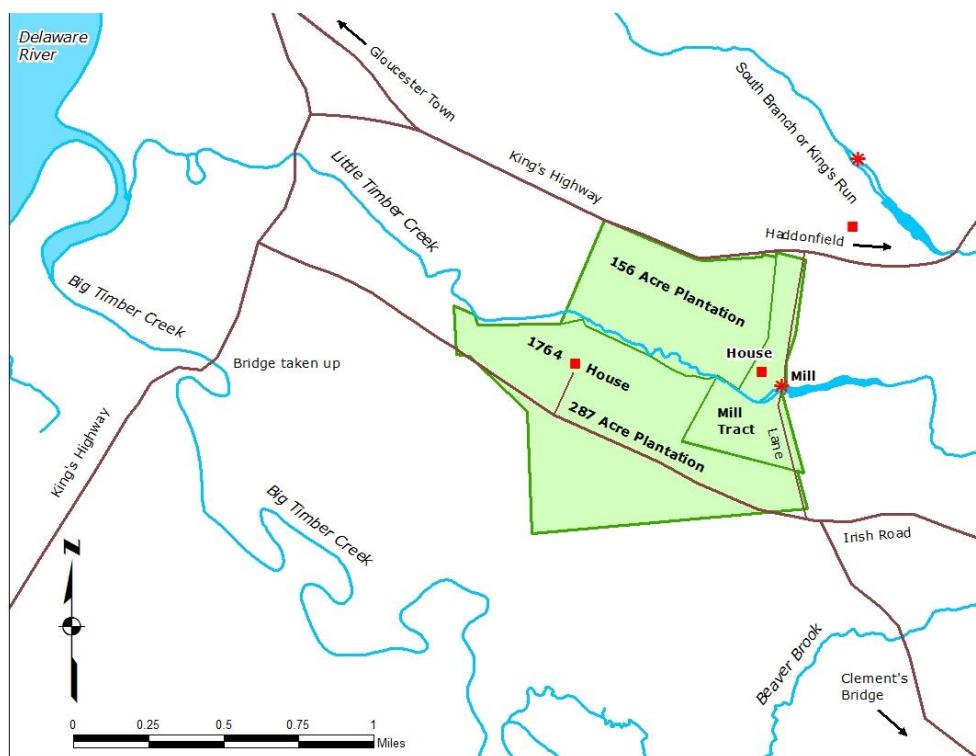


Draft Report on Bellmawr in the American Revolution
Garry Wheeler Stone

During the American Revolution, the area that is now Bellmawr was part of Gloucestertown Township, Gloucester County, New Jersey.¹ The township was located along the Delaware River between the south or “King’s Run” branch of Newton Creek and Big Timber Creek. Beaver Brook was its eastern boundary. Included in the township were the remnants of the 17th-century settlement of Gloucestertown. They included the County courthouse, a ferry landing, William Hugg’s tavern, the sheriff’s farm, and a few dwellings and small farms. The south boundary was Big Timber Creek; the north boundary was the south branch (or “King’s Run”) of Newton Creek.

The men of the township reported to Captain William Harrison, commander of the Gloucestertown Township militia company. Harrison owned 514 acres straddling Little Timber Creek, land that included a grist mill. His property extended from the King’s Highway south across the creek and across the “Irish Road,” now Browning Road. Elsewhere he owned three, 35-acre “tenements,”—rental properties. At least one, the “Malt House” property, was in Gloucestertown.



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Although did not become part of a war zone until October 1777, the war with Great Britain had begun effecting New Jerseyans much earlier. In May 1775, a rebel “Provincial Congress” had taken control of the colony’s government, conscripted all able-bodied males into the militia, and

¹¹ Camden County was separated from Gloucester County in 1844.

imposed war taxes. Pacifists who opposed the war and refused to pay their taxes or fines for not serving in the militia, had property seized and sold.

Harrison's militia company was a unit of the Second Battalion of Gloucester County's militia. Its colonel was Sheriff Joseph Ellis, a veteran of the French and Indian War. Ellis was a charismatic, politically adept leader, whose organizational skills would, in late 1777, make him "Colonel Commandant" of all South Jersey's militias. The district of the Second Battalion ran from Big Timber Creek north to Burlington County—roughly the area of modern Camden County.

