

### Notes regarding the following text

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## Pearson's Early Life and His Career

Isaac Pearson was born in 1739, one of a pair of twins.<sup>6</sup> He and his brother Robert were raised in what became known as the White Horse section of Nottingham Township on his father's farm that Isaac would later inherit, in a frame house that stood, according to the archaeologists, on the face of where the bluff then stood overlooking the marsh, not far from the present house. In 1753 his father died. After a re-survey of his father's lands in 1755, Isaac, then sixteen, inherited the exceptionally large farm on which his house stands, while his twin brother Robert received a legacy of other lands. For some time, however, they continued to live together in their parents' house. The twins inherited a very sizeable estate. Isaac's share came to nearly 900 acres. In 1756, the executors of the estate bought rights to an additional 123 acres to bring it to just over 1,000 acres. There may have been an underlying political motive behind this purchase. Under the colonial laws of New Jersey, with a holding of 1,000 acres a man could run for a seat in the colonial legislature, the New Jersey Assembly.<sup>7</sup> Even before this purchase, Isaac's share of the estate probably represented the largest single landholding in Nottingham Township; after the purchase it would be.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps he was already being readied for a career of public officeholding.

In 1760, Pearson and his brother reached the age of twenty-one. A year later he married Elizabeth Smith, probably the daughter of a Gilbert Smith, whose name appears on the marriage bond. Isaac's first public service came the following year, when in July 1761 he was chosen at a Nottingham Township meeting to serve on a committee to investigate the accounts of "the officers belonging to the town," and to "raise such sums of money" [ie. taxes] as were needed for township purposes.<sup>9</sup> The committee had an auditing function, to review the accounts brought in by the past year's local officeholders. It also had an assessment responsibility, to levy the local taxes on Nottingham citizens. He would be elected again in 1764, his twin brother Robert was chosen the following year, then from 1766 through 1772 he was elected to this committee in every year except 1771.<sup>10</sup>

In 1762 Isaac was named one of Nottingham's two overseers of the highways, and it was with respect to roads and bridges that he would first distinguish himself. One of the major local issues was to ensure the state of repair of the bridge over the Assunpink Creek at the Trenton mills. That year the township dug into the

pockets of its citizens to raise thirty pounds toward replacing the Trenton bridge. In the latter 1750s, this bridge, then built of timber, was in a dangerous state of disrepair.<sup>11</sup> Quick fixes bought a few more years, but a replacement was needed and what was agreed upon was to build a "stone bridge" or stone-arch bridge. Timber bridges, usually fashioned of oak timbers and planks supported on stone piers and abutments, were cheap to build but they had a short life span, often only ten to fifteen years and seldom as many as twenty before public safety required a complete replacement of the deck and stringers.<sup>12</sup> Stone bridges, however, were permanent, would never wear out and require almost no maintenance, but they were extremely expensive. For the cost of building one stone bridge from scratch, the freeholders could have probably built ten timber bridges or repaired twenty. Which meant that few of them were built at all, and only those for which there was a good reason. Although stone bridges had been built even in ancient Roman times, in the 1760s only a handful of them existed in New Jersey.<sup>13</sup>

It would be three more years before the Trenton bridge would be replaced. Meanwhile in 1763, Robert and Isaac Pearson were named in a provincial statute to be Nottingham's two members of a four-man commission to oversee construction of a timber drawbridge over Crosswicks Creek (on the site where US Route 206 crosses the creek today).<sup>14</sup> This was to be paid for, however, by voluntary subscription, and it was the responsibility of the commissioners to raise the money. The bridge was needed to shorten the travel time between Trenton and Bordentown. The money was raised, and the drawbridge promptly built. The other two commissioners were older and more experienced men, Joseph Borden of Bordentown, and William Emeley, but because the drawbridge was to be constructed at the edge of Isaac Pearson's farm, he would have been the logical person to take the leading role in overseeing construction.

Isaac Pearson was also elected Nottingham's tax collector in 1763, which may have made raising subscriptions for the drawbridge easier. He and his brother were already paying the largest tax of any of Nottingham's citizens<sup>15</sup> so it may have made sense to the town fathers to allow this young man to collect the tax money from everyone. Meanwhile, both men were gaining an education in township governance as they moved from office to office. His brother Robert was named collector in 1764, but Isaac was retained on the standing township committee. The following year they alternated again, with Isaac taking over the collector duties and Robert returning to the township committee. Also, in 1765, Isaac sampled another township office when he performed the duties of overseer of the poor.<sup>16</sup>

Isaac evidently had the greater aspirations, and he gradually began to distinguish himself with higher offices by which he distanced himself from his brother. He

was also more likely to hold multiple offices at the same time. In 1766 he was again named to the Nottingham standing committee and was chosen for the first time to be township clerk. He would continue as clerk through at least 1772. In 1765 he was also chosen by Nottingham Township to be its manager to supervise the construction of the stone-arch bridge in Trenton over the Assunpink (today South Broad Street).<sup>17</sup> As already noted, the condition of this bridge had been a festering issue since the 1750s at least. Isaac's position as tax collector and his work on the drawbridge over Crosswicks Creek must have commended him for this assignment. Pearson petitioned the Assembly in February 1764 for a statute to compel Hunterdon County to join in the project, to which the legislature eventually complied<sup>18</sup>. Construction of the new bridge was an important assignment because the bridge was vital to everyday life for Trenton and Nottingham alike. In addition, it was on the main route between Philadelphia and New York City and its stage traffic was growing in importance every year. Likewise, it bore a heavy freight of wagons headed for the Trenton ferry and the Philadelphia market. Its importance to Nottingham was so great that once when it needed repair, the overseer of the highway was authorized to repair the bridge immediately, even if he had to borrow money at interest to do so.<sup>19</sup> Few pieces of the public's business could claim that level of urgency.

Hunterdon County was not unaware of the importance of the bridge, however, and had spent nearly eleven pounds in its own repairs of the bridge since the spring of 1763. In May 1764 the Hunterdon freeholders at their annual meeting voted 10 to 4 to accept a two-thirds cost share for a new Trenton bridge and to raise 270 pounds in additional taxes by the following November, evidently estimating that a new bridge would cost about 400 pounds.<sup>20</sup> The new bridge was built under terms dictated by a law enacted the following year by the legislature.<sup>21</sup> The Assembly adopted the funding formula that Hunterdon had already agreed to, which placed the other one-third share on Nottingham Township, not on Burlington County as a whole. Nottingham also was to receive credit for the thirty pounds it had already spent on work on its end of the bridge. Similar cost-sharing arrangements had already been imposed on Middlesex and Somerset counties for the project to construct the Bound Brook stone-arch bridge in 1730 and would be again for other expensive bridges. Counties, reluctant to spend money on bridges that were not fully their own, would sometimes cooperate only when compelled to do so by legislation.<sup>22</sup> The 1765 law named only two of the three men that Hunterdon had selected as managers for the project, Thomas Barnes and Abraham Hunt, who were Trenton merchants. Pearson was the only manager named in the act to represent Nottingham. Thus, the number of managers for each side reflected the funding formula. These men were not strangers to one another, and Pearson probably felt very congenial about the naming of Hunt, for Hunt had recently married one of

Pearson's sisters. Thus, the two men were brothers-in-law. They were three men drawn from the local elite.<sup>23</sup> To ensure that they constructed the bridge and stuck to the bargain, however, the act named five commissioners to oversee the managers.

