

Englewood - Historic
Site

Historic Englewood Series

#1



Englewood's Liberty Square

From the 1766 Liberty Pole to the
1999 Centennial

🍷 A self-guided walking &
driving tour

Liberty Square features as its modern focal point the 1924 Englewood Monument,

the City's best known local landmark, but the intersection began making history before the American Revolution.

Writing: Eleanor Harvey and Dr. William L. Lee

Design: Barbara deC. Lee

Text preparation: Marion C. and Alfred M. McKenzie

Date of publication: April 17, 1998

Joint publishers:

Englewood Historic Preservation Advisory Committee (EHPAC)	Englewood Historical Society (EHS)
City Clerk's Office 2-10 N. Van Brunt Street Englewood, NJ 07631	P.O. Box 8136 Englewood, NJ 07631

Copies on sale at Eagle Point and at the Englewood City Clerk's Office. Or mail an inquiry to the Englewood Historical Society.

Both organizations gratefully acknowledge the sponsorship of the following donors, who helped make this publication possible:

City of Englewood
Eagle Point
Fleet Bank
NVE Savings Bank
PNC Bank
State of New Jersey
Neighborhood Preservation Program
Valley National Bank



Historic Highlights

In 1766, the British government repealed its hated Stamp Act. To celebrate, local patriots erected a Liberty Pole. By 1776 the neighborhood around the intersection of the King's Highway (now known as Palisade Ave. and Lafayette Ave.) and Tenafly Rd. was widely known as Liberty Pole.

- In 1776, a substantial portion of George Washington's army narrowly escaped superior British forces marching down Tenafly Road toward Liberty Pole.
- After the Revolution, Alexander Hamilton made the first known written request for a constitutional convention while staying at Liberty Pole, and the first Liberty Pole Tavern became a local gathering place.
- In the 1880's, one block south of Liberty Square, William Walter Phelps built the northern gatehouse for his 4,000 acre estate, which

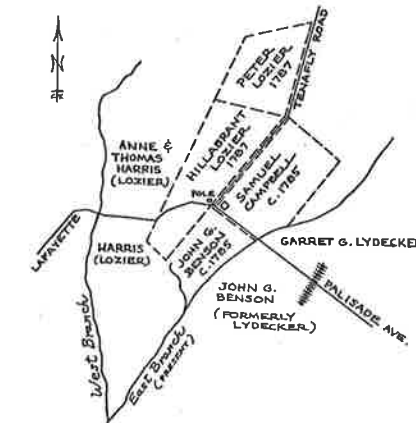
Over the years, "liberty," the presiding spirit of the place, has freely given its name to Liberty Poles, Liberty Caps, Liberty Road, Liberty Pole Taverns, Liberty Union School, and Liberty School. You can easily see why a walk around Liberty Square will put you in touch with many of the key chapters of Englewood's history.

stretched south and west through the current site of Teaneck's Municipal Complex.

- In 1898 one of Englewood's oldest churches, Dwight Chapel, which had served since 1883 as the home of our oldest continuous African American congregation, was moved to Liberty Square.
- In 1902, newly-incorporated Englewood proudly dedicated its first modern, professionally-designed public building — Liberty School.
- In 1924, Englewood proudly dedicated the Monument to honor her citizens who had died serving their country in World War I.
- The 1997-98 architectural renovation of Liberty Square highlighted its historic and architectural significance and anticipated Englewood's 1999 Centennial.

The neighborhood named for the original Liberty Pole

In the decades before the Revolution, a few buildings gathered around the dusty intersection of four roads: the King's Highway (now Palisade Ave.), its continuation to the west (now Lafayette Ave.), an alternate "byroad" to New Bridge (now Liberty Rd.), and Tenafly Rd. Were it



Map showing land divisions shortly after American Revolution. Reconstructed by Reginald McMahon 1976.

not for local colonists' hatred of the British Stamp Act of 1765, the crossroads might have remained anonymous. After England had repealed the Stamp Tax in 1766, however, the colonists felt so triumphant that they erected a Liberty Pole to celebrate. In doing so they were following the example of the Sons of Liberty in the Boston area and similar patriotic groups elsewhere. By 1776, as George Washington's military map indicates, the immediate neighborhood had become, widely known as Liberty Pole.

