

STORIES of New Jersey

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SCOTCH PLAINS

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THE TEA BURNERS OF GREENWICH

When the word "tea" is mentioned as a cause of the Revolutionary War most people picture howling redskins throwing cases of tea into Boston Harbor. Few know that New Jersey had its own tea party --- one that was as colorful and as violent. The New Jersey patriots used fire instead of water but the destruction was as complete. The incident occurred in the town of Greenwich in the southern part of the State, a peaceful law-abiding community whose citizens were about equally divided in their loyalties: half Whig, half Tory. Many of the Whigs were younger persons who bitterly opposed England's treatment of the Colonies.

On that exciting night in December 1774 the citizens of the little town of Greenwich were awakened by a racket. People were running toward the market place where a huge bonfire was burning. Around the high-leaping flames a band of 40 Indians, grimly silent, was opening large packages which they brought from the cellar of a house on the square. As each package was opened its contents were fed to the fire.

Many a Greenwich housewife sniffed the air regretfully as she recognized the fragrance of burning tea leaves. So this was another tea party; like the one in Boston a year ago! There were people in the group of citizens watching the destruction who deeply disapproved the rash act, while others looked on admiringly; but whatever the sentiments of the spectators no one offered to halt the work of the young men who had disguised themselves as Indians in order to intimidate any Tories who might attempt to resist them.

About ten days previously a ship named the Greyhound, loaded with tea for Philadelphia, had sailed up the Delaware River. At the mouth of Cohansey Creek the captain unexpectedly gave the order to come about and the vessel headed up the stream to Greenwich. The skipper had decided that Greenwich was a safer place to unload his cargo than Philadelphia. In Greenwich he knew of a Tory named Dan Bowen who would be pretty sure to permit the storing of the tea in his cellar.

This tea business was being taken seriously by the colonists. They enjoyed the comfort of a cup of tea as much as ever; but rather than submit to a tax imposed without fair representation, many refused to drink tea. All sorts of substitutes were used, raspberry and blackberry leaves, golden rod, dittany, and various other native plants and herbs. There is a story told of Hugh Drum of Somerset County who was so thoroughly in earnest that he