

The Continental Army at “Headquarters Towamensing” October 8-16, 1777

From the chapter “A Respite from A Revolution” in the book “Paper Quill and Ink, The Diaries of George Lukens 1768-1849 Towamencin Township Quaker - Farmer - Schoolmaster - Abolitionist, And A History of Towamencin Township” by Brian Hagey published 2016 by the Mennonite Historians of Eastern Pennsylvania. Copyright © 2016 Brian Hagey. Edition Two

For years a sign hung on the wall beside the front desk of a hotel along the Sumneytown Pike in Kulpsville that read "At this spot on July 4, 1776 not a damn thing happened." The satirical phrase with roots in the Bicentennial Celebration is a humorous and crude reminder that nothing noteworthy happened on that quiet summer day in pastoral Towamencin Township, as compared to a world-changing event that took place the same day 23 miles to the south in colonial Philadelphia. After much debate among the delegates and several rewrites by Thomas Jefferson of Virginia, the Second Continental Congress approved a recent congressional vote to declare independence from King George III of Great Britain. On July 4, 1776, the birth of our new nation was announced and Towamencin's future, as well as the rest of the world, was soon to be very much affected.

A mile marker along the Sumneytown Pike in Kulpsville states 23 miles to Philadelphia. During the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Philadelphia was the largest city in the British colonies; an important marketplace for Towamencin farmers as well as the birthplace of our nation.

The war that began in Lexington, Massachusetts on April 19, 1775, over a year before independence was declared, eventually made its way to Towamencin. Although no battles were fought in Towamencin, residents became personally involved in the American War for Independence when General Washington moved his headquarters and most of the Continental Army from various local townships to Towamencin on the morning of October 8, 1777.



On that cool autumn day, nature's peaceful and timeless sounds along the Skippack Creek were briefly interrupted as hundreds of soldiers marched east on the Skippack Road from Schwenksville, fording the muddy banks of the Skippack Creek, while others came up from Skippack and still more westward from Worcester along the Skippack Road. They all merged into one large army of thousands marching along the present-day Old Forty Foot Road, crossing the Great Road, also referred to as the North Wales Road (present day Sumneytown Pike) with horses and rattling wagons arriving all day onto quiet Towamencin fields. What a sight and sound that must have been to Towamencin farm families, including eight-year-old George Lukens and his siblings, on an otherwise quiet autumn day. The population of Towamencin at that time was about

390 persons. Within the course of a few days, approximately 11,000 soldiers had moved into the township. It would not be until the census of 1980 that the population of Towamencin was again as large!

Today Towamencin holds the honor for having provided General Washington, soon to be the first President of the United States, and the Continental Army a much-needed rest during the war. For nine days and eight nights, thousands of Continental soldiers were camped across Towamencin fields on the Wambold (Wampole) farm next to the Lukens and other Towamencin and Lower Salford Township farms. Washington's headquarters were in the Wambold farmhouse that once stood along present-day Detwiler Road near the Greene Tweed building, directly behind the MedComp building. The stone farmhouse situated there today, was built over a hundred years later in 1881, on the site of the original eighteenth-century Wambold farmhouse.

Continental soldiers were camped along the Skippack Creek near the Sumneytown Pike and on Lower Salford fields. Farther north along the east bank of the Skippack Creek on Fretz Road in Lower Salford, Brigadier General Pulaski, head of the Continental cavalry known as the Corps of American Light Dragoons, and his staff stayed at Schwenkfelder preacher and farmer Christopher and Rosina Hoffman's farmhouse. For most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, locals knew this farm as the Derstine farm. Soldiers also camped across Fretz Road on Schwenkfelder Christopher Kriebel's farm. The log farmhouse that stood during the time of the encampment was razed in the early years of the twentieth century. Descendants of Christopher Kriebel still own the historic farm.

Christian and Rosina Hoffman both wrote letters to relatives in Europe shortly after the war, making note of the October 1777 encampment surrounding their farm. Christian wrote to his relatives informing them that the General of the cavalry and his bodyguards stayed in their farmhouse for nine days. The Continental soldiers not only shared the Hoffman and Kriebel farmhouses and fields, but also the Kriebel family burial ground across the road. On the Kriebel farm by the edge of the woods, eight unknown Continental soldiers rest in peace surrounded by pacifist Schwenkfelder graves in the burial yard adjacent to the historic Salford Schwenkfelder Meetinghouse, built much later in 1869. Rosina wrote in her letter that General Pulaski stayed in their house, and soldiers, wagons and animals of the army were camped all over their back fields. She also wrote that soldiers were camped at Aunt Anna & Uncle Melchior Kriebel's farm in present-day Upper Gwynedd Township, near the Towamencin Township line. Just a few miles from Towamencin, Gwynedd Friends Meeting records confirm their meetinghouse on Sumneytown Pike (across from the present-day William Penn Inn) was used by the Continental Army as a temporary hospital shortly after the Battle of Germantown. A number of Continental soldiers are buried in the Gwynedd Friends Cemetery.

Brigadier General Francis Nash of North Carolina, mortally wounded in the battle of Germantown on October 4, was taken to Skippack and shortly thereafter to the Towamencin farmhouse of Adam Gotwals along the Old Forty Foot Road, located about a mile west of Godshall's burial yard, today the site of the Towamencin Mennonite Church. General Nash and other officers and soldiers injured at Germantown were treated there. Doctor Craik was the attending physician.

The Adam Gotwals farmhouse (background to the right) and barn along the Old Forty Foot Road in Towamencin Township.

General Francis Nash died in the farmhouse sometime on or shortly before October 8, from wounds suffered during the October 4, 1777 battle at Germantown.

A number of other soldiers and officers were also treated at the Gotwals farm during the same time.



General Nash succumbed to his wounds in the Gotwals farmhouse on October 7 or 8. He was laid to rest with full military honors in Godshall's burial yard on October 9, 1777, alongside three other fallen officers: Major White, Colonel Boyd, and Lieutenant Smith. General George Washington and his staff attended the burial services. The four Continental Army officers lie beneath a mighty granite monument next to local Mennonite graves marked by plain and simply etched rust colored fieldstones. The old burial yard used by Mennonites (whose theology and witness is dedicated to peace and non-resistance) has become a historical marker for the role it played in the Revolutionary War by having the Commander in Chief of the Continental Army preside over a military burial service honoring soldiers who died from wounds received on a nearby battlefield.

