The Massacre of Little Egg Harbor

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Address Delivered by

William E. Blackman

at the

Annual Spring Meeting

of the

Sons of the Revolution

NEW JERSEY SOCIETY

at

TUCKERTON, - NEW JERSEY

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"THE MASSACRE OF LITTLE EGG HARBOR"

Address delivered by William E. Blackman, at the Annual Spring Meeting of the Sons of the Revolution, New Jersey Society, at Tuckerton, New Jersey, Saturday, May 21st, 1921:

We are here today to commemorate the Massacre of Little Egg Harbor, an event that I suspect many of you did not know ever occurred. Yet it was thought quite important, particularly to those then living in this neighborhood.

Before I go on with the narrative of this affair, let me tell you something of the history of this township. Most of the information that I have gathered comes from the writing of my Grandmother, Leah Blackman, who was an authority upon the history and genealogy of this section.

Little Egg Harbor is one of the original townships of Burlington county, being the easterly point of the county and was established in the year 1741. I might add that is was transformed to Ocean County in 1891 for political reasons.

The first recorded account of a visit of Europeans to Little Egg Harbor is that of Captain Cornelius Jacobson Mey, commander of the renowned ship "Fortune," which sailed into the harbor in the year 1614, reaching the harbor by the Old Inlet, which then flowed between Long and Short Beaches. This visit seems to have taken place during the season for birds' eggs, which must have been in the months of May or June, for in their exploration of the marshes, the crew of the "Fortune" found immense quantities of gulls' and other meadow birds' eggs, and the unusual abundance of those fair oval prizes induced the Dutch adventurers to name the place Eyre Haven which in their language means Egg Harbor.

After the visit of Captain Mey there does not seem to have been much, if any, notice taken of the place, until the year 1698, when several persons from the upper section of Burlington county, made verious locations of land in the township.

The first settlers in Egg Harbor appear to have been people of respectability, possessing the means

and enterprise necessary for establishing themselves in a new country. Most accounts go to say that they were eminent for piety and good works; living in strict accordance with the discipline of the Friends' Society.

The first settlers had many difficulties to contend with in the wilderness and isolated land of their adoption. They at first built themselves rude dwellings, such as caves in the ground or else log huts, in which they resided until circumstances admitted of their erecting more commodious and substantial habitations.

The chief occupation of the early settlers of Little Egg Harbor were farming, the sale of timber and later the gathering of sea products and ship-building. The ship-building industry developed into an important industry and many large vessels were built here in Tuckerton, some of which, I believe are still sailing the sea.

Tuckerton is the largest and most flourishing village now set apart and incorporated as a Borough, of Little Egg Harbor.

Tuckerton was one of the first ports of entry in the United States, the commission bearing date March 21st, 1791, and signed by George Washington, President, Thomas Jefferson, Secretary of State.

It might be interesting before I speak of the affair at Little Egg Harbor, to refer to some of the notorious Refugees of the Revolutionary period in this section or as they were called the "Outlaws of the Pines."

One of these was known as "Jo Mulliner" who was the captain of the principal band of outlaws who infested the sea-coast of Atlantic, Burlington and Monmouth counties, ad especially the gang who committed so many depredations about the Fork of Mulica River.

Mulliner was an Englishman, and is described as a stout built man, over six feet in height, possessing a hard grub-like face, a most forbidding countenance and his whole aspect seeming to insinuate that nature formed him for the business which he followed.

When Mulliner first came to America, he took up his abode in Little Egg Harbor, where he resided until

the Revolutionary War broke out, and outlawry became the order of the day. He then removed to the Forks of Mullica River, where he collected a band of desperadoes from various sections. He was usually seen habited in an officer's uniform, with a ponderous sword at his side, a brace of horse-pistols in his belt, and when on the march he carried a huge musket—thus being fully equipped for any emergency. It was said that he also possessed a spirit which feared not God nor regarded man.

The Forks of Mullica River was a noted resort for Refuges and other Tories, as many valuable goods were brought in vessels from New York into the Old Inlet and taken up Mullica River to the Forks and then transported in wagons to Philadelphia. This made a profitable marauding ground for the outlaws. These outlaw bands often numbered several scores, who had little regard for human life, if it stood in the way of their interest or plans.

