

The American Revolution in Ocean County Documentary Series

By Pat Johnson and Catherine McLearen

New Jersey has been described as the Crossroads of the American Revolution since it lies between the ports of New York and Philadelphia but the important events that occurred in Ocean County have often been overlooked. That is soon to change.

American Revolution in Ocean County: Ocean250.org

“This is a great opportunity to put our revolutionary history on the map,” said Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission Division Director Tim Hart.

The Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission received a \$148,864 Battlefield Preservation Planning Grant from the National Parks Service to create an American Revolution in Ocean County Trail. Preservation Planning Grants are the American Battlefield Protection Program's broadest and most inclusive grant program, promoting the stewardship of battlefields and sites of armed conflict on American soil.

The grant will result in six interpretive signs at the six most significant sites of conflict during the Revolutionary War in what is



Affair at Egg Harbor dramatization.
Photo credit: Oak Leaf Media

today Ocean County: The Long Beach Massacre, The Manahawkin Skirmish, The Toms River Blockhouse Fight, The Affair at Cedar Bridge, The Affair at Egg Harbor, and the Death of John Bacon.

Each sign will include a QR code that will link to a short documentary film produced by Oak Leaf Media. The documentaries will also be available on the Ocean County YouTube page and a special website dedicated to the commemoration of the

The project is central to Ocean County's ongoing effort to address the responses and contributions of the people of Ocean County in the forging of the new nation. The National Park Service attributes 296 significant military engagements in addition to hundreds of lesser-known skirmishes to New Jersey during the American Revolution, making it the most conflict-ridden colony of the war. New Jersey's strategic location along the Atlantic Coast between the ports of New York and Philadelphia earned its reputation as the “Crossroad

of the American Revolution.” Village ports were vital centers for ship building, information trading, and the transporting of goods and people. Notorious for the shifting shoals of the Jersey Shore leading to shallow backchannels in the Pinelands, the region was dominated by skilled loyalist, patriot, and other advantageous privateers during the Revolution – what British General Clinton called a “nest of rebel pirates.” They led devastating raids destroying places of industry,



Top: Stockton University researching sunken Revolutionary War ships, Mullica River.

Middle: Documentary title sequence.

Bottom: Cedar Bridge Tavern Historic Site.

Photo credit: Oak Leaf Media.



What is today Ocean County (then part of Monmouth and Burlington Counties until 1850 and 1890 respectively) experienced a deep societal split during the American Revolution that manifested as a bitter civil war with the population split between Quakers, loyalists, and patriots. The people of Ocean County seized the chaos and uncertainty of war as an opportunity to challenge existing structures. Loosely organized gangs and irregular troops of loyalists known as “pine robbers” operated guerrilla warfare from the densely forested and swampy Pinelands. Patriots wreaked revenge for pillaging, murder, and even petty infractions through the unofficial Association of Retaliation.

Inspired by the Dunmore Proclamation, formerly enslaved New Jersians fought for their freedom as loyalists. The frequently altering forces of occupation at the “crossroads” influenced the purported allegiances among the population to regularly shift while many hid their loyalties altogether to avoid harsh consequences inflicted at the hands of neighbors and occupying forces.

In fact, a significant amount of New Jersey’s violence took place after Yorktown despite the textbook cessation of hostilities, as the deeply rooted divisions between neighbors came to define the living memory of communities. The purpose of this project is to interpret the historic relevancy of Ocean County’s civil war experience during the American Revolution to engage the public in the complex lived experience of the many diverse communities and individuals in this time and place. This ongoing commemorative project will address how allegiances were motivated at times by personal grudges, opportunity, moral conviction, or retaliation.

Oak Leaf Media is working now on dramatizing the major battles and skirmishes that occurred in Ocean County. “We feel that this is a legacy project that will live past the Semiquincentennial,” said Brendan Walsh, partner Oak Leaf Media.

seizing valuable goods, and ambushing encampments.

The abundance of natural resources in the Pinelands made forges and furnaces strategic regional industries where munitions for the Continental Army were manufactured. With many turning points waged in New Jersey, George Washington also famously spent more time here than in any other colony during the war. Historical interpretation of the American Revolution in New Jersey gives much due attention to the major Battles of Trenton, Princeton, and Monmouth, at the expense of scholarship on the experiences of the diverse and bitterly divided population in the southern half of the colony who would see most of New Jersey’s conflict.

“The coast was really the frontline of the American Revolution as this was the supply line for the Patriots,” he added.

Oak Leaf is using multiple cameras, drones, and animation plus interviews with historians to tell the stories in a dramatic way, “We used the same reenactors, the Jersey Grays, that Ken Burns used in his documentary series of the Revolutionary War,” said Walsh.

Oak Leaf Media grew out of a high school friendship of three video ‘nerds’ at Pinelands Regional—Walsh, Kyle Griffin, and Dave Niziolek.

“My partners and I started making little home movies. In high school every project was a video. This was 2004. Kyle lived on Oak Lane (in Little Egg Harbor) and that’s where the name came from. After high school we all went our separate ways. I went to the art school in Pittsburgh, Kyle went to the art school in Philadelphia and Dave started a recording studio. Of all the founders, I credit Dave for turning us into a business.” This is their tenth year in business.

“It was our dream to tell great stories for TV and movies and Dave and I have never let go of that dream. We have been clacking keyboards for better than six years. We have 20 finished screenplays and the story structure for an additional 20 to 30 movies and TV shows.”



Photo credit: Oak Leaf Media

Each success has built on the next. They did a documentary feature “The Oyster Farmers,” with help from the Jetty Company. Then they got a grant from the Southern Ocean Chamber of Commerce to do commercials for Ocean County. Next, they partnered with director/producer Jon Cohen on a series “Just Beneath the Surface” about the Long Beach Island area.

“Then Dana Lancelotti worked in tourism and she got us hooked in with Tim Hart, director of the Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission. All our opportunities came on the back of being able to survive,” said Walsh.

Walsh also thanks their first intern Kamryn Barr who had a project to write a full-length movie for Oak Leaf’s first narrative feature film they wrapped up in March.

The documentaries on the Revolutionary War sites are moving ahead. “I look at this product as a large legacy project---something people will probably see and talk about way past the 250th celebration.”

Visit Ocean250.org for updates on the American Revolution in Ocean County and to view the documentaries in the fall of 2026.