

NEW JERSEY SOCIETY

OF THE SONS OF THE

AMERICAN REVOLUTION.

Celebration of the 112th Anniversary of the
Battle of Red Bank, New Jersey,
fought October 22nd, 1777.

OCTOBER 22ND, 1889.

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BATTLE OF RED BANK

The New Jersey Society of the Sons of the American Revolution met October 22, 1889, to celebrate the 112th anniversary of the Battle of Red Bank, fought October 22, 1777.

Hon. Samuel F. Bigelow presided in the absence of the President, Hon. Robert S. Green, Governor of New Jersey.

Before announcing the regular toasts the chairman spoke substantially as follows :

It was the desire of the Society to celebrate the battle of Red Bank at some place contiguous to where it was fought ; but the field being far from the general routes of travel, and the season inconvenient for many members to remain away from their homes, it was decided to select Newark as the place of meeting.

And aside from this question of convenience, I know of no locality, other than the battle field, where the celebration could be made with greater propriety. The muster rolls of the New Jersey troops show that Essex county men were not laggards in the war. From one church parish of that county went forth, besides common soldiers, 200 commissioned officers, to fight for independence, and it is reasonable to believe, from the intensity of patriotic ardor that prevailed that all the men in the county, excepting a few skulking Tories, were enlisted in one way or another in the patriot cause.

Excepting at Springfield the county was not the scene of a pitched battle between contending armies regularly organized, but for seven long years it was the theatre of harrassing and devastating predatory strife, and within the memory of living men the blighting, withering effects of the war were felt in many broken and impoverished families.

We will listen with pleasure to-night to a critical sketch of a battle about which little has been published. It is hoped and believed this sketch will be followed by other notices of revolutionary incidents in our own State equally interesting. To perpetuate the history of "The Times That Tried Men's Souls" is one of the objects of this society, and in perpetuating this memory, we bring in relief men of such majestic proportions that they have been the prototypes of all the world's heroes since their times. Let us illustrate lessons of patriotism by incidents from their lives. Let us familiarize our youth with their examples of unselfish patriotism that they may be strengthened always to subordinate their personal interests to the welfare of the State.

The time is opportune for the work, as well as its execution becoming. We are passing through; indeed, I hope we have passed through, a period when it has been fashionable to be un-American, to be English, to be a snob; when brusqueness, coarseness and incivility in intercourse have marked a departure from the kindly, dignified, gentle manners of our ancestors. Indeed, there are a few who are weary of our republican forms; they would have about them the pomp and circumstances of monarchy, the dazzle and the glitter and the autocracy. If our society can do something to promote American pride, to foster the sentiment that American ancestors, American traditions, American customs, American institutions and American men have been and are the best the world has ever known, its mission will not have been in vain.

And how can this be better done than by recounting the deeds of the men of the revolution. The tales of their heroic endeavors and patient sufferings in this county and in the

State have never been written. No stately monument of granite, like that at Monmouth, recalls memories of their greater than Spartan patriotism ; no graphic and comprehensive history excites admiration for their martial deeds ; and now, after only a century, if their characters were not written in the State they helped to create and exhibited in the civic institutions they aided to form, it would be difficult for the stranger to discover what manner of men they were. But, as knowing naught of the sun, we enjoy its bright light and beneficent heat, so all mankind in every land and clime, though ignorant of the men who wrought out constitutional government, are to-day enjoying greater liberty and happiness for their having existed.

The Chairman then announced the first toast :

The Day we Celebrate. We celebrate to-night the memory of the battle of Red Bank and Fort Mifflin, and the fame of the ragged regiments of Greene, who so humbled the Briton's pride and ratified in blood the priceless victory of Saratoga.

John J. Hubbell, Esq., responded as follows :—

Fort Mercer, at Red Bank, is situate on the New Jersey side of the Delaware River, below Philadelphia. Fort Mifflin is on an Island in the River opposite Fort Mercer, near the Pennsylvania shore. These two forts were the scene of a memorable event of the War of the Revolution. Fort Mifflin is still garrisoned by U. S. troops ; but Fort Mercer is deserted, naught of it remains and all vestiges of the conflict which was waged there have disappeared. An unassuming monument marks the spot where the conflict took place without whose aid the patriotic traveller in search of the scene, where once was fought this memorable battle, would be powerless to locate the site. This monument commemorating that short but decisive conflict, is almost hidden in the midst of a forsaken growth of trees, and all around it is desolation.

