



TODAY'S SUNBEAM

Hancock House massacre remembered

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By **REBECCA PURCHASE**
Staff Writer

LOWERALLOWAYS CREEK TWP. On March 21, 1778 British forces quietly made their way up the Alloways Creek determined to stop the supply of food and supplies from the area to Washington's troops at Valley Forge. The order was given to "Go ... spare no one ... put all to death ... give no quarter." And so each March groups of volunteers come together to commemorate what has come to be known as the Revolutionary War Massacre at the William Hancock House.

The day-long event that has often been played out in the rain and chilling wind is a labor of love for those who participate. It allows all who visit to become eyewitnesses to history as the house, tavern and cabin come alive with "colonists" demonstrating life as it was at the time of the Revolution. Militia members camp around the house, meals are cooked, music played and in the afternoon the Hancock House is once more raided, a living lesson in history, better than any classroom and free for all to see.

This year the committee welcomed a special guest and speaker. Mark Dilonno, columnist and Assistant Managing Editor of the Sunbeam's sister paper, the Star Ledger of Newark, came down to give support and to ask for support. In addition to his newspaper work which earned him a Pulitzer nomination, Dilonno has written three books about New Jersey.

His first book about pleasures of traveling off the highway in New Jersey (Back Roads New Jersey) encouraged him to continue his quest to know more about the state where he was born.

His second book, New Jersey's Coastal Heritage, helped those in and out of New Jersey understand that South Jersey also has a shore. It included stories of such towns as Bivalve and Shellpile and other stops in Salem and Cumberland Counties.

His third book was started in the mid '90s when he realized his children were learning about the contributions of Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania and Virginia but nothing about the role of New Jersey in colonial times in general and during the Revolution in particular. He put together a book that details 350 Revolutionary War sites with exact addresses that were significant to the outcome of the war that shaped our nation.

The book is part of Dilonno's crusade to get New Jerseyans to recognize the treasures in their own back yard. His is a crusade to change the image of New Jersey from Tony Soprano to Richard Stockton. It is a crusade to get the state to send visitors to places like Madison, Monmouth and Hancock's Bridge instead of the casinos of Atlantic City. On Saturday of course, he was preaching to the choir. He encouraged that choir to keep singing to their legislators and anyone else that will listen about how important it is not only to preserve New Jersey history but to show it off to everyone one in and out of the state.

Dilonno then joined coordinator Alicia Bjornson for a tour of the house and cabin to see the continuing restoration efforts. The cabin next to the house has been an ongoing project. This year, with the fireplace finished, Barbara Johns was able to move her cooking demonstration from camp fire to hearth. The "troops" camped around the house were treated to beef stew with potatoes, carrots and onions, pumpkin, carrot soup and cardamom cookies made by her husband especially for (and only for) the event each year.

There are several events each year at the Hancock House to learn more visit their Web site at

www.fohh.20fr.com.

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