



# IN BERGEN'S ATTIC

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Spring greetings, everyone!

You've probably met Kate Reilly on a tour of the bridge or while visiting the Washington Room in the Steuben House. After more than a decade as the person who 'staffs' our regular events, Kate is stepping aside as BCHS Volunteer Coordinator, and Trustee Jon Long is taking on the role. Kate worked with the late Kevin Wright in developing our innovative *School of Interpretation* for training volunteers; she received the forms prospective volunteers submit then dispersed them to various committees. While Kate continues in her membership (and even covers as the scheduler) we are fortunate that she created very well-organized files needed for either job by whoever takes them on!

On behalf of the society, I'm giving a big and grateful hand for Kate Reilly and all she has done for Bergen County Historical Society!

And speaking of volunteers, I'm also thinking of you! You're not quite ready to commit monthly hours to BCHS? [See page 7.] We understand. We all have other obligations.

You may have filled in the form but didn't follow through because the time was not quite right. And our apologies if you did send in a form and have not heard from us; some of our committees are humming along better than others, committee chairs have a lot to juggle. We do our best.

You can still help with our Events by setting-up or breaking-down. Especially in warmer weather, there are canopies and tables that need to be set in place and foodstuff to be carried from cars. Think 'barbeque party for a hundred'! An hour or so of your time will be much appreciated by the interpreters at every event. Contact: [BCHS.eventstaffing@gmail.com](mailto:BCHS.eventstaffing@gmail.com)

I have been thinking of trying something new. One-time tasks come up now and then – replace-



## BEVERLY HASHIMOTO

ment and repairs are needed for fence posts and rails or broken windows; the Out Kitchen gables and doors need painting, irises require dividing, the lilac shrubs need pruning. We get to some tasks on Workdays and Weeding Days, but not all.

If, for example, you have wood-working skills or do well at gardening and you cannot yet commit to serving on a regular basis, please do consider signing up to take on one of these jobs. Occasional 'help wanted' emails will be sent out and if you express interest you will be contacted with details. Send your contact info. (name, phone number and your special talents) to [BCHS.help.wanted@gmail.com](mailto:BCHS.help.wanted@gmail.com)

Are you a good amateur photographer? Often the regular volunteers making an event happen don't have time to capture the memories. Send us your best photos to:

[contactBCHS@bergencountyhistory.org](mailto:contactBCHS@bergencountyhistory.org)

Attended a talk somewhere recently that might be of interest to history buffs? Drop us an email: [eventsBCHS2020@gmail.com](mailto:eventsBCHS2020@gmail.com)



The Museum Building Committee and members of the Board of Trustees have been busier than ever meeting with our architect, contractor and lawyer to review schedules and contracts. The Groundbreaking Ceremony is being planned to happen soon, and we hope to make it an event to remember! 🌿

# Italians Help Win American Independence

SAMANTHA PERKINS

Despite the challenges of tracing Italians during Colonial America, Italian and Italian-American men contributed significantly to the American Revolution. Their influence was seen through their rhetorical talents, military support and participation in signing the Declaration of Independence. Although Italian women's stories are missing due to limited research and materials, the impact of Italian male writers, ambassadors, politicians and soldiers on the American Revolution should not be overlooked.

One key Italian is Philip Mazzei. Persuaded by Thomas Jefferson in 1773 to immigrate to Virginia, Mazzei with Jefferson wrote and published articles supporting independence and sharing ideas of democracy on American soil. Mazzei's enlightened philosophies



OIL PAINTING OF FILLPPO MAZZEI  
THE LOUVRE MUSEUM, PARIS

influenced Jefferson's writing of the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson later asked Mazzei to read over a "rough draft."

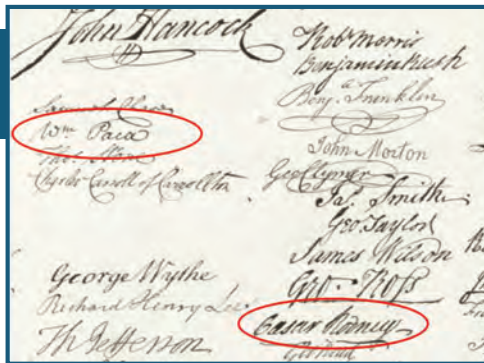
Mazzei continued working for the American Revolution by visiting officials and socialites

across Europe. His writing and propaganda succeeded in winning European sympathy. Through influential Europeans, he obtained French assistance, Spanish and Dutch naval support, and funds. Additionally, he strategized a successful military plan that defeated the British at the Battle of Yorktown.

