

The American Revolution in Monmouth
County, New Jersey
&
Local Government on the Military Frontier

Presentation to
the Morristown Revolutionary War Round Table
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The American Revolution in Monmouth County, NJ

Monmouth County on the eve of The Revolutionary War

- Present-day counties of Monmouth and Ocean
- 12-15,000 diverse people
 - 5 religious denominations
 - Significant African-American minority
- No cities
- New York and Philadelphia-bound commerce
 - Agricultural and maritime economies
- Pre-Revolutionary Agitation:
 - Sons of Liberty chapters, 1765-6
 - Land Riots, 1769-70

Civil War in Monmouth County

- Rival Militias and Loyalist insurrections: 1776-1777
- Loyalist raid warfare: 1777-1782
- Internal Loyalist partisan warfare: 1778-1782
- Sustained illegal trade with British: 1777-1783
- Vigilante Whig reprisals (outside militia and courts): 1780-1783

Scope and Severity of Warfare:

- About 20% of men suffer a documented adverse event during the war
- Estimated 50% of families suffered at least one adverse event
- Well over 100 battles and skirmishes
- 127 estate confiscations
- Over 600 serve in Loyalist New Jersey Volunteers
 - Hundreds more become Loyalist irregulars

Loyalist Insurrectionaries

“I am as Innocent as Unborn Child”

- Summer 1776
 - Freehold/U. Freehold
 - Shrewsbury
- Fall 1776
 - The Monmouth Shore
 - Middletown
- The Tory Ascendancy
 - Loyalist Regime
 - The Loyal Militia
 - 1st Battle of Monmouth
- Col. George Taylor
 - Squire family
 - Colonel of Whig Militia
 - Commands State Troops opposite British
 - Growing disaffection
 - Declares himself inactive
 - Colonel of Loyalist Militia
 - Leads raids into Monmouth

African-American Loyalists

“A Motley Crew at Sandy Hook”

- Pre-War Racial Tensions
 - Dunmore’s Brigade come north
 - The lure of Sandy Hook
 - Refugeetown
 - Loyalist Raiding
 - The Black Brigade
 - Alternative Means of Support
 - Post-War
- Colonel Tye
 - Titus, slave of John Corlies
 - Guide to White Raiders
 - Raids of June 1780
 - The Legend of Col. Tye
 - Colts Neck Raid

The Continental Army in Monmouth Co.

“They Do Rather More Harm than Good”

The Army's mixed record in Monmouth County

- 1776: Pennsylvania Associators & Forman's Flying Camp
- 1777: Pennsylvania & Delaware Regiments
- 1778-9: Debacles
 - Pulaski's massacre
 - Disorderly cantonments of North, Gist, and Ford
- 1780: Light Horse Harry Lee

Col. Benjamin Ford's VA. Regt.

- Assigned early April 1779
- Numerous disorders
- Captain Beatty's letters
- Response to April 25
 - Loss of men
 - Censure
- Withdrawal on May 11
- From bad to worse...
 - Murder of Capt. Dennis
 - Raids of Middletown
 - The razing of Tinton Falls

The Association for Retaliation

“A Combination to Trample All Law Underfoot”

- Precedent for Retaliation Col. David Forman
 - Grievance & Petitions
 - Articles for Retaliation
 - Early actions
 - Opposition
 - Local
 - State Legislature
 - The Associated Loyalists
 - Climactic Retaliation
 - Dissolution
- 1776: Flying Camp
 - 1777: Additional Regiment & Martial Law
 - 1777-8: Setbacks
 - 1780-2: The Retaliators
 - 1781-2: Justice of Courts
 - 1782-5: More Setbacks
 - Post-War

Local Government on the Military Frontier

Democratizing Local Leadership

- Doubling of Offices and Expansion of Franchise
 - Opens leadership to new families and individuals
- High turnover of pre-war leaders
 - Less than half of pre-war leaders serve in the new govt.
- New 'democratic' leadership emerges
 - 1/3 of Revolutionary Leaders were modest landholders
 - Most others were Yeomen farmers
- Sharp decline in incumbency
 - Few leaders serve more than two consecutive years
- Three antagonistic factions emerge
 - Machiavellian Whigs, Due Process Whigs, and Disaffected

Machiavellian Whigs

- Centered in Freehold
- Mostly Presbyterian
- Defining Issues
 - Curbing illegal trade
 - “Retaliation” against disaffected
- Machiavellian Acts:
 - Election Day Coercion
 - Articles of Retaliation
 - Loyalist Estate Auction Scandals
 - “Sweeps” of the shore

Example: James Green

- Tavernkeeper and Militia Captain
- Active Whig throughout the war
- Horse stolen 1778; captured by Loyalists 1780
- Aggressively fines militia delinquents
- Leads property confiscations for Retaliators

Due Process Whigs

- Centered in Middletown and Shrewsbury townships
- Mostly Dutch and Anglican
- Defining Issues
 - Security for shore residents
 - Legal Protections
- Due Process Actions:
 - Advertising and boycotting their foes
 - *Holmes v. Walton*
 - Local prisoner exchanges
 - Maintaining the State Troops

Example: Hendrick Smock

- Pre-war leader
- Plundered during Loyalist insurrection (Dec. 1776) and by British (June 1778)
- Captain, militia
- Delegate, NJ Assembly
- Captured by Col. Tye, 1780
- Paroled home on condition of presenting Loyalist grievances
- Retires from service, but still holds civil offices

Disaffected

- Strongest in the shore townships of Shrewsbury, Dover, and Stafford
- Mostly Anglican and Quaker
- Defining Issues
 - Quick condemnation of prize vessels
 - Free Trade/Free Seas
- Disaffected Actions:
 - Wink at trade with Loyalists
 - Tolerate low militia turn-out
 - Opportunistic privateering
 - Maintain relations with Pine Robbers

Example: Trevor Newland

- Pre-war ties to Gen. Charles Lee and Ben Franklin
- Land speculator and salt-works owner
- Long dispute with Col. David Forman
- Stafford Twp. Tax Assessor
- Holds secret correspondence with Associated Loyalists
- Indicted for two misdemeanors; including illegal travel to New York

Disorder Amidst the New Order

Sampling of Disorders: scandalous elections, violence between faction leaders, vacant offices/incompatible commissions, organized vigilantism, dysfunctional courts, rigged Loyalist estate sales

Inland Township Factions

Shore Township Factions



The Continuum of Local Officeholders

External

Concluding Thoughts

- Monmouth County was part of a larger military frontier
 - The NYC Theatre
 - Four other military frontiers
 - Was Monmouth County typical?
 - Representative activities
 - Higher quantity
 - Shows the under-studied side of the Revolution
- To learn more:
- *The American Revolution in Monmouth County: The Theatre of Spoil and Destruction*
 - Forthcoming: *The Razing of Tinton Falls: Voices of the American Revolution*
 - To contact Mike Adelberg, visit 'Hey Mike' at www.michaeladelberg.com