

Vital Statistics

Torrey's New England Marriages

- * CODNER, John & 1/wf? Elizabeth _____; by 1659; Marblehead {Gen Mag. 2:130}

- CODNER, John (1625–1710) & Joan (BARTOL) [CHAPMAN], w Edward/Edmond; by 1664; Marblehead {Essex Ant. 9:189; Bartol 7; Chapman (1893) 1; EIHC 47:345}

- * CODNER, Christopher (–1660) & Mary [BENNETT] (1638–), m/2 Elias WHITE 1661 (div), m/3 Richard DOWNING; by 1655; Marblehead {Marblehead VR 3:33; Essex Co. Probates 1:325–6; Sv. 1:417; Essex Ant. 8:186; Reg. 32:237, 40:65; EIHC 1:99; 44:229; GDMNH 88; Gen Mag. 2:41}

- * Related?

- BLACKLER, William & Jane [CODNER] (–1701); by 1684, by 1680?; Marblehead {Essex Ant. 9:189, 191; EIHC 46:308}

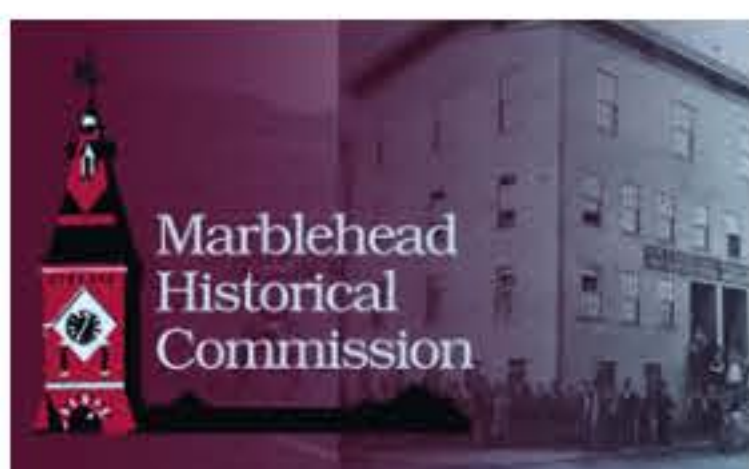
- { GALE, Benjamin & 1/wf Lydia _____; by 1677; Marblehead {Gale 193}
- { GALE, Benjamin & 2/wf Deliverance [CODNER] aft 3 Oct 1699, by 1701?; Marblehead {Gale 193}

Marblehead

Deaths

- BLACKLER Jone, 1701

- GALE Deliverance, w. Benjamin, 4m: 1723
- Benjamin, Apr. 3, 1714.



The first William Blackler was John Codner's son-in-law and inherited the house. William Blackler IV crossed the Delaware with George Washington.



2006-075-00407 - House

Marblehead Junior High Archives Historical Building Survey The house at 60 Front Street has many notable features: Greek revival door, windows and fireplaces, a common wall, two shed dormers, a fisherman's shack, and the house becomes wider as it goes toward the street. John Codner, a fisherman and large owner of land, owned 60 Front Street at the same time he owned State Street Wharf.



2006-075-00406 - House

Marblehead Junior High Archives Historical Building Survey The original owner of 57 Front Street was John Codner. William Blackler, who lived in this house, crossed the Delaware in 1776 with George Washington to fight the Battle of Trenton. John Codner was a wealthy fisherman and owned a lot of land. Blackler married John Codner's daughter and in his will he left the house to his son-in-law.

Essex Institute Historical
Collections, Volume 46

The cove at the foot of State street was called the cove in 1725; and Codner's cove in 1731. Oct. 21, 1662, at a town meeting, the commoners agreed "that the Cove lying between John Codners and John Northies stage, shall be for a common landing place for the use of the public good of the Towne forever." This agreement was signed by Moses Maverick, Joseph Dolliber, John Peach, sr., Christopher Lattimore, John Waldron, John Codner, John Bartoll and five others in the name of all of the commoners. †

The John Codner Lot: John Codner of Marblehead, fisherman, owned this lot in 1699, and died possessed of it in the early spring of 1710.

John Codner House. John Codner of Marblehead had his fishing stage at this cove as early as 1662. He owned this tract of land before 1696, probably as early as 1662; and died possessed of the house and lot in the winter of 1709-10; his will, dated Jan. 19, 1709-10 being proved, March 28, 1710. His estate was divided in the winter of 1725-6, the mansion house and land adjoining, being assigned to his son-in-law William Blackler and his wife and children, William, John, Elias and Elizabeth, the parents having a life estate, and the children the remainder in fee. The house was gone in 1732;* when the Blacklers made a division of the estate. Essex Registry of Deeds, book 105, leaf 54. [1]

* Probably our John Codner. If not asterisked, it could be another.