This would not be the only time a military honor burial for a fallen soldier would take place at the Towamencin Mennonite Cemetery. On December 16, 1944, PFC Herbert Landis Metz who grew up in the Mennonite congregation was killed in the Battle of the Bulge during World War II. Since the war for American independence, most Mennonite men of draft age chose to pay fines or seek alternate government service in lieu of participating in war, in order to follow their pacifist beliefs. However, a few Mennonite young men (prior to joining the church) chose military service. Herbert's cousin Dorothy Landis Haberle recounted the day when her cousin's remains were brought home and laid to rest on April 24, 1949. "After the funeral service in Skippack, Herb's flag-draped coffin was brought to the cemetery, and an honor guard performed a 21-gun salute. The line of uniformed men firing their rifles along the edge of the cemetery and the red, white and blue draped coffin against a sea of black plain-clothed Mennonites was such a site. Each time they fired their rifles the loud noise made us all flinch; it was such a sad time for everyone. We just wanted the shooting to stop."



The historic farmhouse along Fretz Road at the Skippack Creek in Lower Salford where General Pulaski and his officers billeted for a week in October 1777. At the time, Christian and Rosina Hoffman owned the farm.

During the latter part of the nineteenth into the twentieth century, the farm was known as the Derstine Farm.



A number of stories have passed down through time, sometimes with different versions from different sources, but they illustrate how residents from Towamencin and neighboring townships fared with the large number of soldiers camped in Towamencin, Skippack and Lower Salford during the Revolutionary War. One such story, as told by B. Whitman Dambly, nineteenth century historian from Montgomery County, is about the Jan Jansen (John Johnson) family, Pennsylvania Germans who lived near the Skippack Creek in Towamencin Township. The Johnson farmhouse was used by a small group of Continental Officers as a field office and temporary hospital for a wagonload of soldiers. It was not uncommon for wounded soldiers to be cared for in private homes, churches or public buildings by Continental Army doctors or the residents of the farm. Nurses were often the wives of soldiers following their husbands during the war. The story tells us the Johnson family faithfully tended to the wounded soldiers for an extended time until they were well enough to return to the war or travel home. A fine dining table meant for the family, recently made by Jacob Hagey, instead served as a writing table for the officers to conduct the business of war.

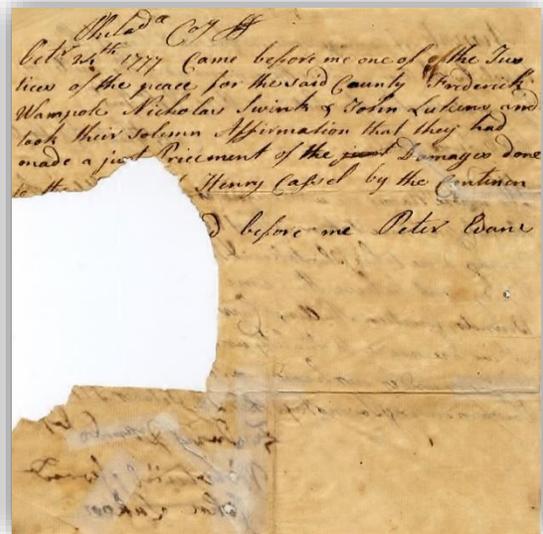
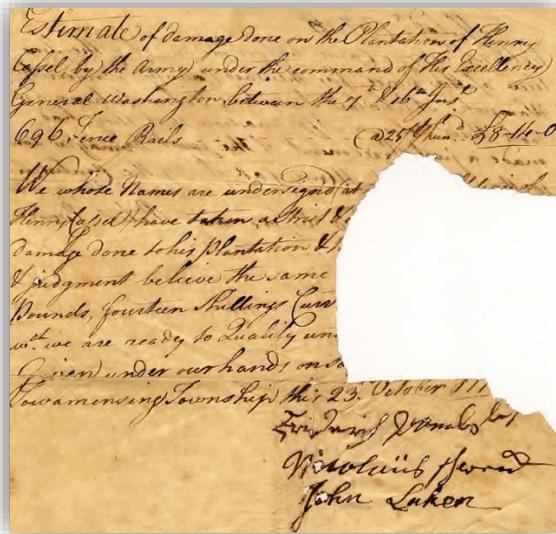
During the war, if your farm was along the path of the British or Continental Army, there was a great risk of having it plundered. Payment for the forcibly requisitioned items was not always made. Colonial families equally feared the British and the Continentals, as both armies took all they needed for the cause. In the latter part of September 1777, a large party of British soldiers moving towards Philadelphia along the Perkiomen Creek near Skippack pillaged Mathias Pennypacker's mill, taking most of his belongings. Neighbor and relative to Mathias, Samuel Pennypacker's farm was pillaged a week later by the Continental Army on its route to Schwenksville. So that future family members would know what had transpired, he wrote a note in his family Bible. "On the 26th day of September, 1777, an army of 30,000 [the actual number was far less] men encamped in Skippack Township, burned all the fences, carried away all the fodder, hay, oats, and wheat and took their departure... Written for those who come after me."

The Henry Rosenberger and John Swartley families, Franconia Mennonites, were about to sit down with family and guests at a wedding feast when, surprisingly, a hungry band of foraging Continental soldiers stopped by looking for food. The family, knowing nothing could be done to stop them, instead invited them to stay for the wedding and enjoy the food. When the soldiers were finished eating, they were so grateful, they departed without requisitioning additional farm and food supplies from the family.

Nearby in Gwynedd Township, a few homes were broken into. Personal items and cattle were stolen by Continental troops before army officers could put a stop to it. General Washington made note of his regrets for the criminal behavior by his enlisted troops on a number of occasions but claimed it was almost impossible to control. In Whitmarsh and Germantown, some farmer's homes and barnyards were emptied of everything by foraging Hessians soldiers working for the British Army. British General Howe once wrote a letter to General Washington expressing his disappointment with the Continental army's ungentlemanly behavior because of all the mills, farms, and homes they plundered in Pennsylvania. General Washington immediately wrote back to General Howe and reminded him of his soldier's gross misconduct on many occasions as well. In the end, General Washington proved to be a gentleman. Continental soldiers found a lost dog with a collar confirming that it belonged to British General Howe. General Washington wrote to General Howe and asked to set up a meeting place so his soldiers could return the dog to its rightful owner.

