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*"History herself, as seen in her own workshop."*

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WASHINGTON'S FIRST VISIT TO LANCASTER AND  
THE OBSERVANCE OF HIS DEATH

By William Frederic Worner

HOPE CHURCH, MOUNT HOPE

By William Frederic Worner

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# *Washington's First Visit to Lancaster and the Observance of his Death*

By William Frederic Worner.

In writing this monograph, I realize that I can make but little claim to original historical research. Dr. F. R. Diffenderfer, the late W. U. Hensel and Miss Martha B. Clark, have referred to Washington's first visit to this city, but their statements are not complete, nor do they seem to be altogether accurate, in view of data that has come to light since they were written. My reason for presenting the subject at this time is to make use of this new material and present a more detailed and accurate story.

In Prowell's history of York county, volume 1, page 738, appears the following:

"Early in life, when George Washington was employed as a surveyor by Lord Fairfax, in the Shenandoah valley, Virginia, he passed through York on his way to the land office in Philadelphia. No authentic account of this visit can be given. All that is known about it is the fact that he passed over the Monocacy Road, through York, and crossed the Susquehanna at Wright's Ferry".

In writing to me on this subject, Mr. George Prowell says that when Washington passed through York it was a small village. He stopped at one of the public inns. Tradition says that he took part in a dance at the hostelry. This is interesting, if true. It is logical to assume that if Washington crossed the Susquehanna at Wright's Ferry, and was on his way to the land office in Philadelphia, his route lay through the little town of Lancaster. This journey, it is supposed, took place in the year 1749 or 1750. If this could be proved by some authentic record it would establish the fact that the first visit of George Washington to Lancaster was made when he was a lad of eighteen or nineteen years of age.

The first visit of Washington to Lancaster borough, of which we have authentic record, occurred on Sunday and Monday, July 3 and 4, 1791. It has been ably described in Vol. 10, No. 4, of the proceedings of this honorable society. It is not the purpose of the writer to repeat what has already appeared in Dr. Diffenderfer's monograph, but rather to give publicity to facts that have been discovered since that paper was written.

In 1789, immediately after the adjournment of the first session of the first Congress, President Washington made a tour of the New England states. On the 19th of March, 1791, sixteen days after the first Congress elected under the Constitution of the United States had terminated at Philadelphia, Washington wrote to Lafayette:

"On Monday next I shall enter on the practice of your friendly prescription of exercise, intending, at that time, to begin a journey to the southward, during which I purpose visiting all the Southern states". He made this trip for the purpose of coming into closer contact with the people. He was everywhere received with tokens of veneration, love and respect.

Philadelphia was then the capital of the United States. Washington left that city at noon on Monday, March 21, 1791, for his home at Mount

Vernon. His equipage consisted of a handsome creme-colored coach, built for the occasion by Mr. Clarke, of Philadelphia, drawn by four horses, a baggage wagon drawn by two horses, four saddle horses and one horse led with these, his valet, two footmen, a coachman and postillion. He was accompanied on the entire trip by one of his private secretaries, Major Jackson. Thomas Jefferson and General Knox escorted him into Delaware.

They went by way of Wilmington, crossing the Chesapeake Bay to Annapolis, Maryland. From Georgetown, they proceeded to Mount Vernon, where the necessary attention to his private affairs and some important correspondence on public business, detained him a week. Leaving Mount Vernon, he passed through Fredericksburg, Richmond, Charlestown, going as far south as Savannah, Georgia, on this eventful tour. Returning he arrived at Mount Vernon on the 12th of June. Dr. Rufus W. Griswold tells us:

"He remained at his seat between three and four weeks, during which time he was occupied with his private affairs; and, with Major L'Enfant and others, with the location of the new seat of government on the banks of the Potomac".

Washington recorded in his diary that he remained at his home, Mount Vernon, from Monday June 13th to Monday the 27th, 1791, a period of two weeks and not "between three and four weeks" as stated by Dr. Griswold.

His approach to all the southern towns was announced by salvos of artillery and the ringing of bells. A reception and banquet were given in his honor by the authorities of every town, and he was always received with the greatest demonstration of joy.

Washington was then at the height of his fame. His great achievements as a soldier and his renown as a statesman were universally recognized. His name was honored and revered in America, and his attributes of greatness were recognized by the civilized world.

After meeting the commissioners and selecting sites for the executive mansion, the national capitol and the other public buildings, he entered in his diary: "Being desirous of seeing the nature of the country north of Georgetown and along the upper road, I resolved to pass through Frederick, Maryland, York and Lancaster, in Pennsylvania to Philadelphia".

