

SPRINGDALE'S HISTORY

By Harold H. (Hap) Heins, Sr. – written 1980-1987¹ - (died 12/12/1999 age 98)

The current location of the Springdale Golf Club has a rich and deep history. The headlines are well known - the golf course was built on the Stockton Farm which was the site of a skirmish in the American Revolutionary War. Fortunately, one of our past members, Harold H. Heins, Sr., was fascinated by this history and inspired to conduct the painstaking research necessary to document its ownership back to 1696 and describe in detail the location and nature of the fighting between the American and British forces that occurred on Springdale in 1777.

Part I – Springdale's History

The area on which our golf course is located has an interesting and exciting past. Because it was the most desirable tract in what was to become the greater Princeton area it was the first to be purchased by the first settler in the area. It is also singular because much of that land remained with that family and descendants until we acquired it in 1899.

We will review the interesting history of our area in four articles; the first purchase by Richard Stockton (grandfather of the signer), Joseph Stockton who built Springdale farm, the area's part in the Battle of Princeton, and a repeat of Norvell Samuel's excellent review of our recent history.

In explanation of the research represented here, some of this material was uncovered in an intensive effort to determine the course of the "Back Road" over which General Washington's army approached Prince Town on that morning of Jan. 3rd. 1777.

This road crossed our golf course. We will describe its course later. As six Quaker families, who acquired all the land from Province Line to Harrison St., cleared their lands, they hauled logs by ox carts to a saw mill built on the Millstone river and located several hundred yards up river from the present canal aqueduct over Lake Carnegie. This road, sometimes called the Saw Mill Road, is not shown on any maps of early Princeton at the Historical Society or in the map room at Firestone.

We begin with the patriarch Richard Stockton who, in 1696, purchased from Daniel Brinson 400 acres. This tract was described as between Springdale Rd. and present Washington Rd. and from the path (Rt. 27 – Nassau – Stockton) south to Stony Brook. In 1697 another Quaker acquired the eastern part of this tract, the area between present University Place and Washington Rd.

Richard Stockton expanded his holdings in 1701 by buying a huge tract from one of the proprietors of East Jersey, William Penn, another Quaker. This tract of 5,500 acres was the area from the path (Nassau – Stockton) north to approximately Bedens Brook and from Province Line eastward to Kingston. Richard's manor house was built on the original 400-acre tract, however. It is today's "Barracks" on Edgehill St.²: the home of our esteemed member, Buzz Cuyler. It is the first house built in Princeton proper.

Richard Stockton had six sons: Richard, Samuel, Robert, John, Thomas, and Joseph. In our next article we will write of the properties of the other five Quaker families and how Joseph, the youngest son, acquired what remained of the patriarch initial purchase of 400 acres.

¹ Retyped with minimal corrections to original document, primarily for references to the clubhouse and hole locations given the move and rerouting of the course that took place in 2007. –Kristina K. Miller, November 2022

² The Barracks, 32 Edgehill Street, Princeton, NJ (private residence).

Part II – Springdale in the Revolution

For a number of years, I have attempted to understand the tactics of the Battle of Princeton. The descriptions of events as related are unclear and confusing. Historians usually described the “Saw Mill” road by which General Washington’s army approached Prince Town as a diagonal road they report “has long since disappeared”; and there is the problem.

Until a lost map relating to this matter was discovered in The Peter Force map collection in the Library of Congress around 1913, the tactics of both sides were approximated around the imaginary road.

Gen. Alfred A. Woodhull in 1913 and Professor Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker in 1922, both of Princeton, used this lost map in correctly identifying the course of the Saw Mill road. Woodhull’s work was called a preliminary study while Professor Wertenbaker’s excellent book expanded the subject. He was able to logically explain the tactics and timing using the correct course of the Saw Mill road. This book was published in 1922 at the time the Battle Monument³ was dedicated. The Professor’s superior history is concise in proving his interpretations of events. That brevity invites detailing, through research of such items as the full course of the Saw Mill road.

In 1979 I requested membership at Springdale Golf Club because I have enjoyed trying to play the game since about 1920. A secondary purpose was to attempt to find the traces of that road as it crossed the present golf course, the old Stockton farm of Springdale.

Research so far indicates that road crossed or bridged the Frog Hollow ravine about where the 9th fairway⁴ crosses the now landscaped stream. Research also indicates that the third phase of the Battle of Princeton occurred here in the area in front of our Club House⁵. More on that confrontation later.