In 1766, Isaac was elected a chosen freeholder at the annual township meeting that March.<sup>24</sup> Like today, the chosen freeholder was a county office, but in the eighteenth century chosen freeholders were selected by township voters during their annual meetings, not elected at large throughout an entire county. County governments were managed by a body called the "board of justices and freeholders"-the forerunner of today's boards of chosen freeholders-but it differed from the modern freeholder boards because it included at least three of the county's justices of the peace as well as all of the chosen freeholders.<sup>25</sup> Isaac's experience would have been a good fit on this board, because one of the board's most important duties-and which took up the bulk of its time-was the repair and replacement of highway bridges. All bridges except the very tiniest were the responsibility of the county freeholders to maintain, even though the roads that connected them were under township maintenance. It must have made for improved coordination, then, that while Isaac was on the county freeholder board, his brother Robert was named one of Nottingham's overseers of the highways for 1766.<sup>26</sup>

In March 1767 Nottingham held its annual township meeting at the "house" of Isaac Pearson. In the colonial period, townships as a rule did not have municipal buildings of their own. Instead, they typically held their meetings in one of the licensed taverns in their township. In this case, the building being referred to was not the present house, which would not be under construction for several more years. Rather, this township minute may be a clue to the history of the White Horse tavern. With the drawbridge in operation, the route through Pearson's farm was becoming more important, more heavily used. As a result, construction of a tavern at what became known as White Horse (in the vicinity of the White Horse Circle on Route 206) would likely have been wanted. Pearson had the tavern built in 1765, according to Helen West's 1954 history of Hamilton Township.<sup>27</sup> Pearson continued to own the property on which the tavern was built until his death, but he would not himself have run the tavern on a daily basis. Many taverns were rental properties, with the tavernkeeper paying rent to the owner. Pearson evidently leased out his tavern. Historians have had some difficulty piecing together a list of Pearson's tavernkeepers, but apparently, they haven't considered the evidence of the township minutes themselves. In 1759 Nottingham began a practice of alternating the location of its annual March meeting between two different parts of the township, to be fairer to outlying residents. James White's tavern was the

most frequently chosen, used chiefly in the even-numbered years between 1760 and 1770.<sup>28</sup> Pearson's next turn to host the meeting after 1767 would have come in 1769, when the minutes state that the annual meeting was held at the house of Michael Nowlands, and again in 1771, when he is referred to more specifically as "Michael Nowlands at the White Horse."<sup>29</sup> Thus, Nowlands may have rented the tavern from Pearson in this period.

1767 was also a memorable year in Pearson's life because he was at the peak of his plural officeholding. He was again picked to be Nottingham's chosen freeholder, he was kept on the township standing committee, and he was held in his position as township clerk.<sup>30</sup> In June that year he also received a commission from Governor William Franklin to become one of Burlington County's justices of the peace.<sup>31</sup> It was his first appointment to public office by the Royal governor. He was one of twenty persons named in the commission, which covered all of the county's justices. The justice of the peace was an office that might be described as part local administrator and part local judge, but the justices also sat on the board of justices and freeholders, which made a justice of the peace a county officer as well. The board had a strange and complex quorum requirement. In order to function as a board, at least three of the justices had to be present at its meetings along with the chosen freeholders, and of the three who attended, at least one had to come from a more select list of ten justices who were specifically named for this purpose in the commission. Pearson was also one of this more select group of ten justices, at least one of whom had to attend these meetings. Such justices were said to be "of the quorum."<sup>32</sup> As a result of how these boards were composed, once Pearson became a justice, he no longer continued to be elected a chosen freeholder by Nottingham Township. This mechanism apparently assured the governor some influence in county deliberations, but it made Pearson an appointed, rather than an elected, member of the board. To become a justice would have been a promotion from chosen freeholder, and he probably would have enjoyed a sizeable income from his new post. The New Jersey colonial assembly frequently tinkered with the laws concerning justices, and by the end of the colonial period, a justice was tasked with dozens of distinct responsibilities. Justices issued writs for election of local officials and appointed local officials such as tax assessor or collector if vacancies occurred in these positions. Justices adjudicated small civil suits, various minor misdemeanors, and cases involving the poor laws. Justices also enforced statutory regulations concerning flour, timber, hunting, liquor, and slaves. For nearly any action a justice was required to take he was entitled to charge a fee that might run from pennies to shillings depending upon how difficult or time consuming it was.<sup>33</sup>

Pearson would continue in the position of justice, until 1776, but the work he performed in that role will likely remain largely unknown, for apparently the dockets he was required to keep detailing his actions have not turned up.

The big issue for the freeholders in 1767 was the insufficiency of the county jail in Burlington. The board voted to fund repairs to the existing jail while also building a new jail.<sup>34</sup> This project, like others that the board would carry out, was entrusted to "managers," usually chosen from among the board members, and this project would take a couple of years to complete. The board in 1767 voted to resurvey the boundary line between Springfield and Mansfield Townships, and it also voted to require township assessors to hand in a duplicate of their assessment lists to the county collector.<sup>35</sup>

The freeholders would hold an annual meeting during the second or third week of May. They would convene at the county courthouse, take and record the attendance, ensure that they had a quorum for the conduct of business, and then they would promptly adjourn to a local tavern, where the real meeting would begin in earnest.

In 1768, for example, they adjourned to the "house" of David Clayton.<sup>36</sup> That year five justices attended the meeting, including Pearson, even though he was not "of the quorum" this time. Still struggling through the jail construction project, the board instituted another modest, good-government reform, voting to require managers of building projects henceforth to inspect deliveries of building materials and determine that the materials were "good and sufficient for [their] purpose," before payment was requested from the county collector.<sup>37</sup>

The next year, May 1769, Pearson again attended, but neither of Nottingham's two chosen freeholders showed up. The county collector, Daniel Ellis, was re-elected to the post for another year.<sup>38</sup> The county sheriff, Thomas Rodman, had advanced much of the money to get the jail built, relying on reimbursements from Ellis.<sup>39</sup> The jail project continued until 1770, when the board directed that stocks and a whipping post be constructed. Ellis, the collector, and Thomas Pryor, Jr., were elected managers to finish the jail project. The board also voted to allow Sarah Champion to remain as the live-in caretaker for the courthouse, and they gave her permission to have an oven built in her quarters there, at her own expense.<sup>40</sup>

One of the annual duties of the board was to pay its share of the colony wide "Sinking Fund Tax." New Jersey had issued a stream of paper money to help fight the Seven Years War with, and those notes had to be withdrawn and canceled, or

"sunk," on a regular basis each year. The board received from the treasurer of the Western Division of New Jersey, Samuel Smith, Esq. (for administrative reasons, New Jersey had two colonial treasurers), a large amount of currency to be sunk. To ensure that the treasurer wasn't cheating, by taking bills that should have been sunk and spending them instead for his personal benefit, the freeholders would take scissors to the bills to be canceled, cut out a specified portion of each one, carefully add up the values of the notes thus canceled, bundle them up and place them into a cloth bag that was sewn shut and stamped with the seals of the justices and the freeholders, and given back to the treasurer. Thus the treasurer would be easily able to show how much of the paper money had been sunk, when his own accounts were audited.

