

# Newsletter of the Bergen County Historical Society

## In Bergen's Attic

**Spring/  
Summer  
2009**

### Whirlwind at New Bridge.

Renaming the *North Hackensack* train

### President's Message

station to  
*New Bridge*

*Landing at River Edge* took place April 28, 2009. The renaming makes us a destination and restores a historic place name. We owe this largely to the relentless persistence of BCHS member and HNBL Park Commissioner **Mary Donohue**.

**Jim Bellis** of the Blauvelt-Demarest Foundation engaged **Tim Adriance** to completely renovate the Demarest House Museum. The two-room house restoration is almost finished.

Please join us in honoring Mary and



Mary Donohue and Jim Bellis with Senator Loretta Weinberg, Kevin Wright, Mike Trecichio and Governor Jon Corzine, March 2008.

Jim as well as out-going trustees **Jack Goudsward** and **Gail Goldstein** at our annual luncheon and election. (It's not too late to send a check in for the luncheon—\$32 BCHS, PO Box 55, River Edge, 07661 by 5/27) We will welcome **Peggy Norris, Lori Charkey, Pat Schuber** and **Jim O'Toole** to the board.

The school year wraps up soon and we thank the many school children and scouts who raised funds for a museum building for BCHS. The campaign raised public awareness about New Bridge Landing.

**Mac Borg** has greatly assisted BCHS by making storage space available for our museum



collections.

Besides allowing us to have the artifacts all in one location—for the first time ever—this generous offer has saved over \$9,000 in annual storage costs. This relieves a financial burden, allowing us to devote our resources to other priorities.

Our greatest priority is to build a museum at NBL.

Good Luck to **Ken O'Brien**, our State Police/FEMA contact, in his retirement. We thank the State Police and FEMA officials in facilitating on-going stabilization work on the flood damaged artifacts.

Everywhere you look we are making progress. Please check our message board, website and email blasts to find out the latest news. If you have not been getting *Our Connection to the Past* email blasts and would like to, please contact me at: [contactBCHS@bergencountyhistory.org](mailto:contactBCHS@bergencountyhistory.org).

BCHS is many people spending many hours saving a piece of the American story. **Help make history by renewing your membership!**

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## Historic New Bridge Landing

by *BCHS Vice President and Historic New Bridge Landing Chairman Mike Trepicchio*

Hello to All, I am happy to tell you that we are finally seeing movement at the entrance to Historic New Bridge Landing, after many a long year of hoping and wishing, the days of the BAPCO Junkyard will finally fade into the annals of history. As I write this, the NJDEP is in the process of the long awaited site remediation. When all is said and done, we will be left with a clean open field, upon which the Historic New Bridge Landing Park Commission will construct the new visitor center for the Park. The HNBPLC is excited and waiting patiently for this process to be completed so we can start the planning phase to construct a replica of the 1819 Bergen County Court House. The BCHS has the bell from this building in its collection. The State has allocated \$300,000 in its fiscal 2010 budget to begin the process. In the coming months you will come to see a different landscape as you enter New Bridge Landing. There is much movement under foot, on the eastern bank of the Hackensack River, directly across the swing bridge. The NJDEP is in the process of razing the old canoe club building, this should be completed by early July. The Blauvelt Demarest Foundation is renovating the Demarest House, under the direction of the skilled hands of Tim Adriance, and the Steuben House has been open again for many of the BCHS spring events. The HNBPLC is working on some projects that will provide new proper signage to the Park, remove modern intrusions by the Steuben House, and fund the purchase of furnishings for the Steuben House, too. Last but not least, the HNBPLC has been working hard to secure important additions to the current state law that empowers the Historic New Bridge Landing Park Commission. This amended legislation was sponsored by great friends to New Bridge Landing, **Senators Loretta Weinberg, Gerald Cardinale, and Robert Gordon, and Assembly Representatives Charlotte Vandervalk, John Rooney, Valerie Huttle and Gordon Johnson, along with the rest of the NJ Senate and Assembly who unanimously voted for its passage.** The Governor signed the bill into Law on April 24, 2009, and we will have a ceremony in May, that will also celebrate the name change of the old North Hackensack train station to New Bridge Landing station. I am very proud to serve as an Officer of the BCHS



and the Chair of the Historic New Bridge Landing Park Commission and I will continue to work hard to serve the BCHS and the Park, to do my part and help carry on the mission of this great 107 year old organization.

Photo by D. Powell

# Fundraising

by BCHS Treasurer Bill Farrelly



The Society has reached an important point in its long history. Thanks to the years of efforts of many members and volunteers (and not without a few setbacks) we are seeing much substantive progress on many fronts. Historic New Bridge Landing is becoming a real definitive location (train station name change, junkyard remediation progressing with soon to be seen greater visibility for the site), the collection is almost totally together in a safe climate controlled place, event programming is getting great publicity and attendance, the barn somewhat organized and cleaned and membership continues to grow.

All that collective accomplishment leads to one conclusion: We have more work to do! To move forward building a museum that will allow our collection to be displayed and shared with the public, growing an acquisitions fund that will allow us to purchase items for the collection that would otherwise be lost, creating an endowment that will allow us to weather (pun intended!) hard times or unforeseen events, as well as support all of our Society's aims, we need to build a fundraising effort.

Fundraising is rarely fun. Having bought candy bars, magazine subscriptions, wrapping paper, attended numerous beefsteak and rubber chicken dinners, had favorite shows delayed for pledge events, it can be very tiring. But each such event is similar to voting. A contribution represents someone making a choice among many competing (and worthy) causes and giving their hard earned money to support something.

## We value membership!



1840s redware platter from the Van Saun-Wolfkiel Pottery, River Edge. Wadsworth Atheneum collection.

It will be our task to define what we want, why we want it, and what we will do with it in a manner that people and businesses will grasp, understand and be willing to support. Your participation will be crucial as our collective vision and effort is what will carry the Society forward to new chapters in its history.

## Have you seen our Message Board?

by Albert Dib

The boards are a great way to share information about local history, genealogy, upcoming events, teardowns and much more. Visit the message boards to browse many never-before-seen images of Bergen County's past. Read about local folklore, try an old recipe or bid on the latest Bergen County history items on eBay. You'll also find many pictures of recent BCHS events, like our last Pinkster festival and Community Boat Building. Feel free to upload your own history-related images as well.

**We are always looking for input from the local history community. Message board members also help each other with genealogic queries. New members are joining all the time.**

The boards are completely free and posting only requires a simple, one-time, electronic registration with a valid email address. Try it today!

Thanks to Bob Leafe for the great images he finds and posts on the Message Boards. Message Board link: [www.bergencountyhistory.org/forums](http://www.bergencountyhistory.org/forums)



# Oratam

by Past President Kevin Wright



In 1921, Hungarian sculptor John Ettl, of Leonia, cast his noble bronze bust of the Hackensack Chief,

Oratam. A bas-relief on

the back base of the statue depicts his people clustered around a tipi, a scene owing more to Western movie scripts than to inconvenient facts of history. Oratam became a paradigm of the “Noble Savage,” living in Edenic harmony with nature, resisting Manifest Destiny and the inevitable progress of Western industrial civilization with childlike innocence. Twentieth-century historians depicted him as the “first Prohibition enforcement agent in New

Jersey,” authorized to seize and destroy brandy brought into his village, and also a Great

Peacemaker, sagacious and just. This statuesque pose hides a dark truth, which descendants of the original Dutch colonists, themselves besieged by

twentieth-century waves of alien immigration,

had good cause to overlook. Only thirty years after

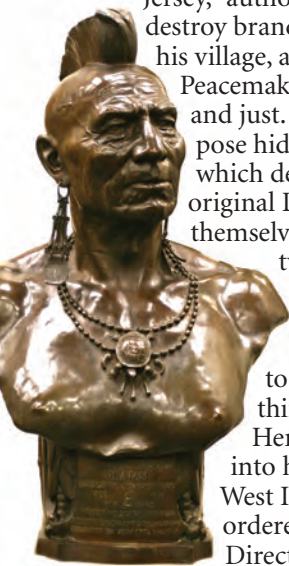
Henry Hudson sailed into history, the Dutch

West India Company ordered William Kieft, Director-General of

their colonies on the Hudson River, to exact a contribution of corn from the native inhabitants. The tribes were justly incensed—the Tappans objected, calling Kieft “a very mean fellow to come and live in this country without being invited by them, and now wish to compel them to give him their corn

for nothing...” And so the seeds of strife were sown.

