



Piscatawaytown Burial Ground

Woodbridge Ave. & Park Way, Edison, NJ
By: Walter R. Stochel Jr. Metuchen-Edison Historical Society, Edison Greenways Group

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.

The Piscatawaytown Burial Ground is one of the oldest cemeteries in Middlesex County with one grave dating back to 1693, and there may have been earlier burials.

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 buried here are Mary Moore (the witch), British Soldiers from the American Revolution, American Soldiers from various wars, a Civil War General, Mayors, other influential residents, and 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.

Another interesting gravestone is that of Thomas W. Harper, who was killed during the tornado of 1835. Legend has it that Harper was standing out in the storm when he was told to enter the inn across from the church. Harper then said he would not fear God until he felt his power. He then was struck with a timber from the Church, and died 4 days later.

Also buried here is Mary Moore. The legendary Witch. During colonial times, Mary was accused of being a witch. Neighbors said she caused animals to do strange things, she grew strange plants, and she dressed like a witch, so they hung her. (Or burned her at the stake) Strange things would happen around her grave. Then one day in the 1950's (or '60's, 70's, 80's) a teenage boy stole the headstone and hid it in his closet. Shortly afterward, he was killed crossing Route 1 and his brother smashed the headstone.

Piscatawaytown Burial Ground During the American Revolution 1776 & 1777

The Piscatawaytown Burial Ground is located next to St. James Church on Woodbridge Ave. 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 Park Way 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 42nd 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 the 42nd Regiment at Piscatawaytown was attacked by 1500 Americans. 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 25th 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 26th, 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.