



PERSONAL SUPERVISION—In his unique and only role as a military commander, Benjamin Franklin is shown supervising the construction of Fort Allen.

CARBON COUNTY PANORAMA—272—

Ben Franklin Began Ft. Allen 203 Years Ago

This is the 272nd in a series of articles, Carbon County Panorama, featuring historic incidents and places throughout the Panther Valley and the county.

By RALPH KREAMER

Two hundred and three years ago this Tuesday construction of Carbon County's most important frontier defense — Fort Allen — was begun.

The circumstances surrounding the necessity of a fortress near the site of the brutal Gnaden Huetten massacre are familiar to most Lehigh Valley residents. Just as familiar is the fact that Benjamin Franklin was actively associated with a military command for the first times holding the rank of colonel.

Ensign Pens Letter

Much of this information is contained in Franklin's letters, his autobiography, and in a letter written by one of the officers in the force, Ensign Thomas Lloyd. Lloyd's letter was written to an unknown addressee and the original is in the possession of the American Philosophical Society.

In his autobiography, Franklin writes, "I had no difficulty in raising men, soon having five hundred and sixty under my command." After assembling in Bethlehem on Jan. 15, 1756, Franklin's little army moved northward toward Gnaden

Huetten. The force became larger during the march when it was met by three additional detachments.

'Hills Like Alps'

Describing the last and most difficult part of the journey from Lehigh Gap to Gnaden Huetten, the officer complained the region was the worst he had ever seen. Lloyd wrote it had hills like the Alps and on each side a long narrow defile where the road could barely permit the passage of the seven supply wagons. He writes of crossing a rapid creek with steep banks that had a single log for a bridge. This stream was probably the Pohocopo Creek which empties into the Lehigh at Parryville.

Stopped at Tavern

In Franklin's report to the governor he gives a detailed description of Fort Allen's construction as well as an account of the journey. On the second day's march, a Friday, Uplinger's Tavern, situated in the Lehigh Gap - Palmerton area was reached. (There are conflicting historical opinions concerning the tavern's exact location.)

Franklin and his forces remained at the tavern that night hoping to reach the abandoned mission on the following day. That Saturday morning, according to Franklin's own account, his troops left Uplinger's and moved two miles north-

ward. Heavy rains and the lack of great coats prompted Franklin to call a halt and return to the tavern.

That evening the expedition's leader observed his 50th birthday anniversary in the cheerless frontier tavern. Franklin's birthday would have been observed in more civilized surroundings on Jan. 6th, but the adoption of the Gregorian calendar in 1752 robbed him of this privilege.

On Sunday morning, his army left Uplinger's and by 2 p.m. arrived at the massacre site. After interring the bodies of its victims, a strong breastwork was built with lumber brought up from Slatington. This lumber was cut in the mill known as Tucker's or Kern's. This defense was only temporary.

Monday was so dark and foggy that no attempts were made to find a location for a permanent fort. The following day, a site opposite the river in present day Weissport was selected. By 10 a.m. the men began to cut timber for stockades and to dig into the ground.

On Jan. 24 the fort was completed. The flag was hoisted and several guns as well as the defense's two swivel pieces were fired. This simple ceremony marked the naming of Fort Allen after Franklin's friend, Judge William Allen — founder of Allentown.