On the corner between Lafayette Ave. and West Palisade Ave., you can see near its original site our current replica of the original LIBERTY POLE and an historic marker describing its significance. Note on top of the pole the gilded replica of the original liberty cap, an historic symbol of freedom. In ancient Rome, soft conical liberty caps were given to freed slaves to mark their attainment of citizenship in the Empire.

The most significant event in the entire history of Liberty Square occurred on November 20, 1776 when a substantial portion of General



Liberty cap on top of the 1964 replica of the Liberty Pole.

George Washington's remaining army narrowly escaped from superior British forces marching down Tenafly Rd. through Liberty Pole toward Fort Lee. After the British had captured Fort Washington in northern Manhattan on November 16, Washington needed to protect the rest of his forces from the predictable invasion of New Jersey and the inevitable capture of Ft. Lee. He therefore instructed his army to withdraw from Fort Lee and reunite on the other side of the Hackensack River near New Bridge

1969 Altshuler map of British invasion (☒) and American retreat (★ main army, ☆ splinter groups) on November 20, 1776.



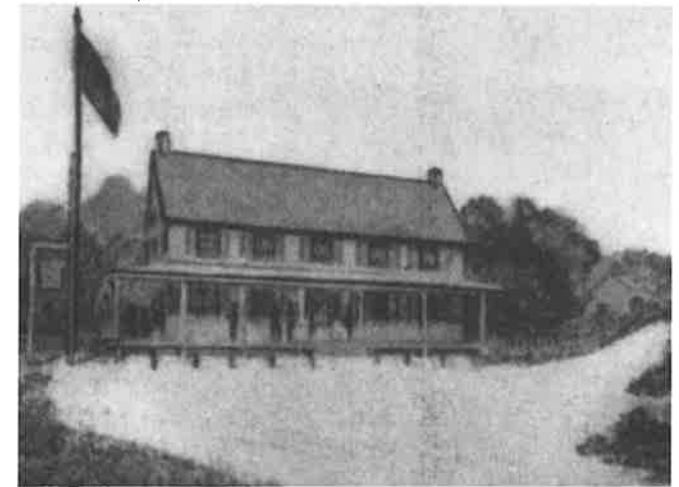
Landing where the Steuben House still stands. According to Thomas Paine, an eyewitness, most of Washington's soldiers took the northerly route along the King's Highway through Liberty Pole. At that point, some probably took the byroad, Liberty Rd.; others, the continuation of the King's Highway (Lafayette Ave.). All escaped a matter of minutes, at most an hour or two, before Cornwallis and his troops passed through Liberty Pole on their way to Ft. Lee. Had the British met up with Washington's troops, cutting off their retreat, or vigorously given chase, American history might have unfolded entirely differently — if it had unfolded at all. The American Revolution could have ended then and there at Liberty Square.

On August 18, 1779, Major "Light-Horse" Harry Lee marched through Liberty Pole on his way to attack Paulus Hook (Jersey City) and engaged the British near Liberty Pole on his way back. That fall, General "Mad Anthony" Wayne led a major foraging expedition which passed through the neighborhood, and his troops often camped in the general area. During 1780, the datelines of several of Washington's letters locate his headquarters at Liberty Pole. A private house later known as the Tunis Cooper homestead, which stood where the small shopping center now stands, probably served as his headquarters. After the Americans had won the War of Independence, Alexander Hamilton made the first known written request for a constitutional convention while staying at Liberty Pole.

Liberty Pole Taverns I, II and III and replicas of the original Liberty Pole

Sometime shortly after the Revolution, the very same house became the Liberty Pole Tavern, serving local people and travellers as a political as well as a social gathering place and focal point. However, no evidence has been found to demonstrate its use as a tavern during the Revolutionary War itself.

Third Liberty Pole Tavern.



