



This famous painting depicts the meeting of Marquis de Lafayette and Gen. George Washington at Valley Forge from 1777 to 1778.

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Valley Forge: Birthplace of U.S. Army

By Steven Walter

The Valley Forge encampment of 1777 and 1778 was the third winter encampment of the Continental Army under the command of Gen. George Washington.

Two and a half years after the “shot heard round the world” in Lexington and Concord, Mass., and a year after the famous Christmas night crossing of the Delaware River, a battered and tired Continental Army marched into the small farming community centered around the village of Valley Forge.

After a disastrous Philadelphia campaign, after the defeats at Brandywine, Paoli, and Germantown, the army was short on supplies. The British had captured the capital city of Philadelphia, sending Congress and the Pennsylvania Supreme Executive Council fleeing to York and Lancaster, respectively.

The army’s supply system had completely broken down, leaving the soldiers poorly clothed and underfed.

Despite these setbacks, the men were in high spirits. While they had lost most of the battles of the previous year, they had made the British

pay dearly for their victories. As the American army marched into winter quarters, three things needed to happen for them to keep fighting: the army needed consistent supplies, the soldiers needed consistent and uniform training, and of course the army needed to survive this winter.

Dec. 19, 1777 was a clear but cold day as the army arrived at Valley Forge.

Following nearly a week of ice-cold rain, the roads were in poor condition and it took several hours for the army to march the six miles from Gulph Mills. Immediately upon arriving, Washington issued orders that 12-man groups of soldiers would build and spend the winter in log huts 14 feet wide and 16 feet long.

In about a month and a half, the soldiers had built nearly 2,000 of these huts to house the army through the winter. This army of around 12,000 soldiers was roughly the equivalent of the fourth largest city in the country at the time, outnumbered only by the residents of Boston, New York and Philadelphia.

The infrastructure that supported this sparse farming community about

20 miles outside of Philadelphia threatened to crumble under the weight of the army.

After almost three years, the American public had largely grown weary of war, and many people longed for an end to the fighting.

The countryside around Philadelphia was largely settled by Welsh Quaker pacifists who would not swear loyalty to either side and sometimes preferred to sell their crops to the British, who paid with gold and silver coin, rather than nearly valueless paper money.

Combined with a supply department rife with corruption, the situation in the army had become dire.

In a letter to Henry Laurens, president of Congress, Washington wrote that “unless some great and capital change suddenly takes place ... this Army must inevitably be reduced to one or other of these three things. Starve — dissolve — or disperse.”

The war effort was teetering on a knife edge, and something needed to be done.

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Marquis de Lafayette,

War hero visits Butler in 1825

By Bill May

Butler was a sleepy, mainly agricultural village in 1825. Its few streets were dotted by crude log and brick homes harboring its 500 residents. During its short eight-year history as a borough, few, if any, notable visitors had ever crossed its borders.

So, the excitement must have been tremendous when news reached the little town on the last day of May 1825 that one of the most revered heroes of the American Revolution was coming.

The visitor, whose name graces one of downtown Butler’s most beautiful buildings as well as colleges, towns, parks and streets across the country, was to arrive the next day after a stop in Pittsburgh as part of a 14-month, triumphant 24-state tour of America.

Gilbert de Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, the last surviving major general of the Revolutionary War and “surrogate son” of George Washington, was invited by Congress and then President James Monroe

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Sharing America’s Journey through Time

By Donna Sybert, Eagle Managing Editor

The history behind our great nation is a tapestry of stories about people who lived through landmark events, challenging times and amazing innovations.

America250: A Journey Through Time is designed to remember, celebrate and honor those pieces of our past as we prepare to mark the nation’s 250th birthday on July 4, 2026.

With the assistance of historians and experts, the Eagle will share insights into pivotal events that changed the face of our nation.

In this first edition, we step into time and try to understand the life of a Continental Army soldier and how the Valley Forge encampment shaped our nation’s future. As the year goes on, we will explore topics as varied as America’s love affair with baseball

and the impact of the railroad.

