

NEW JERSEY STATE LIBRARY



3 3009 00540 7038

Ann C. Whitall, the Heroine
of Red Bank. ¶ The Battle of
Gloucester. ¶ Lost Towns and
Hamlets in Old Gloucester
County

For Library Use Only
DO NOT CIRCULATE

Prepared for and read before the
Gloucester County Historical Society
"Woodbury, New Jersey"

J974.981

M144

copy!

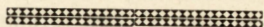
Sold for the Society for
Fifty Cents the Copy

whence comes the sound of ding-ding-ding-dick; and west, within twenty feet the trolley groans its remonstrance to the steep grade, whose passengers may note at the edge of the embankment a small marble slab, eight inches by two, and showing but six inches above the sward. That marks the final resting place of Ann Cooper Whitall. Three miles to the westward is the Whitall house, and the same beam of the setting sun that glints upon the bosom of the Delaware at her former home, is reflected on the corner of that little monument.

Now the sun in all his state, illumines the western skies;
But she has passed thro' Glory's gate, and walks in Paradise.

"The sun is but a spark of fire,
A transient meteor in the sky;
The soul, immortal as its Sire,
Can never die."

—James Montgomery.



THE BATTLE OF GLOUCESTER

Read before the Gloucester County Historical Society by
Wallace McGeorge, M. D., January 9, 1906

THE Battle of Gloucester, as people living in this part of the State in the Eighteenth Century, called it, was of more importance to the American cause than most readers of history are willing to ascribe to it.

From history we learn that after the fall of Fort Mifflin on November 10, 1777, and the evacuation of Fort Mercer, by Col. Greene, on November 20, 1777, Lord Cornwallis marched a portion of his troops to Red Bank, November 21, destroyed the fortifications and magazine, and then went up the river to Gloucester Point, and established his headquarters there, where his force of five thousand men would be under the protection of the guns on the British frigates lying in the river, and secure from an attack by the Continental troops. Foraging parties were immediately sent out and large quantities of cattle, provision and stores were secured by Cornwallis' men, and ferried over the river to be used by the British army, then in possession of Philadelphia (*a*).

At that time, all the region of country south of Newton Creek (then called New Town Creek) and north of Timber Creek (then called Big Timber Creek), was called Gloucester, the village

itself being known as Gloucester Point. Yet the engagement or skirmish, or battle, known in history as "The Battle of Gloucester" took place within the limits of the then township of Union, now called Centre Township, the Hessians retreating, at the close of the third attack towards Gloucester where the main force of the English army was encamped.

Christopher

General Nathaniel Greene, considered by some historians, to be next in rank and ability to Gen. Washington, had been sent by Washington across the Delaware river from Bristol to Mount Holly, with an almost equal body of troops, a part of which was militia, and awaited the arrival of Glover's brigade from the North, in order to take offensive measures against Cornwallis.

There had been an unaccountable delay in the arrival of this brigade, which had been expressly ordered by Washington to report to General Greene, and assist him in the second defense of Fort Mercer. Owing to its non-arrival, General Nathaniel Greene did not feel himself strong enough to attack Lord Cornwallis, or to support Colonel Christopher Greene, the brave defender of Fort Mercer, and in consequence four days after the capture of Fort Mifflin, Colonel Green retired with his forces toward Haddonfield. Cornwallis marched his troops to Red Bank and destroyed the fortifications, and then went up the river to Gloucester Point.

"Had they (Glover's Brigade) arrived but ten days sooner," writes Washington to his brother, "it would, I think, have put it in my power to save Fort Mifflin, which defended the chevaux-de-frise, and consequently have rendered Philadelphia a very ineligible situation for the enemy this winter." (b).

The foraging parties sent out by Cornwallis, went all over the country now known as Camden, Gloucester, Mt. Ephraim, Collingswood, Haddonfield, Westville, Woodbury, Mantua, Berkley, Paulsboro, Billingsport and Red Bank, seizing horses, cattle, poultry, hay, grain and all manner of provisions from the storekeepers, farmers and residents, carrying them off to feed the British army. As our troops were at Mt. Holly, the inhabitants were powerless to prevent these incursions, and much ill feeling was engendered.

About this time, Lafayette, although the wound in his leg had not entirely healed, had returned from Bethlehem to the headquarters of the army, and knowing that General Greene had been ordered to New Jersey to look after and attack Cornwallis, asked Washington's permission to accompany Greene, and was assigned as a volunteer, and went with Greene through Bristol and Burlington to Mt. Holly. Shortly after, with Greene's permission, he proceeded to Haddonfield, and from there with a small force of men he reconnoitred the enemy's position at and around Gloucester.

In Prowell's history of Camden county we read: "on the evening of November 25, General Lafayette, notwithstanding that he was still suffering from an unclosed wound, came out from camp at Haddonfield, with the intention of reconnoitering Cornwallis. His zeal carried him close up to the British lines upon the sandy peninsula south of the outlet of Timber Creek, and he was pursued by a squad of dragoons." (c)

In Mickle's Reminiscences of Old Gloucester, the same account is given, also the additional information that it was only through the aid of a scout who knew a by-road that Lafayette escaped being captured.