Oratam only appears in the historical record after the Dutch eliminated the leadership of his community in a brutal massacre at Paulus Hook. Under attack from a more northerly tribe, probably Mohawks, who wished to subjugate those who controlled the peltry trade into New Amsterdam, four to five hundred natives fled through deep snow to the houses of Dutch settlers around Manhattan for protection on February 22, 1643. Lacking firearms, Hackensack warriors sought a copper kettle from Captain De Vries’ brewery in Edgewater to cut up for arrowheads. The following day, these same Indians walked from Edgewater to Jersey City, where some crossed over the river to Brooklyn. Those refugees remaining at Pavonia camped on a small island in the mouth of Mill Creek, surrounded on three sides by salt marsh and east by Communipaw Cove. On February 24, 1643, Director-General Kieft decided, “to wipe the mouths of these savages” by attacking the unsuspecting Hackensacks and Tappans. In the early hours of February 26th, Dutch soldiers brutally massacred about eighty Indians at Pavonia, young and old alike, some in their sleep, most by slashing, some by drowning, and some by burning. Some children were thrown alive into the frigid waters of the river. Of the horrific scene, Captain De Vries later reported, “Some came running to us from the country having their hands off, some, who had their legs cut off, were supporting their entrails with their arms, while others were mangled in other horrid ways, in part too shocking to be conceived; and these miserable wretches did not know, as well as some of our people did not know, but they





had been attacked by the Mohawks.” Soldiers loudly returned to Manhattan carrying the severed heads of their victims. Those who eluded slaughter, by hiding in the brush, soon retaliated, burning four Dutch farmhouses and killing ten colonists. A war of terror raged until spring, when the Dutch wished to drive their cattle out to pasture and the natives hoped to plant maize. Responding to a flag of truce on March 4, 1643, Captain David De Vries crossed the East River and traveled to Rockaway, on Long Island, to meet with a Hackensack chief who lived half a league from De Vries’ farmhouse in Edgewater, who was hunting with his friends and relatives on Long Island. He assured Captain De Vries that his people sought peace. At a conference the following morning, an Indian orator, using mnemonic sticks to recall each point of his speech, told the history of the Swanneken (Dutch) arrival and settlement in their country. He particularly noted, “They had given them their daughters to sleep with, by whom they had begotten children, and there roved many an Indian who was begotten by a Swanneken, but [the Dutch] had become so villainous as to kill their own blood.” Oratamin, sachem of Achinkeshacky, acting on behalf of several river tribes, made peace with Director-General William Kieft on April 22, 1644. Apparently, the Dutch governor did not understand the native custom of compensation for injuries done and the aggrieved chiefs predicted, “the infant upon the small board would remember [the massacre].”

Several variations of Oratam’s name are recorded. Oratamin, sachem of the savages living at Achinkeshacky, acting on behalf of the savages of Tappan, Rechgawawane (Near Rockaway, now Rockville Center, Long Island), Kichtawanc, a village on Croton and Hudson Rivers, and Sintsinck, now North Tarrytown, Briarcliff Manor and

Ossining, concluded a peace treaty with Director-General William Kieft on April 22, 1643.

Oratamy, Chief of Achinkeshachy, signed a treaty of peace with Willaim Kieft on August 30, 1645. In 1649, Seysegeckimus, Oratamin, Willem of Tappaen and Pennekeck, chief at Achter Col, attended a meeting held in the Council Chamber at New Amsterdam. Pennekeck, Oratany and other sachems negotiated with Dutch emissaries for the release of Dutch prisoners after the Indian landing on Manhattan on September 15, 1655 and the subsequent destruction of out-lying plantations on Paulus Hook. Oratin, sagamore and sole proprietor, conveyed the lower end of Hackensack Neck (present Ridgefield Park, Teaneck and Bogota below Fort Lee Road) between the Hackensack River and Overpeck Creek, as far north as “above the place where Winkelens’ House Stood” in Bogota to Captain Edward Grove of his Majesty’s Frigate the *Martin* on October 5, 1664. In 1666, Oraton, being very old, approved the sale by Perro and his kindred of lands on the west side of Achter Kol, whereon the City of Newark was sited, to Captain Robert Treat. Oratam apparently died shortly thereafter. On June 24, 1669, Sarah Kiersted received confirmation for a neck of land given to her by Oratan, the Sachem of Hackensack, containing 2,260 acres between the Hackensack River and Overpeck Creek. This was also called Hackensack Neck. ❖



DeVries’ depiction of a Warrior



# Albert Spickers

by Jack Goudswaard

ALBERT SPICKERS was born in Paterson New Jersey on April 29, 1917 to Doctor William and Sophia Reed Spickers. He came into a well established family. His father was a prominent surgeon in Paterson N.J. His mother was well known in music circles. His grandfather manufactured pianos in Paterson and is credited with the development of the upright piano.

Albert attended Public School No.6 in Paterson. Upon graduation he enrolled in the Newark Academy. After which he enrolled and graduated from the Wilbraham Academy in Wilbraham, Mass. While there he participated in the Glee Club, Philo, Track, Soccer and the Dramatic Club where he excelled. He appeared in a number of productions. In the one-act play "Trouble Brewing" by Larry Johnson, Albert played the part of "George Gibbens". Next he played "Olivia" in the "Merry Madness" by Sheridan Gibney. Finally he played the part of "Clara" in Frank Tompkins' "Sham".

After graduation he went to Rutgers for one semester. While at Rutgers he was the Photo Editor for the "Scarlet Letter" and Manager of the Cross Country Team. He then transferred to Wesleyan University.

At Wesleyan he was studying to become a Concert Pianist. Albert, already a well known Concert Pianist, had composed several Piano selections. He was well known to the music and literary greats of the time.

In 1942 he left Wesleyan University and enlisted in the U.S Army Air Corp. His basic training was at Cal Aero Field, Ontario, California and his advance training at Williams Field and Chandler Field both in Arizona.

Upon graduation he was

commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant and received his Pilots Wings on July 25, 1942. He was then assigned to fly the B-26-B Martin Marauder Bomber. This training took him to Tampa and Lakeland Fields in Florida and Baer



Field, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

At Baer Field he became part of the 442nd Bomb Squadron of the 320th Bomb Group.

He was

assigned to Air Craft # 117813 along with his close personal friend 2nd Lt. Thomas F. Schofield who he knew from basic training and was his room mate.

On Oct. 3, 1942 Albert, acting as co-pilot, along with Schofield and 5 others left Baer Field for Akron, Ohio on an Instrument and Navigation training mission. They flew into Akron with no problem. Arriving at Akron they spent time on the ground while the plane was refueled and checked for the return flight. They spent this time meeting family and friends of the crew.

When the right engine was started some trouble was noticed. After the engine was checked, some oil was added. This seemed to clear the problem and the aircraft was cleared for take off.

The take off started to the S.W. of the Akron Municipal Airport run way. After traversing about 1/3 of the runway the right engine apparently started to malfunction, but the pilot continued the take off run which was unusually

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# A Century Ago

by Past President Kevin Wright



Trailing Arbutus

Whistles, bells and guns gave a noisy welcome to the New Year 1909. A new law took effect at midnight, barring riders from carrying dogs, cats, poultry and pigeons on trolleys. Sleigh bells jingled for the first snow of the New Year on January 14th, but rain soon followed, icing the branches. Hackensack ice dealers received most of their ice supply from the Pocono Lake region. In his office, County Clerk Samuel Taylor exhibited a photograph of the proposed new Court House, showing “a very pretentious looking structure, with white marble front, the three-story building being topped with a very tall cupola on which is perched the bird of freedom. The building is set back 50 feet from the street.” Carnations adorned many buttonholes on McKinley Day, January 29th.

By February, workers extended the North Jersey Trolley line west of the Easton property at Arcola, running just north of the Hudson River trolley route. William Howard Taft took the oath as President of the United States on March 4, 1909. Fishermen made their first haul of the season on March 10th, fishing a short distance south of Bogert Brothers’ coal and lumberyard—only suckers were then running. Fishermen at New Milford claimed fish were very scarce since the Great Flood of 1903.

Trailing arbutus, one of the first of the early spring flowers, bloomed on April 1st. Bakers filled orders for hot cross buns for Good Friday and florists had their stock in trade ready for Easter. One local correspondent thought the new spring hats looked “like a waste-paper basket.” Large quantities of oil were seen floating on the river near the Valvoline oil dock at Bogota on April 3rd. Cows went to pasture, promising new grass butter

would soon be on the market.

Owner D. Z. Westervelt tore down the old stone house near Linden Avenue in the New Milford section of Oradell to make room for a modern structure, even though General Washington once occupied this old dwelling as his headquarters.

James Wilson, Secretary of the US Department of Agriculture, banned bleached white flour in April 1909 and flourmills discontinued its manufacture. Attempting reforms for a long time, food specialists claimed ordinary white flour was indigestible, injurious to the teeth and lacked proper nutriment. On the other hand, golden flour contained real wheat kernels and was much healthier. The government’s pure-food expert, Dr. Harvey W. Wiley, claimed manufacturers indulged in extensive bleaching to make an inferior flour resemble the fine grade.

In the last days of April, cherry trees blossomed and birds eagerly waited upon the fruit. Ice — a quarter of an inch thick—was reported at River Edge on the morning of May 3, 1909. Yet Farmer Cooper’s extensive strawberry patches at New Milford were white with blossoms. Lilac bushes also sprung into full bloom. Public schools observed Arbor Day on May 7, 1909, with singing and recitations. Peter Cosney of New Milford captured the first shad of the season on May 13th. Palisades Amusement Park, which met with considerable favor the previous season, re-opened May 29, 1909. Located several hundred feet above the Hudson River, this place of summer amusement provided a remarkable view of New York City. Its attractions included a Wild West show, a free menagerie, daily flights of airships, and for the first time on page 8

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opening day, an open-air theatre with a musical comedy called "Widow Winnie Wynne," by Robert Jeannette.

