The Heritage Review
The Newsletter of the Morris County Heritage Commission
VOL. 48, NO. 1 Spring 2026

Re-Grant Funds Awarded for History Projects in 2026



The Richardson House is the home of Mount Tabor Historical Society and the Camp Meeting Cottage Museum. *Image courtesy of Mount Tabor Historical Society.*

The Morris County Heritage Commission (MCHC) is pleased to announce we have been awarded funding from the New Jersey Historical Commission (NJHC) County History Partnership Program (CHPP) to continue the history re-grant program in 2026. The program owes its continued success to the ongoing support of the New Jersey Historical Commission and Morris County's dedicated history and other nonprofit communities.

The Heritage Commission was awarded $56,150, including $900 for MCHC administrative uses for fiscal year 2026. The $55,250 was allotted for re-grant funding to Morris County history organizations for project and General Operating Support (GOS) and history-related project grants to other nonprofit organizations. No match is required. Both history and non-history nonprofit organizations may use funding from the re-grant program for history-related projects such as exhibits, collections management, archival supplies, conservation, ADA compliance projects, and professional consultants.

All nonprofit organizations based in Morris County are eligible for history project re-grants. Morris County nonprofit history organizations not receiving GOS funding from the New Jersey Historical Commission may be eligible for GOS funding through the Morris County Heritage Commission.

In February, three outside reviewers considered applications and awarded the 2026 funds to 11 organizations. The Commission and staff congratulate the successful applicants listed on page 3. ❖

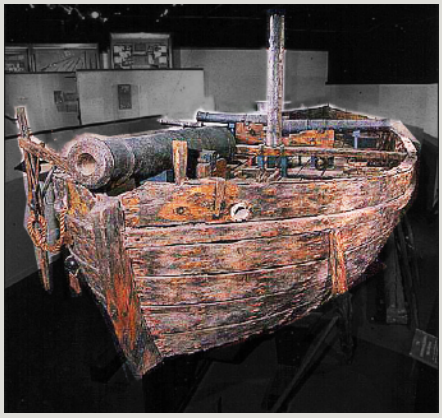
Commissioners' Corner

Planning to Celebrate America's Semiquincentennial

Planning nationwide to celebrate America at 250 began a decade ago, and we are now in the final run-up to July 4, 2026, which will be celebrated with even more gusto than usual. We will be celebrating the first and most historic day in our nation's history.

Let's remember what happened that day. The Continental Congress had finally passed a resolution on July 2, 1776: "…that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally absolved." By July 4, it was known throughout the 13 colonies.

Our second president, John Adams, wrote to his wife Abigail, "…I am apt to believe that this day will be celebrated, by succeeding Generations, as the great anniversary Festival. It ought to be commemorated, as the Day of Deliverance by solemn Acts of Devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with Pomp and Parade, with Shews, Games, Sports, Guns, Bells, Bonfires and Illuminations from one End of this Continent to the other from this Time forward forever more."



The *Philadelphia* gunboat is the only surviving fighting vessel from the American Revolutionary War. *Image courtesy of National Museum of American History.*

The Morris County Commissioners appointed a coordinator, Sarah Neibart, who is overseeing America250 county events including educational programming, living history events, and activity books for children. Local history organizations are committed to educating and celebrating not only Revolutionary War history but all eras of American history. Here are just a few of the ways you can experience American history this year near home and throughout America. The Morris County Heritage Commission and the Morris County Historical Society at Acorn Hall have developed monthly lectures and walking tours highlighting local history. You can find out more about these events at morriscounty250.org.

At Morristown National Historical Park, visitors can learn the story of how the Continental Army survived the "hard winter" of 1779-80 here in Morristown, an important tale of perseverance. On July 4, you can hear a dramatic reading of the Declaration of Independence at the Ford Mansion. Learn more at nps.gov/morr.

The Morris County Park Commission is scheduling fun family events throughout the park system honoring America at 250. They are also celebrating their 70th anniversary in 2026. Their three historic sites are worth a visit: Fosterfields, Speedwell, and Cooper Gristmill. Visit morrisparks.net/calendar.

In the tri-state area, on July 3 a parade of 30 tall ships will sail down the East River. On July 4, another 30 tall ships will gather for a Parade of Sail from the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge to the George Washington Bridge. Visit sail4th.org for more information. Morris County will hold its own boat parade Saturday, July 11, on Lake Hopatcong. There will be antique boats, decorated boats, sailing vessels, and paddlers.