The New Jersey State Archives contain only a few records of the service of the Gloucestertown Township militia company. Secondary sources relate that Ellis and Harrison were involved in the skirmishing at Mount Holly, 21-23 December 1776, just prior to Washington's rout of the Hessians at Trenton. A pension applicant claimed to have joined Harrison in Haddonfield in December 1776. He mustered again with Harrison early in January 1777, and marched to Morristown where they quartered in three farmhouses and marched into town every day to drill under Colonel Ellis. At the end of their month tour, they marched back to Gloucestertown Township.²

Militia companies were divided into "classes." So that all of the men of a township would not be absent at the same time, Governor William Livingston would issue orders calling out a specified proportion of the militia, and company commanders would issue orders for specific classes to muster for one month tours of duty. The New Jersey State Archives preserves Captain Harrison's record of calling out two classes in the aftermath of the Battle of Springfield. August 6, 1780, he directed Sergeant Samuel Harrison to "warn" 15 named men to muster. On August 26, another 20 were called up.³ Like their men, company officers served in rotation. Captains would alternate with lieutenants, or sometimes men from one company would join those from a neighboring company. In 1780, Private Stephan Wooley served for two months under Captain Harrison and a third month under Captain Brown [Jacob Browning?]. While with Brown, Wooley was at the Battle of Springfield, 23 June 1780.⁴

Unlike today's National Guard, our Revolutionary War militias had no permanent staff or office buildings. Company commanders worked from their homes or saddlebags. Captain Harrison's headquarters were his brick farmhouse. There he would have kept his lists of military-age males, their subdivision into classes, and which men showed up for drill or tours of duty. For those on duty, he kept payrolls noting the days served, as well as lists of subsistence and mileage expense and bounty payments due. Undoubtedly, it was at his farm that Harrison serviced the public muskets that had been given to him to clean.⁵

In October 1777, the men of the Gloucestertown Township militia no longer had to march to war. The war had come to them. At the end of August, the British main army landed at the head

² Isaac Armstrong, Pension Application (S.2038), abstract transcribed by Jason Wickersty.

³ NJSA, Ms 10783

⁴ Stephan Wooley, pension application W.11,820, abstract transcribed by Jason Wickersty.

⁵ NJSA, Auditors' Book B, pp. 1, 146, 152; C, p. 38; A, p. 97

of the Chesapeake Bay determined to crush the rebellion by seizing its capital. After defeating Washington at Brandywine, they marched into Philadelphia on September 26th. Their hold on the city was precarious, however, until they could open the Delaware River to British shipping. Obstructions in the river, forts, and rebel gunboats kept British supply ships from reaching Philadelphia wharves.

Only a few days after occupying Philadelphia, British engineers began planning and then constructing siege works from which to bombard Fort Mifflin on Mud Island. However, constructing batteries in the marshes of Carpenter's and Province Islands was painfully slow. Hard pressed to feed and supply his army, the British commander decided to storm the forts. On October 22, a brigade-sized force of Germans would assault Fort Mercer at Red Bank. The next day, after naval bombardment, British grenadiers would make an amphibious attack on Fort Mifflin.

At 8 A.M. on October 21, Colonel Carl von Donop crossed the river to Cooper's Ferry. While his light infantry ("Jaegers"), skirmished with the militia, Von Donop led three battalions of Hessian grenadiers and a battalion of infantry to Haddonfield. The next morning, they marched for Red Bank with their battalion field pieces and two, 5-1/2inch howitzers.

As the Germans marched down the King's Highway, somewhere in the vicinity of modern Mount Ephraim, they learned that the militia had dismantled the bridge over Big Timber Creek. Rather than backtrack to the road to Clement's Bridge, the Germans crossed Little Timber Creek on Captain Harrison's mill dam. At the Irish Road they turned east and then south to Clement's Bridge, crossed Big Timber Creek, and marched to Red Bank. Their attempt to storm Fort Mercer was a bloody disaster. Over 400 Hessians were killed or wounded. The survivors fled back to Philadelphia.



