

GEHR Watershed Minute #21

Privateers: (201 words)

During the Revolutionary War, the Continental Congress issued Letters of Marque documents giving private ship owners and captains legal permission to capture British ships and confiscate their cargoes. The Great Egg Harbor's secluded coves and inlets provided safe haven for many of these privateers who harassed and captured enemy vessels.

Privateers were actually licensed pirates who split their prizes with the American government, and they were an important source of revenue for the Continental Congress and a constant source of aggravation for the British. Privateering became a staple of the local economy along the Great Egg Harbor River during the Revolutionary War.

Many confiscated ships were docked at Sugar Hill in Mays Landing where sugar, molasses, rum and other confiscated commodities were stored and shipped by horse and carriage inland to the Colonial Army and other markets. Early history books tell the story of one such privateer, Captain Snell, nicknamed "The Hero of Sugar Hill", who brought havoc to 29 British ships as they tried to capture Mays Landing.

The privateers essentially brought all British commerce to a halt. They made the war so expensive that it lost support in England, while making a profit for themselves at the same time.