

# LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP REVOLUTIONARY HIGHLIGHTS

By

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Those of us who live here, reside in the locale of one of the most stirring events of the American Revolution. The Trenton Campaign in the early winter of 1776-77 involving the capture of the Hessians and Washington's crossing of the Delaware is known to every school child.

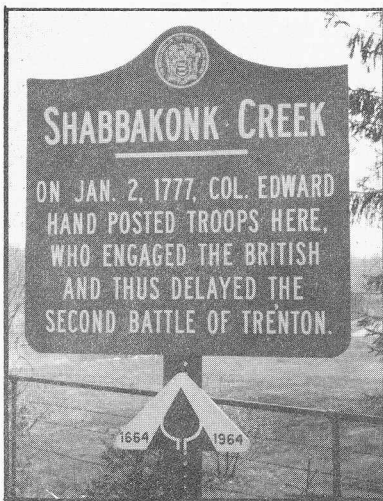
The Village of Maidenhead, as Lawrenceville was known in those days, was in the very center of these military operations. Maidenhead was located on the Kings Highway, at that time the only north-south through route across the Province and for that matter, the main artery across the state for a century and a half later. (Now U.S. 206 and at one time a link in the cross country Lincoln Highway.)

The rhythmic tramp of British troops and Hessian hirelings was heard here frequently during the Trenton Campaign. Here the raw recruits of the Continental Army on several occasions harassed and ambushed the British regulars, who were untrained, in fighting "from behind each fence and barnyard wall."

The Village of Maidenhead with its historic church, taverns or "ordinaries" and cluster of dwellings, formed the principal settlement of what is now Lawrence Township. Only scattered farms and houses were located on either side of the Village towards Princeton and Trenton. Although frequently there were troop movements back and forth through Maidenhead, these are overshadowed by what happened during the Trenton Campaign because of the importance of this event in the Revolutionary scene.

Historians will continue to disagree which was the most significant event of the Revolution or when the "turning point" really occurred. One thing is clear – without the success at Trenton, there would have been no further battles or campaigns about which to argue.

Lord Germain eloquently expressed the significance of Trenton when he said, "All our hopes were blasted by that unhappy affair at Trenton."



*This blue and white historic marker is to be found on Lawrence Road, near Darrah Lane.*

*This obelisk marker is located on Port Mercer Road, near Route 1. It is one of 12 that mark Washington's route to Princeton following the Second Battle of Trenton, January 2, 1777.*



When the American Army retreated across New Jersey following the disastrous defeat at Long Island and the indecisive battle at White Plains, it was in a pretty sad state numbering about 3,000 men. Without much real effort the British could have annihilated the American Army. The fact they did nothing was due largely to the British General, Sir William Howe. Stryker says of him "he was fond of taking his own ease and given to postponing decisive action. The fascination of gaming and blandishments of beauty had more charm for him than the rough path of duty of a soldier's life."

Washington and his army en route to Trenton arrived in Princeton on the morning of December 2, 1776 and after breakfast marched on to Trenton. Since they arrived there about noon, they must have passed through Maidenhead about 10 o'clock. This was, of course, before the establishment of his camp on the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware River. During early December there were constant movements back and forth between Princeton and what is now Lawrenceville.

Maidenhead, along with other communities suffered the devastation and rapine common in all military campaigns of those days. Armies then did not have modern transportation or commissaries and did considerable foraging and plundering among local inhabitants. Although the enemy was doubtless responsible for most of the pillage, our own soldiers were not guiltless in this respect. When a man is hungry he will steal bread to sustain life whether he is friend or foe.



NEW JERSEY TRICENTENARY

1664-1964

The following relates what happens with the invasion of an enemy.

"When the British troops were passing through Lawrenceville, after Washington's retreat through the Jerseys, a party of Hessians entered the dwelling of Jacob Keen, who was a strong Whig. His wife, a woman of great courage and resolution, had locked up her silver in a bureau. Upon their entering, she dispatched one of her children in search of an officer. She stood before her bureau, with the keys in her hand. They demanded, in their own language, that she should open the drawers. She pretended not to understand their object; and they, much enraged were in the act of breaking the drawers with the butts of their muskets, when an officer entered with the child, and the men retreated. The above anecdote is derived from a lady now living in Trenton, a daughter of Mrs. K., at that time a child of 6 years of age; and who, on this occasion, was secreted in an oven."