On May 31, 1909, several hundred people attended the dedication in the New York Cemetery at Hackensack of the first monument erected by any Spanish-American War veterans' camp in the United States. Little Belle Burroughs, a daughter of Lieut. A. B. Burroughs, unveiled the monument, which was topped by a small cannon captured in the Philippines. Members of the Major John Engel Camp, S. W. V. of Hackensack, witnessed the ceremony.

North Hackensack had no hotel, but citizens were indignant that a big beer sign was planted near the depot on a lot owned by the railroad company. Crabs were crawling up the Hackensack River from Newark Bay. On July 1, 1909, an Italian laborer fell from the New Bridge and drowned, the body not being recovered. A prolonged dry spell played havoc with the potato crop, drying up the vines, while tubers in the hill were of medium size. As golden rod bloomed, crabbers flocked to the river. On July 16th, one boy reportedly caught sixty crabs in a very short time.

Spectators enjoyed a pitchers' battle on Saturday afternoon, July 17, 1909, in the ball game between the North Hackensack team and the Wanderers of Teaneck; the visitors finally lost 3 to 5. The grass looked greener after a late July rain. Mailboxes in Hackensack looked greener due to the recent attention of a painter—someone noted the street letterboxes were introduced in Hackensack 51 years earlier. A large circular sign near the Court Street Bridge reminded automobilists that the speed limit was 8 miles per hour. R. F. Harold, the artesian well-driller of Tenafly, reached a depth of 212 feet,



Maple Grove Cemetery

boring in solid clay as hard as rock in the rear of the new Consolidated Market Company building at 153 Main Street, Hackensack, operated by Henry C. Renner and George Van Buskirk. Charles W. Bell of Hackensack, receiver for the Traders' Paper Board Company at Bogota, appointed twenty months earlier, terminated the receivership on July 28, 1909, after paying all of the company's debts and making a profit for stockholders of \$30,000.

The moon was full on August 1st and again on August 31st, a great rarity. The cricket sang of dying summer and the locust sang of hot weather. The new Lincoln pennies were in great demand. Starting out on August 12, 1909, County Engineer Earle accompanied the new Court House Committee, consisting of Messrs. Gulnac, Christie and Brewster, on a trip to Cleveland, Ohio, to inspect a stone quarry and ascertain whether sufficient stone could be procured there for the new building. Camping parties were numerous near Captain Henry Lozier's dock at North Hackensack. When August roses bloomed, summer saunterers headed home. Local folks gathered wild cherries and pressed them into wine.

A movement was started to separate the New Milford section from Delford Borough and form their own township—residents claimed New Milford property owners paid the bulk of the taxes for support of the borough for the past fifteen years, but derived few benefits. With ideal weather conditions during the summer, mushroom hunters filled the fields on the Essex Street hill on August 22nd, some searchers for the common field variety returning with baskets filled with a delicacy that grows in a single night.

The name on the railroad depot



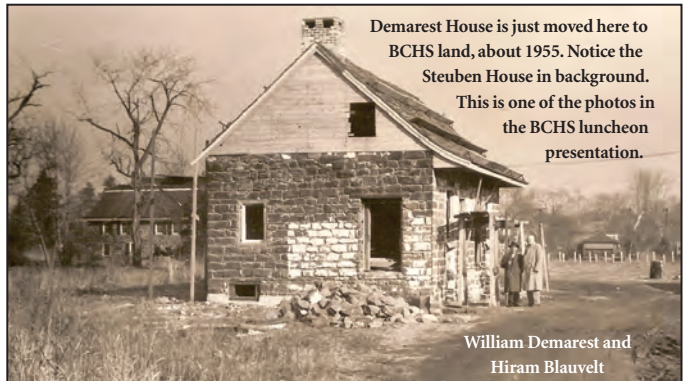
at Etna was changed to Emerson in September 1909 with the trainmen calling it “Em-er-son.” The Edgewater ferry carried 130,000 passengers on the opening day of the Hudson-Fulton Celebration, September 25, 1909. New York Governor Charles E. Hughes and New Jersey Governor J. Franklin Fort for New Jersey formally dedicated the Palisades from Fort Lee to Piermont

as a public park on September 27, 1909. The dedicatory ceremonies took place at the supposed headquarters of Lord Cornwallis at Alpine Landing, opposite Yonkers, where the Palisades tower nearly 300 feet above the river. A historical marker was placed where Andre landed

on September 21, 1780, the spot being an old dock about one-quarter mile north of the entrance to the West Shore Railroad tunnel at Haverstraw and about the same distance north of the stone crusher.

On July 12, 1909, the Baron Steuben House at New Bridge was in danger of being “remodeled and made into a tenement house, unless some friend of historic structures comes forward and buys it for the purpose of preserving it.” The reporter for the *Newark Sunday Call* noted the Steuben House was “quite as historic and quite as beautiful architecturally” as any other antique building and deserved “better treatment than to be transformed into a tenement house.” When a new roof was put on the place, “the rafters were found with bullets embedded in them, and there were marks of many others.” The house could be bought for about \$5,000 and “would make a delightful summer home for some one who is interested in

such a building, and it really deserves preservation.” Speaking of the former Zabriskie gristmill at New Bridge, the reporter observed one of the millstones used as a steppingstone for the house and another “lying in the mud at the mouth of the creek, above which projects the shaft upon which it turned. A few of the posts which supported the mill are still visible, but aside



Demarest House is just moved here to BCHS land, about 1955. Notice the Steuben House in background. This is one of the photos in the BCHS luncheon presentation.

William Demarest and Hiram Blauvelt

from that the structure has entirely disappeared.” On October 1, 1909, Magdalena Zabriskie sold 30 acres of land, including the old Baron Steuben House, to Charles W. Bell, a former president of the Common Council of Dayton, Ohio. He was a Hackensack businessman who built a home on West Anderson Street in 1906. According to report in *The Hackensack Republican* on October 7, 1909: “It is the purpose of Mr Bell to build on the [Steuben House] property a large mill for the manufacture of cardboard. A large sum of money was to be invested and the enterprise will be of great importance, especially to that vicinity. The property acquired by Mr. Bell has an important waterfront, and plans are already prepared for running in a spur from the New Jersey and New York Railroad so as to give direct freight facilities. Mr. Bell was familiar with the business, he having acted as receiver for a similar plant at Bogota and placed it upon a paying basis.” ❖

# A Dangerous Expedition

*How George Washington saved the life of Abraham Van Buskirk's Son*

*by Past President Todd W. Braisted*



It is well known that Abraham Van Buskirk was Bergen County's leading Loyalist during the American Revolution.

A prominent "Practitioner of Physic" with an annual income of £ 200 per annum, Van Buskirk lived in Teaneck, across the New Bridge from John Zabriskie.<sup>1</sup> Both men were officers in the Bergen County Militia, Zabriskie a lieutenant colonel and Van Buskirk the surgeon.<sup>2</sup>

The Van Buskirk family, like most others in Bergen County, and many across the country, had divided loyalties when war came. George Van Buskirk went so far in 1776 as to enlist in Colonel Elias Dayton's Third New Jersey Battalion, serving in the Continental Army for a full year until the expiration of his enlistment.<sup>3</sup> For the most part however, the family threw in their lot with the Crown Forces, no fewer than sixteen of them from the metro area serving King George III. Foremost amongst these was Abraham Van Buskirk of Teaneck, commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, New Jersey Volunteers.<sup>4</sup>

For Lt. Col. Van Buskirk, he would not enter the service alone, but rather joined with his son Jacob. Jacob Van Buskirk entered his father's battalion at the age of just sixteen, commissioned a lieutenant on 17 January 1777.<sup>5</sup> With his battalion, young Jacob would serve throughout the 1777 Campaign, stationed primarily on Staten Island. He almost certainly took part in repulsing Major General John Sullivan's 22 August expedition to Staten Island and in Sir Henry Clinton's grand forage of Bergen County the following month.

The battalion received the public thanks of Sir Henry in each instance.

The great events of the 1777 Campaign however did not take place in the New York City area. While Lt. Van Buskirk and his father's battalion may have earned themselves some laurels in action, the battles at places like Saratoga, Brandywine and Germantown were those of more lasting note in the war. The New York area though was the land of diversion for the 1777 Campaign. Sir Henry Clinton hoped his 1777 Grand Forage in Bergen County would work in Sir William Howe's favor in Pennsylvania, as his October advance into the Hudson Highlands would facilitate Burgoyne's advance on Albany. In the former case, hundreds of militia were held up from advancing earlier to Washington's assistance in Pennsylvania, but the latter failed to do little more than cause some nervous moments in Kingston and Albany. Washington likewise realized the value of diversions in his dance with Howe in Pennsylvania. If New York could be threatened from Westchester, Connecticut or New Jersey, valuable British reinforcements might be delayed in joining Howe's army in Philadelphia.

