

The Willits-Andrews Farmstead (Pulaski Headquarters Site) is a Valuable, Nationally Recognized Local Landmark

The written history of Little Egg Harbor spans just over three centuries, although what happened in October 1778 during the American Revolution stands out because we now know so much more about the actual events. Still, the battle of October 15, 1778, when the British tried but failed to march inland from the upland landing opposite Osborn Island, suffers from a reputation that it is a poorly understood episode in the war which led to our country's founding. For many, many years the only reminder of what happened here was the granite stone 'Pulaski Monument,' located behind the 800 block of Radio Road.

National level recognition of Little Egg Harbor's historical significance occurred when the U.S. National Park Service issued its report, 'Crossroads of the American Revolution in New Jersey' over a decade ago. A close look at the federal report (under the 'National Register Sites related to the Revolutionary War' appendix) reveals a couple of things. The listing identifies the somewhat lesser known 'Headquarters' site (at 18 Hollybrook Drive, behind Ocean County-Atlantis golf course) as the Willits-Andrews Farmstead. The same entry also shows the Pulaski Monument-Radio Rd. site is associated with it. The two sites, of course, are separated by a distance of about three-quarters of a mile yet they are directly related to the same historical moment. And therein lays the story of the battle.

The history behind the National Register of Historic Places listing brings to light the fact that while the Willits-Andrews farm was important in and of itself for cultural and archeological reasons, the fact General Casimir Pulaski chose it as his headquarters makes the location even more noteworthy. By way of comparison, the Federal report includes places like the famous Princeton Battlefield in addition to the lesser known Haddonfield Historic District, where [quote], *Revolutionary War military heroes, "Light Horse" Harry Lee, General "Mad" Anthony Wayne,*

Daniel Morgan, Count Pulaski and General Lafayette were familiar figures



The National Park Service's 2002 report identifying the Willits-Andrews Farmstead site & Pulaski Monument

along the streets." But no battle took place in Haddonfield. In our case, where there was an actual military engagement, the meaning of the National Register designation is that *historically important events actually played out here.*

Pulaski and some of his officers occupied the structure while the soldiers of the Pulaski Legion (including dozens of horses) made the entire Willits farm their main base of encampment for several days starting the second week of October 1778. Local lore, as Leah Blackman recorded in her seminal history of the area, held that the site was where Pulaski one might say 'stabled' his main camp (there were so many horses). The choice to make this the principal point of defense against an attack from the water was no accident.

Leah Blackman offered a hint of its importance when, writing in the mid-1800s, she noted in that era the high ground on which the farm was built offered a clear view of ships below in Little Egg Harbor. This makes sense as General Pulaski, faced with dilemma of planning for an attack he knew would shortly come, had to have a centrally located position from which he could observe (at least during daylight hours) the enemy. The British flotilla, whose movements he reported seeing in the harbor, was anchored off today's Long Beach Island.

General Pulaski instantly recognized that the attack (which would take place on the night of October 14-15) could come about from one of two directions. First there was the obvious possibility of the enemy sailing directly across the harbor (likely from the vicinity of Beach Haven) into Tuckerton Cove. The other possibility was a landing on Osborn Island, located in Great Bay (but only after an arduous row of several miles). Due to the danger of an island landing on his right flank, the general stationed an infantry outpost (three-quarters of a mile distant from his headquarters camp) to screen against any enemy advance along



Speculative drawings of the home of Willits at the time of the American Revolution

Island Road (today's Radio Road). That is, of course, where the battle actually occurred and is the reason the Pulaski monument is located there. In the end, the enemy had decided to land on Osborn Island to maintain secrecy and have a 'base' to which to retreat if things went wrong (which they certainly did from the enemy's viewpoint).

In fact, the choice of the Hollybrook Drive site as the best position to dominate the battle area was obvious and simple. A survey of the *modern topography confirms that the site of the former farm is the highest point which is also closest to the harbor.* Other farms in the area in 1778 might have been suitable for various reasons, but none met the crucial criteria of high ground offering a direct line of sight into

Little Egg Harbor like the Willits farm. The site also removed to a safe distance Pulaski's main force from any point of first attack. When the pre-dawn attack did come, this secure location gave time to mount up, form ranks and counter-attack as the tactics of the era called for.

