





The Ferryman

Fostering an awareness and appreciation for the history of Dobbs Ferry and all the people, noted and humble, who transmitted the good things of the past to the present and the future.

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A timeline of pivotal months in the Revolution, and a look back at previous commemorations.
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A map of the American-French encampment, July 6 to August 19, 1781.
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A look back at what Dobbs Ferry was like in 1781, when Washington made the pivotal decision to head south to Virginia.
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And what of the runaway slaves in Manhattan? They won freedom because a British general stood firm against Washington.
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Volume XXIX Issue No. 9 Fall 2020

Welcome to the Road to Freedom Issue of The Ferryman!

The world's turned upside down — to borrow some lyrics from “Hamilton” — and we must commemorate Road to Freedom differently this year. This special newsletter is one of the ways we will do this.

This year marks our 15th annual observance of an important date in Revolutionary War history, August 19, 1781. Boston has its Patriots’ Day, New York City has Evacuation Day, and — albeit on a more modest scale — Dobbs Ferry now has Road to Freedom Day. To find out why it’s worth observing, see “The Decision that Changed History” on page 2.

By establishing Road to Freedom Day, the Historical Society seeks to draw your attention to the historic significance of Dobbs Ferry as the starting point of Washington’s march to Virginia and the victory that won the war. Since 2006, in partnership with the Village of Dobbs Ferry, we have marked the event with fife and drum and other reenactors. We usually march over part of the route of the armies 239 years ago, followed by a public program on the grounds of Mead House. With the pandemic, we have cancelled such plans this year. Instead, we plan a virtual program of music and stories on October 18, supplemented by a do-it-yourself scavenger hunt to acquaint you with key local landmarks.



A recurring highlight of Road to Freedom has been the march led by fife and drum. In this scene from 2012 the fife and drum lead marchers carrying our period flags on the Old Croton Aqueduct.

This issue continues with short articles on two less-known happenings in Dobbs Ferry during Washington’s encampment. Next we profile three different reenactor groups that participated in past Road to Freedom events; each portrays a unit that was encamped here in 1781 and marched to Yorktown from Ashford Avenue and Broadway. One group was the First Rhode Island, a majority Black regiment under Lt. Col. Jeremiah Olney, a white commander. Their presence reminds us that African Americans did fight in the American Revolution or play other roles, voluntarily

or not. The centerfold reproduces the map drawn by a French officer showing the 1781 encampment that stretched from Dobbs Ferry east to White Plains. On page 6, Larry Blizzard looks at the area now known as Dobbs Ferry as it was in 1781. And on page 7, Jim Luckett offers a counterpoint to our Road to Freedom with details of another march to independence.

We hope you enjoy this special issue!

*Linda Borkow & Ellen Klein
 Chairs, Road to Freedom 2020*

The Decision That Changed History [1]

Adopting the Strategy That Would Win the War

During the summer of 1781 the allied armies of General George Washington and French General Rochambeau were encamped in our area looking for an opportunity to move against the British forces occupying Manhattan, but also considering the alternative of attacking the British army in Virginia. On August 14, Washington and Rochambeau received a letter from Admiral de Grasse, commander of the French fleet in the Caribbean, who told them he planned to sail to the Chesapeake Bay and suggested that if he were joined by Continental and French troops from Westchester, together they could surround and trap the army of British General Cornwallis in Virginia. Because of de Grasse's message, Washington and Rochambeau abandoned plans to attack the British in Manhattan and adopted instead the strategy that would win the war.

Ashford Avenue and Broadway, the Starting Point

On August 19, the allied armies began their 400-mile march to Virginia. Continental forces stationed at points in what is now Dobbs Ferry met up and assembled at the intersection of today's Ashford Avenue and Broadway with other Continental troops moving west from the areas of Ardsley and Hartsdale. Washington had kept his plans secret. The soldiers expected to head south on Broadway toward the British in Manhattan and were surprised at the order to turn north instead. They marched 20 miles to Kings Ferry (now Verplanck) to cross the Hudson where there would be less risk of interference from British warships. On the western side of the river they turned south toward Virginia.

Secrecy and Deception, a Vital Ploy

If General Sir Henry Clinton, commander of British forces in Manhattan, were to learn that

Washington's army was marching to Virginia rather than laying siege to New York, he could dispatch reinforcements to General Cornwallis, imperiling the allied armies. That is why only a few key officers were told the army's destination. Washington's elaborate efforts to deceive General Clinton into thinking that his true aim was to threaten British forces in New York included setting up bread ovens in Chatham, N.J. These would be needed if New York were to be put under prolonged siege.

