



In Bergen's Attic

We have again faced down another storm of historic proportions. About a

President's Message

foot of water invaded the

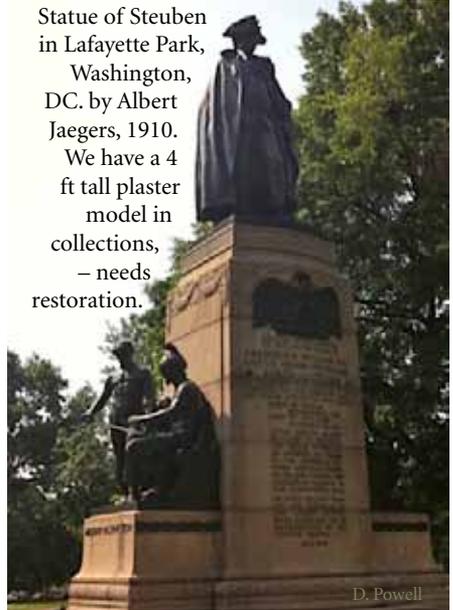
main floor of the Zabriskie-Steuben House, but it receded with the tide, leaving a coat of muddy sand. Unlike in April 2007, however, we now have access and volunteers were able to move everything of value to the upper floors in plenty of time. We can always mop muddy floors and air out rooms, but at least there is no damage to significant artifacts or furnishings. Since the display cases were set on blocks and tables, which we keep handy for such purposes, we only have to wipe off their bases and arrange the exhibits. We also raised furnishings in the Demarest House, where floodwaters filled the basement, barely reaching the main floor. The Campbell-Christie House, Out Kitchen and Westervelt-Thomas Barn stood above the flood. We also set that portion of our museum and library collections, presently stored in a warehouse considered safe above the century-flood mark, on pallets and tables. Obviously, it is better to be safe than sorry.

Since 1850—the approximate date of the close of the Little Ice Age—sea level in New York Harbor has risen 15 inches, so we must adapt to circumstances beyond our control. Otherwise, we would have to be willing to abandon a priceless piece

of our heritage and the most significant surviving fragment of the Jersey Dutch countryside. Johannes Ackerman chose this site at the confluence of Coles Brook and the Hackensack River in 1720 as a suitable location for a tidal gristmill.

Statue of Steuben in Lafayette Park, Washington, DC. by Albert Jaegers, 1910.

We have a 4 ft tall plaster model in collections, — needs restoration.



D. Powell

Obviously, being located at the narrows of the Hackensack River, site of the *Bridge That Saved A Nation*, it survived more of the American Revolution than any other extant site in America. Having served as a fort, military headquarters, encampment ground and battle ground in every year of the war, it literally is the *Crossroads of the American Revolution*. We cannot move a Revolutionary War battleground and Washington's headquarters (in September 1780) to higher ground, so we stand prepared to do all we are called upon to do for its safety.

We are now working on resolving issues that will allow us to open our

continued on page 17

In this issue

President's Letter	1 & 19
Fundraising	2 & 4, 5
New Trustees	3
Events & News	13 & 18, 19
Saving the Army	6-12, 17
Coytesville	13-17



We thank ROOSEVELT SCHOOL, River Edge for their generous donation to the BCHS Museum & Library Building Fund!

Retiring teacher Anne Marchetti and her fourth grade class raised \$844 in 2 days! Their efforts, on our behalf, will resume in the fall. We are deeply grateful to all those who recognize the need and who meet the challenge of preserving our irreplaceable heritage!

Pictured here: Past BCHS President Kevin Wright with representatives from Anne Marchetti's fourth grade class.



We thank Outwater Militia for their generous donation of \$1,000 to the BCHS Museum & Library Building Fund!

Pictured here: Meredith Dansak, Michele Dansak, George Skic (Deputy Commander of Outwater's Militia) Mike Trepicchio, BCHS President accepting the check, Richard Dansak, Jim Smith and Caroline Dansak.

Welcome new BCHS trustees **Jim Smith, Scott Barone and Janet King.**



A resident of Ridgewood, **James M. Smith** has always had a passion for history and is excited to be joining the Board of Trustees. He attended The Catholic University of America, receiving a BA in History and continued his studies at St. Peter's College and is a State Certified Social Studies Teacher.

However, Mr. Smith's interest in history does not reside solely in the classroom. He is also an officer of Outwater's Militia, which is based on an actual unit that served in the Hackensack & New Bridge area during the Rev War. While other areas of the Colonies saw fighting through different periods, it was Bergen County and its militia that was on constant duty. We may know the names of George Washington and Anthony Wayne, but how much is known about John Outwater, Adam Boyd, John Fell, and Major Goetchius?

I am **Scott Barone** and I have been married to my wife Jodi for seventeen years. We have twin nine-year-old boys and live in Paramus. I am a Network Engineer for Verisk Analytics in Jersey City, NJ. I have always loved history for as long as I can remember. I especially enjoy the colonial period. For this reason I joined a living history group called the Third NJ Regiment, which is a member organization of a larger group called the Brigade of the American Revolution (aka BAR). We portray Continental soldiers and re-enact battles and events that happened between 1775 and 1783. I like to camp out at events with my kids, where they learn about history and get to stay at some pretty cool historic sites. I enjoy participating in all the wonderful BCHS events they hold throughout the year.

Janet King traces her interest in history to family road trips with stops to visit historic sites and read all of the "hysterical" markers along the way. Soon she was bringing along library books about territory they were passing through to paraphrase for her little brother (who ended up majoring in history). She also began compiling information for a family tree and dreamed about going West on a wagon train. Born in Denver and growing up in Los Angeles, Phoenix, Seattle and Cincinnati, she had a Western bent, but is happy to have ended up in Bergen County, where colonial and Revolutionary War days are also part of the picture.

Janet retired last year after teaching English and ESL for 40 years. She is happy to be part of BCHS.

