

MIDDLESEX COUNTY

# HISTORY GUIDE

1762 – 1783

*A Revolutionary Story  
of Divided Loyalties*



**MIDDLESEX**  
COUNTY • NJ



## INTRODUCTION

# AMERICAN REVOLUTION

The American Revolution holds different significance across cities and counties. In Middlesex County, its impact was especially profound. Neighbors fought, homes were destroyed, and families were torn apart by questions of loyalty, liberty, and governance.

This guide invites you to explore real places where those moments happened. You'll find short history reads, interactive challenges, and chances to learn how everyday people helped shape a new nation.

Some activities are meant to spark your imagination. Others might encourage you to draw, write, or pose for photos. All are designed to connect you with the stories that unfolded right here in the towns that you know.

### **HISTORY LIVES HERE**

*Connect with  
places, moments,  
and voices  
from the past!*





## THE KEYS TO THE GUIDE

### *Fill Out Your Book*

Write, draw, snap photos, or bring the challenges to life in your own way. Use the pages in this book or bring your own notebook along.

### *Complete the Activities*

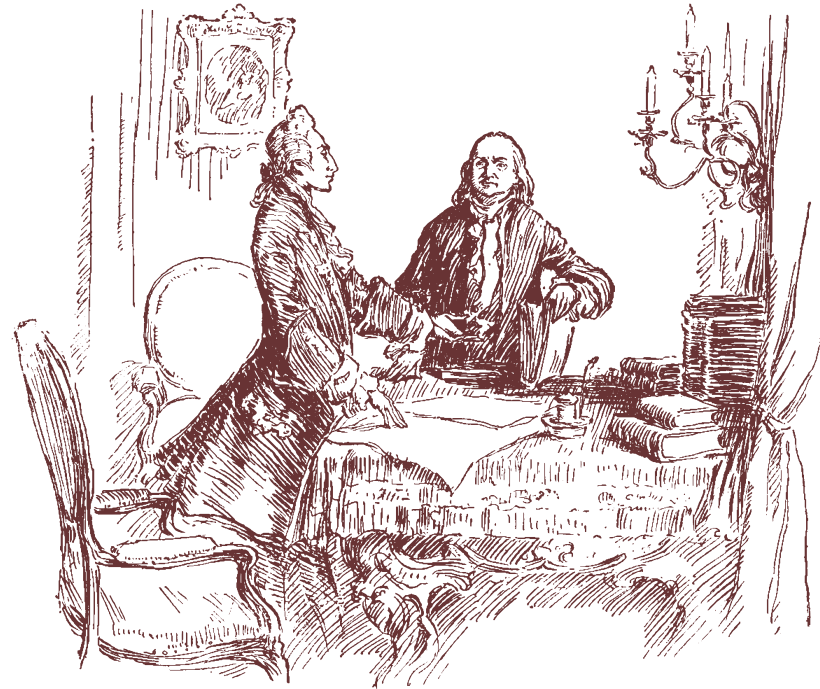
To be eligible for a prize, you must be a Middlesex County resident and complete all activities.

### *Submit Proof of Completion*



Scan to submit photos of your work and the places you visited (don't forget to include yourself!) and win the prize.

You can also tag your adventures with **#RevolutionReady** for a chance to be featured on our social media.



## PRE-REVOLUTION

### **The Governor, a Mansion, and a Family Divided**

For many, 1776 marks the beginning of the American Revolution. But the sparks that lit the fire started earlier, long before independence was declared, when King George III appointed William Franklin as the royal governor of New Jersey.

## *In February 1763,*

William officially became governor during a ceremony on the steps of what is now Perth Amboy's City Hall. He was popular at first, starting a farmers' welfare program, running lotteries to raise money for roads and bridges, and helping establish Queen's College—what would later become Rutgers University.

## *By 1774,*

the political climate had changed. Tensions between Britain and the colonies had grown, and William's role as royal governor placed him in a delicate position. He and his family moved into a grand home in Perth Amboy—a residence that reflected his status but also made his loyalties clear. **As unrest spread, William made a defining choice:**

***He sided with Britain,  
not the colonies!***

His father, Benjamin Franklin (who later became a founding father), tried to persuade him to join the colonial cause, but William remained loyal to the Crown. Benjamin had long hoped for a peaceful resolution. But after repeated failures to persuade British leaders, he gave up on compromise and

## **ACTIVITY: Photo Stop**



Take a photo at Rutgers University (originally Queen's College) or at the Proprietary House—and don't forget to check online for hours before you go.



supported independence, and his son's decision to stay loyal to the Crown deepened their divide.

