



Volume 24, Issue 2 **The Raritan-Millstone Heritage Alliance** Spring, 2020

THE RARITAN-MILLSTONE HERITAGE IS HAVING AN UNUSUAL YEAR!

Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, all Raritan-Millstone Heritage Alliance events beginning in March through May, 2020 have been cancelled. This has included the March meeting of the Board of Directors at the Hillsborough Reformed Church with the distinguished speaker and author, Surinder Kaur Paur, at which time we were to approve the 2020 annual budget; the annual meeting in April at the Royce Brook Country Club, with John Daniel of the Vermeule family speaking about "Lost Fort of the Plainfields" and when we were to elect directors; and the May board meeting at St. John's Episcopal Church, Somerville, with a talk about Doris Duke, "The Duchess of South Somerville," when we were to have elected officers for the coming twelve months. We thank Program Chair Chris Retz for having made all these arrangements which had to be canceled.

The Board regrets to announce the passing of our Directors Robert S. Mettler of East Millstone, distinguished historian, churchman and community leader and Wendy Kennedy of Monroe Township, past Commissioner for the Monroe Township Preservation Commission and docent at historic Morven, Princeton, NJ. Robert had only recently joined our board while Wendy served on our board for several years and also was at one time Vice President. Wendy and Robert were devoted Alliance board members and will be greatly missed as are our two previous board members who passed away in 2019, John Allen and Jan ten Broeke.

We continue to be grateful for our faithful individual and site members who have paid their annual dues for 2020 and encourage those who have yet to pay for 2020 to remit their dues now. Your contributions make it possible for us to print and distribute our "**Historic Sites in the Raritan & Millstone Valleys**," Fifth Edition, published in 2019. Committee Chair Karen Keithler and her committee since its printing in the Summer of 2019, have faithfully distributed more than 6,000 copies to historic sites in Central New Jersey. The complete Guide is also available on our web site www.raritanmillstone.org.

The RMHA is pleased to welcome contributing writer George W. Stillman, Sr. with his two-part article on the life of Abraham Beach, Loyalist Minister at Christ Church, New Brunswick and St. James Church, Piscataway. The property on which the Rutgers Preparatory School, Somerset NJ is situated, was once owned by Abraham Beach. Beach was one of the six founders of Rutgers Prep, the oldest independent preparatory school in New Jersey. It opened for classes in New Brunswick in 1768 under a charter granted by King George III in 1766 for both a college and a grammar school, initially Queen's College (now Rutgers University). George W. Stillman, Sr. is a distinguished researcher and writer from Colonia (Woodbridge Township), New Jersey. His research and writing form a portion of the work that was developed concerning the "Battle of the Short Hills" and getting this site nominated to the National Register of Historic Places as the Short Hills Battlefield Historic District. Please see The RMHA "Guide" for more information on these five historic sites.

WHAT IS THE RMHA GUIDE?

The nearly 200 Raritan & Millstone River Valley sites presented in our Guidebook are located throughout Central New Jersey, primarily in Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, and Somerset Counties; It also includes Sites in Hunterdon and Union County.

This guidebook does not aim to be a comprehensive guide to all sites of interest, but instead consists of those with a shared history within the entire Raritan-Millstone watershed.

IN MEMORIAM
Barbara Stack, Kearny Cottage

WHY ARE THESE TWO RIVER VALLEYS

SO IMPORTANT TO PROMOTE?

These rivers run through valleys rich in the unique heritage and culture of Central New Jersey, an area that has continually contributed to the strength of the United States. The Guide serves to encourage interest in history and scenic tourism of these significant sites.

RARITAN-MILLSTONE HERITAGE ALLIANCE

P.O. Box 5583, Somerset, NJ 08875-5583
www.raritanmillstone.org

An organization of individuals, organizations, and sites working to promote preservation and understanding of the rich, eventful, and cultural heritage of significant historical, educational, environmental and cultural sites located in Central New Jersey.

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The Board of Directors meets on the third or fourth Saturday of March, May, September, November at designated historic and museum member sites in the region.