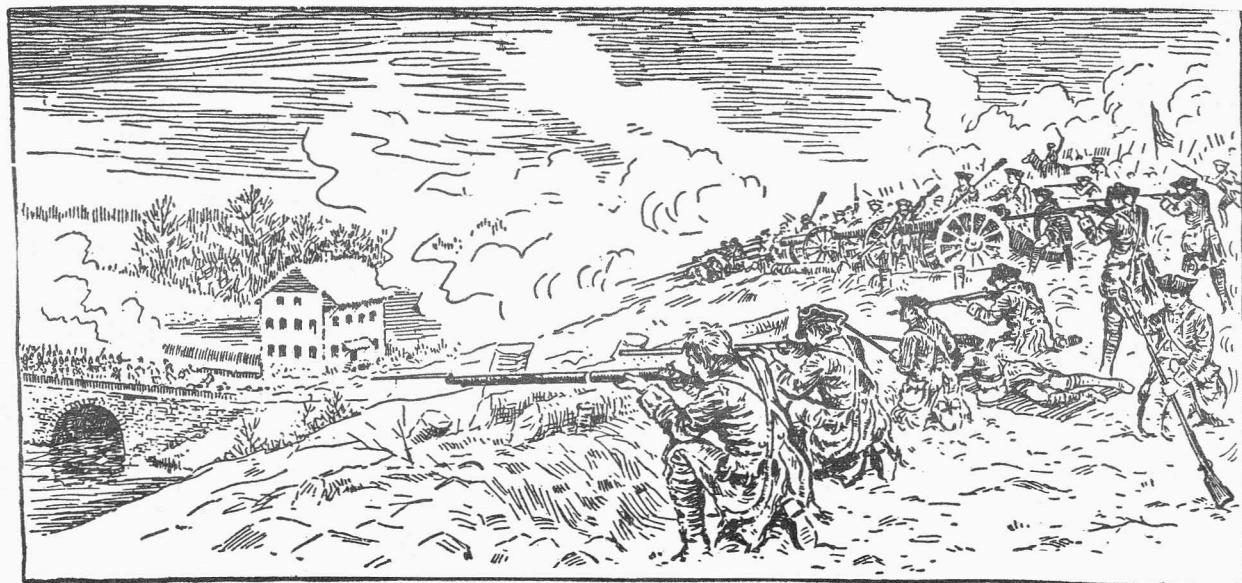
After the capture of the Hessians on the morning of December 26, the best-known incident of the Trenton Campaign, Washington retreated to his camp in Pennsylvania. When Cornwallis, the British General, heard this astounding news of the Hessian rout, he immediately ordered the main British Army to Trenton.

Washington, on December 30, returned from his Pennsylvania camp and took up a position on the south side of Assunpink Creek (near Broad and Lafayette Streets) in Trenton.

On January 2, Cornwallis having arrived at Princeton, started for Trenton. Part of his army of 8,000 men under the command of General Leslie was left in Maidenhead. About 5,500 continued to Trenton. The British outpost was at Eight Mile Run (Carter Road and U.S. 206) and the American outpost was at Five Mile Run, (near Darrah Lane) just a short distance south of the Village of Maidenhead.

Washington, in Trenton, was trying to delay a general engagement. Consequently, he wanted his army to oppose the advance of the British by harassing them while they were trying to reach Trenton. The picket at Five Mile Run (Little Shabakunk) was forced back toward Trenton, but made a stand at Shabakunk Creek (near Notre Dame High School). The affair at Shabakunk lasted three hours and was extremely successful in helping to consume much of the day. When the British arrived in Trenton it was late in the afternoon and nearly dark. The running fight had been successful. Both armies bivouacked for the night, the British Army on the north side and the Americans on the south side of Assunpink Creek. It was on this night that Washington stole away under cover of darkness and marched to Princeton where the battle occurred on the following morning that successfully ended the Trenton Campaign.

Who knows, when you are gardening you may turn up a souvenir; a canteen, musket, bayonet, powder horn or some other relic of the American Revolution. It would not be strange with all the troops who have passed to and fro or were quartered here.



*A George Bradshaw sketch of the Second Battle of Trenton. Washington's army at the Assunpink Creek repulse British attempts to cross.*

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Mr. Cottrell is a vice-chairman of our Tercentenary Committee. He is the author of several State publications on historic sites, including "The Trenton Battle Monument and Washington's Campaign, December 26, 1776 to January 3, 1777." A graduate of Boston University and the Yale School of Forestry, he is the State Forester.

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