There was an old Colonel who kept a tavern and a store at the Forks, and when it suited his purpose, he expressed unbounded loyalty to the cause of Liberty, but at the same time, he was giving aid and comfort to the Refugees, concealing their stolen goods and filling his coffers from the proceeds of their maraudings. An immense tree stood in front of the many faced Colonel's abode and a few feet from the ground the tree branched off into several large forks, which grew in such a way that with a little artificial aid a cage was formed, in which ten or a dozen men could be seated at a time and be fairly hidden from the sight of a casual observer, and it was said to have been a customary thing for a number of Refugees to ascend the tree and secrete themselves in this airy roost, which they designated the "punch owl") to drink punch and debate on some fiendish plot.

It is affirmed that Mulliners' wife, like Mrs. Surratt, was an active and ingenous assistant to the Refugees in their nefarious proceedings. She lived in a cabin, in a dense swamp, on the southerly side of Mullica River, nearly opposite to where her husband had his principal rendezvous on the northern bank. Mulliner had a dog, to whose neck he attached an ingen-

iously constructed collar; he had trained the dog so effectually, that he was a competent and trustworthy courier. Often when the Refugee Chief wished to communicate with his wife, and through her aid, with some of his absent gang, he would write a note, place it in the collar on the dog's neck and then direct him to swim across the river to the cabin of his mistress, who would read the mesage and act according to its directions, and, if necessary, return an answer by the brute courier, who would safely convey it to his master.

Mulliner's outrages at last became too audacious for the tardy justice of those troublesome times, and he was hunted out by an armed force, arrested in the year 1872 and imprisoned in Burlington jail. His imprisonment lasted but six weeks, when he was tried, and sentenced to be hung at Burlington. It is recorded that on the day of his execution, thousands of persons assembled to witness the hanging of the bold refugee. Mulliner, the condemned desperado, was placed in a wagon, which contained his coffin, and followed by an immense procession, it passed out of Burlington, over Ewling's Bridge to a place called "Gallows Hill," where Mulliner was suspended from the branch of a large tree. Under the gallows he confessed many of his crimes and acknowledged the justice of his sentence. After his execution his body was delivered to his wife, who resided at the Forks. He was buried in the woods near Batsto Furnace, where his grave it still to be seen.

When the Refugee Chief, Mulliner was taken, his burly Lieutenant William Giberson, betook himself to the waters of the Mullica River. The Soldiers fired at him, slightly wounding him, yet he succeeded in gaining the southerly bank where he found a safe refuge in that swampy locality

Captain John Davis was sent with a company of men to Little Egg Harbor to break up the bands of refugees. Here his lieutenants, Benjamin Bates and Richard Howell, were informed that two refugee officers were concealed in a certain house. They called early in the morning and found and captured William Giberson and Lane, who had killed one or two Americans in cold blood. On

their way to the quarters of Captain Davis, Giberson called Bates' attention to something he pretended to see in the distance, and while Bates was looking that way, Giberson started and ran the other way, and being a fast runner, made his escape, although Bates fired his musket. The next night Bates went to hunt for him at the same house, and while opening the door, heard the click of a musket lock behind a large tree, within a few feet of him, and turning around saw Giberson taking aim at him. Bates dropped on his knees and the ball went through the rim of his hat. Giberson started to run, but before he got many rods Bates gave him a load of buckshot which broke his leg. Giberson was then well guarded and taken to Burlington jail.

Giberson had a sister that, in many respects was as remarkable as her brother. She was the heroine of the feat of jumping, without touching her hands out of one hogshead into another as many as eight or ten in a row; that her brother, the outlaw, would start on a hop, skip and a jump and leap over the top of a farm wagon.

One day a lad was gunning in Tuckerton Bay, when a boat containing Giberson and a number of his gang, came upon him and took him captive, dispossessed him of his fowling piece and ordered him to pilot them to Tuckerton, and when they reached Scow Landing, they moored their boat and went to the new Tavern, which once occupied the site of Dr. Page's cottage, which had just then been erected by Daniel Falkinburg, the first Inn-keeper of Little Egg Harbor. As soon as the Refugees reached the Inn they set about to institute an outlaw revel.

Some of the inhabitants of the village despatched a messenger to Toms River, where there was a company of militia, to inform them of the whereabouts of the Refugees. A small squad of soldiers came down with the intention of capturing or dispersing the drunken revellers. About the time the militia were coming into Tuckerton, the outlaws fled from the Inn and sought their boats at Scow Landing, seized their blunderbusses and took an advantageous position in the boat. The militia marched down Green Street, toward the Landing,

and as they came near the Creek, the Refugees poured the contents of their heavily charged guns into their ranks with such fury and precision that the militia were forced to retreat, followed by the outlaws, who pursued them to West Creek stream. Giberson, with his victrious force returned to Tuckerton to take possession of their War boat. When they reached the Landing, the boat was some distance down the stream. In their absence, two of their comrades, who were too drunk to join in the chase, had got sober enough to unmoor the boat and were paddling the craft down the creek shouting as their comrades came in sight, "We are the boys who can hold on to the boat." The returning outlaws mistaking them for Continentals, ran along the bank of the stream in pursuit of the receding craft, fired at the rowers and killed them before they ascertained the fact that they were their own men.