## *In 1776,*

shortly after being declared a Loyalist enemy, William was placed under house arrest by the colonial militia and ultimately sent to prison in Connecticut. He never saw his wife, Elizabeth, again; she died soon after his arrest. Although the couple's belongings were later destroyed in a wartime fire, their home, the Proprietary House, still stands today in Perth Amboy.

## PRE-REVOLUTION

# Housing British Troops

After the French and Indian War, British troops remained in the colonies, and in 1765, Parliament passed the Quartering Act, requiring colonial governments to provide them with food, housing, and supplies. This act, along with others, became part of a growing list of laws that fed colonial frustration. People saw it as a sign of how little control they had over their own communities.

The colonists were expected to follow orders from across the ocean without having a seat at the table. The anger it caused didn't go away; it grew over time, adding to the momentum that would eventually lead the colonies into full-blown revolution.

*In Middlesex County, two sets of barracks were built to help house British troops.*

The New Brunswick barracks, finished in 1758, could hold up to 300 soldiers. A year later, one of the largest barracks in New Jersey was built in Perth Amboy. Even so, when British forces crowded the Raritan Valley during the Revolution, there still wasn't enough room. Soldiers spilled into private homes, and reactions depended on loyalties—some families were welcoming, while others felt like their homes had been taken over.

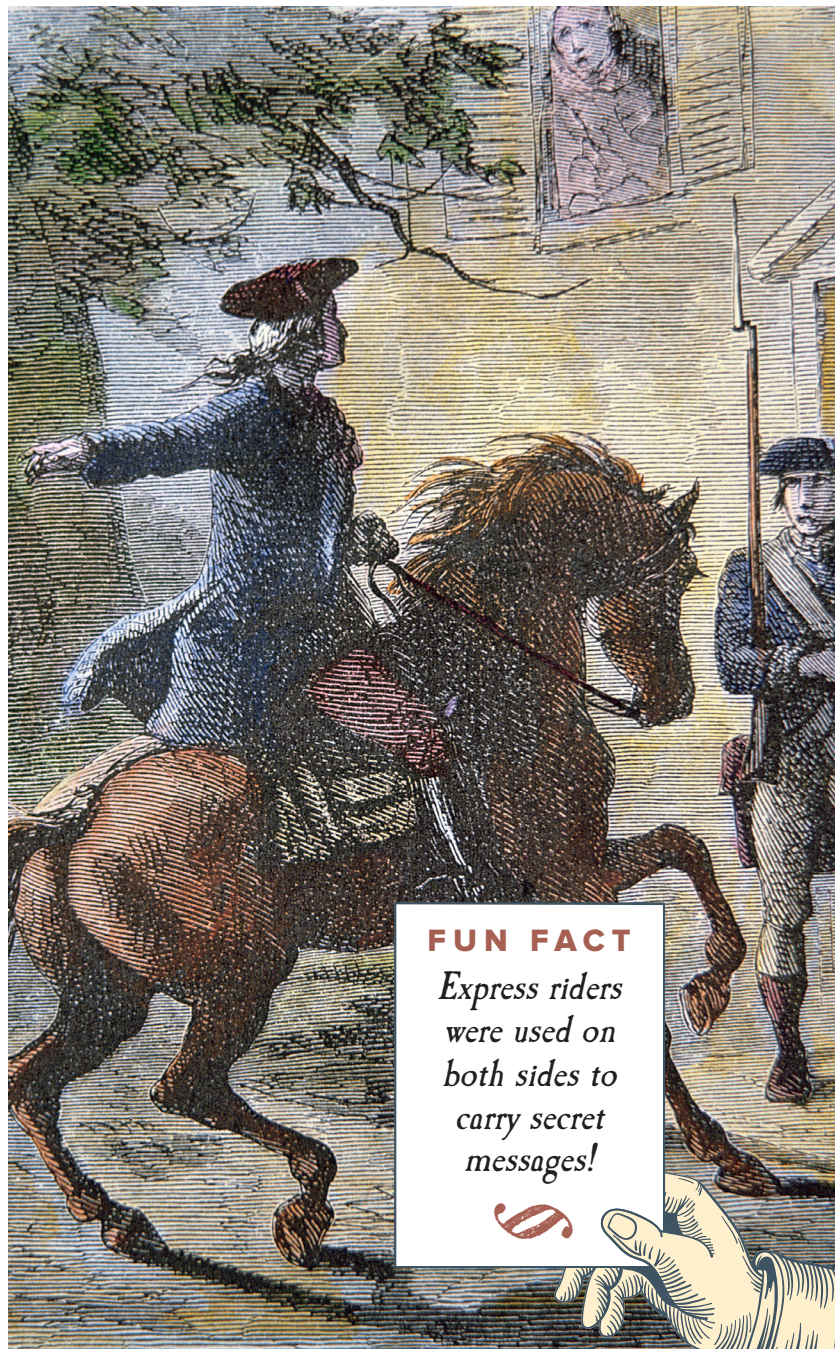
## ACTIVITY:

