenant General Cornwallis was captured. Yorktown was the last "great" battle of the Revolutionary War, which formally ended after the Treaty of Paris was signed on September 3, 1783.

SPARKS



Rev. Azel Roe

was invited to the First Presbyterian Church of Woodbridge to preach "on trial." He was officially installed in 1763. Church pastor for over fifty years, Roe "preached independence from tyranny." When the "White Church's" militia members hesitated to commit to the struggle, Rev. Roe put himself in the line of enemy fire until his flock promised to join him. His fiery sermons and militant actions drew the attention of the British who captured and briefly incarcerated him in the infamous Old Sugar House Prison in New York City.

Not surprisingly, the first Committee of Correspondence was formed in 1772 in the radical hotbed of Boston. By 1776, Committees were established throughout cities and regions of the thirteen colonies. They rallied colonial opposition to British rule, operated as an extensive communications network and, after the start of the rebellion, acted as provisional governments for the new states. News of the events in Lexington was advanced through the Committees of Correspondence. On Tuesday, April 25, 1775, three members of the Woodbridge Committee, Nathaniel Heard, Samuel Parker and Jonathan Clawson, signed for that message at 10:00 PM.



Gen. Nathaniel Heard

Nathaniel Heard was one of Woodbridge's best military minds. In January, 1775, Nathaniel Heard was selected for the local "committee of observation" aka Committee of Correspondence. Later that year he was selected as one of Middlesex County's delegates to the Provisional Congress and made colonel of a battalion in the Middlesex Militia. Promoted to Brigadier-General in the Continental Army with a battalion named after him, Heard corresponded directly with General Washington. In January, 1776, Washington directed then Colonel Heard to take his troops to disarm Tories in Queens County, Long Island. Heard executed his task promptly and efficiently which earned him scorn from the Tories who mocked him in verse. An example is this ditty sung to the tune of Yankee Doodle: "Col. Heard has come to town. In all his pride and glory; And when he dies he'll go to Hell; For robbing of the Tory."

On June 18, 1776, Colonel Heard took a contingent to Perth Amboy to arrest Royal Governor, William Franklin, Benjamin Franklin's illegitimate son. Heard later participated in the Battles of Trenton, Princeton and Monmouth. The British retaliated on multiple occasions raiding Heard's property on the southeast corner of the Post Road and the Road to Amboy (Main Street and Amboy Avenue.) Tons of hay, over one thousand pounds of grain, horses, cider and fencing were all stolen and the two homes on his property, a "hatter's shop, weaver's shop, chair house and two barns" were all burned to the ground. As late as 1860, General Heard's heirs were still appealing to Congress for compensation on the grounds that the property was used by the Americans as a military rendezvous point.

At the time of the Revolution, Woodbridge was a community of consequence. Their Sons of Liberty and Committee of Correspondence exerted considerable influence in the Jerseys and, situated on the main thoroughfare between New York and Philadelphia, was visited by many "worthies" of the day. "Families who lived along the main roads bore a special burden during the war. Advancing and retreating armies, whether patriot or loyalist, passed their houses, often desperately hungry. Women and girls watched helplessly as food, livestock, firewood, clothing, and equipment disappeared." (6.)

Then, as now, most roads lead through Woodbridge.

1765
**** Power of the Printed Word * The Parkers ****
 Notwithstanding his mentor Benjamin Franklin, James Parker was among the most important colonial printers. Despite his role as the Jersey's first Royal Printer, James Parker printed items for his friends in the Sons of Liberty. On September 21, 1765, Providence minister William Goddard used Parker's Woodbridge print shop to produce The Constitutional Courant, a powerful protestation of the Stamp Act. James' son, Samuel Franklin Parker, took over his father's Woodbridge printing business and, fully committed to Liberty, joined the Woodbridge Committee for Correspondence. By autumn 1775, Samuel Parker was a Captain with the 1st Regiment of the Middlesex County Militia. Serving with Heard's unit on Long Island, he was promoted to Major. He died, Dec. 6, 1779, after a long illness and before victory was assured.