By 1805, with prosperity returning to the region, the original Liberty Pole Tavern had fallen into disuse. John Vanderbeek, a blacksmith, therefore built a new tavern across the street, where the Monument now stands. During elections, citizens gathered at the new Liberty Pole Tavern to vote out loud so that there could be no questions as to the choice of candidate or the final result. In 1828, in honor of the election of President Andrew Jackson, Vanderbeek erected the first known replica of the Liberty Pole. Reportedly a bushel of hickory nuts was thrown into the excavation in honor of "Old Hickory." Rebuilt after a fire in 1835, the third Liberty Pole Tavern later served as the starting line for horseraces and a major stop for the stagecoach to and from Hoboken.

In 1893 the Liberty Pole Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution sponsored the erection of a new Liberty Pole to celebrate the patriots' victory in the Battle of Trenton on December 26, 1776. In 1964 the present Liberty Pole was erected as part of the Tercentenary observance of England's takeover of New Amsterdam from the Dutch in 1664. To this day the Liberty Pole participates in celebrations of patriotic holidays such as Memorial Day and Veterans Day.

Liberty Union School

The first local school was probably a wooden schoolhouse built by 1804 just east of the Liberty Pole. In 1818 local residents replaced it with a sandstone building called the Liberty Union School. "Union" signified that the school welcomed children of different religious denominations. In 1850 it was moved stone by stone to 486 Tenafly Rd., where it continued to function as a school. In 1900 it was converted into a resi-



dence, and in the 1940's Lester Cohen, an architect, designed an addition in back but restored the rest of the exterior. Beginning in 1958, the Friedmans restored much of the interior, including its pine floors and the wainscoting in which students had carved their initials. It's worth driving up Tenafly Rd. to read the historic marker and take a look around.

