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TABLETS ARE UNVEILED ON BRANDYWINE BATTLEGROUND – One Hundred and Thirty-Third Anniversary of Great Revolution Engagement Observed by Delaware County Historical Society – Addresses Delivered By Prominent Men

With ideal weather and amidst auspicious circumstances the bronze tablets marking the headquarters of Generals Washington and Lafayette on the Brandywine battlefield at Chadd's Ford, where one of the series of struggles of the Revolution in the year of 1777 occurred, were unveiled on Saturday afternoon by the Delaware County Historical Society to fittingly commemorate the one hundred and thirty-third anniversary of the Battle of Brandywine. Gathered on the battlefield were hundreds of people, who reached there by automobile, train, carriage and afoot, some coming from long distances. Delaware and Chester counties were well represented, the historical societies of both counties having prominent members present. From California, Oklahoma, Tennessee and several other far distant states went people desirous of witnessing the ceremonies and tramping over one of the historic battlefields of Revolutionary times.

AT WASHINGTON'S HEADQUARTERS – The Philadelphia Delegation and persons living in the Eastern section of the county arrived on a train on the Pennsylvania line early in the afternoon over the Baltimore Central. The train stopped before reaching Chadd's Ford junction to make the walk to the battleground a shorter one for the passengers. Several hacks and teams were placed in service and it was not long before all of the visitors had reached the Washington headquarters on the Baltimore Pike. Here the visitors inspected the historic house and placed their names of the register.

In one portion of the house, the part which has not been rebuilt, Christian Sanderson and his mother, Mrs. Hannah Sanderson, reside. Christian Sanderson is a student of history and is thoroughly familiar with the story of the battle of Brandywine and the biographies of the famous men who took part in the conflict. He has a large collection of curios of the battle and also souvenirs of the Civil war, which the visitors of the house observed with pleasure. The other part of the house is occupied by Mrs. L.J. Guss and her sister, Miss R. Anna Jefferis, who have resided there for thirteen years. They were much interested in the observance but Mrs. Guss was disappointed that the tablet placed there did not mention the battle of Brandywine.

TABLETS UNVEILED – After the sightseeing was over the historians and party gathered along the road and prepared for the unveiling of the tablet in front of the Washington headquarters. After the short exercises had been opened by A. Lewis Smith, Esq., of Media, president of the Delaware County Historical Society, the tablet was unveiled by Miss Jefferis. In observance of the one hundred and thirty-third anniversary of the battle, which occurred September 11, 1777, the ceremonies were held. When the flag was removed from the marker the inscription could be read, "Washington's Headquarters, Sept 10th and 11th, 1777, Delaware County Historical Society, Sept 10, 1910."

The tablet is attached to a boulder. The house was occupied at the time of the Revolution by Benjamin Ring. It passed into other hands at one time the owner being Joseph Turner. The house is now the property of Mrs. Randolph of Philadelphia as part of the estate of her late husband.

From the Washington headquarters the crowd went to the house where Marquis de Lafayette made his headquarters when he joined the American army after securing his

commission from the Continental Congress. Here the unveiling was by Dr. Arthur H. Cleveland of the Medico Chirurgical College, Philadelphia, the owner of the property. The house is occupied by John Andress. These ceremonies were of brief duration.

HISTORICAL EXERCISES – The historical exercises followed in the Brandywine Baptist Church, which lies between the two headquarters. The church was filled to overflowing. The platform was occupied by the speakers of the afternoon. Charlemagne Tower, one of the speakers, who was former ambassador to Austria and to Germany, arrived early with Senator William C. Sproul of Chester, whose guest he was during the day, the trip being made in Senator Sproul's automobile. Also accompanying Senator Sproul was Dr. John W. Jordan, librarian of the Pennsylvania Historical Society and editor of the Pennsylvania Magazine of History. Judge William B. Broomall also arrived from Chester by automobile.

