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THE DEMISE OF JOHN BACON, THE "NOTORIOUS" LOYALIST

by Thomas P. Farner

[last article in a series]

Their names are known to local historians: Giberson, Davenport, Fagan and Bacon. To most others, they are simply lumped together as Pine Robbers, refugees or "banditti." To us, they are the lowest of the low, nothing more than common criminals hiding in the vast pine area of Ocean County waiting to pounce on helpless travelers or isolated, innocent farmers. Through the years, they have been vilified and treated as an aberration in the War for Independence, when in reality, they represented a large portion of the population - those who remained loyal to the King.

In a revolution that began as a tax revolt, their property was seized for non-payment of taxes. They were branded traitors by government officials and guilty of treason. The Revolution in Ocean County was also a civil war of neighbor against neighbor, which turned into a guerilla war of the worst kind - one of atrocity and revenge. As the war drew to a close, both sides attempted to get in one last punch. A look at the final one hundred days of the war and the activities of the Loyalist leader, Captain John Bacon, offers some insight into the politics and passions of the Revolution.

Following his night action on the beach at Barnegat Light in October 1782, Bacon sailed back to New York City where he sold the captured rebel privateer *Alligator*. He then returned to his base of operations at Little Egg Harbor to continue his campaign against rebel shipping. Near the end of December, the rebel governor, William Livingston, placed a reward on Bacon's head for his raid into Burlington County a few months before.

The commander of the Burlington County militia decided to act before the war ended. After several days of searching in vain, the militia started back. While "refreshing themselves" at the Cedar Bridge Tavern, Bacon found the militia.

The January 7, 1783 *New Jersey Gazette* reported:

Captain Richard Shreve, of the Burlington County Light Horse, and Captain Edward Thomas, of the Mansfield Militia, having received information that John Bacon, with his banditti of robbers was in the neighborhood of Cedar Creek . . . collected a party of men and went immediately in pursuit of them. They met them at the Cedar Creek bridge. The Refugees . . . had greatly the advantage of Cpts. Shreve and Thomas' party . . . but it was nevertheless determined to charge them.

The onset on the part of the militia was furious, and opposed by the Refugees . . . for a considerable time, several of them having been guilty of such enormous crimes as to have no expectation of mercy should they surrender. They were, nevertheless, on the point of giving way when the militia was unexpectedly fired upon from a party of the inhabitants . . . who had suddenly come to Bacon's assistance. This put the militia



Cedar Bridge Tavern

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FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR: OCEAN COUNTY'S EXPANDING RANGE OF FINE HISTORICAL MUSEUMS . . .

The Ocean County's heritage community is proud to welcome two new local museums to its growing cadre of first-rate historical venues in the area - Lakewood Heritage Museum and Navy Lakehurst Historical Society Heritage Center.

Lakewood Heritage Museum has been targeted to open in the mid-spring at the Princeton Avenue School Administration Building, 655 Princeton Avenue, Lakewood. Lakewood Heritage Commission Chairman Sheldon Wolpin has been anxiously anticipating developing a permanent home for artifacts, photos, and memorabilia highlighting Lakewood's rich heritage, including its glory days as a luxury resort town during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The township has engaged Cathleen J. Lee, a social studies teacher in the Lakewood Schools for many years, to serve as a part-time coordinator for the museum.

Navy Lakehurst Historical Society (NLHS) is planning the grand opening in May for its museum in historic Hangar One at Lakehurst Naval Air Base. According to President Carl Jablonski, the ribbon-cutting ceremony will occur at 2 P.M. on Saturday, May 8. Although there is much work to be done in the next four months, NLHS is optimistic that its museum will be ready for the public at that time. Emphasis in this museum will be on dirigibles, both rigid and nonrigid lighter-than-aircraft, including blimps. The museum has a unique collection of artifacts from the German zeppelin *Hindenburg*, which crashed nearly 67 years ago.

We extend our congratulations to all who have had a hand in making these latest museums become a reality. Both, along with our county's other 21 museums, contribute much to enhancing Ocean County's historical and educational foundation.