During the war, Continental and British armies often commandeered horses and wagons. Historians claim that in 1777 nearly 400 horse and wagon teams were commandeered in the Philadelphia area for the use of the Continental Army. Family history records show that locally a team of fine horses and a new wagon shared by pacifist Schwenkfelders George Anders and Abraham Kriebel was commandeered by the Continental Army for military service. Fearing their team of horses and wagon would not be properly cared for, Mr. Anders sent his teenage son Abraham along with them as the wagon driver to assure the horses were well fed and the wagon maintained. At one point, Abraham attempted to escape, but he was exonerated by the army after claiming he had simply lost his way. Eventually, Abraham with his horses and wagon unscathed, were permitted to return home.

Thankfully, there are no accounts of brutalities by the Continentals as they camped in Towamencin. Farmers in the region, hearing about earlier accounts of soldier's ungentlemanly behavior, reportedly kept their daughters and wives inside their houses as much as possible so no trouble would develop. Henry Cassel, Mennonite farmer from Towamencin Township, filed a claim against the Continental Army for 696 fence rails taken by soldiers for firewood during their stay in Towamencin. Towamencin Township officials John Luken, Frederick Wambold and Nicholas Swink (Schwenk), assessed Henry Cassel's financial loss at 8 pounds, 14 shillings. Much of the area farmers' stores of grain, corn, hay and other agricultural products were requisitioned to feed the army and their horses. It has been said a large number of chickens and other barnyard animals went missing that week. They somehow lost their way and ended up in soldier's campfires becoming a tasty and much needed hot meal. Undoubtedly, there are dozens of lost tales of uncertainty, fear and sacrifice by the Wambold's, the Lukens', and other Towamencin, Lower Salford, Skippack and Gwynedd Township farm families sharing their fields and provisions with the Continental Army for those nine autumn days in October 1777.



Front (left) and rear (right) views of the damaged October 23, 1777 document which Towamencin Township Supervisors John Luken, Nicholas Swink and Frederick Wambold presented to Peter Evans Esq., attesting to the cost of damages suffered by Henry Cassel when Continental Soldiers took the fence rails from his farm for their campfires. The next day, Peter Evans Esq. attested to the validity of the claim. (John F. Reed Collection, Valley Forge National Historic Park)

In the latter half of September 1777, prior to the Continental Army's march into Towamencin Township, General Washington was moving large portions of the Continental Army north of Philadelphia through our area. Records show part of the army was in the Trappe and Evansburg area for several days. Soldiers then moved to Camp Pottsgrove, at the present-day Bella Vista Golf Course on Fagleysville Road near Frederick. Washington's headquarters were nearby in the William Antes home, located on present-day Colonial Road. Later a large part of the army moved to Pennypacker Mills, near the Perkiomen Creek in Schwenksville. Shortly thereafter, troops marched into Skippack Township. On September 29, Washington made his Skippack Township headquarters at the Joseph Smith house near the Skippack Road. On October 2, he moved his headquarters and the army to the Mathias Wentz farmstead in Worcester. They remained there until after the early morning battle of Germantown on October 4, 1777. His headquarters were again briefly in Schwenksville before he ordered the bulk of the Continental Army to march in the direction of Towamencin Township on the morning of October 8. It was in Towamencin, after two dreadful battles in September, troop movements in the region and a major battle in Germantown just four days earlier, that the army was finally able to find a weeklong respite from the revolution.



The William Antes home on Colonial Road in Upper Frederick Township, Montgomery County, was Washington's headquarters September 23-26, 1777. Today the Goschenhoppen Historians maintain the property.



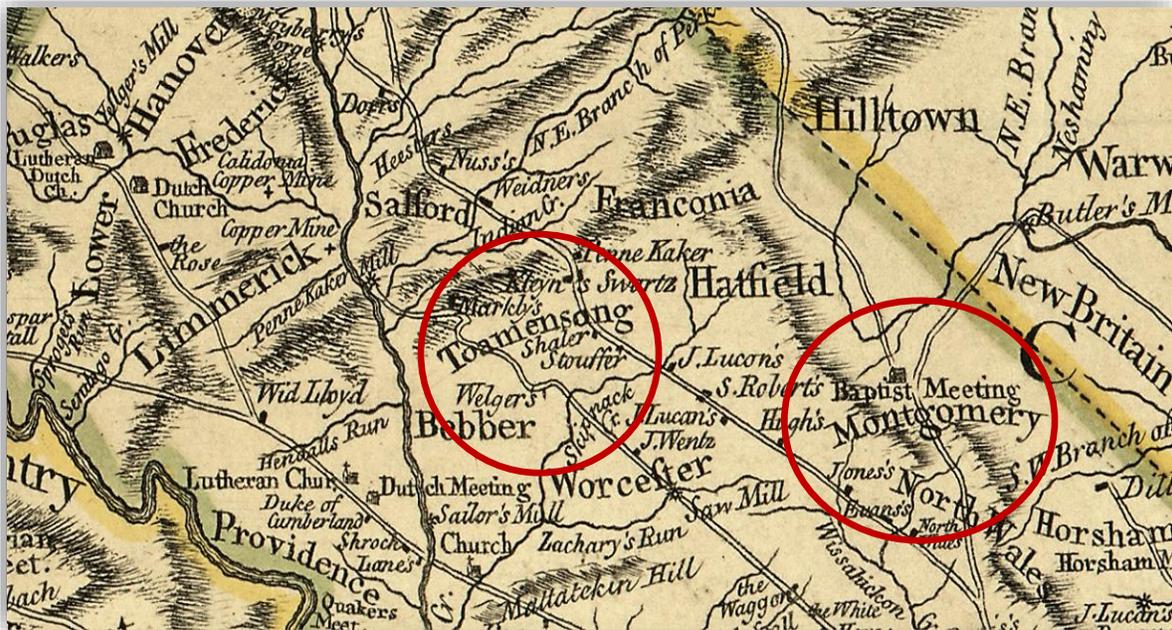
A thorough examination of General Washington's personal account books, his correspondence with the Continental Congress, officers in the field, Continental Army ledgers, general orders, General Muhlenberg's orderly books, and his officers' firsthand accounts reveal how General Washington conducted the business of war each day from the Frederick Wambold farmhouse at "Headquarters Towamensing" as was penned in official Continental Army records.

