Thank you for coming this evening! For those attending in person, fill out the sign-in sheet on the cabinet and grab a seat. If you have a beverage, please take a coaster.

For those online, the presentation will begin soon.

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The Pen and the Sword: The Impact of Poets and Pamphleteers During the American Revolution

A South Brunswick Historical Society Presentation
April 2026

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This presentation will focus on unique stories, poems, pamphlets, and other works that reflect the Revolutionary values of the period. We will highlight aspects of the time by sharing anecdotes alongside additional commentary.

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Thomas Paine - The Liberty Tree - 1775

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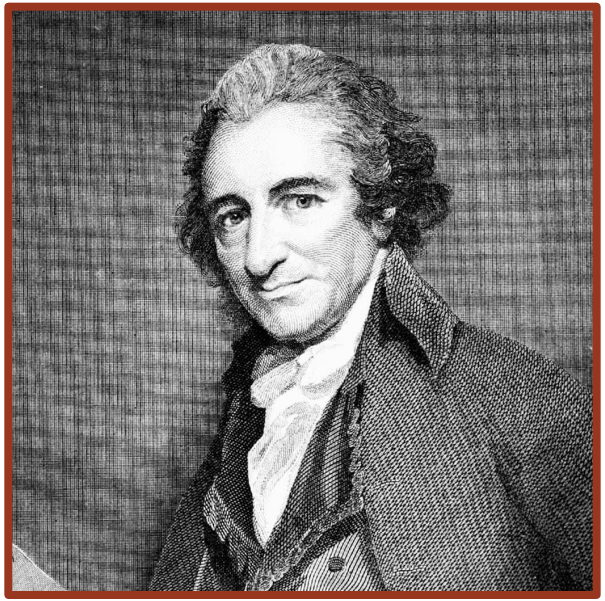
- “Liberty Tree” by Thomas Paine reflects on an American tradition in which colonists once rallied to discuss their grievances and hopes for independence under a “Liberty Tree.”
- As we reflect on the United States’ 250th Anniversary , National Poetry Month, and on South Brunswick’s newest “Liberty Tree” in Kingston, we hope to continue to be inspired just as Paine was.



William Legge, Earl of Dartmouth - 1775

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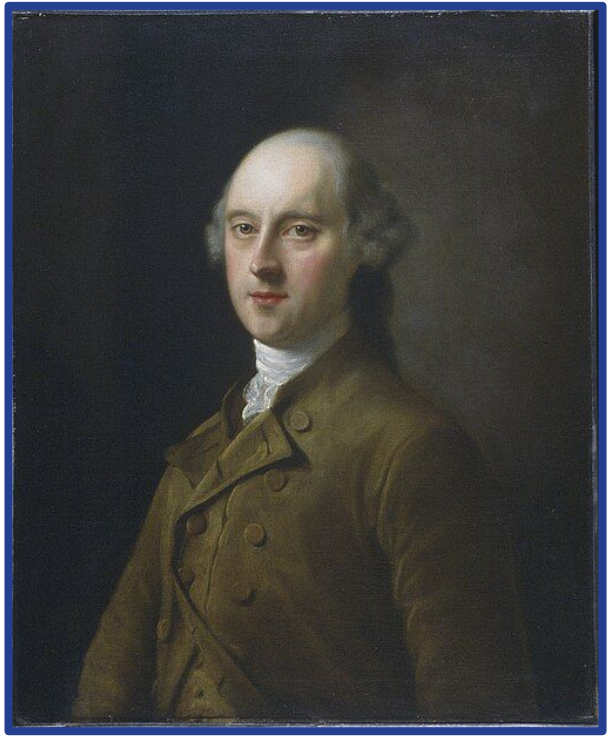
- William Legge was the 2nd Earl of Dartmouth
- Served as the Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1772-1775
- Supported the Intolerable Acts and the Quebec Act
- Made famous in the colonies for the poem written by Phillis Wheatley: "To the Right Honourable William, Earl of Dartmouth"
- Presented to Legge with the hope that he would appeal to the colonists struggles through the experiences of Wheatley, and enslaved woman, that he would be less tyrannical than his predecessor



New Jersey Militia - 1776

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- 1775 law called for every township to enroll men ages 16-50 into the active militia
- These “Jersey Blues” proved instrumental in working alongside the Continental Army and on their own, fighting in battles such as the Battle of Monmouth and conducting raids along the Jersey coastline directed towards Britsh shipping lines and other groups
- Approximately 2% of those serving in the militia were African American or Native American
- - Militia Museum of NJ

“Volunteer Boys”

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- There were consistent examples of along with the enlistment of young and regular adult men, of younger boys lying about their age and coming into some form of military service
- Song written by Henry Archer called “Volunteer Boys” may have touched on younger soldiers as well as the general milita and army servicemen. Archer emigrated from Scotland in 1778, inspired by the colonists fight for independence, and volunteered in the Continental Army