This was a routine procedure by the late-1760s, but every bill that was sunk shrank the money supply. By 1770, the tight money was causing problems. At its May meeting that year, the board appointed the collector, Ellis, along with Pearson and Anthony Sykes to be a committee "to draw up a Memorial to the Assembly Setting Forth the hardships this County Labors under in Transacting the Public Business according to Laws."<sup>41</sup>

The following year, 1771, no one showed up from Nottingham for the May meeting. At that meeting, Robert Smith, Esq., one of the justices, proposed a series of thirteen rules of etiquette and procedure by which board meetings were to be governed. These "Robert's" rules were promptly approved by the board and spread upon the minutes.<sup>42</sup> The minutes state that the board met again, out of season, so to speak, in January 1772. They were summoned evidently to decide whether to offer medical care to a man named William Read, described as a "County Laborer," who was also accused of murder. Read had contracted some "foul disease," and the board was concerned that he might die before his trial. This was the first time that a decision was reflected in the minutes by a roll-call vote. Only the names of the freeholders were called, however; they voted 13 to 5 in favor of paying for the doctor. The four justices who attended the meeting, including Pearson, were not included in this poll. But after the freeholders approved the measure, the minutes state that the justices all concurred in this humanitarian gesture.<sup>43</sup>

In August 1772, Isaac Pearson was promoted again. This time he was appointed by Governor Franklin to serve for a special three-month term as one of several judges of the Burlington County court of oyer and terminer.<sup>44</sup> This was an important assignment, given primarily to a hand-picked number of the county's justices of the peace. The oyer and terminer courts were sessions held to try the most serious criminal cases, including murder. A court of oyer and terminer could impose the death penalty for various high crimes. Horse stealing had already been

a capital crime, for example, but in 1772, the year of Pearson's appointment, the legislature gave oyer and terminer courts a measure of discretion in meting out lesser punishment to horse thieves, especially first-time offenders. In 1774, the legislature added counterfeiting to the oyer and terminer caseload. Sessions were held in each county usually once or twice a year, and they were presided over by the chief justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court or by an associate justice, joined by justices from the county involved. Serving on this court would have allowed Pearson to continue as a justice of the peace for Nottingham Township, but from the time of his appointment he seems to have paid little further attention to the board of justices and freeholders.

### **Pearson's House**

In 1773, Pearson undertook to have a new house built for himself and his family. It still stands well-preserved on its original site at a slight bend of today's Hobson Avenue, just north of the bridge over Interstate Route 195. The residential neighborhood that surrounds the house today was Isaac Pearson's farm in the 18th century. His home is an extraordinary building in the southern New Jersey patterned brickwork tradition. It is a vernacular expression of the "Georgian" architectural style, a fine example of what was the reigning style in America. It was built of brick, the most expensive building material that was commonly available. It is symmetrical in elevation and nearly so in plan, with a central stairhall flanked by two rooms on either side (two halls and two parlors-front and back) on the first floor, with a full cellar underneath, and a second story with four bedchambers. Together with a sizeable kitchen wing that is now missing, these features marked this building as the type of house that a person of means would aspire to own. Pearson, with his income as a justice added to his income as a gentleman farmer, was one of the very few in Nottingham Township who had the money to afford it.

The house is loaded with unusual refinements. Most of its original, fine, interior woodwork remains intact, even though some elements have been replaced. Numerals fashioned from vitrified bricks in the west gable form "1773," representing the year that the walls went up. These numerals appear to be the only decorative use of vitrified bricks in the house (the stringcourse on the south elevation is another possibility, but it is covered with stucco and cannot be examined). The brickwork of the facade is laid in Flemish bond, but the headers are plain. This feature-Flemish bond with plain headers-is in line with the emerging fashion among finer houses that would become typical after the Revolution with the rise of the Federal style. The popularity of Flemish bond with vitrified, or "glazed," headers was already on the wane, and that



building practice would disappear in the 1790s. A pent roof extends from front to rear, just below these numerals. Pent roofs, or pentices, were a vernacular feature not found on the most formal Georgian houses. Rather they had been popular in the north midlands of England from whence most of the Quaker settlers had come nearly a hundred years before. As a result, pent roofs were common features in the Quaker architecture of southern New Jersey. An original pent roof from the 18th century, such as the one on the Pearson house may be, is an increasingly rare survival.

No specific information about the construction of this house has yet turned up, but such records may still exist, and might someday reveal who the masons and carpenters were who built it, and how much it cost. It was, by any reckoning, an expensive house. The likelihood is that it cost much more than 1,000 pounds in the New Jersey money of the period, probably more than most gristmills cost to build at that time. A large house such as Pearson's would have probably taken a year or longer to complete, so construction probably continued at least into 1774. The property also had a large barn and would have had a full complement of outbuildings. Isaac Pearson must have spent heavily for their construction and took extra pains with many of the features of the house. When a new wood-shingle roof was installed in 2000, one of the original shingles was retrieved and tested. The USDA Wood Products Laboratory in Wisconsin identified the wood species as (*Taxodium distichum*).<sup>45</sup> Few bald cypresses grow in New Jersey today, and in the 18th century it would not have been found north of Cumberland or Salem counties. In other words, Pearson went the extra mile, literally, for his roof shingles, in a regional trade that suggests he acted through an unidentified Philadelphia supplier.

Another fine touch is found over the first-story windows. The only building material more expensive than brick—much more expensive—was cut stone, and the longer the piece of cut stone the more expensive it was. The first-story window lintels, and the one over the door, are shaped from single pieces of limestone or marble, hand cut, beveled, and tooled on the face to resemble keystone flat arches, as if several pieces of stone were combined. In less expensively built houses, wood or roughly shaped sandstone would have been used in keystone lintels. Wood is, in fact, used in the second-story lintels of both the facade and the rear elevation. The chimneys are another feature bearing details that set this house apart from its contemporaries. A common chimney that would be found on almost any farmhouse would have risen with a simple rectangular stack straight up from the

point where it pierced the roof, extending up to a simple cap of one or two courses of corbeled brick. Only in the best houses was there any effort at all for a sculptural effect. In the Pearson house, the west chimney tapers slightly inward and displays extra bands of original corbeling at the top. The extra effort that this required in construction-like the extra effort in placing the date in the gable-was made for a client who must have understood the appearance that it would make. The east chimney still has the taper and probably once also had the corbeling, but the uppermost few courses of brick have been removed.

Structurally, the house was built with a transverse masonry bearing wall in the cellar that rises between the halls and the parlors respectively up through the second floor between the bedchambers to the level of the attic floor. This was a feature that some brick houses of the period possessed that were two rooms deep, and it was a feature that would have added both to the strength of the building and to its cost. The position of the attic stair along the transverse wall, and the short, transverse passage that accesses it, foreshadow the more complex floor plans that would become common in large houses of the Federal period after the Revolution.

The interior woodwork was also executed with an above-average level of fineness. The original interior door openings on both the first and second stories are finished with architrave surrounds that are more finely molded than those that were generally fabricated for the houses of prosperous farmers that were built in rural New Jersey before the Revolution. Some of the rooms also feature molded cornices, either around the entire room or at the top of paneled walls. The paneling in the principal bedchamber is completely intact and occupies the entire east wall of the room. It is the largest and finest piece of paneling in the house, featuring a fireplace with original molded surround, overmantel paneling, and two flanking, full-size closets. This must have doubtless been the bedchamber of Isaac and Elizabeth Pearson, as it is the finest of the upstairs rooms. Whether these surfaces were originally painted, and in what colors, awaits a future forensic investigation.

Even miscellaneous features of the house reflect an extra level of care in the construction or an additional nod to fashion. Some of the door hinges are of the butt-L form, a more fashionable type than the-H-L hinges that were widely used during the period. And at least two of the hearths still retain the shallow, square, fancy, hearth bricks with which they were originally tiled. In one hearth they appear to have been either painted a red ochre color or glazed. Hearths were usually tiled with ordinary, unpainted common bricks in this period, even in many of the finer houses.