Fundraising Efforts for BCHS Museum & Library

DONATIONS: \$38,024 Updated 8/17/2011

BENEFACTOR: \$1,000 to 4,999

Deborah Powell & Kevin Wright,
River Edge
Sgt. Walter Scott Brown American
Legion, Post 226, River Edge
Outwater Militia, New Jersey

Naomi Rothschild, Englewood
by Jennifer Rothschild
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Klaus & Jerri Angermueller in memory of
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Roosevelt School, River Edge
(lead by Anne Marchetti's Class)
Mac Borg, Woodland Park

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Dennis and Nancy Buttacavoli,
Hasbrouck Hts
Thomas Jordan, Hackensack
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Norwood American Legion Post 272,
Norwood
Clifford Zink, Princeton
Al & Jeanne Dib, Hackensack
Dee Ann Ipp, Teaneck
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Barbara Bosch, Hasbrouck Heights
Martin and Eleanor Gruber, Ridgewood
Martin and Norma Goetz, Teaneck
Sgt. Walter Scott Brown Post 226
American Legion Post , River Edge
Keith Brickman, Cary, NC

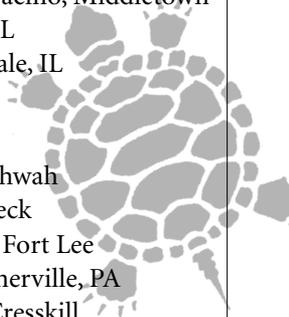
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Eleanor Roth, Bergenfield
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Judith Grace, Teaneck
Dawn Langmaack, Fort Lee
Marie Haisan, Tannerville, PA
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SOCIETY: \$5,000+ Be the first



Every donation counts Will you help?

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Roosevelt School, (Mary Miller)
River Edge
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(Miss Caitlin Carroll) Demarest
Cliffside Park School 4
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\$1,000 and up donation includes you on a
commemorative plaque in the new building

If you think I missed including you here, please advise me by email for the next newsletter:
contactbchs@bergencountyhistory.org



We thank
Eleanor Roth
and her son
Bob for their
longtime
support!

Ramsey Historical Association
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Donations were made in Memory of
Gail Goldstein
Weinberg Family
of Teaneck and
others.



The Means of Saving the Army

The real person who warned the garrison of Fort Lee

by Past BCHS President Todd Braisted



Few things in Bergen County Revolutionary War History draw more debate than who it was that warned the garrison of Fort Lee that the British had crossed the Hudson and were on their way to attack them. Legend and lore have often been brought to the front as facts, often because the stories have been told so many times they have simply been accepted as such. This aspect of the story was indeed just one more controversy of the invasion, added to: Where did the British actually land? Who were the three guides for Cornwallis? And was the Kearney house really “Cornwallis’ Headquarters?”

We are fortunate that historians such as John Spring and Eric Nelsen have stepped forward in our lifetime to examine the true facts of some of these events, often at the risk of heated arguments or worse. One of the reasons I have always respected the Bergen County Historical Society is its fundamental desire to seek, accept and support the truth of real history, even at the risk of not supporting popular legend. Perhaps the last legend unresolved from the invasion is that which is the subject of this article.

Fort Lee in November 1776 was a post with little future ahead of it. Often described as two distinct posts, Fort Lee and Fort Constitution (the former the redoubt located in what is now the town of Fort Lee; the latter the batteries along the cliffs where the historic park lies), this work acted in conjunction with Fort Washington, located on the opposite side of the Hudson, diagonally to the north. Ships sunk in the river would theoretically channel British warships into an area where the guns of both forts would prevent their advancing further up-river. The Royal Navy frigates *Phoenix* and *Roebuck* along with the

smaller *HMS Tartar* sailed successfully through these defenses in October 1776, much to the dismay of the garrisons in the forts. Further probes of the river proved equally fruitless in defending against, and in one instance at least was deadly for the defenders, as referenced in this newspaper account from Rhode Island:

*In discharging a Cannon at some of the Enemy's Ships, that were, on the 5th Instant, endeavouring to pass Fort Lee, at New-York, it missed Fire, when the brave (though very young) the intrepid, and the gallant, Capt. Hardy Peirce, of this Town, stepping nimbly before it, to give Orders, it, on a Sudden, went off, when he received the whole Charge in his Body, which put a Period to his Existence.*¹

During the period of July through November, particularly during the last eight weeks or so, thousands of troops, Continentals, Flying Camp and Militia, either passed through the fort, built or defended it. At its height, over 3,600 officers and men occupied the works and environs of Fort Lee.² Some of the troops remained in garrison for an extended period, but most moved over to the New York side, either to garrison Fort Washington or join Washington's Army.

The fort and batteries were built upon the property of Mr. Peter Bourdet, who ran a ferry at the base of the Palisades. Although Bourdet was sympathetic to the Rebel cause, one of the ferry operators there certainly was not. Isaac Perkins of English Neighbourhood, who owned a pettiauger (a common Hudson River small vessel) to “ply” the ferry across the

river, would be one of Cornwallis' guides on his invasion.³

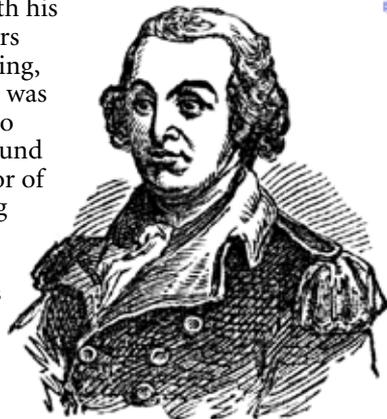
After the British victory at the Battle of White Plains on 28 October 1776, Washington led the bulk of his army across the Hudson and down to Bergen County to await the next moves of the British. Establishing his headquarters in Hackensack, he left Major General Nathanael Greene in charge of Fort Lee. Greene on 13 November 1776 had twelve regiments and one independent company under his command, with a total of about 3,500 officers and men present and fit for duty under his command.⁴ It is at this point the strength of the garrison goes into flux, with regiments being detached and new regiments arriving on a daily basis. These troops were all Continental or state troops. While several Bergen County Militiamen stated they were in garrison at the post when Fort Washington was taken, none stated they were there when the British invaded New Jersey. Indeed, the last return of troops at Fort Lee that explicitly mentions the Bergen County Militia there was at the end of September. An examination of numerous pension applications shows these men were primarily involved in constructing the fort, which would correspond with the earlier time period.

The attack on Fort Washington, which occurred on 16 November 1776, was clearly an incident forever etched in the memory of not only those who took part in it, but those who witnessed it from across the river. Major General Greene had sent the better part of six regiments from Fort Lee across the river to aid Colonel Magaw in the defense of Fort Washington. Greene held back one man in five from each of the corps he sent over, most likely to tend to their camps and baggage, but it left him briefly with just over 500 privates at Fort Lee present and fit for duty. That ended within forty eight hours, as the regiments of Heard's NJ

Brigade and the Maryland Flying Camp joined the garrison, having crossed the river earlier with Washington. These corps probably swelled Greene's command to somewhere between 2,500-3,000 officers and men, to which could be added Colonel Ebenezer Williams' regiment of Connecticut Militia, which lay in the adjacent English Neighbourhood.

