A Village street scene

defenses were constructed, but for a reason unknown to this day, they were not armed.

Sir Henry Clinton, Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces in America, regarded Chestnut Neck, The Forks and Batsto as being of such importance that he sent a naval force, headed by the flagship "Zebra," to destroy that nest of rebel pirates.

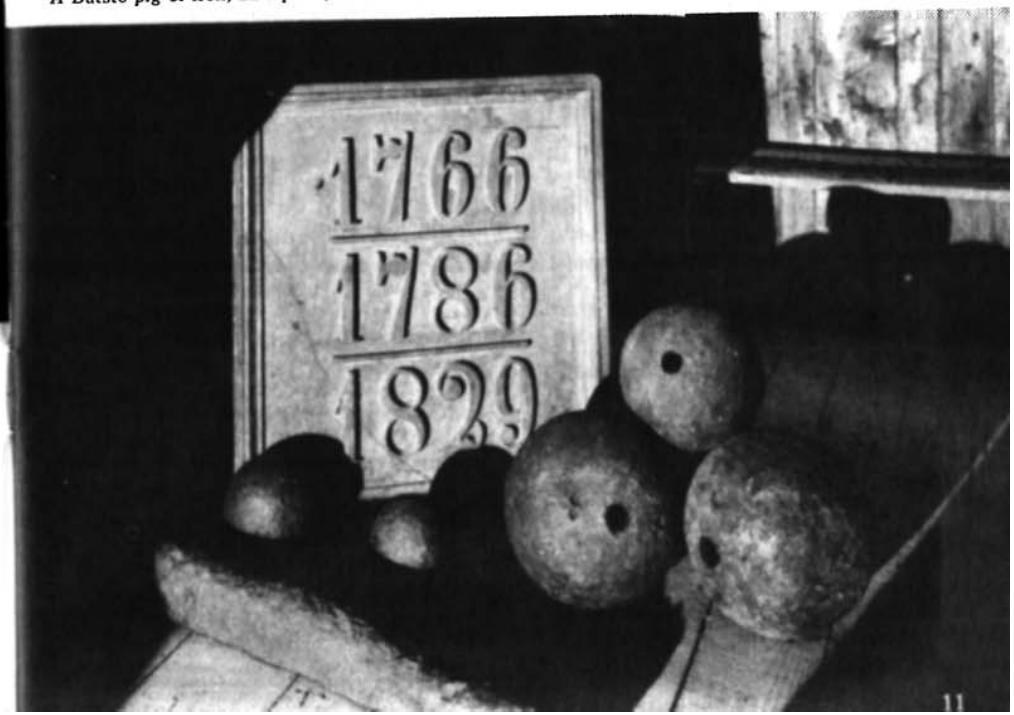
The British made no attempt to reach Batsto, however, fearing capture in the natural bottleneck of the winding Mullica River, and contented themselves with completely burning the entire village of Chestnut Neck to the ground, sparing not a single building. Attempting their departure they were trapped in the Great Bay region for nine more days during which the infamous massacre at Tuckerton occurred.

Joseph Ball was the nephew of William Richards, and the two were associated in the operations at Batsto until Richards left the Furnace village to serve in the Revolutionary War. A venerable tradition has it that he was with General George Washington's forces during the bitter winter of 1777 at Valley Forge.

In 1778 the Furnace changed hands when John Cox sold out to Thomas Mayberry, ironmaster, who built a slitting mill during his year of ownership. Mayberry sold his interests in 1779 to Joseph Ball at a considerable profit.

John Cox became a figure of great importance during the American Revolution. Early dur-

A Batsto pig of iron, date plate, ball and shot



ing the conflict he was elected Lieutenant Colonel of the Second Battalion, and in March of 1778, by resolution of Congress, was appointed Assistant Quartermaster General. As a member of the Council of Safety, his ownership of Batsto Furnace was a vital factor in the production of munitions.

