

STORIES of New Jersey

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SCOTCH PLAINS

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CAPTAIN HUDDY

DEFENDER OF THE SALT WORKS

One of the English tyrannies that drove the Thirteen Colonies to revolution was the salt monopoly. England insisted on selling salt to the Colonists and forbade them to manufacture any of their own. Meat and fish had to be preserved for the American soldiers and the families at home, so the Colonists resorted to the only available means of making salt -- evaporating sea water. At various points along the coast salt works were established. One of these was at Toms River, on Barnegat Bay. The creeks branching from Toms River into the lowland were filled with the saltiest of water from the inlet and distant sea. Wells and ditches were dug, and the water allowed to collect in evaporation ponds. The brine was then boiled in iron pans, producing a thick soupy solution. This was placed in wicker baskets and allowed to drain. What remained in the baskets was salt.

At that time, where the summer colony of Seaside now is, there was an inlet through which American patriots could sail forth to harry British shipping, returning safely to the quiet waters of Toms River.

The British had made several raids on the Toms River settlement, bent on destroying the salt works and avenging the attacks made on their vessels by rebels. Fearing that they would not be able to hold out against the enemy, the Toms River citizens asked for a military force to protect this important source of supply. This was in the spring of 1782. The war was practically over, although the British still held New York. The colonial forces were so depleted that only 25 men could be spared.

A block house was built on a rise of land where the Toms River town-hall now stands. It consisted of a palisade of sharpened logs seven feet high, which was an outer defense for a log barracks building and a magazine. At the four corners of the palisade square were platforms on which were mounted small brass swivels. The little band of 25, in charge of Captain Joshua Huddy, were assigned to duty and established their vigil at the precious salt works.

Huddy had become a marked man to the British and their Tory sympathizers. It is little realized how many of these British sympathizers were within the American lines. Throughout the Revolution they kept up a steady guerilla warfare with the patriots.

The worst element among these Tories were the famous Pine Robbers of South Jersey. In the beginning these had been sincere loyalists, but they had