Uncontested Independence

Exactly two months later, on October 19, 1781, an American and French siege of Yorktown, Virginia, culminated with the surrender of Cornwallis and the 7,500 British and Hessian troops under his command. The defeat of Cornwallis was decisive. It led to American victory in the Revolutionary War and to uncontested independence for the United States.

Col. Hamilton Jeopardizes Secrecy

Haverstraw Aug 22d. 81

...A part of the army My Dear girl is going to Virginia, and I must of necessity be separated at a much greater distance from my beloved wife. ... I cannot persuade myself to ask a favour at Head Quarters. I must go without seeing you. I must go without embracing you. Alas I must go.[2]

So writes Alexander Hamilton to his wife as the army is heading toward its destination in Virginia. This was a shockingly reckless treatment of Washington's efforts at deception of the

British since mail dispatches were sometimes intercepted, precisely to gain intelligence on the enemy. However, this indiscretion did not end with damage to the cause.

In fact, Hamilton distinguished himself by his actions at Yorktown. Washington decided during the Yorktown siege that British redoubts nine and ten must be overpowered by his troops using bayonets rather than by bombardment. There was always the possibility British ships and troops would arrive from New York to

extricate Cornwallis, so time was of the essence. Hamilton petitioned Washington by letter to be given the honor of leading the charge into redoubt ten, and his petition was accepted. He jumped onto the enemy parapet and his men followed. The operation was completed in less than ten minutes. With the taking of redoubt nine by the French, the bombardment could continue and soon led to Cornwallis's surrender. Because of his performance at Yorktown, Hamilton gained "legendary status," something very valuable for his political future.[3]

Andre's Preferred Meeting Place Was Dobbs Ferry

I hope [for] your indulgence in permitting me to meet a friend near your outposts. I will endeavor to obtain permission to go out with a flag, which will be sent to Dobbs's Ferry on Monday next, the 11th instant [September 11, 1780]. At twelve o'clock... Let me entreat you sir, to favor a matter so interesting to the parties concerned, and which is of so private a nature that the public on neither side can be injured by it. [4]

So wrote a Mr. John Anderson to American Col. Elisha Sheldon, who had authority over the southernmost guardpost of American lines at Dobbs Ferry.

"Mr. Anderson" was the assumed name of Major John Andre, Adjutant-General to

the British Army under Sir Henry Clinton, British commander of His Majesty's forces, who was seeking a rendezvous with American General Benedict Arnold to make plans for the turnover to His Majesty's government of West Point, a key American stronghold.

Did Col. Sheldon acquiesce to this request? Yes, because he received a letter from Arnold asking him to admit a Mr. Anderson.

Both Andre and Arnold, while eager to have a meeting to discuss the turnover of West Point and terms of Arnold's defection, were apprehensive about exposing and endangering themselves. Thus Andre tried to

arrange for the meeting under a flag of truce, although clearly misrepresenting the nature of the business that would be transacted. Arnold traveled downriver by barge for the meeting in Dobbs Ferry, but his barge was fired on and almost sunk by British gunboats on the Hudson. Sir Henry Clinton had failed to notify the commanders of the boats to allow this passage, so Arnold was forced to retreat to the western shore of the Hudson, could not make contact with Andre, and returned to West Point. The next effort at a meeting would not take place under a flag of truce. It would result in the discovery of the treasonous plot, the escape of Arnold, the capture of Andre in Tarrytown and the hanging of Andre in Tappan. [5]

Military Units of the Past Join Road to Freedom Day Commemorations



Sheldon's Horse reenactors join the 2009 "Return To The Hudson" Quadricentennial at Waterfront Park, which incorporated the Road to Freedom Walk.



First Rhode Island reenactors took part in the 2014 Road to Freedom Day events, which included their serving as an honor guard at Little White Church Cemetery.



A member of Lamb's Artillery reenactors explains how a cannon is shot and maintained on the lawn of the Mead House at Road to Freedom 2010.

