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Revolutionaries to go to war again in Mount Holly

By *CAROL COMEGNO*
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The boom of cannon and the crack of musket fire will reverberate through downtown streets Saturday during the re-enactment of a Revolutionary War battle critical to George Washington's crossing of the Delaware River and his subsequent victory at the Battle of Trenton.

More than 125 re-enactors for Battle of Iron Works Hill will pose as either American militia or English Crown forces and will face one another in a cannonade in the streets between Mill Race Village and High Street.

The 3 p.m. cannonade will be the highlight of daylong events with military encampments, field cooking, a 2:30 p.m. artillery demonstration at the Old Prison Museum on High Street, a demonstration of 18th-century medical techniques by doctors and English country dancing.

"This battle is very important to the history of Mount Holly because it was the one that allowed Gen. George Washington to get through and cross the Delaware River (from Pennsylvania) at Trenton on Christmas night. Maybe if he hadn't, we would be under English rule," said Lynn Scowcroft, executive director of Main Street Mount Holly.

The opposing forces will fight until they reach Monroe Park near Monroe Street and Rancocas Creek.

Author and re-enactor Dennis Rizzo of Mount Holly, also an event co-chair, said at the real battle on Dec. 23 and 24, 1776, about 2,200 Hessians and Scots allied with the British Crown were both atop the mount along High Street and downtown while Colonial Continental and militia forces were entrenched on Iron Works Hill, now a cemetery on Pine Street.

"Our eventual goal is to drag a cannon up the mount and fire it from there during the re-enactment in some future year," said Alicia McShulkis, another co-chair of the event.

Rizzo said the American force of 600 to 800 under Col. Samuel Griffin lured the Crown troops there intentionally from posts in Bordentown and harassed Crown troops in Mansfield at a skirmish at Petticoat Bridge in order to divert them from Trenton. That allowed Washington with his roughly 1,200 plus troops to surprise a Crown force of 1,800 in Trenton on Dec. 25 and defeat it.

Because of the economy, McShulkis said the event was in jeopardy this year, but was saved through the efforts of its sponsors and volunteers. However, she said there was not enough money available to bring in a fife and drum corps to perform as in previous years. Ian Johns of Mount Holly said he will be firing his Brown Bess musket, which was the standard British weapon issue in 1776, as a re-enactor in the British Brigade. He said re-enactors will come from the Mid-Atlantic states and a Queens Rangers group will be arriving from Ohio.

"It's nice to be able to remind people about what happened in their own town that was really pretty important and to do it amidst some of the buildings that were standing then and which are still standing," Johns said.

All historic buildings in the township will be open from the Olde Courthouse that was in use when George Washington was alive to the Burlington County Prison Museum and the Brainerd School, the state's oldest, one-room schoolhouse on its original foundation.

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Additional Facts

IF YOU GO

The Battle of Iron Works Hill re-enactment will be Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m..

New this year is a "Dancing with the Stars and Stripes" competition featuring English country dancing at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, 121 High St.

From 4 to 9 p.m., the Mill Race preservation group will sponsor a progressive chocolate walk to benefit the South Jersey Food Bank. Tickets are available online at www.millraceshops.com or at village shops for \$15 in advance or \$20 the day of the event.

For more information or to register as a re-enactor for the free battle event, visit www.ironworkshill.org
