Studying the Spatial Dimensions of the American Revolution in New Jersey

The intent of this project, created by the Advanced Geomatics students at the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences, Rutgers University, was to demonstrate the spatial dimensions of the American Revolution within New Jersey. The project was inspired by John D. Alden's 1945 map, 'Battles and Skirmishes of the American Revolution in New Jersey' (available through the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection). Utilizing the Alden map, an extensive GIS database was developed by digitizing over 700 locations including all major battles, known skirmishes, and places of interest. One of the challenges when digitizing information from historical maps is the spatial accuracy of the map elements, therefore in-depth research was conducted to improve the spatial accuracy of the point data, including 451 skirmishes and 13 battles rated by the students as having 'poor' spatial quality, as well as an additional 75 landmarks such as homes, camps, and military headquarters. Overall, spatial accuracy of the points were ranked as 'very good', 'good', 'poor', 'very poor', and 'very very poor'. The large map of New Jersey displays all of the digitized points within the database. To better tell the story of the war, inset maps were included. These depict major general involvement and turning points in the war. More information regarding the project can be found at the class webpage: http://crssa.rutgers.edu/advgeo.

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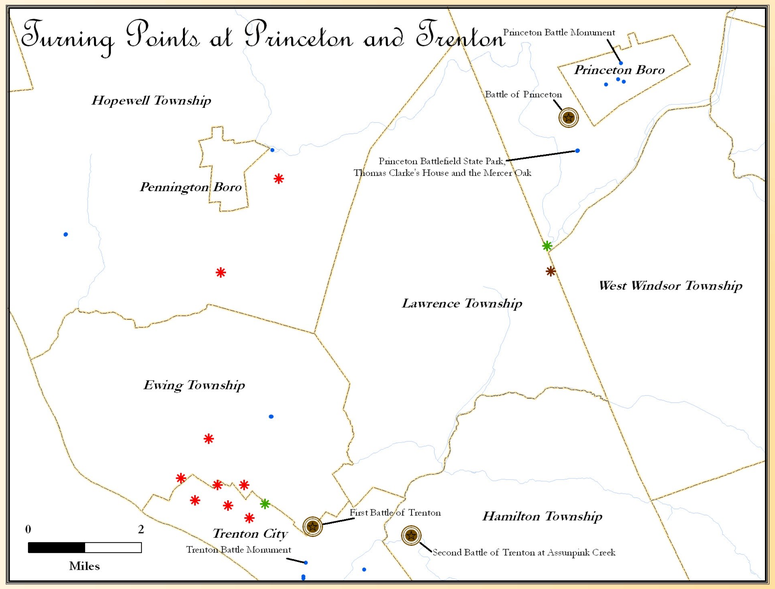
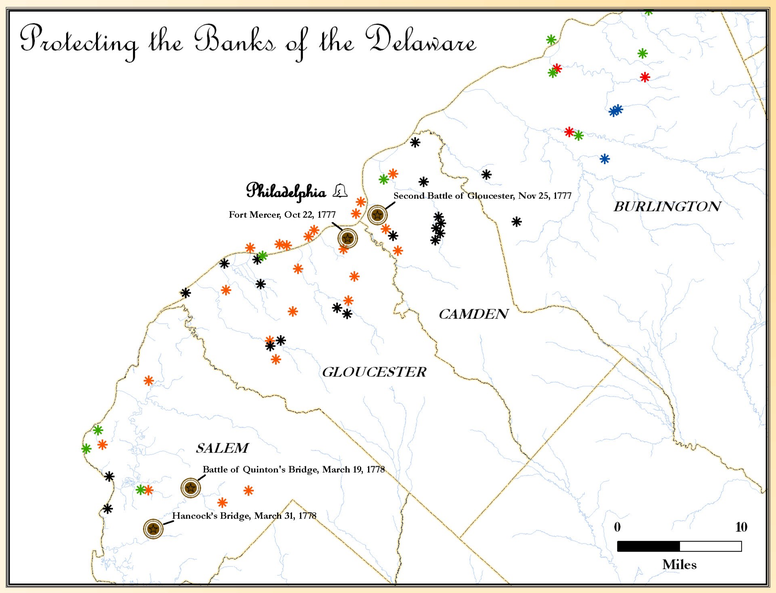
Turning Points at Princeton and Trenton

