

NJS Presents

Museums, Archives, Artifacts, and Documents

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Freedom's Battleground: Monmouth County Readies for the Semiquincentennial

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This article highlights one New Jersey county's semiquincentennial planning and discusses Revolutionary War-era archival records available for public use.

Ben Franklin famously referred to New Jersey as “a barrel tapped at both ends,” critically positioned as it is between New York City and Philadelphia, and countless historians have referred to the state as the “Crossroads of the American Revolution.” As the Crossroads of the American Revolution National Heritage Area notes, “General George Washington spent more than one-quarter of his time as Commander-in-Chief in New Jersey, establishing dozens of headquarters here during the war. In fact, New Jersey saw nearly 600 battles and skirmishes, which involved both soldier and citizen in a daily struggle to survive.”¹

The Battle of Monmouth, also known as the Battle of Monmouth Court House, was the last skirmish of the Philadelphia campaign and proved to be pivotal to the American Revolution. On a hot and humid day, June 28, 1778, 46-year-old General George Washington and his Continental Army attacked General Sir Henry Clinton's British Army as the “Red Coats” were retreating across New Jersey from Philadelphia toward Sandy Hook. It was the biggest and longest one-day battle of the war. However, Monmouth County's Revolutionary War story is so much more than

¹ “About Crossroads of the American Revolution,” accessed 23 May 2023, <https://revolutionarynj.org/about-crossroads-of-the-american-revolution/>.

that. It's the story of families and loyalties divided. It's the story of men and women from different backgrounds attempting to navigate tumultuous and uncertain times, with many similarities to life in Monmouth County in 2023. There are heroes, villains, and everything in between. History, boring? No. Stories to tell? Yes! It's a great human drama that will leave you captivated and moved. Monmouth County was truly freedom's battleground, and understanding our revolutionary history can both inspire us and help us make sense of the world we live in today.

The America250 - Monmouth NJ Committee aims to ignite American and Monmouth County spirit, honor our history, and create experiences that people will be talking about for years to come. The Monmouth County Board of Commissioners has established the committee with the following purposes:

- Plan and provide guidance for Monmouth County's official observances of the 250th anniversary.
- Cooperate with national, regional, and statewide governmental entities and historical organizations.
- Coordinate interagency and municipal government participation in the celebration.