One such offer came from Major General Philemon Dickinson, senior officer in the New Jersey Militia. Dickinson commanded over a thousand militia at Elizabethtown, including a company from Bergen County commanded by Captain John Mead.<sup>6</sup> Washington eagerly accepted Dickinson's offer, writing to him on 4 November 1777:

*Your idea of counteracting the intended Reinforcements for Mr. Howe's Army, by a demonstration of designs upon New York, I think an exceeding good*

one, and am very desirous that you should improve and mature it for immediate execution, a great shew of Preparatives on your side, boats collected, Troops assembled, Your expectation of the approach of Generals Gates and Putnam, intrusted as a secret to persons who you are sure will divulge and disseminate it in New York; in a word, such measures taken for effectually striking an alarm in that city, and which it is altogether unnecessary for me minutely to describe to you, I am in great hopes may effect the valuable purpose which you expect.<sup>7</sup>

Dickinson had already been active in raiding the island, which proved lucrative to those involved. One such raid took place on 9 November 1777, which prompted the following order by General Dickinson the next day: "The plunder taken from the Enemy last Night, will be sold Tomorrow Morning at 10 O'clock, at Major Heards Quarters, for the Benefit of the Party—the Major is requested, to make an equal distribution of the Money among the Party."<sup>8</sup> Four New Jersey Volunteers were also taken in this raid, including one from the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Private Hendrick Ackerman.<sup>9</sup> These men had been sentries, taken during a time of thick fog which concealed the militia, one hundred in number, crossing from Elizabethtown Point.<sup>10</sup>

Staten Island, principally garrisoned by the 1<sup>st</sup>, (part of the) 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> Battalions, New Jersey Volunteers



Silver beltplate of Ensign Justus (Joost) Earle, brother of Edward Earle, both of Hackensack Twp  
Courtesy: The New Brunswick Museum.

along with the regiment of Waldeck, was already on edge, with a clear view across the kill of a number of boats collecting. Brigadier General Skinner, commanding officer of the New Jersey Volunteers, wrote Colonel Christopher Billopp of the island's Loyalist militia "I have written & asked for Galleys. I hope they will be sent."<sup>11</sup> The request was repeated by Brigadier General John Campbell, commanding the island, telling Clinton "I must here add my concern that the Row Galleys

cou'd not be granted as requested; Any other Vessels for this Sound will be found merely Show & of insignificant Force shou'd they be attacked..."<sup>12</sup>

A galley and the Sloop George were ordered down to the island the middle of November, but it was not enough to deter General Dickinson from sending parties to the island.<sup>13</sup>

One advantage on the British side was the spy system administered by Brigadier General Skinner. Few movements on the New Jersey side took place without his knowledge, faithfully brought by New Jersey Loyalists secretly in British pay. The night of 19 November, one of Skinner's spies was to make his way to the island and report when Dickinson decided to send another party over to the island: "The Enemy abt. 9 o'clock in the Evg. Attempted to Surprize a Centry to the Left of the point but was discovered & repulsed after exchanging a few shott, it was at the very place I expected a man to Land at that time, this Attempt prevented him..."<sup>14</sup> The

raids continued. The chaplain of the Waldeckers recorded in his diary on 24 November: "This evening at one o'clock we heard shots. A corps of our provincial troops<sup>15</sup> was sent over in order to eliminate a sentry post of the Rebels and came upon a troop intending to pay us a visit this evening."<sup>16</sup>

Brigadier General Campbell had bigger things in mind than simply taking off a rebel picket. On 26 November he wrote to General Clinton "by all Accounts we may expect a visit from them [the rebels] very soon. If I can find Boats I intend to send a Party of Chosen men in a Night or Two over to Thompsons Creek to endeavour if possible to destroy or carry off the Rebel Boats reported to be in that Creek."<sup>17</sup> Campbell was too late. Before dawn the next morning, Dickinson and over 1,400 militia landed on Staten Island.

Landing in three divisions, Dickinson's troops probed their way around the island, "having the best guides." One of these guides was a less than willing John Merrell, an inhabitant of Staten Island: "...he was ordered to march with a body of Rebel Troops, to Halsteds point, where they arrived about one o'Clock in the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup> day of November...when [he] was first told, that the intention of bringing him with the Army, was that he might serve as a pilot to conduct them through Staten Island, where it was meant the Army should Land, to carry off the greens."<sup>18</sup> That about Sunrise on the same Morning...he...was ordered to Abraham Cashoon's House, on Carles-Neck the Cantonement of part of General Skinner's Brigade;<sup>19</sup> And that General Dickenson gave orders at the head of his Troops, to blow out [Merrell's] brains, or to run him through with a bayonet, if he should offer to make his escape, or seem to deviate in the least from the Orders given him as a Guide..."<sup>20</sup>

General Dickinson's hope of secrecy

for his expedition, communicating his intentions only to senior officers, proved in vain, as "notwithstanding all my precaution, Mr. Skinner received the intelligence [of their descent] at three o'clock in the morning, which frustrated my plan. I flattered myself I should have had the pleasure of giving...a good account of the General and his Green brigade, which, undoubtedly, would have been the case, had he not unluckily received the above information."<sup>21</sup> Being warned of the attack, all the Loyalist and German troops retired into the different forts on the island, protecting them from any attack. Signal guns were fired and Flags raised on the island, notifying Sir Henry Clinton in New York City that a major attack was under way there. Sir Henry embarked at once for the island, taking with him one or two Royal Navy frigates with their Marines. After having remained eight hours on the island, Dickinson and his troops retired to their boats, skirmishing with detachments of New Jersey Volunteers who had sallied from their works. In this action, Captain Arthur Maddox of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion "received a Wound through the right shoulder and Breast under which he Languished for five Years."<sup>22</sup> Dickinson would claim his men "killed five or six Green" but the muster rolls indicate Maddox was the only casualty.<sup>23</sup> Brigadier General Campbell later reported two or three privates had likewise been wounded.<sup>24</sup> Isaac Brokaw of the Somerset County Militia under Dickinson would later recall "We had a Skirmish with [the enemy], we lost one man by the name [Marion] Miller. We took John Honeyman & James Hood (two tories) prisoner and brot them to Elizabethtown."<sup>25</sup> The taking of the former was confirmed by another Somerset Militiaman, Frederick F. Van Liew, who "recollects of going out under Captain [John] Baird and went to Staten Island, and took in one of the



Excursions to Staten Island a tory by the name of Honeyman one of the heads or leaders of the tories.”<sup>26</sup>

John Honeyman may not have been any “leader of the tories,” by Dickinson did scoop up several important prisoners. Amongst those returning to New Jersey with him would be Lieutenants Jacob Van Buskirk and Edward Earle and Surgeon John Hammell, all of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Dickinson would claim to have taken twenty privates, although the rolls indicate only two enlisted men captured in the raid, along with assistant commissary, John Brown, formerly of New Brunswick.<sup>27</sup> Dickinson’s forces returned to New Jersey with their prisoners, minus three of their own men prisoner.<sup>28</sup> There is no record of precisely how the officers were captured, but it may be plausible to presume they were all quartered in a private home that was surprised before they received word of the alarm.

Four days after the raid, Lieutenants Van Buskirk and Earle, along with Surgeon Hammell and John Brown were brought before Governor Livingston and the New Jersey Council of Safety, where they were promptly charged with high treason in accordance with the state’s Treason Act of 1776 and ordered to jail in Trenton.<sup>29</sup> This act gave the state the power of life and death over those convicted of treason against it. Livingston proved quite willing to use it as well, executing two recruiting officers for the New Jersey Volunteers at Morristown on 2 December 1777, as recalled years later by a militiaman present at the execution: “In the fall..., two officers, Captain Iliff & Lieutenant Mee, who had recruited a company for the enemy, were tried at Morristown, condemned & hanged by Sheriff Alexander Carmichael. The privates of the Co. were condemned also but were pardoned on condition of enlistment in the American Army.”<sup>30</sup>

Since Van Buskirk and the rest of the Loyalist prisoners had been taken prisoner by the state’s militia, they were under the control of Governor Livingston, rather than a Continental Army commissary, who had the charge of prisoners taken by the standing army. This put them in immediate jeopardy to be put on trial, as opposed to the norm of enjoying a period on parole and waiting for an exchange. On 1 December 1777, Livingston wrote to Washington, announcing his intentions:

*General Dickenson has sent me two Lieutenants one Surgeon & one Commissary taken Prisoners on Staten Island by a Detachment of our Militia under his Command. As we found them all to be Subjects of this State who had joined the Enemy since that Offence was declared high Treason by our Law, I have sent them to Trenton Gaol to be tried in the County of Hunterdon, where a Court of Oyer & Terminer is to be held about the middle of this month. If your Excellency apprehends any ill consequence respecting our Prisoners will result from our treating them in that manner, I should be glad to be favored with your Sentiments on that Subject; & I doubt not the Council of Safety will do every thing in their Power to manage the matter as your Excellency shall think most conducive to the general Interest.*<sup>31</sup>

