Butler Eagle

A Journey
Through Time

America 250PA - Butler County: Our History Inspires Our Future

January 2023



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

PROVIDED BY FRANCES TAVERN MUSEUM

# Valley Forge: Birthplace of U.S. Army

By Steven Walter

he 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.

See Valley Forge, Page 3

# War hero visits Butler in 1825

By Bill May

utler 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

See War hero, Page 2

# 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.

America 250: 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.



**JANUARY 2023** 

# **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,

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

he 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 upand-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 travel ing 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

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

'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 ufferings of a Revolutionary soldie

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.

See Turning 18, Page 4

## War hero -

## From Page 1

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

See War hero, Page 4

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**JANUARY 2023** 

# Joining the fight, fighting to survive

By William L. Kidder

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### 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

"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 Stanwix. 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 vears. For more information, visit his website: www.wlkidderhistorian.com.

# Valley Forge

# **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 Frenchspeaking 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 frequent cold rain and occasion-

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

Influenza, typhus, typhoid, Army, killing many and making many more unfit for duty. Alor starved to death at Valley Forge, an estimated 2,000 men died of disease over those six

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

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.

hovered just above freezing, with

became extremely difficult.

and dysentery swept through the though few, if any, soldiers froze

and throughout the war.

Washington and Congress reorganized the supply department of

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

## Among the ranks

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

supplies.

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 multiracial 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 musketry. 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 Vallev Forge National Historical Park.



**JANUARY 2023** 

# War hero

From Page 2

Monmouth Courthouse in New Jersey.

Afterward, Lafayette returned to France to win vital support for the fledgling United States following the signing of the Treaty of Alliance, which provided military and financial help to the new American government.

Lafayette helped convince King Louis XVI in 1779 to send the French fleet north from the Caribbean to fight the British. as well as dispatching an additional 6,000 troops crucial to sever King George III's rule over the colonies.

Back in America in 1780, Lafayette was given senior positions in the Continental Army. In 1781, troops under his command in Virginia blocked forces led by British Gen. Charles Cornwallis until other forces could position themselves for the decisive siege of Yorktown. That turned the tide to victory in the last major land battle of the American Revolution.

Eventually there would be independence. With the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1783, Great Britain formally recognized the United States of America.

But for Lafayette, peace was short-lived. Soon the French Revolution, and the subsequent years of political upheavals convulsed his native land, including the rise and fall of Napoleon. Eventually he had to flee from France and was imprisoned by the Austrians for a time.

#### A visiting hero

The Lafayette who journeyed back to America was a 67-year-old man, accompanied by his son, Georges Washington de Lafayette, and others. His "grand tour" began on Staten Island on Aug.15, 1824. The returning hero was welcomed in towns all along the 6,000-mile route.

According to the Butler Sentinel, word was received in Butler on Tuesday, the last day of May 1825. that the Frenchman would be traveling from Pittsburgh after a two-day visit and traveling on the regular stagecoach route between Pittsburgh and burgh City Light Troop of Cavalry served as

The day of his arrival, June 1, 1825, three arches were constructed to welcome Lafayette. The first arch was built at today's corner of South Main and Wayne streets, the second spanning over South Main and Diamond streets, and the third crossing the corner of Cunningham and South Main.

Each was patriotic, featuring evergreen and laurel with a 24-star American flag waving from the top. Suspended from the arch's center was a tablet proclaiming, "Welcome Lafavette.'

Men and boys rode horses or walked out to the Old Plank Road to escort the famous visitor into town. Other men, women, and children lined the dirt road from the north side of the Connoquenessing Creek bridge to Diamond Street to catch a glimpse of Lafayette. As his horsedrawn stagecoach passed, the crowd turned and walked behind him.

After passing under the second arch, the stagecoach driver stopped; the doors opened and out stepped the celebrity they had been awaiting.

He was no longer the dashing young man seen in artist John Vanderlyn heroic oil painting alongside Washington nearly 50 years ago. Nine-year-old Thomas Mechling of Butler described him in a 1894 Butler Citizen interview as "stout, round-faced man who walked with a limp from the wound he received during the Battle of Brandywine."

Lafavette progressed from the stagecoach to a welcoming ceremony led by former U.S. Sen. Walter Lowrie. After official greetings, the distinguished visitor walked over to the front door of the red-brick Mechling House or Mansion House as it was also called. This hotel was in the center section of West Diamond Street along the block between South Main and Jackson Streets.

Considered the finest lodging and dining in Butler the hotel was owned by German-American innkeepers Jacob Mechling and his wife, Mary Magdalene.

The couple's son, Thomas, was the last person alive to have shaken the hand of Lafayette in Butler when he died, in 1904.

Among the dishes Mrs. Mechling served boiled sauerkraut. Lafayette, it was reported, "ate freely of this.'