With his numbers increasing, Greene was about to compound his error of sending over 1,600 officers and men to certain

doom, by mustering more units to make the journey to cross the Hudson. Isaac Clinkenbeard, a soldier in Captain Andrew Hines' Company of the Maryland Flying Camp, had arrived in Fort Lee on 15 November 1776. He recalled the next morning, that of the attack, his regiment was formed "with the intention to cross over to fort Washington, but there we were met by General George Washington, who ordered that no more troops should cross over."⁵ Lt. John Longstreth, also of Captain Hines' Company, recalled that he and his men "expected to cross the river early in the morning to assist at the Battle of Fort Washington, whilst taking a little Breakfast, an armed vessel



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and would like to, please email me at:
contactBCHS@bergencountyhistory.org
— D. Powell**

came up the river, took command of the Ferry prevented our crossing; Fort Washington was taken that day in our view..."⁶ George Shall, a soldier in Colonel Michael Swope's Regiment of the Pennsylvania Flying Camp, recalled either the same incident, or a similar one happening the previous day. Swope's corps was one of those sent over to Fort Washington a few days earlier by Greene; Shall had been sent back on the 14th or 15th with a few other men to deliver dispatches. Shall recalled "The next day we were ordered to parade to cross the river, when Gen. Washington rode up & asked what we were paraded for, & being told it was for the purpose of crossing to the island, forbade it, & said he was sorry so many had already gone over for they would probably be lost. The next day was the battle & Capture of Fort Washington."⁷ The incident described by Shall was probably the same as that related by Clinkenbeard and Longstreth, only altered by the passage of time.

Not all the troops at Fort Lee remained passive while Fort Washington was under attack. Thomas Jones, a soldier in the Maryland Flying Camp later noted "Ge[enera]l Bells regiment fired cannon and threw bombs across the North river at the British while they were attacking the Fort [Washington] – but the distance was too great for them to take Effect."⁸ Daniel Parkison of Colonel Frederick Watts' battalion of the Pennsylvania Flying Camp "assisted in drawing up upon a Rock they called Fort Constitution two 36 Pounders, there was some small cannon and a bomb, I think the cannon were to annoy the British vessels on the North River; we used the 36s against the British when they marched against Fort Washington."⁹

For the troops at Fort Washington, the British and Hessian attack was very quick and in the end, unstoppable. Some, not wishing to surrender with the garrison made their way to the water's edge in an attempt to flee across the river. Amongst them was Pennsylvanian

George Owrey who later recalled his terrifying experience: "I was Stationed at Fort Washington under Colonel Magaw and when the Fort was Surrendered made my escape across the River to Fort Lee, in company with some others, where I joined again my own Regiment under Colonel Broadhead. As we crossed the Hudson River from Fort Washington the British fired upon us and one small cannon Shot passed through our Boat. Some of us Stuffed our Clothes into the hole and others bailed the water with their Hats..."¹⁰

One young New Yorker and his family had already made the crossing. Benjamin Romaine, whose family would settle



in Bergen County and he himself take up arms for the United States, described their ordeal: "In or about the month of August 1776 my Father, mother and myself fled from this City to Fort Washington, a few miles above on the Hudson River. On the approach of the enemy, we crossed the Hudson to Fort Lee, on the opposite shore, while the cannon balls were flying over our heads, from Fort Lee, directed at the enemy's ships, which were endeavouring to ascend the river in aid of the storming Fort Washington."¹¹

The refugees above described were not the only ones on the water that day. Nathanael Greene, along with Washington and other senior officers had been ferried over from Fort Lee the morning of the battle. Greene, feeling

“mad, vext, sick and sorry” the next day, described the harrowing details to Colonel Henry Knox of the Artillery:

Yesterday morning General Washington, General Putnam, General Mercer and myself went to the Island to determine what was best to be done – but Just at the instant we stept on board the Boat the Enemy made their appearance on the Hill where the Monday action was – and began a severe Cannonade with several field pieces – our Guards soon fled, the Enemy advanced up to the second line, this was done while we were crossing the River and geting upon the Hill. The Enemy made several marches to the right and to the left I suppose to reconnoiter the fortifications and lines. There we all stood in a very awkward situation, as the disposition was made and the Enemy advancing we durst not attempt to make any new disposition – indeed we saw nothing amiss. We all urged his Excellency to come off – I offered to stay, General Putnam did the same and so did General Mercer, but his Excellency thought it best for us all to come off together – which we did about half an hour before the Enemy surrounded the fort. The Enemy came up Harlam River and landed at Party at Head Quarters which was upon the back of our People in the lines, a disorderly retreat soon took place without much firing the People retreated into the fort. On the north side of the fort there was a very heavy fire for a long while – and as they had the advantage of the ground – I apprehend the Enemies loss must be great. After the Troops retreated in the fort very few Guns was fired, the Enemy approached within

small arm fire of the lines and sent in a flag – and the Garrison capitulated in an hour.¹²

The Battle of Fort Washington had ended; the battle to take Fort Lee was about to begin.

With the loss of Fort Washington, there was little strategic need for Fort Lee, but neither was there apprehended a rapid need to abandon it. Washington had established his headquarters at Hackensack with part of his army¹³; an additional guard occupied New Bridge, carefully watching the comings and goings of the inhabitants. Bergen would become known by the Continental troops (and even the state’s governor) as the “disaffected” county for the large number of Loyalist inhabitants living there. Guards from the fort were certainly on the watch for any friends to the King making their way to the British, as evidenced in this extract of a letter written from Fort Lee on 13 November 1776:

Last night I went tory hunting with a party of 50 men, but the birds had flown before we arrived; however, we were repaid by a sight of the enemy’s encampment, whose fires being very numerous, and greatly extended, exhibited a delightful appearance.

I was just now interrupted by the sergeant of the guard we left at the river side opposite to the ships. He informs me, they have taken a red hot tory coming from the enemy’s vessels, so our expedition was not entirely fruitless.¹⁴

These patrols and detachments from the fort would be key over the coming few days. The return of 14 November 1776 shows “1 Captain, 2 1st Lieutenants, 2 2nd Lieutenants, 2 Ensigns, 6 Sargeants, 10 Drums & Fifes, [and] 145 Privates” scattered on guards at Bergen, Hobuck, Bull’s Ferry, Hackensack and “opposite Spiten Devil.”¹⁵ It is this last-mentioned guard post that will be the focus of our

continued on page 10

attention.

