

WASHINGTON CROSSING STATE PARK

NEW JERSEY

March 11, 1975

Operations and needed additions for reception and interpretation within the historic area during the bicentennial years.

Estimates exist, that thousands of people will visit this historic site in the coming years starting around the summer and end of this year.

The only facilities to interpret a part of this history now are the Ferry House and the Flag Museum, the latter is staffed by the Washington Crossing Association; facilities are very inadequate to receive any significant increase in visitation. Even if we assume that Washington Crossing State Park, New Jersey will not have to accommodate as large a daily crowd as Philadelphia and Washington Crossing, Pennsylvania predict, our historic facilities exist and there is a tremendous interest to come to this historic site to learn about the revolutionary history of New Jersey during the first days of its turning point and gather information, how to proceed to other points of interest. This, as far as we can determine, can be the task of the program we feature.

It would be absurd to think that if nothing is done to accommodate the public, they would not come, we would not only miss a great opportunity but also find out that the existing historic buildings, without control, will deteriorate to the point where they soon will have to be closed down. The arrival of the Continental troops at the New Jersey shores is an event that is sorely overlooked, however, not by the many visitors from all States in the Nation who come to relive a part of their history. This site is probably better known than many others. Much time and money has already been spent to discuss a costly masterplan, and it is apparent that we cannot continue on that basis; it is time to set this priority and do it now, whatever is possible to correct this situation, with whatever plans and possibilities left to us, to at least try to control the visitation, protect the area, and make a visit worth while.

To control the crowd, a visitors' center where information and sufficient interpretation can be handled is a tool, if operated right, to retain the public and to guide them into the type of use which will be less destructive, and create a program.

Since the time to accomplish anything is extremely short, and no permanent plans exist or are too costly to accomplish, the construction of a semi permanent structure, that can be used for another purpose at a later date if so desired, or be salvaged in parts for other future construction, is envisioned, but if this structure will prove to be satisfactory, it can be retained.

#### Suggested system of construction

The Kenfro-Arkeol system of uniform prefabricated wooden insulated units, inclusive door and thermopane window units appears to be an excellent solution to erect such a visitors' center on short notice. This system is very flexible, and adjustments, enlargements, varieties of designs can be made whenever it is desirable. Many permanent very attractive houses were built with its materials and it is best suited to blend in with the environment of a park. It can prove to be the most economical solution for our problems. This unique building system is one of its kind. Once the design is approved and an agreement about the actual plan of operation is reached, the plan does not have to change any of the other present facilities, no other cost for further planning will have to be assumed. A preliminary design is now available for an attractive Visitors' Center which will serve the purpose and has all necessary units and facilities included for a price which can be absorbed under the given circumstances. However, it would leave room for elaboration or last minute change.

#### What should a Visitors' Center contain?

- A. Information and sales counter.
- B. Exhibit space for incoming visitors to view for instance, some paintings of historic events relative to the history which is interpreted in the center. Some artifacts, maps, drafts and models will be included.
- C. A small auditorium that should not seat more than 80-100 people at one time to avoid costly requirements when facilities exceed the number. The ideas revolve around showing a film 15-20 minutes which will be appropriate and explains the events. However, to show such a film on a regular e.g. half hour basis can become costly and depending on the film, it could defeat its purpose. However, occasional full length film showing should be incorporated. The purpose as we see it is to first introduce what we have to be visited: the walk of the Continental Lane, the Ferry House, the Flag Museum, the Crossing and its history all illustrated with stills and narration. Following this, an historic electrified map of the areas between Washington Crossing, Trenton and Princeton to be shown explaining the troop movements in New Jersey, the Battles of Trenton and the following march to Princeton, all to be narrated at the same time with stills, and illustrating this part of the campaign. Further details about the Battle of Princeton can be left up to interpretation at Princeton Battlefield. After this interpretive program, the public will leave on an historic trail to the historic area. If display of early colonial life is incorporated this can be their first visit and located in a separate unit close to the Visitors' Center for all practical reasons. To retain more people in the Visitors' Cen-

