



#5 1997

GEORGE WASHINGTON SLEPT HERE

A boastful claim made by quite a number of owners of venerable, old houses throughout the eastern seaboard is that the Father of Our Country, George Washington visited (and slept), if even for only a single night, in their house. Many of those claims can be verified and proven by available public records, but perhaps just as many are simply tall tales spun through the years by families who believed their importance to be just a little bit greater than their neighbors. The Blair County Chapter can truly boast of being associated with a place where George Washington visited and stayed (and stayed, in fact, more than a single night) because of the fact that the Bedford County region falls within this Chapter's jurisdiction. This article is about George Washington's visits to Bedford.



George Washington came to this region in the Autumn of the year 1758. Five years earlier, at the age of twenty-one, Washington had traveled near the region that would, in 1772, become Bedford County. Virginia's Lieutenant Governor Robert Dinwiddie sent him on a mission to ascertain the intentions of the French army that was constructing a line of forts through the Ohio Valley. George Washington's reconnaissance journey to Forts Venango and Le Boeuf had brought him near, but not actually through the Bedford County region. In 1755 General Edward Braddock was dispatched to the Ohio Valley with a force of 1,400 British regulars and 450 colonial militia to attempt to drive the French forces from that region. George Washington participated in that campaign in the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and found himself in charge when, on 09 July, General Braddock was mortally wounded during the Battle of the Wilderness. The British force was routed in an ambush by the French and Indians and fled to safety.

The Indians, who had been allies of the British colonials for some time, were turned against those former allies by the French, who were now claiming the entire Ohio Valley for King Louis XV. In what would be called the Seven Years War in Europe, and the French and Indian War in America, France and England became embroiled in a struggle for dominance that would ultimately result in France's defeat. Between 1755 and the summer of 1758 the British and Colonial forces prepared for the inevitable war by building and manning a string of forts along the frontiers of the provinces of Pennsylvania and Virginia.

George Washington played a role in that conflict, but not a central role such as he would later play in the American Revolutionary War. The Virginia Assembly raised a force of militia to garrison forts on the frontier. Washington was sent to Fort Loudon first, and then to Fort Cumberland to command the militia there and to try to maintain a peace with the Indians.

A weak point in the plan of defense of the frontier region was the lack of a good road over which the frontier forts could be supplied with provisions and troops. General Braddock had cut a road to Fort Duquesne at the forks of the Ohio and the Monongahela Rivers in 1755. That road, known appropriately as Braddock's Road, was, in spots, no more than a thin path and it proved inadequate as an efficient supply route.

In 1757 the British Secretary of State, William Pitt formulated a three-pronged plan of attack on the region the French had laid claim to. That plan, scheduled to be put into effect the following spring, included an attack on the fortifications in the Ohio Valley. Brigadier-General John Forbes was chosen to cross the Allegheny Mountain range and take Fort Duquesne. General Forbes was accompanied by Colonel Henry Bouquet, a Swiss Protestant who had fled his native country, and who

would be required to take over the command of the expedition when the General succumbed to "the cursed flux." The expeditionary force consisted of several companies of the First Highland Battalion, the Royal American Regiment, and colonial regiments from the provinces of Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Delaware and North Carolina. Colonel George Washington was placed in command of the Virginian troops. At first, General Forbes was going to follow the route that Braddock had taken, but then he changed his mind and decided to construct a new road from Raystown to the forks of the Ohio. The new route, to become known as Forbes' Road, would save forty miles and avoid the need to cross several rivers.

Washington's letters clearly reveal his, and most of the Virginian troops', disagreement with Forbes' decision. On 02 August, 1758, following a meeting with Colonel Henry Bouquet, Washington sent a letter to Major Francis Halkett from the Camp at Fort Cumberland in which he lamented:

"...If Colo. Bouquet succeeds in this point with the General, all is lost! All is lost by Heavens! Our Enterprise Ruin'd; and we stop'd at the Laurel Hill this Winter; not to gather Laurels, by the by, desireable in their effects. The Southern Indians turn'd against Us, and these Colonies become desolated by such an Acquisition to the Enemy's Strength."

A letter, dated 02 September, 1758 at Camp Fort Cumberland, which Washington sent to Francis Fauquier (the Lieutenant Governor of Virginia) stated:

Hon'ble Sir: Your favour of the 17th. Ulto. I had the hon'r to receive the 30th. following. If you are surpriz'd to find us still Incamp'd at this place I shall only remark that your surprize cannot well exceed my own.

