

Brandywine Battlefield Dedication
Tuesday, June 26, 2007
Brandywine Conservancy

Seven score and four years ago a great American President, Abraham Lincoln, stood on the site of another American battlefield located in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Gettysburg, to recognize the importance of the Civil War battlefield and the sacrifices made by many Americans at that location.

Lincoln said that day in November 1863, “Our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”

Today we stand on another piece of sacred ground, as Lincoln called the ground at Gettysburg. This ground played an important part in the founding of the United States of America, the nation that was conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men – and women - are created equal.

On a hot summer’s day in 1777, September 11th to be exact, the forces of King George III formed in the area of Kennett Square, just a few miles to the west of where we stand, to do battle with General George Washington’s army – either rebels or freedom fighters depending on your view. The aim of British commander General William Howe that day was to entrap and crush Washington’s army.

According to several British officers, they believed they could have ended the American Revolution here if they only had a few more hours of daylight. Howe’s plan was a success but Washington did escape.

Yes, the Battle of Brandywine was a military defeat for General Washington but it was also the beginning of renewed hope for those in Washington’s army. At Sandy Hollow, just to our east, American troops fought British regulars and Hessian mercenaries to a draw for several hours. The Americans took that memory of holding their own against some of the best soldiers in Europe with them to Valley Forge and used it, with the help of General von Steuben, as a basis to improve their military knowledge and expertise.

Washington’s army included a number of foreign officers besides von Steuben. Brandywine was the first battle for a great friend of America, French General Lafayette. On land just across from Sandy Hollow, Lafayette, shed some of his own blood for America.

When Washington was informed the British had flanked his army and was forming on Osborne Hill, just to our north, Lafayette rushed to the area of the crisis and took charge of a portion of the army. His bravery and courage endeared him to his new American brothers. America to this day reveres that young French general for helping us win our freedom.

The Battle of Brandywine is historically significant for many reasons. This was the main battle of the Philadelphia campaign; this was the largest land battle of the whole war; this was the battle where our nation's flag, the stars and stripes first came under hostile fire; and the Continental Congress fled Philadelphia after the defeat here at Brandywine. Also, this is where new heroes to Americans, such as Lafayette, came to life.

History is really the story of individuals, like you and me, and not so much the events and dates – even though September 11 is important to all of us. Lafayette is one of the heroes. Another is Squire Cheyney who alerted General Washington that the British army was forming to his rear. Cheyney is known as the Paul Revere of the Brandywine.

A future Supreme Court justice, John Marshall fought at Brandywine, as did his father, Colonel Thomas Marshall, who was in the 3rd Virginia. We can see from here about where he fought as he was in the unit that stopped the British for a time at the intersection of Birmingham Road and Route 926.

Many heroes, some unknown and lost to history, sacrificed their lives here at Brandywine. Actually, heroes were here on the O'Dell property where we stand. When Squire Cheyney warned General Washington of the British forming on Osborne Hill, General Sullivan was given orders to march his troops to this area to meet General Howe's forces.

It is altogether fitting that we preserve this ground for Americans of today and for future generations. Those who have participated in the protection of the more than 100 acres of the Brandywine Battlefield National Historic Landmark are to be congratulated for their vision, dedication and patriotism. I know I thank all of them.

I'll conclude by noting that even though my talk is almost three times as long as Lincoln's address at Gettysburg, it is about two hours less than the talk of Edward Everett, who was the orator who preceded Lincoln at Gettysburg.

Thank you all for caring and for taking action.