Sheldon's Horse, Known as "Washington's Eyes"

Sheldon's Horse, more formally known as Sheldon's light dragoons, originated as part of the Connecticut militia and was reorganized by Washington into the Second Continental Light Dragoons under Col. Elisha Sheldon. [6]

The tasks assigned to Sheldon's Horse were diverse. They included recruiting and training; patrolling and intelligence gathering; messenger service; guarding supplies, commissaries and supply routes; flanking, screening and skirmishing; combat and ambushes; espionage; guarding Washington, and serving on his staff. [6] Sixteen of the dragoons served with Major Benjamin Tallmadge to assist in obtaining intelligence on the enemy. [7]

At the 1781 encampment they were guarding access and entry to the camp of the American army. Along with Washington's aide-de-camp, 160 members of Sheldon's Horse formed the escort for General Rochambeau and the French troops when they travelled to Westchester from Rhode Island. "Military practice dictated that you send a visiting commander an escort of your best troops as a gesture of honor and respect." [6] Clermont Crevecouer, who was part of the staff family of Rochambeau, wrote in his journal entry for July 2, 1781, that Sheldon's Horse "are incontestably the best troops on the Continent." [8]

On July 15, 1781, Sheldon's Horse rushed from Dobbs Ferry to Tarrytown to help repel a British attack on an American supply ship. [9]

The First Rhode Island, A Majority Black Unit

In February 1778, the Rhode Island state legislature promised freedom to enslaved Blacks who joined the army, and many African American Rhode Islanders, both free and enslaved, enlisted. [10] All troops in the Rhode Island regiments, Black and white alike, received the same bounty and pay. A majority Black unit, the First Rhode Island Regiment was formed that summer.

By the spring of 1781 the Rhode Island regiment was posted in Westchester County near Pines Bridge. Under the command of Christopher Greene, their mission was to defend the northern part of the county. The unit consisted of about two-thirds Black troops. The remaining third consisted of white and Native American troops.

On May 14, 1781, Loyalist troops launched a surprise attack on the Rhode Island regiment and their commander.

According to William Cooper Nell, writing in 1855: *Colonel Greene, the commander of the regiment, was cut down and mortally wounded: but the sabers of the enemy only reached him through the bodies of his faithful guard of blacks, who hovered over him, and every one of whom was killed.* [11]

In 2018, a monument, with a sculpture of representative figures from the First Rhode Island, was erected at nearby Yorktown Heights, N.Y., to honor the brave soldiers of the First Rhode Island for their heroism at Pines Bridge.

After the death of Col. Greene, Lt. Col. Jeremiah Olney took command. The unit was at the 1781 encampment and participated in the march to Yorktown.

Cannon, a Key Weapon against British Ships on the Hudson

Prior to the Revolutionary War, John Lamb was a prominent member of the Sons of Liberty in New York. In January 1777 he was appointed colonel of the 2nd Continental Artillery Regiment. He commanded the artillery at West Point, N.Y., in 1778 and 1780. [12]

Lamb's Artillery was the only artillery unit at the 1781 encampment. We see in the letter below that Col. Lamb received his orders from General Knox to remove and safeguard the cannon, ammunition and related material the day before the departure from the camp in Westchester in August 1781.

*Camp near Dobbs Ferry
18 Aug 1781.*

All The Park except the 4 light three pounders which were ordered today are to march.... The spare ammunition and every thing belonging to the park are included in this order — The route will be to Kings Ferry at which place you will cross with 2 three pounders, three five & half inch howitzers, and five six pounders with the ammunition belonging to them, 200,000 musquet Cartridges... [13]

Cannon played an enormously significant role at Dobbs Ferry in curtailing the impact of British attacks. We see four specific reports described by Major General William Heath at Dobbs Ferry between July 19 and August 6, 1781, of cannon exchange between Dobbs Ferry and British ships on the Hudson. [14] Cannon fire could severely damage and drive away British ships. The artillery regiment was therefore an invaluable part of the military might of the army.

American Army Under Gen. Washington

Elite troops in Dobbs Ferry (Sheldon's Horse and Scammell's Light Infantry) were deployed to protect the camp from attack by British ships on the Hudson and British troops coming from the south.

Broadway can be seen on this map as well as the roads which became Ashford Ave., Saw Mill River Rd., and Heatherdell Rd. Key to numeric locations follows.

11 Batteries of cannon were placed at the river's edge to defend the camp from British ships. (faintly visible under the "F" in "Dobbs Ferry")

7 Sheldon's Horse, commissioned as the Second Continental Light Dragoons, were mounted troops known as 'Washington's Eyes.' They were stationed at two spots on Broadway, each indicated by the number 7. The southern location may be the line of entrenchments referred to by the monument at the vest pocket park at Broadway and Livingston. The monument was moved from its original location 140 ft. to the north on Broadway. The text of the monument reads:

In July and August, 1781, The First Connecticut Brigade, Continental Army, held a line of entrenchments about 500 feet long crossing the road at this point.