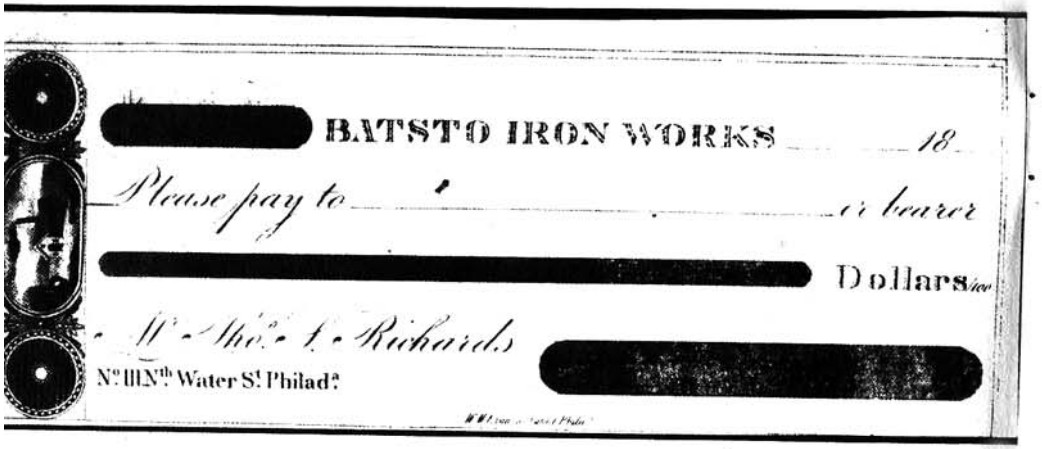
After Thomas Mayberry sold Batsto to Joseph Ball, another Assistant Quartermaster General, one Charles Pettit entered the picture in company with the Quartermaster General himself, the distinguished General, Nathaniel Greene. In what today might be considered a case of conflict of interest, both Pettit and Greene acquired substantial shares in Batsto Furnace, which at the time was producing large quantities of shot, ball, and even cannon for the Revolution.

Nathaniel Greene was no stranger to the iron industry. Born at Potowomut, Rhode Island, in 1742, he worked at his father's iron foundry there until 1770, when he moved to Coventry Forge near Valley Forge to take care of the family operations there. He entered politics in 1770 as a deputy to the General Assembly, and when the Revolution broke out began an illustrious military career that by the time of his death in 1786 would have earned him a niche in American Revolutionary War history second only to Washington.

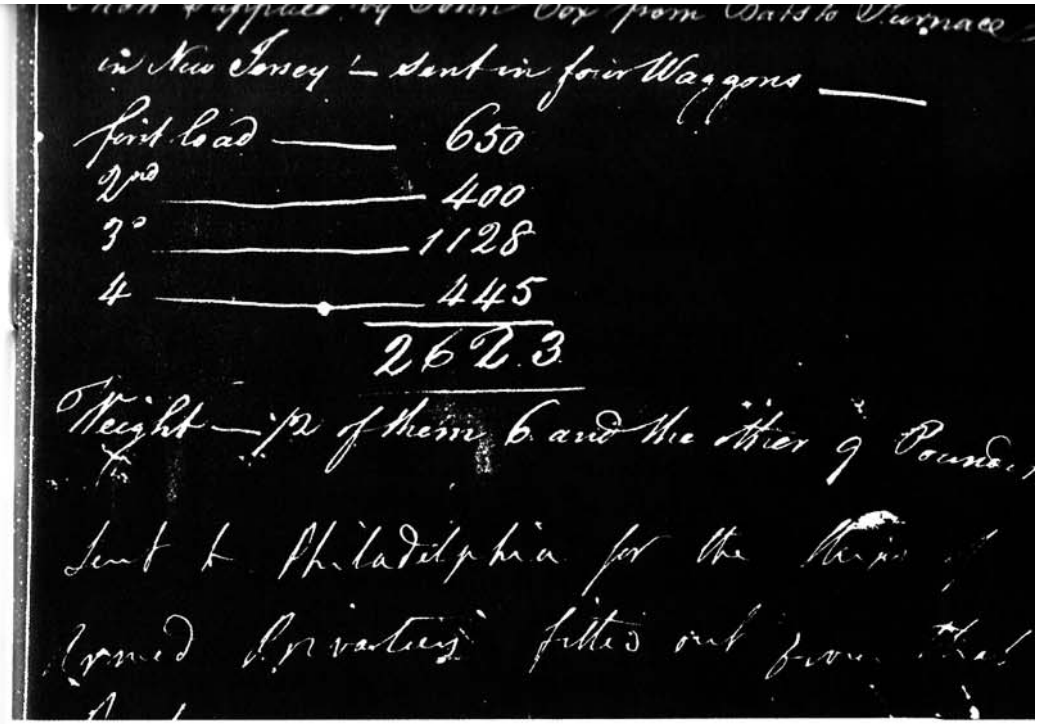
Both Cox and Pettit were close friends of General Greene, in fact Charles Pettit and Greene were boyhood chums, which accounted for the great mutual trust displayed between them.