So many battles were fought on the soil of New Jersey during the Revolutionary War, that Red Bank, important as

it was, has been well nigh forgotten. It took place on the 22nd day of October, 1777; just 112 years ago to-day. In reviewing the preceding events, we find that in July of the same year General Howe, with a fleet carrying thirty-six English and Hessian Battalions, including light infantry and grenadiers, with a powerful artillery, a New York company called the Queen's Rangers, and a regiment of light horse, was making his way by sea to the mouth of the Delaware river. It was evident that his destination was Philadelphia; and General Washington at once took means to frustrate his plans. Washington before this had examined the country round Philadelphia, and the works below, and had come to the conclusion that the defense of the river should be confined to the fort at Mud Island, called Fort Mifflin, and to Red Bank on the high ground opposite. On the 26th of September, 1777, Lord Cornwallis at the head of the British and Hessian Grenadiers entered Philadelphia, the main body of his Army, however, was encamped at Germantown. General Howe, in order to retain possession of Philadelphia wished to free the Delaware for his fleet, but he found that the fortifications at Fort Mifflin and Red Bank interfered with his plans. Chevaux-de-frise had been sunk in the channel between the batteries preventing the entry of the ships. General Howe could not communicate with his fleet, and this put him to much inconvenience. The American vessels, in the river above Red Bank and Fort Mifflin, prevented him from foraging and obtaining supplies in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, but the "Delaware," one of the largest of the American vessels was captured, and the disadvantage to the British, caused by these vessels, was much diminished. While the British fleet was endeavoring to advance up the river, the Fort at Byllingsport below Red Bank was feebly garrisoned, and was captured by the British, and this gave them a better opportunity to ascend the river. The attention of both British and American Commanders was now directed to this point on the Delaware; one to remove and the other to retain the impediments to navigation. Lord

Howe had arranged his ships along the Delaware shore from Reedy Island to New Castle. The Fort at Byllingsport, as we have shown, had been taken by the British. General Howe then removed the Chevaux-de-frise from the channel opposite Byllingsport, so that only the line from Fort Mifflin and Fort Mercer at Red Bank, remained to prevent the fleet from passing further up the river. Every effort was made for the destruction of these forts; batteries were erected on the Pennsylvania shore to play on Mud Island, while a fierce attack was directed against the redoubts on the New Jersey shore. On the 21st of October, Colonel Compte Donop, a distinguished German officer, crossed the Delaware River, at Cooper's Ferry, at the head of a detachment of Hessians of two thousand or twenty-five hundred men, in order to proceed the next day to the attack on Red Bank. It was a part of the plan that so soon as the assault should begin a heavy cannonade on Fort Mifflin should be made from the batteries on the Pennsylvania shore; that the "Vigilant," a ship of war, should pass through the narrow channel and attack Fort Mifflin on the rear. The fortifications at Red Bank consisted of extensive outer works, within which was an intrenchment eight or nine feet high, barded and fraized — a work upon which Colonel Christopher Greene, of Rhode Island, the Commander of the American Forces, had bestowed great thought and labor. Late on the evening of the 22nd of October, Compte Donop attacked the fort with great fearlessness; it was defended with equal resolution by the American contingency, which consisted of white men and mulattos, who showed wonderful amount of bravery. The outer works being too extensive to be manned by the garrison, which did not exceed five hundred men, were only used to delay and annoy the assailants, and on their near approach were abandoned by the Americans, who retired within the inner intrenchment, whence they poured upon the Hessians pressing on with great gallantry a most destructive fire. Colonel Donop leading his troop was fatally wounded; the second officer in command, Lieutenant-Colonel Mingerode,

was killed at the same time. Lieutenant-Colonel Linsing, aided by the darkness of the evening, collected many of the wounded Hessians, and with the rest of the detachment marched that night about five miles, and returned to Philadelphia the next day. The loss of the Hessians was estimated at four hundred men; the garrison being reinforced from Fort Mifflin, aided by the galleys on the river which flanked the Hessians, while advancing and retreating, fought under cover and lost only thirty-two men killed and wounded.