# Choose Your Side

Colonists who chose to break free from Britain were known as Patriots, while people like William Franklin who opted to stand by the Crown were referred to as Loyalists. If you were a colonist in 1765, would you be a Patriot or a Loyalist?

**Declare your allegiance by creating a sign to protest the British soldiers or welcome them in!**





#### FUN FACT

*Express riders were used on both sides to carry secret messages!*

## REVOLUTIONARY WAR

### The Spark in Middlesex County



In 1774, Middlesex County hosted a bold meeting of the Provincial Congress of New Jersey in New Brunswick. These early leaders were organizing in opposition to British rule, and it didn't go unnoticed. During the occupation of the County from December 1776 to June 1777, British troops launched targeted raids. 43 of 69 homes owned by local delegates were burned or looted. The damage was strategic to silence those advocating for independence.

***The first reports of the Revolutionary War didn't come by news article or town crier,***

***but arrived on horseback, in the middle of the night!***

On April 25, 1775, Nathaniel Herd of Woodbridge received word that fighting had broken out in Massachusetts. The message had been passed down by riders from Watertown, through Connecticut and New York, until it reached New Jersey. Herd wasted no time. He sent Samuel Parker to deliver the alarm to New Brunswick. Parker made the ride and arrived by midnight.

Private Collection Peter Newark American Pictures / Bridgeman Images.

There, local leaders James Neilson, Azariah Dunham, and William Oakey heard the news and sent it on to Princeton. The information kept moving, rider by rider, eventually reaching Philadelphia.

This relay of messengers helped spread the word that the colonies were officially at war. It also marked Middlesex County's earliest involvement in a growing struggle for independence.



## ACTIVITY: Photo Stop

**The Corner of Albany Street & Neilson Avenue**

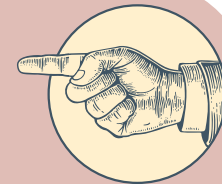
On the morning of July 9, 1776, colonists gathered at this corner to hear Colonel John Neilson, who commanded the New Jersey militia, read the Declaration of Independence. Snap a photo of yourself in this historic spot!

## Tactical Tip

### *Patriots*

**Liberty or Death!**

**Wear blue so your fellow Patriots recognize you.**



### *Loyalists*

**King George sent his finest regiments to settle the unrest here in the colonies. This will all be over soon—wear red to show your Loyalist pride!**



## REVOLUTIONARY WAR

### The War Comes Home

In November 1776, George Washington and his troops reached New Brunswick while retreating from British forces. They briefly used Cochrane's Tavern as HQ and destroyed the bridge over the Raritan River—today's Landing Lane Bridge—to slow the enemy's pursuit. Alexander Hamilton set up a cannon battery on the heights near the current Old Queens building at Rutgers and fired on British positions to buy more time, but they were rapidly closing in. Washington's forces withdrew, and for seven months, British troops occupied New Brunswick.

Daily life changed dramatically. Some buildings were overtaken by British soldiers. Local supplies were seized. Movement and communication were restricted. Families had to adapt quickly—some by keeping a low profile, others by quietly supporting the Revolutionary cause.