Marblehead, Volume 1

By John Hardy Wright



"Old Tucker House," formerly at 64 Front Street, built mid- to late seventeenth century (1905 postcard). An old stone foundation is as pronounced as the overall deteriorating condition of what many nineteenth-century local historians believed was one of Marblehead's earliest First Period dwellings. Built by John Codner in a field near Gregory Street and later moved to the site opposite Ferry Lane, the ramshackle house was photographed in raking sunshine several years before it was demolished. (Courtesy Mr. and Mrs. Robert Swift.)

Joseph Bowed, not having the approbation of the selectmen of Marblehead to sell strong waters or beer, court ordered him to forbear selling any longer upon his peril. Fines of the last court remitted.†

Court taking into consideration the case of Elias White and Mary his wife, and weighing all things seriously, upon the deliberate hearing of the parties, together and apart, and the evidence, declared that it would not be offensive to the court for her, the said Mary, to marry another man.‡

†The petition of Moses Maverick, Francis Johnson, Lott Connant, John Codner, and Christo. Latamor, selectmen of Marblehead, dated 26th 9: 1663, "that whereas Joseph Bowed of the same place hath for some space of time kept a Common timpling house selling of strong waters and Rapp, and pretends a license from the last Court: at Salem. In June last your petitioners humbly Craue the fauor of this honored Court and Benefit of the Law that neither he; nor any other be Intruded: on us with out the approbations of the Towne or Select men; which the said Joseph Bowed never had and that we may be free in the Choyse of men to such Employment as other Townes are."

‡Copy of record of Court of Assistants held at Boston, Mar. 3, 1662, made by Edward Rawson, secretary: Major Hawthorne, by letter returning a warrant, bond and evidence taken before him relating to what Margaret, in behalf of her daughter Mary White, the wife of Elias White, said in regard to his insufficiency concerning the marriage state and her desire of being freed from him. The parties appeared and the court declared that they did not see sufficient ground to separate them, but advised them to live together a while longer.

William Charles and John Codner of Marblehead deposed in relation to what Elias White told them, etc. Sworn, 2: 1: 1662-3 before William Hawthorne. Co y made by Edward Rawson, secretary.

Copy of Elias White's answer to William Charles and John Codner both of Marblehead, recorded in the records of the Court of Assistants, Mar. 3, 1662, made by Edward Rawson, secretary. He owned their statements to be true and told the court that he was fully contented to be separated, if it so pleased authority.

Alice (her mark) Peach and William Waters deposed that the third day after Elias White and Mary Codner were married, he invited deponents to supper, and Alice Peach's husband wished Mary Whit joy of her marriage. She answered that she hoped to be married again in three or four years.

John (his mark) Thorning deposed that Richard Downing had kissed Mary White many a time and shown other marks of affection. Also that he saw Ellis Whit drink to his wife but she refused to drink, and answered that she would rather pledge her cousin Downing than him.

Mary (her mark) Trevet and Jane Woolcot deposed the same. The foregoing testimony was sworn to, 3: 1: 1662-3, before Wm. Hathorne.†

* Mary Condner was the wife of Christopher Codner.

William Browne v. John Codner Non-performance of a promise made by him upon the marriage of his daughter-in-law to the said Brown. Verdict for plaintiff, either the two acres of land at Gatchell's hill or on the neck, or ground to set a house upon and a garden spot by the cow house of said Codner also one-third part of the shallop called the Black Besse, and seven years' stage room for his own particular person.‡

†Writ, dated June 6, 1664, signed by John Fuller, for the court. John Codner and John Bartoll, sureties for Codner's appearance. Wm. Browne's bill of cost, lii. 14s. 10d.

John Pedrick, aged about forty years, and James Poere, aged forty-five years, deposed that being in September last at the house of Goodman Grosse at Boston, in company with John Codner and William Browne and others, they heard Codner discoursing with said Browne about marrying his daughter-in-law Mary Chin. Deponents heard Codner say to Browne "yf thee doest mary my Daughter, (meaning ye said mary) I will giue thee two acres of land at Gatchells hill or on the neck, & yf you accept not of that, I will giue thee ground to sett a house upon & a garden spot, by my cow house, & further said I will also giue thee the third pt of my shallop called ye black Bess: & for stage roome I will giue thee yt alsoe for 7 years for thy owne || pteuler person" and said Browne answered, taking off his hat, when John Codner drank to him upon those foregoing words, calling him son, "I thank you, father." Then they shook hands, and Codner was well in his right understanding and memory without being distempred with drink or otherwise. Sworn, 25: 4: 1664, before Wm. Hathorne.†

Saml. Condey, aged about thirty-three years, deposed that Jno. Pederrick said that Browne's estate was worth two hundred pounds in England, etc. Sworn in court.

