

NORTH JERSEY

A better view of American history

Junkyard will make way for museum

By **PAUL H. JOHNSON**
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RIVER EDGE – Politicians and historians hope to transform an old junkyard into a museum and visitors center celebrating New Bridge Landing's role in the American Revolution.

State Environmental Protection Commissioner Bradley Campbell came to the borough Wednesday to announce the purchase of the junkyard at Hackensack Avenue and Main Street. The Department of Environmental Protection will clean up the property, and the state and historians will work to turn it into a museum and visitors center for New Bridge Landing.

"This junkyard site is the key," said Robert Griffin of the New Bridge Historic Landing Commission. "It provides the critical visual and physical entrance to the park."

Griffin said that as soon as the DEP finishes its cleanup, he will raise money to erect a 6,000-square-foot museum, visitors center and monument to the battle for New Bridge. The bridge spanned the Hackensack River and enabled George Washington's troops to escape from British forces.

Griffin said removing the junkyard will allow people to see New Bridge from busy Hackensack Avenue.

"This acquisition preserves a key Revolutionary War site, where the public can



DANIELLE P. RICHARDS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Members of the New Bridge historic group wore Colonial clothing for Wednesday's announcement in River Edge, where Robert Griffin lauded the purchase of historic ground.

Fast facts

- New Bridge was constructed in 1744 to provide a crossing over the Hackensack River.
- On Nov. 20, 1776, Lt. General Charles Earl Cornwallis led British and Hessian troops across the Hudson River for an attack on Fort Lee.
- To escape certain defeat, the army of George Washington retreated across the Hackensack River at New Bridge to avoid entrapment on the narrow peninsula between the Hudson and Hackensack rivers.
- In 1928, the Steuben House at New Bridge Landing was acquired by the state and opened as a museum in 1939. New Bridge was declared a state park in 2004.

Source: Bergen County Historical Society

walk in the steps of our founding fathers," acting Governor Codey said in a statement about the purchase.

Historians have been working for decades to preserve the 1.3-acre property,

which was sold to the state Dec. 1 for \$821,873. The county also purchased an additional one-third of an acre and will make road improvements in the area.

Campbell said the cleanup should be fairly routine.

He said that tests on the site revealed oil and auto parts. "Most of the contaminants are typical of what's in a junkyard," he said.

Campbell said the DEP got involved in the purchase of the site because the owners were reluctant to sell the land if they had to clean it up first. The land was owned by the Lehr family of Fair Lawn.

The adjacent New Bridge Landing has been a historic site since 1928 and the state park encompasses portions of River Edge, New Milford and Teaneck. Politicians from both political parties have been working to acquire the land for decades, said State Sen. Loretta Weinberg, D-Teaneck.

"We have all collectively pulled together to make this dream a reality. It shows that discipline, focus and stick-to-it-ness and my best attribute as a Jewish mother – nagging – can get things done."

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