Battle of Saratoga - 1777

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- One of the most decisive battles of the Revolutionary war
- Saw the forces of American General Horatio Gates versus John Burgoyne
- Significant in proving that the Americans could hold their own against the British
- Also helped France justify joining the war on behalf of the Americans

“Room for America” - 1777

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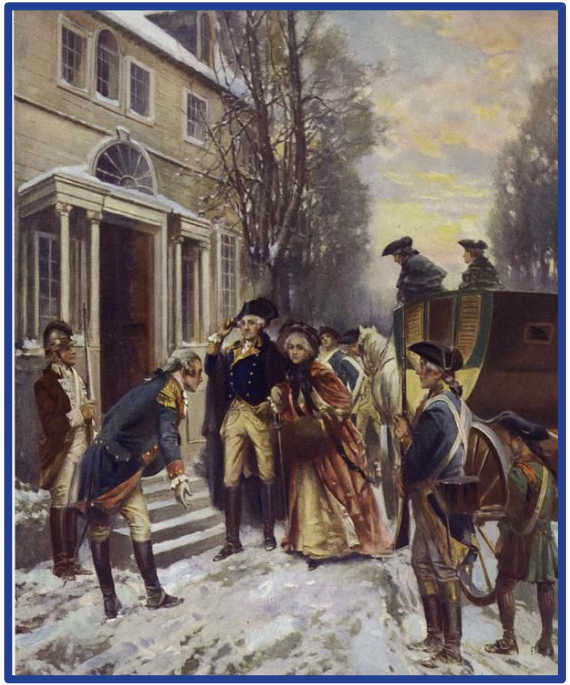
- The 1777 encampment by George Washington and his men at Morristown, NJ, from December 1777 to June 1778
- The location was a vital point for the men as it had sufficient food, water, fuel, and housing with enough security for a large force
- Faced with extreme cold, even more extreme than Valley Forge, the soldiers were forced to deal with food shortages and unwilling farmers who conserved their crops due to an extreme drought earlier in the season



King’s Highway (Rt. 27) - “The Jersey Road” - 1777

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- Route 27, as we know it today, used to be called the King’s Highway, the Old Road, or the Upper Road in the colonial era
- Constructed to provide a connection between many New Jersey towns and was frequented by colonial and British troops during the war at varying points
- Fragments of this King’s Highway have been absorbed into other larger roadways today but the general footprint is still visible

Battle of Princeton - 1777

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- The 10 day campaign centered around the Battle of Princeton continued to solidify the possibility that the Continental Army could hold its own against the British
- The British, while outnumbered 4500 to 1200, were able to delay the American in the initial phases of the Battle
- One of the most significant casualties of the Battle was the death of General Mercer (pictured right)

Camp Followers - 1777

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- The primary example of Camp Followers from the American Revolutionary Period refers to the number of women (and others) who traveled with the Continental and British Armies
- Many women were significant others of the soldiers. Helped mend clothes, provide resources, sell goods, and care for the sick and wounded
- Some also were looked at upon as being distractions for the soldiers, as some cases say they convinced some to desert

British Privateership

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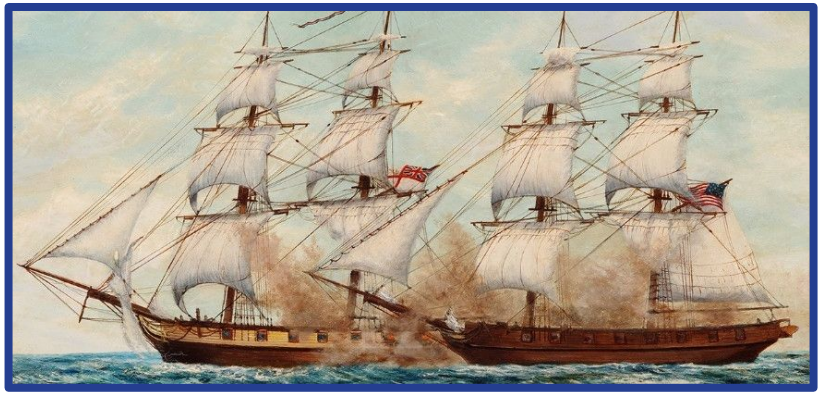
- The British continuously submitted Letters of Marque and Reprisal, allowing for a legal definition of “piracy” for one vessel to take over another as well as its contents
- The British, once protectors of the American naval shipping, worked to suppress their maritime abilities during the Revolutionary War



Battle of the Kegs - 1778

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- A ballad, written by Francis Hopkinson which described the actions taken to destroy British ships located in Philadelphia Harbor
- Barrels were to be filled with gunpowder and sent down the Delaware River to make contact with the ships, hopefully exploding and destroying their fleet
- The plan failed and there was little damage done as the British had positioned their ships in such a way that ice would not make contact, and subsequently the kegs as well

BATTLE OF THE KEGS.