Robert Pety, aged twenty-three years, deposed that when William Browne demanded what Codner had promised, the latter said he had promised him nothing and "yf I did com by it how you can." Sworn, 25: 4: 1664, before Wm. Hathorne.†

Mary Codner, (Mary nee Bennett, wife of Chris. Codner) aged twenty-six years, deposed that Andrew Rowland received of her mother Benitt, etc. Sworn in court.

Execution, dated 15: 8: 1664, to be levied upon estate of John Codner, namely, on two acres of land at Gatchell's hill or on the neck in Marblehead, or ground to set a house on and a garden spot by the cow house of said Codner, at the choice of William Browne, also one-third of the shallop called the Black Besse and possession of the stage for his own personal use for seven years, to satisfy judgment of Salem court of 28: 4: 1664, signed by Hillyard Veren,† cleric., and returned by Isack Williams,† constable. The two acres of land on Gatchell's hill were delivered to William Browne before Mathew Price† and Samuel Archard,† marshal, by John Codner without serving the execution.

Bi-centennial of the First
Congregational Church,
Marblehead, Massachusetts ...
By Old North Church (Marblehead, Mass.)

While overhauling the ancient records of the town, among numerous sales of land made to individuals, by chance my eye fell on the following significant entry, bearing date of 1695: "Voted that the Trustees for the Commoners be instructed to sell a piece of land to widow of William Norman, adjoining John Codner's Orchard on the south-west, and is there two poles wide and is so much on the opposite towards the meeting-house spring, and is three poles long on the north-west and south-east sides." To make this intelligible I will state that John Codner (whose house, built about 1640, still stands, on Front street, doubtless the oldest house in town) was one of the earliest settlers, and a farmer; his farm extending, tradition says, from the first cove to Cotty's head, near the foot of Franklin street, in one direction. In the oldest land grants reference is very frequently made to John Codner's "Orchard," or "Garden," as making one of the bounds for various tracts of land sold by the town authority for house-lots and fish-fence lots.* It is a tradition that a foot-path ran through his farm, where State street is now located, as far as Harris' Court, where an Indian had his hut, while a white man lived about half way up State street on the right, as one goes from the wharf. I mention this path, the forerunner of the future street, as suggestive of an explanation why so many lots bounded on John Codner's "orchard," or "garden," the territory being part of his farm, the lots having no great depth bounded on that portion of the farm used for orcharding or gardening. Now returning to widow Norman's house-lot, to bound south-west on the Codner orchard it must have been located with a front about where Franklin street now is, and this would make the shallow public well that stands there at the present day just back of where the old meeting-house stood, the "meeting-house spring" of the record. And as it may be assumed that it was naturally so named from the meeting-house being in the vicinity at the time, this would strongly tend to prove that it was there as early as 1695.

Faithfull Bartlett's bill of costs, 17s.

John Codner deposed that being at Marblehead about fourteen days since, he heard Cristo. Lattamore warn these men not to moor their boat upon his land, but they said they would. Then Lattamore said he would cut it, and they dared him to do it. Presently he came with an axe and those who were upon the stage called to those in the boat to come ashore, whereupon Faithfull Bartoll and John Prest came ashore and fell with violent hands upon Mr. Lattamore. Down came Mr. Lattamore upon the rocks, it being his own land by common repute, and said Bartoll was upon the body of said Latamore, and shook him and punched him with his knee and hands. When Latamore arose, his face was very bloody and he spit blood. Robert Codner testified to the substance of the foregoing. Sworn in court.

Mr. George Emery deposed that Mr. Lattemar sent for him and he went to his house and found him very much bruised and "he lett him blood." Three or four days afterward he went again and found him not well, etc. Sworn in court.

Jno. Pedrick, aged about twenty-five years, deposed that he saw Faithfull Bartlett, one of Francis Johnson's crew, go ashore to the rock where their mooring was made fast against Mr. Latmore's land, and saw the latter strike said Bartlett two blows on his head and shoulders with an axe-helfe. At this they both closed and fell down upon the rock together. When they arose, deponent saw said Latemor strike him again with his fist, etc. Sworn in court.

The Probate Records of Essex
County, Massachusetts: 1635-
1664

ESTATE OF GEORGE CHIN OF MARBLEHEAD.

Administration on the estate of George Chin granted 6: 1: 1653-4, to his widow, Elizabeth Chin of Marblehead. Inventory, 34li. 4s. Debts, 33li. 7d. Salem Quarterly Court Records, vol. 3, leaf 69.

Court 28: 4: 1664, ordered that the estate of houses, lands, etc., of George Chin, deceased, in the hands of John Codner, said Chin's successor, be given to said Codner, in consideration of bringing up the children of the deceased, and paying his debts. Salem Quarterly Court Records, vol. 4, page 133.