. . . Cynthia Smith

OCEAN COUNTY CULTURAL & HERITAGE RESOURCE DIRECTORY

The Cultural & Heritage Commission announces the publication of the revised and updated Ocean County Cultural & Heritage Resource Directory.

This updated guide is an inventory of cultural and heritage organizations and venues - arts and history - in the county arranged by category. Information includes a brief description, address, and contact data, such as website, e-mail address, and phone number, for each entry. An alphabetical index of the more than 175 listings is also provided to facilitate using the directory.

A limited number of directories will be distributed to each Ocean County Library branch and at the County Connection in the Ocean County Mall. To receive a copy by mail, call or e-mail the Cultural & Heritage Commission office.

DEMISE OF JOHN BACON

(Continued from page 1)

into some confusion and gave the Refugees time to get off . . . The militia are still in pursuit of the Refugees and have taken seven of the inhabitants prisoners and are now in Burlington jail, some of whom have confessed the fact.

Because Bacon attacked the militia, rather than hide and let them leave the shore, claims that he was a lowly criminal are rightly weakened. And, the fact that the local inhabitants aided him shows the complexity of the residents' loyalties, even at this late point in the war. The militia failed to find Bacon, who returned to New York City where newspapers printed his version of his victory.

By March 1783, rumors swept the colonies. The war would soon be over. Bacon left the safety of British-held New York City and again returned to the shore. Joel Cook, whose brother had been killed at the December skirmish with Bacon, wanted to settle the score.

Cook went to Captain John Stewart of Arneytown (Pemberton) in Burlington County to ask for his help. Stewart and four other men agreed to make one last attempt to take Bacon before word of the peace treaty arrived. On April 2, the party entered the Jersey Pines. Between

West Creek and Clam Town, the party came upon the house of William Rose, used occasionally as a tavern. Cook and Stewart crept up to the window. Inside, they saw Bacon sitting by himself, his musket between his knees.

Stewart entered the tavern first. Catching Bacon by surprise, Stewart pointed his musket at Bacon and ordered him to surrender. Bacon jumped to his feet and, in the close quarters of the tavern, attempted to prime and cock his musket. Stewart, who could have fired and killed him instantly, chose instead to take him alive.

Stewart grabbed Bacon and the two men fell to the floor. Outfought, Bacon surrendered and asked for quarter. Still holding on to Bacon tightly, Stewart called Cook to join them; Cook entered the room from behind the two and ran Bacon through with his bayonet. Bacon groaned; his body grew limp, and Stewart allowed it to collapse to the floor, thinking the prisoner had fainted.

Without saying a word to Stewart, Cook went outside to tell the others. Stewart was standing over Bacon when suddenly the Loyalist revived and jumped up. Stewart tried to block his escape by pushing a table in front of the door, but Bacon shoved it aside. As Stewart regained his feet, he picked up his gun and fired. The musket ball

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LINDSAY DANDEO JOINS THE COMMISSION'S STAFF



In November, the Cultural & Heritage Commission welcomed Lindsay Dandeo of Manahawkin as its newest staff member. She was appointed to the position of Program Development Specialist and will be responsible for coordinating arts programs, including providing technical assistance, securing appropriate grant funding, and preparing resource material for publication.

Ms. Dandeo is a graduate of Rutgers University and has experience as the head teacher of children's hand building art programs at Long Beach Island Foundation of the Arts and Sciences in Loveladies. She also

developed and organized art programs for developmentally disabled adults through Community Options in Forked River.

DEMISE OF JOHN BACON

(Continued from page 2)

passed through Bacon, killing him instantly, then passed through the door and wounded Cook on the other side.

This account is both Stewart's and Cook's official explanation of why Bacon was bayoneted and shot from behind. What really happened the night of April 3 in that tavern will most likely never be known, but many witnessed what the men then did with Bacon's body. The victors dragged their trophy back to Burlington County where one last act of revenge was planned.

During the long ride from the shore, Stewart and Cook decided on a fitting send-off for the hated Bacon. They would not lay him to rest in the holy ground of a church cemetery. Instead, he would be buried under the main road of Jacobstown where the daily traffic of wagons and horses would prevent his soul from getting any peace.

