April 2026

Chatham Historical Society Newsletter

Do you own this painting?

This painting, *"Chatham Ovens, New Jersey,"* was created by Connecticut artist David R. Wagner, who passed away on December 6, 2025. His family is now working to document his full body of work—and they believe this particular piece may be in the Chatham area.

The subject of the painting is rooted in one of our town's most fascinating Revolutionary War stories. In the summer of 1781, George Washington ordered the construction of bread ovens in Chatham as part of a strategic ruse. The ovens were meant to signal that Continental troops were preparing to remain in the area for an attack on New York. Instead, while the bread baked overnight, Washington quietly marched his troops out of town under cover of darkness—gaining a crucial advantage that led to the victory at Yorktown and, ultimately, the beginning of the end of the Revolutionary War.

Today, you can read about this clever maneuver at the kiosk in Shepard Kollock Park. But somewhere, this painted tribute to that moment in Chatham history may be hanging in a living room, hallway, or office nearby. If you recognize this painting—or know who might own it—please reach out to the Chatham Historical Society at Chathamnjhistory@gmail.com. The information will help complete the artist's provenance records and honor his legacy.

If found, the estate would like to create a high-resolution digital version of the painting so they can create fine-art giclée prints to add to the full collection of the artist's Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route collection (view all his paintings at davidrwagner.com).

Let's see if our community can help bring this story full circle.

As the 250th Approaches:
Looking Closer at Chatham's Revolutionary Past

As we approach the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution, it's worth asking: How much of the story do we really know?

In this thoughtful piece, John Puccio reflects on what he calls "semiquincentennial fever"—the growing awareness of this milestone—and how much of the war's most important chapters are often overlooked. Not just in documentaries like Ken Burns's recent 12-hour extravaganza, *The American Revolution*, but in our everyday understanding of the past.

Even more compelling: The realization that history isn't just something that happened somewhere else. It happened here. In and around Chatham, figures like Washington and Lafayette passed through as part of the campaign that would ultimately lead to victory at Yorktown. And yet, many of those stories remain surprisingly underexplored—even by those of us who live here. Which raises an intriguing question...What might we still be missing?

Three ways you can become a local history detective:

1. Help us uncover Chatham's Revolutionary story.
Do you know of a location, home, or local tradition connected to Washington, Lafayette, or Revolutionary War activity in Chatham?
2. Have old maps or historical records?
We're especially interested in early road names, property records, or maps that might help connect past routes to present-day Chatham. Please share it with us!
3. Have you heard a story passed down?
Sometimes oral history holds even more clues to verifiable facts. If you've ever heard of a "Washington passed here" location or local Revolutionary-era story related to Chatham, we want to hear it. 📩 Email us at chathamnjhistory@gmail.com — even small clues can help.

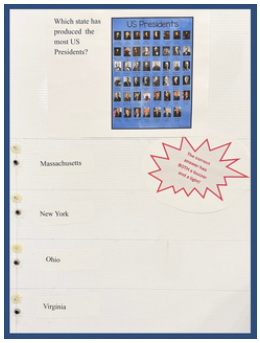
And don't skip reading John's full piece. It's got everything—intrigue (a Revolutionary-era murder in a neighboring town), a historical conundrum (help us put a pin on the map for the Day house), family drama (a local orphan "adopted" by the Marquis de Lafayette), and stories you won't find in the Burns documentary—far beyond the famous "ruse de guerre." You'll also discover the origin of Lafayette Street (do you know the story?) and, of course, a visit from George Washington himself.

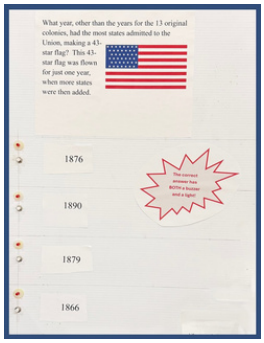
Chatham Historical Society's 250th Anniversary Display at the Library of The Chathams

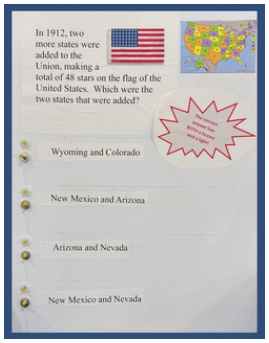
The Chatham Historical Society unveiled a spectacular 250th anniversary display at the Library of The Chathams. Visitors can test their U.S. history knowledge by answering five questions on "electronic" boards. Correct answers will light up and buzz!

Visitors will also have the chance to "vote" for their favorite U.S symbol. What would be yours—the Liberty Bell, the Statue of Liberty, the Great Seal of the U.S., the USA Flag, or the American Eagle?

Stop by the library soon to have some fun at CHS's Semiquincentennial display.







Photos by Tom Salvas

Join us on Thursday, April 16 at 7 p.m. at the Library of the Chathams

Chatham Township Historical Society &
Chatham Historical Society present

Crossroads of the Revolution: New Jersey During the Revolutionary War

with Patricia Wells

Thursday, April 16, 7:00-8:00 PM
Lundt Room, Library of the Chathams
214 Main St, Chatham

Soldiers Plunder a Loyalist Home During the American Revolution, Wood Engraving American, 19th Century

From 1776 to 1781, every resident of New Jersey experienced the Revolution whether soldier or civilian, Patriot, Loyalist, or neutral.

The War of Independence was often fought in New Jersey. Militias, Continentals, Red Coats, and Hessians: sometimes they encamped here, sometimes they fought here, sometimes they were only passing through.

Sometimes the war was just neighbor against neighbor.

Learn about New Jersey's essential role in the War of Independence and how it affected every resident.

Chatham Township Historical Society

Attend in person or on Zoom.

https://chathamlibrary.librarycalendar.com/event/crossroads-revolution-new-jersey-during-revolutionary-war-38142

RevolutionNJ
PROUD PARTNER

Save the Dates:

CHS 2026 Annual Dinner and Meeting is Wed., May 13

Richard Veit, Ph.D.

CHS 2026 Annual Dinner and Meeting will take place at Fairmount Country Club starting at 6:30 p.m on Wed., May 13. Member invitations to follow in the mail.

Guest speaker Richard Veit, Ph.D., Chair of the History and Anthropology Department at Monmouth University will deliver "Excavating Morristown's Role in American Independence."

Dr. Veit led an archeological team in the excavation of Jockey Hollow at Morristown National Historic Park, and through remarkable finds put many pieces of the puzzle together of the grueling 1779-1780 winter that George Washington's troops suffered in the area.

The Fishawack Festival is Sat., June 6

Stop by the CHS table from 10 a.m.-6 p.m. on Sat., June 6 and visit with Chatham Historical Society members, check out displays of our town's history and celebrate our country's 250th anniversary!