ESTATE OF JOHN ELIE OF (MARBLEHEAD?).

John Codner was bound 6: 1: 1653-4, to account for what had been received and paid for the use of Jon. Elie, being administrator of his estate. Salem Quarterly Court Records, vol. 3, leaf 69.

The History and Traditions of Marblehead

1662

At a town meeting held October 21 the commoners agreed " that the Cove lying between John Codners and John Northies stage, shall be for a common landing-place for the use of the public good of the Towne forever." The agreement was signed by Moses Maverick, Joseph Dolliber, John Peach, senior, Christoph Lattimore, John Waldron, John Codner, John Bartoll, and five others, who were probably all of the commoners who could write, and signed in the name of the rest.

Some of the oldest houses in the town are undoubtedly to be found in the vicinity of the section known as Peach's Point, where the first settlement was made. The oldest house of which we have any accurate record, however, is that known as the Tucker House, situated on Front Street. As early as the year 1664, this house was deeded by John Codner to his son John. It is said that the young man was about to be married, and that his father intended it as a wedding present. For many years the house stood by itself in an open field, and as Codner owned nearly all the land in the vicinity, there were few houses built around it.

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Joanna Codner Lot. This lot consisted of one and one-half ten-acre lots, the whole lot being the eastern portion of this lot. It was owned by Abraham Whiteare of Marblehead, fisherman, before 7: 10 mo. 1652, when he conveyed it to Edmond Chapman of Marblehead, shipwright.† Mr. Chapman died in or before 1664, and the lot belonged to Joanna Codner, wife of John Codner, in 1700. Mrs. Codner was probably either widow or daughter of Mr. Chapman.

Estate of William Bartoll House. This lot was the western half of the ten-acre lot of Abraham Whiteare of Marblehead, fisherman, 7: 10 mo: 1652, when, with the Joanna Codner lot, he sold it to Edmond Chapman, shipwright, and William Bartoll, both of Marblehead.† The deed was made to Mr. Chapman only. Mr. Chapman died before Dec. 1, 1664, when John Codner and his wife Joanna, administratrix of Mr. Chapman's estate, released their part of the lot to Mr. Bartoll.‡ Mr. Bartoll built a house upon the lot, and lived there until his death, which occurred before June 18, 1691, when administration upon his estate was granted. The house and land belonged to his estate in 1700. How much longer, the house stood is unknown.

*Essex Registry of Deeds, book 7, leaf 86.
†Essex Registry of Deeds, book 7, leaf 150.
‡Essex Registry of Deeds, book 9, leaf 9.
§Essex Registry of Deeds, book 7, leaf 140.

This appears to be evidence that John Codner had a son, John, by a previous marriage, but I can find nothing else about that.

John Codner with Several Marblehead Inhabitants Including Several of Our Other Ancestors Provide for Cow Pasturage

Massachusetts, Town and Vital Records, 1620-1988 for John Codner

Marblehead > Town Records

The 30th day of December 1668
The Inhabitants of Marblehead being warned to a Town Meeting by the Worshipfull Major Wm Hawthorne and the Reverend Mr. Dr. Higginson: who were desired by the Honored Court at Salem: to have had advise with Mr. Walton and the Inhabitants: concerning what he was to have for the year 67 and the years 68 soe long as he lived: the generall vote passed that for the years 67 it stand as formerly, wch for five pounds and for the years 68 as long as he lived being about eight months Mr. Walton was to have thirty five pounds:

March 4th 1669
The Major part of y^e Commoners being met about dividing of y^e fence which is between Mr. Wm. Farm: and the Farm that was Mr. Humphreys: found that every bowes Commonage: was to make taine two fould and a halfe the proportion to every man as under written: Beginning at y^e Swamp: neere Nathaniel Potomans fence: the first Lot fell to John Peach Jun^r