If you are planning summer vacations a little farther afield, check out Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and Boston, which are each planning multiday parades, festivals, fireworks, concerts, and block parties to celebrate our nation's birthday.

In D.C., the National Archives and the National Museum of American History will present "In Pursuit of Life, Liberty and Happiness," an exhibit featuring 250 objects that embody the ideals in the Declaration of Independence. They include the portable desk used by Thomas Jefferson to draft the document and the gunboat *Philadelphia*, the only surviving American ship from the Revolutionary War. More information available at americanhistory.si.edu.

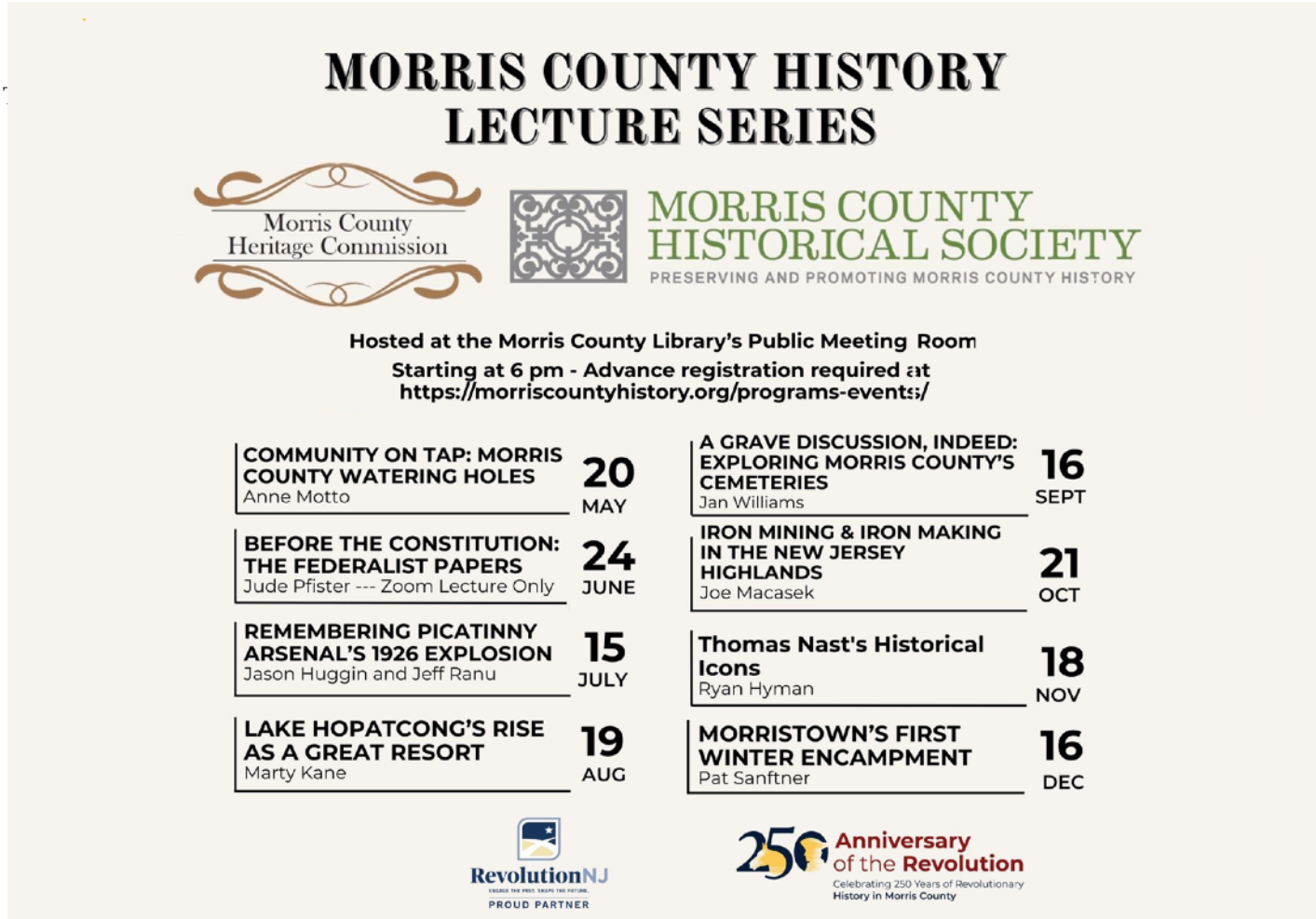
Chris O'Brien, president of Sail4th250, notes that tributes planned for the Fourth of July allow Americans "to breathe in and reflect on 250 years, the sacrifices our founders made to bring about the experiment of the republic and our work that continues to preserve it."

