

# Piscatawaytown Burial Ground

Woodbridge Ave. & Park Way, Edison, NJ  
By: Walter R. Stochel Jr 2004

In 1666, settlers from Piscataqua Maine came to this area to live. They founded a Township they called Piscataway. In 1870 this portion of Piscataway Township became Raritan Township, which later became Edison Township. This is the oldest neighborhood in Edison.

On March 5, 1695 the Proprietors of the Province of East New Jersey granted a tract of land for a Burial Ground and a Town Common. Buried here are many of the original families of this area. The Stelles, Bonhams, Randolphs, and Drakes. Also British Soldiers from the American Revolution, American Soldiers from various wars, a Civil War General, Mayors, other leading residents, & the Hoopar brothers (who died of eating poisoned mushrooms)

The oldest readable headstone is the 1693 stone of the Hoopar Brothers:

SPATATER. UNDERNEATH THIS TOMB  
LIES 2 BOYES THAT LAY IN ONE WOMB  
THE ELDEST WAS FULL 13 YEARS OLD  
THE YONGEST WAS V TWICE TOLD  
BY EATING MUSHROMS FOR FOOD RARE  
IN DAYs TIME THEY POYSEONED WERE  
RICHARD HOOPar AND CHARLES HOOPAR  
DESESED AUGUST ANNO DOM 1693

There are no other Hoopars buried here.

## Piscatawaytown Burial Ground During the American Revolution 1776-1777

Behind the Burial Ground is the "Commons" which is the oldest public open space in Middlesex County. The Commons was a place where the local militia drilled, where animals were allowed to graze. There was also a Town Meeting House, and Stocks located in the Commons. Across from the Commons is the Dunham house, which was a tavern during the American Revolution. At one time George Washington, & Alexander Hamilton ate breakfast here.

Woodbridge Ave. during the Colonial Era was known as the Post Road. This was the main road from New York City, to Philadelphia. News from throughout the 13 Colonies passed through this area. People such as George Washington, Ben Franklin, and John Adams, all traveled on what is now Woodbridge Ave.

In December 1776, the American Army under the command of George Washington retreated through this area on their way to Pennsylvania. Quickly the British Army moved into this area. The British used the Burial Ground and Commons as a camp. The St. James Church was used as a barracks by the 42<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, which was known as the Royal Highland Regiment "The Black Watch", and as a hospital, during the winter and spring of 1776-1777. Legend has it that British soldiers were buried in the front of the church.

Woodbridge Ave. (Then the Post Road) connected British forces in New Brunswick, Piscataway, Bonhamtown, and Perth Amboy. This was a major supply, and communications artery for the British. To feed and supply this large army, the British sent out foraging parties to seize food and supplies from the local farmers. This increased the opposition to the British rule in Middlesex County.

On the afternoon of May 10, 1777 1500 Americans attacked the 42nd Regiment at Piscatawaytown. The British then brought in reinforcements, and fought the Americans all the way to the Metuchen Meeting House 4 miles away. The British had 2 officers' killed, and 26 men killed and wounded. The Americans lost 40 and had 36 men taken prisoner.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 1777 the British moved out of Piscatawaytown, and marched to Perth Amboy. Later that night, they changed directions and marched to North Edison, where the Battle of the Short Hills was fought on June 26<sup>th</sup>, which was the largest battle in Edison during the Revolution. 4 days later, the British Army leaves New Jersey, and sails to the Chesapeake and later in the year fight at the Battle of Brandywine.

## General Thomas Swords 1806-1886

The highest-ranking veteran buried in the Piscatawaytown Burial Ground is Brvt. Major General Thomas Swords. He was a veteran of the Mexican War (1846) and the Civil War (1861-1865).

He was born in New York in 1806 and graduated from the US Military Academy in 1829. He served in Alabama, Florida, and Missouri. He was promoted to Lieutenant and transferred to a regiment of Dragoons at Ft. Gibson Okla. In 1834 he was an Assistant Quartermaster, and was at Ft. Leavenworth KS. He was promoted to Captain in 1837.

In May 1838 he married Charlotte Cotheal. By 1842 he was directing the construction of Ft. Scott Kansas.

In 1846 during the Mexican War, Captain Swords, marched with Col. Stephen Kearney from Kansas to Santa Fe New Mexico, and captured the city. They then marched to San Diego California, and fought in a battle to take that city. After the battle Swords sailed to Hawaii for supplies. He returned to San Francisco, and then, in March 1847 he marched back to Ft. Leavenworth with Col. Kearny.

In 1852 he was appointed chief quartermaster of the Pacific. From 1861 to 1865 he was chief quartermaster of the Department of the Cumberland, and the Ohio. He also served at the battle of Chickamauga.

He was made a Brevet Major General on March 13, 1865, the same day that Custer and Abner Doubleday were made Major Generals.

General Swords retired in 1869, and died in New York City in 1886 at the age of 79. Charlotte Cotheal Swords died in 1888.

After years of being covered with brush and vines, his gravesite was cleared in 1998. Research on his life began in 1999. At this time there is no known reason why he is buried here with his wife's family.

For more information on this cemetery or local history contact:  
Metuchen-Edison Historical Society, PO Box 61, Metuchen, NJ 08840