The northern location seems to indicate the barracks for Sheldon's Horse.

6 Light Infantry Regiment under Col. Alexander Scammell, estimated troop strength 380 [17], was at present-day Children's Village in Dobbs Ferry. Washington ordered the army to commit "its best men" to form the light infantry. See interview with David Hackett Fischer, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Washington's Crossing*. [18] Note that this site has a high elevation for observation of approaching enemy troops.

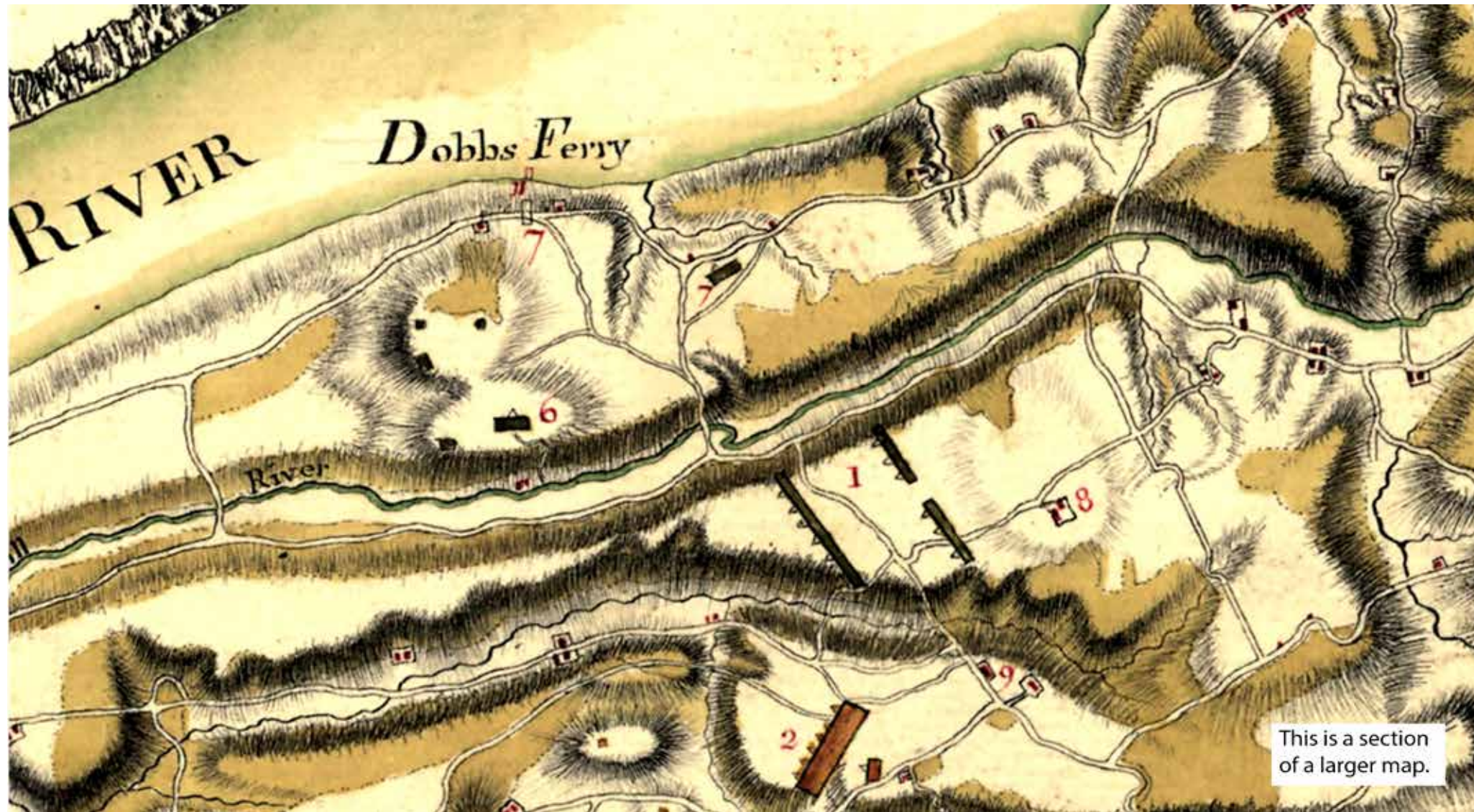
Scammell was known as one of the few men who could make Washington laugh with his jokes and stories. He was killed at Yorktown.