1	John Peach Jun ^r	8 bowes Commonage	88.00
2	Mr. William Walton	8 bowes	88.00
3	Rich: Rowland	11 bowes: & halfe	11.00 1/2
4	Mr. Johnson	3 bowes	33.00
5	John Gatchell Jun ^r	2 bowes	22.00
6	William Woods	2 bowes	22.00
7	James Wats	1 bow	11.00
8	Elias Peabody	1 bow	11.00
9	Diames James	1 bow	11.00
10	Moses Maverick	15 bowes and half	15.00 1/2
11	John Codner	3 bowes	33.00
12	Thos. Gray	1 bow	11.00
13	Joseph Dilliver	4 bowes	44.00
14	Wm. Middle: Bennett	1 bow	11.00
1095	Black Pittman	1 bow	11.00
16	John Legg Jun ^r	4 bowes	44.00
17	William Bartoll	5 bowes	55.00
18	Thos. Pittman	3 bowes	33.00
19	William Stiche	1 bow	11.00
1055	John Peach Jun ^r	8 bowes	88.00
21	Robt: Knight	2 bowes	22.00
1060	Amose Gale	2 bowes	22.00
1105	Wm. Middle: Bartoll	5 bowes	55.00
24	Lott Conant	1 bow	11.00
25	Rich: Norman	3 bowes	33.00
26	Mathew Clark	1 bow	11.00
27	Christopher Lattimore	1 bow	11.00
28	William Charles	5 bowes	55.00
29	Thony Stacie	2 bowes and halfe	22.00 1/2
965	Colas Merritt	11 bowes	11.00
31	Thos. Bowing	1 bow	11.00
32	Mr. Smith	21 bowes	21.00
33	John Waldron	1 bow	11.00
1140	Sam ^l : Ward	2 bowes 1/4	22.00 1/4
1000	John Dovoray	2 bowes	22.00
1025	John Northy	2 bowes	22.00

19th March 1668: 69: 49 1/2



Tucker's Wharf

Its Long, Proud History Is Getting Shorter & Less Revered. Has Time Run Out For Marblehead's Historic Maritime Treasure?

by Peter Sorlan

William Blackler, fisherman, lived in Marblehead; married a daughter or granddaughter of John Codner; he died before 1731, administration being granted on his estate Jan. 24, 1733; children: 1. Elias, fisherman, lived in Marblehead, 1732; 2. William, fisherman, lived in Marblehead, 1731-1736; 3. Mary, married Thomas McColey of Marblehead, fisherman, June 5, 1726; of Marblehead, sailor, 1 51; 4. John, fisherman, lived in Marblehead.

The Essex Antiquarian, Volume 9
edited by Sidney Parley

FRIENDS OF TUCKER'S WHARF



BLACKLER'S SALT HOUSE
MARBLEHEAD
1770

Town for its revolutionary service, echoes through history leaving no doubt of Marblehead's pivotal role. And yet, nearing demolition, now all but abandoned, stands a symbol from that very era when Marbleheaders reached for the stars and boldly led a grateful nation to independence and freedom. Now the handiwork of William Blackler, who rowed Washington across the Delaware himself, in a boat built with the same hands, quietly inclines, almost metaphorically, towards a quiet death by the sea. Blackler's salt shed, an admittedly modest, and run-down building has had the Town twice now turn its back on its restoration. Like an old library book whose dog-eared cover was replaced with a generic institutional binding (and even that is worn and warped now) there are still hidden within all the wonders of the original...waiting for the right hands to pick it up again. The Town voted for a new trash truck but not to save Blackler's salt shed. But the little building that could continues to inspire a small group of crusaders, who won't say die. The struggle of the Friends of Tucker's Wharf, like the revolutionary whose building they want to save, is a struggle against the odds, against the apathy of many, and against the special interests that would sweep history aside in favor of simple utility and cost effectiveness. And, just like the history of Marblehead's revolutionaries, this story still commands attention and there is still time to save a happy ending.

Marblehead's own story begins with fishing and quickly includes Blackler's Salt Shed. There is no mistaking that simple truth. It was, after all, the abundant cod that drew Europeans to New England, beginning probably in the sixteenth century. They came in the spring, fished through the summer, and took their catch home in the fall. To keep the fish from spoiling, they removed the head and internal organs, rubbed them with salt, and flaked them in the sun to dry. The bare rocks on the shore of Marblehead were a natural place to accomplish this, away from the eternal rocking of their small, but seaworthy boats.

The Salt Shed's story begins with William Blackler and his descendant's. Blackler was a Marblehead fisherman whose date of birth, even the date he came here from England's Channel Islands is not exactly known. He was among those hardy souls who stayed in Marblehead through the winter, after the fleet returned to Europe. He married the daughter of another fisherman, John Codner, and they had five children, one of them also named William. When Joan (or Johann or Jane) Codner Blackler died in 1701, their children inherited her father's land on the Great Harbor next to Bartoll's Head (now Crocker Park).

The second William Blackler married Mary Rowles on December 18, 1701, in Salem. Their son William III was baptized on August 27, 1704, and he also ultimately became a fisherman. His wife Sarah bore five children, of whom the second was named William and baptized on May 18, 1740.

By this time, Marblehead's hardy fisherman had grown tired of the low prices they were paid for their hard-won catches. Sometimes, England wouldn't even buy their fish because of mismanagement by the Royal monopolies. The fish brokers of other countries were not so constrained, and so without official approval, some ships filled with Marblehead fish were forced to go to France and Spain. There was an eager market for salt cod among other English colonies too, particularly the islands whose large populations of slaves growing sugar could not be sustained with local produce. The fourth William Blackler may have begun in fishing boats, but while still a young man he commanded much larger ships.