Each issue also will include an article from a state perspective on events such as the Civil War. This special publication also will examine moments in time such as the Johnstown flood, the effects of Prohibition and the lives of the Seneca tribes.

Butler County’s ties to history are strong, and each issue will connect local people to historical events. This month, we learn how an ancestor of the Sullivans served at Valley Forge and can imagine being downtown as Marquis de Lafayette visited Butler.

Look forward to reading profiles on people who made their mark on history such as Charles Albert Waters, the first Black soldier from Butler; a visit to town by Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross; and the infamous tale of Sam Mohawk, who

confessed to the murder of the Wigton family in 1843.

During our journey, we will tell the stories of the boroughs and townships in our county. We will also offer a list of places where readers can continue their own journey through time.

To accomplish this 3½-year mission, we are grateful for the support of local historical groups and county residents whose love of history brings the past alive as well as experts from across the country. We are looking to shine new light on our most beloved historical gems, such as the invention of the Jeep, and are also seeking stories yet untold.

America250: A Journey Through Time hopefully will help us learn more about who we are as Americans, connect with that history and be inspired by it. Enjoy.



EPIC party coming for 250th

Hello Friends,

With a new year starting, it may seem difficult to think about events beyond the coming year or next. But there's a big celebration coming in 2026 with events being planned for Butler County, throughout Pennsylvania, and across the United States.



Jack Cohen

What's so important that it will take more than three years to plan? Well, the United States Semiquincentennial, of course! What's a semiquincentennial? Simply, it's the country's 250th anniversary,

which will be celebrated July 4, 2026.

America250PA — Butler County is the official, local committee responsible for organizing Butler's celebration of this historic event. Formed under the direction of the Butler County commissioners, our steering committee is helping to plan Butler County's path to educating, celebrating, and recognizing our nation's EPIC milestone.

Today's "America250: A Journey in Time," is the first of a monthly series of the Butler Eagle, which supports our committee's work and will lead county residents up to the celebration by highlighting the history of our nation, state and county.

And make no mistake, Butler County has played a significant role in the development of Pennsylvania and the birth and growth of the United States.

During the next 43 months, you will read about George Washington's historic trek through the region in 1753, contributions of business tycoons such as "Diamond Jim" Brady, the amazing life of Frank W. Preston, the creation of the Bantam Jeep, and many other stories of the major impact Butler County and its residents have had in making the United States the great country it's always been.

Although the semiquincentennial is slightly more than three years from now, some events and campaigns in other counties have already begun. Butler County, however, wants to be a leader in this initiative.

America250PA — Butler County will engage county residents to bring the county's history into the conversation so that we can use our history to encourage and inspire future county leaders, celebrate our contributions to history, and leave a lasting impact on the next generation.

This is an EPIC initiative that will Educate, Preserve, Innovate, and Celebrate Butler County's and Pennsylvania's rich history, culture and future through various programs, projects and events.

If you are interested learning more about America250PA — Butler County and possibly volunteering your support in any form, visit: www.america250pa.org/14-Volunteer

Sincerely,
Jack Cohen

Jack Cohen is president of the Butler County Tourism & Convention Bureau and chair of the America250PA — Butler County committee

BUTLER FAMILY'S HISTORY



The Sullivan family poses outside the Lowrie House on West Diamond Street during Christmas in 1905. Their family tree included Craven Sullivan who served in the Continental Army and was at Valley Forge with the 1st Virginia Regiment.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BUTLER COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Turning 18 at Valley Forge

By Jennifer Ford

The Senator Walter Lowrie House is home to the Butler County Historical Society, but between 1839 and 1986 it was home to four generations of Sullivans, direct descendants of a Revolutionary War soldier who was at Valley Forge with George Washington.

