

East Falls Past-- Washington Encampment in East Falls

The Fallser, February 2009, by Wendy Moody

This month we celebrate President's Day, as well as welcome our 44th President into office. Both occasions make us recall our national roots and our first president, George Washington, who encamped in East Falls. Margaret Spino's excellent article in *East Falls: 300 Years of History*, recounts this time in history:



Washington and his army occupied the high plateau at the Queen Lane Reservoir both before and after the Battle of Brandywine in 1777. The Army remained here a week, while Washington was trying to ascertain what General Howe and his British Army were up to. His uncertainty was evident from the orders issued the first day in camp: all troops were to have two days provisions ready and be prepared to march. Washington wrote to his brother: "We have remained here in a very irksome state of suspense; some imagining the British have gone southward, whilst a majority...are satisfied that they have gone eastward." During the anxious days of the American army's camp at the Falls, the troops were held in constant readiness to march, should news come about the British fleet.

Washington joined his army in the camp at the Falls, making his headquarters at the farmhouse of Henry Hill, near Midvale Avenue and Stokely Street.

"The states have been shamefully deficient in supplying troops," he wrote. And, at that time, he did not place much hope upon French aid: "I have from the first been among those who have never built much upon a French war." The French, he declared, give only "underhand assistance supplying arms in trade."

Lafayette, just arrived in Philadelphia from South Carolina, rode out for a visit. The Marquis saw the American Army for the first time here at Falls of Schuylkill. He wrote: "There were 11,000 men, ill-armed and still worse clothed. Many wore hunting shirts. Some were attired in long, gray linen coats much used in Carolina. But the soldiers were fine, and the officers were zealous. Virtue stood in place of science, and each day added to the experience and the discipline." General Lafayette made his headquarters at the Morgan house, near the corner of Coulter and Henry, when the Continental soldiers were encamped here. (When the Americans left this camp, Lafayette went with them, and was severely wounded at Brandywine, his first American battle).

A monument, consisting of a bronze tablet attached to a granite boulder, surrounded by cannon, was erected at Queen Lane and Fox Street in 1895 by the Pennsylvania Sons of the Revolution, to mark Washington's campsite. This hill, where the Queen Lane reservoir stands, was once proposed as the site for the permanent federal capital.