Marquis de Cheastelaux, in his Travels in North America, gives a very vivid and most excellent account of the battle. He visited the battlefield in company with Lafayette and M. Mauduit, the latter having had charge of arranging and defending the fort under the orders of Colonel Greene, and so the Marquis had peculiar advantages in his description. The account which he gives is too long to be quoted here, but he gives some incidents of great interest, one of which I will mention.

"M. de Mauduit, after fixing the palisades, employed himself in repairing the abattis. He again sallied out with a detachment; and it was then he beheld the deplorable spectacle of the dead and dying, heaped one upon another. A voice arose from amidst these carcasses, and said, in English, "Whoever you are, draw me hence." It was the voice of Col. Donop. M. de Mauduit made the soldiers lift him up, and carry him into the fort, where he was soon known. He had his hip broken; but whether they did not consider his wound as mortal, or that they were heated by the battle, and still irritated at the menaces thrown out against them a few hours before, the Americans could not help saying aloud, "Well! is it determined to give no quarter?" "I am in your hands," replied the Colonel. "You may revenge yourself." M. de Mauduit had no difficulty in imposing silence, and employed himself only in taking care of the wounded officer."

While visiting the scene of the battle a few days ago, we found all that now remains of the old Fort Mercer. The

spot is beautifully situated upon the high bluff on the Delaware and looking across the river one sees the ramparts of Fort Mifflin. The battle field itself is much neglected; the only way of approach is by a small path among the brambles. By making a detour of some distance north of the Whitall House towards Timber Creek, one finds at the present day an embankment which, as tradition has it, was the outer breastwork of the fort. The plan of the fort, as these embankments show, was large and extended, but evidently made in a rude way. One finds also raised places with gulleys between, nearer the bluff, which corresponds with the inner fort, as history tells us. On the outside of the outer fort is a ditch or gully, from which evidently the earth had been taken to build the embankment. These marks are apparent to this day. The land on which the battle of Red Bank took place is now owned by the Government, and stones labelled "U. S." marks the boundaries.

We had the pleasure of going over the battlefield with Judge Carter, the Historian of Woodbridge, and he pointed out many places of historical value connected with this memorable struggle. Among them is the old Whitall house which is still standing, and this also is owned by the Government. One can see in front of it pieces of cannon that were used in the conflict; one of the largest having been taken to Woodbury. The monument erected on October 22nd, 1829, to commemorate the bravery of the officers and soldiers who fell in this historic ground has a lonely and neglected appearance. At one time it had crumbled and the elements threatened to destroy it. The bank upon which it was placed was washed away and only with great difficulty was it moved back further on the bluff and restored to its former condition. This was made possible by the generosity of the people of Woodbury. We learn that at the present time this memorable spot is neglected by the Government. On Sundays the place is over-run by careless and trespassing visitors, and at other times the monument is used for a target from the boats passing up and

down the river. Mr. Murray, the Government Farmer, who lives in the Whitall house, told us that his life was often in danger from the flying bullets, and that a battle, though not so fierce as the former one of Redbank, is frequently suggested to him. There are many marks of the battle in the old Whitall House, and one can see the room and cellar where old Mrs. Whitall remained during the conflict.

Many of the wounded were carried to this Whitall House where they were kindly taken care of; others were taken to the Campbell House, as it is now called, which is situated opposite the Court House in Woodbury; this house also is still standing, and it is pointed out to visitors as being at one time the headquarters of Lord Cornwallis.

It should be the duty of the New Jersey Society of the Sons of the American Revolution to see that the battlefield of Red Bank is not left to desolation and neglect. It should be our pleasure to maintain and keep sacred this memorable spot where so much bravery and patriotism were shown for the great cause of religious and political liberty.

Let us then, at this our first dinner, take some effective measures for the restoration and future preservation of the monument already erected in commemoration of the sacred battle field of Red Bank.

Mr. J. C. Pumpelly, being called upon by the Chairman, further responded to the first toast as follows:

1777-1889.

History bristles with inspiring personalities and throws upon the canvas before us pictures which threaten or encourage us as with a tongue of flaming fire.

It is one of these scenes we would recall as we celebrate to-night the memory of the battle at Red Bank and Fort Mifflin, and the fame of the ragged regiments of Greene, who "so humbled the Briton's pride and ratified in blood the priceless victory at Saratoga."