1766
**** Sons of Liberty * The Stamp Act ****
 Creation of local chapters of the Sons of Liberty were prompted by the New York City Liberty Boys. The chapters in Woodbridge and New Brunswick, more moderate than their radical brethren in Boston and NY, were very popular and effective in rousing opposition to the Stamp Act.

As a town founded largely by families seeking commercial and economic advancement, England's repeated demands for a growing share of their profits via the Sugar Act, Stamp Act and Townshend Acts, were egregious insults. On June 4, 1766, Woodbridge's Sons of Liberty and their friends and families celebrated the repeal of the Stamp Act. Hundreds attended the festivities which began with the "beat of drum and sound of trumpet." Feasting on roasted ox and drinking "liquors of different kinds in great plenty," the joyous town folk gathered 'round a bonfire. Eighteen toasts were offered including those to the King and Queen; the Parliament; the Sons of Liberty in America; the Liberty of the press; a hope that lawyers might charge smaller fees and be less litigious; and the last pleas - 17. Peace and Happiness to those who treat their Debtors with Lenity. 18. Prosperity to the Jerseys. After covering all their political bases and engaging in some wishful thinking, it is possible that partiers may not have been able to bend their elbows for a nineteenth toast.

1775
**** Resistance Strengthens * Communication * Arrest of a Royal Governor ****

The foundations for Woodbridge's war experiences were laid during the decades and days leading up to the American Revolution.

1669
**** Woodbridge's Beginnings * Early Colonists ****
 The first European settlers who made their way to this fertile area arrived in 1665. They were principally English tradesman and "lower gentry" who sought land and religious freedom so journeyed south after several decades in Long Island, New York and northeastern New England. Captain Philip Carteret granted a private charter to them in 1669, creating Woodbridge Township.

By the time the shot heard 'round the world' was fired in Lexington in 1775, Woodbridge was already over a century old and for many of its citizens, their ties to mother England had loosened over time and distance.

1673
**** Militias * The Jersey Blues ****
 In 1673, Woodbridge men joined with their Piscataway neighbors to form a militia "to repel foreign Indians" who for centuries had annually migrated to the banks of the Arthur Kill and Raritan River to take advantage of abundant fish and shellfish. Founding father John Pike was made a Captain in the militia in 1675, starting the family military tradition which descended to his g-g-g-grandson, General Zebulon Montgomery Pike, who was killed in battle during the War of 1812.

This nucleus grew into the regiment later renowned as the Jersey Blues. Over the following century, Woodbridge men were called into service during King George's War (1744-1748) and others became battle-seasoned, as did George Washington, after being drafted into the French and Indian War (1755-1763). Tradition has it that the Jersey Blues routinely rendezvoused at Timothy Bloomfield's house near Fords Corners and at Joseph Gilman's place in Woodbridge.

While the Blues fought bravely under British command during the French and Indian War, they were American patriots during the Revolution. General Washington reportedly held the Blues in high esteem and they manned the inner line of defense around Washington's headquarters at Valley Forge and participated in many actions.

1686
**** Society of Friends * Quaker Tenet ****
 The first Quaker meeting was held in Woodbridge in 1686. Over the following decades, the size of the Woodbridge meeting began to diminish and the meetings in Rahway and Plainfield grew. In 1756, a draft was called to fill the local quota of soldiers to fight for England in the French and Indian War. A cherished principle of the Quakers was a prohibition against bearing arms against their fellows and at least twenty-three men "experienced the penalty of law" and were fined for refusing to bear arms or train with the militia between 1757 and 1760. The last monthly Quaker meeting was held in Woodbridge on April 19, 1769.

