



# The Continental Army Comes into Its Own

## The Middlebrook Cantonment of 1778-1779

Proceedings of the Heritage Trail Association's  
240th Anniversary Middlebrook Symposium

### Learn about George Washington's Middlebrook Cantonment in Somerset County, New Jersey

- **First military academy**
- **Creation of a beacon warning system for local militia**

Archeologists and historians weigh in on the impact of the Middlebrook winter on the development of the American army and the continuing war effort.



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*Belt tip found during archeological dig  
at the Pluckemin Artillery Park, Pluckemin, NJ*

The Heritage Trail Association announced the publication of its latest book, *The Continental Army Comes into Its Own: The Middlebrook Cantonment of 1778-1779*. This new work includes articles drawn from a symposium, held in 2019, about New Jersey's central role in the American Revolution. The work presents original research and previously unreleased findings about George Washington's strategic positioning of the army in the Raritan Valley during the winter of 1778-1779. Known as the Middlebrook Cantonment, this winter is an essential but often overlooked aspect of the Revolutionary War. Chapters by leading historians and archaeologists show how this time period marks the point when the Continental Army became a professional fighting force able to stand up to the British army, the strongest fighting force in the world at the time, and win.

George Washington and the Continental Army spent about a quarter of the length of the entire Revolutionary War in New Jersey – more than in any other state. Famous Revolutionary events in New Jersey include the Battle of Trenton, the Battle of Princeton, and the brutal 1779-1780 winter cantonment at Morristown. The Middlebrook Cantonment, falling roughly at the midpoint between these other events, is given comparatively little attention. Why? In part, because the weather was mild, the troops were reasonably healthy, and there were few headline-grabbing disasters or stunning victories. In essence, the calm professionalism and strong defensive position of the cantonment lacks drama that grabs public attention and contributes to stirring tales. Yet, the Middlebrook Cantonment has many unique aspects deserving of increased recognition including:

An improved method of quartering soldiers was developed to avoid the problems of Valley Forge, one that served as the model for the army's winter quarters for the rest of the war.

The first beacon signal system was erected on the Watchung Hills for the purpose of alerting local militia.

The first formal training academy for artillerists and the standardization of weaponry began.

More efficient, strategic resupply along existing road networks allowed the army to co-exist with the local population.

*The Continental Army Comes into Its Own* explains that this period of organization, consolidation, and the sense and order were exactly why the Cantonment was successful, and why it was an essential ingredient to the American victory in the Revolutionary War. By spending that winter training and concentrating on resupply, the army went from being a rough fighting force to being a centrally organized, disciplined, uniformly trained military. The winter may have lacked drama, but without that winter the American forces would not have been in as strong a condition as they became. Drawing on archaeological research, contemporaneous military records, and new scholarship, *The Continental Army Comes into Its Own* goes compiles the best of recent scholarship on this long-neglected component of the American Revolution into context. The work will appeal both to researchers and amateur scholars alike.

*The Continental Army Comes into Its Own* by The Heritage Trail Association, Editors, Linda Barth, Sean Blinn, and Margaret W. Sullivan is available on Amazon at <https://www.amazon.com/Continental-Army-Comes-into-Its/dp/B09HQ25ZB3/> and is available in both paperback and digital editions.

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