As a crowd watched the road being dug up, Bacon's brother arrived. After many pleas, he was able to convince the good citizens to turn the body over to him for private burial. The same *New Jersey Gazette* that proclaimed the glorious news of peace and independence trumpeted the demise of the "notorious" Loyalist John Bacon.

While Ocean County did not actually exist in 1783, nor have a signer of the Declaration of Independence nor a famous general, its role in the war was not only significant, but also came at a time when the entire population of what later became Ocean County was much less than that of most towns today.

Four major local events - the Battle of Tuckerton, the Joshua Huddy Affair, the Long Beach Island Massacre, and the death of John Bacon - demonstrate the important role that Ocean County played in the War for Independence. Unfortunately, over the years, many have viewed these as minor issues and their respective sites as not worth preserving. However, without details such as these, questions are not raised nor thoughts provoked, and our history becomes little more than a 30-second sound bite.

After almost 30 years of studying and writing about the American Revolution in Ocean County, I have never considered that I had found the answers, but instead, had only generated more questions. And, as we contemplate these questions, it's both ironic and significant that it was a question - "Why do I pay taxes when I can't vote?" - that started it all.

2004 Grant Awards

The Ocean County Cultural & Heritage Commission is pleased to announce that it has awarded 32 county-based organizations a total of \$ 71,923 for arts and history programming in fiscal year 2004. Funding for these programs has been made possible by funds from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and the New Jersey Historical Commission.

- Alliance for a Living Ocean
- The Arc, Ocean County Chapter
- Barnegat Historical Society
- Township of Barnegat
- Beach Haven Community Arts Program
- Carpenter Gothic Publishing
- Brick Township Historical Society
- Col. Charles Waterhouse Historical Museum
- Community Chorus of Ocean County College
- Festival of the Atlantic
- First Night Ocean County
- The Historical Society of Waretown
- The Island Singers
- Jackson Township, Department of Recreation
- Jewish Federation of Ocean County
- Lacey Historical Society
- Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians
- Laurelton Art Society
- Lavallette Heritage Committee, Inc.
- Long Beach Island Historical Association
- Manchester Township
- Ocean County Artists' Guild
- Ocean County College Theatre Company
- Ocean County College - Challenged Adults
- Ocean County Library
- Pine Shores Art Association
- Plumsted Township Council for the Arts
- Seaside Heights Business Improvement District
- Ship Bottom Borough, Parks & Recreation
- Stafford Township Historical Society
- Teen Arts Festival of Ocean County
- Toms River Seaport Society

OCEAN ARTS & HERITAGE

Ocean County Cultural & Heritage Commission

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Requests for Literature & Information:

Contact the Commission for a free brochure listing all Commission publications with an order form or to be added to the mailing list to receive **OCEAN ARTS & HERITAGE** newsletter:

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PLANNING FOR NEW JERSEY'S HISTORIC PRESERVATION

To assist in providing direction to preservation supporters and advocates across the state, Preservation New Jersey, in partnership with the Historic Preservation Office of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, presents the five-year plan for historic preservation in New Jersey, entitled *New Jersey Partners for Preservation: A Blueprint for Building Historic Preservation into New Jersey's Future*.

It is intended to provide direction to state, county, and local government agencies, private organizations and individuals and the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office in their efforts to protect and preserve New Jersey's rich and diverse history. It aims to preserve our historic places, including houses; neighborhoods and communities; farms and landscapes; industrial sites, public buildings; archaeological sites; and 20th century resources

Historic preservation already pours more than half a billion dollars into the New Jersey economy, including more than \$120 million for improving historic buildings and over \$400 million from heritage tourism spending, according to statistics from the Rutgers Center for Urban Policy Research. It also generates over \$260 million a year in income for New Jersey residents and \$120 million annually in property taxes.

For more information or to obtain a copy of the plan, please contact the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office at 609-984-0545, by mail at PO Box 404, Trenton, NJ, 08625, or visit <http://www.state.nj.us/dep/hpo/>