1763
**** First Presbyterian Church of Woodbridge * Patriotism from the Pulpit ****
 The British called Reverend Azel Roe "the famous rebel clergyman of New Jersey." In 1761, Rev. Roe

The mission of the Woodbridge Township Historic Preservation Commission is to inform, educate, advise and unite public officials and the community at large as an advocate for the preservation of the rich history of Woodbridge Township

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Special Thanks to
 Mayor John E. McCormac



"Portrait of George Washington Taking the Salute at Trenton" by John Faed, circa 1880.

Grant funding has been provided by the Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission, Middlesex County Board of Chosen Freeholders through a grant provided by the New Jersey Historical Commission a division of Dept. of State.

MIDDLESEX COUNTY, N.J.

www.woodbridgehistory.com
 A complete list of resources is located at www.woodbridgehistory.com
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EMBERS

Although peace had come and a new nation formed, the War left its mark on the land and souls of Woodbridge.



**Families Divided * Janet Pike Gage * Liberty Pole **

The Revolutionary War has been called America's first civil war and there is much to support that claim. Once companionable neighbors turned on each other. The property of British supporters and sympathizers was confiscated. Tories were driven out of town, some escaped to Canada never to return.

Brother fought against brother, father against son, even husband against wife. Janet (Jennet) Pike Gage was the daughter and sister of Continental soldiers and a fervent patriot herself. On August 15, 1778, Janet's husband, Philip Gage, appeared on a list with others from the Township who had joined the army of the King of Great Britain or had otherwise betrayed the colonies. Their property was seized and put to auction. As her politics and those of her family were well known, Janet bid for and won her husband's lands.

After the end of the War, Janet determined to erect a liberty pole to proclaim the new country's freedom. She and the black man 'Joe' took a yoke of oxen, went into the woods and selected a stately hickory tree. Joe cut it down and trimmed it clean and together they affixed the flag to the pole and set the first Stars and Stripes to fly in Woodbridge in front of the Cross Keys Tavern.

The local D.A.R. group, Janet Gage Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, Woodbridge, was named in her honor. Separated by politics but united in death, Janet and Philip are buried together at the Woodbridge United Methodist Church on Main Street.

**** Cross Keys Tavern ****
 Located on the Post Road between Philadelphia and New York, the Cross Keys Tavern was a well-known overnight stop and colonial meeting place. Built in the early half of the 18th century the Tavern/Inn occupied the corner of Amboy Avenue and Main Street where the Knights of Columbus building stands today. One of the tavern's most famous guests was the first President of the United States, General George Washington, who was welcomed by Innkeeper and first Postmaster of Woodbridge John Manning. General Washington spent the night of April 22, 1789 at the Cross Keys Tavern, while en route to New York to take the oath of office as President of the United States. A gala was held in his honor and Washington apparently caused quite a stir when he bypassed the Township's eligible ladies to grace an elderly Patriot woman with a dance. On September 24, 1824, Woodbridge received another important guest at the Cross Keys Tavern. Gilbert du Motier, the Marquis de Lafayette, the famous French general who helped the Americans during the

Revolutionary War, stopped here on his way to Philadelphia. Moved from its original location in the 1920s, the Tavern still stands, although today it is a private apartment building.

****Inventories * Violation****
 Plundering and destruction was not limited to the time of the "Forage War." While some properties were targeted because of the politics of their owners, the Heards, Bloomfields and Parkers for example, every household in Woodbridge sustained loss of property or worse. Food and means of its production was stolen, as were valuables, furniture, clothing, books, even feather-beds. Windows were broken and buildings vandalized and burned. Residents were often left cold and hungry with little recourse.