Part of an anonymous “Sketch of the Roads,” probably early November 1777. The dashed line shows the Hessian march route crossing Little Timber Creek through Captain Harrison’s property. Edward Fox has tentatively identified the cartographer as General John Cadwalader of the Pennsylvania militia (Library of Congress).

The following day, the British aborted their attack on Fort Mifflin. They were unable to get their battery ship into position, and while cannonading the fort, the 64-gun ship *Augusta* ran aground, caught fire, and exploded. The British resumed constructing siege works on Province and Carpenter’s Islands.

November 10, the siege batteries were complete and the British opened fire with 14 pieces of heavy artillery. By the fifteenth, Fort Mifflin was a wreck. Shortly after 11 A.M., the British were able to warp their battery ship, the *Vigilant*, up to the southwest side of the fort. Its sixteen, 24-pounder guns quickly leveled what remained of the fort. That night, the remaining rebel garrison was ferried to Red Bank. Only Fort Mercer and the river obstructions stood between the British fleet and Philadelphia.⁶

November 18-19, Lord Cornwallis and 6,000 British troops crossed the River to Billingsport. Washington sent troops from Valley Forge to counter, but the British had the shorter distance to travel. As they approached Red Bank on the 20th, the garrison set the fort on fire and withdrew to Haddonfield. The British spent the next few days leveling the fort’s earthworks and foraging (confiscating cattle) the surrounding area. By the 25th, the British were in Gloucester town,

⁶ John W. Jackson, *The Pennsylvania Navy, 1775-1781: The Defense of the Delaware* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1974), pp. 225-258.

embarking cattle for Philadelphia. In Haddonfield, Continental Army major-general Nathanael Greene prepared to attack the British with four infantry brigades. However, as the rebels reconnoitered the British position at Gloucesterstown, they found it was naturally fortified by Newton and Little Timber Creeks, Mile Run, woods, and marshes. In addition, British naval vessels were positioned to provide heavy artillery support. But Greene allowed the marquis de Lafayette to attack an outlying picket with a small force of ten Continental light dragoons (cavalry), 150 riflemen, and 150 to 200 militia. The militia, commanded by Colonel Ellis, included Captain Harrison and men from Gloucesterstown Township. The marquis' brilliant little victory would be the only bright spot in what was otherwise a rebel disaster.

A picket post of 350 Hessian jaegers (rifle-armed light infantry) with two field pieces were posted at the King's Highway crossing of the King's Run (now at the western edge of Haddon Heights). The marquis hit them hard and fast. Riflemen and militia worked their way around the jaegers' flanks, firing from behind trees. As the Germans fell back, Lafayette's small force of light dragoons—probably reinforced by some of the French officers with him—were able ride through Harrison's farm fields and threaten the jaeger's south flank. Twice, British light infantry was sent to reinforce the Germans, but pushing hard, the rebels kept the enemy off-balance and falling back. By the time it became dangerously dark, the jaegers and their British comrades had been pushed back about two miles—to within half a mile of the troops at Gloucesterstown.

Lafayette's detachment had few casualties. A Gloucester County Egg Harbor militia company suffered the most with its lieutenant killed and its ensign wounded. Cumberland County also lost a lieutenant. There were three or so other Continentals wounded, and three French officers had their horses wounded. German and British losses were higher. The jaegers lost one officer and four or five men killed and an officer and about 20 men wounded. The next day, the elated marquis wrote a long description of the skirmish, admitting that it was a "very trifling" affair, but would please Washington "on the account of bravery and alacrity" of the Continental soldiers. Major General Greene complimented Lafayette in his letter to Washington. That same evening, Washington wrote Henry Laurens, President of the Continental Congress, recommending that Lafayette be given command of a division of the Continental Army. The members of Congress agreed, and December 7, Laurens wrote Washington that it was "highly agreeable to Congress" that Lafayette command a division.⁷