The meal was served on the hotel's finest china, and Butlerites of older generations will remember samples of the Mechling china were displayed in the lobby of the old Butler County National Bank (later Mellon Bank's Butler office) in what is today's Lafayette Building.

After concluding his meal, "The Nation's Guest" promenaded out the front door of the hotel to greet the crowd. He shook hands with not fewer than 400, including speaking to many men who had fought during the Revolution and the Battle of Brandywine. He recognized some of the old soldiers as they stood in review, conversing in detail about the battle, which had nearly taken his life.

Lafayette's sojourn in Butler ended after only a few hours. By 4 p.m. he resumed his tour of the nation he helped create.

As he headed north for a seven hours journey to a town named for fellow Revolutionary War general and friend Hugh Mercer. he was accompanied by two members of Butler's welcoming committee. "Farewell, my friends," he said. "You will not see me again."

## Journey's end

Lafavette's 14-month, an end on Sept. 6, 1825, in Washington, D.C.

At the White House, newly elected President John Quincy Adams celebrated Lafayette's 68th birthday. On Sept. 7. Adams and the guest of honor exchanged farewell speeches, and the former major general boarded the steamboat "Mount Vernon" on route to the mouth of the Potomac River.

The entourage transferred to the frigate "USS Brandywine," which carried them back to France accompanied on the voyage by 24 young naval officers, one from each state.

Lafayette died in Paris of pneumonia at the age 76 on May 20, 1834 and was interred in Picpus Cemetery.

About his last resting place, Lafayette left a strange request: He desired to be buried in both American and French soil.

During his visit to America in the 1820s, he had collected soil from each state. Only three weeks before his visit to Butler, the steamship "Mechanic," carrying Lafayette, sank in the Ohio River east of Louisville, Ky. The soil collected for his grave was gone.

The next best thing, Lafayette thought, would be soil from Bunker Hill. Honoring his father's wish. Georges Washington Lafayette spread the Massachusetts dirt from Bunker Hill over the remains.

An American flag, courtesy of the Daughters of the American Revolution, has waved over Lafayette's grave since the 1850s.

Bill May is a local historian, speaker and tour guide.

# Take a trip to Valley Forge

#### By Adam Gresek

For anyone traveling to the greater Philadelphia area, Valley Forge is a destination unto itself.

Preserved as the site of the 1777 to 1778 winter encampment for the Continental Army during the American Revolution, today it is a 3,500 acre park and one of the largest green spaces in southeastern Pennsylvania.

As part of a series of renovations and upgrades in preparation for the 250th anniversary of the Revolutionary War and founding of the United States, we reopened our visitor center after nearly four years of im-

The centerpieces of which are a new park movie and museum exhibition. Both include the latest scholarship on the soldiers at Valley Forge, and the women, children, and civilians that followed and supported them. Visitors can also see more original objects from the encampment, including some of the first uniform buttons featuring the initials

In addition to the visitor center and park movie, history seekers can also stop by Washington's Headquarters. George Washington rented this small stone house for his winter

From the two first floor rooms, he ran the entire Continental Army and Navy. The house bustled with officers, enslaved servants, and notable figures like Alexander Hamilton. Today, you can see where these people worked and slept and learn about their roles, great or small, in founding our nation.

To see Valley Forge, there are several options to take it all in. There is a car driving tour that circles the heart of the park and takes visitors



Ranger Jen Bolton, wearing a Continental Army uniform, speaks with visitors in the Valley Forge visitor center museum. NPS PHOTO/A GRESEK

to the most import sites. Just be sure to pick up a map and cell phone guide at the visitor center.

For those that don't feel like driving, the park bookstore sells 90-minute trolley tours with a live guide narrating your ride through history.

For those that want to literally follow the footsteps of the Army, almost all the significant historic spots are walkable through 36 miles of trails.

Even if you are not a history fan, Valley Forge is the perfect spot to get outdoors. The casual walker or serious runner will be right at home on the paved Joseph Plumb Martin Trail. Those seeking an unpaved challenge can hike Mount Misery.

The Grand Parade offers amazing birdwatching opportunities and Valley Creek has some of the best fly fishing for the properly equipped and licensed angler.

So, stop by the park's website at www.nps.gov/vafo to see all you can do at the park, and we hope to see you this year in Valley Forge.

Ranger Adam Gresek is director of Visitor and Community Engagement at Valley Forge National Historical Park.

Mount Vernon, Va.

#### PLACES TO EXPERIENCE HISTORY

Gathered here are suggestions where history can be experienced. Information included was gathered from the musuems' websites.

#### **Fort Pitt Museum**

Address: Point State Park, 601 Commonwealth Place, Pittsburgh

Phone: 412-281-9284 Open: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Of note: The Fort Pitt Museum tells the story of Western Pennsylvania's pivotal role during the French and Indian War, the American Revolution, and as the birthplace of Pittsburgh through interactive exhibitions, lifelike figures, and 18th century artifacts.

summer During the months, there is living history in Point State Park as the Fort Pitt Museum's colonial reenactors demonstrate how life was lived during the 1700s.