The meeting at the church was presided over by President A. Lewis Smith of the society and opened with the invocation by the pastor, Rev. Charles F. Hahn. The opening address by President Smith was of a historical nature, and in its course he spoke of the great events of the Revolution and the relation of the battle of Brandywine to the other struggles of war for freedom. Mr. Smith said:

“We are gathered here today up in the invitation of The Delaware County Historical Society to aid in permanence of a belated duty to the community and to posterity as well – a duty which could not be more appropriately performed than under the auspices of this Society.

“If asked why we take such pains to preserve in bronze and stone the memory of that fateful day a century and a third ago when the stubborn courage and matchless bravery of the patriotic army were borne down to defeat by the superior numbers and better equipment of the British forces. I answer first, that history is impartial and its sole function tis to preserve perpetuate and disseminate the truth, regardless of the passions and prejudices of the actors whose deeds are recorded; and I answer further that the Battle of Brandywine was only one of the incidents of the struggle which in its entirety, evolved the Great Republic whose blessings we are enjoying today, and whose foundations were in a measure laid when the first Continental Congress met only three years before. Had the result of the battle been different, who can now say in the light of after events, that the ultimate outcome of the war would have been hastened or the cause of the colonies benefitted? Defeat it was, indeed, but by no means the disaster it seemed at the time. Within less than a week the American Army, little discouraged was again facing the foe on the verge of a far more serious conflict than any which had occurred during the war; a conflict which was only forestalled by a war of the elements of sudden and extraordinary violence. That the army was in no wise disarrayed by its late reverses was again amply demonstrated by the spirited battle of Germantown in the early part of the following month.

“It is not my purpose, however, to detain you by describing the battle which was fought here on September 11, 1777, or the events which led up to it. The battle of Brandywine has probably been more written about and commented on than any other which occurred during the Revolution except perhaps Lexington and Bunker Hill and this probably for the reason that although the advantage of position was with Washington's army, it has been assumed that the day was lost because of his failure to receive from some of its subordinates, until too late, correct information of the movements by the enemy.

This indeed is given by Washington himself as a material cause contributing to the result, but many intelligent persons who have investigated the matter with access to facts since obtained from numerous sources – facts unknown to Washington himself – have questioned whether even if that Commander had received timely advice of these movements, his forces outnumbered as they were by at least a third, would not in the end have been compelled to retire before the well-appointed and well-disciplined British Army. The late Judge Futhey who was very familiar with the ground traversed by both armies and who made a special study of all the information respecting this battle obtainable from any source, while conceding as inexcusable the negligence of certain officers, concludes notwithstanding that it was problematical whether the Americans could have succeeded under any circumstances. But taking a broader view, he adds that looking at all the surroundings and the difficulties encountered and overcome, the disasters which befell the American army benefits victories from the first gun which was fired in the struggle until the British laid down their arms at Yorktown.”

The sole aim of Sir William Howe in undertaking his costly expedition was to capture Philadelphia, the Capitol, and most populous city in the country – not indeed for any strategic advantage or material benefit to the captors or disadvantage to the defenders but merely for the moral or sentimental effect which the possession of the metropolis might have both here and abroad.

For a like reason, which in modern parlance would be called “political necessity” and to prevent its capture, the American Commander was spurred on by Congress and others in authority to an encounter with Howe at Brandywine. It was natural that such a view should prevail. We are often so anxious about what other people think of us that we do not always act the best for our own interests. In this case the result quickly developed the entire futility of the undertaking of Sir William Howe both in its conception and in its conclusion. The invaders soon became practically prisoners within the boroughs of the town they had taken with so much effort; they voluntarily abandoned its possession in less than nine months from the time they entered and made a disastrous retreat to New York, whence as a mighty host they had embarked in July of the previous year prepared to strike a final blow at the rebellion and restore the authority of that Sovereign of whom a British poet has said:

“He ever warred with freedom and the free;
Nations as men, home subjects, foreign foes
So that they uttered the word “Liberty”
Found George the Third their first opponent.”