The real significance of this defensive measure can be better understood from other historical records. Only weeks before the attack at Little Egg Harbor, a disaster for the American cause occurred at the 'Tappan massacre' (near the Tappan Zee Bridge just above New York City); it was a prime example of what could happen when certain defensive precautions were not taken. At Tappan, virtually an entire Continental cavalry regiment ceased to exist because the surprised troopers were bayoneted by the British while encamped in barns. The unit was defeated because there had been no infantry guard force to protect the camp. But that disaster would not be repeated at Little Egg Harbor. There have been occasions when facts about the 2 engagements became seriously confused and some have supposed that what happened at Tappan also occurred at Little Egg Harbor.

When the British finally made it off Osborn Island and attacked, they ran into the outpost picket guard (where the Pulaski monument is today) which was just so positioned to watch over the approach to the main camp at the Willits-Andrews farm. In the course of the battle's opening skirmish, the outpost actually halted the British attack (with a loss of about 19 Americans killed, each by a bayonet thrust just like at Tappan). The delay was long enough for Pulaski to launch a counter-attack with his light horse dragoons. The British (who numbered about 200 infantry) were driven back in a hasty if not panicked retreat to their boats on Osborn Island, losing several men captured and a score or more scattered in the process.

The 60+ horsemen of Pulaski must have been truly impressive, charging in the early morning light through the fields (today's residential neighborhood streets of Cedar Brook and Willow Brook Lanes, the golf course and most probably directly on to the grounds of the modern day Township Hall at the

corner of Radio and Mathistown Roads). It was at this point a mounted dragoon officer rode into a group of British infantrymen, one of whom stabbed his horse to death. Continental Congress archives contain a commendation for bravery awarded to the officer, which survives today as a record of the event.



American Continental Dragoons returned to the Pulaski Headquarters - Hollybrook Drive site during the 225th anniversary of the Defense of Little Egg Harbor



In short, Pulaski with his outpost and cavalry, prevented the enemy from reaching Stage Road in Little Egg Harbor Meeting (modern day Tuckerton), which was the route to the British objective, Batsto. And just like a week earlier down on the Mullica River when the enemy was halted and forced to withdraw, the attackers realized their plans to cripple the Port of Little Egg Harbor were fruitless.

While these details explain how Pulaski carefully protected his main force and how it successfully counter-attacked, the still larger strategic significance of whole military engagement is only dimly understood even by historians. For this reason

research is continuing into the significance of the Port of Little Egg Harbor and its role in the American Revolution. The goal is to tell the full story behind the National Register designation (according to National Historic Preservation Act criteria) and to make clear why Little Egg Harbor and the region are noteworthy in the history of our nation's founding.



The 225th anniversary gave occasion for a proper commemoration of the Battle of October 15, 1778 at the Pulaski Monument on Radio Road

The National Park Service
Northeast Region
Philadelphia Support Office



Crossroads of the American Revolution in New Jersey

Special Resource Study
National Heritage Area Feasibility Study
Environmental Assessment



August 2002

NATIONAL REGISTER SITES RELATED TO THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR

Resource	County	Existing Condition			Level of Threat			Need for Action		Potential for Interpretation			
		H	M	L	H	M	L	OK	\$	NO	1	2	3
Miller-Kingsland House	Morris	•						•					•
New Vernon Historic District	Morris		•		•			•					•
Peter Kemble House	Morris			•				•		•			•
Ralston Historic District	Morris		•							•			•
Samuel Ford Jr. Hammock Farm	Morris		•					•					•
Simon Van Dyne House	Morris		•					•					•
Timothy Mills House	Morris							•					•
Van Dyne-Jacobus House	Morris		•					•					•
Washington Valley Historic District	Morris	•						•					•
Willits-Andrews Farmstead Site/Pulaski Monument	Ocean			•						•			•
Dey Mansion	Passaic		•					•					•
Westside Park (Van Houten House)	Passaic		•					•					•
Alexander and James Linn Homestead	Somerset		•					•					•
Alward House	Somerset		•					•					•
Blawenburg Historic District	Somerset			•				•					•
Bridgepoint Historic District	Somerset		•					•					•
East Millstone Historic District	Somerset		•					•					•
Franklin Corners Historic District	Somerset	•						•					•
Griggstown Historic District	Somerset		•					•					•
Jacob Vosseller/Casner/Allen Tavern	Somerset		•					•					•
Jacobus Vanderveer House	Somerset		•					•					•
John Parker Tavern	Somerset		•					•					•
Kingston Village Historic District	Somerset		•					•					•
Kirch-Ford House	Somerset		•					•					•
Lamington Historic District	Somerset		•					•					•
Lord Stirling Manor Site	Somerset		•					•					•
Manahawkin Baptist Church	Somerset		•					•					•
McDonald's-Kline's Mill	Somerset		•					•					•
Middlebrook Encampment	Somerset		•					•					•