Red Bank, as it stands to-day, moss grown by the shores of

the Delaware, so little known even to our citizens, was in the great plan of history chosen as one of those pivotal points upon which hung as in the balance events of grave importance to the future of liberty in America.

These 112 years that have passed in the progress of events have accomplished more than a thousand and twelve in the middle ages. Memory reverts to many heroic deeds in our little State which have been crowded into their compass.

In the war for Independence, as we remember, the battle of Long Island gave to Lord Howe honors and knighthood, while Red Bank's bloody day brought him only disaster and disgrace. It was Charles Lee; we remember, too, the marplot at both Moultrie and Monmouth, who, when a prisoner of war in New York so maladvised Lord Howe that neglecting the direct orders of his own Government, he sailed for Philadelphia, thus forcing that complication of events which assured the *surrender of Burgoyne*, the *alliance with France*, and the *capture of Yorktown*.

The British campaign in Pennsylvania was well satirized by Franklin in his oft quoted words, "Howe has not taken Philadelphia, but Philadelphia has taken Howe." So in the fall of '77, Howe still blundering and seeking vainly to open a passage for his frigates to the Chesapeake found himself confronted on the East shore of the Delaware by the earthworks at Red Bank and in mid stream by the island defences of Fort Mifflin. Insignificant, indeed, must have appeared these humble *bulwarks of liberty* to the doughty and insolent British captains, but what instruments of vengeance they proved to be to them before the setting of the sun. On came the English frigates "Augusta," "Roebuck," "Merlin," every gun well manned, with their accompanying galleys, appearing as they passed through the Chevaux-de-frise like Titans as compared with those pigmy defences confronting them. But the same pigmies proved themselves no common foe, and "so incessant was the fire on both sides," says the *New Jersey Gazette*, "that the very elements seemed to be aflame." The "Augusta" took fire and blew up. So near

were the combatants to each other that some of the American powder horns took fire. The "Roebuck" retired from the fight and the "Merlin" ran aground, was set fire to and burned to the water's edge, and thus ended a naval engagement as *singular as any in history*. As in the day of Moultrie's victory Carolina single-handedly humbled the naval supremacy of Great Britain, so now New Jersey, ragged and torn as she was, again brought quick and wholesale destruction to the best ships of the English line.

Thus, it is that Moultrie and Monmouth, Mifflin and Mercer, will be ever glorious names in the bloody annals of earth's great struggles for human liberty. So long as life endures we, as "Sons of the American Revolution," yes, and sons of patriots yet unborn, shall venerate and cherish these shrines made sacred by the blood of America's noblest Freemen. Greene's able defence of the attack on the fort at Red Bank, was also equally glorious and complete. Though the number of the combatants was not so great, yet no battle of the Revolution was more desperately contested, and none reflected more credit upon the American arms. The fort, so called, was but an earthen redoubt of pentagonal shape, behind which were fourteen pieces of cannon and three hundred as brave men as ever fought a battle. Most of these were *negroes and mulattos* from Rhode Island; ragged and destitute was their condition, but within their breasts glowed such a fire of patriotism as rendered them indifferent to every personal suffering or condition. How often, comrades, in our great Civil War, did we see this same heroic self-sacrifice among the men of our colored regiments.

In direct command of the position on this 22nd of October, 1777, was Col. Mauduit, a French officer of tried skill; also there fought with him those other two able Frenchmen, Armand Charles Tuffin and brave Count Duplessis. Lord Howe with special malice had despatched his most savage officer, Col. Donop, with two thousand Hessians, not only to subdue the place, but even massacre every one of its defenders. Upon approaching within cannon shot a Hessian officer

advanced, preceded by a drummer boy, and demanded the surrender of the fort, or "if battle ensued *no quarter would be given.*" Insolent was the demand and infamous the order, and for its infamy Col. Donop must ever stand an arraigned murderer at the bar of history.

The battle that was fought on that sunlit day in October was one of the fiercest in all the bloody records of the Revolution, but it is not my purpose here to give more than a few details of the contest. Upon the enemy's reaching the abatis they were received with a fire so severe in front and flank and at such short range that many bodies were perforated with wads and others literally blown to pieces.

In the thick of the fight Col. Donop, noticeable by the marks of the orders he wore, and by his handsome figure, fell fatally wounded, and soon after the attack was relinquished and the remnant of the Hessian forces regained the wood in complete rout.

