

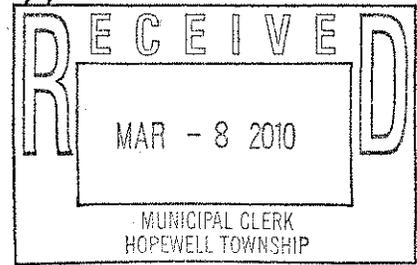
HOPEWELL TOWNSHIP

MAR 10 2010

ADMINISTRATION

Mr. Robert B. Britton, Jr.
98 West Upper Ferry Road
Ewing, New Jersey 08628

Ms. Joelle Schatz, Special Project Coordinator
National Trust for Historic Preservation
1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036



Dear Ms. Schatz:

As a private citizen who is deeply concerned about the preservation of important historic landmarks, I feel compelled to write this letter in order to express my support for the Jacob's Creek Road Bridge to be included on the National Trust for Historic Preservation's annual list of America's most endangered places. My reasons are noted in the following paragraphs:

The immediate area surrounding the Jacob's Creek Road Bridge, known as "Washington's Hollow," constitutes an unspoiled landscape which has remained virtually unchanged since the eighteenth century. "The surrounding landscape is," according to the Crossroads of the American Revolution Association, "extremely significant from an historical point of view. Indeed, it would appear that it is one of the very few locations along the 'Washington Victory Trail' (the route that was taken by General George Washington and his Continental Army during their famous march to Trenton on Christmas night, 1776) that remains today much as it did when that historically significant event occurred 233 years ago."(1) Moreover, it is also the site of the only major stream crossing that was made by Washington's army during their eight mile march to Trenton.

The Jacob's Creek Road Bridge is "a six-panel, pin-connected Pratt through truss with a wood deck and steel tread plates that is 75' feet long, two lanes wide and supported on ashlar cut stone abutments."(2) Located at the intersection of Jacob's Creek Road and Bear Tavern Road (a.k.a. County Route 579) in the extreme, southern part of Hopewell Township, Mercer County, New Jersey, near its border with neighboring Ewing Township, it is situated approximately one mile north of Route I-95. It carries Bear Tavern Road over Jacob's Creek, a small tributary that flows east to west, under the Delaware & Raritan Feeder Canal, and directly into the Delaware River, which is about 1 1/2 miles away.

At the time when Washington's army crossed the Delaware River and marched on Trenton, "Jacob's Creek was a big and fast-moving stream that lay at the bottom of a 100' deep ravine. The terrain that was on both sides of it was steep and treacherous. As the Continental Army of 2,400 men crossed the stream, they did so in a blinding winter storm of snow, sleet and hail. The soldiers' slow and arduous descent into the ravine below not only proved extremely difficult for them, but nearly impossible for the powder wagons, the eighteen artillery pieces and the horses that had to be brought across the high, swift and tumbling waters that raged below. According to an eyewitness account given by Lieutenant Elisha Bostwick, one of the officers who had also crossed the ice-

choked Delaware River and had participated in the subsequent march to Trenton, 'the artillery's long drag ropes had to be brought out, and trees used as mooring posts for mechanical advantage, so that the guns could be lowered slowly to the bottom of the ravine. On the other side of the creek, the guns then had to be hauled up again by teams of men who were struggling to keep their own balance on the slippery surface of the road. As the soldiers slowly advanced down the slope to Jacob's Creek, and up the other side, they met yet another deep ravine, a flooded tributary of Jacob's Creek, smaller, but still very steep. ... When, at last, the army had passed the deep ravines of Jacob's Creek, it came to a high stretch of Bear Tavern Road that rose gradually to an elevation of 250 feet.'"(3) It was here that the army, still under the cover of darkness, continued its advance southward toward Trenton and what, ultimately, would prove to be the first major military victory of the American Revolutionary War.