Happy 250th, America!

Carol Barkin
Morris County Heritage Commission

Re-Grant Funds Awarded for History Projects in 2026:

Organization	Municipality	General Operating Support (GOS) Project Name	Re-grant Award
Ayres/Knuth Farm Foundation	Denville	Project – Pathways Marketing/website	$7,000.00
Dover Area Historical Society	Dover	GOS	$6,050.00
Friends Meeting House Randolph	Randolph	Project- Informational Pamphlets Kiosk	$1,975.00
Historical Society of Boonton Township	Boonton Twp.	GOS	4,955.00
Historical Society of Rockaway Twp.	Rockaway Twp.	Project – Travel Display Boards	$798.00
Morristown Chapter- Daughters of the American Revolution	Morristown	GOS	$7,000.00
Montville Township Historical Society	Montville	GOS	$2,472.00
Mount Tabor Historical Society	Parsippany	GOS	$7,000.00
Parsippany Historical and Preservation Society	Parsippany.	Project – Beverwyck Archaeological Site Exhibit Marketing	$6,000.00
Ralston Cider Mill Museum	Mendham Twp.	GOS	$5,000.00
Roxbury Historic Trust	Ledgewood	GOS	$7,000.00



Morris County Park Commission 70th Anniversary

By Joe Caggiano

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the Morris County Park Commission (MCPC), the largest park system in New Jersey. Operating and managing more than 20,000 acres and 38 facilities, the MCPC is integral to the County's expansive recreation, leisure, and historical and natural education resources.

Following the examples of state-operated park systems, which began with New York City's Central Park Commission in 1856 and in New Jersey with the Essex County Park Commission in 1895, the MCPC was formed as suburbanization took root in the region and began to redefine a mostly rural Morris County. By the turn of the twentieth century, many county lakes served as vacation getaways and second homes for residents of cities like Newark, Elizabeth, and New York City. Some of these retreats evolved into established communities as a result of philanthropic efforts, namely the Borough of Mountain Lakes, which currently maintains its original layout, landscape design, and many of its first homes. However, the future of other lakes and forests in the region remained uncertain, and action was necessary to balance the inevitability of economic and population growth in Morris County with the preservation of the natural beauty that continues to make the region attractive.

Upon recommendation from the Morris County Planning Board in 1955, the Morris County Park Commission was established by the Board of Chosen Freeholders (now



Sunrise Lake, located in Lewis Morris Park, which is the first park dedicated by the MCPC. *From the Morris County Heritage Commission Collection.*

County Commissioners) the next year via voter referendum and was first headed by landscape architect Russell W. Myers. The Garden Club of America was also instrumental in the formation of the Park Commission, forming an alliance with its early leadership in order to acquire land for preservation. Lewis Morris County Park, home to the public Sunrise Lake Beach Club, was the first to be dedicated by the Commission in 1958. This was followed by acquisition of 45 acres of areas-of the Great Swamp and construction of the Outdoor Education Nature Center, and the donation of land creating Loantaka Brook Reservation, both to protect these spaces from development and provide environmental education to the public.

The thriving Fosterfields Living Historical Farm was bequeathed to the MCPC by Caroline Foster, owner of the estate and major figure in the Morristown community, upon her death in 1979. The farm continues to host the preserved Revere House in which Foster resided, live animals, and operational historic farming equipment. Fosterfields regularly hosts events such as reenactments, craft workshops, and concerts open to the public on the bucolic historic property.



Caroline Foster bequeathed her family's farm and home to the Park Commission in 1979, which is known as Fosterfields Living Historical Farm now. *From the Collections of the Morris County Park Commission.*

The smaller historic sites operated by the Park Commission offer some of the closest access and educational opportunity to engage with historic materials and knowledge in the region. The Cooper Gristmill, the only publicly accessible, fully operational waterwheel mill in New Jersey, is open each weekend April through October, offering guided tours demonstrating the mill in action. Its operational status is the direct result of restoration projects and consistent stewardship dating back to the early 1970s. Ongoing maintenance requires consulting not only modern engineers but also mill manuals from the 18th and 19th centuries. Historic Speedwell, an 18th- and 19th-century village, is comprised of the home of Stephen Vail, owner of the Speedwell Ironworks, and other historic buildings original to the property or moved from elsewhere in Morristown. The site's staff offer guided tours and craft and cooking workshops, and regularly host reenactments and holiday-themed events. Capturing public interest in history is central to the mission of each historic property managed by the MCPC, and this is best accomplished by making what is usually obscured behind pages of books into what can be seen, touched, and heard.

