

Spanning the Gap

Peace and War: a find in the park



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Spanning the Gap
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A routine maintenance assignment brings to light an unmistakable link to early Dutch and German settlement stretching from the Hudson to the Delaware valley. The park's historian explains the find.

by Susan A. Kopczynski

While working at the site of the Christopher Decker house, built in 1837 and since torn down, a park maintenance employee stepped on a heavy plate of iron partly buried in the ground. The plate showed two tall figures and two much smaller colonial-looking gentlemen who were shaking hands, as well as part of an inscription.

Brought to the park curator and park historian, this curious piece was found to have a twin pictured in a 1914 work entitled *The Bible in Iron*, by Henry C. Mercer. The piece is the left plate from an early five-plate stove from about 1720 to 1760. These stoves were popular with German and Dutch settlers in the colonial era. The plates on these stoves were decorated with scenes and inscriptions, often out of the Bible.

Mercer calls this particular decorative design *Peace and War*. The tall figures are *grenadiers*, distinctive members of an elite corps whose men, both on the continent and in England, were chosen for their impressive size: *War*. The short bearded men with broad brimmed hats and long hair may represent pacifist settlers, such as Quakers: *Peace*.

Still, the stove-plate holds more questions than answers. How did this stove get there? Where was it



The stove plate found at Decker House. (NPS Photo by Ken Sandri)



A stove plate showing the identical scene as the plate found in the park. The plate shown was found in Dyerstown (Bucks County) PA in 1914. (Photo courtesy of Bucks County Historical Society, Doylestown PA.)

Another plate with the same scene has been found in the area of Dutch settlement around Kingston, NY. The tall figures resemble English

made? The Decker family moved down from the Kingston, New York, area in the very early 1800s. Andreas Decker was the first white settler on the property and the land passed on to his son, Christopher, and later to his grandson, Christopher Jr., who built the now-demolished stone house. Did Decker bring this stove with him from Kingston? Or did he get it from one of the many colonial iron works in the area, such as Sterling or Andover in New Jersey?

Years later the stove-plate probably became a stepping-stone in the garden of the house. Still, long before Christopher Decker, Jr., built his stone house in 1837, someone had a stove to remind him of the virtues of war and peace, while it kept him warm.

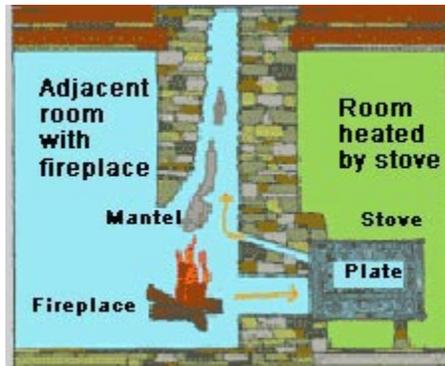
Susan Kopczynski is the recreation area's historian.

grenadiers brought to America for the French and Indian Wars, but more likely were meant to represent the distinctive grenadiers of Frederick William I, King of Prussia from 1713 to 1740.

The inscription reads:
*Den Cranetir gestelt er
hebt wol aus dem Satel
gar manchen brafen Helt,*

which translates:
*He posted the grenadier;
(he) threw from the saddle
many a hardy hero.*

. (Adapted from a drawing by Henry C. Mercer. Drawing used courtesy of Bucks County Historical Society, Doylestown PA.)



(Left) Set-up of a five-sided jamb stove, seen from its left side. The stove was constructed of left, right, front, top, and bottom plates. The rear of the stove was open and was connected to a hole in the back wall of a fireplace in an adjacent room, in order to keep a second room warm. The stove's flue made use of the chimney of the fireplace in the adjacent room.