After this exploit they returned to the Inn and finished their spree in true refugee style.

After Giberson was captured as above related and lodged in the Burlington jail, his sister visited him and while with him, exchanging clothes with her brother, and so strikingly did she resemble him that when the brother came out, the jailer, thinking it was the sister, helped him in the wagon and so he escaped. He went over to the British and with them went to Nova Scotia, and then returned to Atlantic County, where he settled down to a more peaceful and honourable occupation.

Another of Mulliner's lieutenants was a Captain Steelman of Atlantic County, who, with a Captain Snell conducted most of his activities to the waters of this neighborhood. Steelman's headquarters was in Willits thoroughfare, whence he would sally forth on his mission of depredation.

During his last sojourn there and just at daybreak, he was attacked by a company of Continentals, and he and the most of his crew were killed. Many years after the death of Steelman and his gang, a man who was oystering in the Thoroughfare, fished up a number of rusty muskets, where Steelman and his pirates fell, and dropped their guns in the water.

But perhaps the best known and

greatest of these refugees was one Captain John Bacon, who might be rated with the Hetfields of Essex and Fagans of Monmouth.

I would like to mention a number of his escapades but time will not permit, and I will tell of his capture and death.

John Bacon was a notorious refugee, who had committed many depredations along the shores of Monmouth and Burlington counties. After having been a terror to the people of this section for some time, John Stewart, of Arneytown (afterwards Captain Stewart), resolved if possible to take him. There had been a reward of fifty pounds sterling offered by the Governor and Council for his capture dead or alive. A short time previous in an engagement at Cedar Bridge, Bacon and his company had discomfitted a considerable body of State troops, killing several; among them a brother of Joel Cook, of Cook's Mills (now Cookstown), Burlington county, which excited much alarm and exasperated the whole country. On the occasion of his arrest, Captain Stewart took with him Joel Cook, John Brown, Thomas Smith, John Jones and another person whose name is not known, and started in pursuit, well armed. They travelled the shore and found Bacon separated from his men at the public house or cabin of William Rose, between West Creek and Tuckerton, in Burlington county. The night was very dark, and Smith being in advance of the party, approached the house and discovered through a window a man sitting with a gun between his knees. He immediately informed his companions. On arriving at the house, Captain Stewart opened the door and presenting his musket, demanded a surrender. The fellow sprang to his feet and, cocking his gun, was in the act of bringing it around to the breast of Stewart, when the latter, instead of discharging his piece, closed in with him and succeeded after a scuffle, in bringing him to the floor. He then avowed himself to be John Bacon, and asked for quarter, which was at once readily granted him by Stewart. They arose from the floor, and Stewart (still retaining his hold on Bacon) called to Cook who, when he discovered the supposed murderer his brother, became exasperated, and stepping

back, gave Bacon a bayonet thrust, unknown to Stewart, or his companions. Bacon appeared faint and fell. After a short time he recovered and attempted to escape by the back door. Stewart pushed a table against it. Bacon hurled it away and struck Stewart to the floor, opened the door and again attempted to pass out; but was shot by Stewart (who had regained his feet) while in the act. The ball passed through his body, through a part of the building, and struck the breast of Cook, who had taken a position at the back door to prevent egress. Cook's companions were ignorant of the fact that he had given Bacon the bayonet wound, and would scarcely credit him when he so informed them on their way home. They examimed Bacon's body at Mount Misery, and the wounds made by both bayonet and ball were obvious. They brought his dead body to Jacobstown, Burlington County, and were in the act of burying it in the public highway near the village in the presence of many citizens who had collected on the occasion, when Bacon's brother appeared among them, and after much entreaty succeeded in obtaining his body for private burial.

This affair took place about the 1st of May, 1783.

