

SCHWARTZ *Report*



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WASHINGTON NAPPED HERE

It was a hot time for George Washington in the Delaware Valley 240 years ago this month. Earlier in that summer of 1777 there was strong evidence that General Howe, who commanded the British army in New York, would try to capture Philadelphia by way of the Delaware River. Therefore, the Continental Congress ordered General Washington to take his army to the Delaware and also ordered that “the militia of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maryland be immediately called forth to repel any invasion of the enemy in these States...” After having navigational difficulties in the Delaware Bay, Lord Howe changed plans and decided to approach Philadelphia via the Chesapeake Bay. Thus, his army’s disembarkation point was at the head of the Elk River in Maryland. After landing on August 25, 1777, his troops marched into Delaware most likely via the Old Baltimore Pike.



engagement fought in Delaware, the battle of Cooch’s Bridge has one other notable distinction. It was there that the “Betsy Ross Flag” was first unfurled in battle. As the inscription on the monument erected on the spot in 1901 reads: “The Stars and Stripes were First Unfurled in Battle at Cooch’s Bridge.”

To counter this threat General Washington, “with the youthful Lafayette by his side”, moved his 12,000 men south through Philadelphia to Wilmington. Caesar Rodney, who commanded the Delaware militia, was ordered to head for the Elk River to reconnoiter and harass the enemy. On September 3rd a contingent of continentals consisting of about 1,700 men, 700 of which were Delaware and Maryland troops, clashed with a body of redcoats at “the foot of Iron Mountain near Cooch’s Bridge.”* What was described as a “severe skirmish” between them took place there and the colonials were obliged to retreat.

Although it was the only significant Revolutionary War

By now you are probably asking yourself “what does this history lesson have to do with real estate?” Well, if you trace the route of the retreating continentals, it is likely that they passed through the town of Christiana. This would lend credibility to the story that Washington and Lafayette stopped at a particularly nice Georgian colonial home with a current address on East Main Street there. Whether they did or didn’t stay there, at least two of the recent owners were impressed that they may have. Now Washington is reputed to have slept in many places, so let’s be conservative and say that he just napped there. What is the psychological value of such history? Thirty some years ago, long before internet marketing and Zillow, when I had the property listed for sale, it seemed to be of little impact at all. The property was then owned by a bank that had let it fall into a sad state of repair and the road network in place at that time insured that there was always a lot of traffic passing in front. My father always admonished would be buyers: “Never buy a house on a road with a line down the middle of it.” So this fine old place lacked two of the four essential selling features of price, condition, location and terms of sale. Its condition was iffy and its location was even worse.

*Excerpted from *A History of Delaware* by Walter A. Powell. Apparently things appeared a lot bigger in those days as this reference is to Iron Hill.

Enter my mentor and hero, John R. Giles, with a recently transferred couple who were looking for a property with some history to it. Jack, as he is known, is the patriarch of the Giles family whose members have made many important contributions to the success of Patterson-Schwartz over the years. Although Jack would never claim to be a historian, I'd say that he has earned his Ph.D. in people studies. He didn't so much want to sell the property to these folks. Let's say he wasn't too high on it and wanted to make sure that they understood what they were getting into. He could see them getting transferred again two years hence. Then he'd get stuck with reselling this gem.

The repartee went something like this. Every time

these buyers would thrill over the fact that Washington and Lafayette had been in the property; Jack would mention the traffic count. When they mentioned owning a piece of history he would point to the deferred maintenance. When they talked about the fine old early Georgian architecture; he asked what if they got transferred before they could make good on their restoration plans. "But what about Washington and Lafayette," they would say? In the end it all worked out surprisingly well. Jack adopted the philosophy of "if you like it, I love it." Even the traffic pattern was realigned. I mark this down as one of the finest examples of reverse psychology I have ever witnessed and it demonstrated to me conclusively that history does have value.

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