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TRACKING HISTORY

Greenwich house was site of last 'tea party' in colonies

As far as "tea parties" go, Boston, Mass., has nothing on South Jersey — or the rest of the country, for that matter.

Greenwich, Cumberland County, was one of four other sites in the country where "tea parties" took place. The others were held at Annapolis, Md., Charleston and Princeton, according to the Cumberland County Historical Society.

"(Greenwich) was the last tea party held in the colonies," said Jonathan E. Wood, vice president of the historical society.

In Boston, on Dec. 16, 1773, a group of activists dressed as Mohawk Indians boarded the British ship "Eleanor" and dumped 342 casks of tea into Boston Harbor to protest England's tax on tea.

A year later, on Dec. 22, 1774, a group of young men, also dressed as Indians, staged their own tea party in Greenwich.

Founded in 1675, Greenwich was the principal settlement of Cumberland County at the time of the incident.

Earlier that month the British brig "Greyhound," bound for Philadelphia with a load of



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tea, sailed up the Cohansey River and tied up in Greenwich.

Its captain, J. Allen, heard news from a pilot that the tea would not be welcome in the City of Brotherly Love. So Allen secured permission from a local Tory Dan Bowen to secretly store his cargo in Bowen's cellar.

"At the time Cumberland County was a hotbed of patriotic fervor in the months and weeks prior to the beginning of the Revolutionary War and the word was soon out about the tea being stored in Bowen's house," said Wood.

As locals formed a committee to decide what action should be taken, a group of 40 patriots decided to take matters into their own hands.

On the evening of Dec. 22, they met at the home of Philip Vickers Fithian and dressed as Indians. They marched to Bowen's house, broke into the basement and seized the cargo of tea.

They took it to the market and threw it into a huge bonfire.

When the fire died out the "Indians" escaped down Ye Greate Street.

"Attempts to prosecute the tea burners went nowhere," said Wood. "Two jury trials brought in a cause for no action."

Historic records show that most of the officials who would have prosecuted the case were related to someone who had been involved in the tea burning.

Wood said that outside of South Jersey, the nation knew little of the Greenwich Tea Burning. It never became a part of the history taught in schools.

"Historians probably did not consider it of equal importance to the Boston Tea Party," Wood said. "But the spirit that went along with it was just as important to the cause of independence."

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