Despite Italian writers advocating for the Americans, the various Italian governments thought differently about them. To avoid offending the influential Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II and to maintain their trade with England, the Republic of Venice refused to recognize the American government. The Kingdom of Naples and the Papal States assisted with diplomacy. Whereas the Republic of Ragusa and the ports of Genoa and Livorno took the commercial opportunity and directly supplied Americans with needed materials.

Regardless, Italian men enlisted in the French military and two regiments of mostly Italian recruits—the Third Piedmont and the Thirtieth Du Perche—sailed to join the American army in 1779. In 1903, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs published these Italians in the book *Les Combattants Francais de la Guerre Americaine 1778-1783* (translation: The French Soldiers of the American War 1778-1783.)

In 1778 St. Louis, Italian fur trader Francesco Vigo supplied Brigadier-General George Rogers Clark with needed provisions and money. Later captured by the British, Vigo claimed Spanish citizenship—from his former Spanish military days—to secure his release on the condition he return directly to St. Louis and not harm the British cause. Vigo complied with the letter of his agreement. He first returned to St. Louis before going to Clark in Kaskaskia to inform him about Vincennes and the British plans to attack Kaskaskia in the spring. Clark's army sur-



CIRCLED IN RED ARE THE SIGNATURES OF WILLIAM PACA AND CAESAR RODNEY ON THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE BELOW THE SIGNATURE OF JOHN HANCOCK.

prised the British at Vincennes and won on February 25, 1779.

Additionally, two of the Founding Fathers, William Paca and Caesar Rodney, both were Italian-Americans.

Born in 1740, William Paca, whose Italian great-grandfather settled in Maryland, served in the Maryland Legislature, and contributed to articles opposing the poll tax. He was on the Maryland Committee of Correspondence and elected to the First and Second Continental Congress, which was when he signed the Declaration of Independence.

Born in Delaware in 1728, Caesar Rodney, whose grandmother's surname "Caesar" originates from a doctor from Treviso, Italy, served in both politics and the military. Rodney was elected to the colonial legislature in 1758. Later, he participated in the Stamp Act Congress, was on the Delaware Committee of Correspondence and the Continental Congress. In 1778, he became President of Delaware while serving as a Major General of the Delaware Militia.

In 1776, Delaware's delegates were Caesar Rodney, Thomas McKean and George Read. While Congress voted for independence, Brigadier General Caesar Rodney was in Delaware squelching a loyalist riot. He received word from McKean that Congress needed a unanimous vote; nine colonies were in favor, two colonies against, New York abstained, and Delaware's vote was split between Read ("no"), and McKean ("yes"). Rodney was needed in Philadelphia by the

afternoon of July 2 to secure the "yes" vote for Delaware. He received this news on July 1 and raced 80 miles to Philadelphia—usually a 30-hour journey. Despite challenging weather, Rodney arrived in time to vote "yes" at Independence Hall and later signed the Declaration of Independence.

Italians contributed to the American Revolution by writing articles, fighting under the French flag, providing finances and



STATUE OF FRANCESCO VIGO  
GEORGE ROGERS CLARK NATIONAL HISTORIC PARK,  
VIGO, VIGO COUNTY, INDIANA

resources, and delivering military intelligence. Their efforts reflect their passion and commitment to establish a democratic-republic in America. As we near the 250th anniversary of the American Revolutionary War, let us honor those who fought for our natural rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

*This is an abridged transcript of the presentation at the June 13, 2024 BCHS Annual Dinner.*



# Gen. Charles Lee's letter to Bergen County

PEGGY W. NORRIS

On November 20, 1776, the British invaded Bergen County by climbing the Palisades and marching on Fort Lee. Washington's army retreated over the Hackensack River at New Bridge [Historic New Bridge Landing] and across New Jersey before crossing the Delaware into Pennsylvania on December 7. Meanwhile, the residents of Bergen County were left to deal with a new reality. They were faced with remaining loyal to England, joining the patriot cause or taking a neutral position, hoping to make the best of things. Families worried about what war and occupation would mean. General Charles Lee wrote a letter to the inhabitants of the eastern quarter<sup>1</sup> of Bergen County to be delivered by General William Heath. Although we don't know how many residents actually read or heard this message, we have the original letter in the Bergen County Historical Society Archives.