There was, however, one man among the patriot defenders of their country who from the beginning was able with a prophetic eye to appraise at its true value the movement of Howe. I mean the far-sighted soldier and statesman, Alexander Hamilton. While the British Commander was engaged in equipping his fleet and transports for the expedition to the Chesapeake, and while the officers of the Continental army were all guessing as to its destination, Hamilton wrote a letter to his friend, Dr. Know, in which he says, if they go to the Southward in earnest, they must have the capture of Philadelphia in view, for there is no other sufficient inducement. We shall endeavor to get there in time to oppose them, and shall have the principal part of the Continental force and a large body of spirited militia, many of them from their services during the last campaign pretty well injured to arms to make the opposition with. Yet I would not have you be much surprised

in Philadelphia should fall, for the enemy will doubtless go there with a determination to succeed at all hazard, and we shall not be able to prevent them without risking a general action, the expediency of which will depend upon circumstances.”

“And he adds, referring to this expediency. “It may be asked, if to avoid a general engagement we give up objects of the first importance, what is to hinder the enemy from carrying every important point and ruining us.” My answer is that our hopes are not placed in any particular city or spot of ground, but in preserving a good army garnished with proper necessaries to take advantage of favorable opportunities and waste and defeat the enemy by piecemeal. Every new post they take requires a new division of their forces and enables us to strike with our united force against a part of theirs and such is their present situation that another Trenton affair will amount to a complete victory on our part, for they are at too low and ebb to bear another stroke of the kind.

“And so it preyed in the end. The back door invasion by the British forces ended in disadvantage to them, and apart from the deplorable loss of life and suffering directly involved, proved to be a substantial benefit to the American cause.

“When on August 26, 1777 Howe disembarked his well-equipped army of 18,000 trained soldiers and marched from the Chesapeake towards Kennett Square, General Washington, to prevent being hemmed in between that army and the fleet, quickly moved his forces from Red Clay Creek near Wilmington to the historic ground upon which we stand today, and established his headquarters in yonder unpretentious house, then occupied by Benjamin Bing; and at the same time the official home of Lafayette, his youthful and ever loyal friend, whose name is indissolubly joined with that of the Father of his Country in the memory and affections of after consideration, was located in the still humbler cottage nearby, then occupied by Gideon Gilpin. When we look at the disposition which the Commander-in-Chief made of the several divisions of the army it is easy to understand why these dwellings in preference to more commodious houses in the neighborhood, (situated also as they were on the main highway along which the enemy would probably advance) were selected for the purpose. That they were so selected an unerring tradition, verified by temporary landmarks has placed beyond cavil. It may well be imagined that on the busy afternoon of the battle scant personal use was made of them by the eminent commanders whose headquarters they were, but the fact that they were so chosen and used, entitles these two localities to the sentimental regard which has for all time attached to places associated with great and worthy names. It was therefore eminently proper for us today to establish and dedicate historical records which shall not only perpetuate the facts which they recite, but shall also serve to inspire and keep ever fresh a patriotic reverence for the memory of the great men whose names they record.

The Battle of Brandywine was fought less than ninety-years after the great Revolution in England which first firmly established there what has been well termed a government of laws, not of men. It was this part of government that the colonies time and gain vainly appealed for to the Mother country, and the denial of which gave birth to the great Declaration of 1776, and in its train to the Constitution of these United States, without which the Declaration would have been in vain. By it was indeed established a government of laws and not men, and of this government so established Washington, in the farewell address, uttered the admonition which holds as good today as upon the day it was spoken: “Respect for its authority said he, compliance with its laws acquiescence in its measures are duties enjoined by the fundamental maxims of true Liberty.”

“If, as I hope we may believe, that we are now doing here shall only occasionally serve to remind those who come after us of the trials, sacrifices and achievements which eventuated in the adoption of that Constitution, and thereby to stimulate even in a small degree a reverence for that greatest of fundamental laws and for the government founded on to we shall have cause for congratulation in having come together today.”

This was followed by an original poem, which was written and read by John Russell Hayes, librarian at Swarthmore College, on Washington and Lafayette at the Brandywine.

Following the reading of the poem, Garnett Pendleton of Upland, a descendent of a hero of the Battle of Brandywine, and a member of the Delaware County Historical Society, delivered a fine address on “Washington,” in the course of which he paid tribute to the Commander-in-Chief of the Colonial forces in his strategic work at the Battle of Brandywine.

KEITH LOCKHART COLLECTION