In my last I inform'd your Hon. that a Resolution was taken to open a new Road from Rays Town to Fort Duquense, 'twas instantly begun, and since that time from one to two Thousand Men have wrought on it continually.

What time it will require to Build a Fort at Loyall Hanning, and after that is accomplish'd, what further time is necessary to cut the Road thro' very rugged Grounds to Fort Duquesne (Grounds of which the Enemy are actually possessed and know every advantageous Post to harass and dispute with us in) I say what time is required for the completion of all this, I must leave to time that faithfull expositor of Events to reveal, not caring even to guess at it myself.

The first Division of the Artillery has past the Allegany Hill and I suppose may be now be got up with the advanced Working Party, the 2d. Division I believe may have March'd by this; and they talk of putting all the Troops in motion immediately.

We have not in our Stores at Rays Town two Months Provisions for the army; and if the best judges are to be credited, the nipping Frosts will soon destroy the [Herbage] on the Mountains, and then, altho' the Communication be not quite stopp'd, the subsistence for horses is render'd very difficult till Snows and hard Frosts prevents all intercourse wth the Ohio and these sets in early in November.

The Road from Reas Town to Carlyle whence the Provisions and Stores chiefly come is perhaps worse than [any] other upon the Continent, infinitely worse than any part of the Road from hence to Fort Duquesne along General Braddocks Road, and hath already worn out the greatest part of the horses that have been employ'd in Transporting the Provisions, the Carriage of which only it is said and from good authority, I have it, stands the Crown upwards of 40/ every hundred weight.

We have certain advice's that the French on the 13th ulto. had rec'd no new Reinforcements at Fort Duquesne from Canada and that their Totall strength at that Garrison could not exceed 800 Men, Indians Included.

Their accounts exactly agree and have given great satisfaction to the Com~ manding Officer being corroborated also by Indian Intelligence, a Party of Cherokee's having been out there and some Delawares come in. What a Golden

opp'y have we lost! but this is past, irretrievably gone I fear.

A party of our Troops 75 in num. is now 40 miles advanc'd, way laying the Road, from whom I hope a Prisoner if the Enemy [should be] passing or repas~sing; I sent out also the day before yesterday a Sergeant and 5 Men to Fort Duquesne for Intelligence; they will be back in fourteen days.

I can give your Hon. no satisfactory acct. of the General. He lay ill at Carlyle a long time of a Flux, from thence getting a little strength he mov'd to Shippensbourg where his Disorder return'd and he continues. By a Letter the other day he hopes soon to be at Rays Town where he desires to see Colo. Byrd and I, but alas! the Expedition must either stand or fall by the present Plan.

In the conference I had with Colo. Bouquet and of which I gave your Hon. an acct. in my last I did among other things to avert the resolve of opening a new Road, represent the great Expenche the Coloney of Virg'a had been at to support the War, the Charge of raising a 2d. Regt. at so short a notice; the time limited for the Service of it; and the Cruelty therefore of risking the success of an Expedition upon such precarious Measures when so much depended on it; and our inability to do more I then exprest my apprehensions of the Southern Indians Case of a miscarriage, and the encrease of French strength in new Alliances; and after this demonstrated very clearly the time it wou'd take us to proceed on the old Road; and at how much easier expence, even if we were oblig'd to get all our provisions and Stores from Pensylvania; and no occasion for this surely. In fine I urg'd every thing then I could do now; and repeated by Letter Copies of which I have now to shew if required, but urg'd in vain, the Pensylvanians whose Interest present and future it was to conduct the Expedition thro' their Government, and along that way, because it secures their Frontiers at present, and the Trade hereafter, a Chain of Forts being Erected, had prejudic'd the General absolutely against this Road; made him believe we were the partial people and determin'd him at all Events to pursue that Rout, so that their Sentiments are already fully known on this matter; and to them as Instigators, may be attributed the great misfortune of this miscarriage; for I think now nothing but a miracle can procure Success.

Beginning on 25 September, 1758, letters sent by George Washington to various friends and associates noted that they had been sent from the "Camp at Raystown". The earliest reference to Fort Bedford is found in a letter from Lieutenant Colonel John Armstrong to the Province of Pennsylvania's Deputy Governor, William Denny dated the 5th of May, 1757 in which he stated that:

"The coming of the Cherokees...prompts me to propose to your Honour... the building of a fort at Raystown without which the King's business and the country's safety can never be effected to the westward."