Of all the houses that are known to have stood in Nottingham Township during the

colonial period, only the Trent house (in the part of Nottingham now within the city limits of Trenton) surpasses it architecturally, and no others are now known to have rivaled it. The Trent house had been built two generations before, largely between 1719 and 1721, for the family of William Trent, New Jersey's chief justice and a major Philadelphia merchant who moved in much loftier social circles that included James Logan and William Penn. Pearson, in comparison, was a local justice of the peace, and he could sit in judgment at an oyer-and-terminer court with a chief justice, but only as a junior member of the panel. Trent's fortune was derived from Atlantic trading; Pearson's was generated locally. That distinction, more than any other, explains the differences between the two men's houses. Still, in the part of Nottingham that would later become Hamilton Township, Pearson's house was probably the finest house built for anyone up to that time.

His house was built when Isaac Pearson was 34 years old. He was married, his eldest child was about ten years old, and he was a successful gentleman farmer, businessman, and public official. He had risen from overseer of the highways to township clerk, to chosen freeholder, to justice of the peace, to county judge. He was already known throughout the county's public sphere and was a rising star among its political figures. He was Nottingham Township's most successful officeholder. Now he had a house to match his position, one that was the equal, at least, of almost any in southern or central New Jersey. For part of the next two years, Pearson played host to the Rev. George Panton, the new rector of St. Michael's Church in Trenton, who arrived in the rectorship in 1773, when the house would have been under construction.<sup>46</sup>

### **Toward the Revolution**

He would not have long to enjoy his new home. After the Stamp Act crisis of 1765 ended, Britain imposed other import duties and the colonies followed by organizing non-importation campaigns. It was in this period that Pearson's service to the Revolutionary-era protests evidently began. It was one thing to get merchants to pledge not to import or sell British goods; it was another to get them to make good on their promises. Non-importation agreements had to be enforced. In 1770, Pearson, while justice of the peace, was named to a committee to "inspect into the trade" in the Bordentown area.<sup>47</sup> This would not have been a mere weights and measures exercise; the committee must have been checking whether merchants were cheating on the non-importation agreement.

Isaac Pearson began to ride the wave of popular outrage over British retaliation against Boston. On July 20, 1774, he chaired a meeting of Burlington County citizens that resolved to support the call for a congress of all the colonies and appealed to the legislature to send a New Jersey delegation.<sup>48</sup>

In the fall of 1774, the first Continental Congress, meeting in Philadelphia, requested that every province and every county and town form committees of observation and correspondence, to help unify the colonies in support of whatever measures were to be taken to assist the people of Boston, where the port had been closed by the British navy after the Boston Tea Party of December 1773. On February 14, 1775, inhabitants of the city and county of Burlington met and appointed a committee of observation.<sup>49</sup> Isaac Pearson was one of its 33 members. He remained a member of this committee for the next few months while similar committees were formed across New Jersey.

Meanwhile, in late January 1775 property owners in Nottingham Township signed a petition to the New Jersey Assembly, urging reconciliation with Britain.<sup>50</sup> Forty-three men signed this petition, including both Isaac Pearson and his brother Robert. Neither seems to have originated the petition, however, which may have been the work of Reverend Panton. The petitioners said that they feared the outbreak of a civil war, which they felt the direction of events was leading to. They urged a negotiation and even allowed that colonists should pay some portion of the costs associated with imperial defense, provided that their share was affordable. These were very conservative views, even at the beginning of 1775. The petition produced no significant result.

### **Pearson in the Provincial Congress**

That's where matters stood in late April 1775, when the news of the battles of Lexington and Concord reached New Jersey. Newark reacted to the news quickly, suggesting that militia captains start drilling their companies not less than once each week, to hasten their readiness. Within a few days, the Princeton committee of correspondence issued a call for a provincial congress to convene on May 5th, and for each county to elect delegates to attend that congress. On May 2nd, Pearson was named with at least nine others to a committee called the "New Jersey Provincial Committee of Correspondence."<sup>51</sup> Apparently this committee helped organize the provincial congress that was soon to follow. This foreshadowed the leadership roles he would play within the congress.

The provincial congress was convened on May 23rd, 1775. Pearson had been elected one of five delegates from Burlington County.<sup>52</sup> He attended both the first session which lasted into June 1775 and a second session in August. Among the congress's accomplishments was the raising of a ten-thousand-pound tax on the colony to fund its work. Its principal focus was to build up the armed militias of the colony and to bring them under the congress's control. The congress aimed to establish

"minute man" companies in each county, modeled on the town-based minuteman companies that had performed well in New England. Burlington County, for example, was assigned to raise five such companies.<sup>53</sup> The congress also set requirements for their establishment.

In the aftermath of the first session of the congress, Pearson took stock of his situation and took at least one precaution. In July 1775 he wrote out a last will and testament, which would be proved many years after his death.<sup>54</sup> In the context of the times it must have been a prudent thing to do. The state of public affairs was deteriorating dangerously, and the civil war that Pearson and other Nottingham Township men had warned of just six months before was coming to pass. Pearson had a wife to consider-Elizabeth--and several children, the eldest of whom was entering the teen years. He had large landholdings and he had his fine, new house, which had been started only two years before and which he had probably been occupying for only little more than one year. His will was witnessed by Reverend Panton, who, as noted above, boarded with the Pearsons for some considerable portion of the two years he was rector of Trenton.

On August 17th, when the congress adjourned, Pearson was named to a select group of eleven delegates who formed a "Committee of Safety" to act during the recess.<sup>55</sup> In the event of necessity, this committee could call the congress back into session. On August 30th the committee considered how to respond to vacancies in militia companies due to the promotion of their officers. The following day the committee resolved that due to increasing horse stealing and other robberies and many servants running away from their masters, that "it be recommended to the good people of this Province, that they do strictly examine all suspicious persons passing to and from through the different parts thereof ...." <sup>56</sup> Two weeks later the committee ordered two of its members to arrange with Isaac Collins, the Burlington printer, to print the proceedings of both the congress and the committee of safety. On September 6th, Pearson issued a notice of election to be held later that month for delegates to the next session of the congress. In the notice, he is identified as "Chairman of the Burlington County deputies" (members of the Burlington County delegation).<sup>57</sup>

The congress postponed the date of its reconvening until October 3rd. Isaac Pearson was again elected one of the five delegates from Burlington County.<sup>58</sup> Careful attention was paid this time to the delegates' certificates of election. Soon some Monmouth County citizens petitioned the congress challenging the legitimacy of their delegation. Burlington County was one of three counties that voted to unseat the Monmouth delegation, but the resolution was defeated nine counties to three.<sup>59</sup> Pearson's own view of the controversy was not recorded. Some

inhabitants of Nottingham Township petitioned the congress to be allowed to join a troop of light horse that was being raised in Trenton. The minutes do not show whether Pearson supported the cause of his fellow Nottingham residents, but the congress gave a qualified approval two weeks later.<sup>60</sup>

Once again, Pearson was an active and leading member. On October 6th, he and four other delegates were named to serve on a committee to examine the returns of the minuteman companies and the rosters of their officers.<sup>61</sup> Pearson was the first of the committee members to be named, which suggests the possibility that he headed the committee. This was an important assignment and evidently a continuing responsibility. Because the creation of these militia companies was authorized by the congress and because the officers would receive their commissions from the congress, it was important to determine that the companies were capably led by persons who would support both the provincial congress and the Continental Congress. On October 7th, Pearson's committee (if it can be so called) reported to the congress that it had reviewed the rolls of three minute-man companies, found them in accordance with the congress's previous instructions, and advised that commissions should be issued to their officers.<sup>62</sup> Additional commissions for other companies were approved on subsequent days, which means that the committee must have continued to meet. On October 17th, 1775, the congress named Pearson as it formed another committee of five delegates to draft an ordinance to compel the payment of the ten-thousand-pound tax by those persons refusing to pay.<sup>63</sup> Such refusals constituted a direct rejection of the authority of the congress, and if they became widespread, they would have undermined the fiscal support needed for the militia companies.