Wednesday October 8, 1777

This morning General Washington sent a courier dispatch from his temporary headquarters along the Perkiomen Creek at Pawling's mill (Pennypacker Mills) in Schwenksville to Brigadier General Varnum. Much of the army was spread throughout Whitpain, Skippack, Evansburg and Schwenksville. The dispatch read "The army here marches this morning [the march was to begin at eight o'clock in the morning] from hence to the Baptist meeting house in Montgomery Township." General Varnum's brigade in New Jersey was ordered to meet him there. The Baptist meetinghouse built in 1721 was along the Bethlehem Road near present-day Richardson Road in Montgomery Township, on the site of the present-day Montgomery Baptist church. The Baptist meetinghouse is shown on William Scull's 1759 and 1770 Pennsylvania maps. Nineteenth century historian William Spohn Baker believed General Washington mistakenly meant the Mennonite Meetinghouse in Towamencin Township instead of the Baptist Meetinghouse in Montgomery Township (Mennonites were often referred to as Baptists) since the march ended in Towamencin. Many historians simply followed his conclusion. However, records seem to point to the fact that the Towamencin Mennonite Meetinghouse was not present in 1777. The meetinghouse is not shown on the 1752 Christian Lehman survey map of the Skippack Creek area along the Sumneytown Pike in Towamencin, nor is it shown on Jacob Broom's 1777 Continental Army map (see page 9 and 10). Additionally, the Towamencin Mennonite meetinghouse is not referenced in any eighteenth century civilian or military accounts.

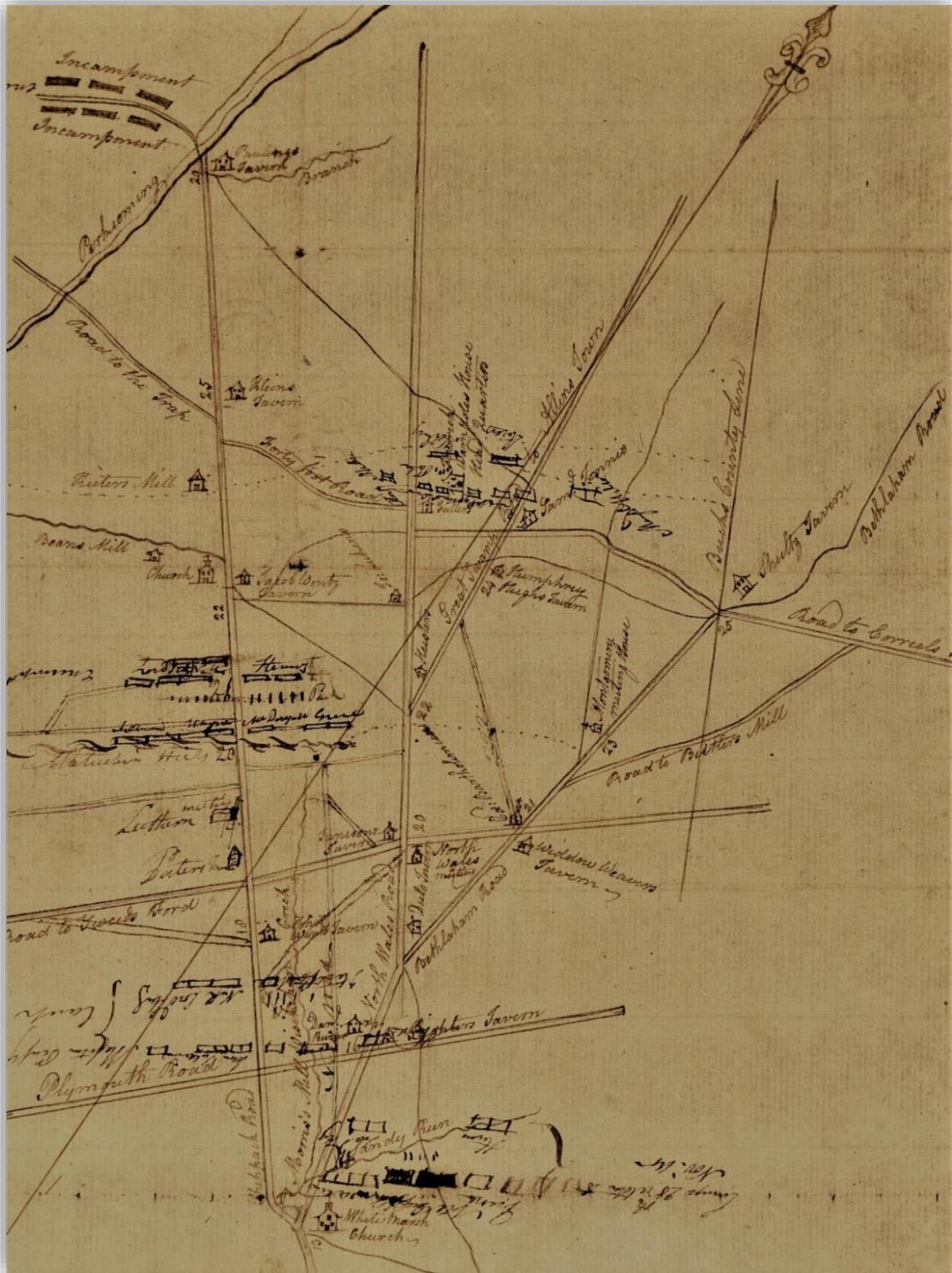
On October 8, the weather was unusually cool and the creeks were high from recent rains. Some soldiers had difficulty marching, and men with wagons were assigned to stay behind to pick up stragglers along the way. General Washington halted the Continental Army's march in Towamencin. This evening it was cold and damp and the first soldiers to arrive were unable to sleep comfortably under the stars. Some huddled together in crowded barns and farmhouses, others in and underneath supply wagons until more tents arrived the next day.

One of several general orders issued was "The commanding officers of corps are immediately to select the most suitable of their men, and set them to making mockasins [*sic*] for their corps. The Commissaries are to order the skins of the heads and legs of bullocks to be taken off and applied to that use so far as they will go. The Commissaries also are to issue the raw hides for the purpose, upon the returns of the officers commanding corps." On a number of occasions, General Washington penned orders or lamented to congress regarding a lack of proper footwear and other needed supplies and money for the Continental Army. Could the cool and wet conditions coupled with a lack of adequate footwear be why the march ended prematurely in Towamencin?