The state’s newspaper likewise enjoyed reporting the capture and predicament of Bergen’s Loyalist officers:

*A correspondent informs us, that the Council of Safety of this State have committed Lieutenant Jacob Van Boskirk, Lieutenant Edward Earle, John Hammel, a surgeon, and John Brown, who has a warrant as commissary from the enemy. They are all subjects of this State, and joined the enemy since such adherence was declared high treason by our Legislature. They were lately taken prisoners on Staten-Island by our militia, under the command of Major-General Dickenson- Van Boskirk*

*was an associator, and is supposed to have been prompted to this act of treason by his father, who acts as Colonel under the enemy, and commands a battalion of about 200 banditti, collected in Bergen, who eat King George's beef and pork to very little purpose.*<sup>32</sup>

For his part, Washington was simply thankful that Dickinson's loss was insignificant and no harm came from the expedition, as he wrote Dickinson on 2 December 1777: "...can only say it gives me concern that your Excursion to Staten Island was not attended with success equal to your expectation which, from the Plan you had formed, and the secrecy with which you expected to have executed it, I suppose was pretty Sanguine; but experience shews us that the most trifling incidents will frustrate the best concerted schemes; & as Mr. Skinner had notice of your approach I think you may be satisfied with the small loss you sustained and the Capture you made."<sup>33</sup> Washington however was much more concerned with Governor Livingston's intention to put Lt. Van Buskirk and the other commissioned officers on trial. Writing from White Marsh on 11 December 1777, he informed the New Jersey governor:

*In my opinion, trying the Officers, taken by General Dickinson on Staten Island, for High treason, may prove a dangerous expedient. It is true they left the state after such an offence was declared Treason; but as they had not taken the Oaths, nor had entered into our Service, it will be said they had a right to choose their side. Again, by the same rule that we try them, may not the Enemy try any natural born subject of Great Britain, taken in Arms in our Service. We have a great number of them, and I therefore, think we had better submit to the necessity of treating a few individuals, who may really deserve a severer fate, as Prisoners of War, than run the Risque of giving an opening for retaliation upon the Europeans in our Service.*<sup>34</sup>

Probably the officer Washington was concerned most about was Major General Charles Lee, who had been surprised and captured by the British at Basking Ridge, NJ in December 1776. Lee had been a British officer and his former comrades had held the specter of trying him for treason over his head during much of his captivity. In fact, Lee had been very well treated during his time as a prisoner, and the idea of trying him was never seriously put forward. Washington of course had no way of knowing that, trusting prudence as the best course of action. Washington may have possibly run across Jacob Van Buskirk while the Continental Army occupied Bergen County in November 1776. A letter from Jacob's mother to her husband after he had joined the British was examined by Dr. Byron G. Van Horne of the Bergen County Historical Society nearly 100 years ago, and probably described the period just before the fall of Fort Lee. He described it thus: "I was shown a letter written to [Abraham Van Buskirk] by his wife in which she stated that part of Washington's army had been encamped on their farm; some of their property was destroyed and some live stock taken, but that on application to General Washington (of whom she speaks in the highest terms), a corporal and guard of soldiers had been stationed on the place for their protection, from which time they had not been molested."<sup>35</sup> Van Buskirk's house was soon after plundered by Continentals under General William Heath of a large quantity of spirits, liquors and furniture, both his own and the property of a New York City Loyalist named Oliver Templeton who had sought refuge there the previous summer.<sup>36</sup>

Livingston, despite his quick acquiescence to Washington's wishes, could not have been pleased with the commander-in-chief's decision. The governor had an immense dislike of

those who retained their allegiance to King George, and in particular those from Bergen, which he referred to in 1777 by saying: "I hope by...vigorous measures...we shall soon reduce that almost totally revolted County of Bergen to the obedience of the States."<sup>37</sup> Their fate—should he have his way—he confessed to Washington the previous October: "A Tory is an incorrigible Animal: And nothing but the Extinction of Life, will extinguish his Malevolence against Liberty..."<sup>38</sup> Indeed, Governor Livingston had prior to Van Buskirk's predicament specifically requested another New Jersey Volunteer officer in confinement, Lt. Col. Joseph Barton, be turned over to his authority, stating to Washington "...if Colonel Barton should be turned over to the civil power of this State (he having joined the Enemy last Winter, & having done infinite Mischief before his Departure) we should hang him."<sup>39</sup> His request was contained in a letter requesting Washington show no leniency to yet another New Jersey Volunteer officer, Lt. John Troup, who had been taken prisoner near Pompton over the summer of 1777.

Unaware of Livingston's intentions, or George Washington's interposition, the British became indignant merely at the fact of officers in their service being thrown in a common jail, rather than entitled to the softer treatment allowed gentlemen in captivity. Those officers of the Continental Army and militia then in British custody at New York were generally on parole housed amongst the inhabitants on Long Island, with some even allowed to walk the streets of the city. They expected their own officers to be given the same courtesy should they fall into enemy hands. Unaware of the jurisdictional protocol, British Brigadier General John Campbell wrote to Major General Dickinson with his concerns:

*I have heard with surprise of the treatment, that his Majesty's Officers*

*taken on this Island the 27<sup>th</sup> Ultmo. have received since in your power; I am credibly informed that Lieut. Jacob Buskirk, Lieut. Edward Earle, and Surgeon Hammel of his Majesty's 4<sup>th</sup> Battn. of New Jersey Volunteers, and Mr. Brown a Deputy Commissary, are now confined like Felons in the common Jail of either Princeton or Trenton: I desire to know whether my Information is right? and whether such Treatment has the Sanction of Authority, and is intended to be continued? That, in case, Officers of equal Rank, who were taken on this Island the 22<sup>nd</sup> Day of August last, may be selected to undergo like Treatment, however repugnant to the Humanity of Britons to inflict it: But I'm in Hopes, that either my Information is wrong, or these Officers have been thus used without proper Authority.*<sup>40</sup>

For those Continental officers held by the British, "like Treatment" would have meant being thrown into "the provost" which was the jail where common civilian prisoners, soldiers awaiting court martial, and prisoners of war being punished or who were considered dangerous were kept. It was not a desirable place. It also was unnecessary, as the ordeal of Lt. Van Buskirk and his comrades, at least its most dangerous phase, was coming to an end. The new year would start with transfer of the prisoners from the state's control to that of the Continental Army. The only glitch being, it had to happen quickly, lest the state's laws be used against it and the prisoners actually set free, as explained from state commissary Charles Pettit to the Continental Army Commissary General for Prisoners, Elias Boudinot:

*In General Dickinson's late Expedition to Staten Island, amongst other Prisoners taken were Lieutenant Earle, Lt. Boskirk, Surgeon Hammel, and Depy. Commissary Brown, of Skinner's Greens. as they were Jerseymen who departed the State after our Treason Act, they were committed to the Gaol of this County for Trial at*

*the Court of Oyer & Terminer which was expected to rise this Day, the Grand Jury being discharged yesterday. No Bills have been found against them & on my Application to the Governor in Council of Safety respecting them this Morning, he informed me they had concluded to deliver them up to you as Prisoners of War. I think His Excellency informed me he had wrote to you on the Subject. As they were committed as Criminals to be kept Safely until the next Court of Oyer & Terminer for the County of Hunterdon, and that Court is now over, the Gaoler has no authority to detain them farther, I shall therefore mention the Matter to Col [Lewis] Nicola or the Commanding Officer here; but as it is necessary they should be kept Secure till they are taken Care of by some military Authority, I have not mentioned to them nor to the Gaoler that the Mittimus is run out, & they will not be likely to think of it of themselves. However as this Gaol is an uncomfortable Place, and I do not think it a safe one, I could wish you would have them removed as Speedily as possible.<sup>41</sup>*

The three New Jersey Volunteer officers were remanded into Continental custody and instantly put on a footing with other British officers, eligible for exchange. The event did not take place before another round of accusatory correspondence between the British and Governor Livingston, this time at the hands of Major General James Robertson. The fear the British had of Van Buskirk and the others being hanged was increased after the rumors of the Morristown hangings of Iliff and Mee were confirmed. Robertson shrewdly held out the threat of severity against a more eligible and significant prisoner under his control, for unlike non-New Jersey Continental officers as General Campbell had threatened, the fate of John Fell was considered much more likely to sway the governor's mind on the subject of Van Buskirk's fate.<sup>42</sup> John Fell was Bergen County's

leading Whig political figure, a member of Governor Livingston's own council and a future delegate to the Continental Congress. Robertson had chosen well. The 56 year old Fell had been taken prisoner at his home north of Hopperstown by a party of 25 New Jersey Volunteers commanded by Captain William Van Allen and lodged in the provost.<sup>43</sup> Livingston had immediately solicited Washington's aid in seeking his release:

*...Mr. Fell one of the members of the Council of this State was lately taken out of his own Bed in Bergen County by the Tories, and carried a Prisoner to New York. Considering his public Utility as a very valuable Member of our Legislature, and incorruptible Attachment to the Cause of American Liberty, in a County abounding with its Adversaries, the delicacy of his Constitution & advanced years; I cannot refrain from being exceedingly sollicitous for his Enlargement as soon as he can be exchange'd consistent with your Excellencys plan for the Exchange of Prisoners.<sup>44</sup>*

General Robertson had informed Livingston in early January 1778 that Fell had been paroled so far as to the limits of New York City, free to walk the streets and purchase what he wished. The British officer threatened to return Fell to confinement unless Livingston give up his plans for any more trials. It was too late to save Iliff and Mee, Lt. Troup had escaped, and Washington had ordered Livingston to treat the prisoners basically how Robertson wished. Save for some more bellicose press statements, the incident had come to an end.