In an economy with a chronic shortage of money, it was common for Marblehead captains to be paid with a share in the cargo. If the captains we shrewd traders, they could make far more for themselves and the other owners across the Atlantic. He could amass capital, and the entrepreneurial William Blackler soon took shares in ships commanded by other men as well and on the land he had inherited, he built several warehouses to hold the return cargoes.

And, as you might have guessed by now, one of William Blackler's warehouses is still standing: the one he built directly on the waterfront. It was very sturdily built, to say the least, of 12" x 16" timbers mortised together. It was built not only to withstand the ocean storms that swept down the harbor, but also for the great weight of cargoes which filled it in its heyday. The building is known to historians as Captain Blackler's Salt House because one of the most precious commodities he traded was salt. Without salt, the fish could not be preserved, and without preserving the first for the ocean crossing, there would be no trade. Salt must be kept dry, and so probably was stored on the second floor. A keg of salt is very heavy and tons and tons of kegs on the second floor meant strong rafters and framing: strong enough to last more than 230 years, and survive the toughest and most violent storms the Atlantic Ocean can serve up. But, will the handiwork of William Blackler prove strong enough to withstand the storm of apathy and the sure, swift hands of expediency?



The River Crossing



Emanuel Leutze's famous but inaccurate* painting of 14th Continental Regiment manning the oars and poles for Washington's crossing of the icy Delaware River on December 25th, 1776.

Excerpts from Chapter 1 of "Gen. John Glover and His Marblehead Mariners" by George Athan Billias.

"Trenton"

"The shrill sound of blaring bands suddenly shattered the quiet along the banks of the Delaware one cold Sunday morning in early December, 1776. With drums beating and flags unfurled, an advance guard of the British army tramped in to take possession of the little town of Trenton, New Jersey. As the troops neared the river's edge, the dull booming of cannon shook the morning air and a shower of shot flew over from the opposite shore. The brisk firing came from ragged remnants of Washington's army that had escaped across the river a few hours before.

"After fleeing across New Jersey, the American commander-in-chief finally had succeeded in placing the Delaware between his force and the enemy. Camped on the west bank opposite Trenton, Washington watched as the British struggled in vain to get across. But further pursuit was impossible. The Americans had commandeered nearly all the boats up and down the stream for miles, and all bridges were destroyed.

"Unable to span the Delaware, General Howe decided to bring to a close his campaign for the year and marched the bulk of his army back to winter quarters in New York. To occupy the conquered colony of New Jersey, the British general left behind a chain of widely separated garrisons. Two of these isolated cantonments, Trenton and Borden-town, were located on the river, the rest stretched back along the lines of communications running to the northeast.

"Washington grasped quickly the flaw in British defenses: exposed enemy posts along the river lay wide open for a surprise raid. The Delaware, which had been a sanctuary from a British assault, could become a springboard for an American attack. Several days before Christmas, he worked out a daring plan to throw four separate forces across the river to attack Trenton on the night of the holiday. The main force led by Washington himself was to cross at McKonkey's Ferry, nine miles above Trenton, and dash down the opposite shore to smash the Hessian garrison stationed in town. A second detachment under General James Ewing was to pass over the river nearer Trenton and seize the bridge leading out of town to cut off any possibility of retreat in that direction. A third body under Colonel John Cadwalader was to cross farther downstream to divert the attention of the Borden-town garrison. Lastly, Washington called upon General Israel Putnam, commanding the forces in Philadelphia, to march a militia column into New Jersey further to distract the enemy.

"The plan was at best a desperate gamble. It called for three of the trickiest maneuvers known to military men; a night attack, precise timing by dispersed forces, and a coordinated movement of columns radiating in an arc from a common center. One young man was willing to hazard nearly 5000 men, or half his entire force after receiving reinforcements, on this risky operation.

"He had no alternative but attack. The week after Christmas his army would disintegrate as enlistments expired, and he had to get one more battle out of these men before many of them left the service. So discouraged was Washington in December that he came closer to admitting defeat than at any other time during the war. "The game" was "pretty near up," he wrote his brother in confidence, unless everything possible was done to create a new army.

"Unfortunately his four-pronged attack never came off as planned. Ewing was unable to get across the river because, he reported later, "...the quantity of ice was so great." Cadwalader encountered the same difficulty, but he did not give up as easily as Ewing. Moving to a different location, he managed to ferry a few troops to the Jersey shore. But when he found that he could not get his artillery across, Cadwalader, too, returned to the west bank. Unaware that his other commanders had failed, Washington was preparing to pull out for McKonkey's Ferry when word reached him that Putnam's troops would be unable to march as he had ordered. By now the Trenton operation had narrowed itself down to a single question: could Washington's own force navigate the ice-strewn river to get into position for the attack?