William Scull's 1770 fine map of Pennsylvania. Circled are Towamencin Township (center) where Washington halted the march sometime on October 8, 1777, and (right) five miles to the east, the Baptist Meetinghouse in Montgomery Township, the original destination. In 1778, The Continental Army sought to buy 30 more copies of Scull's trusted 1770 map or, if unavailable, the printing plate so the army could print their own copies. (U.S. Library of Congress)





1777 hand drawn map from Schwenksville to Whitemarsh by Jacob Broom, Continental Army cartographer showing Continental Army encampments from late September to mid-December 1777. Towamencin Township (center of the map) is where General Washington's headquarters was located at the Frederick Wampole house October 8-16, 1777. (Reproduced with permission from the Historical Society of Pennsylvania)



The 1777 Jacob Broom map enlarged to show the Towamencin area. In addition to Frederick Wampole's farmhouse (Washington's headquarters), the map shows the Samuel Tennis, and Benjamin Fuller farmhouses in Towamencin Township as well as Joseph Lukens' home and inn along the Sumneytown Pike. Also seen are the Klein (Harleysville), Jacob Wentz (Worcester), and Humphrey Hughes (Upper Gwynedd) Taverns, as well as Bean's and Hiester's (Skippack area) Mills. (Reproduced with permission from the Historical Society of Pennsylvania)

October 8, 1777 continued: First Lieutenant James McMichael of the 13th Pennsylvania Regiment wrote in his journal about today's march: "8th. At 8 o'clock A. M. we march'd from Camp on the W. bank of Perkyomen and Steering S. E. we pass'd Pennybeckers Mill and proceeded some Distance on the Skippack road then turning N. N. E. we Cross'd the N. Wales road, [Sumneytown Pike] and proceeded to the road leading from Philad. to Bethlehem [Allentown Road] on Which we Encamp'd 26 miles from Philada. in the Township of Towamensing where we remained for some Days but our Common occurrences were not worthy of record"



Left, a Towamencin mile marker along the Allentown Road stating 26 miles to Philadelphia. Right, Fredrick Wampole's 1755 barn (razed in 1979) on the farm where General George Washington established his headquarters in Towamencin Township, October 1777. The eighteenth-century part of the barn is to the rear. The historic Wampole farmhouse was located in the foreground to the right out just out of the photograph. (Private collection)

Thursday October 9, 1777

It was raining in the region today. General orders were "A general court martial with Col. Brodhead in charge is to convene tomorrow morning at eight o'clock. Everyone is to meet on time at the horseman's tent next to the artillery park". "Brigadier General Nash will be interred, at ten o'clock this forenoon, with military honours, at the place where the road the troops marched in, yesterday comes into the great road." We know that to be the cemetery along present-day Sumneytown Pike where the Towamencin Mennonite Church is located today. In describing where the burial was to take place, General Washington did not write at the meetinghouse, or Baptist meeting, he simply wrote "at the place". Some historians have written that the Towamencin meetinghouse was used as a military hospital, but there are no contemporary accounts from the Continental Army or civilian records to substantiate the claim. Jacob Broom Continental Army cartographer, in his 1777 map shows houses, taverns, churches, mills, and roads in and around Towamencin where the Continental Army camped, but the map does not show a meetinghouse in Towamencin.

Camp supplies were inventoried and the numbers of soldiers missing, sick and wounded at the battle of Germantown were to be accounted for. Soldiers began practicing priming and loading of their muskets. Tents were distributed to waiting officers and soldiers. General Washington issued an order of execution, "The execution of John Farndon is to be postponed till tomorrow morning." Lastly, General Washington wrote to the Continental Congress temporarily assembled in York, with the safety of the wide Susquehanna River between them and the British occupying Philadelphia, expressing his concerns about the shortage of money and needed stores for the army. The cool autumn weather continued.

Friday October 10, 1777

There were clear skies and it was unseasonably cool in the region today. At noon, convicted deserter Private John Farndon was put to death by hanging at the artillery park. According to oral history passed down to Kulpsville resident John Cassel Boorse Esq. from his grandfather, the site of the execution was near the Skippack Creek a quarter mile upstream from the Sumneytown Pike. That may be the case, as artillery parks were often located near the center of an encampment for ease of maintenance, the best protection and for the quickest dispatch of cannons to any front. The execution was delayed until noon today because of yesterday's funeral for General Nash and three other officers. General Washington was present at today's execution. His orders called for 60 soldiers from each brigade to be present at the execution. There were estimated to have been as many as 13 to 16 brigades in Towamencin. Local folklore claims the soldiers were there to form a barrier around the deserter, so Towamencin youth gathered to witness the act would be shielded from witnessing his hanging. More likely General Washington had so many soldiers present so that the word would spread quickly through the camp clearly showing the deadly result of desertion.

General Washington cautions his officers in one of his general orders today. "It is not for every officer, to know the principles upon which every order issued and to judge how far they may or may not be dispersed with or suspended, but there [*sic*] duty to carry them into execution with the upmost punctuality and exactness they are to consider that military movements are like the working of a clock and will go equally regular and easy if every officer does his duty. But without it be as easily disordered; because neglect in any one part like the stoping [*sic*] of a wheel disorders

the whole. The Genl. expects therefore that every officer will duly consider [*sic*] the importance of this observation; there [*sic*] own reputation and the duty they owe their country claims it of them; and he earnestly calls upon them to do it."

General Washington also directed that "Arms shall be put in the best order without Loss of time ammunition completed and every thing in readiness against a sudden call if such should be made upon us Those who want arms are to be supplied Immediately by and from the Adj. Gen. but at the foot of each Return an account is to be Rendered how the Deficiency arose."

Sometime today, General Washington wrote to Congress with his concerns on finding a suitable place for the Continental Army to spend the winter. Unfortunately, winter quarters finally chosen would prove to be far less than suitable for many soldiers.