There was indeed a massacre at Red Bank, but those who came to slay without mercy were themselves slain, and in such numbers that over three hundred were buried in one ditch. But in the providence of God it was fated that here at this spot the American volunteer soldier, *deemed half civilized by our European foe*, should teach not only his English foe but the whole world its first great lesson in the humane treatment of a vanquished enemy.

To the last Col. Donop refused to recognize the loyal and chivalric kindness of the American leader, Col. Christopher Greene, but recognizing that Col. Mauduit was a Frenchman, he said when dying, "I am content; I die in the hands of honor itself." "It is finishing a noble career" early, he said, "but I die *the victim of my ambition and of the avarice of my sovereign.*"

Unequaled as was the courage shown by the combatants, so equally great, let us not forget, was the heroism shown by that mother of the Revolution, Mrs. Whitall, whose home was but a stone's throw from the fort; there

she sat spinning unappalled by the roar of the contest until a cannon ball whistling through the entry induced her to take her wheel into the cellar, where she continued to spin undisturbed through the whole engagement, although her dwelling was struck several times by shot from the frigates.

Of such stuff were made our mothers in the Revolution, and their inspiring personalities are before our wives and daughters as rare examples of consistent morality, plain, loving and deep thinking. Courageous and industrious and God-fearing was this Mrs. Whitall, like her great exemplar, Mary the mother of Washington, "simple in garb, majestic and serene, unmoved by pomp or circumstance, in truth inflexible." Shame upon us, as a people, that the grave of this illustrious woman is to-day dilapidated and neglected. Let the daughters as well as the sons of the Revolution make the preservation of this sacred spot their first duty, and show in their lives the loving and active influence of a great and noble memory.

But while our Red Banks are all passed and peace is over us, our conflict is to be with the forces that war upon the moral sentiment and threaten corruption to our social and political fabric. Let us but upbuild the citizen and adjust not so much the cold economic relation of capital and labor as the warm relations of man with man in the great struggle for happiness, then shall we be worthy sons of worthy sires, and if we neglect this duty, then is our celebration of historic days and our praise of the fathers only a vain and useless show.

The Chairman then announced the second regular toast, the National Society. All honor to our National Society. May she continue to all time to keep ever in remembrance the noble deeds of our Revolutionary Ancestry.

The Hon. L. P. Dering, President of the National Society, was expected to respond to this toast, but he was prevented from being present.

The third regular toast was the following: Society of

the Cincinnati. May friendship, benevolence and patriotism, the basis of the Institution forever inspire the conduct of its members. Flavel McGee, Esq., of Jersey City, spoke to this toast substantially as follows:

The Society of the Cincinnati which I represent here this evening was founded on the tenth of May, seventeen hundred and eighty-three, on the banks of the Hudson at the close of the Revolutionary War. The officers of the Army of the Revolution decided to found an Association whose object should be the perpetuation of the friendship that had been cemented by years of hardship in the field, and by memories of the struggle for American independence. They hoped that the Society would exist, not only during the lifetime of its founders, but would be perpetuated by their descendants during the whole life of the Republic, and that it would hand down to succeeding generations the traditions of that eventful period which had resulted in the birth of a new nation.

They formed a constitution by which it was provided that at the death of any member his membership should descend to his eldest son, and so by the right of primogeniture, the Society might always retain the same number and be kept alive perpetually.

At its inception it met with great opposition. It was regarded by many as an effort to create an order of Nobility, and so severe was the opposition that a proposition was made that all the moneys raised by the branch societies in the various states should be paid into the treasuries of the states, there to remain forever, and the interest only to be paid to the Association from time to time. The New Jersey Society particularly refused, and so did many others, to become a party to any such arrangement, the plan was abandoned, and the method has ever since obtained that the moneys raised should be used for the purposes of the Society, and for the benefit of any of its members who should by reason of sickness or misfortune be in need of aid.

For a time the Society flourished, then it languished. The State societies grew less in numbers, some have gone out of existence, but several of them still exist, and amongst them the Society of New Jersey, which is just now in a condition perhaps more flourishing than any of the others.

And now your Society has been organized, and has the same object in view as that of the Cincinnati, the only difference being that membership in the Cincinnati is only for the oldest sons of officers; whereas in your case all male descendants of those who took part in the War of the Revolution may become members. The two societies form the complement of each other; neither is complete without the other.