GALLANTS attend, and hear a friend,
Trill forth harmonious ditty ;
Strange things I'll tell, which late befel
In Philadelphia city.

'Twas early day, as poets fay,
Juft when the fun was rifing,
A ſoldier ſtood, on log of wood,
And ſaw a ſight ſurprifing.

As in a maze, he ſtood to gaze,
The truth can't be deny'd, ſir,
He ſpy'd a ſcore of kegs, or more,
Come floating down the tide, ſir.

A ſailor too, in jerkin blue,
The ſtrange appearance viewing,
Firſt damn'd his eyes, in great ſurpriſe,
Then ſaid ſome mifchief's brewing.

Theſe kegs now hold the rebels bold,
Pack'd up like pickled herring ;
And they're come down t'attack the town,
In this new way of ferrying.

The ſoldier flew, the ſailor too,
And, fear'd almoſt to death, ſir,
Wore out their ſhoes, to ſpread the news,
And ran till out of breath, ſir.

Now up and down, throughout the town,
Moſt frantic ſcenes were acted ;
And ſome ran here, and ſome ran there
Like men almoſt diſtracted.

Some fire cry'd, which ſome deny'd,
But ſaid the earth had quaked :
And girls and boys, with hideous noiſe,
Ran through the town half naked.

Sir William he, ſnug as a flea,
Lay all this time a ſnoring,
Nor dreamt of harm, as he lay warm
In bed with Mrs. L——y.

Now in affright, he ſtarts upright,
Awak'd by ſuch a clatter ;
He rubs both eyes, and boldly cries,
"For God's ſake what's the matter?"

At his bed ſide, he then eſpy'd
Sir Erſkine at command, ſir,
Upon one foot he had one boot,
And t'other in his hand, ſir.

Ariſe ! ariſe ! Sir Erſkine cries ;
The rebels—more's the pity—
Without a boat, are all on float,
And rang'd before the city.

The motly crew, in veſſels new,
With ſatan for their guide, ſir,
Pack'd up in bags, or wooden kegs,
Come driving down the tide, ſir.

Therefore prepare for bloody war ;
Theſe kegs muſt all be routed ;
Or ſurely we deſpis'd ſhall be,
And Britiſh courage doubted!

The royal band now ready ſtand,
All rang'd in dread array, ſir,
With ſtomach ſtout, to ſee it out,
And make a bloody day, ſir.

The cannons roar, from ſhore to ſhore ;
The ſmall arms make a rattle :
Since wars began, I'm ſure no man
E'er ſaw ſo ſtrange a battle.

The ſiſh below ſwam to and fro,
Attack'd from ev'ry quarter ;
Why ſure, thought they, the devil's to pay!
'Mongſt folks above the water.

Theſe kegs, 'tis ſaid, tho' ſtrongly made,
Of rebel ſtaves and hoops, ſir,
Could not oppoſe their pow'rful foes,
The conq'ring Britiſh troops, ſir.

From morn to night, theſe men of might
Display'd amazing courage ;
And when the ſun was fairly down,
Retir'd to ſup their porridge:

An hundred men with each a pen,
Or more upon my word, ſir,
It is moſt true, would be too few,
Their valour to record, ſir.

Such feats did they perform that day
Upon theſe wicked kegs, ſir,
That years to come, if they get home,
They'll make their boaſts and brags, ſir.

Soldier and Child - 1778

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- A significant number of Revolutionary War soldiers lived long enough to be photographed in the 19th century
- The stories of the Revolutionary War were made possible through their ability to remember their experiences serving in some way
- What can we learn from their ability to transcend generations?

Pine Barrens - 1778

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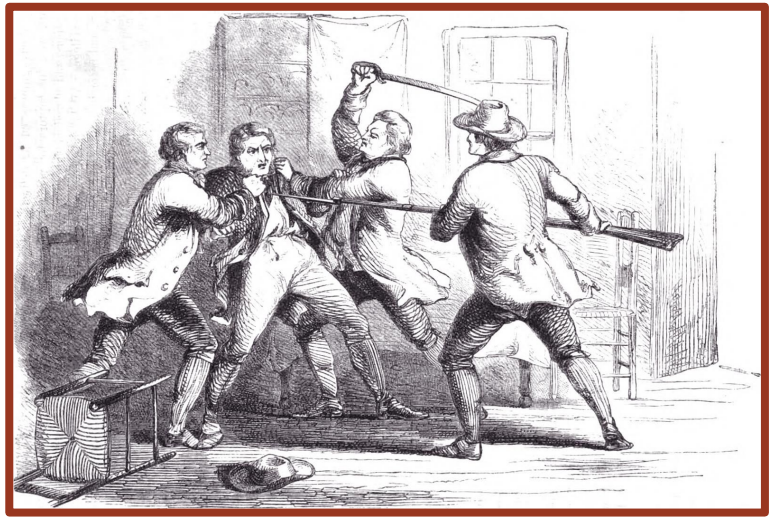
- During the War, the most significant individuals located in the NJ Pine Barrens were the “Pine Robbers”
- This group of Loyalists, most notably Jacob Fagen and his “Refugees” conducted a series of guerilla raids, attacking Patriot and sometimes Loyalist troops