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Map of American-French Encampment July 6-August 19, 1781

Cartographer, Louis-Alexandre Berthier, officer in Rochambeau's army [15]
 "...extending from Dobbs Ferry on the Hudson River eastward into present-day Ardsley, Hartsdale, Edgemont and White Plains" [16]



Earthwork forts and redoubts in Dobbs Ferry. There are multiple reports of earthwork forts and redoubts that were built during the Revolution in Dobbs Ferry. A redoubt is a small supplementary fortification. A fort was located at High Street [19][20][21]. According to an account in *Life of a River Village*, it was ordered built by Washington to protect the ferry crossing. When developers began to level it in 1836, they were attacked by James Hamilton, son of Alexander, as "Goths" and "hogs." James Hamilton's estate is now Nevis Labs in Irvington.

Near the fort, at an adjoining property, a historical marker indicated the location of a redoubt. The marker was located at 71 Livingston Ave. and was moved from that location to the vest pocket park at Livingston and Broadway in 1969. It reads: *Within is the site of a Revolutionary redoubt, constructed in July, 1781.*[21] We don't know when or by whom the historical marker was originally placed.

A partially surviving earthwork is the rise in the terrain at the corner of Livingston

and Broadway. At the time that the property was being developed in 1966, village historian Alice Denike lobbied extensively for its preservation and for preservation of an earthworks at Hudson Terrace, facing the Hudson River to the west of Main St. in Dobbs Ferry.[22]

Historian Alvah French, writing in 1925, notes the presence of a Revolutionary earthworks embankment at the foot of Chestnut Street that had been leveled only a few years prior as well as an extensive earthworks fort, which, from his description, would seem to have been on the property of present-day Washington's Headquarters townhomes. [23]

Probably the best-documented earthworks is the redoubt that was on the property of William P. Brown. In 1892 he commissioned a painting of the redoubt on his property by the Hudson River School artist Jasper Cropsey prior to dismantling it and building his estate at the site. His house was near the corner of Livingston and Broadway. He named the estate "The Redoubt." [24]

American Army under Gen. Washington (continued)

1 The main American camp was located at present-day Ardsley High School.[17]

- These units encamped in this area took part in the March to Virginia, estimated to total 2500 with Light Infantry and Commander in Chief's Guard. Rhode Island Regiment, Lt. Col. Jeremiah Olney (360)
- First New York Regiment, Col. Goose Van Schaick (390)
- Second New York Regiment, Col. Philip Van Cortlandt (420)
- Combined New Jersey Regiment, Col. Mathias Ogden (330)
- Canadian Regiment (Congress' Own), Brig. Gen. Moses Hazan (270)
- Second Continental Artillery, Col. John Lamb (200)
- Corps of Sappers and Miners, Capt. James Gilliland (50)
- Artificer Regiment, Lt. Col. Ebenezer Stevens (100) [17]

8 HQ of General Washington was at the Joseph Appleby House, no longer standing, present-day site of WFAS Radio in Hartsdale.

Not seen on this section of the map; appears on the larger map.

5 Corps of Col. Waterbury was in Scarsdale, near the White Plains border.

French Army under Gen. Rochambeau

2 The main French camp was at Underhill Rd., Hartsdale.

9 HQ of Gen. Rochambeau was at the Odell House, Ridge Rd., Hartsdale. The house is still standing but is very dilapidated, and funds are being raised for its restoration.

Not seen on this section of the map; appears on the larger map.

3 French Light Infantry, Chatterton Hill, White Plains

10 French Hospital, White Plains

4 Legion of Lauzun, White Plains

— THANK YOU —

Donald W. Brown Roofing Contractors
 for their speedy repairs to the Mead House roof after Tropical Storm Isaias.

Dobbs Ferry in 1781

By Larry Blizard

(Richard and Linda Borkow assisted in the preparation of this article.)

For the past half-century that I have resided in Dobbs Ferry, I have been aware of the village's significance during the Revolutionary War: It was the southernmost point at which Washington's troops could cross the river safely. Dobbs Ferry was also the spot at which Washington changed the direction of his army's march in August, 1781. Instead of continuing south to attack the British in New York City, he went north to take the longer route to Yorktown, Virginia, out of sight of the enemy. But Dobbs Ferry was much more than simply a place where the troops changed direction. It was, in fact, the place where the long march actually began – where the troops gathered and were organized for travel.

I have also read that the Continental Army marched through the village at that time. But I have always wondered: What was the village like in 1781? What is left from that time? Would there have been residents turning out to wave tiny flags and applaud?