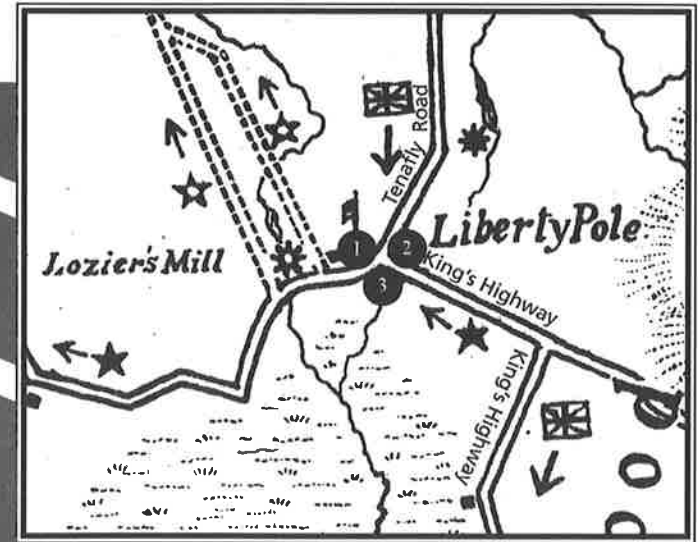
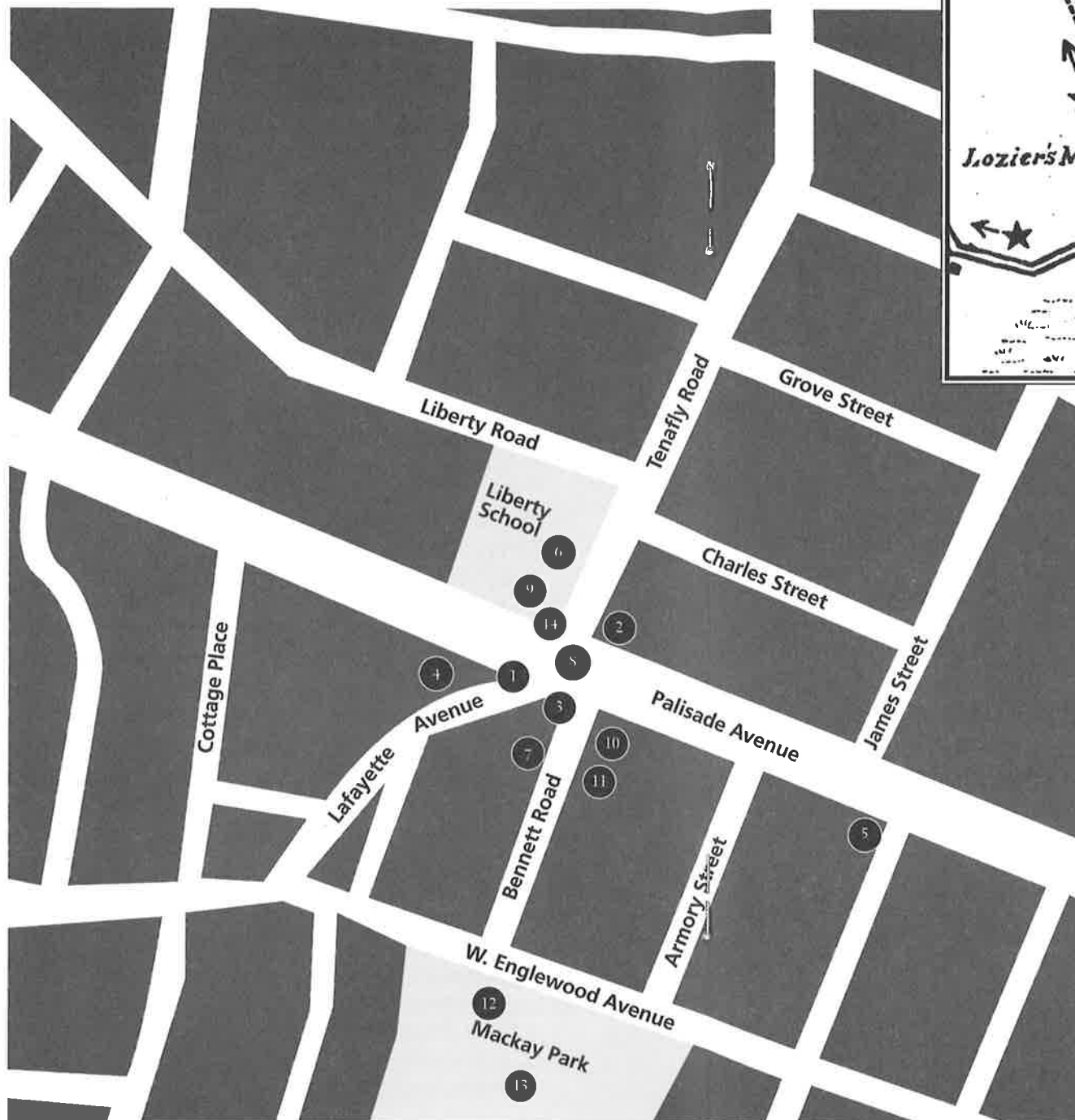
The Church at Liberty Square

On the same corner as the Liberty Pole, the church where an Apostolic congregation has been worshipping since 1973 has a long history of service to the community.

The building was originally located on the corner of William Street and Palisade Avenue, where it opened on January 18, 1883. Known at that time as Dwight Chapel, it originally served as a gathering spot for educational as well as religious purposes. The Calvary Mission, having been established in 1880 by the First Presbyterian Church to minister to the first African-American congregation in Englewood, immediately began to meet at the new chapel. C.A.S. Dwight, the son of the first pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, was the Mission's first pastor.

In 1898 Dwight Chapel was moved to Liberty Square, enlarged, and renamed the West Side Union Chapel. Its new congregation, which had previously met at the Kursteiner School on Liberty Road, soon voted to reconstitute themselves as the West Side Presbyterian Church. Note the architectural signs of the church's nineteenth century origins: its Victorian Gothic windows with their pointed arches and its tower on the northwest corner.





Modified detail from 1969 Altshuler map of British invasion (☒) and American retreat (★main army, ☆ splinter groups) on November 20, 1776.