Molly Pitcher - 1778

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- Molly Pitcher is the name often given to a woman who took up the mantle of swabbing loading a cannon at the Battle of Monmouth
- Mary Ludwig Hays, the likely real life persona of Molly Pitcher, was the wife of William Hays, the artilleryman who's place she took during the Battle

American Soldier - 1783

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- Following the Treaty of Paris in 1783, the lives of normal soldiers did not transition in a quick and effective manner
- Soldiers were often only sent home with one months worth of pay
- These furloughed soldiers, left to travel long distances in various instances, looked to transition back to their livelihoods prior to active service

Honeysuckle

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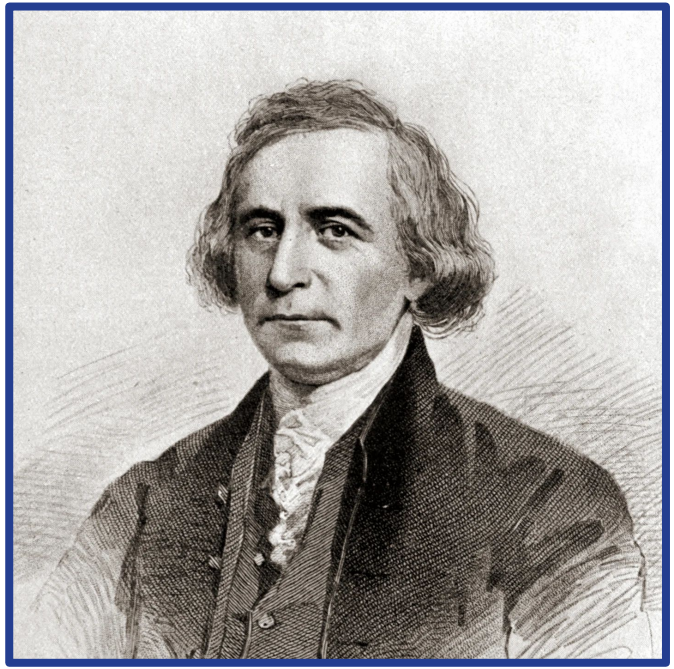
- The main example of a literary work describing the Honeysuckle is “The Wild Honey Suckle” by Philip Freneau
- Described as a precursor to American Romanticism, the poem takes a unique look at the nature of the our land



Annis Boudinot Stockton

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- Annis Boudinot Stockton was an American poet and one of the first women to have a book published in the colonies. Her poems and writings, totaling around 120, were relatively unknown until 1985
- She famously wrote a letter to George Washington when he lived in Rocky Hill describing her feelings about a recent congressional event in Princeton

Hannah Flagg Gould - “The Veteran and the Child” - 1833

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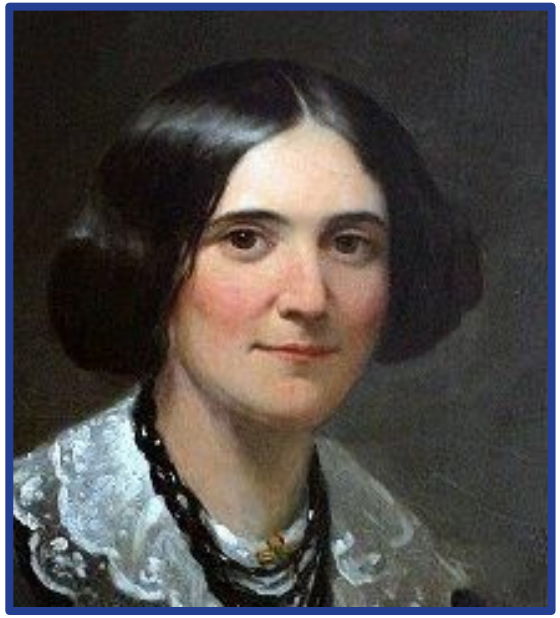
- Gould was born in 1789
- Began composing poems in the 1830s and wrote “The Veteran and the Child” about in 1833
- Describes her personal experience living with her father, a veteran of the Revolution, and her perspective on memorializing war



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Thank you!
Any questions?