

**THE PENNSYLVANIA SOCIETY OF SONS OF THE  
REVOLUTION: OBSERVANCE OF THE ONE  
HUNDRED AND TWENTY-THIRD ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE EVACUATION OF PHILADELPHIA BY  
THE BRITISH ARMY. FORT WASHINGTON AND  
THE ENCAMPMENT OF WHITE MARSH,  
NOVEMBER 2, 1777**

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The Pennsylvania Society of Sons of the Revolution: observance of the one hundred and twenty-third anniversary of the evacuation of Philadelphia by the British Army. Fort Washington and the encampment of White Marsh, November 2, 1777 by Richard McCall Cadwalader

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**RICHARD MCCALL CADWALADER**

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The Pennsylvania Society of Sons of the Revolution.

Observance of the  
One Hundred and Twenty-third Anniversary  
of the Evacuation of Philadelphia by  
the British Army.

Fort Washington and the Encampment at White Marsh,  
November 2, 1777.

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE SOCIETY BY THE PRESIDENT,

RICHARD McCALL CADWALADER,

AT HIS RESIDENCE,  
"STONEEDGE," ON THE SKIPPACK PIKE,

JUNE 15, 1901.

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ADDRESS  
OF  
RICHARD McCALL CADWALADER,  
AT "STONEDGE,"

June 15, 1901.

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*Mr. Chairman and Fellow Members of the Pennsylvania Society of  
Sons of the Revolution :*

In accordance with our usual custom to commemorate some historic event, you have come to the scene of the encampment at White Marsh and Fort Washington. Let me remind you however that unlike other expeditions, you are on this occasion, on hallowed ground, literally surrounded by localities closely identified with the active events of the War of the Revolution.

Along here marched the militia, under General Potter to Militia Hill, and along this Skippack road, through these fields, the militia were supposed to be on guard at the time of the attempt to capture Lafayette at Barren Hill, just beyond the wood on the right. Directly in front is St. Thomas' Church, occupied by both armies, and where Gen. Wayne rallied the troops after the battle of Germantown.

In the rear is Edge Hill, the scene of a fierce fight at the time of Howe's threatened attack on Fort Washington. To the left is Fort Washington, where a part of the army encamped, defended by a redout that can still be seen. Behind, higher up, is Camp Hill where the main army was stationed. Lower down in the valley is George Emlen's house, Washington's headquarters. In the rear are the Limekiln Pike and York roads along which the troops marched. Further to the left is Hatboro, then known as "Crooked Billet," from the sign of a tavern, where some 800

British troops attacked Gen. Lacey sent out by General Washington while at Valley Forge, to stop marauding.

Then further along is the Bethlehem Pike, the road to Bethlehem and Easton, and near by the Three Tuns Tavern where Washington is said to have dined with his officers, on the march to Valley Forge. The descendants of the host to this day, celebrate the event by a dinner each year. Still further in the circle is the Foulke Mansion, made famous by Miss Sallie Wister's letters, relating that the young ladies were obliged to flirt with the officers of both armies; then the Drayton farm where some 10,000 men encamped at the time of the headquarters at the Morris house immediately adjoining. Here the court martial sat at the request of Gen. Wayne, and a council of war discussed an attack on Germantown. Continuing thus on, the Skippack Creek, Matson's Ford, Swedes Ford, Plymouth and Barren Hill, completing the circle.

It is therefore not only with pleasure, but with some pride that I welcome you to the White Marsh Valley. How it ever obtained that name was for a time seriously discussed. At first, White Marsh was called Farmerstown from Major Jasper Farmer, the first settler. Some say the name came from the white sand oozing from the ground. Rev. Mr. Millet, a former Rector of St. Thomas' Church, contended it was from a parish in England, but the parish has never been found, though the name appears in Virginia and North Carolina. Enthusiastic followers of Pastorius, who settled Germantown, claimed the name from "Whit mar sun" in Friesland, Holland.

It is finally settled that the name came from the wide marsh along the Wissahickon, which, as the local historians are fond of saying, developed into the beautiful name of "White Marsh." (In 1713 the Germans on the Skippack petitioned that a road be opened from Pennypacker's Mills to the wide marsh at Farmer's Mill.)

Among numerous others, there are two Fort Washingtons of importance; the one on the Hudson erected by Col. Rufus Putnam, just above New York, to command the river, guard the

stores at Peekskill and prevent reinforcements to Canada, and *this* fort almost in front, to the left of St. Thomas' Church.

I propose to make a brief address from Fort Washington on the Hudson to Fort Washington in the White Marsh Valley. The capture of Fort Washington on the Hudson was one of the worst blows of the whole War, and had the effect of changing the plans of both armies, resulting in the march to Philadelphia and the encampment at White Marsh. The campaign from the Hudson was one continuous campaign to Fort Washington here, ending with the retreat to Valley Forge. It also embraces the most critical period of Washington's military life, for he was never able to assert himself until the winter at Valley Forge. It is of special importance to us, because nearly all the troops were Pennsylvania regiments under Colonel Magaw. They were among the best in the service and well officered.

You will remember that soon after Washington took command at Cambridge, he hastened to the troops investing Howe at Boston after the battle at Bunker Hill. The Americans succeeded in fortifying Dorchester Heights, thus commanding the town. Howe evacuated Boston, and set sail for Halifax, as if to aid against Canada, but really to await reinforcements from his brother Admiral Howe.

Washington conceived that he would make for New York to attack the centre of men and supplies.