(continues on page 5)

*(**Park Commission** continued from page 4)*

The Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, one of the most recognized and frequented preserved areas in the state of New Jersey, claims much of the credit due for Morris County's enduring status as an area environmentally rich and protected from suburban development. At its edge sits the Great Swamp Outdoor Education Center, opened in 1963 and now operated by the MCPC. It serves as the visitors' center for the refuge, and staff provide environmental education for the public from its classrooms and along two miles of boardwalk trail. The swamp's dedication as a national wildlife refuge in 1964 was a result of a years-long effort from local residents, who founded what would become the New Jersey Conservation Foundation in 1959, to resist a proposition from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey to build a huge domestic hub airport on the site with linkages to Idlewild (now JFK) International Airport. If not thwarted, its construction would have permanently destroyed the swamp's prehistoric ecosystem and demolished 700 buildings and homes. The establishment of the Great Swamp Watershed Association followed in 1981 to monitor and protect the watershed, which the Association continues to do today.



Great Swamp NWR field office opened in Meyersville, 1961. *Image courtesy of Long Hill Township Historical Society.*

Further north, beyond Boonton Township, is Pyramid Mountain, a 1600-acre expanse featuring challenging hiking routes frequented by trail runners and wildlife spotters. The mountain provides seclusion from the sights and sounds of civilization while offering views of the hills and lakes spanning the lesser-developed northwestern lakes of the county. Along its trail systems are the remnants of rock shelters used by the Lenape, namely Tripod Rock, as well as stone walls from the homesteads and woodlots left behind by the early Dutch settlers of old Pequannock.

While the MCPC's 70-year history stands on its own, many of the sites that the organization oversees and operates have connections to early Dutch, English, and German settlements dating back to the 17th through 19th centuries. The oldest historic home belonging to the MCPC was constructed c. 1730, but remnants of Indigenous and European settlement and agricultural activity are present in some form at each site, most noticeably in the new-growth forestation that defines most of Morris County's hilly landscape. The Black River Park hiking trail, while dominated by new-growth forest today, gained its landscape features from decades of agriculture by settlers who themselves emulated the hillside cultivation methods of the seminomadic Lenni-Lenape who had been residing in the area for around 2,500 years.

Just as the Indigenous population and later European settlers practiced there, the Black River continues to serve as a fishing spot and community nexus for the people of western Morris County. Trout are periodically added to the river's wildlife ecosystem to attract fishermen, and the trailhead begins after passing through the operational Cooper Gristmill. Deeper into the trail system is the Elizabeth D. Kay Environmental Center, a more recent construction built for environmental education and bird-watching in a meadow formerly used for agriculture. The site combines recreation with historic education in real time and is visited by tens of thousands of people each year.


Concert held at Schooley's Mountain Park. *From the Morris County Heritage Commission Collection.*

The Commission continues to serve the public through stewardship of Morris County's rich cultural and environmental resources as well as offering expansive educational and volunteering opportunities for all ages. The County's recognition for its rich history and natural landscape is in large part due to the efforts of the Park Commission to put its resources to use for the public good. Hosting more than 5.4 million visitors per year across over 20,000 acres of parkland, and with numerous ongoing historic preservation and park improvement projects, the MCPC continues to serve as the keystone of Morris County's most cherished locations. ❖