1. Liberty Pole (1766; current replica dates from 1964)
2. Washington's Headquarters (1780; probable) & 1st Liberty Pole Tavern (c. 1790); now a mini-mall
3. Liberty Union School (1818)
4. Dwight Chapel (1883), home of Calvary Mission; currently Jesus Christ Is God Apostolic Church
5. Bethany Presbyterian Church (1922)
6. Liberty School (1902)
7. West Side Athletic Field (1910)
8. Englewood Monument (1924)
9. Camp Merritt Flagpole (1917; relocated to Liberty Square 1942)
10. Eagle Paint Building (c. 1920)
11. Elks Club's Ideal Lodge (c. 1912)
12. William Walter Phelps Gatehouse (1880s); currently City of Englewood Parks and Recreation Department
13. Mackay Park (1910; renovated 1996-97)
14. Liberty Square architectural renovation (1997)

Bethany Presbyterian Church

Just two blocks east of Liberty Square on Palisade Ave., the direct spiritual descendants of the original 1880 Calvary Mission still worship. When Dwight Chapel moved to Liberty Square in 1898, a smaller but sufficient wooden frame church was built on its original site. On April 21 of that year, the Calvary Mission congregation incorporated as Bethany Presbyterian Church. Between 1911 and 1922 they erected the vernacular neo-Gothic church which still serves as their home, making them the oldest continuous African-American congregation in Englewood. Note the windows with their pointed Gothic



arches, the yellow-brown brick, the gable roof, and the 2 story entrance tower with its parapet and its crenelles at the corners.

Englewood incorporates and transforms a village into a city

Englewood did not officially incorporate until March 17, 1899, but rapid growth and civic self-awareness marked the entire period from the 1890's through the 1920's. Roads multiplied; new buildings housed new businesses along Palisade Avenue; houses ranging from grand to humble sprouted. As more and more children needed schooling, new schools were designed and constructed.

Liberty School

The grounds of today's Liberty School occupy over two acres along Tenafly Road between Liberty Rd. and West Palisade Ave. The oldest surviving public school building in Englewood and the very first public building authorized by the fledgling Englewood municipal government, it was begun in 1901 and dedicated on September 6, 1902. The original Jacobean Revival core, designed by Herbert C. Davis of Davis, McGrath, and Kiessling, a firm which also designed many of the grand houses on the East Hill, still lends the building much of its architectural personality. The symmetrical additions, the northern one built in 1913 and the southern one designed in 1927 by Lawrence Licht, the architect for Dwight Morrow High School, complement the core and preserve the historic look and feel of the building. On the front, note the three ornamental gables with criss-cross brick work, the arch of the main entrance with its keystone and fanlight, and the stone balustrade above the entrance. The materials are consistent throughout the main building and the additions: common bond red brick with Indiana limestone trim.



West Side Athletic Field

Currently occupied by a Mobil station and a Korean supermarket, the level land between Bennett Road and Lafayette Avenue once served as the West Side Athletic Field. Rev. Charles Ellis Smith counted its purchase for \$7500 in 1910 among his most significant achievements. Because his West Side Presbyterian congre-

gation invited the entire community to use the field, it frequently hosted baseball games and other outdoor activities, especially on Election Days and other special occasions. Parishioners and neighbors would gather each Christmas to sing carols under the branches of a large pine tree between the two roads.

The Englewood Monument

After World War I, sentiment in favor of a memorial to honor "those who gave their lives and services to win the war" steadily grew. A committee of citizens appointed by Mayor David McKenna chose a site and a design, then raised half the necessary funds. At that point the City Council took over, chose the present site, paid



the architect to redesign a Monument for the new site, and brought the project to completion. Note the bronze American eagle, its wings outstretched, perched on a bronze globe mounted on top. The eagle and the ten foot obelisk of Barre, Vermont granite serve to accentuate the seven foot bronze statue of a young soldier. Kenneth W. Dalzell of Maplewood designed the Monument; J. Thompson and Sons, a local firm, constructed it; and Henry Schell of Montclair, who had served in the Great War, posed for the sculptor, Henry Lewis Raul of Orange. The Monument was dedicated on Armistice Day, November 11, 1924, during a well-planned, moving ceremony.

12

The Camp Merritt Flagpole

The flagpole now located between Liberty School and the Monument once stood in front of the camp commandant's headquarters at Camp Merritt.