On Saturday afternoon, July 2, 1791, he arrived in York, Pa. He was given a public reception by the inhabitants of that historic town, which for nine months of the darkest period of the Revolution had been the seat of government. Congress held its sessions during that period in the county courthouse, and while there passed the articles of Confederation.

On page 1047 of Ellis & Evans' history of Lancaster county, it is stated: "When the British army occupied Philadelphia and Congress sat in Lancaster, George Washington and his wife, on their way to the latter place, stopped and stayed over night at the White Horse tavern in Sallsbury township."

Nothing could be farther from the truth than this. The diaries of the immortal Washington are still in existence, and show where he spent most of his time during the Revolutionary period. To state that General and Mrs. Washington were present at or on their way to the one session of the Continental Congress held in Lancaster on September 27, 1777, is to repeat what Prof. Albert Bushnell Hart calls "an historical lie."

During the whole time the Continental Congress was in session in York, Washington was in command of the main body of the American army at Valley Forge, and never in that eventful winter of 1777—1778 was able to visit either York or Lancaster.

In the Examiner-New Era, dated November 16, 1922, appeared an article entitled "Historic Landmarks in Mountville Torn Down," in which there was described the little log cabin that stood on the east side of Main street in the borough of Mountville. In the article it is stated: "During the days of the Revolutionary war, while General Washington was encamped with his troops at Valley Forge, the General who was to become the first President of the United States, made trips through Lancaster county and on one occasion, at least, was entertained at the Schneider house."

From whence the writer of the article in question obtained his information is a mystery. He does not even quote tradition—the elder sister of history—to prove his statement. He had afflicted upon an indulgent public what local historians know to be, and what is, a mis-statement of the facts.

Washington, so far as we are able to prove by incontestable evidence, passed through what is now known as the borough of Mountville on three different occasions. The first occurred on Sunday, July 3, 1791, when he rode from York to Lancaster, on his return from a three months' trip to the Southern states. The second was on Sunday, October 26, 1794. He had gone to Carlisle to visit the army that was being collected to march against the "Whiskey Insurrectionists," in the western part of the state. On his return, he passed through the borough on his way to Philadelphia. The third and last time he passed through Mountville occurred on Wednesday, September 21, 1796, when he was on his way to Mount Vernon. On none of these occasions did he dine in a little, rickety log cabin in Mountville. Washington liked style, and plenty of it. He travelled in the finest equipages and stopped at the best taverns. He was familiar with this section of country and knew that first class inns (for that day) abounded in Columbia and Lancaster. Then why should he have dined in a log hut when six miles farther on in Columbia a good inn awaited him? If the Lancaster County Historical Society does nothing else but refute mis-statements of this kind it will have rendered to posterity a service of inestimable value.

In the closing paragraph of the article referred to, it is stated: "In the old log cabin a court martial was held, according to history, for the purpose of determining the fate of a Continental soldier, who was charged with desertion. He was found guilty and sentenced to carry or wear a ball and chain for three months." This is so far-fetched and absurd that no sane person will give any credence to it.

On Sunday, July 3rd, 1791, after service, which he attended in Zion Reformed church, York, Pa., Washington set out on his journey to Lancaster. He was accompanied by Colonel Hartley and "a half dozen other gentlemen." Washington dined at Wright's Ferry, now Columbia. It is to be regretted that we do not know in which hostelry the President ate his repast. At Columbia, he was met by General Hand and "many of the principal characters and escorted to the town by them." At Brenner's tavern, which was located near the present hamlet of Abbeyville, he left his coach, mounted one of his saddle horses and, amidst great enthusiasm, rode into the town beside General Hand on Sunday evening at six o'clock. Concerning this journey Washington wrote in his diary: "The country from York to Lancaster is very fine, thickly settled and well cultivated. About the Ferry they are extremely rich. The river Susquehanna at this place is more than a mile wide and some pretty views on the banks of it".

A German almanac published in Lancaster in 1779, by Francis Bailey, was the first to call Washington the "Father of His Country". A noble

spirit of patriotism and a profound veneration for him pervaded the entire community; and the old soldiers of the Revolution, throughout Lancaster county, came to town to see their former chief.