(Charles Pettit was named "agent and factor" in Philadelphia with the postwar job of selling Batsto's output in that City. During this period he sold four iron firebacks to George Washington, two of which are even today in Mount Veroon, one in the Washington bedroom and the other in the West Parlor. The fate of the other two firebacks is unknown, but all were cast at Batsto to General Washington's personal order, with his "GW" monogram.)

A Batsto check, issued about 1835



Courtesy Budd Wilson



A spy's intelligence message, sent to the Earl of Dartmouth via Governor William Tryon relating to munitions shipments from Batsto. Courtesy: Crown Copyright reproduced by permission of controller of H. M. stationery office.

Wartime correspondence between Charles Pettit and General Greene regarding the operations at Batsto Furnace* illustrates the vital importance of the Batsto iron operations. On April 20, 1779, Pettit wrote . . .

"I have agreed for as many shares in Batsto as will now afford you, Col. Cox and myself one sixth each . . . the stock of coal being short, Mr. Ball blew the furnace out immediately on getting possession so that now she is idle, waiting for further stock. The only risk we run seems to be from the enemy and if they should learn we are casting cannon that may be something."

Then, on August 27th, 1780 . . . *"The furnace has begun her blast and is now running entirely on shot and shells on a contract with the board of war for about 100 tons; . . . this contract will take two months run of the furnace or more in which time . . . L30 for shot and L45 for shell . . . I shall make a point of pushing this blast as far as it will go . . . ."*

America, fighting for her freedom during the Revolution, was constantly faced with financial difficulties . . . troops were poorly clad, ill fed, and supplies were short. The transportation of supplies was not always the reason, oftentimes suppliers were unpaid and faced severe economic

* *Credit: Clements Library Ann Arbor, Michigan.*

problems as illustrated in this letter of May 24th, 1781, from Pettit to Greene . . .

" . . . all the produce of the blast to that time was for the public, on a solemn promise of immediate pay — but to this day they are nearly L2,000 specie in debt to us for shot, shells and rod iron, and the greater part of is must rest . . . till debts in common shall be paid."

Perhaps the most significant letter from Charles Pettit to General Greene regarding Batsto's production was penned on May 24th, in 1781, when he wrote . . . " . . . *not till April 1 could get her in blast (Batsto Furnace) again, meantime the expenses of feeding and paying so many people have pressed me sorely indeed. I have, at length got two pair of nine pound guns sold & delivered & have nine pair of sixes contracted for & cast, but they are not yet dressed & bored out . . . In carrying on the Furnace tho' we run as much as we can on guns and other castings, pig (iron) will necessarily accumulate . . . thus an advantage offers by having a forge to work . . . on the spot . . . the forge is to be built this summer, most of the timber being already prepared . . .* "

In the summer of 1781, Batsto Forge was erected along nearby Nescochague Creek. Here, the iron produced at the Furnace was shaped into various useful products.

America emerged victorious from the conflict for independence from Great Britain in October of that year, and in 1783, the final terms of the peace were settled. Batsto, the furnace in the Jersey Pines had contributed her share to the victory.

William Richards returned to Batsto in 1784, acquiring full ownership of the works. He rebuilt the facilities, making additions and improvements. Atop a hill overlooking his holdings he built a mansion, and, according to contemporary accounts, resided in "baronial splendor," entertaining lavishly. And Batsto Furnace flourished, enjoying what was possibly its greatest period of prosperity.

Samuel Richards, William's son, became owner of Atsion, Weymouth and Martha Furnaces, and with his brother Jesse, of Washington Furnace in Monmouth County. The Richards' family interests represented an iron empire of no mean proportions.