Occupying 770 acres extending into six towns, with its center just north of Tenafly, Camp Merritt served as the major embarkation and debarkation center for soldiers serving in World War I. In 1931, the *Bergen Evening Record* reported that more than a million men had saluted the flags of the camp. According to the plaque at Liberty Square, the pole was "Erected [in its new location] on September 6, 1942, in memory of Major Valentine Ruch." Dr. Ruch had served with the medical corps at Camp Merritt during the war and lived at that time across the street in the historic Tunis Cooper homestead, which had probably served as the site of General Washington's headquarters and later as the first Liberty Pole Tavern.

Eagle Paint Building

The Eagle Paint building, constructed soon after World War I and owned for two generations by the Pisarri Family, has won numerous state and local awards for historic preservation and restoration. The locations of the original signs are still visible: the broad areas framed by brick above the plate glass windows. The restoration and renovation consisted of stripping the original brick, bringing back the copper window trim, adding the historically sympathetic cornice and dentils at the top of the facade, and restoring the Benjamin Moore Paint Can which has served to identify the store for decades.



13

Elks Club

Down Bennett Road to the south of Eagle Paint, you'll see a two and a half story building constructed around 1912 as a local Lodge for the Fraternal Order of the Elks. Its horizontality, emphasis on wood as a building material, exposed eaves, decorative window panes, small balcony supported by brackets, and grouped windows suggest the Arts and Crafts style, but its paired Tuscan columns, wrap-around porch, and other features mark it as a Colonial Revival building.



William Walter Phelps Gatehouse

Look down Bennett Road toward the newly reconstructed Mackay Park, and you'll see what we now call Mackay Park Gatehouse. William Walter Phelps, railroad magnate, U.S. Congressman, and ambassador, followed in the footsteps of J. Wyman Jones, I.S. Homans, and other early Englewood citizens who amassed large tracts of land in the area. But Phelps outdid them all. By the time he was through developing what he referred to as his "Englewood farm," it boasted over 4000 acres with six gatehouses, of which this was the most northerly. His Victorian mansion on the site of the current municipal complex in Teaneck, then part of Englewood, was so grand that,



after a fire in 1888, its ruins served for decades as a major tourist attraction. Probably built in the 1880's, the gatehouse is late Romanesque Revival in style. Note its large arches, overhanging hip roof, and simple massing. The only Phelps gatehouse to survive, it retains its architectural integrity thanks to careful restoration after a fire in the late 1970s. It remains important not only as a reminder of Englewood's age of grand estates, most of them now broken up, but also as a distinctive piece of architecture.

Mackay Park

To this day the Romanesque arches of the gatehouse at the southern end of Bennett Rd. invite people into a park where William Walter Phelps' private riding trails and lanes for carriages once ran through his woods and alongside his streams. Why, then, do we refer to Mackay Park rather than Phelps Park? Because Donald Mackay, Englewood's mayor from 1906-1909, having purchased 20 acres including the gatehouse from Phelps' estate, gave them as his 1906 Christmas present to the city. In 1907 the park was enlarged; in the late 1970s it acquired facilities for skating, tennis, baseball, and children's swimming; and in 1996-97 it underwent a second major renovation. To make room for baseball, soccer, basketball, and tennis courts in the center, the new plan shifted pathways for walking, bicycling, jogging, and rollerblading toward

Pergola installed 1996

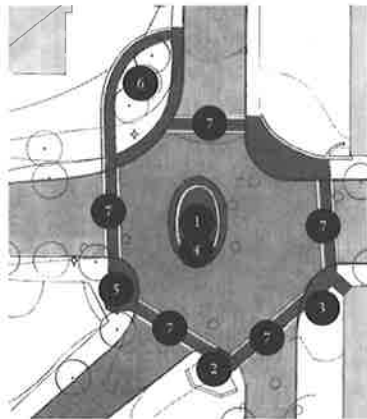


the edges. Other amenities and facilities include an expanded outdoor pool, pole lamps of a traditional style, an outdoor picnic and concession area, rest rooms, telephones, two substantial playgrounds, and a pergola, rendering the park more pleasant and useful to a wider range of people. Depending on your mood and the weather, take a look around and return to Liberty Square or else enjoy a leisurely walk through the park. Maybe you can spot some of William Walter Phelps' original trees. By his own count, he planted over 400,000 of them on his estate.