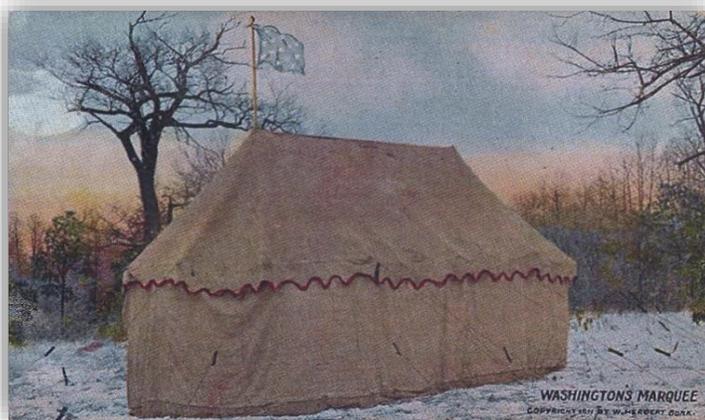
Saturday October 11, 1777

A court martial was ordered against General Anthony Wayne, native of Paoli, Pennsylvania, at the request of General Wayne himself, regarding his alleged poor leadership and conduct on September 20 at the Battle of Paoli. General Wayne wanted his name cleared of all charges. The General's wishes eventually came true, as he was acquitted of all charges at the conclusion of his court martial trial in Whitpain Township on November 2, 1777.

One of General Washington's marquees; where he sometimes slept and often met with his staff to conduct the business of war.

The general's slave valet William Lee often used the tent for his lodging.

The large 24-foot-long marquee (tent) is on permanent display at The Museum of the American Revolution, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. (Museum of the American Revolution)

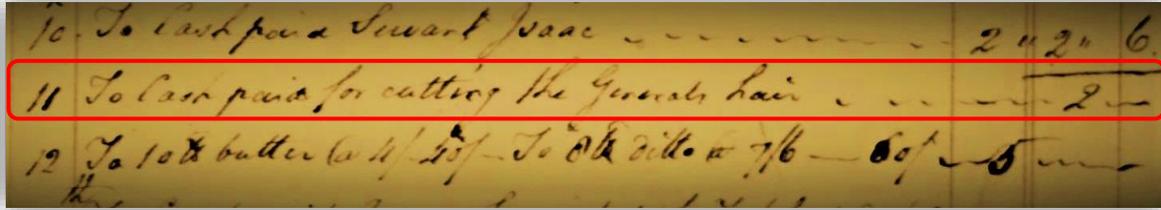


The General suggested cutting riverbanks along the Schuylkill River in an effort to flood fields hampering movement of the occupying British army. General Washington wrote to Congress again with concerns on a serious lack of money, shoes and clothing for his men.

General Washington commanded to all personnel in Towamencin, "All firing of guns is absolutely forbidden without licence [*sic*] first obtained from the Major General of the day and the instant a gun is fired, a serjeant [*sic*] and file of men shall be sent, to catch the villain, who is thus wasting ammunition, and alarming the camp. All officers are strictly required to see this order put in execution."

Over the years, locals have searched for musket balls fired into creek banks by soldiers practicing their shooting skills or shooting game before being ordered to stop unnecessary firing of their weapons. A number of times farmers have plowed up military artifacts while tilling their fields.

In 2006, a local man unearthed a cannonball in a field near the Wambold farm. Lower Salford farmer Samuel Kriebel has a musket ball found by his father in their field along Fretz Road where General Pulaski's troops were camped.



An entry in General Washington's personal account book for October 11, shows he paid 2 shillings for a haircut. (U.S. Library of Congress)

Sunday October 12, 1777

Resulting from a general court martial on October 3, 1777, Ensign Ford of the 4th Virginia Regiment was found guilty and sentenced today. The record reads, "Ensign Ford of cowardice also getting drunk in the morning and behaving in an un gentlemanlike manner, found guilty of the charge brought agt. him and sentenced to be discharged from the service."

Washington wrote, "Every day weather permitting, soldiers are to practice in essential exercises, particularly in priming, loading, forming, advancing, retreating, breaking and rallying. Nothing is to be spared to improve the soldiers in these points."

One of General Washington's orders today was "For the better security of the ammunition, each brigade Quarter Master is early tomorrow morning, to go with ten ax men and five other men of his brigade, and collect with the utmost care and dispatch, all the horns [cattle horns were made into powder horns] they can find at this and upon return, report the number he shall have collected."

A decorated powder horn from Upper Salford dated 1767 with initials J H is like the horns Continental soldiers procured from the surrounding Towamencin area on October 12, 1777.

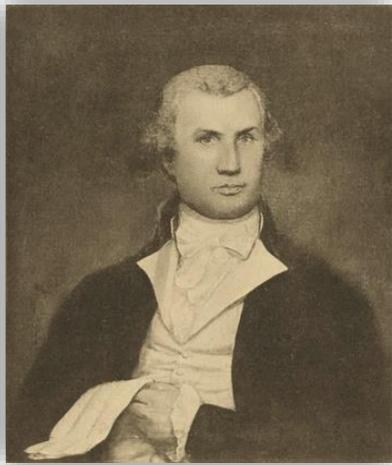
A wooden stopper held on tight with a piece of linen cloth kept the powder clean and dry until needed for firing a musket. (Donald A. Hepler)



Records are inconclusive, making it difficult to confirm if the Towamencin Militia, First Battalion, Sixth Company of Philadelphia County under the command (from 1777-79) of Towamencin resident Captain Benjamin Weaver, also spelled Weber, trained with the Continental Army while they were camped in Towamencin; but presumably, some of the men did. The Towamencin Militia

was a civilian basic training unit, not an active duty unit. When called to active duty militiamen were often drafted into new units. Philadelphia County militia groups that saw active service during the Philadelphia campaign were usually assigned to rear guard and escort duties. The Militia from Towamencin is reported to have supported the Continental soldiers from a rear position at the battle of Germantown; hence, they did not see as much action as the frontline soldiers. Daniel Springer of Towamencin was the Towamencin Militia Lieutenant in 1777. Lieutenant Springer was promoted to Captain in 1780. He was given command of the unit, which by this time was Philadelphia County's First Militia Company Fifth Battalion.

Colonel Daniel Hiester of Sumneytown, whose beautifully restored manor house still stands above the Unami Creek overlooking Sumneytown, was the battalion commander for the part of Philadelphia County that included Franconia, Salford, Skippack and Towamencin townships. Not surprisingly, over half of the Towamencin militia members were Non-Associators, made up of pacifist Mennonites, Brethren, Schwenkfelders and Quakers. The case was the same with neighboring militias from Franconia, Salford, and Skippack.