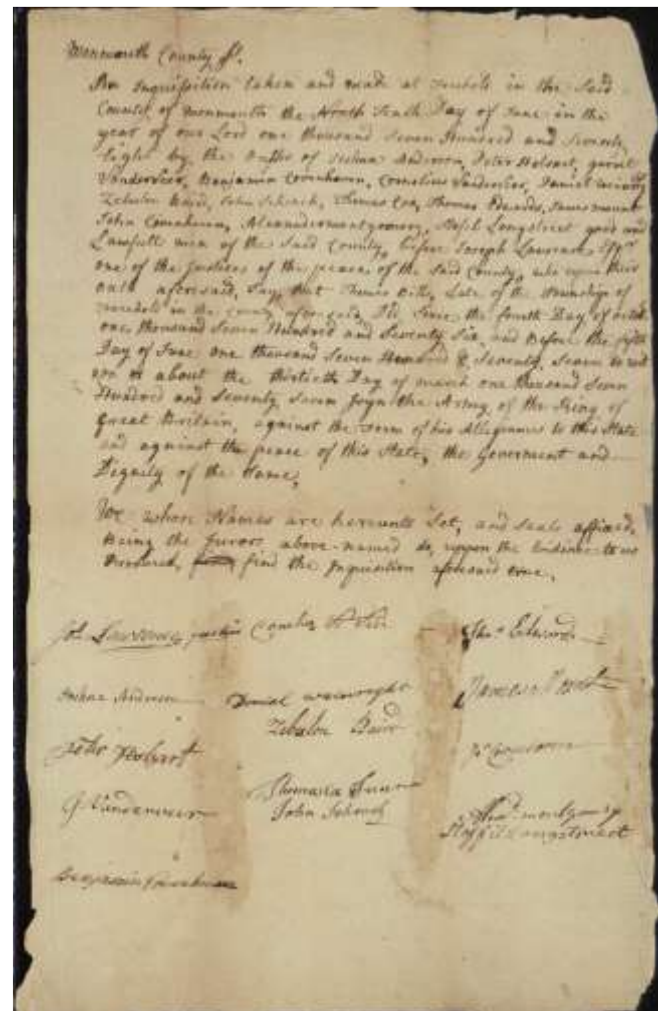
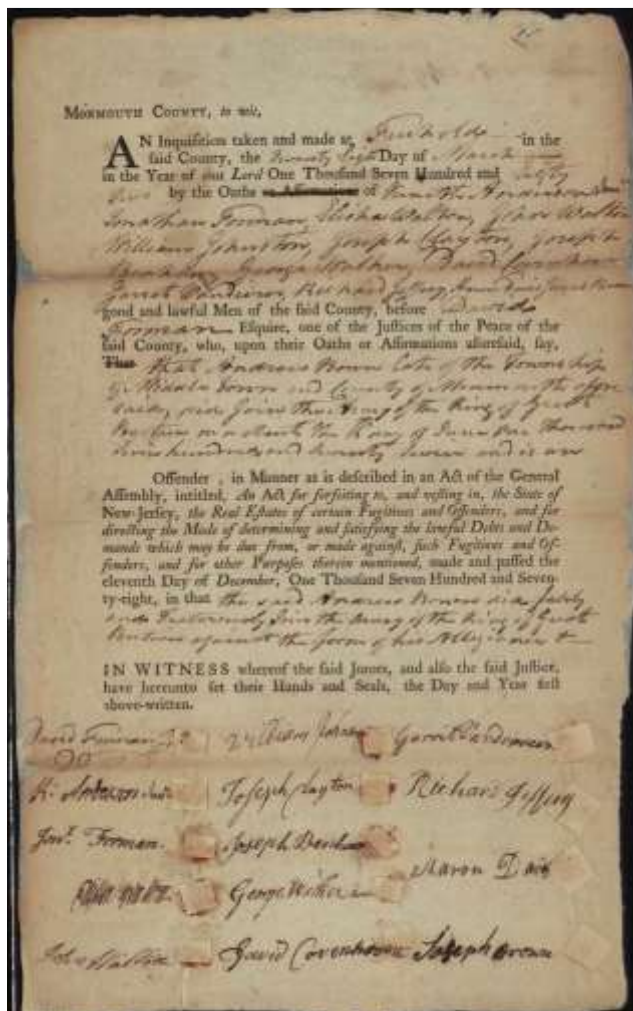
There are several ways to learn more about Monmouth County's Semiquincentennial celebration:

- Visit our website: www.MonmouthNJ250.org
- Follow us on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook @MonmouthNJ250.
- Connect with us on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/monmouthnj250/>.

Aiding our understanding of this period in Monmouth County's rich history are the Monmouth County Archives. The Monmouth County Archives operate under the direction of Monmouth County Clerk, Christine Giordano Hanlon, Esq. The Archives preserve, organize, and provide access to Monmouth County government records of enduring historic value and are retained on a

permanent basis. These records include documents pertaining to deeds, court cases, naturalizations, and many other subjects. These records are used for legal, genealogical, historical, and other research purposes. The Archives also work to educate the public about Monmouth County history through public programs and exhibits.²

The Archives contain thousands of records dating to the Colonial and Revolutionary War eras. Provided below are samples of Inquisition files selected by Monmouth County Clerk Archives Division Head, Gregg Gaal, and Research Archivist, Mary Hussey, because they represent a direct link to the rift between patriots and loyalists during the revolution. They also serve as examples of real-life action taken against any person who went against the cause.



² Learn more about the Monmouth County Archives at <https://www.monmouthcountyclerk.com/archives/>.

In October of 1776, New Jersey passed *An Act of New Jersey to Punish Traitors and Disaffected Persons*. Inquisitions were held, wherein three appointed commissioners presented evidence to a jury regarding the accused who were often not present at these events. A majority vote from the 24-member jury, rather than a unanimous decision, resulted in a later confiscation of the accused person's property. The Archives have 60 inquisitions and 110 confiscation records. Researchers can schedule a visit to the Archives Division to see how these records, and many others related to the Revolutionary War, might assist in their work.

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