The Executive Committee meets in January and June

YOUR LINK TO THE PUBLIC:

The Link is on a quarterly publication schedule. News of major upcoming events for possible placement in the newsletter may be mailed, emailed, or faxed to the following address. Any questions, please contact:

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WHO WAS DINA?

Submitted by Ann M. Suydam

Dina Van Bergh was an important woman in the history of New Brunswick. She came to New Brunswick from Amsterdam with her husband Dr. John Frelinghuysen, the pastor of First Reformed Church, who died shortly after her arrival in 1786. Her strength and spirituality attracted the attention of Dr. Jacob Hardenbergh who courted and later married her. After Hardenbergh's death, Dina continued to be an important spiritual leader in New Brunswick. Her resolve in times of difficulty and service to the community reminds First Reformed Church of its historic roots. Her namesake is an inspiration for the Dina's Dwellings project, which will provide homes for women who fight for a better life for themselves and their families.



In 1971, a man set fire to the sanctuary of the First Reformed Church, angry that the church was providing sanctuary to his partner who was a victim of abuse. The fire destroyed much of the historic sanctuary, including the altar and most of the historic stained glass windows. Over the past few years, the congregation has diminished in number. Though a still vibrant community, they no longer have the resources to maintain an historic building of the church's size. The fire's destruction and dwindling congregation numbers could be seen as signs of a church that is at the end of its days. However, they can also be the catalyst for many new opportunities.

Concerned congregation members and community leaders came up with a creative solution to address their problems in a way which could help solve a greater social issue. One which affected their own church. While some faith based organizations support and fund affordable housing and adaptive reuse efforts, the Town Clock CDC, with Dina's Dwellings will be the first to integrate affordable housing into a sanctuary space. Through the church was originally destroyed for providing sanctuary for a victim of abuse, its futile rebuilding will ensure that the space is used to permanently provide sanctuary for these victims.



Abraham Beach — The Peaceful Persevering Loyalist Minister in the mist of the American Revolution

By George W. Stillman Sr. 2020

Part 1. Early Life Experiences to Young Adulthood

INTRODUCTION. On August 29, 1740, a child was born in Cheshire, New Haven County, Connecticut named Abraham Beach. To his young eyes it would have seemed like being born in a pleasantly calm land with serene skies but without knowing it was more like the eye of a storm. The dark clouds would have been too far off to see, being in the distant neighborhoods of New York and Massachusetts. He would not have known of the political unrest between the powerful force of Britain and France which struggled for control of North America's rich resources. He would not have known the significant unrest of the native population which was split between the European powers. Less than one hundred years had passed since King Phillip's War had nearly annihilated large regions of New England. Still to be seen would have been the recognition of moral issues involving slavery. New England had been caught up in this when it embraced strong money returns in the slave sea trade market. By the 1730's and 1740's the Great Awakening for religious revival had arrived and would have an impact on the course of much of Abraham Beach's life. While the emergence of the Great Awakening did cause a degree of turmoil in the colonies due to differences in religious opinions, it was also responsible for encouraging the founding of educational institutions.

Elnathan Beach and Hannah Wooster were the parents of Abraham. Elnathan and Hannah both had ancestry to the small New Haven Colony founded in 1637 by English pilgrims and merchants. It's location near the Long Island Sound afforded excellent opportunities for trade. Unfortunately, Abraham would have only a few short years before the realities of life would strike him.



Old Cheshire, New Haven Cty., Connecticut

In 1742, when Abraham was only 2 years old, tragedy struck his family with the death of his father, a merchant. His father had been born in 1698 and was described as a man of high character and respectability. Elnathan's marriage to Abraham's mother Hannah Wooster in 1738 had not been his first. The first had been to Abigail Ufford in 1720. Elnathan and Abigail had lived in Wallingford and produced six children before she died at a young 38 years old in 1738. Elnathan was buried at Cheshire and was given an inscription on his tomb stating, "Here lies the body of Captain Elnathan Beach, a gentleman, who from a small fortune, by honest industry and diligent application to business, raised a very considerable estate." "And as he was, perhaps, the first in Connecticut to raise a fund for the relief of the poor, so he deserves the particular place in the memory of all who wish well of mankind". After the death of Captain Elnathan, Abraham's mother, Hannah married Dr. Jonathan Bull perhaps by 1745. Dr. Bull had studied medicine and surgery in Boston for seven years and was one of