- C. ter and to fill waiting time, a small indoor snack restaurant to be included with the larger terrace outside which will take in one of our most fascinating views of the hills, and Bowman's tower in the distance. This should set the needed atmosphere for an unrushed absorption of the points of interest. To avoid excessive use of the Ferry House and Flag Museum, tickets can be sold at the counter in the Visitors' Center which only will entitle visitors to see inside these buildings, this should eliminate overuse. No further narration would be necessary at these buildings where the furniture, encased artifacts, dioramas, flags, etc. can be viewed; the houses would be guarded. The historic walk will go from the Visitors' Center, either through the adjacent woods or by the paved road and Continental Lane to the two existing structures, from there to the flagpole overlook where a better picture of the river and the opposite banks can be obtained than at the river itself. Open-air displays here can explain items like the names of regiments, officers involved, etc. For those who desire this, an extended trip to the actual river bank can be made, especially if any artifacts were housed in the Nelson House which might be a future possibility, or to view a reproduced ferry, etc. (It should not be necessary to visit the Delaware river itself and cope with traffic and limited space.) The public can return by Continental Lane to the Visitors' Center and the limited parking facility either by foot or if so desired, by a people mover, preferably, a horsedrawn wagon that can be operated throughout the area on the presently paved roads. Especially during operational hours, the entire area will be closed off for all traffic which can be accomplished by the construction of a small number of pleasing looking gates.

#### Location of Visitors' Center

To reduce the walk-in area and maintain a center within an area which is basically the historic area, the best location appears to be at the edge of the scrubby woods between the nursery field and the larch plantation at Greene Drive. This will encompass a spectacular view over the hills without interfering with the nursery operation that will rather be an asset of interest. The nursery fields along that road may be fenced in with a colonial-type fencing to avoid possible damage. All traffic on this lower section of Greene Drive and in the historic buildings area will be closed off as it is used for walk-in only. This can be accomplished in the ways marked on park maps.

#### Parking

Parking facilities for the Visitors' Center should not be too large and, at most, for 100 to 150 cars. Parking facilities to be developed below the Visitors' Center screened by the existing woods will be invisible. This can be accomplished in a simple way, saving much of the present vegetation, most of it is of no aesthetic value. A short walk from here will bring the visitor to the Center. Parking area will require access either through an extended section of road at Chestnut Grove, or from Greene Drive. A more ideal added operational concept will be to develop entrance and additional parking lot with contact station off Route 546 as shown in proposed "Masterplan". This could possibly be a second phase development.

The reason for making the parking facilities for 100-150 cars below the Center is to be able to better control the crowds. Ways to limited time parking can be developed to avoid overcrowding, and an effort can be made to limit visitation, and close off the area in case of saturation. In this case, and as a last resort, overflow parking at Phillip's Farm or elsewhere with minibus connecting service to the area is left as a good possibility in case of need. This would also help the traffic situation as a part of the traffic then can leave on a secondary road which is a concern the Hopewell Township Police Department has expressed.

Since there are sanitary facilities in Sullivan Grove and the Flag Museum all included in the historic walk and this concept is to serve a reasonable number of visitors, sanitary facilities inside the Visitors' Center can be left to a minimum. The proposed building system, leaves room for easy expansion. For the time being, if a deep well is too expensive, limited gallonage can possibly be drawn from adjacent Sullivan Grove.

The next phase of development would be to reduce picnic use in Sullivan Grove or limit it for Visitors' Center use only and reduce or eliminate picnic at Greene Grove. To accomplish this, one or more of the proposed new picnic sites can then be developed.

The existing parking areas for Sullivan Grove can also be used for bus parking to serve the Visitors' Center.

I think that this proposal can serve the problem to accommodate a reasonable number of visitors without oversaturation of our facilities and leaves control possible without the development of extremely costly plans. The impact on area traffic, and traffic within the Park can then be reduced greatly for the benefit of its environment and the overall traffic situation in Hopewell Township.