## ACTIVITY:

### Meet the Past

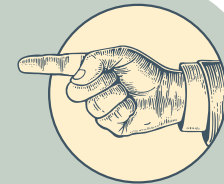
East Jersey Old Town Village, Piscataway

From soldiers to farmers, a blacksmith, a stone carver, a tailor (and even George Washington!), the historical interpreters at The Village are ready to share all about life in Middlesex County before, during, and after the American Revolution.

## Tactical Tip

### *Patriots*

**Remain vigilant. Some who are loyal to the Crown walk among you. Find an interpreter or exhibit that supports your cause and write a coded message to share only with trusted allies.**



### *Loyalists*

**Make haste! The militia approaches! Find a place in The Village where you can sketch a quick escape route.**

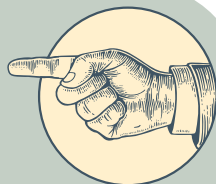
### BONUS ACTIVITY:

## Take The Tour

**A Glimpse of Life on the Raritan River in the 1770s!**

Use the QuestUpon app to take the self-guided, augmented reality tour, “Uncovering Raritan Landing.” You can enjoy this immersive activity right from your phone. Fortunately, cell reception is much better now than back in 1776!

### Get the Lay of the Land



**While you're at The Village, Cornelius Low House Museum, or Raritan Landing, take one of our self-guided, augmented reality walking tours. Explore the area, answer trivia, discover artifacts, and watch out for a pig on the loose!**



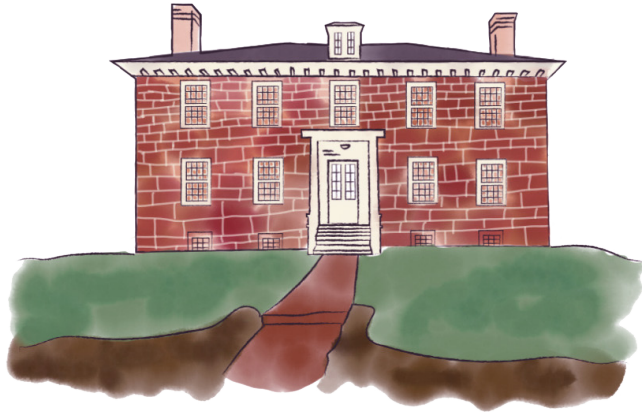


## REVOLUTIONARY WAR Fighting for Freedom

During the Revolutionary War, Middlesex County housed free and enslaved African Americans who played vital and often overlooked roles.

*Some saw the British promise  
of freedom as their chance  
to escape a life of slavery,  
while others placed hope  
in the American cause!*

Peter Williams was one of those people. Enslaved by a Loyalist, he escaped and joined the American militia, serving with the Continental Army and later being freed. After the war, he moved to New York City and became the custodian of the John Street Methodist Church. His son, Peter Williams Jr., would go on to become a leading anti-slavery minister and advocate.



In Raritan Landing, Lissey McIntyre was enslaved by Cornelius Low (whose house you may have visited). After Low's death, she left Raritan Landing with her husband, Cornelius McIntyre, a miller who had likely been indentured until age 21.

## *Their family received a Certificate of Freedom*

***issued by Brigadier General Birch, granting them  
safe passage to Canada after the war.***

Their names appear in the *Book of Negroes*, a British military ledger that documented freed Black Loyalists.