Captain David Wooster grew famous in the King Georges War and the expeditions to capture French Louisbourg (1745). As a result of his military exploits Abraham's uncle was granted an audience with King George II in England where the captain became a favorite of the court and given a commission as a captain in the 51st Foot Regiment of William Pepperill, "hero of Louisbourg". The year 1745 was also special to Uncle David as it was the year in which he married Marie Clapp, daughter of Thomas Clapp, president of Yale College.



18th Century Yale College Connecticut

Following the marriage of Hannah and Dr. Bull, Abraham moved to Hartford with his mother and stepfather. At Hartford, Abraham Beach received his elementary school education. Two new half-siblings joined Abraham in Hartford with the births of Jonathan Bull (1746) and Hannah Bull (1747). At the young age of thirteen (1753), Abraham Beach entered into Yale College. He was joined by his older half sibling Samuel Beach who was sixteen years old. Both boys were fortunate to come from well-to-do families and both appear to have been exceptional students. While very satisfied with his time at Yale, Abraham Beach expressed deep dissatisfaction over what would now be the equivalent of hazing. This was introduced by the English schools and was forced on the Freshmen by the higher classes to do menial tedious jobs. According to a family member, this was an abhorrence to Abraham, "calculated to engender in both parties the worst feeling of human nature." Still, while attending his studies at Yale, Abraham developed a keen appreciation for the instructions provided by Mr. Thomas Clapp, president of Yale. Even though Mr. Clapp had a tendency to be pugnacious and embroiled in controversy he was also instrumental in trying to modernize Yale in collaboration with the great educator Rev. Samuel Johnson. Among the changes instituted was the inclusion of math and science into the curriculum. An improved method was introduced for the library and new buildings were added on the campus. In 1757 Abraham and Samuel Beach finished their degree of Master of Arts (A.M.) together. Abraham was noted as having gained a reputation for outstanding scholarship and was selected to give the class Valedictory address. Following their graduation, Samuel returned to Wallingford while Abraham returned to his stepfather's home in Main St. Hartford. While there, he probably began to ponder over the possibility of considering a career in a mercantile business.

War had broken out in 1754 again between England and France and was still going strong when Abraham Beach graduated in 1757. The first few years of the war had been going badly for the English forces. Although a supporter of the English King's cause, Abraham did not enlist as a soldier even though his uncle David Wooster, now a Colonel of Connecticut Provincials was seeking recruits. Instead, Abraham decided to accompany the troops as a sutler. Although independent from the army, the sutler was a person who followed the army and sold provisions to the soldiers. Although his actual service time is unclear, he likely served between 1758 and 1759 when Colonel Wooster and the Connecticut troops were sent to Fort Ticonderoga, then known as Fort Carillon, to battle the French. By 1763, the French and Indian War drew to a close with France losing much of its American possessions to England. Because of the immense expense of the war, Britain was saddled with an overwhelming national debt which they wished

to also pass along to the colonies. Thus began the sore issue of unwanted taxation. By this time Abraham Beach had finished his time as a sutler and returned to Hartford where he opened up a store. In October 1764, Thomas Green had arrived in Hartford with intend of opening a newspaper called the Connecticut Courant. In the first edition, Abraham placed an advertisement which stated, *“Abraham Beach Near the South Meeting House in Hartford, exchanges choice Saltertudas & Anguilla SALT for FLAX-SEED, on the best Terms.”* More surprising was a rumor around Hartford that the first issue “00” was written by Abraham Beach, now considered the oldest continuous newspaper in the US. The rumor involving Abraham seemed to matter to the local colonists because Thomas Green was a life-long Anglican whom the people felt might be inclined to remain loyal to the King. It also coincided with the beginning of Abraham Beach’s path to conversion to the Anglican faith. To add to the turmoil of the time, by 1765, Abraham was reported as the Hartford Collector of Taxes.