I was somewhat shocked to learn that, in fact, there was no village of Dobbs Ferry then. The name simply referred to the presence of a ferry service across the river. But the ferry itself was, technically, no longer Dobbs Ferry, for William Dobbs had sold the ferry to Mollie Sneden in 1759. As she lived across the river, Sneden's Landing became the headquarters of the ferry service.

The area around the ferry was referred to as "Dobbs Ferry," but it included, in addition to present-day Dobbs Ferry, Ardsley, the northern part of Hastings, and the southern part of Irvington. To further complicate matters, the area around the western terminus of the ferry was also called Dobbs Ferry. In truth, the area was part of the Manor of Philipsburg, a 20-mile tract owned by one family and divided into leaseholds farmed by some 300 settlers.

The area comprising the current village contained five farms — those of the Storms in the northern part (bordering present-day Irvington); below them, the Dusenberrys (containing the current Stop & Shop); and below them, the Jasper Stymus property

(formerly the Dobbs leasehold, but sold to Stymus in 1759). To the south was the Hyatt leasehold (site of the misnamed Washington's Headquarters townhomes). And finally, the leasehold of James De Clarke (bordering Hastings). On Sunday, August 19, Washington's troops broke camp and headed for the area that is now Dobbs Ferry, reached by following old trails made by Native Americans, known today as Heatherdell Road, the Saw Mill River Road, and Ashford Avenue; but in early times, it was simply called the "Dobbs Ferry Road."

The first task of the troops was to get across the Saw Mill River (a.k.a. the Nepperhan River). While it comes across today as a rather sleepy, meandering creek, it was probably a channel of some energy and breadth in 1781. Remember, it powered old man Philipse's sawmill in what is now Yonkers (hence the current name).

While it is assumed that there was a wooden bridge, the troops may have had to ford the river. A theory regarding the origin of the word "Ashford" suggests the existence of a crossing point by an ash tree. (A competing theory is that Ashford was the birthplace in England of John King, an immigrant who became prominent through his creation of a lucrative pickle industry in the area in the early 19th century.)

In any case, once across the river and back on the Dobbs Ferry Road, they trudged past acre after acre of farmland. No stores, no churches, no sidewalks or streets, no village: Only the barns, stables, and other structures associated with agriculture. Records indicate that there was a pond on Ashford Avenue, at which Washington's cavalry would water their horses.

Upon arriving at the place where the Dobbs Ferry Road intersected the Albany Post Road (now the intersection of Ashford Avenue and Route 9), the troops were "paraded" (assembled into marching order and reviewed) and ordered to turn north to cross the Hudson and head to Yorktown, Virginia, in the cloak of secrecy.



The farmhouse belonging to the Storm family stood on what is today the lawn of Sacred Heart Church. The house was moved to Rochambeau Avenue around 1905.

At the place of assembly were two farmhouses: One, belonging to the Storm family, stood on what is today the lawn of Sacred Heart Church. Nearby, on what is now the parking lot of the Stop & Shop, stood the home of the Dusenberry family. (The Storm farmhouse still exists, although it was moved to Rochambeau Avenue around 1905.)

Had the troops continued south, they would have passed the only structure considered significant enough to appear on maps — the George Knox Tavern, formerly the Dobbs Tavern, on the Albany Post Road (Broadway) near Walnut Street. Also, since the British army was occupying New York City, Washington sent several regiments upstate to protect the river and to keep the enemy preoccupied. They also provided a "screen" – a cover to protect the departing forces from being spotted. Thus, the larger area probably resembled a typical military encampment of the time although one was abandoned.

It is doubtful that there were residents cheering and waving flags. The area had been devastated by warfare. In those days, armies simply took what they needed from the local populace. In addition, bands of marauders looted and pillaged. Crops were destroyed, cattle and other livestock were carried off, and farmhouses were burned. Residents either fled or lived in terror.

It would be years before this area recovered. But it did.

The Other Road To Freedom

By Jim Lockett

The American struggle for independence produced heroes, whom we honor even today. Leaders such as Washington, Jefferson, Hamilton, Franklin, and Adams are memorialized in countless ways — as place names, in books, movies, and coinage. Clearly, we need heroes as guideposts.

However, we are taken aback when we learn of weaknesses or failings in some aspect of our treasured heroes' lives. Since no one is perfect, should this diminish our respect for the good they achieved? This is a question strongly under discussion now.