On October 17th and 18th, the congress took up the issue of Reverend Jonathan Odell, the Anglican priest of St. Mary's Church in Burlington City, and even took the step of calling Odell to appear before them. The congress was responding to a letter it had received from the Pennsylvania committee of correspondence asking New Jersey to investigate Odell's recent statements and conduct, for he had gotten himself into trouble in Pennsylvania over some remarks he made there. Odell got off easy, this time. The congress concluded that even though he philosophically opposed all measures taken by the provincial and Continental congresses, he had merely expressed his opinions on these matters and had not taken any overt act.<sup>64</sup> How Pearson, himself, felt about an Anglican rector being grilled the minutes do not record, but he must have felt a strong sense of concern. As a vestryman of St. Michael's Anglican church in Trenton and a county judge in Burlington, Pearson certainly must have been well acquainted with Odell and would have looked upon him as a leader of his own faith. Although the minutes do not record any input from Pearson on this issue, the congress nonetheless reached a resolution in this

matter that one might imagine was a compromise that Pearson could easily accept and might even have argued for.

The congress took two other major steps during this session. It authorized the emission of L30,000 in bills of credit-the paper currency or "proclamation" money that comprised the bulk of the circulating medium in New Jersey.<sup>65</sup> The Assembly had passed a law in 1774 authorizing L40,000, but that law contained the suspending clause that Britain required of all colonial paper money laws, and the bills had not yet been issued.<sup>66</sup> The congress wanted to loosen the money supply to make it easier for citizens to pay the L10,000 tax. Leaders knew that it would be a popular move, and that it would further undercut the colonial Assembly. The congress's other step was even more ominous. It voted to buy 3,000 stands of arms, ten tons of gunpowder and other munitions.<sup>67</sup> Although no public body was openly advocating independence from Britain, the effect of the congress's actions was to move New Jersey toward a de facto autonomy.

At the end of October 1775, the congress named a new committee of safety, with eleven members plus the president and vice-president of the congress. Once again, Pearson was named to this committee.<sup>68</sup> It was an important time to serve. The congress had voted a long recess, intending to reconvene the following April, subject, of course, to being called back sooner by the committee. So the committee possessed considerable power, and as events turned, would need to use it. The Assembly-the legitimate legislature of the colony- was called by Governor Franklin and met for its final productive session in November. Pushed by petitions to discourage independence, including one from 48 property owners of Burlington County (Pearson did not sign it),<sup>69</sup> the Assembly stated flatly, "reports of independency, in the apprehension of this House, are groundless."<sup>70</sup>

Less than two months later, Thomas Paine's Common Sense appeared in the colonies.

The committee of safety called the congress back into session at the end of January 1776. Once again, Pearson was a member of the Burlington County slate that was elected.<sup>71</sup> For Pearson, it was the final time he would be elected to a public office. He continued to occupy the lesser offices that he still held, but this would be his last term in the congress. The tone of this winter session was different, more tense and hostile. The committee of safety had ordered a guard to surround the residence of Governor Franklin in January, threatening to arrest him, but then backed off. The congress in February sent militia to Bergen County to help build defenses for New York and New Jersey. The Assembly the previous November had voted that single men who were living at home should pay a tax. These men were already

serving in the militia, and now they were going to be taxed, yet most of them probably lacked the freehold property qualification to vote. To remedy the unfairness of this situation, the congress in February 1776 voted that henceforth inhabitants who were worth LSO in proclamation money would be eligible to vote if they had resided in New Jersey for one year. For the first time in New Jersey, voters would not need to be landowners.<sup>72</sup> It is not clear how many people at once took advantage of this historic broadening of the franchise, but these terms would be used the next time the congress was elected, and they would be incorporated into the New Jersey constitution later in the year.

With Tom Paine's *Common Sense* on everyone's mind, the spring of 1776 became the moment to debate the question of independence. The provincial congress set a date in May for a referendum on the question.<sup>73</sup> This time, the new, relaxed suffrage rules would apply. No evidence has emerged to show if Pearson worked to persuade people to oppose independence, but he evidently did not support it. Meanwhile, patriot militias were disarming Tories, who in some places were forming militias of their own. In some places justices of the peace were being arrested. The next election for the provincial congress took place in June 1776. It would seem likely that Pearson would have stood as a candidate on a county-wide slate in this voting, but he was not elected. Some within the county evidently felt that irregularities marred the voting, but no successful challenge to the results was mounted, and Burlington presented a completely new five-man delegation, who were independence supporters.<sup>74</sup>

### **July - December 1776**

The first week of July 1776 was one of the most remarkable moments in American history. New Jersey's provincial congress—now without Isaac Pearson—approved a new constitution for an independent New Jersey on July 2nd. In Philadelphia, the Declaration of Independence was approved on July 4th. The Declaration was hastily printed in Philadelphia and was read in Trenton on July 8th.<sup>75</sup> The war, previously limited to Massachusetts and Quebec, was being brought in abundance to New York and New Jersey. The British began to land troops and supplies on Staten Island that same week. For Pearson, the moment must have been bittersweet. Out of office, he took no part in the final takeover of New Jersey government by the provincial congress and no part in its decision to support independence. No one from Burlington County was included in the new, New Jersey delegation to the Continental Congress. Pearson, an Anglican himself, must have been dismayed when three weeks before, Governor William Franklin, New Jersey's highest-ranking Anglican, was arrested and brought to the provincial congress for questioning and then imprisonment. We don't know whether Pearson attended the public reading of the Declaration in Trenton. The one thing known of



his whereabouts that first week in July is that on July 7th, a day before the reading, he attended a meeting of the vestry of St. Michael's Church in Trenton, at which the vestrymen decided to lock the doors of the church for what would turn out to be the duration of the war. The nature of the times, they concluded, was such that they could not ensure the physical safety of their rector, Panton, or even of parishioners, if worship services continued. Since Pearson and the rector spent a good deal of time together, Pearson must have felt concerned for his own physical safety as well.<sup>76</sup>

The last six months of 1776 are nearly a blank page as far as knowledge of Pearson is concerned. Nearly all of what is known dates from December. By December 1776 there were plenty of reasons for a Loyalist to feel vindicated and a supporter of independence to feel a mounting sense of panic. With one military defeat following another, the Continental Army was pushed out of New York and then across New Jersey. As December began, the army reached Trenton. Soon the Americans were commandeering all private boats for many miles up and down the river.<sup>77</sup> Pearson probably would have been affected by this action. His property backed up to Crosswicks Creek and the Trenton marsh. He had his own landing on the creek, so it seems deducible that whatever boats he had would have been taken at this time. We don't know what he thought or felt about this, but it may have been his own first loss to the war effort. More would come later.

The Americans began leaving Trenton on December 7th and the British arrived on the 8th.<sup>78</sup> On the 14th, they left a brigade of Hessians to occupy Trenton, three regiments and about 1500 men, and another Hessian force of roughly equal size to take Bordentown. The latter force marched through Trenton to White Horse, past Pearson's house, and tavern, and passed over the Crosswicks Creek drawbridge enroute to Bordentown. A 100-man detachment from the Trenton force was promptly stationed at White Horse to guard the drawbridge to protect communications with Bordentown. These men encamped in the houses of the neighborhood, undoubtedly including both Pearson's tavern and his own house.<sup>79</sup> When the Hessians came, they seized a wagon that Pearson owned and impressed into service a laborer who worked for the Pearsons as a driver.