Where General Washington lodged on the nights of July 3rd and 4th, 1791, on the occasion of his first visit to Lancaster borough, has always been a matter for considerable speculation. Obviously, Dr. F. R. Diefenderffer did not know, for he made no reference to it in his monograph. Miss Martha B. Clark frankly admitted (Vol. 16, No. 8) that "where General Washington lodged that Sunday night is a question some bright high school pupil might set himself or herself to find out." The late W. U. Hensel, in referring to the first visit of Washington to Lancaster says: "Where he lodged during the night of his stay, tradition only says; most likely at the Grape."

Die Neue Unpartheyische Lancaster Zeitung und Anzeigs Nachrichten, for Wednesday, July 6, 1791, contains an item which proves conclusively that the illustrious President of the United States did not lodge at the Grape on his first visit to Lancaster borough. The following is a free translation:

"About six o'clock on Sunday afternoon, his excellency, the President of the United States, arrived here from Yorktown, amidst the ringing of bells and the cheering of a great many people. Flags were displayed on the courthouse. The President alighted at the White Swan tavern, kept by Matthias Slough. A number of our citizens had gone on horseback to Wright's Ferry, on the Susquehanna, the western boundary of Lancaster county, to meet the President. They received him upon landing and escorted him to Lancaster.

"Before dawn of the next day, Monday, the inhabitants were reminded that it was Independence Day by the firing of cannon, the ringing of bells and the beating of drums. At noon, the President honored the citizens with his presence at a splendid dinner which was given in the courthouse. The local company of light infantry paraded before the courthouse and fired three volleys."

The Monday referred to above was the Fourth of July, 1791, and the fifteenth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Every effort was made by the citizens of Lancaster borough to honor the distinguished guest and fitly to celebrate the joyous occasion. General Edward Hand, who had himself achieved distinction and won fame as an officer in the Revolution, was then the most conspicuous citizen of Lancaster county. At a request of the inhabitants, he, with the other officials of the town, waited upon the President and delivered an address, which is printed in Vol. 10, No. 4, of the annals of this society. Washington feelingly responded. This address is also printed in the society's proceedings.

Die Neue Unpartheyische Lancaster Zeitung und Anzeigs Nachrichten for Wednesday, July 13, 1791, contained the two addresses, printed in German. This issue of the only newspaper published in Lancaster at that time, also contained a news item which reads: "Concerning the President's visit here, we wish to add that the clergy and corporation of the town handed him the above mentioned address, whereupon the President kindly replied as stated above."

Mr. George R. Prowell, the noted historian, is the authority for the following: "At three o'clock the President and a very large number of citizens sat down to an elegant entertainment, provided for the occasion, in the court house, then situated in Penn square."

Die Neue Unpartheyische Zeitung states that this took place "at noon."

Washington referred to it in his diary in these words: "This being the anniversary of American Independence and being kindly requested to do it, I agreed to halt here this day and partake of the entertainment which was prepared for the celebration of it. In the forenoon I walked

about town. At half past two o'clock I received and answered an address from the corporation and received the compliments of the clergy of different denominations, dined between three and four o'clock."

After dinner the following toasts were drunk:

1. "The Day and all who honor it."
2. "The United States."
3. "The Legislature of the Union—May it always be guided by the genuine maxim of an honest, magnanimous policy."
4. "The King and National Assembly of France."
5. "The Marquis de Lafayette."
6. "The Friendly European Powers."
7. "The Memory of those Patriots and Heroes who fought and fell in the Glorious cause of American Liberty."
8. "The General Prevalence of Religion and Morality."
9. "Agriculture and Commerce."
10. "May the Example of America and France be Productive of True Liberty to every Nation on the Globe."
11. "May the Rights of Man be Understood, and be Preserved Inviolable in our Great Republic."
12. "The Fair Daughters of America."
13. "May the Lamp of Science continue to illuminate this Western World to the End of Time."
14. "The Memory of the American Patriot, Statesman and Philosopher—Benjamin Franklin."
15. "May the Oppressed of all Nations find an asylum in America."

Die Neue Unpartheyische Zeitung states that "during the fifteen toasts which were given at the banquet, order and quiet were evident."

The President then gave, "The Governor and State of Pennsylvania," and retired, when the company rose and volunteered:

"The Illustrious President of the United States."

Die Neue Unpartheyische Zeitung further states: "This day, which closed with the best of order will ever be a memorable one to the inhabitants of this place. Early the next morning at four o'clock this great friend of mankind continued his journey to Philadelphia. As this was the first time he had passed through this place in his public capacity, old and young flocked to see him; and here, as everywhere, he drew all hearts to him by his friendly manner."

