

RED BANK BATTLEFIELD ARCHAEOLOGY PROJECT

Summer 2022

About the archaeological dig

- In 2020, Gloucester County purchased a quarter-acre lot adjacent to Red Bank Battlefield Park's northern boundary. The site contains a part of a trench at Fort Mercer used by American soldiers in their 1777 battle for independence against Hessian forces fighting for the British during the Revolutionary War.
- A \$19,000 New Jersey Historical Commission project grant in 2021 funded an initial archaeology survey on the parcel, as well as a public education and outreach program.
- Gloucester County committed \$30,000 in additional funding for the second phase of the project.
- Professional archaeologist Wade Catts of South River Heritage Consulting was contracted to direct the survey. Catts also conducted the 2014 survey of the battlefield that unearthed, among other items, a portion of a cannon from the battle.

Public participation

In May, Gloucester County's Parks and Recreation Department offered four public archaeology participation days. Over 100 members of the public, including Rowan students, shoveled the ground, screened for and washed artifacts, and learned about archaeology.

Discoveries

Among other items, the public uncovered the following:

- A rare 1766 King George III gold guinea, the equivalent of a soldier's wage for a month
- Five impacted musket balls
- A knee buckle from a uniform containing material and human blood
- Grapeshot and lead canister shot
- Pewter and brass buttons



Discovery of human remains

- On June 26, the final public dig day, a volunteer uncovered what appeared to be a human femur.
- Continued excavation work has unearthed what the team believes are remains of Hessian soldiers who died on the battlefield 245 years ago.

Project partners

Jennifer Janofsky

*History professor, College of Humanities & Social Sciences, Rowan University
Megan Giordano Fellow in Public History
Director, Red Bank Battlefield Park*

Wade Catts

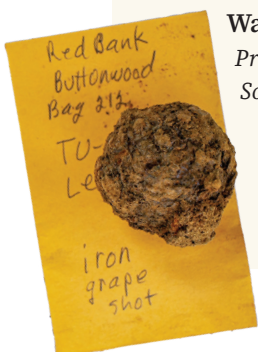
*President/principal archaeologist
South River Heritage Consulting LLC*

Anna Delaney

*Forensic anthropologist
New Jersey State Police*

Next steps

- All exposed remains are in the custody of the New Jersey State Police Forensic Unit. They will be studied by NJSP forensic anthropologist Anna Delaney and Utica College emeritus anthropology and anatomy professor Dr. Tom Crist.
- DNA extracted from the remains, as well as studies on teeth, bones and surrounding soils, will help anthropologists learn more about the soldiers and their stories.
- Eventually, the remains will be reinterred for proper burial. A site has yet to be determined.
- The trench site will be incorporated into the park, serving as a place to memorialize the war dead and offer visitors a more nuanced understanding of the battle.



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About Red Bank Battlefield Park

- Owned and maintained by Gloucester County, the 44-acre site sits on a bluff above the Delaware River in National Park.
- The park's Fort Mercer is the site of the Revolutionary War battle between Hessian and American forces. The Hessians served as an auxiliary force for the British. Americans destroyed the fort before they abandoned it in November 1777.
- The fort was a key defense for Americans to delay the British from advancing up the Delaware River to Philadelphia.
- In the 1970s, the park was listed on the National Register of Historic Places and was designated a National Historic Landmark and added to the list of New Jersey Historic Places.



ABOVE: Jennifer Janofsky, a public historian at Rowan, and history major Raluca Muscan examine artifacts.

TOP RIGHT: The archaeology project included more than 100 members of the public who volunteered at the digs.

RIGHT: A volunteer and archaeologists from South River Heritage Consulting search for metal in the trench.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Burst cannon barrel at Red Bank drawn by Benson Lossing, Pictorial Field Book of the American Revolution (1850).

About the Fort Mercer Battle of Red Bank

- Fought: Oct. 22, 1777
- Forces: 2,000 Hessians fighting for the British; about 500 American defenders from the Rhode Island regiment plus a contingent of New Jersey militia. The American force included Black and white soldiers fighting for freedom side by side.
- Casualties: Though historical accounts vary, approximately 377 Hessian soldiers were killed or wounded during the battle, while the Americans lost 14.
- According to historians, from the standpoint of killed and wounded, the Hessian assault on Fort Mercer was the worst defeat they experienced during the Revolutionary War.



OLD CANNON AT RED BANK.

Thanks also to project partners

Dana Linck, *Great Chain Archeology*
Dr. David Orr, *retired, Temple University*
Dr. Heather Wholey, *West Chester University of Pennsylvania*