#### Fort Pitt Blockhouse

Address: 601 Commonwealth PI Building C, Pitts-

Phone: 412-471-1764 Open: 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. year-round, check for

days Of note: The Fort Pitt Block House, owned and maintained by the Pittsburgh Chapter of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, is a historic building in Point State Park in the city of Pittsburgh. It was construct-



Fort Pitt Museum is an indoor/outdoor museum that is administered by the Heinz History Center in downtown Pittsburgh. FORT PITT MUSEUM PHOTO

ed in 1764 as a redoubt of Fort Pitt, making it the oldest extant structure in Western Pennsylvania, as well as the "oldest authenticated structure west of the Allegheny Mountains.'

## Fort McIntosh Museum

Address: 1 Beaver Road, Beaver, Pa.

Phone: 724-775-7174 Open: 24 hours

Of note: Gen. Lachlan McIntosh built Fort McIntosh during the American Revolution in 1778 on a plateau above the Ohio River at what would become the town of Beaver, Pa. He was assigned by Gen. George Washington as commander of the Western Department of the Continental Army. Constructed in 1778, it was

the first fort built by the Continental Army north of the Ohio River, as a direct challenge to the British stronghold at Detroit.

#### **Fort Laurens Museum**

Address: 11067 Fort Laurens Road NW, Bolivar,

Phone: 330-874-2059 Open: Weekends

Of note: Fort Laurens was an American Revolutionary War fort on a northern tributary of the Muskingum River in what would become northeast Ohio. The fort's location is in the present-day town of Bolivar, Ohio, along the Ohio and Erie Canal Towpath Trail.

#### George Washington's **Mount Vernon**

**Phone:** 703-780-2000 Open: 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Vernon Memorial Highway,

Of note: Mount Vernon is

an American landmark and former plantation of founding father, commander of the Continental Army in the Revolutionary War, and the first president of the United States George Washington and his wife, Martha.

#### **Army Heritage Center** Foundation

Address: 950 Soldiers Drive, Carlisle, Pa. Phone: 717-258-1102

**Open:** 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays

Of note: The U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center in Carlisle, Pa., is the premier educational, research, and archival facility focused on U.S. Army history. The center features free and publicly accessible exhibit galleries, a research library and archives and the

#### Museum of the American Revolution

Army Heritage Trail.

Address: 101 S. Third St, Philadelphia Phone: 215-253-6731

Open: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily; Revolution Place, 11 to 4 p.m. winter hours

Of note: Revolution Place features four key recreated historical environments — a military encampment, a tavern, a home, and an 18th century meeting house - to im-Address: 3200 Mount merse and engage families.

# Turning 18

#### From Page 2

"Our prospect was indeed dreary. In our miserable condition, to go into the wild woods and build us habitations to stay (not to live) in, in such a weak, starved and naked condition, was appalling in the highest degree," wrote Joseph Plum Martin, from a (1830) narrative of some of the adventures, dangers, and sufferings of a Revolutionary soldier. The severely crowded conditions

might have helped the soldiers stay warm, but close quarters and unsanitary conditions also fostered the rapid spread of dysentery and typhus.

Craven became ill that winter and spent time at Yellow Springs, America's first purpose-built military hospital. His stay there might have helped Sullivan survive while many of his comrades perished for lack of proper care in makeshift infirmaries. The exact death toll will never be known, but at Valley Forge,

where no battle was fought, at least 2,000 soldiers lost their lives.

Craven enjoyed another stroke of good fortune at Valley Forge. We don't know how or where, perhaps while he was convalescing, but Craven met his future wife that winter.

Susannah Johnston, the daughter of Chester County residents Thomas and Margaret Johnston, was 14 years old when she and Craven met. They must have harbored real feelings for one another; their relationship survived through the War for Independence and two years beyond.

Charles Craven Sullivan and Susannah Johnston finally became man and wife at a Methodist church in Chester County in 1785, seven long years after they had met during the winter of the Valley Forge encamp-

After Valley Forge, the 1st marched south with other Virginia

regiments to fight in the Carolinas. Most of the regiment mustered

out in 1783. Many, including Craven, took up lands given to veterans in southwest Pennsylvania.

Craven and Susannah settled at the head of Sawmill Run, about five miles south of Pittsburgh in 1786, then began a family. Their first five children were born in Allegheny County, but the family had relocated to Butler by the time daughter Jemima arrived in 1800.

Susannah had another four babies who were born on "Partnership Farm," the family's home in Franklin Township. One of those four, Charles Craven Sullivan, grew to be the young lawyer who purchased the Lowrie House in 1839.

His children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren - all descended from a young couple who met at Valley Forge — owned Lowrie House until 1986, when it passed to the Butler County Historical Society.

Jennifer Ford, PhD, is the executive director of the Butler County Historical Society.