In order to more fully understand the historical significance of the Jacob's Creek Road Bridge, one must also know about the history of the company that designed and made it. "The King Bridge & Manufacturing Company, as it was originally called, was founded in Cleveland, Ohio by Zenas King in 1858. ... While not among the first to seek the possibilities of the iron bridge business, Mr. King was among the first to have a vision of how bridge building could evolve from a local craft to a national industry. With that goal in mind, he systematically charted a course of action to achieve that end."(4)

By the 1880's, "although the company was building all types of truss, wooden and combination bridges, as many as 200 a year, its business was primarily focused on the production of larger and heavier Pratt trusses,"(5) of which the Jacob's Creek Road Bridge, built in 1882, is an excellent example. Up to that time, the company had produced 5,000 structures and became the largest highway bridge works in America.(6) By the end of the nineteenth century, however, it "claimed to have built over 10,000 bridges"(7) throughout the United States.

After Zenas King's death in 1892, the company continued operating as a family owned enterprise for the next thirty years. However, due to legal trouble with anti-trust laws and a changing business climate, the company was officially disbanded in 1923.(8)

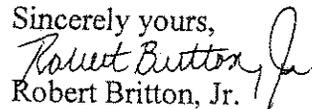
It is important to note "the major role the King Bridge Company played in the development and construction of metal truss bridges, a product of American engineering and construction technology."(9) Thus, the Jacob's Creek Road Bridge is truly a testament "to the accomplishments of Zenas King, both as an imaginative bridge-builder and a creative business entrepreneur."(10)

In 1991, the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office issued an opinion that this small span "was eligible to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and in 2001, Hopewell Township designated it as a local historic landmark."(11) To date, however, no further action has been taken by either state, county or local government officials to have the bridge formally registered as a national historic site.

In an effort to acknowledge the significance of Washington's march to Trenton, a major military event that changed the course of American history, to protect the integrity of the historic landscape in which the Jacob's Creek Road Bridge is located, and because, as a structure, the bridge possesses "the distinctive characteristics of a type, period and method of construction,"(12) that is no longer to be found in today's world of modern

bridge building, I believe that the Jacob's Creek Road Bridge should be preserved, intact, at its present location. It is imperative that definitive steps be taken to ensure that the bridge and its environs are added to the National Trust for Historic Preservation's annual list of America's most endangered places as soon as possible.

Sincerely yours,


Robert Britton, Jr.

Footnotes/Acknowledgements

(1) Article entitled, "*Washington Victory Trail*" *Landscape Faces Potential Redevelopment*, written by Preservation, New Jersey, October, 2009 and found on the Internet.

(2) Report entitled, *Historic Bridge Alternatives Analysis, Mercer County Bridge No. 214.2, Bear Tavern Road Over Jacob's Creek, Township of Hopewell, Mercer County*, prepared by Keller & Kirkpatrick, April, 2009, and found on the Internet.

(3) David Hackett Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, Oxford University Press, Inc., New York, New York, 2004, pgs. 223, 226-227.

(4) The historical information and related quotations about the King Bridge Company were taken from several articles that had been written in 1999 and 2006 by Allan King Sloan, a great, great-grandson of Zenas King, and found on the Internet.

(5) Ibid.

(6) Ibid.

(7) Ibid.

(8) Ibid.

(9) Article entitled, *The King Iron Bridge & Manufacturing Company*, from Cleveland Digital Library, Cleveland State University, May, 2001, and found on the Internet.

(10) This historical fact and related quotation about the King Bridge Company was taken from an article that had been written in 1999 by Allan King Sloan, a great, great-grandson of Zenas King, and found on the Internet.

(11) Report entitled, *Historic Bridge Alternatives Analysis, Mercer County Bridge No. 214.2, Bear Tavern Road Over Jacob's Creek, Township of Hopewell, Mercer County*, prepared by Keller & Kirkpatrick, April, 2009, and found on the Internet.

(12) Article, entitled *National Register of Historic Places- Frequently Asked Questions*, found on the Internet.

cc: Hon. Michael Markulek, Mayor, Hopewell Township, Mercer County, New Jersey
Hon. John Ball, Mayor, Ewing Township, Mercer County, New Jersey
Mr. David Blackwell, Member, Hopewell Township Historic Preservation Commission
Ms. Barbara Geary, Chairperson, Ewing Township Historic Preservation Commission
Ms. Stephanie Cherry-Farmer, Program Director, Preservation New Jersey