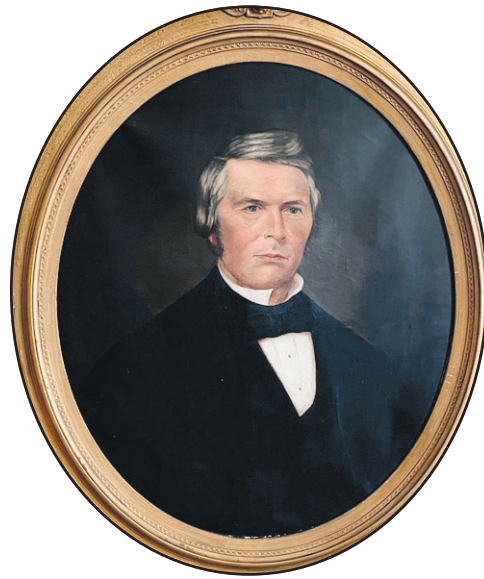
Eleven years after Sen. Walter Lowrie built his brick mansion in 1828, the house was sold to Charles C. Sullivan, an up-and-coming young lawyer whose parents met in 1777 while his father, Craven, was bivouacked at Valley Forge with the 1st Virginia Regiment.

Virginia originally raised the 1st regiment during the French and Indian War (1754-1763). The regiment had the distinction of becoming the first colonial militia incorporated into the regular British Line.

Before the war ended, the Virginians saw action at Jumonville, Fort Necessity, and with the Braddock and Forbes expeditions.

Virginia commissioned the 1st regiment again in July 1775, this time in response to escalating political tensions with England. The following February, the regiment became part of the Continental Line. By August 1776, the men of the 1st were traveling north to join Washington's army near New York City. In their ranks marched a third-generation Virginian, 16-year-old Craven Sullivan.

Craven saw action with the 1st at Harlem Heights and White Plains, took part in Washington's Dec. 26 attack on Hessian troops at Trenton. He then fought at Princeton, Brandywine and Germantown before Washington bivouacked his men at Valley Forge in the winter of 1777 and 1778. While he was there, battle-hardened veteran



State Sen. Charles Craven Sullivan (1807-1860), above, was the third owner of the Lowrie House in Butler. His father, Craven, was with Gen. George Washington at Valley Forge.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BUTLER COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Craven Sullivan turned 18.

Conditions at Valley Forge

Every American has heard about the frightful conditions at Valley Forge during the winter of 1777 and 78. The stories of suffering are woven into our national consciousness.

But sometimes we need to stop and really consider what it was like to be there. Christmas 2022 here in Butler was brutally

cold. Wind chills plunged below 0 and many of us had to postpone our holiday celebrations; we felt quite inconvenienced!

Now imagine being stranded outside in similar conditions without benefit of shoes or socks, insulated coats, gloves, hats or scarves.

"The unfortunate soldiers were in want of everything; they had neither coats nor hats, nor shirts, nor shoes. Their feet and their legs froze until they were black, and it was often necessary to amputate them," wrote The Marquis de Lafayette in 1778.

Imagine there's no indoor space to get warm, and you have nothing to eat but cakes of flour and water. That's what young Craven and his fellow soldiers experienced when they first arrived in winter quarters on Dec. 19, 1777.

"We had nothing to eat for two or three days previous except what the trees of the forests and fields afforded us, but we must now have what Congress said, a sumptuous Thanksgiving to close the year of high living ... it gave each man half a gill (about half a cup) of rice and a tablespoon of vinegar!" said Joseph Plum Martin, from an 1830 narrative of adventures, dangers, and sufferings of a Revolutionary soldier.

Washington immediately ordered his men to construct crude shelters by felling trees and stacking logs. His orders were specific: each structure was to measure 16 feet long by 14 feet wide with log walls stacked to a height of 6 feet 6 inches, topped by a wooden roof, equipped with a fireplace, and closed by a cloth over the door. Each one-room hut was to house 12 men.

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War hero

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in January 1824 to kick off activities for the upcoming 50th anniversary of America's War for Independence from Great Britain.

Our national leaders felt the story of our fight was being forgotten with the passing of the old soldiers. A visit from America's French "boy general" might help instill the virtues and sacrifices made during that time into the hearts and minds of the younger generation.

Born of an aristocratic, land-owning family in the Auvergne province of France, Lafayette was only 19 years old on June 13, 1777, when he arrived on his personally commissioned boat, the "Victoire."

Two weeks later, he was appointed by the Continental Congress, after agreeing to serve without pay, to the rank of major

general and to serve on the staff of Gen. George Washington.