The badge which the Society of the Cincinnati adopted had this motto: "Let us relinquish all to serve the Republic." Is it not our duty, as descendants of the men who fought the War of the Revolution and made it possible for this nation to exist, to relinquish all, if necessary, to serve the Republic? True, we cannot all go to the war; we cannot all fight in the field, but each of us, in his own neighborhood, can fight the battles of his country in another arena. Dangers are continually attacking the integrity of the Government—political frauds, political immoralities, political wrongs of every sort; more fruitful sources of destruction to the body politic than the armies of an enemy. As fruitful, did I say? Nay! more so, for they are insidious. An enemy's army comes with guns and flags and provokes resistance, these attacks from among ourselves are made in silence, under cover, in the dark, and before their existence is known the integrity of the Government is sapped, its strength gone, and it is a ready prey to every fraud. Is it not our duty then, as descendants of these men of old to stand as bulwarks, each in his own neighborhood, and to fight all such attacks, and to maintain that purity which characterized that Government in its inception, and to keep it intact in all its pristine vigor.

Is it not our privilege then, and our duty, to be up and doing, and to see to it that the dark places politically in our communities are enlightened; that the danger spots are watched and cared for and cleansed, and that the politics of the Republic are kept clean and pure?

Let us recall the glorious days of our ancestors. Let us remember that this nation has grown until it has become one of the greatest of the world. That, instead of its being sparsely settled, as it was in the days of the Revolution, it has become a vast, seething, surging mass of population. That instead of being, as it was then, mainly agricultural, it has now extended its commerce to all parts of the world, and has within its limits all opinions, all shades of thought, all habits, all the dangerous theories of the old nations of the earth; and that the proportion of the foreign born and uneducated population is vastly greater than were the ignorant at the time of the Revolution. Is it not then our duty, by every means within our power—by the aid of the common school, of religion, of individual effort, by aggregate endeavor, to see to it that this vast population is so led, guided and directed, that its forces shall work together for the preservation of the Constitution and the furtherance of all that is good within it. Let your Society and ours then work together, shoulder to shoulder, with one common purpose and one common thought, to save this country for God and posterity.

The fourth toast was next in order, The Monmouth Battle Monument Association, reared by patriotic sons of patriotic sires—imperishable memorial of imperishable days.

Mr. Robert Laird was to have responded to this, but he was unable to be present, and the Chairman proceeded to the fifth and last regular toast:

Washington Association of New Jersey, for their careful preservation of the home of the great Commander, in the trying times of 1779-'80 is due the heartfelt gratitude of every Jerseyman. Hon. Geo. A. Halsey gave an interesting account of the rise and progress of the Association.

He was followed by the venerable William L. King, Esq. of Morristown, great-grandson of Frederick King, first Post Master at that place. Mr. W. L. King is Vice-President and Secretary of the Washington Association. He spoke in substance as follows :

The Washington Association of New Jersey dates its origin from the burst of enthusiasm attending the preparations for the great Centennial year of 1876, when that most able and patriotic Governor of New Jersey, Theodore F. Randolph, by his personal influence secured the passage of our charter by the State Legislature. Among the four financial founders of the Institution may be mentioned the names of the Hon. George A. Halsey and the late Gen. N. N. Halstead, of Newark.

From the day the old Headquarters opened its doors to the public down to the present time, the Institution has been a complete success, and its collection of nearly 2,000 Revolutionary relics is now one of the largest and most interesting in the country; in proof of which I may mention that the number of visitors during the year ending October 1st, was nearly ten thousand.

During all these years we have been favored with many valuable gifts from friends, amongst whom I must not fail to mention that worthy and honorable son of New Jersey Ferdinand J. Dreer, Esq., of Philadelphia, who besides contributing to our collection many documents of revolutionary interest from his immense collection, has given us that priceless relic, the original commission of Washington as Commander-in-Chief, signed by John Hancock, President of Congress.

I beg gentlemen, in the name of the Washington Association and as one of its Vice-Presidents, to welcome the sons of the Revolution as fellow-workers in the same field of usefulness, having kindred objects in view, namely the preservation of the records of the Revolution and the cherishing of the memory of the dead heroes of New Jersey, who did so much towards achieving American Independence.