In 1714 Samuel Johnson, then a young student and a future mentor of Abraham Beach, was an advocate of the era of Enlightenment. Samuel was overwhelmed to learn of a donation of 800 books for what was to become Yale College. The donation included works by Francis Bacon, John Locke, Isaac Newton and other Enlightenment authors. Johnson would later write, *“All this was like a flood of day to his low state of mind [and] he found himself like one at once emerging out of the glimmer of twilight into the full sunshine of open day;”* These words would likely have fit the mind of Abraham Beach as he chose in 1765 to make major adult life decisions for himself, beginning with his conversion as a communicant of the Anglican faith. No doubt Abraham Beach must have been influenced by Rev. Johnson’s philosophies on nature, life, religion, morality and happiness. In reflecting on Johnson’s view of morality and happiness, “happiness depended upon a composed state of mind in possession of truth and not in false pleasures”. Johnson favored respect between various religious denominations which also was to become a favored point of Abraham Beach. By early 1723 Samuel Johnson had himself travelled to England and became an Anglican missionary priest. He returned later in 1723 to Connecticut to continue his lifelong ambition as an educator and eventually was a founder of Columbia University in New York. Upon his return to Connecticut, Johnson mentored 63 Yale graduates, between 1724 and 1772, who desired to take up Anglican orders. One of these students, of course, was Abraham Beach. By 1765, Abraham seems to have given up a career as a merchant and approached the clergy about his liturgical interests. He began the pursuit of studies preparatory to ordination under the direction of his uncle, Rev. John Beach and with Rev. Samuel Johnson. A group of Connecticut clergy provided him a very complementary letter of recommendation. Although Rev. Samuel Johnson had been busy starting King College (Columbia), performing church services and writing, he still found time to write an attachment for Abraham to the clergy’s recommendations as follows: *“he has ever since I have met him appeared to be ever so hopeful a candidate, and is generally well spoken of, that I doubt not that he will grow a very useful missionary, and I wish he may be placed at New Brunswick.”*

To Be Continued -----

The Edison Job Corps Academy recently named the school's campus library in honor of the literary legacy of Joyce Kilmer, New Brunswick's most famous writer. The one- room library is decorated with memorabilia about Kilmer, the journalist for the ***New York Times***, and World War I officer, best known for his poem "Trees." Sgt. Joyce Kilmer was born December 6, 1886 and died in an heroic attack on a German machine- gun nest at the Battle of Chateau Thierry in France.

Named Alfred Joyce Kilmer, he preferred to be called Joyce Kilmer. He was educated at the Rutgers Preparatory School and Rutgers College but graduated from Columbia University, New York. His military exploits persuaded the U.S. Department of the Army to name its nearby World-War-II embarkation base in Piscataway as Camp Kilmer.

"Trees"

I think that I shall never see
 A poem as lovely as a tree
 A tree whose hungry mouth is pressed
 Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;
 A tree that looks at God all day
 And lifts her leafy arms to pray;
 A tree that may in summer wear
 A nest of robins in her hair;
 Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
 Who intimately lives with rain.
 Poems are made by fools like me,
 But only God can make a tree



JOYCE KILMER HOUSE

17 Joyce Kilmer Avenue

New Brunswick, NJ

Joyce Kilmer's birthplace was originally a Dutch farmhouse built in 1780, with Greek revival additions dating from the 1830's. It is considered one of the oldest remaining structures in New Brunswick. Tel: 732-745-5117, Hours: By Appointment, Parking: Street.

RARITAN MILLSTONE HERITAGE ALLIANCE

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- Membership Fees**
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 - Site \$35
 - Household \$50

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Thank you!
Visit our website: raritanmillstone.org

The Raritan-Millstone Heritage Alliance consists of committed individuals and organizations representing sites within the region of Raritan and Millstone systems. In an area that has continually contributed to the strength of the United States, we seek through our programs to promote, protect and preserve an understanding of our rich historical, cultural and educational heritage as we work to be a model for current and future generations by promoting the rich heritage of our American society.