Washington correctly realized the situation and announced his intentions to Congress on the 19th of November:

As Fort Lee was always considered, as only necessary in conjunction with that on the East side of the River, to preserve the communication across, & to prevent the Enemy from a free navigation, It has become of no importance by the loss of the other, or not so material as to employ a force for its defence. Being viewed in this, light and apprehending that the Stores there would be precariously situated, their removal has been determined on, to Boundbrook, above Brunswic, Prince Town, Springfield & Acquackinac Bridge, as places that will not be subject to sudden danger in case the Enemy should pass the River, & which have been thought proper, as repositories for our Stores of Provision & Forage.¹⁶

Washington had the correct plan. But having just started hauling away stores within the previous 48 hours, he was too late.

Sir William Howe, commander in chief of the British Army in America, has been criticized in history for moving too slowly during the New York Campaign. His movement on Fort Lee however has never been a part of that assessment. On the night of the 19th, soon after Washington announced his intention to evacuate Fort Lee, eleven battalions of British & Hessian troops, totaling 5,000 men in two divisions, embarked on board flat boats and slipped out north from Spuyten Duyvil Creek towards the west bank of the Hudson. The invasion was begun. But who actually would warn the garrison, and what was the scene like on that autumn morning? Using the accounts of those that were actually there on the scene, we now have a reasonably clear picture.

Years of research have tracked down 68 veterans from the war that were present at Fort Lee the day of the invasion. These veterans submitted pension applications to the United States government, typically in 1818 or 1832, depending upon their circumstances. Some accounts were mere mentions, such as Rowland Cotton of the 20th Continental Regiment, who recalled being stationed at Fort Lee “until the general Retreat of the army through the State of New Jersey to the Pennsylvania Shore...”¹⁷ There are a handful though who provided rich details, which we will examine now.

The first thing that strikes you when reading the accounts is the confusion that must have reigned by the common, young soldiers. Jonathan Clayton, a Monmouth County soldier in Forman’s Regiment of Heard’s Brigade recalled “while at Fort Lee the British army landed both above & below them, & were permitted to take the Fort without much resistance.”¹⁸ Obviously, history shows there was no landing below Fort Lee, but this is an excellent example of the rumors and fears that no doubt spread that day, and in some cases believed for years afterwards. Another incorrect assumption or memory that carried on for years was that the fort knew the British were coming from their breakfast cook-fires! This tale was told by Mahlon Pitney, a Morris County soldier in Ephraim Martin’s Regiment: “one morning we Saw a large Smoke Rising two or three miles up the River & our Lighthorseman Said it was the British cooking there Breakfast. Immediately there was a council of of [sic] officers held on horseback with Washington in the center and we were ordered to march without delay.” Aside from the fact that the British had marched with cooked rations and didn’t build giant bonfires to heat a meal, Washington never made it to Fort Lee that day.¹⁹

The best clue as to at least what type of person warned the garrison comes from Thomas Paine, who wrote

in *The American Crisis* that “an officer arrived with information that the enemy with 200 boats had landed about seven miles above.” If it was an officer, it was then most likely to have been one of at least seven officers detailed as being detached on guard. With the increase of the garrison after the date of that final return, there is the possibility the number of guards was correspondingly increased. Frederick F. Van Liew, a Somerset soldier in Heard’s Brigade, was indeed one of the guards north of the fort and discovered the British, as he describes it:

Deponent...was made Second Sergeant, and sent out with a guard up the river about three miles. About day break deponent discovered the River full of boats of Brittish and as they landed deponent with his men fired and immediately run for Fort Lee. When we came to the Fort, Washington had left the Fort with his army, for Hackensack in New Jersey, and only about seventy men remained at the Fort of stragglng appearance, drinking liquor that was left by the Sutlers. Deponent and his men filled their cantines & left the Fort and went after the army, and overtook them on the highs near Hackensack town, and remained their over night.²⁰

If Van Liew’s distance was relatively accurate, that would have put him in the northern part of present-day Englewood Cliffs. He and his guard would have seen the boats on their way north to the Lower Closter Dock. His mention of firing muskets would not have been to harm the British (the muskets would have been hopelessly out of range) but rather in the hopes that the sound would alarm the garrison. Significantly, he notes that by the time he and his guard had gotten there, the garrison was gone. The time it would have taken to get to the fort probably would have been in the range of 45-60 minutes, but no more,

working on the assumption they set off immediately upon their discovery of the British. Someone else, almost certainly on horseback, had already warned the garrison.

The two great myths and legends of who warned the garrison of Fort Lee center around a young slave girl named Polly Wyckoff, and an unidentified “countryman” from Closter. The legends still regrettably are told and written as fact, Polly Wyckoff’s most recently by David Hackett Fischer’s *The Crossing* and before him (and whom Fischer cited) Arthur Lefkowitz in *The Long Retreat*. Ignoring the fact there was no one in Bergen County at the time named Polly Wyckoff, these authors also ignored Paine’s observation that the garrison was warned by an officer. The “Closter Countryman” was an invention of the 20th Century and not based on any actual facts of the landing. If Thomas Paine was correct in his observation, the officer who warned Fort Lee has now most likely been found.

John Clifford was born 10 January 1749 in Bethlehem Township, Hunterdon County. At the time the war broke out, he was living in Pittstown, in Kingwood Township, and was later commissioned a lieutenant in Captain Houten’s Company of Colonel Philip Johnson’s battalion of Brigadier General Nathaniel Heard’s Brigade of New Jersey State Troops. With his battalion he fought at the Battle of Long Island, where his colonel was killed. The corps was evacuated to New York City with the rest of Washington’s Army, then north to Fort Washington before proceeding with the army to White Plains. After the battle there on 28 October 1776, in which Clifford took part, Washington, the brigade, and other corps crossed the river and headed south, some to Fort Lee, others to Hackensack. Clifford and Heard’s Brigade headed to Fort Lee.