During the two weeks that they kept the wagon, they also took a set of harness that they never returned and twelve "fat sheep," undoubtedly to slaughter them to feed their men. These were merely a few large items that Pearson's widow would later remember; what other items they lost are not recorded.<sup>80</sup> If they had lost nothing else it would have been unusual, given an established reputation for plunder that surrounded the Hessians in America.<sup>81</sup> Most farms lost their fences in this period, for example, and any other loose lumber-outbuildings even had their clapboards lifted-as the troops scavenged for wood to maintain campfires. Houses abandoned

by their owners were likely to be stripped.

### **The Battle of Trenton and Its Aftermath**

When General Washington led 2,400 men in his attack on Trenton on December 26th, his surprising success must have astonished Pearson as well. The Americans captured or killed two-thirds of the Hessian force, but the other third managed to escape the American encirclement and retreated to Bordentown with the news.<sup>82</sup> Once again, they would have crossed Pearson's farm and passed close to his house. Perhaps this time they were in too much of a hurry to take anything. From them Pearson would have learned that the Continental army had taken Trenton. Once again, he would have been reminded even more powerfully that he was caught between two military forces, only this time they were enemies to one another. In fact, Pearson found himself about half-way between Trenton and Bordentown. If part of the American force came out to take back the drawbridge, they might well make a battlefield of Pearson's farm, and very soon. The remnants of Rall's brigade that reached White Horse, almost 300 men, left the drawbridge detachment in place and proceeded to Bordentown. The Hessian commander there briefly sent a brigade to reinforce the drawbridge and to reconnoiter, but after staying there for a few hours in the afternoon, the entire force was ordered back to Bordentown. So, by the evening of the 26th there were no Hessians at White Horse for the first time in nearly two weeks.<sup>83</sup>

### **The Final Ride**

Pearson must have thought his situation was still desperate, or else he never would have taken off when he did, leaving home on December 28th for what would be the final time. Where he was going and why have never been known with certainty, but local traditions that were reported in the 19th century assert that he was seeking protection for himself and his family and property. In the absence of direct evidence, it seems likely that he made his decision to leave after the Hessian withdrawal and took the day of the 27th to prepare. Amid an atmosphere of swirling rumors, he probably learned on the 27th that the Continental Army had evacuated Trenton within a few hours of taking the town. So, if he had wanted to travel, this would have looked like a window of opportunity. Suddenly, the regiments in Trenton, the brigade in Bordentown, and the detachment at White Horse were all gone at the same time. He must have thought that this relaxation would not last and chosen the following day to act. But Saturday, December 28th, 1776, was no ordinary day. It was also not an occasion fit for travel, and for Pearson it would have tragic consequences. It snowed heavily that morning, yielding six inches according to one weather record in the region.<sup>84</sup> Then it stopped snowing and turned bitterly cold in the afternoon, much colder than when the Americans had attacked Trenton two days before. If Pearson had waited until the

snow stopped before setting out, that fact alone would have sealed his chances of reaching New Brunswick, one of the places where he was said to be going. What might under warmer circumstances have been a one-day ride became an overnight affair. But wherever Pearson was heading, he never got there. He was discovered in Hightstown late that afternoon or that evening by an advance party of Continental troops who shot him, claiming he was trying to escape. He was probably killed instantly. His body was brought to a tavern in Allentown the following afternoon, the 29th.<sup>85</sup> From there he was carted home and buried in the Pearson family burying ground.

### **Was Pearson a Loyalist?**

Hamilton Township historians have struggled ever since with this question: was Isaac Pearson a Loyalist? In 1979, historians involved in an archaeological study of Pearson's farm essentially accepted that he was but did not provide demonstrable proof. Nearer in time to the events, however, nineteenth-century local historians Joseph H. West of Hamilton and Charles R. Hutchinson of Allentown also wrote about Pearson but left the question of his allegiance open. West told Hutchinson, "unless he [Pearson] had done something which has not been handed down to us, he could not properly be called a Tory."<sup>86</sup> Even at the time of Pearson's death he did not go unnoticed. The rumors and the word-of-mouth didn't take long even to reach New York City, where the Tory printer Rivington noted Pearson's death in the January 13, 1777 issue of his newspaper.<sup>87</sup> He related what he must have heard, although his source is unknown. Rivington wrote incorrectly that Pearson had died the previous week (it was actually more than two weeks before), that he was killed by "rebellious banditti" (editorial license) and that he was attempting to reach New York, not New Brunswick at the time. The last claim, if true, would have been very damaging to Pearson's reputation among Americans, if it could be confirmed, because that would have marked him in almost everyone's eyes as a Loyalist, but no one else who might have known claimed Pearson was headed for New York.

Some others thought he was a Loyalist, too. William Smith, a fellow member of the provincial congress who did become a Loyalist, left for New York, and would have his property confiscated. He wrote to British authorities after the end of the war that he thought Pearson to be like-minded to himself, and he gave an affidavit that lends credence to the belief that Pearson did not support independence and was opposed to much of what the "whig party" in the congress was up to.<sup>88</sup> But one legislator, talking to a fellow legislator about what their political opponents were attempting does not make Pearson a Loyalist, either—a conservative, yes, a Loyalist, no. And finally, the Reverend George Panton. After the war he told the British authorities that during the two years that he was rector of St. Michael's church, he boarded with Pearson, and that he firmly believed that Pearson was

loyal to Britain.<sup>89</sup> But he also admitted that he had left Trenton for New York City once the church had been closed in July 1776; thus he had not been present during the last six months of Pearson's life, when any decision by Pearson to take sides in the conflict-if he made such a decision-would have crystallized. And Pearson also fit the profile of a Loyalist. His Anglicanism, as already noted, would have been one strike against him to many people. And as a justice of the peace, he held an office of profit under royal appointment, another fact that would have led him to prefer the status quo ante.<sup>90</sup>

But it would have been hard to find anyone that winter who was objective. It would have been self-serving of Loyalists like Rivington to claim Pearson as one of their own, such a prominent man who'd previously been so well regarded and so closely associated with the rebel movement. But equally self-serving, perhaps, was the family recollection in the 19th century, which held that Pearson had not been a Loyalist but rather a timid patriot who in the circumstances of the moment sought a protection for himself and his family. His family believed he was headed to New Brunswick. Did Pearson lie to his family about where he was going? Seems unlikely. And where is the smoking gun? None of those who claimed that Pearson was a Loyalist ever advanced a single claim that he committed any overt act to help the King's army put down the rebellion. He never joined a Loyalist militia. Never crossed the lines into New York City, and never did any spying, as far as we can tell. He seems never to have struck New Jersey's tory hunters as disloyal or dangerous, and the government never took any official action against him. He was never called before any committee for questioning, as far as we know, and his property was never confiscated. The truth is that we may never know which way Pearson would have turned out. He simply did not live long enough to make his posture known. Would he have become a Loyalist if he had lived? It seems quite doubtful. He had too much to protect and the opportunity to support the King would never again be so favorable. Would he have become a loud supporter of independence and the United States? Maybe not. My own view is that he would have remained quiet during the war and afterward would have continued a distinguished career.

