

553

STORIES of New Jersey

PREPARED FOR USE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS BY THE
 NEW JERSEY WRITERS' PROJECT, WORK PROJECTS ADMINISTRATION

44 Chestnut Street, Newark, New Jersey

GEORGE WASHINGTON IN NEW JERSEY



Commander in Chief

British soldiers lay dead and dying on the fields at Lexington and Concord April 19, 1775. The flame of open and armed rebellion against British rule, struck in Massachusetts, was soon raging savagely across New Jersey. In this State, strategic gateway between north and south, took place the crucial events which saved the desperate struggle for American independence. And it was here that a soldier-farmer from Virginia, confronted by a terrible and heartbreaking ordeal, achieved the greatness of character and vision that made possible the rise of a mighty, democratic nation.

Eight days after Col. George Washington was chosen commander in chief of all colonial troops by the Second Continental Congress at Philadelphia on June 15, 1775, he set out across "the Jerseys" (West Jersey and East Jersey) to take command of the crude army which had already stopped the British at Bunker Hill and was hemming them in at Boston.

Washington had been in New Jersey before: on his first trip to Boston in 1756, at the age of 24, and again in May 1773 on a journey to New York. On this second occasion, he dined with Governor William Franklin at Trenton and stayed the night there. Next morning he breakfasted at Princeton and moved on to Basking Ridge, where he spent the day at the mansion of William Alexander, known as Lord Stirling, who had accompanied him from Philadelphia.

Now in 1775, accompanied by two of his generals, dependable Schuyler and brilliant, ambitious Charles Lee, he was in New Jersey once more, hastening to lead a rebellion which he expected would last only six months. Six years passed before he saw Mount Vernon again, and during this long time more than one-third of his actual campaigning was carried on in New Jersey. Across the small area between the Delaware and the Hudson rivers he was to maneuver a ragged army four times and fight three battles which vitally affected the outcome of the Revolution.

As he traveled northward to Cambridge by way of New Brunswick and Hoboken, Washington had reason to feel optimistic about the future. The Congress planned to raise a Continental Army of 15,000 men, and this force, together with the various militia, he felt, could drive 8,000 British soldiers from the colonies. This accomplished, Washington expected that Parliament and the King's ministers would retract their tyrannical laws and grant to the American people a greater