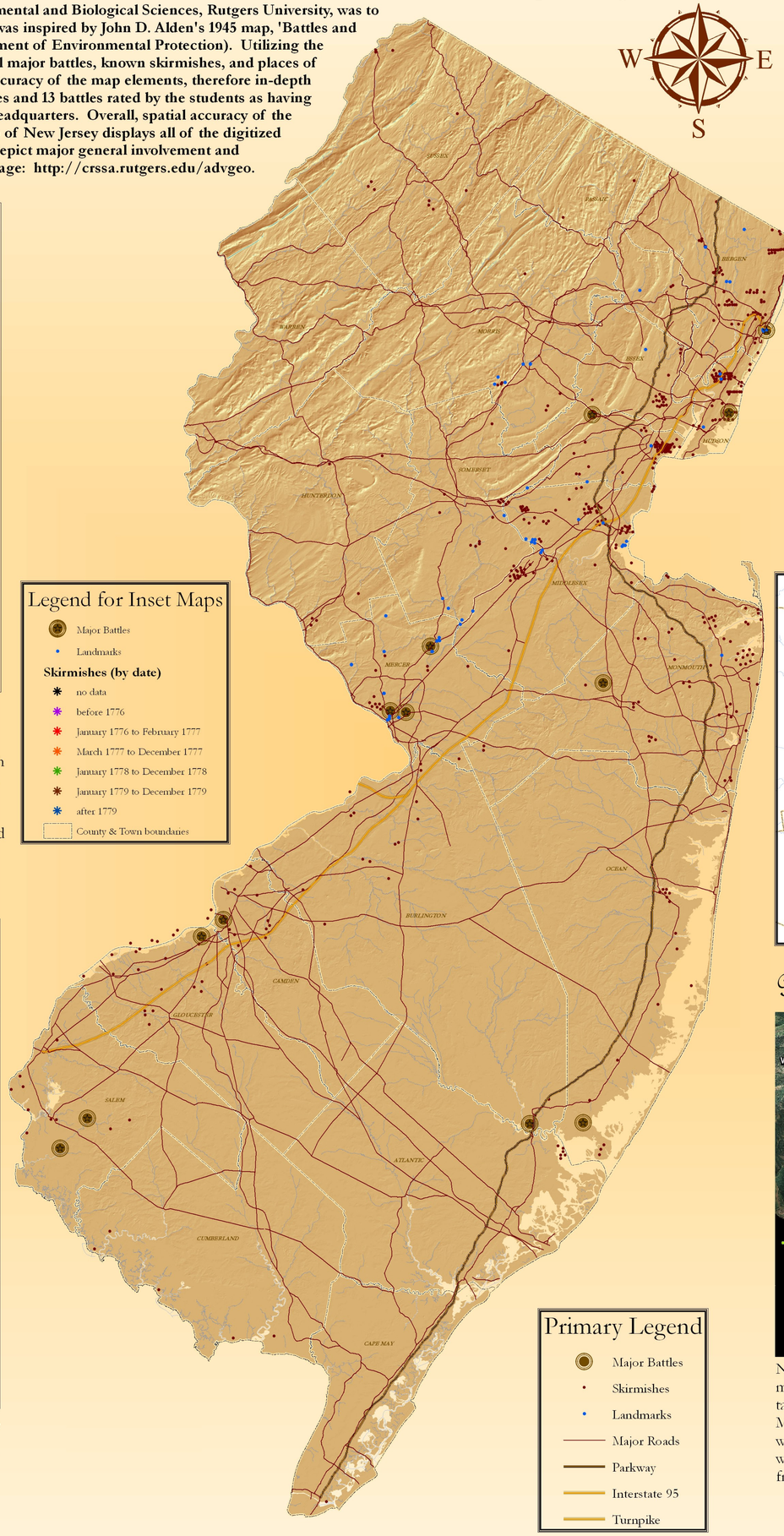


The western landscape of New Jersey played an important role in the state's Revolutionary War events. The Delaware River helped create a turning point in the war with the Crossing of the Delaware on Christmas Eve in 1776. The Battle of Trenton provided the troops with the much needed victory for the Continental Army to boost morale among General Washington's troops. A few days later, the British conducted an unsuccessful counterattack at the Continental Army camp site along the Assunpink Creek. After a British retreat, General Washington and his troops were able to sneak away to Princeton. The following day, the Continental Army were again victorious in the Battle of Princeton, which took place on Thomas Clarke's farmland (the Clarke home became a hospital). General Hugh Mercer was wounded during the battle near a gigantic oak tree, now named the Mercer Oak. The Clarke house was also the site of General Mercer's death, nine days later. Following the battle, General Washington marched his troops north into the Watchung Mountains.

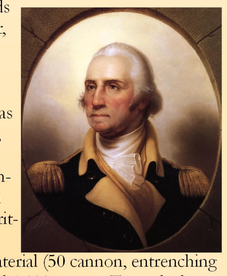
Protecting the Banks of the Delaware



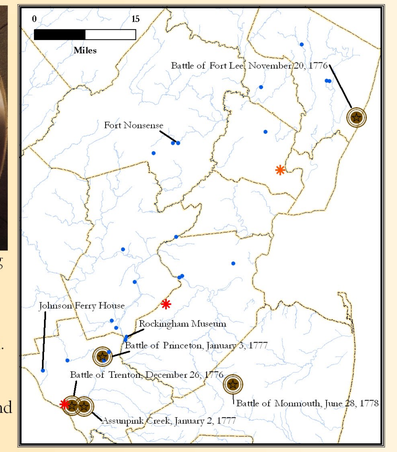
The Second Battle of Gloucester was fought between American soldiers under the Marquis de Lafayette and British regulars under Lord Cornwallis. At the Battle of Fort Mercer, now named Red Bank Battlefield, an American garrison repelled an attack by Hessian troops. The Americans sank two ships, one of which is still located on site. The Battle of Quinton's Bridge and Hancock's Bridge were fought consecutively and noted as a massacre for American troops.