The Frenchman and the Continental Army's commander met in Philadelphia on Aug. 5. Because the 45-year-old Washington had no children of his own, the dashing Frenchman's youthful exuberance and his dedication to the American led to the pair forming an immediate bond.

Like other French army officers, Lafayette had been recruited to help the Americans in the Colonies in their struggle against British rule.

The marquis was one of the richest men in France, and had been raised to despise England. What's more, he was eager to seek revenge for the death of his father, who was killed fighting for France against the British in 1759 during the Seven Years War.

However, Lafayette was not recruited for his military experience, as he had never seen combat. Rather, Lafayette's connections to King Louis XVI were sought, with hopes that the monarchy might provide the rebellious colonies with military help.

During the Revolutionary War, Lafayette served heroically. He was wounded in the leg at the Battle of Brandywine on Sept. 11, 1777, as he led his men on an orderly retreat during the Continental Army's defeat. Washington sent his own doctors to the young officer's side, instructing them: "Treat him as though he were my own son!"

Lafayette served on Washington's staff during the brutal winter at Valley Forge, and in June 1778, following the Battle of

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Joining the fight, fighting to survive

By William L. Kidder

A clue to the story behind the soldiers in the Continental Army can be found in a frequent image of the time — a farmer leaving his plow in the field as he goes off to fight for the independence of the 13 British colonies.

Another is the iconic image of a soldier suffering in the snow at Valley Forge. He is not properly clothed, even lacking shoes, and is hungry.

These images offer a glimpse of who the Continental Army soldiers were, why they joined and what they experienced. The men who survived struggled to adapt to constantly changing conditions — irregular supplies of food, clothing and equipment, and the personalities and experience level of their officers and peers.

While most soldiers in the American Revolution faced combat, the majority of their time was spent simply surviving exhaustion, lack of necessities, and too often rampant illness.

The Army life

There is no simple picture of life in the Continental Army.

The war lasted for about eight years, 1775–1783, and took place over a wide area involving people of various ethnic ancestries.

The Army was highly diversified. Men who served came from various European backgrounds, including England, Scotland, Ireland, France, Germany and Spain, as well as numerous African Americans and Indigenous people.

Experts estimate 230,000 men served overall with a maximum of 48,000 at any one time. About 6,800 to 8,000 Army personnel were estimated killed in action, with 6,000 to 25,000 wounded in combat.

The 13 British colonies, that became states on Sept. 9, 1776, were not yet a unified country. While the Continental Congress may have developed the overall structure of the Army, the individual colonies/states were very involved in regard to their men and the regiments they served in.

For the troops raised for 1777, the individual states provided recruits from their state with arms, clothing, and “every necessary.”

It would not be out of line to say that for the Continental Army there were too many cooks and the “broth” immersing the soldiers, frequently got ruined. Any man who completed his enlistment was a true survivor.

There was no boot camp to teach military skills to those who



Soldiers of the 1st Rhode Island Regiment at Valley Forge during a reenactment.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE IMAGE

enlisted. The soldiers started with on-the-job training, and often without a uniform or complete set of gear.

It is estimated that between 20% and 25% of the men deserted over the course of the war — more in the early years before better conditions and battlefield successes improved morale.

An additional estimated 16,000 to 17,000 soldiers died of disease, including as prisoners of war.

Finding recruits

How a man dealt with the conditions often was related to his reasons for joining the Army.

The Continental Army formed in June 1775. The conflict with Great Britain involved protesting and trying to overturn several acts of Parliament, only some involving taxation. A soldier could say he was fighting to make his country, Great Britain, better, for himself and others like him.

However, after July 4, 1776, the conflict changed to a war for independence — a new nation separated from Great Britain with freedom and equality for all “men.” Would those two very different goals for war attract the same recruits?

The Continental Army was a volunteer army — made of up recruits rather than draftees. Potential recruits had to be found and then persuaded to enlist. At the beginning of the war, men were asked to enlist for just several months. Everyone thought the war would be short and Great Britain would come to its senses.

