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First U.S. hot air balloon flight landed in Deptford 225 years ago

Tammy Paolino

PHOTOS: 35th annual QuickChek New Jersey Festival of Ballooning



Deptford was the site of the first hot air balloon landing in America 225 years ago.

The first hot air balloon flight took off from Philadelphia's Walnut Street prison yard (near the site of Independence Hall) and ended in a field in Deptford on Jan. 9, 1793.

According to the New Jersey Festival of Hot Air Ballooning, President George Washington watched as Jean-Pierre Blanchard soared over the Delaware River from Pennsylvania and into the New Jersey skies and the history books.

The flight also marked the nation's first air mail delivery, "as Blanchard carried with him a letter from President Washington to be delivered to the owner of whatever property the balloon would happen to land upon, which turned out to be a farm," according to festival organizers.

The Deptford Police Department has had its own hot air balloon since 1998. The newest incarnation of "The First and Finest" balloon was first launched in 2004, according to the police department's aviation team website, www.firstandfinest.org/html/history.html. Under the guidance of President Steve Moylan, a retired police lieutenant who oversees the First and Finest non-profit organization, the balloon continues its mission of promoting police and community cooperation by participating free of charge in police, community, civic, school, church and charity events throughout the region.

New Jersey is still a popular state for hot air ballooning, and hosts the annual **QuickChek New Jersey Festival of Ballooning** every summer.

In its 36th year, the festival is scheduled for July 27 to 29 at Solberg Airport in Readington Township, Hunterdon County, and will feature more than 100 balloons. Visit www.balloonfestival.com.