To accurately establish the course of that road I found it necessary to go back to the time of the original Quaker settlement of Stony Brook, 1696; a community that was to be named Prince Town around 1724 after William of Orange.

Land grants, patents, and early purchases of large tracts by the original five Quaker families established the street pattern of our present town. The purpose and use of the earliest roads also explains that pattern of “North by Northwest.”

The first road in this settlement was, of course, the old Indian Trail between the Hudson and Delaware River valleys. Known by many names over the past 300 years, the towns of Elizabeth, Rahway, New Brunswick, Kingston, Princeton, Lawrenceville, and Trenton owe their location to that trail. The course of that trail was changed but little. In Princeton it is known as the Kingston Road – Nassau – Stockton, or as Route 27.

³ Princeton Battle Monument, 55 Stockton St., Princeton, NJ.

⁴ In 2007, a new golf club house was built and the golf course was rerouted. This is now the 5th hole fairway.

⁵ The old clubhouse at 26 College Road is now used by Princeton University as their Campus Dining business office.

The probable second road was one established by those early Quakers to reach the nearest meeting house at Crosswicks, now called Quaker Road; a necessary route from 1696 until 1726 when the present Stony Brook Meeting House was established.

Another road required by these Quakers, as they cleared the land, was a course to haul their logs to a saw mill on the Millstone River to provide timbers and lumber with which to build their farm structures; the Saw Mill road from the Quaker settlement of Stony Brook to the Mill.

Another early road, now Witherspoon – Mt. Lucas, along a property line, reached the Rocky Hill Grist Mill area and back reaches of the first Richard Stockton's immense plantation of 5,500 acres, purchased in 1701 from Wm. Penn. The center of the Stony Brook community commenced to form around the junction of this road with the Indian Trail about 1710 and by 1754 Nassau Hall of the College of New Jersey was building exactly at the head of this road.

Now to anchor the Saw Mill Road. Its purpose, as we have noted, was to reach a large saw mill located on the Millstone River just above the junction of the Stony Brook creek. The site, now submerged by Lake Carnegie, was several hundred yards south of the present canal aqueduct. The exact date the dam and mill were built is not established but it was early since three of the first six Quaker settlers chose to build their residences along this road.

Known as Scudder's Mills during the Revolution the deed of purchase by Scudder in the seventeen-forties describes the mills as a saw mill, a grist mill and a fulling mill.

On that lost map previously mentioned and sometimes referred to as the "Cadwalader Spy Map," a footnote describes the Saw Mill road as: "this road leads to the back part of Prince Town which may be entered any where on this side – the country clear for about 2 miles of [*everything?* blotted] – few fences -."

The map was obviously hurriedly sketched by Gen. Cadwalader at Crosswicks from information given to him by a young spy the General had previously sent into the garrisoned and fortified village. Understandably it lacks scale and has some minor errors but much revealing information.

Three days before the Battle of Princeton Cadwalader sent this map to General Washington then at Trenton with a lengthy report. (It would appear that the map and letter became separated at some time after the conflict.) Forwarding this information to Washington at that time would indicate that he contemplated, even then, reaching the British stores at New Brunswick.

While the course of the Saw Mill road on this map is approximated, not showing turns etc., it shows the turn off the Quaker road at the marker in the field south west of the Quaker Meeting. Also, it is shown as just south of the Baldwin Farm residence. It became known as Prospect and present Prospect [House] is on that site. The road is then shown as terminating or joining a north-south road labeled "road to Scudders Mills" and that road became today's Harrison with the course of Western Way and Ivy Lane on the line of the Saw Mill road.

We have several other anchor points but not noted on this map. The Thomas Clarke house on the battlefield, built just before the Revolution, faced south. Second is the Wm. Clarke house (site of the original Benj. Clarke plantation mansion) is shown, in a painting by a Peale who was in the battle, as

facing sound and this road. Third is the Col. Olden house on Olden Lane. The original part of that house faced south and this road. This is further confirmed by Maj. James Wilkinson's description of the battle.

A fourth anchor point is, as indicated, Prospect. Another quite probable is the prior location of our club house near the second tee⁶ and behind the sixth green⁷. More on that later.

