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
- Grievance & Petitions
- Articles for Retaliation
  - Early actions
- Opposition
  - Local
  - State Legislature
  - The Associated Loyalists
- Climactic Retaliation
- Dissolution
- Col. David Forman
- 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

Machiavellian Whigs  Due Process Whigs  Disaffected  Loyalists

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*
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