For Van Buskirk, Earle and Hammell however, they still had problems to deal with, above and beyond those of being prisoners with an enemy. In their absence, their battalion had been reduced from ten companies to five, with a number of superfluous officers being retired upon half pay.



The battalion still needed a surgeon however, so it took that of the former 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion upon its consolidation, namely Absalom Bainbridge. Bainbridge was a Princeton Loyalist, graduate of the university there, president of the New Jersey Medical Society, and would be remembered in history as the father of William Bainbridge, Captain of the USS Constitution of War of 1812 fame.<sup>45</sup> The five slots for lieutenants in the battalion were all full. When the officers were eventually exchanged in 1778, there was no place left for them to return to.

Surgeon Hammell appears to have been the first to return, relieving Bainbridge of his position by 31 August 1778. A lieutenant's vacancy opened up when Donald McPherson accepted an appointment to the newly raised British Legion, commanded by the famous Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton. His slot was filled by Lt. Edward Earle, whose commission pre-dated that of Van Buskirk. That left only the colonel's son unprovided for.

Jacob appears to have done no further duty with the battalion until 1780. The previous year however, he received a warrant to recruit a new company for his father's battalion.<sup>46</sup> New recruits for both armies were difficult to obtain at this stage of the war, the result being that deserters from the other's army made up a greater percentage of new enlistments. This was the case with the many of the men recruited by Jacob Van Buskirk, as reported to George Washington by one of his spies in May 1780: "The Recruits obtained by desertion from your Army, when the River was frozen, are seperated from the Rest & incorporated by themselves. They constitute an additional Company & are commanded by the Cols: Son."<sup>47</sup> One of these recruits was James Kent of Hackensack, A Bergen County Militiaman who had been taken prisoner during the British raid there on 23 March 1780. He

deserted home on 2 June 1780, as his wife Catharine many years later recalled: "he enlisted with the enemy, and he was with the British Army sent down to Staten Island, where he deserted, and as she distinctly recollects he came to Hackensack. . .dressed in a full suit of British regimentals."<sup>48</sup>

Van Buskirk's new company was soon completed and he obtained his desired commission as captain. In August 1780 the company was reorganized and became the light infantry of the battalion. This company was detached and joined to five others with the designation of Provincial Light Infantry, under the command of Lt. Col. John Watson Tadsweil Watson, a British officer from the elite Brigade of Guards. Captain Van Buskirk and his company were part of Major General Alexander Leslie's October 1780 expedition to Virginia.<sup>49</sup> After an uneventful month there, the troops were summoned to South Carolina to reinforce Lord Cornwallis' army. Captain Van Buskirk's Company spent much of the first half of 1781 engaged in anti-partisan activities in the High Hills of Santee, defeating a superior force under Thomas Sumpter in February of that year.<sup>50</sup> The culmination of this service was the Battle of Eutaw Springs, South Carolina on 8 September 1781, one of the bloodiest actions of the war. After the army under Major General Nathanael Greene was repulsed, Captain Jacob Van Buskirk lay on the field seriously wounded.<sup>51</sup>

With the peace of 1783, Van Buskirk's battalion was sent to the Bay of Fundy, Nova Scotia, where it was disbanded along with the other Provincial units on 10 October 1783. Jacob and his father would become leading citizens of the new Shelburne, Nova Scotia which in 1784 became one of the largest cities in North America, founded by thousands of Loyalist refugees from America. Jacob would

marry Sarah Breen there in 1790, with whom he had a son and two daughters. In his new home Van Buskirk became a merchant, serving over the years as a fire warden, a grand juror, a justice of the peace, a collector in the custom's house and in 1805 elected to the provincial assembly. His former military experience no doubt helped him as lieutenant colonel commandant of the 22<sup>nd</sup> (Shelburne) Nova Scotia Militia Battalion. After his wife's death in 1832, he moved to Yarmouth, where he passed away on 27 November 1834. His house in Shelburne still stands today.<sup>52</sup>

(Endnotes)

1 Memorial of Abraham Van Buskirk to the Commissioners for American Claims, c-1784. Audit Office, Class 13, Volume 19, folios 323-324, The National Archives of the United Kingdom. Hereafter cited as TNA.

2 Van Buskirk was commissioned surgeon in the militia on 17 February 1776. Zabriskie would soon afterwards resign his commission. *Minutes of the Provincial Congress and the Council of Safety of the State of New Jersey, 1775-1776*. Trenton: Printed by Naar, Day & Naar (1879), 375.

3 George Van Buskirk thereafter entered the militia at Closter, where on 9 May 1779 he was bayoneted and taken prisoner by a detachment of the 4th Battalion, New Jersey Volunteers, commanded by Abraham Van Buskirk. Collection M-804, Pension and Bounty Land Application Files, No. S42601, George Van Buskirk, New Jersey, National Archives and Records Administration. Hereafter cited as NARA.

4 His commission from Lt. Gen. William Howe was dated 16 November 1776, indicating he joined the British several days before the invasion of New Jersey by Lord Cornwallis. RG 46, O/S Mss. # 360, Archives and Records Management Nova Scotia. There were actually two other Van Buskirk Loyalists by the name of Abraham: one a corporal in the same battalion of New Jersey Volunteers, the other a captain of grenadiers in the King's Orange Rangers.

5 "Return of Officers in the Brigade of New Jersey Volunteers" 24 February 1778. Misc. Loyalist Muster Rolls, 1778-1782, Accession No. 5066, Library of Congress. Hereafter cited as LOC.

6 Mead's Company arrived at Elizabethtown on or about 8 November 1777, when it was placed into the Hunterdon County battalion commanded by Colonel John Taylor. Orderly Book of Major General Philemon Dickinson, 1777-1778, Revolutionary War Miscellaneous Numbered Manuscripts, No. 11072, New Jersey State Archives. Hereafter cited as NJSA.

7 Washington to Dickinson, 4 November 1777. George Washington Papers, Series 4, General Correspondence, 26 October 1777 - 7 December 1777, LOC.

8 Dickinson Orderly Book, NJSA.

9 Muster Roll of Major Daniel Isaac Browne's Company, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, New Jersey Volunteers, 18 November 1777. RG 8, "C" Series, Volume 1860, Page 21, Library and Archives Canada. Hereafter cited as LAC. The others were members of Lt. Col. Joseph Barton's 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion: Privates Stephen Collins, John Burdock and Miles Mosely. "A Return of the Men on Command, Absent with Leave, Recruiting & Prisoner with the Rebels in the 5<sup>th</sup> Battn. New Jersey Volunteers, March 8<sup>th</sup> 1778." *Ibid.*, Page 19.

10 Philip Waldeck, "A Diary kept by Chaplain Waldeck During the Last American War," ed. William E. Dornemann, *Journal of the Johannes Schwalm Historical Association* (1984), No. 4, 32.

11 Skinner to Billopp, 30 October 1777. Audit Office 13/117/67, TNA.

12 Campbell to Clinton, 6 November 1777. Sir Henry Clinton Papers, Volume 26, item 23, The University of Michigan, William L. Clements Library. Hereafter cited as CL.

13 Sir Henry Clinton to Brigadier General John Campbell, 13 November 1777. Clinton Papers, Volume 263, Misc. Correspondence, 1776-1782, CL.

14 Skinner to Clinton, 18/19 November 1777. Clinton Papers, 27-10, CL.

15 i.e. the New Jersey Volunteers.

16 *Waldeck Diary*, 33.

17 Campbell to Clinton, 26 November 1777. Clinton Papers, 27-34, CL.

18 A reference to the color of the coats worn by the New Jersey Volunteers.

19 The 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, New Jersey Volunteers was posted at Carles Neck.

20 John Merrell was an inhabitant of Staten Island who had served the

previous winter as a wagoner for the British. He had been taken prisoner near New Brunswick in March 1777 and remained as such until pressed into duty as a guide. After the Staten Island expedition, he escaped home, where he was promptly arrested and tried by general court martial by the British for having acted as a guide. He was acquitted upon their determining he was forced to do so. War Office, Class 71, Volume 85, Pages 241-248, TNA.

21 Dickinson to Washington, 28 November 1777. George Washington Papers, Series 4, General Correspondence, 26 October 1777 - 7 December 1777, LOC.