The architectural renovation of Liberty Square

In the 1990's, with the municipal centennial approaching in 1999, Englewood as a community turned the spotlight once again upon Liberty Square. Thanks to the original Liberty Square Project Committee, chaired by Eleanor Harvey, the Main Street Program restored the stone and bronze of the Englewood Monument (1), the Mobil station upgraded its corner (2), and Eagle Paint, having already renovated its storefront (3), sponsored dramatic lighting for the Monument (4). In 1995, the Liberty Square Association incorporated to raise funds for a new setting for the Liberty Pole (5), a well-lit memorial walk and wall on the Liberty School corner (6), and a network of brick-red paving stones crossing the five streets that make up the intersection (7), increasing safety by slowing traffic while visually tying together the entire site. Under the

leadership of Dustin Griffin and project architect David Maron, the Association has completed this thoroughgoing architectural renovation of historic Liberty Square. At the formal dedication on April 17, 1998, Honorary Chair Charles Osgood delivered the keynote address.



SOURCES

- Altshuler, Joel. "The American Revolution Bicentennial Map of Bergen County, New Jersey 1774-1783." Compiled and created by Bergen County Cultural and Heritage Commission. Published by Bergen County Board of Chosen Freeholders, © 1976. Based on Erskine maps cited below.
- Altshuler, H. Jeanne. *Dumont Heritage: Old Schraalenburgh, New Jersey*. Dumont, N.J.: Mayor and Council of the Borough of Dumont, New Jersey, 1969. Includes on p. 58 an earlier map drawn by Joel Altshuler: "Schraalenburgh and Environs in 'The Neutral Ground' During the American Revolution, 1775-1783." Based on Erskine maps cited below.
- Bergen County Historic Sites Survey; City of Englewood*, 3 vols. Created by Bergen County Office of Cultural & Historic Affairs and Bergen County Historic Sites Advisory Board. Published by Bergen County Board of Chosen Freeholders, 1981-2.
- Bergen County Historical Society Collection, Johnson Library, Hackensack, N.J.
- Erskine, Robert. Maps in the Erskine-DeWitt Map Collection, New York Historical Society. Main sources for 1969 and 1976 Altshuler maps above.
- Humphrey, Mrs. J.A. *Englewood; Its Annals and Reminiscences*. NY: J.S. Ogilvie, 1899. Photo opp. p. 72.
- Lattimer, John K. *This Was Early Englewood: From the Big Bang to the George Washington Bridge*. Englewood, N.J.: Englewood Historical Society, 1990.
- Leiby, Adrian C. *The Revolutionary War in the Hackensack Valley; The Jersey Dutch and the Neutral Ground, 1775-1783*. Second printing, with corrections. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1980. Original printing 1962.
- Londahl-Smidt, Donald M. "British and Hessian Accounts of the Invasion of Bergen County." *Bergen County History: 1976 Annual*, pp. 35-92. Includes *Captain Johann Ewald Diary* edited by Joseph P. Tustin. River Edge: Bergen County Historical Society, 1976.
- McMahon, Reginald. "Liberty Pole: A Report on the Historic Site at Englewood, N.J." *Bergen County History: 1977 Annual*, pp. 112-133. River Edge: Bergen County Historical Society, 1977.
- Spring, John. "The 1776 British Landing at Closter." *Bergen County History: 1975 Annual*, pp. 27-41. River Edge: Bergen County Historical Society, 1975.
- Sterling, Adaline W. *The Book of Englewood*. Sponsored by the Committee on the History of Englewood. Published by Authority of the Mayor and Council of the City of Englewood, 1922. See photo p. 16.



With thanks to members of the Bergen County history community, especially Robert Griffin, Leonard Hansen, Dr. John K. Lattimer, and John Spring.



EHPAC

ENGLEWOOD HISTORIC PRESERVATION
ADVISORY COMMITTEE