In regard to George Washington, who devoted his life to the American cause, his apparent obliviousness to the basic human rights of enslaved people makes him a product of his time.

In this article, we examine a shortcoming of one of our greatest heroes.

Deborah and Harry Squash are crossing a Manhattan dock carrying their precious "Certificates of Freedom." Now they mount the gangplank to board the British ship Polly.

Will it take them to freedom as promised?

It's April 27, 1783. Parliament's vote to abandon the war against American rebels is more than 14 months past, but the Redcoats still occupy New York City. Thousands of Loyalists and runaway slaves crowd the war-ravaged city, hoping to escape the United States.

George Washington is 60 miles north, at Newburgh. He's thinking about an order from Congress issued just 12 days ago, telling him to arrange with the British commander to get the Americans who escaped slavery back into bondage.

He's also thinking about how to recapture the 16 Black people who escaped his plantation two years ago — including Deborah. He doesn't know that at this very moment, she's walking up that gangplank, taking the final steps on her road to freedom.

Deborah's and Harry's hopes are based on the Philipsburg Proclamation, named for Philipsburg Manor, the vast estate on the Hudson. At this moment, its manor house sits 40 miles south of George Washington and 20 miles north of Deborah. At that site four years ago, the British commander made a promise

to emancipate every Negro who escaped a rebel owner and reached British lines.

Would a defeated Britain keep that promise? In the early months of 1783, frightening rumors swept through the city that it would not. "This dreadful rumour filled us with inexpressible anguish and terror," one African American (Boston King) would later write.

The rumors were well founded: Article 7 of the preliminary peace treaty prohibited the British from "carrying away any Negroes or other property of the American inhabitants."

Yet, incredibly, Deborah, Harry, and thousands of other African Americans had been issued Certificates of Freedom by General Guy Carleton, the new commander of British forces.

And now, Deborah and Harry are among those boarding the Polly. A British officer boards the ship, talks to each passenger, then writes in a ledger:

"Harry Squash, 22, stout middle sized ... Property of Mr. Lynch ..." *"Deborah his wife, 20, stout wench, thick lips, pock marked ... Formerly slave to General Washington ..."*

The officer moves on. Now he writes:

"Samuel Bayard, 45, stout tall man. Formerly slave to Peter Bayard, New Jersey ..." *"Simon Gairway, 26, stout man ... Served Jenkin Philips, Pennsylvania ..."*

And so on.

Each entry encapsulates a human life at a climactic moment. The American Revolution is opening a road to freedom for that individual. But tragically, it's a back road, opened in defiance of Patriot efforts to close it. The side that declared liberty to be an unalienable right of all men is acting as if "all" does not really mean "all."

We jump forward eight days now, to May 5, 1783. General Carleton's ship is anchoring opposite Dobbs Ferry, on his way to meet Washington at Tappan, N.Y. Washington waits for him, planning to use this meeting to carry out Congress's order to "obtain the Negroes."



(Right) Statue of Sir Guy Carleton, also known as "Lord Dorchester," at the Quebec Parliament building.

Harry and Deborah are a week along in their voyage to freedom. Their risk of being "obtained" is gone. But what about "Rose Gozeman, 24 years, stout wench. Formerly slave to John Easton, Rhode Island," and "Fanny Gozeman, 5 months old," and "Dorras Scudder," "Andrew Dickson," "Peter Mercer," and thousands more? They are still waiting for space aboard British ships, their freedom at stake in this meeting.

It's May 6 now, one day later. The meeting is underway. Let's listen in:

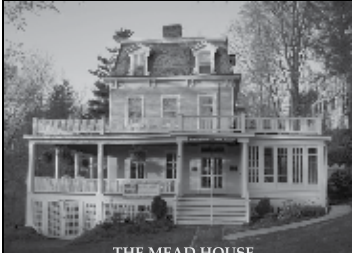
Washington asks about obtaining the Negroes. Carleton's answer is a shock: Shiploads of African Americans have already sailed from New York. He intends to carry off every Negro covered by the Philipsburg Proclamation.

Washington objects, citing the treaty. Carleton responds that the Philipsburg Proclamation is a promise, binding as a matter of honor. He doubts his government intends an interpretation of the treaty that would violate this promise. In his view, not carrying away "Negroes or other property" means only that he cannot carry away Negroes *who are property now*. Those he is carrying away are no longer property.

If he is wrong, then let the injured slave owners seek financial compensation, Carleton says. He will document every Negro transported, so that claimants will have full evidence.