While we have established the course of most of the Saw Mill road, and its function, the middle section is as yet unclear. How far south of the Wm. Clarke and Col. Olden houses was its course? Possible traces, not conclusive, might bring the course about parallel to our 7th and 8th fairways⁸, depending on where that road crossed the present Springdale Road. We need more convincing evidence on this part of the course.

The events, circumstances and timing of the Battle of Princeton fit logically into the place when related to this road course; the events become confusing and contradictory when related to that imaginary diagonal course used by early historians.

[Note: When the present Mercer St. – Princeton Pike was laid out 30 years after the Revolution, 1807, the need for the Saw Mill road diminished. We find no maps of early Princeton showing it or many traces.]

Before we describe the confrontation in front of the location of our club house⁹, the third phase of the Battle of Princeton, we might briefly review the beginnings of the Springdale property.

Richard Stockton, grandfather of Richard the signer, was one of the six original Quaker families to form the Stony Brook Settlement, starting in 1696, as a place of "non molestation." They came not from Pennsylvania as we might assume but from Piscataway Twp. and Woodbridge having previously owned property in Long Island. With Stockton came The Benj. Clarkes, Wm. Oldens, Joseph Worths, Wm. Horners, and a few years later Benj. FitzRandolphs. All were seeking release from religious persecution.

From Proprietors and others they purchased the farm areas that would later become Princeton except the areas to the east, the Daniel Brinson and Dr. Henry Greenland (Castle Howard) tracts.

These Quaker properties were acquired from 1696 to 1701. In 1696 Richard Stockton's first purchase was 440 acres, the area between the present Washington St. and Springdale Rd. and from the Indian Trail to Stony Brook, from which Springdale developed. His second purchase was from the proprietor Wm. Penn of 5,500 acres (one half the size of Manhattan Island). This is the area north of the Indian Trail reaching the Sonman tract at about the Bedens Brook Road and west from the Division Line (Province Line) east to Kingston except the Daniel Brinson tract.

In 1704 Benj. FitzRandolph, Quaker, bought 100 acres of Richard Stockton's first purchase, the eastern boundary being the present Washington Rd. From this property FitzRandolph provided four-and one-half acres in 1753 and on which Nassau Hall was built in 1754-1756.

⁶ Now the 7th hole tee.

⁷ Now the 2nd green.

⁸ Now the 3rd and 4th fairways.

⁹ Referencing the old clubhouse at 26 College Road.

Much of the remaining 340 acres were to remain in the Stockton family for about two centuries. Richard Stockton's first residence was probably what is known as the Barracks on Edgehill Rd. His son John built Morven on the northern property. The farmer's house and buildings on the Springdale tract were located on the Saw Mill road more central to the operation but date of building is not determined—probably just after 1709.

Of interest is the origin of many of the North-South thoroughfares of Princeton today. Province Line (Division Line), dividing East and West Jersey, was surveyed in 1686 as North by Northwest, 22 ½ degrees west of true North. Later most property lines were surveyed parallel to that line. Thus the following streets, on property lines, are approximately North by Northwest: Elm Road, Library Place, Bayard Lane, Witherspoon, and Harrison while south of the Indian Trail we have Olden-Lover's Lane, Springdale, Alexander, Washington, and Harrison. All run North by Northwest as well as the east and west boundaries of the Boro.¹⁰

Springdale's part in the Battle of Princeton occurred in this manner. The first phase, on that morning of Jan. 3, 1777, was maneuvers after the marching British and American forces sighted each other just after sunrise. The second phase was the battle on the Wm. Clarke farm involving the British 17th regiment, plus some of the 55th, with Gen. Mercer's Continentals and Cadwalader's Militia.

The third phase developed after the British 17th was driven from the field. The British 55th, from their position on the wooded crown of Mercer Heights (now Mercer and Olden Lane) saw their valiant companion regiment, the 17th, beaten and pursued. Below them to the south were 2,500 American continentals and 1,000 militia in column on the Saw Mill road; about in front of the present Advanced Studies¹¹ structures and straddling present Olden Lane.

Earlier when the sound of the battle to the west reached the third British regiment, the 40th assigned to remain in Princeton and quartered in Nassau Hall, moved out to block that Saw Mill road. They deployed along the east bank of the Frog Hollow ravine and bridge (assumed). The 55th, withdrawing from Mercer Heights, moved quickly to support the 40th in confronting Sullivan's column on the Saw Mill road. They took up a position on the left (south) of the 40th. These moves took place at about 9:10 AM.