### **Subsequent History of the House**

The history of the property after Pearson's death is considered in great length in the "Historic Sites" Report (Report 12) of the Trenton Complex Archaeology project, from which the following is a summary. After Pearson's death, his widow Elizabeth retained control of the property. For reasons that still remain unexplained, Pearson's will, written in 1775, remained unprobated until 1798. Under its terms, Isaac's son William was to receive half of the property when he reached 21 years of age, and that Elizabeth would retain control of the other half

during her lifetime. Both continued to share the Pearson house. In 1802, after Elizabeth's death, William was named sole administrator of Isaac's estate, and thus cemented his ownership.

By the time William Pearson finally gained full ownership of the property, he had already retraced some of his father's footsteps in politics. He represented Burlington County in the New Jersey Assembly in 1801, 1802, 1813, and 1819. And in 1813 he served on Governor Aaron Ogden's staff, according to Report 12. (Thus, it would appear likely that William Pearson was responsible for the minor, Federal-style modifications to the Pearson house, including those of the first-floor fireplaces.) As Aaron Ogden was a Federalist, it would seem that if William Pearson had served him, then Pearson must also have been a Federalist, which suggests that he inherited something of his father's conservative temperament, and that his father's equivocation in 1776 was no bar to his own political service a generation later. William kept the property until his death in 1835, even though he evidently lived in Bordentown during his final years.

The property then passed to his daughter Mary Pearson, who soon afterward married Thomas Mifflin Hopkinson of Burlington County. They were childless, however, and having no heir to leave the property to, Mary ordered the property to be sold in 1857. Peter Decou bought the property for \$18,000, which still contained 287 acres. Decou and his wife Mary had eight children, and five of them were still living on the property in 1860. Decou died in 1876, leaving the farm to his surviving children. An inventory of the house was taken at this time, enumerating the contents room by room. This inventory gives a sense of the now-missing service wing to the east, which was still standing at that time.

The Decou heirs continued to hold it jointly for a decade, then it passed to Charles Decou, one of Peter's sons. He held the property, now reduced to 156 acres, for another ten years until his death in 1898. His executors then held the property until 1907. A Frances Green, of Trenton, bought the house with only 40 acres attached to it, and sold that in 1909 to the trustee for the Independent Brick Company of Trenton. That company operated two brickyards in the lowland areas of the property into the 1930s. The property then passed to the heirs of a Lewis Thompson. In the 1940s, during their ownership, the kitchen or service wing was demolished, and in 1950 a fire substantially destroyed the large, 3-story barn that stood to the east of the house. A portion of the first story of the barn remained standing.

In 1950 Carney Rose bought the Pearson house. He was still the owner during the 1970s and early 1980s when the investigations for the Trenton Complex archaeology project were carried out. Rose continued to own the property until he

sold it to Hamilton Township in 2000. During the first year of the township's ownership, the original wood-shingle roof was removed from the house and a new wood-shingle roof was installed. In 2004, Hamilton Township had the remains of the barn demolished. An inspection undertaken before demolition, however, revealed that this barn dated from the middle of the 19th century, and not from Isaac Pearson's time.

### **A Note on Sources:**

This narrative rests largely on the research of others about the life of Isaac Pearson. The most important effort in this regard has been the work of the historians and archaeologists who worked in the late 1970s and early 1980s for the "Trenton complex" archaeology project. This project consisted of contract archaeology services performed in advance of the construction of the complex of highways (Interstates 195 and 295 and NJ State Highways 29 and 129) known as the "Trenton complex." The massive reports include an entire volume (Report 12) that focuses on several historic period sites and buildings that were included within the scope of the investigations. The Isaac Pearson house and its associated archaeology take up an entire, long chapter in this volume. There is relatively little now known about Pearson that this team of historians did not find and analyze. This narrative adds some new material regarding the architecture of Pearson's house, some new findings and additional perspective regarding his public service, and some information about Pearson's relationship with George Pantan. In addition, considerable new material about Pearson's death in Hightstown was left out of this narrative because it is not germane to this nomination.

Other, earlier treatments of Pearson are less comprehensive but still useful. Helen Almy West wrote a history of Hamilton Township that was published in 1954, which included a brief chapter about Pearson and his house. Charles R. Hutchinson of Allentown, whose own massive and largely unpublished writings on local history extend at least from the 1870s until his death in 1927, was also interested in Pearson. His writings include important quotes from a fellow local historian and contemporary, Joseph H. West of Hamilton Square, NJ, that reveal much about how Pearson was looked upon during the 19th century and what the local traditions surrounding his death were.

### **SOURCES:**

1. William M. Dwyer, in his book *The Day is Ours!*, mistakenly thought Pearson was an old man in 1776 (he was 37), but he did contribute that Captain Thomas Rodney of Delaware was an important witness concerning the events surrounding Pearson's death.
- 2 Trenton Complex Archaeology, Report 12 (hereafter simply "*Trenton*

*Complex Archaeology*"), chapter 5 (Tindall-Pearson farm), esp. 170-207.

3 Ibid., 184.

4 Hamilton Schuyler, *A History of Saint Michael's Church, Trenton* (Princeton, NJ: 1926): 27, 42-46.

5 Schuyler, 103-104; *Trenton Complex Archaeology*, 189.

6 *Trenton Complex Archaeology*, 188.

7 Donald L. Kemmerer, *Path to Freedom: The Struggle for Self-Government in Colonial New Jersey, 1703-1776* (Princeton, NJ: 1940): 18, 37, 80-81. The requirement was softened somewhat in 1705 to require a candidate for office to own real and personal property worth five hundred pounds. Pearson amply met the requirement.

8 *Nottingham Township Minute Book, 1692-1710, 1752-1772*, [Trenton, NJ: 1940], Reprinted by Trenton Historical Society (originally appeared serially in *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, January, April, and July 1940) [hereafter *Nottingham Township Minutes*]: 36-38.

9 *Nottingham Township Minutes*, 33-34.

10 Ibid., 39, 40, 42-48.

11 Ibid., 22, 23, 26, 27.

12 These conclusions about the low durability of timber bridges and about the cost comparisons that follow are based on this author's extensive examination of county freeholder minutes of Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, and Somerset counties.

13 Bound Brook had two stone-arch bridges, Elizabethtown had one, and the one over the Assunpink was Trenton's first. Princeton's first was built over the Stony Brook in 1791-92, and one over the Millstone River at Kingston was built in 1798-99. Southwestern New Jersey also had a tradition of brick-arch bridges with stone spandrel walls, beginning in the 1680s and continuing into the 19th century.

14 *New Jersey Archives*, 3rd Series, 4:244. No account of the construction of the drawbridge is known, but it is referred to in subsequent years.

15 *Nottingham Township Minutes*, 36-38.

16 Ibid., 40.

17 *NJA*, 3rd Series, 4:350.

18 Petition of Isaac Pearson, February 16, 1764, in *Petitions and Other Papers Related to Bridges, Canals, Dams, and Ferries*, NJ State Archives, Trenton, NJ [hereafter *NJSA*].

19 *Nottingham Township Minutes*, 27-29. The best discussion of the growing stage traffic remains Wheaton J. Lane, *From Indian Trail to Iron Horse: Travel and Transportation in New Jersey, 1620-1820* (Princeton, NJ: 1939).

20 Hunterdon County Freeholder Minutes, May 9, 1764, Hunterdon Co.

Clerk's Office, Flemington, NJ.

21 *NJA*, 3rd Series, 4:350-351.