When the war dragged on, the Army was reconstituted, and men were recruited to serve for a full year. As the end of their enlistment drew near in late 1776, Congress created a third establishment of the Army to recruit men to serve for three years or the remainder of the war.

The man who put aside his plow was a volunteer in the first version of the Army. Men with established businesses or jobs supporting their families, especially as farmers, could not serve as full-time soldiers for a long period of time.

As the enlistment time span grew, potential recruits became men who did not have full-time obligations. They were usually younger, healthier men, or from the poorer classes. In either case, they were individuals perhaps seeking a job, looking for an adventure or some other personal reason.

While some recruits felt strongly about the cause they were signing up to fight for, not all of them did.

Failing to enlist enough men, the Continental Congress reacted by providing monetary incentives to attract recruits. These included cash enlistment bonuses and promises of 100 acres of free land when the war ended in victory.

Aside from some of the top ranking officers, it would be hard to find a soldier who served the entire war from Lexington in April 1775 to the disbandment of the Army in June 1783. Even George Washington was two

months short, assuming command in June 1775.

Yet those that enlisted in the Continental Army, also served additional time, before Continental service or after, in their local militia.

Follow the captain

Most regiments were raised and at least partially supported by a colony/state in line with the resolutions of the Continental Congress. Congress could determine the number of regiments and how many men each of the companies making up each regiment should have. But it depended on the skills and efficient work of the captain and his junior officers as to how many men actually served.

Men who joined the Continental Army were not assigned to a regiment and company. They enlisted directly into a company.

The quality of their lives depended upon the abilities of their captain, in addition to the captain’s superior officers and subordinates, other recruited privates and noncommissioned officers. The officers struggled to overcome problems and inefficiencies created by those responsible for the welfare of the Army.

While they continually reported problems to higher authority, the officers — using their own money — sometimes even purchased supplies, such as clothing and shoes, for their men.

Alexander Graydon of Bristol, Pa., on the Delaware River, received a captain’s commission

from the Continental Congress on Jan. 5, 1776, to serve in the 3rd Pennsylvania Regiment.

Graydon was responsible for recruiting men into his company, each enlisting for one year.

“My recruiting party was therefore sent out in various directions; and each of my officers as well as myself, exerted himself in the business,” Graydon wrote in his 1846 “Memoirs of His Own Time.”

Those men who joined under Graydon accepted him as their leader.

“Since the common opinion was, that the men and the officers were never to be separated ... to see the persons who were to command them, and above all, the captain, was deemed of vast importance by those inclining to enlist,” Graydon wrote.

He makes it clear his regiment enlistment goals were not met.

“Some officers had been more successful than others, but none of the companies were complete; mine perhaps contained about half its complement of men, and these had been obtained by dint of great exertion,” he said.

Recruiting duty could be dangerous. On one occasion at a tavern, Graydon had to defend himself and fight a man who refused to enlist and threatened the recruiters.

Afterward, Graydon said that the man “was as submissive as could be wished, begging my pardon for what he had done, and although he would not enlist, he hired himself to me for a few weeks as a fifer, in which capacity he had acted in the militia.”

Graydon pointed out that “This incident would be little worthy of relating, did it not serve in some degree to correct the error of those who seem to conceive the year 1776 to have been a season of almost universal patriotic enthusiasm. It was far from prevalent in my opinion, among the lower ranks of the people, at least in Pennsylvania.”

Especially among the poorer and less-educated people, Graydon said, “the true merits of the contest, were little understood or regarded.”

William L. “Larry” Kidder is the author of five books on the American Revolution including “Ten Crucial Days: Washington’s Vision for Victory Unfolds” (2020 Knox Press). He is completing a sixth book on the Revolution about the August 1777 siege of Fort Mifflin. Kidder, a graduate of Allegheny College, served for four years in the U.S. Navy, two years in the U.S. Naval Reserve and was a high school history teacher for 40 years. For more information, visit his website: www.wlkidderhistorian.com.

Valley Forge

From Page 1

Organizing the Army

When the Army arrived in Valley Forge, many regiments had their own system of training.