General Sullivan had his column moving forward on the Saw Mill road over our golf course (avoiding the greens we are sure). We still seek traces of that road. This may explain why we are constantly looking up on our shots.

With the British regiments already in position Sullivan deployed along the west bank of Frog Hollow described as having steep banks. The extent of the gun firing is not determined. Undoubtedly there was some. Sullivan then sent a detachment to flank (move around) the British left (south possibly as far as your favorite 15th hole¹²). This detachment was climbing up the steep incline, even as we do today, when the British broke. They retired hurriedly toward Nassau Hall.

Several hundred of the 40th reentered Nassau Hall probably to retrieve their packs but were surrounded by the closely pursuing Continentals. In this last phase the 55th and the remainder of the 40th,

¹⁰ On January 1, 2013, Princeton Borough and Princeton Township merged into one Princeton.

¹¹ Currently, the Institute for Advanced Study, incorporated in 1930 and located at 1 Einstein Drive.

¹² Now the 13th hole.

now in a rout, hurried down Witherspoon and Mt. Lucas Rd. toward Somerset Court House (Millstone) where they had left their baggage train the day before. Others rushed out toward Kingston. Thus three of the best regiments of the King's army in the Colonies were ignobly driven from the village.

At about 9:40 the 200 King's troops (approximate) in Nassau Hall surrendered. They were described by a witness as, "a haughty crabbed set of men", understandable with their pride so crushed.

As you tee off on number one¹³ or as you sit on the veranda¹⁴ try to imagine what that confrontation might have been like had you been there 205 years ago. There on the left are the handsome crimson uniforms drawn up in perfect formation. Bayonets fixed they face the determined Continentals over that Frog Hollow ravine. Imagine cannon being wheeled into position while commands sound out above the shouts and murmurs of the men as they anticipate conflict. It happened here on this ground.

Six years later, in 1783 General Washington, on arriving at Rockingham, addressed these remarks to: "the inhabitants of Princeton and neighborhood together with the President and Faculty of the College" saying "—the pleasure I feel in visiting the scene of our important Military transactions and in recollecting the period when the tide of adversity began to turn, and better fortune to smile upon us." It happened here! May we be proud of this heritage.

Part III – Springdale in the Revolution (continued)

The road over which the action of the Battle of Princeton revolved was the Back Road, not Stockton St. Not a soldier was killed on the Post Road (Stockton-Nassau today) during that conflict.

We will not detail the sequence of events of the battle in the Clarke orchard and which progressed toward the Thomas Clark house on the Back Road. We are concerned here with the confrontation on our Golf Course and in the area before our clubhouse¹⁵.

Executing a daring and brilliant strategic plan, Washington had moved his army of about 5,800 from the south bank of the Assunpink Creek in Trenton during the night of Jan. 2, 1777. His army marched in two Divisions: the first under Gen. John Sullivan and the second under Gen. Nathanael Greene.

In establishing his route of march toward Princeton, Washington used a roughly drawn map supplied by his Col. John Cadwalader. This map showed the approximate course of this Back Road. Found in a map collection in the Library of Congress in 1913, this map had the following notation on it; "This road leads to the back part of Princeton Town which (the town) may be entered any where on this side – the country cleared for 2 miles – few fences." This is the Saw Mill or Back Road that crosses our golf course.

Before or during that night march Washington had directed his trusted Gen. Hugh Mercer to cut his Brigade of about 350 men out of the Second Division column, mover over the Stony Brook Road and destroy the wooden bridge at Worths Mills (206 today) and thus retard the expected British pursuit.

¹³ Now the 6th hole.

¹⁴ Reference here is to the old clubhouse on Colledge Road.

¹⁵ Ibid.

On discovering two British regiments, the 17th and 55th, marching over the bridge, Mercer attempted to regain the American column marching on the Back Road. While crossing the Wm. Clark farm Mercer's unit was engaged by the British 17th.

When the first shot was fired at about 8:00 AM Gen. Washington and his staff were riding at the head of Gen. Sullivan's 1st Division on the Back Road and had just crossed today's Olden Lane. Noting Red Coats arriving in the wooded crown of today's Mercer Heights (Olden and Mercer Rd.) Washington ordered Sullivan to hold and to watch the British (the 55th) while he and his staff hurriedly rode back about two thirds of a mile to assess the firing there near the Thomas Clark house.