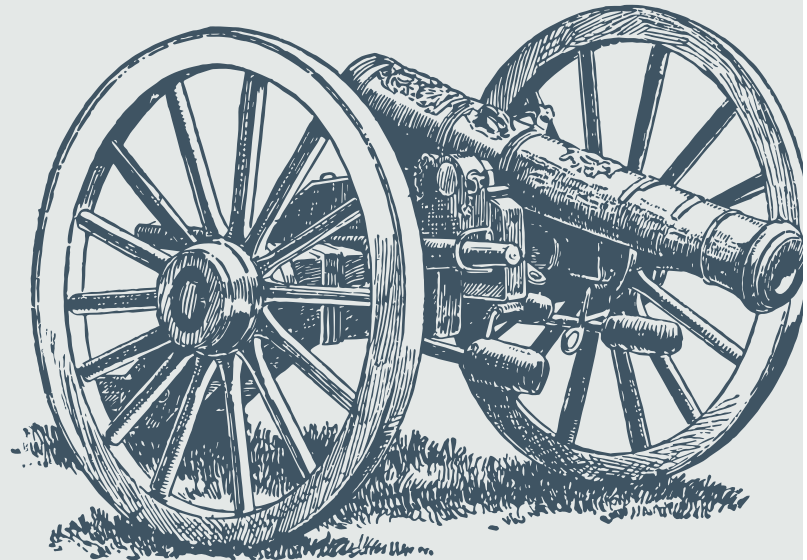
Freedom wasn't guaranteed. Some African Americans gained emancipation for their service, while others were re-enslaved despite promises made. Many, like the McIntyres, chose to resettle in Canada, often in Nova Scotia, home to Black Loyalist communities.

### ACTIVITY:

## Visit the Exhibit

**East Jersey Old Town Village, Piscataway**

Tour the first floor of the Cato Hoagland House, owned by a freed Black man from 1862 to 1899, as part of a new and expanding exhibit. It features historical objects and primary texts that tell stories of enslaved and free African Americans who called Middlesex County home.





#### **FUN FACT**

*Bennett's Island disappeared as rivers shifted and land was developed!*

## **REVOLUTIONARY WAR**

### **Battles, Skirmishes, and Surprise Raids**

Middlesex County saw both battles and skirmishes during the Revolution. A few months before the larger Battle of Short Hills in June 1777, local militia struck an early blow closer to home. On February 18, Colonel John Neilson led 200 local soldiers in a surprise attack on Bennett's Island, along the Raritan River, capturing over 60 Loyalist troops and key British officers. The plan worked, and the colonists lost only one man.

Strategic raids like this undermined British control. Killing officers, blocking supply routes, and disrupting operations helped slow British advances in the region. These smaller actions might not have made headlines, but they gave American forces a critical advantage and lifted local spirits.

Later that year, British officer John Graves Simcoe led his own raid through South Amboy and the Raritan Valley. Dressed as American dragoons, his troops tried to burn boats and seize New Jersey's governor. But local militia ambushed Simcoe near Quibbletown, and he was wounded, captured, and later exchanged.

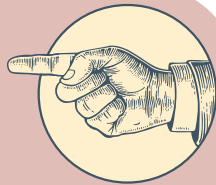
### ACTIVITY:

## Draw a Battle Plan

Known as the Battle of Bennett's Island, Colonel John Neilson's surprise attack was a success, thanks in large part to his strategy of attacking before dawn.

Use the map to plot out your own battle plan.