Lieutenant Clifford appears to have been one of the officers of the guard laying at an outpost north of Fort Lee.

continued on page 12

Exactly where is not known. When dawn broke, Clifford must have rubbed his eyes at the sight of flat boats crossing from Philip's house, transporting 5,000 troops under Lord Cornwallis. If he was in the area where Sergeant Van Liew and his post was, he would have been located 3-4 miles south of Lower Closter Dock, close enough to peer up the river from the Palisades and view the impending danger. Clifford quietly recorded the event in his 1832 pension application: "The enemy landed on the Same Side that we was, he was officer of the guard and by Strict watching discovered them when he pressed a Horse and gave Genl. Green information immediately, which was of very essential service to the army, we then retreated under Genl. Washington threw the State of New Jersey..." The pressing of a horse refers basically to taking by force or coercion a horse from an inhabitant's farm. This part of the story may actually be incorporated in the legends of Polly Wyckoff and the Closter Countryman. Clifford, as an officer in the state troops, would have had no uniform, and as such might easily be described by some as "a countryman." But of importance to historians... did anyone support Clifford's claim? Yes.

Jacob Anderson was a soldier under Clifford's command in 1776. On 28 August 1832, he testified before Judge Benjamin Egbert that the British "Landed in a few days on the Same side of the River we were and John Clifford was officer of the Guard and by Strict watching discovered them who immediately pressed a Horse and gave Geln. Green information, which was thought was the means of Saving the Army at that time..."²¹

The process of finding Clifford as the mysterious officer took years of searching through thousands of pension applications. Starting in 1818, the United States government provided for some of the veterans of the country's founding. Clifford's particular pension was administered under a law passed

7 June 1832, which provided for most veterans, regardless of their current financial situation and establishment of service.²² One pension application led to another, which gave more names and led to another, which... There are thousands more pension applications to go through. Who knows what fascinating secrets they may hold?

In our next installment: the aftermath of Clifford's discovery. Was there an actual confrontation between the retreating army and Cornwallis's forces? Washington wrote on the 21st that the "retreat was secured." But did the armies in fact meet? Tune in next time...

Todd W. Braisted
Past President BCHS
March 29, 2011

- 1 *The Freeman's Journal or New-Hampshire Gazette* (Portsmouth,) November 26, 1776, republishing a piece from a Providence newspaper of November 5, 1776.
- 2 "Return of Troops in General Green's Division, English Neighbourhood Sept. 29 1776." Record Group M246, Revolutionary War Rolls, RG 93, Reel 137, Folder 7-7, No. 59, National Archives and Records Administration. (Hereafter cited as NARA.)
- 3 Perkins' vessel was worth either £ 40, £ 50 or £ 55 currency. It later sunk while transporting some of the captured stores from Fort Lee. "Evidence on the Claim of Isaac Perkins, late of Hackensack, New Jersey," Saint John, New Brunswick, 8 February 1787. Audit Office, Class 12, Volume 16, Pages 267-268, Great Britain, The National Archives.
- 4 "A Return of the Forces encamp'd on the Jersey Shore Commanded by Major Genl. Greene, Nov. 13, 1776." Record Group M246, Revolutionary War Rolls, RG 93, Reel 137, Folder 7-7, No. 61, NARA.
- 5 Pension Application of Isaac Clinkenbeard. M-804, Pension and Bounty Land Application Files, MD/VA S15380, NARA.
- 6 Pension Application of John Longstreth. M-804, Pension and Bounty Land Application Files, No. S23778, NARA.
- 7 Pension Application of George Shall. M-804, Pension and Bounty Land Application Files, No. S7493, NARA.
- 8 Pension Application of Thomas Jones. M-804, Pension and Bounty Land Application Files, No. S2655, NARA.
- 9 "36 Pounder" refers to the weight of shot fired by a

Footnotes continued on page 17

BCHS EVENTS & PROGRAMS Fall 2011

LECTURE PROGRAM: The Roebling Legacy in Bergen: Building the Great Cables of the George Washington Bridge • Thursday, Sept 15 @ 7:30 pm

The cables and choring strings, Hart Crane salutes in “To Brooklyn Bridge,” were made in Trenton, where a humble truss bridge over the Delaware still unhumly claims TRENTON MAKES, THE WORLD TAKES. Since the main cables and suspension ropes for two other great American bridges were made by John A. Roebling’s Sons, not to mention the elevator ropes used in the world’s most famous skyscraper, the world also has “taken” what *Fortune* magazine called “the vitals” of the George Washington, the Golden Gate, and the Empire State Building. Clifford W. Zink elaborately documents and illustrates it in *The Roebling Legacy* (Princeton Landmark Publications \$50). Mr. Zink, who grew up in Westwood and graduated from Bergen Catholic High School, will speak on the great cables of the GWB. Mr. Zink made a donation of his book for our library. **LECTURE PROGRAM LOCATION** Unless otherwise noted, all lecture programs are held at the Second Reformed Church, corner of Anderson and Union St, Hackensack on the third Thursday of the month at 7:30 pm. The public is invited to attend. Second Reformed Church, 436 Union St Hackensack.

DOCENT & INTERPRETER MEETING: Wednesdays, Sept 21 & Oct 19 @ 7:30 pm

Meet at the Steuben House to learn the history of New Bridge Landing and how you can contribute **We rely on interested volunteers to open Historic New Bridge Landing.**

EVENT: Baron von Steuben and his Jersey Estate at Historic New Bridge Landing. Sunday, Sept 25, 1-5 pm

The Bergen County Historical Society will honor Major-General Friedrich Wilhelm Baron von Steuben at Historic New Bridge Landing, 1201-1209 Main Street, River Edge, NJ 07661. Re-enactors of the Third NJ Regiment (aka Jersey Blues) will demonstrate military dress and skills of the American Revolution. Displaying Jersey artifacts and furnishings, the Steuben and Demarest Houses will be open to visitors. Refreshments and a gift shop are available in the Campbell-Christie House, a restored tavern house dating back to 1774. A Jersey Dutch Out Kitchen will demonstrate culinary arts of the period. At 4 PM, historian Kevin Wright will speak in the Steuben House on Baron von Steuben and his Jersey Estate, emphasizing his significant contribution to the training and organization of the American army. Takes place at HNBL, 1201-1209 Main Street, River Edge, NJ.

AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY WAR ROUNDTABLE: Tuesday, Sept 27 & Oct 25

Where are meetings held? The Iron Horse. Westwood, N.J. Open to the public? Yes, definitely. What time? **Come between 6:00 and 6:30 PM** for conversation and fellowship. Meals? Optional dinners costing \$20, including gratuity. Advance reservations? Not required. Admission charges or dues? Not required. Questions? Contact Chairman David Whieldon at 201-967-7692. **Sept 27: War of Outposts:** British attack on Hackensack, Paramus (Ridgewood), and Hopperstown (Ho-ho-kus) on March 23, 1780. Presented by historians Dr. Henry Bischoff, Todd Braisted, Peggy Norris, Deborah Powell, Joseph Suplicki and Kevin Wright.

