250th Anniversary
American Revolutionary War
1775 - 1783
Ocean County
New Jersey

The Mysterious Hanging of Rev War Patriot Matthias Handlin

By R. Joseph Latshaw III

The American Revolution in Ocean County was home to many battles and skirmishes. All of them had people involved with unique stories to tell that also have connections to the present. One of those people that had a story to tell was

Matthias Handlin. He was a Private who joined the cause at 16 years of age for two years commanded by Capt. Butler of the Regt. Commanded by Col. Ray of the New Jersey Line. We know of his service almost two hundred and fifty years later because of pension records that Congress authorized many years later for payments long past due. So many years later, in fact, that at 68 he had forgotten much of the detail and had trouble remembering names and places with complete accuracy.

One of the stories that pertains to Ocean County, then part of Monmouth County that is relayed is an account of his earlier service. In it he states that he was sent to Kettle Creek, in what is now Toms River, to guard a saltworks in Toms River (known as the "Pennsylvania Saltworks"). He was permitted to take some time away and found himself in conversation with some young ladies and before he realized was taken by British Tories. He was then hanged until he was thought to be lifeless and, after an unspecified amount of time, found himself on the ground abandoned. He then proceeded to make his way back to the saltworks. It is amazing that he goes on to complete his turn of service after such a horrible incident. I am sure many would have rather gone home.

This account was brought to the Cultural & Heritage staff by a curious connection. Matthias Handlin is a Patriot ancestor of the current President General of the Sons of the American Revolution John L. Dodd, Esq. and he highlighted this account in the Summer 2023 quarterly SAR magazine to a readership of approximately 37,000 members. This goes to show that Ocean County is an important link to the American Revolution not just in New Jersey but all over the country to so many people, whether part of a lineage society or not. A hardship was had that, although not as horrible as we may experience today, the perseverance and commitment to the country can be inspiring to those who are first generation Americans or have been here since the fight for independence.