

# Historic Cedar Bridge Tavern

By Pat Johnson

Photo credit: Ocean County Parks & Recreation.



**The annual Cedar Bridge Tavern Commemoration will be held on Saturday, December 2, 2023 noon - 4 pm.**

purchased in 2020 by the Natural Lands Trust; now connected to the site by a recent second land purchase. Before this, Cedar Bridge Tavern Historic Site was just 5 acres of the original 1743 estate that was more than 200 acres.

Ocean County worked tirelessly over the years to acquire state and federal historic site status for the tavern. Ocean County and grants from the New Jersey Historic Trust provided funds to hire consultants to do extensive architectural and archeological research and on August 8, 2013 the tavern was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The county also invested county and state funds to do a complete renovation of the tavern which had been used as the private residence of Rudy Koenig from 1959 until Mr. Koenig's passing in 2012.

Besides being a prime example of early tavern life, when taverns were essential stopping places for stagecoach travel, the Cedar Bridge Tavern site is postulated to be the last documented land-engagement of the American Revolution.

Tim Hart, Director of the Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission, is pleased with the acquisition of the additional land around Cedar Bridge Tavern that roughly reassembles the 1743 estate, actually more than the original, now about 291 acres of ground.

## Editor's Note:

*What is known for certain is that on December 27, 1782, the patriot Mansfield and Burlington Militias stopped at an area tavern to refresh themselves while on a manhunt for the loyalist John Bacon, wanted dead or alive by the Governor of New Jersey for "many atrocious and murderous acts along the Jersey Shore."*

*Learning of the militia's location, Bacon ambushed the patriots. Local townspeople entered the conflict on the side of the Bacon, preventing his capture. The skirmish left one patriot dead and four wounded, in addition to four loyalists wounded, including Bacon.*

*Several issues remain uncertain. Contemporary accounts of the conflict differ on which side prevailed. The actual location of the incident has been questioned since there were several locations with the words "cedar," "creek" and "bridge" in the title. Ocean County historian Tim Hart believes that the existing Cedar Bridge County Historic Site is the most likely location based on corroborating scholarly and circumstantial evidence.*

*Each year Ocean County hosts a commemoration of the skirmish with reenactors, live music, games, and new this year – demonstrations in beer making and period clothing. It draws a family crowd to the site to learn not just local history but the struggles in founding our nation.*



Cedar Bridge Tavern exhibits.



Cedar Bridge Tavern reenactors.



Ocean County Liberty Bell.



Live music.



Pomroy sign.



War at the Shore activity table.



New Jersey 1st.



Giant checks - War at the Shore trailer.



# Cedar Bridge Tavern continued....

The acquired property features a tributary of the Oswego River and a portion of the Yellow Dam Branch of the Wading River. At least one sawmill was erected on the branch of the Wading River by c. 1740.

The existing Cedar Bridge Tavern's history dates back to c.1816. The first tavern (c. 1745) was located just east of the present building and eventually a small community grew around this portion of stagecoach routes that connected Camden and Philadelphia to the shore towns including (Little) Egg Harbor and Tuckerton.

This addition to the Cedar Bridge site means further archeology can be done on the hamlet sites and the colonial farmstead. The original farmstead was about 250 acres, said Hart and the original cornerstone of bog iron sandstone dated 1743 is still there. "Monmouth University under the direction of Dr. Richard Veit has been excavating around the tavern and there are so many artifacts because they used to just throw things outside through windows creating middens (trash heaps). Dr. Veit and his students have uncovered at least 25,000 artifacts. The glass and ceramic dishware that we have on display in the tavern are facsimiles of the artifacts," he said.

Ocean County Director of Parks and Recreation Mike Mangum said the land swap allows the park to be more fully developed for recreation. A new sign was installed in July directing the public to a kayak and canoe launch at the lake just to the north of the Tavern. Recreation also includes hiking, fishing and bird watching.