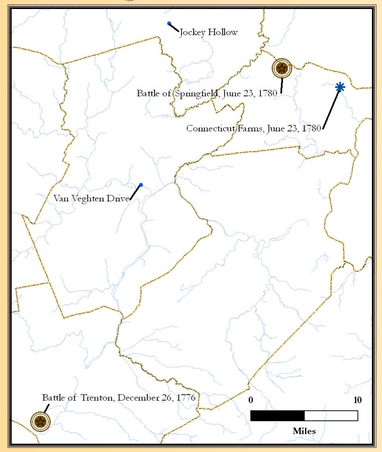
General George Washington's Progress Through New Jersey

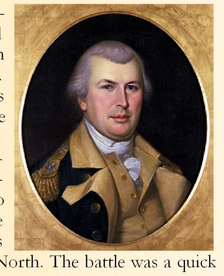


New Jersey, the crossroads of the Revolutionary War, was host to many pivotal battles influenced by General George Washington. One key event was the Battle of Monmouth, which was the last major engagement of the Northern Theatre (Philadelphia Campaign). When the British captured Fort Lee, Washington sacrificed material (50 cannon, entrenching tools and flour), but saved 2,000 troops. Towards the end of the war, Washington wrote his Farewell Orders to the Armies of the United States in the second floor study of the Rockingham Musuem located in Kingston. George Washington, who was native to Virginia, grew up as a surveyor and held an invaluable knowledge of terrain. His charisma, leadership, knowledge of land, and political base made him an ideal commander-in-chief of the American army.



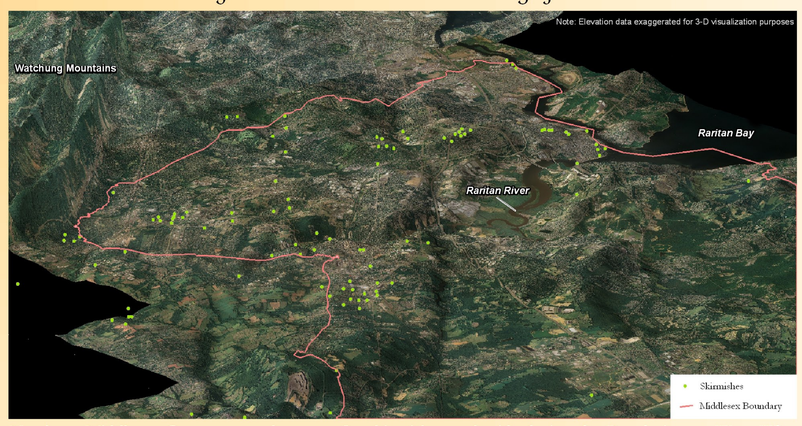
Nathaniel Greene - Notable Events





At the start of the Revolutionary War, Nathaniel Greene held the rank of militia private which was the lowest rank possible. By the end of the war, he was considered one of George Washington's most gifted and dependable officers. Major General Nathaniel Greene commanded one division of two American columns at the Battle of Trenton in which Greene's division approached from the North. The battle was a quick victory for the Continental Army early in the war. Soon thereafter, Greene urged Washington to move into Princeton but his idea was voted down. Van Veghten Drive served as Greene's headquarters in the winter of 1778 to 1779. Greene was also involved in the skirmishes at Connecticut Farms which happened at the same time as the Battle of Springfield. Washington transferred command of his headquarters in Springfield to Greene a day before the battle. Springfield was the site of the last major engagement of the Revolutionary War in New Jersey.

Middlesex County - A Continental Thoroughfare



Northern Middlesex County was a hot spot for skirmishes and raids during the Revolutionary War. What made Middlesex so significant? Topography is often an important factor in determining where conflicts take place. The easily guarded Raritan River running across the County from east to west and the Watchung Mountains to the northwest would have been difficult for an army to cross. To the east is the Raritan Bay, which also would have served as a barrier. In order to pass through this region, troops from both sides were constrained to the valley between the mountains and the bay. As a result, this land became the site of frequent conflict, visited by Generals such as Washington, Maxwell, and Britain's Cornwallis.

Miles
0 20 40 60

Data Sources: County, municipal, and hydrography source: NJ Department of Environmental Protection, Bureau of GIS; Roads source: NJ Department of Transportation; Yr. 2006 leaf-on aerial photography source: US Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency

References: David C. Munn, 'Battles and Skirmishes in New Jersey of the American Revolution' (1976); Map by John D. Alden, 'Battles and Skirmishes of the American Revolution in New Jersey' (1974); Raritan Millstone Heritage Alliance, 'Guide to Historic Sites in Central New Jersey' (2006).

Web Sites: Bergen County Parks web site, DEP Parks and Forests web site, Morristown National Parks Services web site, discoverourtown.com, getnj.com, minisink.org, oldparamus.org, preservationnj.org, princetonhistory.org, saveprincetonbattlefield.org, staatshouse.com, thehermitage.org, wikipedia.org