President Washington arrived in Philadelphia about noon on the sixth of July, in perfect health. His approach to that city was announced by the firing of cannon and the ringing of bells. He had been absent from the seat of government from March 21 until July 6 of the same year.

The Lancaster Journal for Friday, February 26, 1796, contains an item which would grace the social page of our modern dailies. It indicates the esteem and affection which the good people of Lancaster entertained for the "Father of his Country," while he was yet in the flesh. The paragraph reads as follows:

"Monday last, being the anniversary of the birth of the President of the United States, the same was observed here with the usual demonstrations of joy. In the evening, a splendid ball and supper, honored by a brilliant assemblage of ladies, was given at Mr. Slough's [White Swan inn]. The utmost harmony and decorum prevailed, and every countenance testified to the high esteem held for the great character whose merits the people were celebrating."

In the year 1797, Washington's birthday was celebrated in Lancaster borough "with every demonstration of respect and veneration. A large company of gentlemen at Mr. Mathias Slough's [White Swan Inn],

and another at Mr. Leonard Eicholtz's [The Bull's Head tavern] dined in honor of the day. In the evening, a ball at the courthouse was honored with a brilliant assembly of ladies; after which they retired to Mr. Slough's and partook of an elegant supper prepared for the occasion.

"The officers of the militia partook of an handsome repast at the house of Major John Light [The Sign of the Ship] and closed the day with social festivity.

"The Volunteer company of Infantry fired sixteen rounds in honor of the day, partook of an elegant dinner at the Conestoga Bridge, [Sign of the Pennsylvania Arms kept by Daniel Witmer] and returned at a seasonable hour in sobriety, order and harmony."

The following year, 1798, the anniversary of General Washington's birth was celebrated in Lancaster "by a ball in the courthouse which was honored with the presence of a brilliant assemblage of ladies. The company partook of a splendid supper at Mr. Slough's."

The Lancaster Journal for Saturday February 23, 1799 contains the following item:

"Yesterday being the anniversary of the Birth of Lieutenant General Washington, it was celebrated in this place with every demonstration of joy and respect.

"The volunteer companies paraded, and after various other evolutions saluted the day with 16 rounds. They then retired to partake of entertainments prepared for the occasion, and closed the day with order and decorum.

"In the evening there was a ball and a supper at Mr. Slough's, which were honored with an handsome essemblage of ladies."

On the floor of the west parlor at Mount Vernon, Washington's home, is a rug of dark green, in the center of which is an American eagle surrounded with stars. The rug was made for Washington by order of Louis XVI of France. As President of the United States, however, Washington was not permitted to receive presents from foreign powers, so the rug was sold. It was bought by Judge Jasper Yeates, of Lancaster, Pa., and for many years covered the parlor floor of his home at South Queen and Mifflin streets. After the death of Jasper Yeates Conyngham in 1880, the rug was purchased by Mrs. Sarah Yeates Whelen, a great granddaughter of Judge Jasper Yeates. In 1897 she presented the rug to the Mount Vernon association.

The news of the death of George Washington was received in Lancaster on Thursday, December 19, 1799. Thomas McKean, Governor of the State of Pennsylvania, sent to both houses of the legislature, then in session in Lancaster, a pathetic communication informing them of the death of the immortal patriot. The issue of the Lancaster Journal, dated December 28, 1799, informed the public that the members of the Pennsylvania legislature had agreed to wear mourning during the present session. In this same issue it was stated that "The ladies of Lancaster, never wanting in patriotism and affection for the good, are putting on the emblems of sorrowful remembrance for the Father of his country." It also tells us that "The citizens of this place, generally, who accredit the idea that 'man was made to mourn,' have adopted the crape as the outward token of respect."

The death of Washington, the illustrious soldier and statesman, caused profound sorrow throughout the country. The patriotic fervor inspired by the success of the War for Independence at this time prevailed to a remarkable degree in Lancaster county. There were then living in the borough and in the county a large number of officers and men who had fought gallantly in many battles under the command of the departed hero. Following the example of New York, Philadelphia

and other cities in the Union, our forefathers honored their deceased Chief Magistrate by a solemn parade through the principal streets of Lancaster.

Tuesday, January 7, 1800, was the day set apart by the inhabitants of Lancaster borough and vicinity "as a day of mourning, tribulation and respect for the memory of the illustrious Washington, whose beloved and renowned fame shall perish only with the last vestige of human recollection."