While the Battle of Gloucester—also known as the Battle of Haddonfield Road—was partially fought on Captain Harrison's land, it did not cross Little Timber Creek into what is now the Borough of Bellmawr. But the fighting was audible and most likely visible from the south side

⁷ Lafayette, marquis de, *Lafayette in the Age of the American Revolution, Selected Letters and Papers*, Stanley J. Idzerda, Editor, volume 1, 1776-1778 (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 156-161, 165; George Washington, *The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series*, vol. 12, Frank E. Gizzard, Jr., Editor (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2002), pp. 408-411, 417-22; Jason Wickersty, transcriptions of Revolutionary War soldier pension applications furnished Garry Stone, John A. Auten (S.945), Robert Leeds (S.18489), and Richard Sayres (S.4660).

of the creek. “Bellmawr” resident Captain Harrison did suffer loss. “For the part he took against them,” British sailors burned Harrison’s Gloucester “Malt House” tenement.⁸



Michel Capitaine du Chesnoy, *Carte de l'action de Gloucester (part)* (Cornell University). This is a presentation rendering of an unfinished sketch map. It does not show the King's Run nor the farmland south of the King's Highway. It does show the approximate location where Lafayette attacked the Hessian jaegers (blue symbols), where they were reinforced by the British light infantry (red symbols), and where Lafayette left them (at the fork in the road leading to Gloucester Town). Note the small yellow symbol (“K”) south of the road representing the Continental light dragoons. Note also the British troops and forage being ferried across the river.

Gloucestertown Township’s war was far from over, including that of the farmers who occupied the present area of Bellmawr. Since the British occupation of Philadelphia, the New Jersey and Pennsylvania militias had been trying to cut off the city from its normal supplies of beef, pork, firewood, lumber, and hay. In February, General Washington learned that the British were planning to forage South Jersey. To prevent these supplies from falling into enemy hands, on February 19, Washington sent Brigadier-General Anthony Wayne across the river into Salem County to collect cattle and horses, and to burn all the hay stockpiled for export to Philadelphia. Starting in Salem, Wayne marched north, small detachments of soldiers driving cattle herds along inland routes safe from British landing parties. By 25 February, he was in Haddonfield

⁸ Paul W. Schopp, “Historic Cultural Context” in New Jersey Department of Transportation, I-295/I-76/Route 42 Direct Connection, Phase I/II Archaeological Investigation Technical Environmental Study (Volume I), March 2006, on line at http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/commuter/roads/rt295/pdf/PhaseI-IIArchaeoInvestTESVol_I.pdf, Part 4, pp. 4-34 to 4-42.

from which he wrote Washington that he had collected 150 head of cattle. Four hundred tons of hay had been burned.⁹

The British were not happy that the rebels had gotten to Salem and Gloucester counties ahead of them. Before daylight on the 25th, two battalions of light infantry were landed at Billingsport and the next night, the Royal Highland Regiment and the Queen's Rangers landed at Cooper's Ferry. However, Wayne was already at Mount Holly, and his herd of cattle was on its way to Trenton. Having missed Wayne, the enemy detachments began foraging. February 28, one unit marched into the present area of Bellmawr.¹⁰

February 27, Major John Graves Simcoe, Commander of the Queen's Rangers, was ordered to destroy the Continental boats and naval stores at the head of Big Timber Creek. However, the boats—and 150 barrels of tar—appeared valuable, and Loyalists with Simcoe volunteered to carry them down the creek to the British fleet. That night, back in Haddonfield, Simcoe was awoken at midnight. The Loyalists conveying the boats had been fired upon. Simcoe was to take his rangers, suppress the rebel militia, and rescue any Loyalists hiding in the marshes.

Before daybreak, the Queen's Rangers were at Chew's landing vainly seeking militia lieutenant Aaron Chew. Missing Chew, Simcoe sent Captain John Saunders with the huzzars (light cavalry) and a detachment of infantry reconnoitering down the creek. From Chew's Landing, the infantry probably marched the Irish Road (Browning Road) while the huzzars rode along the creek bank. Captain Saunders found that the report of rebel militia had been a mistake. A foraging party from the British shipping, rowing up the creek and meeting the Loyalists, "they fired upon each other, but the mistake soon being discovered, they returned together to the Delaware."¹¹

When Wayne discovered that the British were foraging, he marched back from Mount Holly and chased the enemy back to Philadelphia.