LECTURE PROGRAM: Hudson River Lighthouses • Thursday, Oct 20 @ 7:30 pm

Henry Hudson explored the river that now bears his name in 1609. The arrival of the steamboat 200 years later, and the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, made the Hudson one of America’s busiest rivers. From 1826 until the middle of the 20th century, more than a dozen lighthouses guided ships past its islands and shallows. Second Reformed Church, 436 Union St, Hackensack.

EVENT: Harvest Homecoming • Saturday, Oct 22 @ 6:30–9:30 pm

This All Hallow’s Eve event will feature a photographic exhibit entitled, “A Restless Heritage,” to highlight Bergen County cemeteries and old burial grounds, which bear silent witness to those who made our history. Speakers will discuss preservation efforts surrounding endangered family-farm burying yards. Donation, Adults \$7, Ch \$5, BCHS members free. Takes place at HNBL.

We’ll be sending out a postcard for Nov & Dec.

Coytesville

by *BCHS Past President Kevin Wright*



There is something almost cinematically scripted about the story of Coytesville. Shoemakers Joseph Coyte, Jr., and younger brother, Benjamin, immigrated from

Devonshire, England, to Brooklyn in March 1836. They married sisters whom they met aboard ship: Joseph, Jr., marrying Ellen Hall and Benjamin marrying her sister, Caroline. Joseph Coyte, Senior, a 48-year-old widower and shoemaker, arrived eight months later with his youngest offspring. Father and sons purchased a desolate strip of land atop the Palisades near the village of Fort Lee in 1841.

At that time, there were only limitless views of sublime grandeur to recommend the spot. From this craggy perch, an eagle's eye can scan the sleepless canyons of Manhattan. Westward, Overpeck Creek glided like a silver snake through bulrush meadows. Despite proximity to the burgeoning metropolis, an oak-and-chestnut forest, interspersed with hemlock, cloaked the Palisades Ridge, north of the ruins of the Revolutionary War earthworks. Into this wilderness stepped a band of urban footwear manufacturers—they came not only to gather tanbark from the rocky heights, but also skins and hides from valley farms, ferrying finished leather to their shoe shop across the Hudson River. When Joseph Coyte, Senior, died in 1847, he was buried at the True Reformed Church on Grand Avenue and Prospect Street in Leonia.

Village founder

Four years later, his son and namesake, Joseph Coyte, Jr., joined John Henry Williams and other English immigrants, nearly all shoemakers, in clearing land and laying out the Village of

Coytesville. They opened a cooperative store, which they took turns running. Joseph Coyte filed a village map with the Bergen County Clerk on July 30, 1851, showing the ground between Englewood Cliffs and Myrtle Avenue divided into building lots, 25-feet in width, on a simple rectangular street grid. Between 1854 and 1859, while the Northern Valley Railroad was under construction, Coyte purchased additional land adjacent to his original hilltop plat. He established his own residence, a grocery store and post office on what is now Westview Place, northwest of Hammett Avenue, where his uninterrupted view reached purple hills on the western horizon. He also kept a summer boarding house, known as the Woodland Hotel, distant only a mile and a half from Fort Lee Landing. In 1867, Joseph and Ellen Coyte sold a lot on the northwest side of First Street to Christian Rambo, who also opened a hotel. After a while, the original founders grew tired of being storekeepers and John H. Williams bought out the business, but even he ultimately returned to shoemaking. Jonathan S. Stiger took over management of Coyte's hotel, situated between Linwood Avenue and Short Street, south of Maple Street, which was renamed the Linwood House.

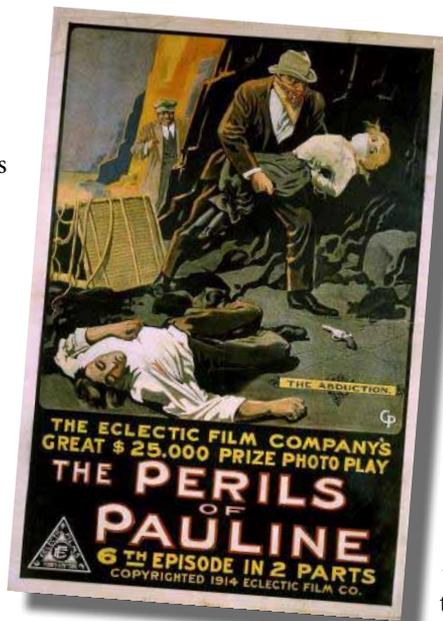
The nearest station on the Northern Valley Railroad was inconveniently situated at the bottom of the steep western slope. To give impetus to the fledgling settlement, Joseph Coyte joined other speculators in 1864 in forming the Palisades Railway Company. With dreams of selling town lots on the rocky summit for fabulous prices, backers proposed laying track along the summit of the Palisades from Weehawken to Alpine. On March 15, 1889, however, the *Bergen County Democrat* noted that cancellation of the improbable project “consecrates to wilderness for sometime longer about the only really wild spot that is left in the neighborhood of New York. This strip of land on top of the Palisades from

about opposite 100th Street, to and for many miles beyond Fort Lee, is more desolate and unimproved than many places hundreds of miles from any city, although almost every front foot of it commands a view of New York City and vicinity that is one of the finest sights in the country. Lack of means of transit has not only kept the section from developing, but has actually caused its abandonment to a certain extent, so that now there are to be found in the depth of woods at the ends of roads overgrown with young trees ruins of what were once fine mansions.” Some, however, did find gold in the trap rock of the Palisades, blasting away at this scenic natural wonder for Belgian blocks to pave city streets. By 1889, quarries employed between 150 and 250 stonecutters in removing sixteen to twenty thousand paving blocks daily from the cliff face.

Joseph Coyte was buried at Woodland Cemetery in Englewood Cliffs on September 4, 1889, under a granite obelisk identifying him as “Founder of Coytesville, N.J.” Finally, on May 6, 1895, the North Hudson County Railway extended their electric double trolley line from Fort Lee to Coytesville. The Hackensack Gas & Electric Company first supplied the village with electricity in 1899.