The exact date of the construction of the fort is not known, but on 16 August, 1758 Major Joseph Shippen wrote a letter from Raystown in which he stated that:

"We have a good stockade fort here, with several convenient and large store houses. Our camps are all secured with good breastworks and a small ditch on the outside..."

In view of the fact that Fort Bedford had been erected prior to the date of Washington's letters, one can only wonder why Washington did not write "Fort Bedford" on them. George Washington remained at the camp at Fort Bedford until October 13. On the 14th the army made camp at the Shawnese Cabins, and on the next day they continued on their way to their eventual destination of Fort Loyalhanna (*i.e.* Ligonier). George Washington, therefore, stayed not just one night, but nearly three weeks in the vicinity of Bedford.

During the period of the Revolutionary War, George Washington did not come to this region of

Pennsylvania, but the Whiskey Rebellion that began to brew in the western part of the state after the Revolution brought him back. The Whiskey Rebellion, which was ignited on 03 March, 1791, was a dispute between whiskey distillers and the newly created Congress of the United States over a federal excise tax. The distillers were told that they had to pay the excise tax on whiskey, but other farmers did not have to pay a similar tax on their grain products. Turning grain into whiskey was, in some farmers' cases, the only practical way to get their crop to market. The Whiskey Rebellion was the first situation that tested the power of the United States Congress; if the government would have failed to suppress the rebellion, it would no doubt have been viewed as weak and ineffectual. On 19 September, 1794 nearly 12,000 troops, under the command of President George Washington, and his subordinate, General Henry Lee, left Philadelphia bound for western Pennsylvania. The farthest west that General Washington, himself traveled during the campaign was the town of Bedford. He stayed at the house of David Espy, a limestone structure at 123 East Pitt Street (which now houses the Washington Bakery) during the night of 18 October. For his headquarters, Washington was given the use of a large room which stretched across the entire front of the second floor. On the following day, he reviewed the troops, issued orders to General Lee and then started back to Philadelphia. That would be the last time George Washington personally led troops on the field, and the only time in the nation's history that the President would literally assume the role of "Commander-In-Chief". The Whiskey Rebellion was quelled with the arrest, on the night of 13 November, 1794, of approximately 150 rebels.

It can be seen, therefore, that it is not simply an idle boast. Even the personal writings of George Washington attest to the fact that he did indeed set foot on ground that lies within the bounds of the Blair County Chapter's area of concern, and we, the members of this chapter, can take pride in knowing that he "slept here."

1997 ANNUAL MEETING

The 1997 Annual Meeting of the Blair County Chapter, SAR will be held on Saturday, December 6, 1997 at Kings Family Restaurant in Altoona. It will begin at 12:00 noon.

We hope that you will be able to attend this year's Annual Meeting. ATTENTION ALL OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS-ELECT: Swearing in occurs during this meeting, so please attend.

The Annual Meetings of 1995 and 1996 had to be cancelled due to very low attendance. We have decided, this year, not to set the meeting up on the lines of our formal Dinners (Constitution and George Washington's Birthday) with a fixed menu and set price. As during our Quarterly Meetings, those attending will simply order from the restaurant's menu. This also implies that reservations need not be made. Your spouses are invited to join us again this year.

Compatriot's Book Is Published

Despite many delays, Blair County Chapter Compatriot, Larry Smith's book, **The 150th Anniversary History of Blair County, Pennsylvania** is now available from Closson Press.

Anyone interested in obtaining a copy of this 926-page history of Blair County should send \$95.40 (which includes tax and shipping/handling costs) to:

Closson Press 1935 Sampson Drive Apollo, PA 15613-9209

[Phone: (412) 337-4482 Fax: (412) 337-9484]

(Note: If you order two books at the same time, the second book's price will be \$84.80)

Work is still progressing on the book, *The Blair County Chapter Sons Of The American Revolution ~ Being A History Of The Chapter -and- A View Of Bedford County in The American Revolutionary War*. Closson Press has already expressed interest in publishing that volume, with an expected publication date sometime in mid-1998. Besides being a factual history of our Chapter, with information on all the past and present members and their Patriot ancestors, the volume will be perhaps the most complete history of this region during the American Revolutionary War yet printed.