The Lancaster Journal in its issue of January 8, 1800, stated that:

"All the stores were shut and all business suspended. It was indeed a day of mourning. The feelings expressed by the countenance of every good man was a sure pledge of the gratitude of Americans, and a confirmation that we have suffered a great national calamity."

On Tuesday, January 7, 1800, at a little before one o'clock, in conformity with the orders of Major General Edward Hand, a military procession was formed, in honor of the memory of the late General Washington. It was joined by a number of the members of our state legislature, some clergymen from the neighborhood, the brethren of the lodge of Freemasons, and a number of private citizens. The procession was conducted in the following order:

Trumpeter.

Captain Montgomery's Cavalry

(in line as follows)

18 dragoon Horse, two and two

Cornet, with standard in crape

22 dragoon Horse, two and two

Captain

Captain Barton's Infantry

(in line as follows)

12 Infantry, two and two

with arms reversed, Ensign, colors in crape

Captain

Music

30 Militia officers, two and two

Major General Hand

Five Clergymen

Colonel Johnson

Captain Dehuff,

General Mifflin,

COFFIN

Colonel Campbell.

Colonel McClellan,

General Boude.

Four Officers of the late Revolutionary Army

The members of Lodge No. 43

(joined by a respectable number of brethren from other Lodges)

with Masonic emblems, in mourning order

Sergeant at Arms of the Senate, with his Mace

Clerk and Assistant Clerk of the Senate

Speaker of the Senate . .

16 Senators, two and two

Sergeant at Arms of the House of Representatives  
 Clerk and Assistant Clerk  
 Speaker of the House of Representatives  
 32 Members, two and two  
 Heads of Departments, two and two  
 Sheriff, with his wand  
 Register, Recorder and Prothonotary  
 Judiciary  
 Officers of the Revenue of the United States  
 Marshall of the District of Pennsylvania  
 Members of Congress  
 Board of Commissioners (direct tax) two and two  
 40 Citizens, two and two.

The procession moved through several of the principal streets and arrived at the "Episcopal English Church," where a short but affecting address and an appropriate prayer were delivered by the Rev. Joseph Clarkson. After the services were over Captain Barton's Infantry formed in the proper order and fired three platoons in front of the churchyard. The coffin, which had been carried in the solemn procession, was left in the church, as a monument of the respect and esteem in which the great statesman was held by the citizens of Lancaster.

The Lancaster Journal says:

"The concourse of people was very great. It could not be less than five thousand, of which number it is supposed there were not more than fifty who did not partake in the general grief."

The committee appointed to make the necessary arrangements for "performing the obsequies in honor of the memory of our late Commander in Chief of the armies of the United States," sent invitations to the two branches of the legislature to participate in the procession. They omitted to extend an invitation to the Governor of the Commonwealth. Whether they intended to insult the Chief Executive of the state by slighting him in this manner, or whether it was merely through inadvertence that he received no invitation, cannot now be determined with any degree of accuracy. All that we are able to gather from the correspondence that appeared in the local weeklies on this subject is, that when the hour appointed for the procession to start had arrived, Governor McKean had not made his appearance. The committee appointed Colonel Jeremiah Mosher to wait on the Governor. This was at a few minutes past twelve. The parade was originally scheduled to start at twelve. The Governor felt that he must decline the invitation, giving as his reason that it was extended in such a manner and at such a late moment as to prevent him from making the necessary arrangements in the executive departments of state.

The Lancaster Journal for Wednesday, January 8, 1800, contained a notice in which Major General Edward Hand presented "his thanks to the officers and soldiers of Captain Montgomery's cavalry and Captain Barton's Infantry for their soldier-like appearance and orderly conduct during the melancholy ceremonial of yesterday." He also requested that Brigadier General Thomas Boude and the officers of his brigade "who assisted in paying the last sad tribute of respect to the memory of their departed friend, will please accept his grateful acknowledgements." General Hand expressed himself as being "particularly indebted to Col. Mosher for his assistance in arranging the procession."

The Lancaster Journal for Saturday, March 1, 1800, informs us that Washington's birthday was observed in Lancaster "with the most respectful attention. Divine service was held in the different churches, and discourses portraying the virtues and patriotism of 'the hero whose loss we deplore,' were spoken to crowded audiences. An handsome eulogium was delivered to the members of Lodge No. 43, (and a number of respectable visitants) by Brother W. C. Frazer. In every part of the country that we have heard from, similar testimonials of respect have been paid. Great indeed must be the tribute of sorrow when a nation mourns a nation's father."



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