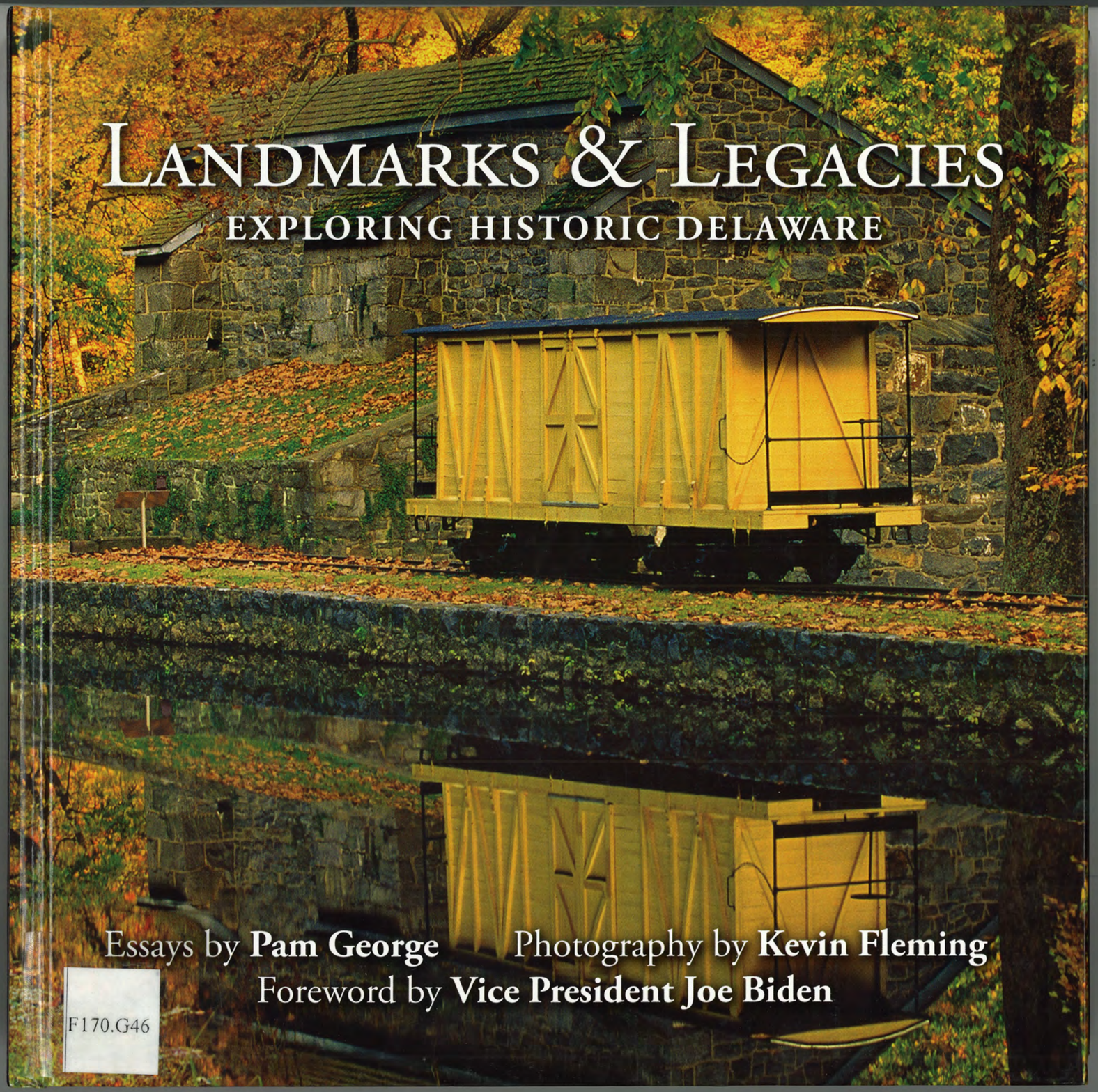
LANDMARKS & LEGACIES
EXPLORING HISTORIC DELAWARE
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F170.G46

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NEWARK

DELAWARE'S REVOLUTIONARY WAR BATTLEFIELD:
PENCADER HERITAGE MUSEUM/COOCH-DAYETT MILLS

The strategy seemed sound. If British forces could capture Philadelphia, the capital of the new United States, the Revolutionary War would end. At least, that's how it often worked in Europe. The plan, spearheaded by British Gen. Charles Cornwallis, was in play on Sept. 3, 1777. Under Gen. William Howe's command, 4,000 British and Hessian soldiers had moved from Maryland into Delaware. Unbeknownst to them, 800 Americans were waiting to ambush their enemy. Continental Army commander Gen. William Maxwell, under Gen. George Washington's orders, sought to delay the British troops' advance, cause confusion and gather information about the enemy.

Initially, the ambush was successful, yet the British and Hessians pushed the Americans from Aiken Town, now Glasgow, over Iron Hill to the Welsh Baptist Meeting House. There was severe fighting at Cooch's Bridge. After going through all their ammunition, the Americans retreated. They would take on the British again at Brandywine and in Germantown. Nevertheless, the British took Philadelphia on Sept. 26, 1777. The Continental Congress already had fled to safety, and, despite British hopes, the war continued for six more years. Many of the Delawareans who fought at Cooch's Bridge wintered with Washington at Valley Forge.

A monument on Old Baltimore Pike marks the Battle of Cooch's Bridge, and Delaware's Revolutionary War heroes are celebrated at the Pencader Heritage Museum on the Cooch-Dayett Mills property. The museum, located in a dairy barn built in 1865, features such relics as a Hessian short sword, found on the Cooch's Bridge battlefield, and British cannonballs dropped during their encampment. You'll also find a wide variety of items associated with local history, including documents and relics from the Chrysler plant's days as a tank-manufacturing site. (The Delaware Nature Society offers programs on the grounds and in the mill, built by William Cooch Jr. in 1838.)

The Pencader Heritage Area Association, which owns the museum, each September holds a battlefield memorial ceremony. "There are 20 young Americans buried in unmarked graves somewhere," noted Bill Conley, the association's president. Many Hessians also died. The association is also raising awareness about the French soldiers' encampment at Cooch Farm in 1781 while en route to and from the victory at Yorktown, Virginia. "It's an unknown story," Conley said of the Delaware events. "We want to proclaim it to everyone."