Lee advises the inhabitants that they should secure the "most valuable and portable articles of their property." He promises that those who support the "Standard of Tyranny" will be punished and that those who were plundered will have their losses restored by Congress. He requests the inhabitants to "stand firm against the threats and artifices of the Instruments of Tyranny" and promises that he is preparing a force for their

protection. Lee repeats that their small valuables should be hidden. The promises of compensation and protection were by and large empty and the advice to secure valuables was wise. After the war, New Jersey considered making compensation to citizens who had losses from either loyalist or patriot depredations.

Claims were made, but no compensation was ever made.

The claims have been digitized by the New Jersey State Archives.<sup>2</sup> They show not only the forage, horses, and fence posts that were used by the troops, but the clothing, silver, and linens looted by the soldiers. The latter are items it may well have been a good idea to hide. This letter of Gen. Lee's provides not only insight into military affairs, but also into the lives of the people of Bergen

County who were to suffer the effects of war for many years, be they patriots, loyalists, or those trying to be neutral.

<sup>1</sup> Bergen County at the time extended south to Jersey City and west to Pompton. Lee refers to the eastern area of Bergen County as it then was constituted.

<sup>2</sup> The damage claims are available at the New Jersey State Archives <https://tinyurl.com/3fnh4yc5>.

<sup>3</sup> Lee was encamped in Peekskill, New York, east of the Hudson. His letter does not reflect his first hand experience with what happened in Bergen County.

**The Bergen County Historical Society Library and Archives is open to the public by appointment. Email: [theBCHSlibrary@gmail.com](mailto:theBCHSlibrary@gmail.com)**



LEFT, MAJOR GENERAL CHARLES LEE, G.N. RASPE, [1778].

BELOW, THE FIRST PAGE OF GENERAL LEE'S LETTER TO THE CITIZENS OF BERGEN COUNTY AND TRANSCRIPT OF THE ENTIRE LETTER.

Camp<sup>3</sup> Novem<sup>r</sup> ye 27th 1776

General Lee is extremely sensible of the distressfull situation of the Inhabitants of the Eastern Quarter of Bergen County, but he can comfort 'em with the assurance that the stanch immovable Friends to Liberty and their Country's rights, will ultimately (whatever may be their present hardships) prevail. Whereas, those who either from fear or a baseness of Principle, repair to the Standard of Tyranny must infallibly be ruin'd. The Congress must vouchs [vouchsafe] to make up the losses of the Sufferers in thr Country's Cause. I shall with the blessing of God be immediately in a situation of giving sufficient protection to the Adherents of Freedom, and inflicting a most just and severe Chastisement on its Opponents; in the mean time, I wou'd advise 'em to secure the most valuable and portable articles of their Property. The Foes and Deserters of their Country's rights on this side have already tasted of the bitter cup, they had prepared for their Country. They were first plunder'd by the Mercenary Ruffians whom they had preposterously invited to protect 'em. The Shells of their houses were alone left standing. These I have most justly, as I think, order'd to be set on fire and this mode I am determin'd to observe wherever I march. People of this Stamp are utterly ruin'd. They never can be indemnified, whereas, those on the side of their Country may depend on a certain and ample compensation. I shall now only request that the Inhabitants of the Eastern Quarter of Bergen will stand firm against the threats and artifices of the Instruments of Tyranny—that I am preparing a Force for their protection, and repeat, that they have only in the meantime to find a temporary secure place to deposit their most valuable and least bulky Effects.

Charles Lee Major General

To the Inhabitants of Bergen of the Eastern Quarter of Bergen





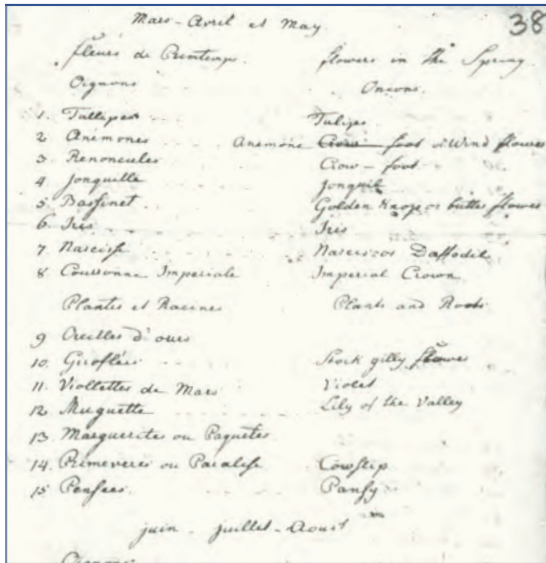
# Plants in Steuben's Garden, *continued*

BEVERLY HASHIMOTO

This is the continuation from the article on page one of Steuben's Garden from the BCHS Winter 2024/2025 Newsletter.