The needs of the workers at Batsto were well handled. Elijah Clark had built a church at the Forks. A grist mill and saw mill had long been in operation, and a village store was established, providing the necessary staples of life for the workers.

Slave labor was utilized in only a minor way, although many other Jersey furnaces depended heavily on such a source of workers. William Richards was the Ironmaster, but he was also counselor and friend to his men. An appeal had only to be made to the "Big House," and a doctor, lawyer or minister would be on the way to the needy. Profits at the village store were not as heavy as they might have been under different circumstances of ownership.

William Richards continued to operate the Furnace until 1809, when he turned the reins of management over to his son Jesse, and retired to Mount Holly where he died in 1823.

Trouble brewing overseas fermented into the War of 1812, and Batsto Furnace workers bent to the task of supplying ball and shot as well as the usual iron "fittings" for warfare.

Batsto Furnace was sold under the hammer at auction upon the settlement of the estate of William Richards. It was purchased by Thomas S. Richards, his nephew, who retained Jesse as manager. Jesse, although an Episcopalian, built a church at The Forks for his Catholic employees. St. Mary's of the Assumption was the first Roman Catholic Church to be built in New Jersey south of Trenton, and services were held there until after the closing of Batsto Furnace years later.

Jesse Richards purchased a half-interest in Batsto operations in 1829, and rebuilt the furnace. Production was averaging some 800 tons of iron, chiefly castings, annually.

Commerce to and from Batsto Furnace was handled largely by shipping aboard sailing vessels. These craft would navigate the Mullica River to within a mile or two of Batsto mooring at Upper or Lower Mordecai's Landings or Crowley's Landing. Shallow-draft "Durham" - style barges would then transport supplies via river and canal to the furnace village.

Records of Batsto's shipping reveal as many as two or three thousand boatloads of cargo being handled at the village during the 1830's. But by the mid-1830's storm clouds were appearing on the horizon.

The discovery of coal in the Alleghenys of Pennsylvania sounded the death knell for the Jersey furnaces which depended on vast acres of timber for fuel. Coal spelled ease of operation, and economy in production for the Pennsylvania Ironmasters. Batsto, its days of glory numbered, struggled for survival.

Jesse Richards inaugurated other industries . . . a glassworks in 1846 . . . and operated it successfully until his death in 1854.

And the fires at Batsto furnace were closed down for the last time in 1848, although some iron was made until 1855 in a small "cupola" operation.

Thomas H. Richards, Jesse's son, continued the glassworks for a brief period after the death of his father, but his interests were in politics and public life rather than industry, and the saga of the almost century-old Batsto Village came to a close.

Creditors were partially satisfied by the mortgage or sale of tracts of land. Workers, their incomes cut or non-existent moved away, seeking employment elsewhere, and the buildings, the houses, and the forests that had been the scene of such bustling activity for so long were stilled and abandoned to the elements and decay.

Batsto, the iron village that helped mold America, was history. Its people, its traditions but a memory. As summer winds and rains changed to winter gales and snows, drifting sands and brown dying leaves obliterated the ruts along wooded roads cut by the passing of countless wagons and stages. The grain of old wooden clapboards became as lines on a chart as the elements cut deep.

Then, in 1874, a devastating fire swept through the village destroying nearly half the worker's houses. The brick chimneys that remained, naked above the blackened sticks and ashes were as headstones to a vanished civilization. Batsto, the furnace village that made iron for the American Revolution was but a ghost town.

The village blacksmith shop, restored under the guidance of Don Streeter, appears today as it would a century ago. Guy Streeter creates a long strap hinge "in the most approved manner."

Photo: Courtesy "Under Four Flags" — Gloucester County Tercentenary Comm. and Gloucester County Board of Freeholders.

Interior of the restored smithy

SOME PRODUCTS OF BATSTO

A Franklin type six plate stove cast at Batsto Furnace.

A glass hat, fashioned at the Batsto glassworks, probably as an "end of the day" piece.

The "Batsto Cypher", a cast made during, or soon after the Revolutionary War for George Washington, who used Batsto firebacks for his home at Mount Vernon. (Courtesy: New Jersey Historical Society Photo. Cypher discovered and authenticated by Arthur D. Pierce.)