Boroughitis

On January 14, 1899, the Fort Lee Taxpayers’ Association, headed by piano manufacturer John C. Abbott, protested against boundaries proposed for the new borough of Palisades Park. Facing opposition from citizens of Coytesville,



where some preferred annexation to Englewood Cliffs, residents of Fort Lee decided upon boundaries conforming to “the present school district,” thereby excluding Coytesville and Taylorsville. In response, Coytesville residents met at Rambo’s Hall on December 3, 1903, to protest formation of a borough excluding them. With the temperature dipping near zero, they again rallied at their Engine

House on December 15, 1903, to raise funds to defray the cost of borough formation. Chairman Fremont C. Lyons recalled how when Englewood grabbed part of Coytesville, he alone went to Trenton to resist. Coytesville joined in the formation of the Borough of Fort Lee in March 1904. In the end, the only savings proved to be the cost of salaries paid to former Township Committeemen, since Councilmen were not permitted by law to draw a salary.

French chef John Richards opened a popular lunchroom on the cliff’s edge, off Hudson Terrace, in 1909, called *Villa Richard*. Later known as Ben Marden’s *Riviera*, it was destroyed by fire in November 1936. Other Coytesville landmarks from the early twentieth century included the Park Hotel on Myrtle Avenue, W. Cook & Son’s Book Bindery on 8th Street, the First Reformed Church on 4th Street, St. Steven’s Episcopal Church on 5th Street, Holy Trinity Church at Lemoine and Myrtle Avenues, and the Casino with its bowling

alley and dance hall on Washington Avenue, between 2nd and 3rd Streets.

Picture Town

Capitalizing on rugged scenery and quaint streetscapes—all within easy ferriage of New York City—pioneers of the early motion-picture industry flocked to Coytesville. On December 30, 1912, the *Evening Post* described Coytesville as “one of the centers of the picture-making industry,” noting, “in the streets of this little town on the Palisades of the Hudson, such stirring events as battles, sieges, murders, highway robberies, and the like, are regarded by the blasé inhabitants as the paltriest of every-day events ... Almost everything that has ever happened, no matter in what time or clime, has happened (cinematographically speaking) at Coytesville ... Often a house catches fire in one of the streets of Coytesville, but no one gets very alarmed, and no particular excitement is caused when some youth dashes through the doorway and rescues a distressed damsel from the devouring flames.”

Placing a few palm trees around a particular house with an attractive stucco front was all that was needed to create a Mexican atmosphere. Writing for *Woman's Magazine* in 1928, Gene Gauntier recalled how Rambo's Hotel “served as a New England tavern, for many a western saloon, for Civil War recruiting stations, and dozens of other sets.” Starting in 1907, the Kalem Company paid a dollar for a dressing room, fifty cents for a hot dinner and nothing at all for use of exteriors and props. Director D. W. Griffith soon appeared on the scene, escalating costs by paying \$25 for the use of a house exterior and \$2 for each room. Griffith filmed *The Call of the Wild* and *The Taming of the Shrew* in Coytesville in 1908.

In 1915, Florence Lawrence, an actress for the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, spoke of her starring

role in “The Girl and the Outlaw,” also filmed in Coytesville, “a town which was the scene of most all the sensational western dramas until about three years ago, and this in spite of the fact that it was almost impossible to make a scene that even remotely resembled the West.” She complained, “There was always a telephone pole around close enough to come within range of the camera, which was never discovered until after the scene had been photographed.” Embarrassingly, the finished print of this particular Western showed “some perfectly lovely and well pruned maple trees on the slopes of the towering mountain.”

Actors and film crews daily crossed the Hudson River by ferry. While most actors and actresses made \$5 per day, true stars of the silver screen were paid \$300 a week. The Champion Film Company (predecessor to Universal Studios) built the Buffalo Moving Picture Factory in 1909 on Fifth Street in Englewood Cliffs—it survives as the oldest movie studio in the United States. Samuel Goldwyn, William Fox and Carl Laemmle also established studios in Coytesville or Fort Lee. According to Florence Lawrence, film manufacturers eventually traded Coytesville for the “continuous sunshine and an infinite variety of background” available in southern California.

In 1915, Fort Lee, including Coytesville, was home to 5,288 inhabitants, residing in 1,002 dwellings. Italians (533) comprised the largest ethnic group, followed by Germans (377), English (127) and Irish (118). Coytesville residents included young men and women employed in motion-picture factories as well as unknown actors, actresses and bit-players. George Overbury “Pop” Hart (1868-1933), Van Dearing Perrine (1869-1955), Robert MacKay and landscapist Samuel A. Weiss formed an artists' colony in the scenic hilltop village. American cartoonist George Price (1901-1995) was born there. With 500 viewers watching in

Philosophy Hall at New York University on August 13, 1928, radio station WRNY, broadcasting from Coytesville, became the first standard station in America to transmit a television image.

Work on the George Washington Bridge, including three major arterial highways, commenced in 1927. By the time it opened in October 1931, whole neighborhoods and old routes of travel vanished. With the onset of the Great Depression, Fort Lee faced extensive foreclosures on over a million dollars in real estate investments and improvements, forcing the borough to refinance delinquent bonds and to dispose of property to developers. Coytesville lost about five-sixths of its public square when the Palisades Interstate Parkway was constructed in 1954 between Hudson Terrace and the Palisades cliff. Previously, the park boasted sidewalks leading to an outlook point along the cliff and was furnished with a cannon, a flagpole and benches.

As early as 1876, observers found Fort Lee “uniquely interesting; for its quaint and varied architecture, its mixed native and foreign population with their busy enterprise, its original literary and professional characters, its romantic and picturesque surroundings, its important situation on the Hudson, and its Revolutionary history.” The same can be said today of this “uniquely interesting” spot as new waves of immigration reshape the character and appearance of the shoemakers’ cooperative village atop the cliffs, remaking *Picture Town* in their own image and likeness. ❖

Perils of Pauline Poster found on eBay.

Kevin has a blog on Riverdell Patch. BCHS member Phyllis Dunsay is noted as saying “Thank you for this interesting article. I learn something new everyday”.

<http://riverdell.patch.com/>

Saving an Army, continued from page 18

particular gun. This would be a very large artillery piece. The area described by Parkison is where Fort Lee Historic Park now stands. Pension Application of Daniel Parkison. M-804, Pension and Bounty Land Application Files, No. S18542, NARA.