On arriving he assisted Green and Col. Cadwalader in retrieving the situation. The 17th fought valiantly but was finally driven from the field.

A third British Regiment, the 40th, barracked in Nassau Hall, had been ordered to remain in Princeton while the 17th and 55th marched toward Trenton. This Regiment was now ordered to block the Back Road at the most defensible point, our Frog Hollow Creek.

When the 55th witnessed the defeat of the 17th from their position atop Mercer Heights, they moved immediately to support the 40th blocking the Back Road.

One might imagine those two regiments of Red Coats stationed in ranks on the east bank of our brook from our present club house¹⁶ across our first and tenth tees¹⁷ and beyond.

When the 55th left Mercer Heights Gen. Sullivan moved his column forward over the Back Road and finally marched up the 7th fairway¹⁸, over the tee and through the Stockton farm buildings. On reaching the area of our first green and ninth tee¹⁹ Sullivan's column halted, aware of the two Regiments of Red Coats arrayed before him.

Sullivan deployed his men and no doubt unlimbered some of his cannon. Rather than attempt a frontal attack and the accompanying casualties, Sullivan decided on a flanking movement to dislodge the enemy. Several units moved to the right, crossed the brook with its steep banks at about our 15th hole²⁰. Avoiding crossing our most beautiful green, our Continentals dislodged the out-numbered Red Coats who now commenced a rapid and rather disorderly retreat through the village.

Several hundred of the 40th, probably trying to retrieve their packs left in Nassau Hall, were surrounded by the rapidly pursuing continentals, and surrendered.

We will write next of the Stockton family and how Springdale, for a period, supplanted Morven as the Family seat.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Now the 6th and 17th tees.

¹⁸ Now the 3rd fairway.

¹⁹ Now the 6th green and 5th tee.

²⁰ Now the 13th hole.

Part IV – Stockton Farm becomes Springdale

We have shown how the Stockton farm was known as “Springdale” as early as 1875 and that it became our golf club. Let us look at that farm’s interesting past.

Before 1656 the first Stocktons came from Cheshire, England, to Flushing L.I. This Richard Stockton acquired a farm out at Stony Brook L.I. His son, also named Richard, moved from Flushing to Piscataway and then to our area when he bought that 400 acres, part of which would become our golf club, from Daniel Brinson in August of 1696.

When that Richard Stockton died in 1709, the youngest of his six sons, Joseph, was deeded the 210 acres that remained of the original 400. Joseph then built his manor and farm buildings on the Back Road on the level area encompassing our 2nd, 7th, and 9th tees and 6th green.²¹

From 1851, for several decades, “Springdale” replaced “Morven” as the family seat of the direct descendants of the first Richard Stockton.

Robert Field Stockton, 6th in direct line, was a national figure, and earned the title of “Commadore”. His accomplishments in California’s early history were notable. On returning to “Morven” he spent his inheritance extravagantly in improving the family home. When the Commadore died in 1866 his son, Richard, was forced to sell Morven to a cousin.

That Richard, 7th in direct line, had lived at “Springdale” since 1851. His son Bayard bought back “Morven” in 1891 and moved there. “Morven” remained in the family for another 50 years.

Springdale and farm were purchased by our club in 1899. The main house was moved to Mercer Rd., at the foot of Edgehill St. where it serves as the home of the head of the Theological Seminary. The Tenant House, after serving as the early club house while in its original location, was moved in 1913 to become the core of our present club house.²²

The recent history of our club was interestingly recorded by Norvell Samuels in May of 1977.

This review of our area’s history is as accurate as meager sources permit. The lack of knowledge of the “Back Road” can be explained, with the establishment of Mercer Road-Trenton Pike in 1807, the usefulness of the Back Road ended. Its traces diminished with time and its importance in the Battle of Princeton overlooked and almost forgotten.

When you drive, or dub, your ball off the 7th tee²³, you might well imagine that you are driving into General Sullivan’s column of patriotic Continentals, or, as your editor observed, “If you think you have it rough driving off the 1st tee²⁴, imagine how tough it was for those Red Coats facing the Continentals’ cannon up there on our 1st green²⁵.”

²¹ Now the 7th, 3rd, and 5th tees and 2nd green.

²² Reference here is to the old clubhouse on College Road.

²³ Now the 3rd tee.

²⁴ Now the 6th tee.

²⁵ Now the 6th green.