In March, the British launched a major foraging expedition into Salem and lower Gloucester counties. They landed in Salem County on the 17th. Five days later, to support South Jersey Loyalists, the British landed an engineer and 80 Loyalists and began building a redoubt in the ruins of Fort Billingsport. The return of armed, organized Loyalists threw central and southwestern Gloucester County into turmoil. March 22, 1777, Colonel Commandant Ellis wrote Governor Livingston that

"Coll [Bodo] Otto's [Woodbury] Battalion have chiefly revolted to the Enemy & have made Prisoners of a Number of their Officers, those who have eskaped dare not stay at their Homes;—The Market to Philadelphia is now open nor is it in my Power to stop it with about fifty men which is all I have at present—I hope the Arrival of a few

⁹ Washington, *Papers*, Revolutionary War Series, 13: 668-672,

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 13: 677-78.

¹¹ John Graves Simcoe, *Simcoe's Military Journal: A History of the Operations of a Partisan Corps the Queen's Rangers* (New York: Barlett & Welford, 1844; reprint edition, New York: Arno Press, 1968), pp. 38-41; William S. Stryker, *Official Register of Officers and Men of New Jersey in the Revolutionary War* (Trenton, N.J.: William T. Nicholson, 1914), p. 442.

continental Troops will change the face of Affairs & encourage the Militia to turn out—
“¹²

Among the few men with Ellis were Harrison and some of his men from Gloucester Township. In March, Harrison was paid £192.12.6 for his detachment's service, and three days later he was paid £155.0.0 for their bounty payments. At the beginning of August, there was another payment (£156.11.4) for bounties, subsistence, and mileage. Other payments may have been included in claims filed for the battalion by Colonel Ellis or Major Ellis.¹³

Fortunately, the 2nd New Jersey Regiment marched into Haddonfield on March 26. Gradually, the Continentals and Ellis's militia regained control of most of Gloucester County. However, at Billingsport, Lt.-Col. John Van Dike's “New Jersey Volunteers” [Loyalists] kept control of their redoubt and in early June they were reinforced by the 15th Regiment of British Foot.

In late spring, the British in Philadelphia learned that a French fleet was on its way to blockade the Delaware River. June 12, the British began moving wagons, horses, and supplies across the river. On the 18th, they completed evacuating the city when the rear guard crossed to Gloucester Township. The next day,

Colonel Prescott was detach'd with the 28th & 55th Regiments of Foot & 2 Light 6 Pounders to Billingsport, in order to bring off the 15th Regiment, & the Provincial Regiment of Vandyke, which had taken post there sometime before. The Regiments join'd him at Manto Creek & the whole reach'd Haddonfield in the Evening, having met with no Interruption in the March, except from a few Stragglers, suppos'd to be Militia, who by a scatter'd conceal'd fire, wounded the Surgeon's Mate & a Soldier of the 55th Regiment & kill'd a Dragoon Horse.¹⁴

This was the last time that enemy soldiers would march near or through Bellmawr. But Gloucester Township men would continue to muster and serve. In August or September 1779, Harrison and some of his men were in South Amboy guarding the shore from the British in New York.¹⁵ During the early summer of 1780, some would serve in Somerset and Middlesex Counties, and, as noted earlier, two more classes were called up in August.

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Acknowledgement:

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Garry Wheeler Stone
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¹² Washington, *Papers*, Revolutionary War Series, 14: 283

¹³ New Jersey State Archives, Auditors' Book B, p. 146; Auditors' Book C, p. 38.

¹⁴ Stephen Ayde, [Artillery] Brigade Orders Commencing 17th June and Ending 31 December 1778, Carson I. A. Richie, Editor, in *Narratives of the Revolution in New York* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1775), pp. 235-236.

¹⁵ Isaac Armstrong, Pension Application (S.2038), abstract transcribed by Jason Wickerst.