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# Search for lost graves of Revolutionary War battle victims renewed in Cumberland County

<http://connect.nj.com/user/Skent/index.html> By Spencer Kent/South Jersey Times  
<http://connect.nj.com/user/Skent/posts.html>  
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COMMERCIAL TWP.

Mike Carney of Dividing Creek walks through Capaldi Field, where it said the Battle of Dallas Landing took place during the Revolutionary War. Thursday Dec. 6, 2012 (Staff Photo by Cathy Cramer/South Jersey Times)

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(<http://www.nj.com/commercial-nj/>) — Aug. 15, 1781, Capt. James Riggins and his troops of the New Jersey militia took action against 15 British sympathizers boarding a boat on the Maurice River in Port Norris attempting to flee to New York.

The skirmish became known as the Battle of Dallas Landing and was Cumberland County's only officially-recorded battle where blood was shed during the Revolutionary War.



Mike Carney of Dividing Creek points out the area between Capaldi Field and the Maurice River that has changed through the years with dikes holding the river back. Thursday Dec. 6, 2012 (Staff Photo by Cathy Cramer/South Jersey Times)

A story printed in a Philadelphia newspaper days after the incident said all 15 sympathizers killed.

Another version has Riggins, a Delmont resident, and his men capturing seven and leaving the rest dead and buried in a field near the Maurice River between Menhaden Road on the east and the Port Norris meadows on the west.

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The county is seeking to uncover if any remnants, like human bones or weaponry from the battle remain buried beneath the ground.

**The Cumberland County freeholder board**

(<http://www.co.cumberland.nj.us/content/173/2954/259/3449.aspx>) recently gave the **county Cultural and Heritage Commission** (<http://www.co.cumberland.nj.us/content/173/2090/936.aspx>) the green light to pursue a grant up to \$75,000 from the National Park Service.

If awarded, local historians and archeologists would seek to excavate around the suspected site and construct a marker of some kind to commemorate and acknowledge the battle.

“We are very interested in pursuing this,” said Matthew Pisarski, principal planner at the county cultural and heritage commission.

“There is a lot speculation surrounding the event. It is unclear where the battle exactly took place or if bodies are, in fact, buried beneath the ground.”

Pisarski said the grant would be the ideal way to go about the project, but is skeptical due to the competitive field it is made up of.

“It’s extremely competitive with an 80-percent decline rate,” Pisarski said. “But if we didn’t receive any funding we would still look for alternative and lower cost ways to do research.”

Mike Carney, lifelong resident of Dividing Creek, is an amateur enthusiast of the area’s local history. Carney’s great-grandfather settled in Dividing Creek back in the early 1800s.

Carney took a visitor down a narrow dirt road recently where the battle is said to have been fought. There, a vast dried-out field and a long lane of flattened hay runs parallel to the Maurice River — which is peering through the trees on the river’s edge. Carney explained that bodies buried 6-feet in the ground would not be affected, even after hundreds of years. However, a shifting river line might.

“If the bodies were buried there, they’ll still be there,” Carney said while walking to the river line. “But the river has changed over the years. I don’t know what you’d find if you dug in there — probably nothin’ is my guess. “But the land has never been touched by anyone — I know that much.”

But Carney feels the county’s priorities are misguided. He sees the project as an erroneous endeavor, especially during such hard economic times.

Freeholder Bill Whelan believes the event is significant to the county’s history and worthy of some attention.

“This is really exciting for the area,” Whelan said. “It’s important for the county to understand that something really important happened here. Who knows, it could bring in tourism, historians from outside the area or just create some general interest within the community. Either way, it is something worth pursuing.”

The project is now in the hands of the Cultural and Heritage Commission, **Tourism Advisory Council** (<http://www.co.cumberland.nj.us/content/173/2090/939.aspx>) and the local



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municipality.

“Right now we are pursuing the application for the grant and then we will have to just wait and see what happens,” Pisarski said. “But we are all eager to begin — it could produce something really exciting.”

Contact **Spencer Kent** (<http://connect.nj.com/user/skent/posts.html>) at 856-451-1000 ext. 516 or at [skent@southjerseymedia.com](mailto:skent@southjerseymedia.com) (<mailto:skent@southjerseymedia.com>).

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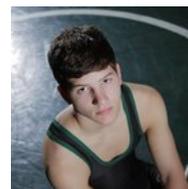
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