Steuben was not a great speller. Uncertain as he was of the actual names of flowers, he could hardly be expected to spell them correctly. Or was it the aide he dictated it to?

Raising this question naturally leads to... what else didn't he [Steuben] know? In other words, if his list of flowers, even in French, which Steuben spoke fluently, might not be reliable, how much less so, his irregularly supplied names for flower in English? The English words the Baron did learn early on at Valley Forge were primarily for colorfully cussing out the troops he was training.



STEUBEN'S GARDEN PARTIAL PLANT LIST IN ENGLISH AND FRENCH  
NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The easiest first move was to note every time the letter 's' was written as 'f' as we see in #7 and #15 in both the French and English for Narcissus and Pansy. The misspelling of

Narcissus was an easy catch. I always thought the 'f' stepped in for a second or double 's', as it appears in Narcisse, but in

#15, Steuben uses it in both French and English, Pensees and Pansy.

7. Narcisfe Narcissos Daffodil
15. Penfees Panfy

In #5 and #10 the long 's', or medial 's', as opposed to the short or terminal 's', as I learned to ID them, were present. There were rules when and when not to use it, but rules were likely adhered to by printers, not letter writers or list makers. In English the practice died out fairly abruptly in 1800, though it took longer to pass from fashion in the new United States. Perhaps we had other things on our minds.

But thank heavens Steuben decided to make his plan bilingual. One wonders why. So in the examples presented, which were easy ones, the English is a confirmation, or at least a clue.

5. Basinet Golden Knop or butter flower
10. Giroflée Stock gilly flowers

Bassinet, or for that matter Golden Knop, looked like nothing I'd ever heard of. I did wonder if butter flower might refer to Buttercup. But, the Baron had already listed Ranunculus:

3. Renonculus Crow - foot  
Ranunculus or Buttercup

I finally found Bassinet in various places online. Golden Knop was of no use, but the Buttercup clue did prove helpful. Bassinet is Ranunculus. A florists' flower cultivated from the common buttercup, ranunculus were known since the reign of Elizabeth I. *Plants of Colonial Williamsburg* tells me it was all the rage from 1760—1770, with more varieties known than any other floral material, and still being widely grown by the time Steuben arrived on these shores. Perhaps the proliferation of the flower's form and array of colors led Steuben to believe they were different plants. "Crow-foot", coming from the

**The 250th Anniversary of the 1776 American Revolution** is upon us. Activity was already taking place in Colonial Bergen County prior to & during the War. BCHS will host **Special Events** to commemorate these stories.

The Bergen County Historical Society thanks you all for your membership and your support. *But have you thought about being a Volunteer at HNBL?*

**Volunteers** are those people cooking in the Out Kitchen, or discussing our historic buildings and those who once lived there. They are the people ready with fun and educational projects for your children, or who sell you delicious historically authentic fare in the tavern. They show you how to make a broom as inhabitants in 1760 was done, or explain that taverns were the center of social life in the communities. Volunteers magically transform HNBL into a vintage baseball stadium, a Winter Holiday musical experience, or a Revolutionary War battleground.

*Did you know eleven battles/skirmishes took place right here?*

Start as an **Associate Volunteer**, by watching and learning from experienced volunteers as you become familiar with this incredible site, learning the rich and fascinating history of HNBL and its inhabitants as you become more experienced.

Please contact Jon Long at [BCHS.eventstaffing@gmail.com](mailto:BCHS.eventstaffing@gmail.com)

★★★ Be a Volunteer at HNBL ★ Be a Part of History Today ★★★

shape of the corm, may have been the commonly used name, easier to remember and spell, than Ranunculus.

Still looking at the medial 's', was #10 Giroflée or Girolée? F or S? Rule or no rule? Neither spelling has shown up anywhere yet.