We know he speaks the truth because last week we watched and listened as Harry's and Deborah's names and stories were being taken down aboard the Polly, just after they boarded.

Continued on page 8



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The Other Road to Freedom

Continued from page 7

That was the documentation he now speaks of.

The meeting ends at this impasse. Outwardly, Washington maintains his position and will continue to press the point with Carleton in the coming days, but privately he admits defeat: He writes to the governor of Virginia that night that he is convinced “that the slaves which absconded from their Masters will never be restored to them.”

It’s now June, now July... September... November. Page upon page is filled in Carleton’s ledger book — 150 pages, documenting 3,000 African Americans escaping to freedom. Known now as the Book of Negroes, it is an important genealogical and historic document.

Epilogue

Historians estimate the slave population in 1776 at 500,000 and escapees from slavery

during the Revolution at 100,000. That makes the Revolutionary years the greatest period of emancipation prior to the Civil War. Some won freedom by fighting for the Patriot side, many more by serving the Loyalists.

And 3,000 won freedom because a British general stood firm against George Washington at a meeting in Tappan, across the river from Dobbs Ferry, on May 6, 1783.

Correction

In the article “The Ferry in the Revolution” (Ferryman, Summer 2020), the description of the location of Washington’s troops during the summer encampment of 1781 was incomplete. While it is true that the bulk of Washington’s army was encamped east of the Saw Mill River, there were two elite groups, Sheldon’s Horse and Scammell’s Light Infantry, placed strategically in what is now Dobbs Ferry. The centerfold of this issue features a map drawn in 1781 by Louis-Alexandre Berthier, an officer in Rochambeau’s army. Berthier’s map shows the location of the American and French units in this area, including those in Dobbs Ferry.

The same article states that “the French overruled Washington’s plan” regarding New York and Virginia. This wording might be misleading to our readers, because the French did not have the military authority to overrule Washington. In fact, the lines of command were the reverse: French King Louis XVI had instructed Rochambeau to place himself under Washington’s command. It is true that the French went to great lengths to promote a Virginia strategy over a New York strategy. Nevertheless, in the end, it was Washington’s decision to take on the risks of marching to Virginia.

★ Coming in October ★

★ Road to Freedom ★

2020
from the
Dobbs Ferry Historical Society

A self-guided and mostly virtual commemoration
of a turning point in the Revolutionary War

OCT 1-15:
Do-it-yourself Scavenger Hunt

For adults and families to find local landmarks and artifacts related to the American Revolution
Visit www.DobbsFerryHistory.org to download instructions

OCT 18 at 4pm:
HISTORICAL BALLADEER LINDA RUSSELL

will perform “Revolution and the Hudson: Songs and Stories,”
a one-hour virtual program of songs and stories
Register for the Zoom link at DobbsFerryRF@gmail.com

Fall 2020 Issue of The Ferryman

The Ferryman will explain the history behind Road to Freedom Day
and highlight observances over the past 14 years!

We thank the **Dobbs Ferry Public Library** for these offerings:
OCT 10 at 10am:

Story hour for grade-school kids via Zoom with children’s librarian
Kate Foster, reading a children’s Revolutionary War history book by local author Jean Fritz.
Register at the Dobbs Ferry Public Library
Check the library website for lists of related books and videos for children and adults

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Do you enjoy The Ferryman?

The Ferryman is delivered to you mailbox several times a year. If you’d like to see it continue, and enjoy our other programs or have used our archives, please join the Historical Society. You may not know that member dues and contributions provide most of the funding for our work. We need you!

<h3 style="text-align: center;">Dobbs Ferry Historical Society</h3> <p>Name: _____</p> <p>Address: _____ _____ _____</p> <p>Email: _____</p> <p>Phone: _____</p> <p>Please make you checks payable to and mail to: Dobbs Ferry Historical Society 12 Elm Street Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522 Renew online at www.DobbsFerryHistorical.org</p>	<h3 style="text-align: center;">Membership 2020-21</h3> <p>Our membership year is September 1 to August 31</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Historian \$1,000 <input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor \$500 <input type="checkbox"/> Patron \$100 <input type="checkbox"/> Business Patron \$100 <input type="checkbox"/> Business \$50 <input type="checkbox"/> Dual/Family \$50 <input type="checkbox"/> Individual \$30 <input type="checkbox"/> Senior (60+)/Student \$20 <p>Additional gift \$ _____ Total: \$ _____ <i>(Tax deductible)</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> My employer’s matching contribution form is enclosed.</p>
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