



KNOW YOUR ROOTS *

"A Family That Doesn't Understand Its Past Doesn't Know Itself"

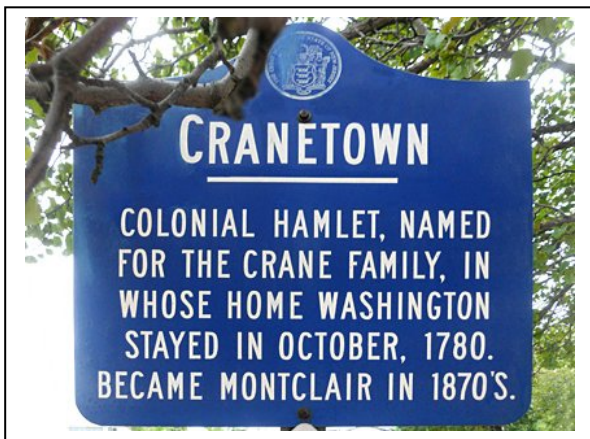
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BENJAMIN CRANE REVOLUTIONARY SOLDIER

This is a story about our Revolutionary War ancestor, a descendant of Jasper Crane who arrived in New Haven in 1637, but before I begin with Benjamin, a descendant, let me remind you that the Cranes are our ancestors through Harry Elson Durland's grandmother, Mary Ann Crane. Her story and many other stories of the Cranes, plus more of New Jersey, can be found in past newsletters.

Jasper's son, Azariah Crane, developer of New Jersey, and his wife, Mary Treat, built a home in New Jersey they called Cranetown. (It is now the southern part of Montclair.) Generations of Cranes including John, Azariah's son, owned many acres as was attested to in John's will when he died there in 1776. John's youngest son was Benjamin and this story begins with Benjamin who was born in 1740 in Newark and married Phebe Meeker, born in 1763 also in Newark which is in Essex County, New Jersey.



Benjamin Crane was unique in many ways during the Revolutionary War era. This is important to remember for several reasons. New Jersey was the area of many battles and skirmishes and suffered greatly during the war. Many people at the time were "disaffected" as they called it. There were Tories, the loyalists, the British, the Hessians and even the Indians. Their lands were looted, there were raids, and sometimes a father had one son in one army and another in an opposing camp. Especially

the British and their Hessian troops who entered the state were brutal in their habits - stealing, looting, and raping both the patriots and the loyalists. Each landowner was in constant fear for his family and his property.

New Jersey played a significant role in the Revolutionary War and General Washington spent more time there than anywhere else. New Jersey's strategic location made it a center of the war's activity.

**The original heading of Know Your Roots in 1997*

This was the situation for Benjamin and his wife Phebe and their children living in Newark, Essex County, New Jersey. Obviously Benjamin decided that the situation was intolerable for his family so he decided to remedy it by taking his children to a more peaceful area in the state of New York, Montgomery County, called Craneville which later became the town of Amsterdam. At this time there were six children in Benjamin's family. Phebe, his only daughter, Jonas, Caleb, Benjamin Jr., and Isaac, all born in New Jersey. This move must have taken place sometime before 1777. We know this because another son David was born in 1777, but in Montgomery County, NY. Not much longer afterwards, another son and our ancestor was born in July of 1780 and was named Obadiah Meeker Crane. (The name Meeker was the maiden name of his mother.) So we find Benjamin and his family living away from their New Jersey home.


However, the situation for Benjamin must have become dire. The raids and looting were continuing in New Jersey. This must have enraged Benjamin so much that he heeded General Washington's plea for more militia and enlisted in December of 1780 in New Jersey. This was the second unusual act for Benjamin, for he was forty years old. Today a man of forty would not be able to enlist, but unquestionably he must have believed very strongly in the fight for independence. Whatever were his reasons, he left his wife with his eight children and went to war.

It was possible then to enlist for specific periods and it is noted that he served one year in 1781 as a private in Capt. John Scudder's Company who was in charge of the New Jersey state militia. What is so surprising is that his record shows that he enlisted as a musician. During this year of his service (1781) there were innumerable raids, battles, and skirmishes in New Jersey. I do not know how much he was involved and where and how he served his year under Captain Scudder, but for a man of forty at that time, he must have feared losing everything. Of the New Jersey militia, the Hessian officer Johann Ewald wrote:

"What can you not achieve with such small bands who have learned to fight dispersed who know how to use every molehill for their defense, and who retreat as quickly when attacked as they advance again, and who will always find space to hide. Never have I seen these maeuvres(sic) performed better than by the American Militia, and especially that of the Province of New Jersey....."

New Jersey in those years enlisted militia men into special units of "state troops" which were militia units usually of one. They would serve along the borders of the state where action was frequent and were said to provide the muscle needed to fight the British. They were not afraid to fight. The British could never control the countryside in New Jersey because of the militia.

This is the story of Benjamin Crane, our Revolutionary ancestor who fought the enemy at age forty. He never returned to New Jersey after his year was over but died at age 72 in Amsterdam, Montgomery, New York.



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