"The answer depended upon Colonel John Glover, a tough little terror of a man on whom Washington relied for so many of the army's amphibious moves. Glover had been a ship owning merchant in Marblehead before the war, and his civilian career had admirably equipped him for military service. Accustomed to a position of power and authority in the business world, he found it easy to command troops in the field. The drive, intelligence, and ambition that enabled him to amass a small fortune in commerce were the same qualities required of a capable officer. Most important of all, his knowledge and experience of maritime matters made it possible for him to master the difficult art of small-scale amphibious operations.

"Glover was forty-four at the time. His well-chiseled features, broad, high forehead, and clear, deep-set eyes made him an attractive-looking man; a long, fine nose and full lips added to his handsome appearance. But it was his outthrust jaw that denoted the commander, for its firm, strong lines indicated tenacity and determination. Although he was short and stocky, Glover made up for his lack of height by abundant energy.

"The regiment Glover had recruited, the Fourteenth Continental, was one of the most colorful units in the entire army. It was composed mainly of rugged fishermen and sailors from Marblehead, men who could handle oars as well as muskets. Everything about the regiment smacked of the sea. Clad in blue jackets, white caps, and tarred trousers, typical garb of fishermen, many Marbleheaders marched off to war in the same kind of clothes they wore off the Grand Banks. The discipline for which the unit was famed was a result of the men's training in taking orders on shipboard. And if they approached the enemy with less fear than most troops, it was because their life at sea had accustomed them constantly to face danger.

"Washington had come to look upon Glover's men as a kind of ferrying command ever since the regiment had helped to evacuate the American army from a precarious position on Long Island in August, 1776. When the attack on Trenton first had been discussed, tradition avers that Washington turned to Glover to ask if his mariners could navigate the ice-choked river. Glover had murmured quietly that his lads could manage the task. Only after this assurance, it was said, did Washington proceed with his plan.

"As dusk fell early on that bleak December afternoon, the boats that Washington had collected and concealed from enemy view were brought down to McKonkey's Ferry. The Durham boats used for ferrying the troops normally carried cargoes of iron, grain, and whiskey. Built for river commerce, they were ideally suited for military operations because of their large size and light draft. Averaging sixty feet in length and with a beam of eight feet, one boat could hold an entire regiment." Even when fully loaded they drew only twenty-four to thirty inches, so that troops would be able to wade to shore. Pointed at both ends and looking like cumbersome canoes, the boats were propelled downstream by eighteen-foot oars and upstream by poles. These freshwater craft must have seemed strange to Glover's salt-water sailors.

"While the boats were being rowed into position, the 2400 men in Glover's force reluctantly left the warmth of their small fires in the camp opposite Trenton and started their nine-mile trek to the ferry. It was a cruel march for thinly clad troops. One young major who trailed the column to deliver dispatches recalled that the route was easily traced in the snow by bloodstains "from the feet of the men who wore broken shoes." But there were no complaints, for another officer noted that the men bore up under these painful conditions without a murmur.

"Reaching the river's edge, the soldiers were hustled aboard waiting craft. Sitting there stiff and tense, the men must have watched anxiously as the process of loading weighted down each boat, causing it to settle lower and lower into the water. Once filled, the heavily burdened boat slowly made its way out into the dark river.

"Christmas night brought with it a howling storm; the first phase of the battle of Trenton became a struggle against the elements, not the enemy. An angry wind roared down, churning the river waters and making difficult the handling of pitching craft.⁷ The river was high; the swift and surging current was littered with ice. As the night turned colder and the wind more piercing, their sea men's skill on the gear, and their undoubted courage as oarsmen and polesmen failed them.

"The Delaware at the ferrying place was only about one thousand feet wide, yet Glover's soldiers were forced to call upon the river's narrowness to their aid. The men unhooked of ice came surging and down-stream like white torpedoes to smash against the sides of the boats. As they ground to a halt, the huge slabs became obstacles as they clung alongside and impeded the forward progress of the craft. Each cake of ice had to be wrestled out of the way before the boats could continue their passage. The floating ice in the river," reported one participant, "began to invade the river."

"As if river conditions were not bad enough, about eleven o'clock it began to snow. What little visibility there had been to steer through the treacherous waters was now obscured. Peering into the blinding storm, Glover's men had to strain their eyes to pick out ice floes from the mass of white flakes that whirled across their vision. Despite these difficulties, the men of the Fourteenth worked away, and the patriot force on the east side of the Delaware gradually swelled in size.