- 10 Pension Application of George Owrey. M-804, Pension and Bounty Land Application Files, No. S17613, NARA.
- 11 Pension Application of Benjamin Romaine. Collection M-804, Pension and Bounty Land Application Files, No. W18839, NARA.
- 12 Greene to Knox, Fort Lee, 17 November 1776. No. GLC02437.00488, The Gilder Lehrman Collection at the New-York Historical Society.
- 13 Exactly how many men were at Hackensack is not known. In all likelihood it was not considerable. In a letter from Washington to Congress on 19 November, he noted that the troops at Fort Lee would soon have their enlistments expire, leaving him with Haslet’s Delaware Regiment, Hand’s 1st Continental Regiment, some remnants of Smallwood’s Marylanders, and some corps arriving from Virginia. The first three were probably those with him at Hackensack. *Papers of the Continental Congress*, M247, Reel 167, i152, Volume 3, Pages 265-268, NARA.
- 14 *The Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser* (Philadelphia), November 20, 1776.
- 15 “Return of Detachments and Out Guards furnish’d from Fort Lee Novr. 14 1776.” Record Group M246, Revolutionary War Rolls, RG 93, Reel 137, Folder 7-7, No. 62, NARA.
- 16 Washington to Congress, Hackensack, 19 November 1776. *Papers of the Continental Congress*, M247, Reel 167, i152, Volume 3, Pages 265-268, NARA.
- 17 Pension Application of Rowland Cotton. M-804, Pension and Bounty Land Application Files, No. S11170, NARA.
- 18 Pension Application of Jonathan Clayton. M-804, Pension and Bounty Land Application Files, No. S16717, NARA.
- 19 Pension Application of Mahlon Pitney. M-804, Pension and Bounty Land Application Files, No. S1080, NARA.
- 20 Pension Application of Frederick F. Van Liew. M-804, Pension and Bounty Land Application Files, No. S23035, NARA.
- 21 Pension Application of John Clifford. M-804, Pension and Bounty Land Application Files, No. S970, NARA.
- 22 The 1818 law was only open to destitute veterans who had served in the Continental Army. ❖

Todd Braisted’s
 Loyalist Studies Website:
www.royalprovincial.com
 New Book: Loyalist Corps

Delford Lady Gardeners

Beth Colombini and Cathy Davis, are co-founders of Delford Lady Gardeners. This year they took on doing the tavern garden by the Campbell-Christie House. You should see the size of the corn! Beth and Cathy also grew hops, squash,

sunflowers, lavender, hyssop, camomile, fox glove and bergomot. If you would like to make a contribution, they have a Donation Watering Can at Delford Flowers & Gifts, 856 Kinderkamack Rd, River Edge. They also do the "Shelter



Our Sisters Memorial Garden" at Van Saun Park. Join them on facebook or email: DLG07649@yahoo.com. ❖

Lafayette Button Donation

Button Collector Ann Wilson donated two Lafayette Presentation Buttons along with related books at an event last spring where we featured items from the BCHS collection related to Lafayette. Ann exhibited her own button collection commemorating Lafayette's return visit in 1824-25. Stuart Schneider exhibited his collection of ribbons. He, Ann and Kevin Wright gave talks on Lafayette.

Ann Wilson also is active with the Mount Tabor Historical Society. They have their annual house tour Sept 24, 2011, which is well worth seeing. ❖



President's letter continued from page 1

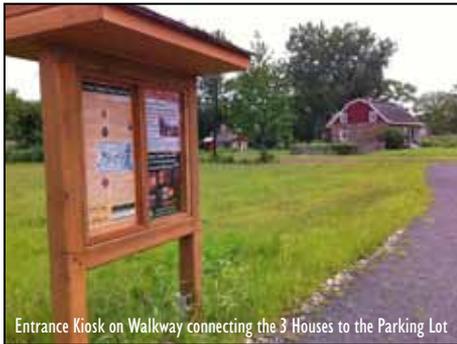
library in space generously donated by a most considerate corporate benefactor. Thanks to Peg Norris, Steve Weigl, Joe Suplicki and Bill Farrelly, and especially to Deborah Powell for making arrangements—the new space is clean and ready to receive our collections, once a certificate of occupancy is granted. We may also have to relocate our stored collections there later this fall. Since we cannot remain peripatetic forever, our highest priority is to build a safe museum for our significant artifact, library and document collections. Let me again invite you to help in raising \$350,000 to accomplish this most worthy task. Just ask yourself—How valuable are the lessons of history?

Our fall and winter schedule of lectures and events promises to be interesting and enjoyable. If you are interested in helping us open Historic New Bridge Landing to the public, then join our School of Historical Interpretation at the Steuben House at 7:30 PM on the third Wednesday of each month. We always need volunteers to help at the tavern, the Out Kitchen, the Gift Shop, the Library, and as Living History presenters or docents. Again, we value your membership and look forward to seeing you soon. ❖
Mike Trepicchio, BCHS President

The Kiosk, the QR Code and the App

Visitor Experience at HNBL

Introducing the new handy Historic New Bridge Landing Walking Tour Mobile App—a website designed for use on any smart phone.



Entrance Kiosk on Walkway connecting the 3 Houses to the Parking Lot

The tour begins with a HNBL Map image (numbered) with corresponding numbered link list: *Prehistory, Steuben Hs, New Bridge, New Bridge Landing, Tidemill, Demarest Hs Museum, Campbell-Christie Hs, Barn, Brett Park, Out Kitchen, The Meadow, Museum & Library and I Spy Hunt for Kids.*

I've included a short history, photos & images of each important site feature at HNBL. You can drill down to additional history links at the bottom of each page.

Mobile App Link: www.bergencountyhistory.org/mobile/hnbl_tour.html

For example; “The Steuben Hs in the Rev War” or “Did Steuben really live here?”

Is this the first NJ historic site mobile app walking tour? I couldn't find any other in NJ except Morristown's town app.

The code I used advertised it had “enabled assistive technologies.” If anyone has ability to test on such software please advise on how well it works.

I can update as needed, no printing costs. It is estimated by one tech watcher that 70% of US will have a “smart phone” by 2014. I had so much fun creating this app.

A QR code (a short-cut web link for mobile phones via bar code) is now on HNBL site kiosks and BCHS website.

We still have a PDF visitors can view or print on website. ❖ Deborah Powell



QR Code
for HNBL tour





Bergen County Historical Society
P.O. Box 55
River Edge, NJ 07661
Address Service Requested

Check Page 13 for
upcoming Events & Lectures
Sept 15 Lecture:
The Roebling Legacy in Bergen

**** If there are two stars after your name in the address label, it is time to renew your membership. Thank you if you have renewed, we value your membership!**