### Tactical Tip

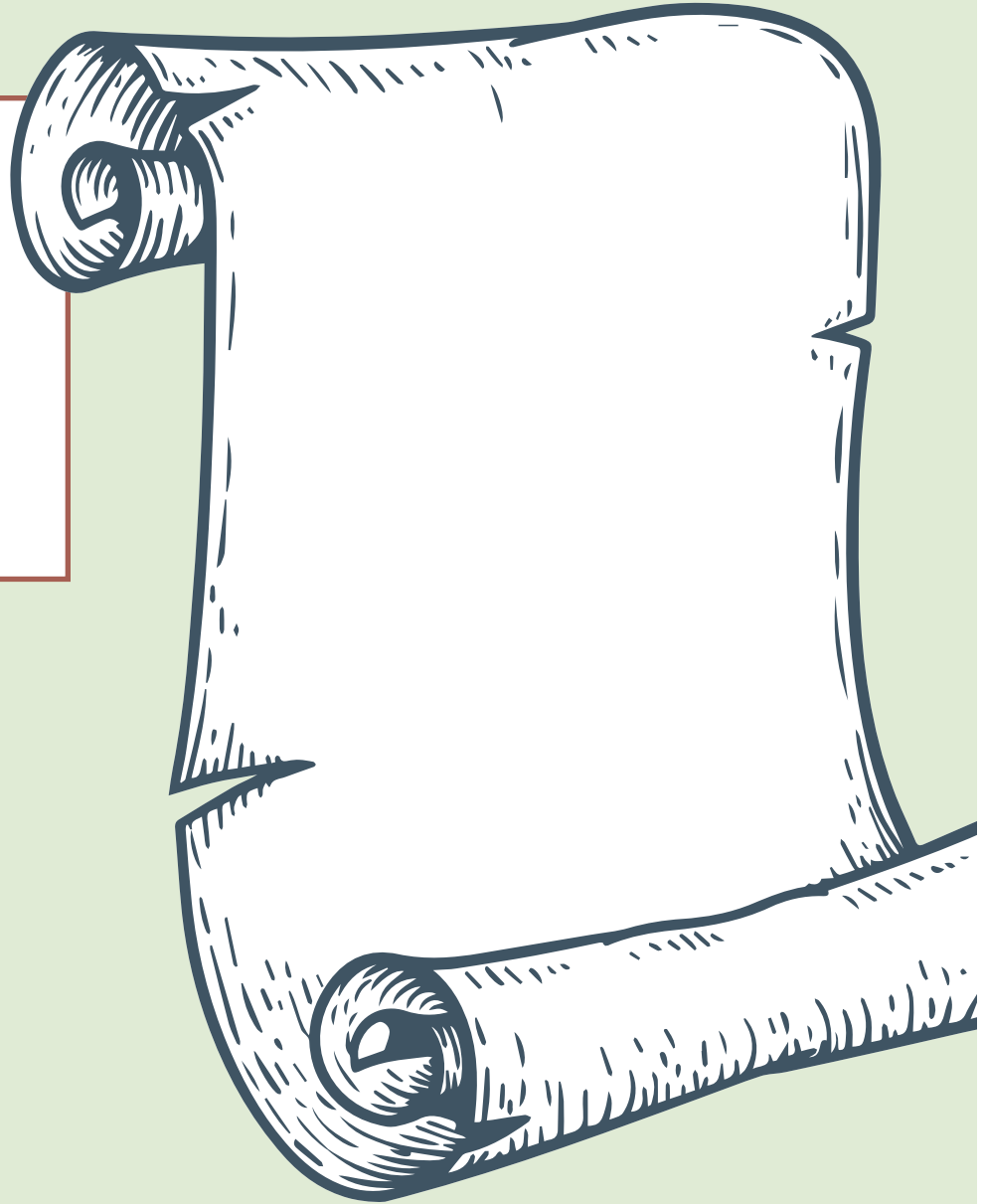


#### *Patriots*

Darkness offers an advantage, but only for so long. Daylight breaks! Be swift in your attack!

#### *Loyalists*

Watch out! Supply ships on the Raritan are at risk! Watch the woods for artillery.



## REVOLUTIONARY WAR

# The British Leave Middlesex County

By the summer of 1777, British troops made a push to defeat Washington's army in New Jersey. On June 26, the Battle of Short Hills unfolded across parts of central New Jersey, including nearby Scotch Plains, Metuchen, and parts of present-day Edison. Though outnumbered, American troops held firm long enough to let Washington's forces retreat to safety.

The British had hoped to defeat colonial troops and capture Washington. Instead, Continental soldiers and local militia delayed British advances to enable his escape into the safety of the Watchung Mountains. Within days, they began pulling out of New Jersey.

*By June 30, British forces had fully evacuated Perth Amboy!*

Their departure marked a turning point for Middlesex County. The occupation lasted months and disrupted nearly every aspect of daily life. Now, as the British left, towns across the County began the slow process of rebuilding and imagining what a truly free future might look like.



## ACTIVITY: Photo Stop

Visit Perth Amboy to snap a photo in front of the oldest city hall in continuous use in the U.S.

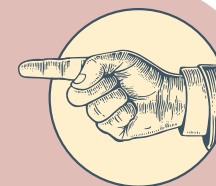
### Tactical Tip

#### *Patriots*

The British are gone—  
stand tall as you snap your  
victory photo! Freedom starts here.

#### *Loyalists*

The tide has turned against you!  
Best to keep to the shadows.



### ACTIVITY:

## Imagine Your Role

With British forces gone, America can finally move forward. Take a moment to consider what this means for you as a Patriot or a Loyalist, and what part you might play in creating the future of the nation.