Non-Associators did not march or train with the militia, but instead paid a fine of five shillings per day when the local militia was on duty or training. As it turns out, so many local men did not serve, it caused local militia numbers to be noticeably small by military authorities. However, county coffers were filled as the result of so many fines paid.

Colonel Daniel Hiester (1747-1804) of Sumneytown, Pa. His colonial two-story brick home still stands recently restored along the Sumneytown Pike just south of the Unami Creek.
(New York Public Library. Artist unknown)

Monday October 13, 1777

Although orders were given recently to have 40 rounds of cartridges per soldier distributed, General Washington clarified his orders today, explaining that he meant cartridges should only be distributed enough to fill up each soldier's cartridge box and tin-canister. "All above that number are to be collected immediately and deposited in a good covered waggon of the brigade or division, no delay is to be made in this matter, lest the cartridges be spoiled or lost." General Washington's last order of the day was "Any blankets, shoes and breeches still in the clothiers' hands are to be distributed tomorrow without further delay."

General Washington wrote to the President of the Continental Congress sometime today, advising him on a number of important issues, one of them regarding the urgency for more general supplies for the army. "It gives me pain to repeat so often... For it is impossible, that any Army so unprovided can long subsist, or act with that vigor which is requisite to ensure success."

Tuesday October 14, 1777

A list of wounded soldiers arrived today from a military hospital in Reading, Berks County, via a military courier. The hospital was actually several commandeered churches, a Quaker meetinghouse, and the courthouse. Doctors wanted blankets and other personal items belonging to the wounded soldiers taken back to Reading. Officers in Towamencin ordered a search for all the wounded soldiers' personal belongings in Towamencin so they could be assembled at the Quarter Master General's quarters for transport by wagon to Reading as soon possible.

Wednesday October 15, 1777

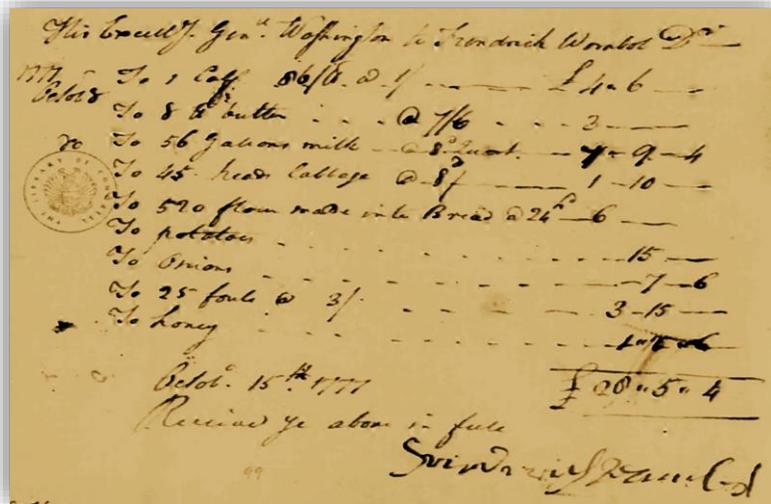
General Washington received word today via a military courier that on October 7, in New York, General Gates and his Continental soldiers in the course of an ongoing battle seized 330 tents and eight brass cannons from the British forces under the command of General Burgoyne. In celebration, General Washington ordered 13 cannons at the Towamencin artillery park to be fired at five o'clock. Ten days later, General Burgoyne surrendered his forces to the Continentals at Saratoga, New York.

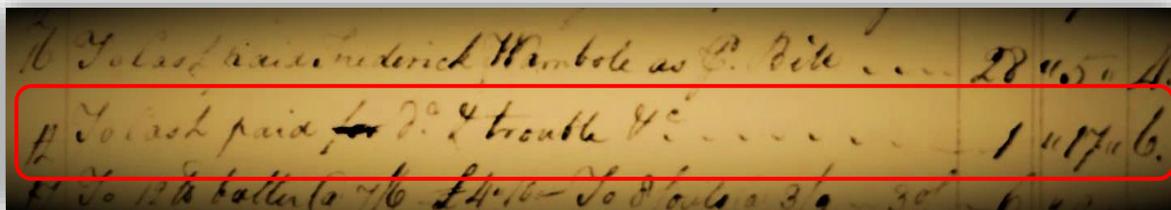
Colonel Daniel Morgan (1736-1802) and his 400 sharp shooters played an important role in the Continental Army's major victory to the north in Saratoga. Colonel Morgan's men went on to play other important roles in a number of victories for the Continental Army during the war. Records seem to point to the fact that Daniel was born in Bucks County, and his parents moved to Hunterdon County, New Jersey, while he was a young boy. When a teenager, he ran away from home to Virginia, where he eventually joined the army. Although Daniel Morgan's ancestors emigrated from Wales, as did the Edward Morgan family of Towamencin, and probably share the same Welsh Quaker ancestors, genealogical records to confirm how they are related are inconclusive.

An itemized receipt from the Continental Army signed by Frederick Wambold shows he was paid 28 pounds, 5 shillings and 4 pence on October 15, 1777 for a calf, eight pounds of butter, 56 gallons of milk, 45 heads of cabbage and 520 pounds of flour (flour was often sold by the barrel and one barrel of flour weighed 196 pounds, so this would have been about two and one half barrels), 25 fowl, potatoes, onions and honey.

An itemized receipt dated October 15, 1777, signed by Frederick Wambold of Towamencin. The eighteenth century Wambold farmhouse was located behind the present-day Medcomp building on Detwiler Road at Delp Drive.

The Wambold farm was adjacent to the Lukens farm, today Dock Mennonite Academy. (U.S. Library of Congress)





General Washington's personal account book also shows Frederick Wampole was paid an additional 1 pound 17 shillings and 6 pence for the inconvenience of his house used as military headquarters. (U.S. Library of Congress)

One of many orders issued today October 15, by General Washington, were the army was to march out of Towamencin tomorrow morning at seven o'clock.

Thursday October 16, 1777

This morning, the army marched from Towamencin towards Peter Wentz's farm in Worcester and several days later to Whitpain and Whitmarsh Townships. Life in Towamencin Township would eventually return to normal, but memories of 11,000 soldiers camped on Towamencin fields would remain on the minds of the residents for the rest of their lives, and in historical records forever.