Little Egg Harbor during the Revolution, was the resort of a large number of privateersmen, and often there were as many as thirty or more of their armed vessels with their anchors resting in the waters of the harbor at a time; and as an intelligent author says, "These men did great service in the cause of Liberty, by capturing merchantmen, and intercepting the transports of the British." A great amount of captured British property was brought by privateersmen in the Old Inlet, and taken up the Mullica River to the noted "Forks" and then transported by wagons to Philadelphia. This kind of business was carried on while the British were in possession of New York, and the great annoyance the patriotic privateers gave them, caused Sir Henry Clinton to resolve on destroying Chestnut Neck, on Mullica River about nine miles from here and just over the bridge spanning that river, where there is a large monument commemorating the battle which took place

there—It was then the place where the large privateers discharged their lading into smaller boats, which would better ascend the shoal water of the river. Taylor in his history of the United States, says "Sir Henry Clinton detached Captain Ferguson, with about three hundred men, upon an expedition to Little Egg Harbor, under a strong convoy to destroy the American shipping and privateers, but these being removed, Captain Ferguson proceeded up to Chestnut Neck, where he was opposed by the militia and other residents of the surrounding country. The British and Americans entered into an engagement but the British troops being better disciplined and far outnumbering the Americans were victorious, and as soon as the skirmish was over, the British set fire to the village of Chestnut Neck, and laid waste the adjacent country, and also burnt all of the shipping in the river, which were not numerous, for General Green, being apprised of the intention of the British to enter Egg Harbor had sent a despatch to Chestnut Neck and Tuckerton, to inform the inhabitants and the privateers of their danger. The privateers profited by the timely warning and quickly made their escape from the field of danger. Two privateers, however, were sunk, and it is said that the wrecks of these two boats, the Venus and Major Pearson, are still lying in the river opposite Chestnut Neck.

The defenceless inhabitants could do but little except hold themselves in readiness to assist the proffered aid when it arrived, for General Green had despatched Count Pulaski and his Legion, to defend Chestnut Neck and Little Egg Harbor. The British were three days in advance of Pulaski, and had destroyed Chestnut Neck and its surroundings, before the Legion reached the scene of action. Pulaski then hastened around by Batsto to Little Egg Harbor, to intercept the enemy at Tuckerton and other places along its borders.

After the sack of Chestnut Neck, and before Pulaski reached Egg Harbor, the British came with barges up Bass River to Eli Mathis landing, where they disembarked, and, guided by their refugee pilots, marched over to Eli Mathis', a man who had the reputation of being a staunch advo-

cate of Liberty—burnt his commodious farm house, outbuildings, hay, grain etc., destroyed his live stock, and did his property all the injury in their power. They then burnt the saw mill at Bass River, and did considerable other damage. They then sought their barges, and went on board their ships.

They dropped the convoy down near the mouth of Mullica River, and during the shade of night landed on Osborn's Island, two hundred and fifty men under Captain Ferguson. They marched up to the farm house of Richard Osborn, and insolently demanded a skillful pilot to lead them over to the mainland. Some of the British officers presented a sword to the breast of Thomas Osborn, a young man, and ordered him to pilot them to the house occupied by Pulaski's infantry. It is said they had been informed of this circumstance by a refugee who acted as a spy on Pulaski's movements. Young Osborn saw that it was useless to refuse and therefore, reluctantly went with them. At the end of the lane, on what was called Parker's Point, Pulaski had stationed a picket; the British came up in silence and killed the sentinel, who, it is supposed was asleep, before he had a chance to give the alarm to his comrades. After bayoneting the guard, with great caution, they marched up to the house where the unsuspecting infantry were stationed. Count Pulaski upon arriving at Egg Harbor ascertained that Captain Ferguson would land at Falkinburg's or Osborn's Island and Pulaski hastened to the settlement of Down Shore, quickly dividing his forces, placed Lieutenant-Colonel Baren DeBaze, with a company of light infantry, at an untenanted log house on Jeremiah Ridgway, Sr's. (part of what was later known as Joseph Parker's) farm. Ridgway house, where Pulaski's guard were stationed, stood in the South West field, near the lane which now leads out toward Tuckerton. After placing Baron DeBaze and his company on the Ridgway farm, to guard the road that leads from Osborn's Island to Tuckerton, Count Pulaski, with his cavalry took a station on the farm of James Willits, later Nathan Andrews' farm. This was the situation of af-

fairs when the British reached the Ridgway house.

When the British reached the farm yard, where DeBaze' company were resting in supposed security, Captain Ferguson ordered a bayonet charge and also "no quarter," for the enemy —and then wildly rushed on to the surprised soldiers, who bravely defended themselves, but were almost instantly overpowered by superior numbers, and seeing the condition, piteously begged for mercy, and again Captain Ferguson cried "No quarter," and in a few moments all were inhumanly butchered, but not until they had killed a few of the Red Coats; and among the number, a little English Captain is particularly mentioned, as being pinned to the door of the house by a bayonet. It was said that the people on the adjacent farms and for a considerable distance around the country, described the terrific death shrieks of the bayoneted men, as being so truly heartrending, that they were ever after ringing in their ears.