**Write about your next move!**

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## POST-REVOLUTION

### Celebrations

After years of conflict, the war finally came to an end in 1783. George Washington passed through New Brunswick one last time, and in his honor,

*Local leaders gathered at  
a New Brunswick tavern  
to offer 13 toasts:*

***One for each newly formed state!***

In the years that followed, Middlesex County took pride in its contributions to the war. Washington spent his last night before becoming president in Woodbridge, staying at the Cross Keys Tavern. He spent more time in New Jersey during the war than in any other state.

New Jersey became the first state to ratify the Bill of Rights, doing so at Perth Amboy City Hall. The very buildings where documents were signed and ideas debated still stand, ready to be explored and reveal how freedom took root here.

#### FUN FACT

*Taverns acted  
like newsrooms;  
headlines were  
posted on walls for  
patrons to read!*



#### ACTIVITY:

### Toast like Washington!

When Washington and local leaders gathered in 1783, they toasted to the 13 original states.

Sort all 13 states (listed alphabetically) in the order they officially ratified the Constitution, then raise your arms for a victory cheer!

- |                |           |
|----------------|-----------|
| Connecticut    | 1. _____  |
| Delaware       | 2. _____  |
| Georgia        | 3. _____  |
| Maryland       | 4. _____  |
| Massachusetts  | 5. _____  |
| New Hampshire  | 6. _____  |
| New Jersey     | 7. _____  |
| New York       | 8. _____  |
| North Carolina | 9. _____  |
| Pennsylvania   | 10. _____ |
| Rhode Island   | 11. _____ |
| South Carolina | 12. _____ |
| Virginia       | 13. _____ |

ANSWER KEY ON NEXT PAGE

### ANSWER KEY

1. Delaware 2. Pennsylvania 3. New Jersey 4. Georgia  
5. Connecticut 6. Massachusetts 7. Maryland 8. South  
Carolina 9. New Hampshire 10. Virginia 11. New York  
12. North Carolina 13. Rhode Island

### ACTIVITY:

## Make a Modern Toast

Write or say a few words in honor of General Washington, the Continental Army, and the everyday men and women who sacrificed so much to help free our nation from British rule and establish the “Great American Experiment.”

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### FUN FACT

*The Bill of Rights  
secured protections  
like free speech  
and freedom of  
religion!*



## MIDDLESEX COUNTY History Lives Here



### *The American Revolution unfolded on the roads, rivers & doorsteps of Middlesex County*

Families faced impossible choices, leaders made daring moves, and everyday people stepped into places that made history.

The people who lived here shaped the future of the nation one decision at a time. Their courage and determination are still visible in the buildings that remain, the stories passed down, and the communities that grew from their efforts.

*This guide is an invitation to remember, reflect, and reconnect. Explore the places, share your story, and carry their legacy forward here in Middlesex County.*

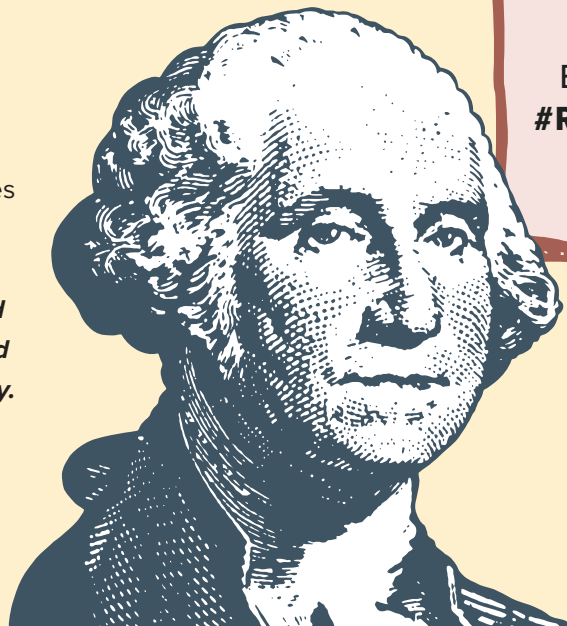
## FINISHED THE GUIDE? Congratulations!



Scan here to upload your completed activities, journal entries, drawings, and photos to get your prize!

### *Want to Share More?*

Tag Your  
Experience with  
**#RevolutionReady**





TAG & SHARE YOUR  
**STORY**

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