First Lieutenant James McMichael of the 13th Pennsylvania Regiment account of today's exit march: "Octr. 16 At 7 oClock A.M. we marched from Towamensing & Steering S. E. B. S. we proceeded to the intersection of the roads to N. Wales and Bethlehem [Springhouse, Pa.], then turning S. S. W. we proceeded to our former Encampment near the Methodist meetinghouse, adjacent to which we formed an Encampment."

The unit's encampment was formed at the Bethel Hill Methodist Church along the Skippack Pike at Bethel Road. The eighteenth-century Methodist meetinghouse was located next to where the earliest graves are seen in the historic cemetery today.

Friday December 19, 1777

The Continental Army, having camped for several weeks in Whitmarsh and a few days in Swedes' Ford and nearly a week in Gulph Mills, finally marched a few miles west to the fields and forests along the Schuylkill River where they prepared earthen barriers as a defense against the British Army in the event of an attack. General Washington made his headquarters in the Isaac Potts house along the Valley Creek near the Schuylkill River, where three months earlier the British Army had destroyed an iron-producing forge. The Continental Army quickly built log huts to shield themselves from the winter at the place we reverently call Valley Forge. The British Army spent the winter comfortably billeted eighteen miles downriver in Philadelphia.

Saturday December 20, 1777

Once again, Towamencin residents were directly affected by the war. General Washington's ongoing plan was to disrupt food and other supplies from getting into Philadelphia in an effort to make life miserable for the British occupying forces. Orders were given to farmers and market men in Towamencin and other townships surrounding Philadelphia, not to sell flour and other supplies in the Philadelphia market while the British Army was billeted in the city. Anyone caught

taking items to Philadelphia risked fines or seizure of their produce, and horse and wagon. At the same time, the Continental Army had its own insatiable need for flour and other food supplies that too often fell short of daily requirements. The Continental Army welcomed area farmers and market men to bring their grain, animals for slaughter, and produce to the Valley Forge commissary located across the Schuylkill River from the Continental Army encampment to sell. However, many locals were afraid to sell their products at Valley Forge fearing their horses or wagons would be confiscated for the cause of the war, or they would be paid in the depreciating continental currency instead of colonial pound notes or other more desirable and stable European coins. Many citizens felt this war was not theirs and ignored the Continental Army's orders. Some local farmers continued to take produce to Philadelphia to sell on their usual market routes. They were fined when caught, or their market items were confiscated. On a few occasions, they were jailed, suspected of being Tory spies.

In an effort to ensure the Continental Army's food and supply needs were met, General Washington ordered a proclamation from his headquarters in Valley Forge to all farmers in the region including Towamencin Township. "By virtue of the power and direction to me especially given, I hereby enjoin and require all persons residing within Seventy miles of my Head Quarters to thresh one half of their grain by the first day of February and the other half by the first day of March next ensuing, on pain in case of failure of having All that shall remain in Sheaves, after the periods above mentioned, seized by the Commissaries and Quarter Masters of the Army and paid for as Straw."

Records show the Continental Army consumed nearly 180 barrels of flour a day during the war to feed the hungry army. There were other occasions in 1778 when General Washington issued similar proclamations to area farmers and market men while the British occupied Philadelphia.

No account of the Revolutionary War is complete without mention of the Liberty Bell, or the "State House Bell" as it was called until the first part of the nineteenth century. There is plenty of folklore and mystery associated with the iconic bell and its clandestine journey out of Philadelphia. Some villages and taverns along the route, eager to be part of the historic event, bolstered with snippets of anecdotal evidence, claim the Continental Army wagon train carrying the State House and other bells enroute to the Lehigh Valley stopped by the tavern in their village. Here Continental soldiers supposedly took an afternoon break or spent the evening drinking the local brew by candlelight.

The exact route cannot be confirmed, but some historians believe the wagon train travelled up the Old York Road out of Philadelphia towards Branchtown, a part of Germantown today. From there the wagon train travelled via the Limekiln Road to Welsh Road, ending up on the Bethlehem Road just south of Montgomeryville on its route to the Lehigh Valley. Most historians believe the wagon train carrying the State House Bell first stopped at the Branchtown Inn near Germantown for rest, then at Sellers Tavern, present-day Sellersville, and later the Great Swamp, which is present-day Quakertown. Quakertown is the only documented wagon stop, but the journey took several days, therefore the wagon train stopped at other undocumented locations on its clandestine journey.

In September 1777, there were upwards of 700 wagons and carts leaving Philadelphia ahead of the arrival of General Howe and the British forces. Congress warned city inhabitants that their safety and wellbeing would be in jeopardy with the brutal British aggressors soon to arrive. Those who

feared the British, or were known believers in the cause of independence, quickly left town. British sympathizers, known as Tories, stayed in Philadelphia and welcomed the British Army's arrival. Among the hundreds of fleeing market wagons were some secretly carrying a number of bronze city bells hidden beneath straw and other nondescript supplies, so Tory spies would not take notice. Had the bells been left in Philadelphia, they would have been seized by the British army and melted down for cannons and other military use. The bell atop the State House, one of the largest, was taken out of the city among other cargo-laden wagons via a military escort.

In Bethlehem, hundreds of other wagons carrying military stores of all kinds from various points in New Jersey and New York arrived around the same time as the wagons carrying bells from Philadelphia. Because of a wagon breakdown, the State House Bell was instead hidden four miles west in Northampton town, present-day Allentown. The army decided to leave the bell there, as it was less of a target than in military-supply-rich Bethlehem. The final destination for the 2,080-pound bell was the Zion Reformed Church on Hamilton Street where it remained hidden until the end of June 1778.

Although Towamencin Township was likely not on the direct path of the State House Bell's historic journey, we do know abolitionists circa 1840 were the first to term the State House Bell the "Liberty Bell". In that regard, there is a Towamencin connection to the Liberty Bell through the cause of abolitionists like Towamencin residents George Lukens and his son Seth.



Left: An 1898 cabinet card of the Liberty Bell at the old State House, we now know as Independence Hall, during extensive restoration of the already 166-year-old iconic building. (Samuel Reeves, Superintendent, Independence Hall)

Right: The Patriotic Order of the Sons of America Washington Camp #355 was organized in 1888. There were dozens of Towamencin area members.