Therefore, Stock Gilly Flowers is the next path to go down.

I have in my notes under: *On difficulty of identifying flowers from century to century.* Gillyflower, also spelled gilliflower, is any of several scented flowering plants: the carnation, or clove pink (*Dianthus caryophyllus*), stock (*Matthiola incana*), and wall-flower (*Cheiranthus cheiri*). However, the gillyflower

of Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakespeare was the carnation. Other plants that are types of gillyflower are dame's gillyflower, aka dame's violet (*Hesperis matronalis*); mock gillyflower, also known as soapwort or bouncing bet (*Saponaria officinalis*); feathered gillyflower, also known as the grass or garden pink (*Dianthus plumarius*); and sea gillyflower, also known as the thrift or sea pink (*Armeria maritima*). — [britannica.com/plant/gillyflower](http://britannica.com/plant/gillyflower)

What is a Stock Gilly Flower? It could be almost anything! LOL – as we write in modern times.

But I'll keep on reading and researching, and I'll let you know what I find. 🌸

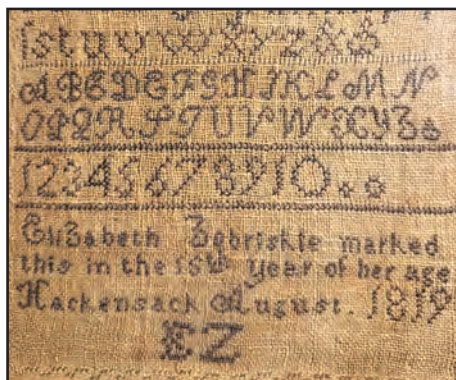
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BERGEN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
P.O. BOX 55, RIVER EDGE, NJ 07661  
[BERGENCOUNTYHISTORY.ORG](http://BERGENCOUNTYHISTORY.ORG)  
DEBORAH POWELL & PATTY DAURIZIO  
NEWSLETTER EDITOR & LAYOUT

## UP-COMING 2025 EVENTS

**Dutch Pinkster** 5/18  
**Memorial Day Wreath Laying** 5/26  
**BCHS Members Annual Dinner** 6/12  
**Vintage Baseball** 7/12  
**Lafayette's Return** 8/24  
**Baron's Oktoberfest** 9/27  
**Harvest Homecoming** 10/26  
**Retreat Weekend** 11/23  
**Holiday Decorating** 12/6  
**Sinter Klaas Day** 12/7  
**Holiday Concerts** 12/13 & 14  
**Linda Russell's Christmas** 12/18  
 -A ZOOM EVENT-

Visit our website  
 or use the QR Code  
 for **HNBL Pop-  
 Up Tours, BCBS  
 Lectures**, and all  
 our other events.  
 Check for special  
**BCBS 250th Events.**



## ON EXHIBIT FOR PINKSTER

BCBS Member & Supporter L. Timpson funded an \$800 purchase of a sampler (detail above) made in 1819 by 15 year old Elizabeth Zobriskie, and it is believed she lived in the Steuben House. HNBL Pinkster celebrates Dutch culture and will feature historian Marty Campanelli speaking on 'girls work,' in the Steuben House, May 18th, 2:30 pm.

## BCBS Members 2025 Annual Dinner

**Thursday ☆ June 12 ☆ 6 to 10PM**  
**The Barnyard and Carriage House**  
**754 TOTOWA RD, TOTOWA, NJ 07512**



- ☆ The evening's speaker and subject TBA
- ☆ Installment of BCBS Officers & Trustees and The Awards Presentation

**Make Your Reservation online by May 29.**

Go to [BergenCountyHistory.org](https://BergenCountyHistory.org) > Events >  
 BCBS Annual Dinner OR mail check &  
 label it for "BCBS Dinner" to: BCBS, PO Box 55, River Edge, NJ 07661

- BUFFET STYLE -

Caesar Salad  
 Tomato & Cucumber Salad  
 Penne Vodka  
 Hot Roast Beef  
 Flounder Almandine  
 Chicken Francaise  
 Roasted Potatoes  
 Seasonal Vegetables  
 Dinner Rolls  
 Fountain Soda, Coffee & Tea  
 Seasonal Fresh Fruit Salad  
 Assorted Cookies

CASH  
 BAR

**\$60**  
 PER PERSON