22 Memorial of Captain Arthur Maddox, Parr Town, 14 December 1784. RG 10, Reel F1027, "Arthur Maddox," Provincial Archives New Brunswick.

23 Captain Maddox received £ 50 in August 1779 to defray the costs of the doctors attending him to recover from his wound. "List of Warrants for Extraordinary Grants by His Excellency Sir Henry Clinton K:B: General and Commander in Chief &c. Between the 1<sup>st</sup> July and 30<sup>th</sup> September 1779. Treasury, Class 64, Volume 109, folios 107-117, TNA.

24 Campbell to Sir Henry Clinton, 27 November 1777. Clinton Papers 27-39, CL.

25 Collection M-804, Pension and Bounty Land Application Files, No. S803, Isaac Brokaw, New Jersey, NARA.

26 Collection M-804, Pension and Bounty Land Application Files, No. S23035, Frederick F. Van Liew, New Jersey/New York, NARA. John Honeyman has come down through history as a secret agent who gave Washington valuable intelligence, enabling the victory at Trenton. Recent research gives little credence to the story however. Honeyman was ordered into the Trenton Jail under a charge of High Treason by Governor Livingston, where he spent about a week until freed on £ 300 bail. His property in Somerset County was confiscated and sold during the war. *Minutes of the Council of Safety of the State of New Jersey 1777-1778*. Jersey City: Printed by John H. Lyon (1872), 169 & 176.

27 Ward Chipman to Colonel Edward Winslow, 29 November 1777, Winslow Family Papers, Volume 1, No. 71, University of New Brunswick Archives. The two privates taken were Abraham Barnet and Joshua Ball.

28 The militia also had ten men wounded in the skirmishing on the island. Dickinson to Washington, 28 November 1777.

29 *Minutes of the Council of Safety*... 1777, 167.

30 Pension Application of Israel Aber. Collection M-804, Pension and Bounty Land Application Files, No. S2525, Israel Aber, New Jersey, NARA.

31 Livingston to Washington, 1 December 1777. George Washington Papers, Series 4, General Correspondence, 26 October 1777 - 7 December 1777, LOC.

32 The New Jersey Gazette (Burlington,) December 10, 1777.

33 Washington to Dickinson, 2 December 1777. George Washington Papers, Series 4, General Correspondence, 26 October 1777 - 7 December 1777, LOC.

34 Washington to Livingston, 11 December 1777. George Washington Papers, Series 4, General Correspondence, 30 April 1777 - 24 January 1778, LOC.

35 Dr. Byron G. Van Horne, "Bergen County Descendants in Nova Scotia," *Bergen County Historical Society Yearbook*, published by the society (1920), 19.

36 Certificate of Abraham Van Buskirk on behalf of Oliver Templeton, 5 April 1786. Audit Office 13/80/492, TNA.

37 Livingston to Washington, 11 July 1777. George Washington Papers, Series 4, General Correspondence, 30 May 1777 - 22 July 1777, LOC.

38 Livingston to Washington, 5 October 1777. George Washington Papers, Series 4, General Correspondence, 3 September 1777 - 28 October 1777, LOC.

39 Barton had been taken prisoner by the Continental Army on Staten Island, 22 August 1777 and confined in Connecticut. A Sussex County Loyalist, Barton commanded the 5th Battalion. Livingston to Washington, 3 September 1777. George Washington Papers, Series 4, General Correspondence, 3 September 1777 - 28 October 1777, LOC.

40 Campbell to Dickinson, 19 December 1777. George Washington Papers, Series 4, General Correspondence, 30 April 1777 - 24 January 1778, LOC. The British & New Jersey Volunteers had taken twenty two Continental officers from the Maryland Line and Congress' Own Regiment prisoner on Staten Island, 22 August 1777.

41 Pettit to Boudinet, 1 January 1778. Langdon K. Thorne Collection, Box 1, Folder 2, No. 42, Princeton University Library.

42 The exchange of correspondence between Livingston and Robertson was published not only in the local press, but made its way to England as well. The *Gazetteer* and *New Daily Advertiser*. (London), March 11, 1778.

43 The New-York Gazette and the Weekly Mercury, April 28, 1777.

44 Livingston to Washington, 30 April 1777. George Washington Papers, Series 4, General Correspondence, 6 April 1777 - 29 May 1777, LOC.

45 The Bainbridge House today is the headquarters of the Princeton Historical Society.

46 Van Buskirk's warrant was dated 23 June 1779, while the battalion was stationed at Hoboken. "Officers recommended for Commissions in the 4th Battalion New Jersey Volunteers, commanded by Abraham Van Buskirk Esqr. Lieut. Colonel Commandant [August 1780. ] Department of Defense

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## About the Bergen County Historical Society

The Bergen County Historical Society (BCHS), a non-profit, 501(c)(3) volunteer organization, was founded in 1902 to develop public appreciation for Bergen County's remarkable history, especially through the preservation and study of its material culture. We are the only historical association to focus on the Bergen County as a whole, from its prehistory to the present day. Our museum collections (4,000+ objects in addition to the library and document collection) are presently on display on a limited basis at Historic New Bridge Landing (HNBL). Public programs include placement of informative roadside historic markers, educational events, museum exhibits, monthly lectures, and a library collection. **We are not a government agency and presently receive no regular or significant public funding; we rely on private donations and membership.**

The Bergen County Historical Society was instrumental in saving the historic Steuben House in River Edge in 1928. The Society established its museum headquarters there in September 1939 and promoted the establishment of the Historic New Bridge Landing Park Commission by legislation in 1995. The purpose of the Commission is to unify and coordinate governmental and private efforts not only to preserve the three Bergen Dutch sandstone houses and their unique cultural contents, presently standing on the Revolutionary War battleground at New Bridge, but also to develop the necessary visitor facilities and amenities commensurate with the significance of the site, its importance to Bergen County and the promotion of public enjoyment and appreciation for the lessons of history.

BCHS stewardship includes the 1944 purchase of 7 acres to protect the Steuben House from the autoparts yard, donations of land to locate the 1954 bridge north of the site and for the Steuben House parking lot. BCHS remains the largest landowner at HNBL and is determined to build a museum building to properly care for its collection.

The museum and library collections comprise the greatest survival of significant Bergen Dutch artifacts and documents in the public domain. The museum collection includes many objects from a time when possessions were handmade or locally made. Furniture, quilts, coverlets, paintings, pottery, tools and prehistoric objects are all represented. More recent donations include the pick axe that broke ground for the George Washington Bridge. The library collections encompass family genealogy, diaries, and manuscripts; church, cemetery, and Bible records; books, clippings, works on local and county history, the Revolutionary War, and historic architecture; postcards, photos, videos, atlases, and maps. The photograph collection is founded upon nineteenth century glass plate negatives, which record the earliest views and studies of Bergen Dutch architecture, and has grown to encompass an important visual record of the county's growth as a metropolitan suburb. The Bergen County Historical Society Library and Manuscript Collection is available to the public and to researchers on a restricted basis at the College Library, Building 5, Felician College, 262 Main Street Lodi, NJ 07644. The library is opened by volunteers Wednesdays, 12-5 pm but closed the month of August.

### **BERGEN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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1840s redware pie plate from the Van Saun-Wolfkiel Pottery, River Edge. BCHS collection.

# Mystery at the Steuben House

by President Deborah Powell

*Over the years, we sometimes heard visitor stories of a tunnel from the Steuben House to the river. Weren't they remembering the vaulted root cellar a previous curator sometimes locked tourists in? This form of interpretation certainly disoriented the visitor in the old stone house. The tunnel story just didn't seem to make sense -- it wasn't practical to have a direct conduit into the house from the tidal river. This recently discovered account by Burton H. Albee is very puzzling. Mr. Albee was BCHS Secretary - Treasurer 1909-1914. The account is repeated here for your speculation.*

Ghosts of another century lurk in the tunnel that connects a mouldy dungeon with the fine old Zabriskie homestead. If it could speak many a stirring tale would be told of nights and days spent their by captured spies of the Revolutionary War, and of flights from Indians. Its phantom heroes and heroines would populate the west bank of the Hackensack River at the ancient New Bridge, in North Hackenack, and the woes the heart breakings, the flights and the sturdy splendors of more than two hundred years ago would be revived.

The Zabriskie homestead, erected some time between 1700 and 1735, is probably the finest specimen of old Dutch houses in existence and in recent years it has been admired by thousands of automobile parties passing its doors. But it was not until recently that the Bergen County Historical Society, which has taken an interest in the place, discovered the secret tunnel to escape from the house and the dungeon under it. These discoveries let to a more minute investigation of historical records, and the romances of the past people have partially been uncovered.

The tunnel of escape is unique. The existence of a simple tunnel under an

ancient house in Vermont, visited by Burton H. Albee, secretary and treasurer of the Bergen County Historical Society, led to the conclusion that the original Zabriskies in America built this one to escape from the Indians which hovered about in the ten miles between Hackensack and Manhattan at that time.