Dickerson Tavern and the Court-Martial of Benedict Arnold

by Joe Caggiano

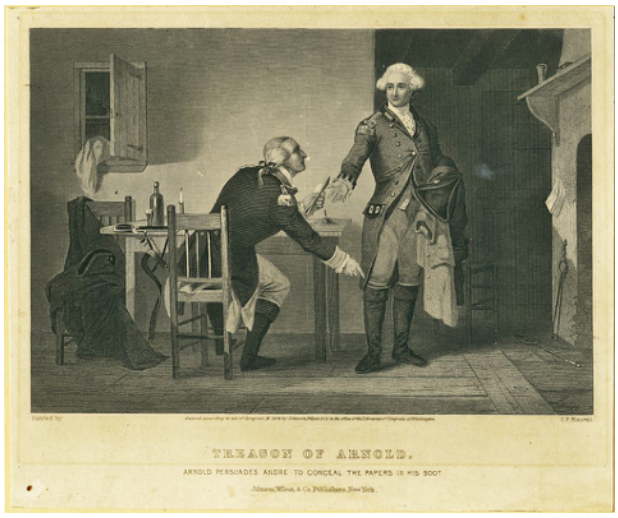
The charges against Benedict Arnold, a Connecticut-born defector from the Patriot cause, are integral to American folklore, with his name emblematic of treason and cowardice. However, less is known of Arnold's presence in Morristown during the War for Independence. Known across the region as a dutiful Patriot and officer of the Continental Army, Arnold's sympathies began to change in 1779 during his assignment in Philadelphia, where he met and married local Loyalist socialite Peggy Shippen. Her family, like many other Loyalists, saw remaining in the British Empire as the best way to preserve their land and wealth, incentives that Arnold grew enticed by as he deepened his ties to the other side. Peggy had already become active as a Loyalist spy soon after her 1777 befriending of British officer John André, who would later become a co-conspirator with Arnold.

As Revolutionary fervor inflamed tensions and began to divide the allegiances of those around him, Major General Arnold was assigned to Morristown before the dreadful winter of 1779-80. Arnold immediately found himself embroiled in a court-martial resulting from accusations of abusing his power during his previous assignment in Philadelphia. Proud of his reputation as a man of stature who had served colonial and Patriot causes honorably, he took great offense to charges being brought against him. Dickerson Tavern in Morristown, also known as Norris Tavern, served as the site of Arnold's court-martial, held between December 23, 1779, and January 26, 1780. It was an unusual location for a trial, as most other proceedings were held in the nearby Arnold Tavern, which by this point in the Revolution was being used for lodging by Patriot officers and as a government administration building.

Four charges were brought against Arnold, all of which were tied to commercial activity and the use of public resources he was responsible for amidst a Patriot takeover of Philadelphia. Arnold fiercely defended himself and denied any wrongdoing during the proceedings, calling attention to the extensive praise he had received from Congress and General Washington for his contributions to the Patriot cause and asserting that the accusations against him were frivolous. After a series of deliberations, he was convicted of two of the four charges and sentenced to an inconsequential reprimand from General Washington. Following this relatively minor punishment, Arnold's name was now clear of suspicion, and he was free to continue his treasonous plotting behind the backs of the Patriots. Just over a year later, Arnold would go on to carry out his legendary failed plot to surrender the Continental Army's strategic outpost at West Point to the British Army, which if successful could have compromised the entire Patriot cause. Shortly before the execution of their plans, his co-conspirator John André was apprehended by the Continental Army in upstate New York with papers detailing the plot. He admitted their motives and was tried and hanged as a spy despite his requests to be shot honorably as an officer, while Arnold managed to flee to New York City and assume his new role as a British officer and defector. Compensated for his actions and promoted to brigadier general by British General Henry Clinton, Arnold went on to lead engagements against his former army, including the brutal sackings of New London, Connecticut, and Richmond, Virginia. He never gained respect among British officers, and his command was associated with high civilian casualties and unnecessary destruction, further disgracing his name. Leaving New York soon before the end of the



Dickerson Tavern stood on Spring Street, c. 1900. *Courtesy of The Morristown & Morris Township Public Library, The Caroline Rose Foster North Jersey History & Genealogy Center*



Treason of Arnold, rendered by C.F. Blauvelt, depicts Arnold persuading André to conceal plot documents in his boot. *Image From the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Collection.*

(continues on page 7)

Changes at the Heritage Commission



Kathy Murphy

The Morris County Heritage Commission bids farewell to Kathy Murphy, who stepped down from her Heritage Commission seat at the end of December 2025. We thank her for her 13 combined years of service as a Commissioner and Chair. Kathy's efforts included overseeing the massive move and consolidation of the Heritage Commission office and archives to the Morris County Library from both the Cultural Center and storage in 2015. During her tenure on the MCHC, Kathy focused much energy on liaising with local historical societies and historians, as well as visiting non-profit organizations in the county that had been awarded re-grant funding for history related projects by the Commission. A long-time member of the Mt. Olive Historical Society, Kathy remains active in historic restoration projects, open space preservation, and environmental issues in Mt. Olive.



