

Cincinnati Hall

Life was different in Freehold Township in the 1700's . Travel was done by horseback or stagecoach with distance travel in winter being difficult or impossible. The Burlington Trail or Path established in 1684 linked Perth Amboy, the capital of East Jersey, and Burlington, the capital of West Jersey. This road was also referred to as *The Great Road*, and the *Old Indian Trail* an important route for the Unami Clan of the Leni-Lenape tribe who used it to get to the sea to collect their winter store of shell fish. It was the main road on which people traveled. The area consisted of farms, a crossroads tavern with accommodations for stage coach travelers, general store, blacksmith shop, wheelwright shop, bakery and post office to support the surrounding agricultural community.

On this well traveled road lived Dr. Thomas Henderson a prominent physician of Scottish descent and born in Freehold, New Jersey on August 15, 1743. He was renowned for being a graduate of Princeton and also a short-term (2months and 3 days) governor of New Jersey after William Paterson resigned from office.

The British army in its march to the Navesink Highlands committed many outrages on the people of New Jersey. Devastations in and around Freehold were extensive and no less than eight residences were laid in ashes. Dr. Henderson's house was the first raided and burned by the British who vented their spite on our area on June 17, 1778, one day before the Battle of Monmouth which took place 2 miles NW of his fine home. They fired upon and burned his old mansion. But, when the British marched away, neighbors ran to the place and succeeded in saving it partly. Seven other homes located along the Burlington Path in Upper Monmouth Courthouse also known as Mount's Corner and later as West Freehold were destroyed that hot, humid summer day. Dr. Henderson fought in the battle as an officer. Local tradition holds that he was the solitary person who brought General Washington news of General Lee's retreat.

Mary Henderson his first wife died shortly after their marriage of Tuberculosis. Ten years later he married Rachel Burrowes and they raised 7 daughters in the house which reportedly was the social center of the community and a necessary stop for many traveling families of note. Freehold hospitality at that time was very much like that to be found in the South before the Civil War. He was one of the largest landowners and the most prominent, influential and active patriots of Monmouth County. His property consisted of 220 acres with other accessory buildings. He also owned slaves and servants who records indicate were later emancipated. His great granddaughter Frances F. Randolph in October of 1899 described him *“as being of medium height, very erect, and slender with square shoulders. His face was smooth, eyes blue and nose rather prominent. He wore a wig of auburn color and always dressed in black. He never wore anything conspicuous. He drove two horses and his carriage was a large, oval shaped one at one time called a coach. While driving, he wore a blue cloth cloak, a large, full one, coming nearly down to his knee. This cloak took the place of an overcoat. His voice was never loud, but very distinct. He did not use tobacco or liquor.”*

After the battle, Henderson rebuilt his home on the existing foundation of the first and named it *Cincinnati Hall* in honor of the newly found Society of Cincinnati in honor of the newly found Society of Cincinnati. This Society was named after *Cincinnatus*, a Roman farmer turned army commander and war hero who lived during the 5th Century BC. After he returned from Battle *Cincinnatus* resumed his life as a farmer. The Society was an organization to continue the association of officers of the Continental Army and to provide assistance to families of original members. The practice of naming a home or estate was common among prominent individuals during the 18th & 19th centuries, thus the name given to this building. There are no known records to indicate if any meetings of the Society took place at the house. The rebuilt home was a large frame dwelling of a much plainer style of architecture than that of the former grand home. Dr. Henderson's other great granddaughter Julia Randolph reported that the home was furnished with Sheraton, Hipplewaite and Chippendale. It was said that General Washington was served cake and wine from Dr. Henderson's tea table. After Dr. Henderson died in 1824, he was interred at the Old Tennent Church Cemetery, in Tennent, New Jersey. The house was sold 15 months later. Rachel his wife died in 1840.

The township of Freehold conducted an archaeological study in 2004 done by Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc. Scope was limited to the foundation remains. In 2005 another study was conducted by CRCG to identify artifacts within 50 feet of the house foundation. This study identified and documented the foundation walls. Archaeological investigations determined that although some of the remains of Cincinnati Hall dating to the late-eighteenth century exist on the parcel, the findings resulted in the fact that the site did not meet the National Register of Historic Places Eligibility Criteria done by this Phase 1B Study. A small prehistoric component of the site was identified in the course of the investigation, but was found to lack both the stratigraphic integrity and the capacity to produce important data that are a prerequisite for this designation.

It was recommended on January 6, 2003 by the Freehold Township Historic Preservation Commission that the foundation known as *Cincinnati Hall* and its outbuildings be identified as an Historic Landmark and that an information marker be installed as close to the foundations as possible as it is the township's intent to preserve the foundation ruins and archaeological deposits associated with it. (Freehold Township Resolution Number 2003-02) The Township has gotten a grant and hopes in the near future to establish a park and small museum along with the appropriate information markers. Richard Grubb & Associates of Cranbury did the background research, fieldwork and conclusion. All artifacts, field notes, photographs and project documents are housed at his office. A total of 3,787 artifacts for Phase IB & II were identified and catalogued by type and feature.

Present Location of site is: Freehold Marketplace Development 302 West Main Street, CR 537 Block 70, Lot 18. The property can be accessed from Beadleston Drive directly off NJ Route 537. The old entrance drive is barely discernable on certain portions of the property. It is now a 4.5 acre parcel of land once part of the larger mid-18th century acreage. *Cincinnati Hall* was torn down in the early 1990's due to disrepair. There is now a heavy overgrowth of trees, bushes and vines. A stone-lined well and concrete fish pond, potting shed and garage still exist on the property along with house foundation remains.