Albert Zabriskie, the founder of that distinguished family in this country, was a cousin of the illustrious King John III of Poland, and bore high titles and owned rich estates in that country.

Becoming dissatisfied with the constant wars there he converted his estate into cash and came to America, settling on a large estate in the Hudson Valley in 1662. He was there only a year or two when the Indians stole his son, Jacob, and his troubles with the tribes multiplied to such an extent that he gave up the property and purchased an immense tract stretching from the Hudson River to the Hackensack about opposite where Harlem and Washington Heights now are.

He built a fine Dutch house at what is now Little Ferry, but which was then known as Old Ackensack, south of the present Hackensack. That house still stands, but it is without the historical associations and romances of the homestead which Abram Zabriskie built at New Bridge, now North Hackensack, in the early years of the 18th century.

Since it was built, with the exception of a few years immediately following the revolutionary war, it remained the homestead of successive





generations of the Zabriskie family, until a few years ago, when Mayor Bell, of Hackensack, purchased the property, intending to utilize its river frontage for a printing ink factory. He recently sold it to the American Ink Company, and this concern rents the old place to a man who rents rowboats and canoes on the beautiful Hackensack River.

Even a close examination of the house fails to reveal the tunnel or its entrance. The entrance is a trap door in a bedroom on the second floor. This had been nailed up for many generations, until recently found. One may drop down through this trap door into a shaft which is quite narrow and originally had the steps of a ladder on one side. This leads directly into the square, stone walled dungeon under the house through another trap door, which apparently was made to close automatically by a weight after one had come through it. In sight there was nothing in the unlighted dungeon but the stairs leading to the first floor, down which prisoners were thrust. But under the stairway there was another trap door carefully concealed and this led into the tunnel.

The tunnel is about two and one half feet wide, and four and one half or five feet high, with stone walls and in places an arched ceiling. This tunnel runs in an almost straight line and in a slightly upward direction 208 feet to the bank of the river. The roof of the tunnel at the river was about one foot and a half above the normal level of the water. There was a strongly built gate thereof oak timbers which kept out the water, but could be opened upward. Six feet back in the tunnel from this gate was another gate, the space between constituting a lock. The fleeing persons would let themselves in the lock and close the first gate.

From unspecified newspaper - no date - SP NJ III BB ❖ Note: The root cellar shows evidence of being 2 or 3 feet lower than today.

47 Intelligence from Staten Island Signed Amicus Republicae, dated 17 May 1780. George Washington Papers, Series 4, General Correspondence, 3 April 1780 — 6 June 1780, LOC.

48 Collection M-804, Pension and Bounty Land Application Files, No. W20313, James Kent, New Jersey, NARA.

49 "State of the Following Corps under the Command of The Honble. Major Genl. Leslie, Hampton Road 15<sup>th</sup> November 1780." Clinton Papers 130:18, CL.

50 "Lieutenant [Richard] Cowper, of Buskirk's battalion, has gained immortal honour, he was sent with twenty men to a mill for grain, some accident happened [to] his wagon, and before he got fit to proceed to camp, found himself entirely surrounded by Sumpter's whole army, he charged through the whole of them, finding it still impossible to prevent being again surrounded, he ordered his men to form the hollow square, and defended himself upwards of an hour against Sumpter's whole army, until Colonel Watson came up and drove off Sumpter." Extract of a letter from Charlestown, March 4, 1781, The Royal Gazette (New York), March 21, 1781.

51 Lt. Troup, who had escaped from Governor Livingston's reach in 1777, was mortally wounded in the same battle. Another casualty in the company that campaign was Sergeant John Van Buskirk's being taken prisoner. He would never return from captivity. "Return of the Killed, Wounded & Missing, at the Eutaws, 8th Sepr. 1781" Diary of Frederick Mackenzie, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (1930), II, 651-652. See also Muster Roll of Captain Jacob Buskirk's Company in the Provincial Light Infantry, Quarter House the 24th October 1781, RG 8, "C" Series, Volume 1900, LAC.

52 Marion Robertson entry for Jacob Buskirk, Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online, www.biographica ❖

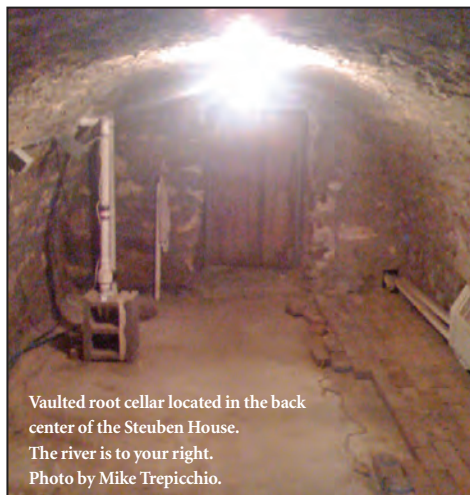
**Wanted:** A 20 foot tall hickory pole

**Purpose:** Liberty Pole at New Bridge

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Vaulted root cellar located in the back center of the Steuben House.  
The river is to your right.  
Photo by Mike Trepicchio.

long and finally pulled the aircraft off with about 300 feet left of the runway, which is slightly down hill, and retracted the landing gear. After clearing the runway the right engine failed. It burst into flames and caused the plane to roll. The flight crew tried to turn the plain and return to the airport. But with the loss of the right engine and air speed the plain hit the ground inverted and exploded killing all seven on board.

This triggered a full official investigation by the U.S. Army Air Corp. The crash site was closed off to the public so investigators from the Army and the Manufacturer could discern the problem. All B-26 Air Craft were grounded at Baer Field pending the outcome of the investigation. Both crashed engines and engine parts were removed, from the site, and sent back to the Army Air Forces Materiel Center for inspection. After the investigation was concluded the report that was produced contained the following, “A study of the spark plugs and the impeller shaft feed valve guide seals of the two engines of the crashed aircraft indicates that there was at least a partial power failure of one of the engines and possibly of both engines. After study of the Impeller Shaft feed valve guide the board is of the opinion that the seals were not sealing properly, which permitted a surge of raw gasoline to by-pass and enter the lower section. This action would permit only intermittent maximum power. If this condition developed after the aircraft had been in the air for sometime and sufficient altitude it might be counteracted. But if it existed on the take-off or on a climb after take-off the results would be disastrous.” Repairs were made to all existing R-2500-5 engines.

The body of Albert was escorted home by Lt. Samuel Ketchman of Baer Field. An American Legion Honor Guard attended the service to render full Military Honors to the fallen Pilot.

He was the first to die in Military service in World War II from Franklin Lakes. He is interred in Cedar Lawn Cemetery.

Upon learning of the death of Albert, Oliver St. John Gogarty, a personal friend and a Senator in the Irish Dahl, wrote a poem in tribute to Albert titled “Remembering Albert Spickers”.

But this was not the only tribute to be paid to Albert and his family. The town of Franklin Lakes presented the family the first “Memorial Certificate” in recognition of the death of their son. Finally a “Memorial Certificate” signed by Franklin D. Roosevelt, was issued honoring the memory of Lt. Albert Spickers. At the time of his death he was twenty six years old.

References Cited

Accident Report- War Department-U.S. Army Air Forces-report of Aircraft Accident-Dated October 3, 1942

Spickers, Albert Leonhard-Special Collections and University Archives- Rutgers University

Wyckoff News:

1942 October 6 Lt. Spickers Funeral held at Franklin Lakes

Wyckoff News: 1943 January 2 Tribute paid to Dr.-Mrs. Spickers. ❖

**The New Jersey Meadowlands Commission is seeking participants for its Oral History Project. We are looking to interview and/or take written submissions and photos from people who grew up in the Meadowlands to help us tell the story of the area. Recollections will be posted on our Oral History Blog, which is set to launch soon. Brian Aberback at 201-460-4619 or [brian.aberback@njmeadowlands.gov](mailto:brian.aberback@njmeadowlands.gov)**



## Pinkster Event and Boat Building at HNBL, May 2 & 3

The boat building event was very exciting. Four groups participated: The Bergen County Historical Society, River Edge Public Schools, Hackensack Riverkeeper and the Meadowlands Environment Center. Four boats were built. We are planning a picnic and boat launch for Winaminge, the ancient corn-roasting festival marking Winu Gischuch, the Dark Moon of August, when corn is in the milk. Check our website for updates in "Events".



Architectural historian and restoration contractor Tim Adriance shows how he based his restoration of the Demarest House on antique photographs and HABS drawings. Tim gave tours of the Demarest House Museum May 3. Restoration work will be finished soon.



Front row: Gene Dunton, John Ponticorvo, John Zeigler, Bill Farrelly, Nick Vos-Wein  
Second row: Frank Puzzo, Mike Trepicchio, Tony Vouvalides, Dick Miller, Steve Weigl, Front: Bill Sheehan  
Many people participated over the two days. To get ready for the event BCHS members spent one long day cleaning the barn. Visit the message board for many more photos of event, including photos of canoes.



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Address Service Requested

*Thank You!*  
**Palmer Ace Hardware, River Edge, NJ**  
donated tools and supplies for the  
**boat building event.**



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