The American army withdrew to Long Island, and fortified the Heights of Brooklyn, to command New York. Howe returned, landing some 25,000 men at Staten Island. The Americans, 17,000 men, were outgeneraled and surrounded, although the fighting was fierce. In the midst of a dense fog, Washington withdrew his army, effecting a masterly retreat to New York, thence to White Plains where he awaited Howe's army, in a fortified camp.

There was some criticism against Washington for the battle of Long Island, but the Declaration of Independence had but a few days before been declared, and Howe's reinforcements from Europe were a surprise. Washington established himself at



White Plains, foiling Howe's attempt to get in his rear, fortified his position, expecting an attack. Howe followed. Military critics say that Howe could have destroyed the American army and should have attacked. Letters from officers confirm this: at least a hostile, well-disciplined army confronted the Americans who were depressed and discouraged. For some reason General Howe hesitated, probably hoping that he could still make terms, but it soon developed that he intended to take Fort Washington by assault.

Fort Washington with Fort Constitution on the opposite side, and Fort Lee further towards Peekskill, with various contrivances blocked the Hudson River. It was supposed that it was a very strong position. The Pennsylvania Regiments under Cadwalader, Magaw and parts of Miles and Atlee's battalions comprised nearly the entire garrison, and were stretched out some two miles. Magaw was in command. Howe's vessels succeeded in passing up the river. Washington saw it was hopeless to remain, as his experience in the French and Indian War in Virginia had taught the danger of a chain of Forts with a weak force; he protested but was unheeded with the fatal result. The same thing happened here; Congress insisted Fort Washington should be held. Washington had gone to West Point to arrange a fortified position there, intending to evacuate. Magaw was confident and Washington had yielded to Greene who was in command on the spot. Greene in the meantime had thrown in about 1,000 men, making the total about 3,000. By a vastly superior force, the Americans were driven from the field to the Fort. It was so small, and became so crowded they were unable to move and defend themselves; surrender followed. Lord Howe returned some 2,800 men and officers besides a great deal of artillery. There was no such loss during the War. The number of prisoners was so great that some were never exchanged.

Discovering a letter from Colonel Lambert Cadwalader, who commanded his Regiment in the Fort to Col. Timothy Pickering, I give you its substance:

TRENTON, May 1822.

*Dear Sir,*

I recd your letter of the 15th inst. and thank you for the information it contains.

It is now more than Forty five years since the Affair of Fort Washington, and though it can scarcely be expected I should be able, after so long an interval, to afford you a full Narrative of all the Incidents that occur'd on the Day of the Attack, yet I have it in my power, in some Measure, to satisfy your inquiries. I shall however avail myself, in performing this Task, and to save Trouble, of a statement of this Nature, wh I made in the year 1811, at the Request of a Friend of mine, formerly a Captain in the 3d Pennsylvania Battalion wh I commanded in the War of the Revolution, who was writing a book entitled "Memoirs of a Life chiefly passed in Pennsylvania within the last Sixty years," in which he mentions the Attack on Fort Washington, and our Posts, on the Island of New York.

My Statement commences on page 175 of that Work, and ends in page 180, with my Arrival at the Fort; exclusively of which I furnished not a single Sentence published in the Book. I however recommend to your notice, a Paragraph of the Author, in his Book pages 188, 189, in which he gives the following extract from Genl Washington's Letter to Congress.

"I sent a billet to Col. Magaw directing him to hold out, and I would endeavor in the Evening to bring off the Garrison, if the Fortress could not be maintained, as I did not expect it could, the Enemy being possessed of the adjacent Ground." When I arrived at the Fort, I found the British had succeeded, in their several Attacks, and were in possession of all the Ground, except that in which the Fort stood. That they should have been possessed of all the adjacent Ground with the Force they employed, could not well be wondered at, when it is known,

1st That the Post on the Rear of Mount Washington was attacked by 3000 Hessians, against Col Rawlin's single Regiment of Riflemen.

2d That the Post at the Point on Haarlem River, opposite to Fort Washington, was assailed by the British Guards & Light Infantry, and defended by a raw Regiment of Militia.

3d. That at Roger Morris's House not a Man was posted for Defence, and when Six or Seven Hundred Highlanders approached the Shore, the only opposition they encountered was by the Detachment of about 150 Men from the lower Line wh they could not well spare.

4th. That the attack on the lower Line, extending across the Island of New York, was by 1600 British Troops against 650 Men ; the Number of Men left after the Detachment of 150 Men was sent to Roger Morris's House.

The Lower Line required 3000 Men for an efficient Defence. The Assailants in the whole, were estimated at 7000, supported by the British Army.

The Fort and the extent of the Ground, including the Flanks on the Haarlem and North Rivers, required at least 8000 men. The Fort I always considered as an open Field Fort—constructed of earth, without Casemates or even Shelter—(the Cannon Iron six Pounders) without any qualification or Character, which could possibly be construed into a Fortress capable of standing a Siege, against a regular Army, furnished with Artillery.

Before I left the Fort, many weeks previous to the Attack, to take charge of the lower Line and the adjacent Ground, I had a Conversation with the commanding Officer on the Island, in which I most forcibly inculcated the necessity of instantly attending to the full Supply of Water, Ammunition and Provisions and everything requisite for the Defence of the Fort, and also proposed to him to form a Work which I conceived would be of great importance in flanking the Enemy should they attempt to ascend the Hill in Rear of Mount Washington—the Spot they actually selected for the Attack ; all of which he cordially approved.

General Washington's idea of the Incompetency of the Fort to make a serious Defence, is efficiently evinced in his Billet to