Individually, the units fought bravely, but when it came to fighting as an organized army, they fell short of the British.

In late February, a Prussian officer with extensive military experience arrived in camp to assist in any way possible. Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben had fought throughout Europe under Frederick the Great of Prussia and had a mind for military organization and professionalism, and a keen eye for detail.

Congress and Washington were immediately impressed with him and appointed him to be Inspector General of the Continental Army, responsible for the training and discipline of the troops.

Although he spoke little English, he was able to use French-speaking translators, such as a young Alexander Hamilton, to retrain the entire Continental Army under the same standard training system.

The following winter, he organized the notes he took at Valley Forge into the first official manual of the United States Army. It was titled “Regulations for the Order and Discipline for the Troops of the United States” but because it was bound in a blue cover, it came to be known as the “Blue Book,” a title that is still applied to U.S. Army training manuals.

Illness hit the troops

While the Valley Forge winter

is often characterized as extremely cold and snowy, that description is not quite accurate.

The winter of 1777–1778 was not unlike most southeastern Pennsylvania winters. Temperatures hovered just above freezing, with frequent cold rain and occasional snowfall.

In the encampment, open latrine trenches overflowed, the fields became a sea of mud, and the roads became impassable. Getting food and clothing became extremely difficult.

Influenza, typhus, typhoid, and dysentery swept through the Army, killing many and making many more unfit for duty. Although few, if any, soldiers froze or starved to death at Valley Forge, an estimated 2,000 men died of disease over those six months.

Many more likely would have died were it not for what was perhaps the first major inoculation program in North America. The previous year, Washington ordered every soldier in the Continental Army to go through what today would be considered a primitive and dangerous inoculation against smallpox. That program continued at Valley Forge and throughout the war.

Through the winter, small units of soldiers scoured the countryside to gather supplies, scout British positions, and prevent the British from foraging for food. Dozens of skirmishes erupted between the British and American forces over the six months of the encampment as both armies fought a battle for survival.

Washington and Congress reorganized the supply department of



Soldiers and women walk through camp at Valley Forge during a reenactment.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE IMAGE

the army, eventually appointing a reluctant Nathanael Greene as Quartermaster General. Greene’s leadership brought order out of the chaos caused by the political and military fighting of the previous year. By the end of the winter, the soldiers finally had proper clothing and sufficient supplies.

Among the ranks

The Continental Army overcame many difficulties and differences throughout the war. Just like today, the army was a cross-section of American society.

The soldiers were adherents to many religions. Many were immigrants who spoke a variety of languages.

In addition to the white soldiers, there were over 700 Black soldiers fighting for American freedom and countless soldiers of Native American or multi-racial backgrounds. The men came from many economic backgrounds. They were businessmen, tailors, shoemakers,

carpenters, farmers, and any number of other professions.

In addition to the many soldiers, there were roughly 500 women and children following the Army that contained their husbands and fathers.

One woman in particular, Hannah Till, was an enslaved cook in Washington’s headquarters household and gave birth to a son at Valley Forge. Many other women acted as laundresses and nurses for the Army.

While historians know how many soldiers died of disease, the Army kept no records of the women who succumbed to illness that winter.

Through all of the hardships of the winter, the army found time for joy. On May Day, soldiers danced around maypoles and played music. Just a few days later, upon receiving news of the French alliance, the army performed a Grand Review in the middle of camp with everyone marching out in formation, firing off cannon, a running fire of mus-

ketry. Three cheers each were given for the King of France, the friendly European powers (which also eventually included Spain and the Netherlands), and for the United States of America.

The soldiers persevered through six months of misery and suffering and on June 19, 1778, they left Valley Forge as the most effective fighting force at that point in the war. Nine days later, they fought the British at Monmouth Court House in New Jersey and drove the enemy from the field.

To this day many historians consider Valley Forge the birthplace of the professional United States Army.

Today, Valley Forge National Historical Park preserves the nearly 3,500 acres of land on which these people fought for their own survival, as well as the survival of the country. At Valley Forge, they are remembered.

Steven Walter, a former Butler resident, is a park guide with the Valley Forge National Historical Park.