Vito Bianco

To fill Kathy's seat, The Board of County Commissioners appointed Vito Bianco of Morristown. Vito Bianco served as a judge of the Tax Court of New Jersey for 22 years before retiring in 2023. Prior to going on the bench, Vito was a partner with the Weiner Lesniak law firm (now the Weiner Law Group), and was previously associated with Judge Rose Guthrie Alexander & Ferdon. For more than 40 years, he has been involved in preserving local history, primarily with the Denville Historical Society. He has also been involved with the Morris County Historical Society and with the early efforts to save and preserve Ford-Faesch House and the Ayres/Knuth Farm. He has authored two books and numerous articles on local history, conducts walking history tours, and lectures on local history topics.



Joe Caggiano

Joe Caggiano was hired by the Board of County Commissioners in December 2025 to fill the History Program Development Specialist position at the Heritage Commission, which was previously held by Nick Palatucci. Joe holds a Bachelor of Arts from Rutgers University. Since 2022, Joe has held educator and archivist roles at museums and historic sites, including his previous position with the Morris County Park Commission. At the Park Commission's historic sites, he designed and led specialized tours and public programs focused on 19th-century social life, fashion, and industry. He also volunteers as a civilian Civil War reenactor with the 2D NJ Brigade. The Morris County Heritage Commissioners welcome Joe to our staff and look forward to his contributions.

*(**Dickerson Tavern** continued from page 6)*

war, Arnold moved to London with Peggy and their children in 1782. Aside from a brief sojourn in Canada, during which he also conducted privateering business in the West Indies, he resided in London, never again to enjoy the good reputation of his past life, until his death in 1801.

While the original Dickerson Tavern building no longer exists, a marker on the current building at the corner of Spring Street and Martin Luther King Boulevard in Morristown preserves the memory of this lesser-known chapter in the American Revolutionary story, where one of its first folk villains made his name known. ❖



PO Box 900, Morristown, NJ 07963-0900
Phone: 973.829.8117 Programs: 973.631.5456
Website: morriscountynj.gov/heritage Email: Heritage@co.morris.nj.us

Heritage Review is now an online publication accessible at
morriscountynj.gov/Departments/Heritage-Commission/Publications
Paper copies will continue to be available at local libraries.

❑ ADD my email address to the Heritage Review mailing list*

❑ ADD my email address to the MCHC email news and events daily alert list*

Name _____

Address _____

Town _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email address _____@_____

*** Please note that your name and contact information may be shared with other local and regional history organizations.**

Publication of the Morris County Board of County Commissioners

Stephen H. Shaw, *Director*
John Krickus, *Deputy Director*
Douglas R. Cabana
Thomas J. Mastrangelo
Christine Myers
Tayfun Selen
Deborah Smith

Morris County Heritage Commission

Martha Wells, *Chair*
Carol Barkin, *Vice Chair*
Larry Fast, *Treasurer*
John Dunado, *Secretary*
Vito Bianco Epsey Farrell, Ph.D.
Thomas Ferguson Marty Kane
Joe Macasek

Amanda Broschart, *Director-Archives and Heritage Affairs*
Joe Caggiano, *History Program Development Specialist*

LIKE US ON facebook
facebook.com/morriscountynj.gov/heritage

Electronic versions can be viewed and downloaded from *morriscountynj.gov/heritage*

For a Large Print Edition
Call 973.631.5456

RevolutionNJ
ENGAGE THE PAST. SHAPE THE FUTURE.
PROUD PARTNER

250 Anniversary of the Revolution
Celebrating 250 Years of Revolutionary History in Morris County

Morris County Honors the 250th Anniversary of the United States

Experience America's 250th anniversary of the Revolution with us! Morris County is where history comes alive during the Semiquincentennial. Discover the pivotal role our region played in the nation's founding and enjoy all the wonderful art, culture, and preserved historic sites our community has to offer. Visit morriscounty250.org to find out about exciting events happening around Morris County.

The Heritage Commission has produced a study of the involvement of the county in the American Revolution. *Colonial and Revolutionary Morris County* examines Morris County's early history, from the time it was first settled until the end of the Revolutionary War. This publication can be found in many local libraries and is available for purchase though the Heritage Commission website https://www.morriscountynj.gov/Departments/Heritage-Commission/Publications.

To dig deeper into the history of the American Revolution, the Morris County Planning and Preservation department has an in-depth look at Morris County's involvement. You can visit: https://www.morriscountynj.gov/Departments/Planning-and-Preservation/Cultural-Resources-Survey/American-Revolution to learn more! ❖