"Back on the west bank, young, stout Colonel Henry Knox bellowed orders to the troops boarding the boats. No doubt he was given this assignment not only because his booming voice could be heard above the river's roar, but because the success of the expedition hinged upon the eighteen cannon over which he had charge. Artillery was the bad-weather arm of the American army; muskets could not be relied upon once priming pans got wet, but cannon could be used in rain or snow, if protected. As soon as it began to snow, Knox's guns took on a greater importance.

"Ferrying the heavy howitzers and guns became the most critical part of the entire operation. After all, Cadwalader had been able to get his men across the river; it was the artillery that had proved his downfall. With much sweating and swearing, Glover's men succeeded where Cadwalader had failed. As Knox noted so aptly, "...perseverance accomplished what at first seemed impossible."

"When it came time for Washington himself to be ferried, Marbleheaders leaped to command the craft in which he crossed. William Blackler, a captain in Glover's regiment, proudly asserted after the war that he had won this post of honor, having served on several patriot committees with Glover, the thirty-six-year-old mariner had both the background and training to be entrusted with so important a task. Blackler's boat was borne out by John Roads Russell, another Marbleheader and a private in Glover's regiment, who claimed he rowed the boat with the general and captain aboard."

* "The image most Americans carry of Washington crossing the Delaware is false. It is based upon the familiar painting by Emanuel Leutze, a German-born artist who lived in America but spent more than two decades in the land of his birth. Using the Rhine to portray the Delaware, Leutze took more artistic liberties than usual and his picture is filled with inaccuracies. Instead of the Durham boats which were actually used, Leutze painted craft that looked like ship long-boats. The dozen men crowded into the small boat in the foreground of his picture most certainly would have swamped a craft of that size. If by some miracle the boat had remained afloat, its heavy draft would have prevented the men aboard from approaching within twenty feet of the shore. Nor does it seem probable that a man with Washington's innate good sense would have invited disaster by standing with one foot on the gunwale while crossing an ice-filled river on a dark night.

"But if this painting has served no other purpose, it has immortalized the performance of Glover's regiment; without the efforts of the Fourteenth Continental there might never have been a battle of Trenton. The surprising talents of Glover's unit gave it the worth of ten regiments that night. Ferrying Washington's force across the river without the loss of a single man or cannon, the Marbleheaders put the American commander in a position to launch a surprise attack against the Hessians.

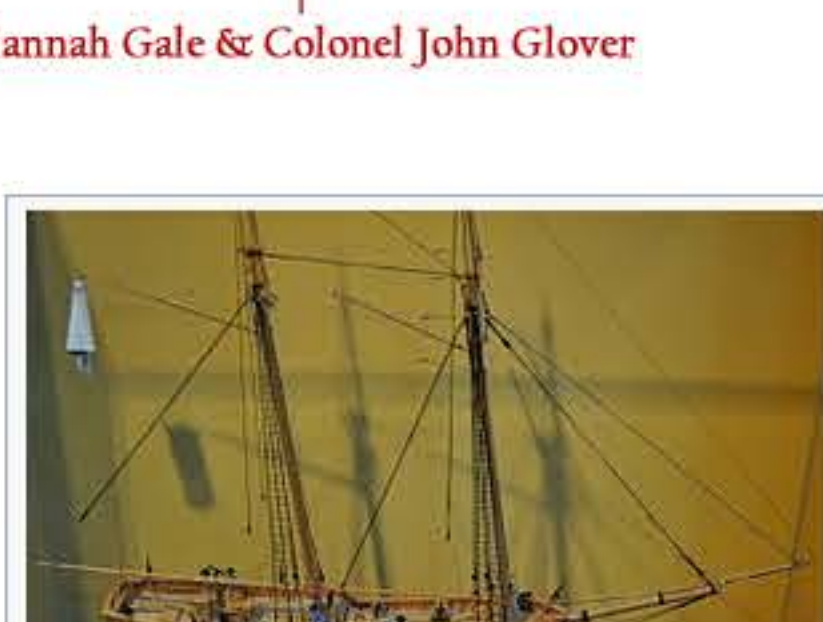
"It was three in the morning, three hours behind schedule, before Glover's men finished ferrying the troops. Another hour passed as the men milled about, lining up into marching formation. Washington's timetable called for the attack to take place one hour before daybreak. But with Trenton still nine miles away, it became increasingly clear that the attack could not be made under cover of darkness as planned. "Victory or Death," the countersign suggested by Washington himself, took on a more ominous ring."

Acknowledgments:
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John Codner & Joan Bartoll

Joan Codner & William Blackler
William Blackler & Mary Rowles
William Blackler & Sarah Burrill
Capt. William Blackler (below)

Deliverance Codner & Benjamin Gale
John Gale & Miriam Stacey
John Gale & Susannah Dennis
Hannah Gale & Colonel John Glover



Model of Hannah in the U.S. Navy Museum



Colonel John Glover organizing the evacuation of General George Washington's Army from Brooklyn