After the war, the new government had survivors attest to their losses. Inventories were made of items great and small in the hopes that some compensation might be forthcoming. Sarah Brittain Skinner, widow of Captain Richard Skinner who was killed in an ambush in 1779, claimed losses that included three cows, sheep, two horses, 200 lbs beef, eleven hogs, 100 chickens, two pair new linen stockings, one copper tea kettle, six new pewter planks, one dozen knives and forks, one dollar in hard cash, one pewter teapot, one new pair of men's shoes, one new set of bed covers, seven yards of linen, one pitch fork and two cedar pails. Their daughter, Anna, married Isaac Payne, son of John Payne of Woodbridge who was killed in action Oct. 25, 1781. Experience Ilsley Fitz-Randolph, widow of Natty FitzRandolph, applied to the Middlesex County Orphans Court for a guardian to be appointed for her children Agnes and Nathaniel who were five and one years of age when their father died in 1780. Few documents convey the magnitude of the suffering endured by Woodbridge's citizens as well as the Revolutionary War Damage Claims, 1776 - 1782. [These can be viewed on microfilm at the Woodbridge Main Library.]

While not recognized or reported as such at the time, it is likely that many endured versions of what we now know as PTSD. Soldiers who killed and saw their brothers-in-arms die, women assaulted and children orphaned were among those who experienced the trauma of what Thomas Paine called "the times that try men's souls." Rape was not an uncommon occurrence and while many attacks were reported, it was recognized, even at the time, that a greater number were not as women feared the shame and public humiliation.

**** Gone but not Forgotten ****
 The cemetery of the First Presbyterian Church is the final resting place for dozens of veterans of the War for Independence, including Azel Roe, Nathaniel Fitz Randolph, Nathaniel Heard, Moses Bloomfield and their families. Other patriots are buried in the Trinity Episcopal Church graveyard among them James Parker and members of the Pike and Dunham families.

**** Living the Ideals of the Revolution ****
 After fighting for liberty and justice for all, some

found slavery to be incompatible with the principles of the new nation. Manumissions increased across New Jersey. In a widely-reported account, Dr. Moses Bloomfield freed his slaves on July 4, 1783 during a celebration of the end of the war. Standing atop a platform, Dr. Bloomfield proclaimed to all present - "As a nation, we are free and independent - all men are created equal, and why should they, my fellow citizens - my equals, be held in bondage? From this day forth they are emancipated and I here declare them free and absolved from all servitude to me and my posterity."

In 1784, Woodbridge's population was second in Middlesex County only to New Brunswick's. The statistics below give a snapshot of Woodbridge just after the Revolution.

Area (sq. miles) 49.9 * Population 2,594 * Farms 318 * Acres of improved land 22,158 * Horses 820 * Horned cattle 1,870 * Single men 32 * Single men with horse 11 * Slaves 39 * House & lots of less than 10 acres 39 * Householders 246 * Riding Chairs 49 * Merchant shops 5 * Taverns 2 * Grist Mills 8 * Saw Mills 2 * Tanyards 3 * Vessels 4 5/6

Today, Woodbridge is less than half its original size after 19th century redistricting took Metuchen, much of Edison, and lower Rahway out of Woodbridge. With Carteret's secession in 1906, Woodbridge's modern boundaries were set, encompassing 24.51 square miles. However, Woodbridge is still the second largest town in Middlesex County with 382 people fewer than Edison (per 2010 census.)

The ideals of the Revolution - no taxation without representation, freedom of the press, personal liberty and self-determination - still burn in our hearts today. Using our minds' eye, we might see the kirk green with its Liberty Oak when we look at the First Presbyterian and Trinity Episcopal Churches. Imagine lifting a tankard of ale at the Cross Keys Tavern or hiding valuables in the outhouse as British and American combatants crisscrossed our Township, leaving scars in their wake. We can walk some of those same pathways thinking of the history beneath our feet. Across Woodbridge the family names of many of the veterans of the War of Independence are preserved in place names that guide our way today - Barron, Bloomfield, Brown, Cutter, Leonard, Moore, Noe and Thorpe Avenues; Heard's Brook; Cutter Dock; Freeman, Brown, Inslee, Marsh, and Ross Streets. Woodbridge remembers.



Sketch of Early Woodbridge - Early 1800's

The Revolution: War Comes To Woodbridge

Historic Tour of
WOODBIDGE

Volume X



Compiled by the
 Woodbridge Township Historic Preservation Commission

First Edition - 2018