When the British came to the Ridgway house, and charged on the surprised guard, one of the soldiers was fortunate enough to make his escape unharmed, and hurried away and informed Pulaski of what was going on. Pulaski ordered out cavalry, mounted his own charger, and rode on in advance of his men, who, it seems were not so soon in the saddle as their distinguished leader; this being the case when Pulaski reached the end of the lane from which several roads diverged. Pulaski took the direct road to the Ridgway place, and, it being dark and his company some distance behind, they took a different route, and Pulaski, who supposed his cavalry close upon him, in the excitement of the moment rushed on with great speed until he reached the Meeting House road, and, it being the dusk of early morn as he emerged from the forest road, he dashed like an avalanche into the ranks of the British, who had finished their butchery and were then bound for Tuckerton, no doubt, with the intention of laying the little Quaker village in ashes. As Pulaski rushed among the British, he mistook them for Baron DeBaze's company, whom he had placed at the Ridgway house; supposing they had been victorious, or were retreating before the enemy—but almost instantly

he saw his mistake, wheeled his charger, and, with the speed of the wind, retreated for the purpose of bringing his cavalry, whom he supposed faithfully following in his course, to charge on the British. By this time the cavalrymen had found their mistake, and were rapidly approaching their commander, and when they met in the forest road, Pulaski informed them of his encounter with the British force, and then hurriedly led them on to charge upon the British ranks; but when they reached the Meeting House road, the invaders were nowhere to be seen, and some time elapsing before they ascertaind which way they had gone, the delay favored the British in their retreat.

Pulaski's dashing so wildly and unexpectedly into the British column, so astounded them that for a moment they were unaware of the valuable prize in their midst; but quickly recovering from their surprise, they appear to have recognized him, as he wheeled his horse and sped away on his retreat, and supposing he had retired for a moment in order to bring his cavalry to charge on their ranks, they seem to have considered it the better part of valor to beat a hasty retreat, and accordingly turned about and with "double quick" sped for Osborn's Island.

When they had crossed Osborn's creek, the British commander ordered the bridge torn up, and soon the last plank was floating down the stream. Pulaski halted at the Ridgway house to ascertain the fate of his infantry, and then sped on after the retreating red coats; but when he reached Osborn's bridge, he found it impassable for his light horse, and the British had gained the upland no doubt, exulting over the consciousness of having foiled Poland's "thunderbolt of war." When Pulaski reached the scene of the fatal skirmish, they stopped to succor the wounded and bury the dead, but there was no need of a surgeon for all were dead, and were shortly interred in four large graves; and the stranger who now views the site of that fatal skirmish, can scarcely be made to realize that it was once the scene of blood and carnage, and the last resting of some of the brave purchasers of our freedom, yet such is the case, for, beneath that dark soil is buried all that is

mortal of Lieutenant-Colonel Baron DeBaze, Lieutenant De La Broderick and fifty other soldiers who fell with them.

After the raid on Little Egg Harbor, the British embarked in their ships, and proceeded to leave when they reached the Old Inlet, the flag ship, the Zebra, grounded—for Jesse Turner, their refugee pilot, understood marauding better than he did the shoals of the inlet—and, to keep her from falling into the hands of the Americans, Admiral Graves ordered her fired.

As soon as the British commenced the attack on Pulaski's men, Thomas Osborn, the pilot, ran and hid himself in the adjacent swamp, where his ears were pained with the heart-rending shrieks and dying groans of the bayonted soldiers. When Pulaski returned from following the British, Thomas Osborn came out from his hiding place and gave himself up to Pulaski's band, telling them how he had been forced to pilot the British, but they did not credit his statement, suspecting him of being a Tory, and therefore a willing guide. They seized him and tied him to a tree that stood on the battleground, and enraged soldiers struck him many times and attempted to bayonet him, but were prevented by their officers. They then took him and his father, an aged man, whom they suspected of assisting and giving the British information of the whereabouts of the American troups and put them in prison at Trenton. They were kept in confinement for about six months but as no charges could be made to stand against them they were honourably discharged.

Thus you may see that this locality suffered severely from the depredations of the out-laws and from this "Affair at Little Egg Harbor,' and had it not been for the presence of the troops of Count Pulaski Tuckerton would have suffered the fate of Chestnut Neck and perhaps its inhabitants massacred.

There is a tablet at the scene of this "Affair" by the Society of the Cincinnatti of the State of New Jersey, about three miles below here, which would be interesting for you all to visit after this meeting.

THE END