The Parks and Recreation department is in the process of assessing the many trails, sand roads and fire breaks that crisscross the site to determine which will be developed into clearly marked trails, said Mangum. "This was an outstanding deal that benefited both agencies and we're there on site for enforcement issues, it made good sense."

It took nine years to facilitate the recent land swap but was well worth the wait said former Bass River State Park Superintendent Cynthia Coritz who was in on the very beginning of the negotiation to consolidate lands for the two agencies. "The property west and south of Cedar Bridge also fills a 'donut hole' that was in the middle of the state forest. That land contains the remains of an old hunting lodge," said Coritz. The land swap had to be approved by the Statehouse Commission and the U.S. Department of the Interior. "I used to joke with Mike Mangum that I was going to be retiring soon and hoped it would be done by then—well, I retired in April of 2023 and the final approval came through in March."



Crafts at the Cedar Bridge Commemoration.  
Photo credit: Ocean County Parks & Recreation.

"It's good for the county too because the county has more funding for the site and appreciates the history. And every time they had the reenactment of the skirmish at Cedar Bridge, they had to apply for a permit from us"

Mark Villinger, former Supervising Planner for the Ocean County Natural Lands Trust Fund Advisory Committee said negotiations started back in 2014 when the county acquired the 269 acres in Warren Grove.





# The Affair at CEDAR BRIDGE

Saturday  
DECEMBER 2, 2023

200 Old Halfway Road, Barnegat, New Jersey



## The Affair at Cedar Bridge 1782

At this time each year the Ocean County Parks and Recreation Department along with the Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Department present, "The Affair at Cedar Bridge," a reenactment of the last land engagement of the American Revolutionary War that took place at the Cedar Bridge Tavern Historical Site in Barnegat.

Saturday, December 2, 2023 Noon to 4 P.M. Snow date – Sunday January 7, 2024  
Skirmishes at 1:30 and 3:30 PM

Refreshments including period Switchel drink, Fire Pit, NJ Fifes & Drums  
Sea Dogs – Traditional Tavern musicians, Historic style tents, Giant Chess and Checkers,  
Crafts – Painting, Archery, Ring the Ocean County Liberty Bell and other games  
Historic Story Telling and Guided Tour of the 200 year old restored tavern

\*Participants and schedule subject to change without notice



Brought to you by the Ocean County Board of Commissioners  
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## Cedar Bridge Tavern continued...

The Ocean County Board of Chosen Freeholders (now known as the Ocean County Board of Commissioners) approved the purchase with the intent of swapping it for land that Bass River owned close to Cedar Bridge Tavern.

There is much to see and do at the Cedar Bridge Tavern site. The county returned the building to a circa 1816 tavern with an 1830's kitchen addition. When touring the site, visitors can see the original barroom with hand-blown glass bottles, tables and fireplaces and then carefully tread the tiny staircase to the upstairs and visualize what it was like to travel by stagecoach and have to stop for the night. Many times people slept together on hay-filled mattresses on the floor with the 'luxury suite' being a rope bed slightly off the floor—also with a hay-filled mattress.

The Ocean County Board of Commissioners purchased Cedar Bridge Tavern from Rudy Koenig on Dec. 27, 2007 and gave him the right to live out his life

peacefully at the remote site. The county began renovations after Koenig died in 2012. The renovation was under the direction of the Ocean County Board of Commissioners, the Ocean County Department of Parks and Recreation and the Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission.

The Cedar Bridge Tavern site also hosts a handicapped accessible nature walk with a synthetic trail for wheelchair access. Fragrant stands of wildflowers revive the senses. Individual guided tours are offered as well as self-guided tours enhanced by many interpretative signs that explain Colonial and farming life.

The site located at 200 Old Halfway Road, Barnegat is cloistered amid the Pine Barrens environs. Modern conveniences such as restrooms have been added for visitor comfort. For group and school tours call 732-929-4769. The site is open from Thursday to Monday from 10 a.m. till 4 p.m.