22 For the Bound Brook bridges, see *NJA*, 3rd Series, 2:384 and 2:408-409. The Bound Brook, Stony Brook, and Kingston bridges were all built with cost sharing between Middlesex and Somerset counties. The best overall source on the Trenton bridge is Hunter Research Associates, Inc. "South Broad Street Bridge: Cultural Resource Assessment." January 2003, prepared for the New Jersey Department of Transportation and Vollmer Associates LLP, copy in New Jersey Historic Preservation Office, NIDEP, Trenton [hereafter HPO].

3 Hunt has recently become the subject of a work of historical fiction; see Michael A. Davis, *The Trial of Lt. Colonel Abraham Hunt, September 22, 1777, Trenton, New Jersey* (Ex-Libris: 2001).

24 *Nottingham Township minutes*, 42.

25 For a further explanation of the roles and responsibilities of the chosen freeholders, see *NJA*, 3rd Series, 5:485, 493 et passim.

26 *Nottingham Township Minutes*, 42.

27 West, *History of Hamilton Township*, 103-105.

28 *Nottingham Township Minutes*. For the site of an annual township meeting, see both the minute for that meeting and the minute for the previous year's annual meeting.

29 *Ibid.*, 46.

30 *Ibid.*, 43.

31 Commissions, vol. AAA, p.430. NJSA.

32 *Ibid.*

33 The legislature tinkered frequently with the laws governing justices, adding new responsibilities as the years passed; see *NJA*, 3rd Series, 5:492-493.

34 Burlington County Board of Justices and Freeholders, Minute Book, 1722-1790, p.243. Microfilm copy, RUL.

35 *Ibid.*, 245-246.

36 *Ibid.*, 246.

37 *Ibid.*, 247.

38 *Ibid.*, 253.

39 *Ibid.*, 261.

40 *Ibid.*, 268.

41 *Ibid.*, 269.

42 *Ibid.*, 270-271.

43 *Ibid.*, 276.

44 Commissions, vol. AB, p.114, NJSA.

45 See letter of Edward A. Lempicki, Chief, NJ Forest Service, to Alex Wiedenhoft, USDA Forest Products Laboratory, December 5, 2002, copy in



author's files.

46 Schuyler, 78-79; E. Alfred Jones, *The Loyalists of New Jersey, Their Memorials, Petitions, etc. From English Records*, vol. 10, "Collections of the New Jersey Historical Society (Newark, NJ: 1927): 168.

47 *Trenton Complex Archaeology*, 189-190.

48 *Ibid.*, 192.

49 *Minutes of the Provincial Congress and the Council of Safety of New Jersey* (Trenton, NJ: 1879): 52 [hereafter *Provincial Congress*].

50 Petition of ... Nottingham Township, January 1775, NJSA, reproduced in Larry Gerlach, *New Jersey in the American Revolution: A*

*Documentary History* (Trenton, NJ: 1975):115-116.

51 *Provincial Congress*, 101, 108.

52 *Ibid.*, 170, 184.

53 *Ibid.*, 190.

54 Burlington County Wills, 12057C, NJSA.

55 *Provincial Congress*, 194.

56 *Ibid.*, 195-196.

57 *Trenton Complex Archaeology*, 192.

58 *Provincial Congress*, 197, 199.

59 *Ibid.*, 206-207.

60 *Ibid.*, 200, 219-220.

61 *Ibid.*, 201.

62 *Ibid.*, 201-202.

63 *Ibid.*, 218.

64 *Ibid.*, 218-219.

65 *Ibid.*, 230.

66 *NJA*, 3rd Series, 5:212-234.

67 *Provincial Congress*, 229.

68 *Ibid.*, 254.

69 *Ibid.*, 292,298. The original manuscript of the petition is held by NJSA.

70 *Ibid.*, 300.

71 *Ibid.*, 325, 335.

72 *Ibid.*, 373.

73 Larry R. Gerlach, *Prologue to Independence: New Jersey in the Coming of the American Revolution* (Trenton, NJ: 1976): xxx.

74 *Provincial Congress*, xxx.

75 Dennis P. Ryan, *New Jersey in the American Revolution, 1763-1783: A Chronology* (Trenton, NJ: 1974): 30-32.

76 Schuyler, 75; Saint Michael's Episcopal Church minute book (transcribed by Carlos Godfrey), typescript copy, Trenton Public Library [TPL], Trenton, NJ.

77 William S. Stryker, *Battles of Trenton and Princeton* (New York: 1898;

reprinted 2000): 15, 28; *Trenton Complex Archaeology*, 45-46.

78 Stryker, 27-28.

79 *Ibid.*, 40-42, 382. Stryker, in describing this detachment, stated that it was commanded by a captain, who was supported by three lieutenants and 82 non-commissioned officers and enlisted men. This detachment was rotated back to Trenton every 48 hours, so it was successively led by several different captains. On December 26th, the captain in charge was Heinrich Ludwig Boking, who "with one non-commissioned officer and twenty men," occupied three farmhouses, "on the road to Trenton ... about a quarter of a mile north from the drawbridge." The location of Pearson's house fits this description nearly perfectly. Since Pearson's house was the finest one in the neighborhood, it seems likely that the succession of captains who commanded this detachment would have chosen it for their own lodging and that of some of their men. Pearson's own last will and testament (Burlington County Wills, 12057C) also indicates the presence of two other houses on his property in addition to his own. It may be that these were the houses that Stryker referred to. 80 Revolutionary War Damage Claims, Burlington County, p.4, no.45 (Elizabeth Pearson), NJSA.

81 David Hackett Fischer, *Washington's Crossing* (New York: 2003): 62-63 et passim, provides an extensive discussion of Hessian plundering, its extent, the reasons for it, and the attitudes of officers and soldiers toward it.

82 Stryker, 218,234, 366.

83 *Ibid.*, 190, 377.

84 Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 399-403.

85 See the entry for December 29, 1776 in *Diary of Captain Thomas Rodney, 1776-1777* (Wilmington, DE: 1888); letter of Thomas Rodney to Caesar Rodney, December 30, 1776, in George Herbert Ryden (ed.), *Letters to and from Caesar Rodney, 1756-1784* (New York: 1970): 151-152.

86 Charles R. Hutchinson Papers, vol. 4, pp.116-117, Item no. 1192, New Jersey Historical Society, Newark, NJ. Microfilm copy available at Allentown [NJ] Public Library and at Monmouth County Historical Association, Freehold, NJ. Helen A. West continued in 1954 to express the ambivalent point of view that came down through her family; see her *History*, 16-17.

87 *Trenton Complex Archaeology*, 193. 88 Jones, *Loyalists of New Jersey*, 201.

89 *Ibid.*, 168-169.

90 See Dennis P. Ryan, *New Jersey's Loyalists*, New Jersey's Revolutionary Experience, no. 20 (Trenton, NJ: 1975).

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## **VERBAL BOUNDARY STATEMENT**

The nominated property consists of Block S-484, Lot 68 as shown on the accompanying survey of the property, excepting and excluding the area of a 40-foot-wide utility and access easement that runs along the easterly line of Lot 68. The nominated property consists of approximately 3 acres and is bounded on the west by the easterly line of Hobson Avenue, on the north by the southerly line of Emeline Avenue, and on the south by the right-of-way of Interstate Route 195.

## **BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION STATEMENT**

The nominated property consists of the remaining lot on which the Isaac Pearson house stands. It is the sole parcel still associated with the Pearson house and it apparently encompasses the locations where the Pearson barn and other outbuildings associated with the house once stood. Thus, any archaeological remains of these buildings that may still be present should also be encompassed within the bounds of the nominated property. All other lands that Isaac Pearson owned have been parceled off since the 18th century.