But according to Lafayette's own report, the time of day is wrong, as well as the location where he was, when seen by the enemy, and pursued. In his official report to Washington, he says that this reconnoitering was in the morning, and in his map of the engagement and location of the enemy's forces, Sandy Point is distinctly shown to be North of Newton Creek where the New York Shipbuilding Plant now is. Directly opposite, about where the old iron foundry is now located, in the upper part of Gloucester, a portion of Cornwallis' troops was posted, to guard the approach from Camden, and these were the troops who saw Lafayette while standing near the river bank at the mouth of Newton Creek, reconnoitering their position, and watching the boats coming from Gloucester to Philadelphia with their plunder.

"To insure protection to the British army, and to the foraging parties sent out by Cornwallis, English and Hessian " pickets were kept on and along the King's road which crossed" Newton Creek and "Little Timber Creek at the Two Tons Tavern, kept by an old lady known as Aunty High Cap. The road extending southerly passed close in front of the Browning homestead, and over Big Timber Creek, where the old bridge formerly stood. Going southerly (easterly is correct) from the old tavern it went near the former residence of Jonathan Atkinson, and through Mount Ephraim towards Haddonfield." (d).

"The section of country lying between this old road and the river was the scene of many encounters, numberless reconnoissances and much strategy, and traditions are still remembered, touching their purpose and success, while others are lost sight of and forgotten." (d).

There are many accounts of this battle or skirmish. In Brook's "True Story of Lafayette" we read: On the twenty-fifth of November, while accompanying General Greene as a volunteer, to test the strength of the British advance from Philadelphia, he (Lafayette) discovered the British position near the town of Gloucester, and with a force of but three hundred and fifty men,

attacked and routed the Hessian advance, with such spirit that Cornwallis supposed himself assailed by Greene's entire division, and with his men retreated in hot haste to the security of the main army." (e).

In Barber's Historical Recollections "A small, but brilliant affair was performed by a detachment of about one hundred and fifty riflemen under Lieut. Col. Butler, and a like number of militia under the Marquis de Lafayette, who served as a volunteer. They attacked a picket of the enemy, consisting of about three hundred men, and drove them with the loss of twenty or thirty killed, and a great number wounded quite into their camp, retiring themselves without pursuit." (a)

In Lossing's Field Book of the Revolution the following brief account is given: "A detachment of one hundred and fifty riflemen under Lieut. Col. Butler, and an equal number of militia under LaFayette, attacked a picket of the enemy three hundred strong, killed between twenty and thirty of them, drove the remainder of them quite into camp at Gloucester, and returned without losing a man." (f).

The following account of the engagement and the events that led up to it, was published in one of the newspapers, and can be found in the New Jersey Archives:

"Mount Holly, Nov. 25, 1777.

"This day at 10 o'clock General Glover's brigade joined the detachment of Continental troops at this place under the command of Major General Greene, who was prepared to attack Lord Cornwallis, and only awaited the arrival of this reinforcement. From the intelligence the General had received, he expected the enemy were encampd on this side of Little Timber Creek, and intending either to possess themselves of Haddonfield, or after plundering and ravaging the country, suddenly, to cross the Delaware; he therefore ordered the whole troops to march that night at twelve o'clock. The Marquis LaFayette, who, the day before had been down to reconnoitre the country, had that evening fallen in with a part of the enemy, consisting of about four hundred; the Marquis took with him the riflemen and part of the Jersey militia as a covering party; with these, though greatly inferior in number he immediately engaged them. The bravery of this little party, after an action of about three quarters of an hour totally defeated the enemy.

"In the action we lost two militia officers killed, and five privates wounded. The enemy had a captain, several commissioned officers, and upwards of thirty privates killed, and we took twenty-three prisoners—the number of wounded is not known. General

Greene being on his march, about two o'clock, received intelligence of the action; he immediately went forward himself, leaving orders for the troops to come on with all expedition.

"On his arrival at Haddonfield, he found the enemy had, after this small action drawn themselves down to Gloucester Point, he however, went to reconnoitre, being determined to attack the enemy, if the ground they occupied, would possibly admit of it, but finding them posted under cover of several ships of war, and in a place where not half his army could act, he directed Gen. Muhlenberg, Gen. Weedon and Gen. Glover's brigade, to return to Mount Holly, leaving Gen. Huntingdon and Gen. Varnum's brigades, with the rifle battalion and Jersey militia, to watch the motions of the enemy, and, if possible, to draw them out. They, however, declined meeting him, and recrossed the Delaware, with all expedition." (g).

In Prowell's History of Camden County can be found an interesting account of the battle, mostly taken from Lafayette's report of the engagement, but the fullest and best account of the reconnoitring before the action, and the engagement itself, are found in Lafayette's report to Gen. Washington, which we quote *verbatim*.

"Haddonfield, Nov. 26, 1777.

"Dear General—I went down to this place since the day before yesterday, in order to be acquainted of all the roads and grounds around the enemy. I heard at my arrival that their main body was between Great and Little Timber Creek since the same evening. Yesterday morning in reconnoitring about, I have been told that they were very busy in crossing the Delaware. I saw them myself in their boats, and sent that intelligence to General Greene as soon as possible, as every other thing I heard of. But I want to acquaint your excellency of a little event of last evening, which, though not very considerable in itself, will please you, on account of the bravery and alacrity a small party of ours showed on that occasion. After having spent the most part of the day to make myself well acquainted with the certainty of their motions, I came pretty late into the Gloucester road between the two creeks. I had ten light-horse with Mr. Lindsey, almost a hundred and fifty riflemen, under Colonel Butler, and two piquets of the militia, commanded by Colonels Hite and Ellis; my whole body was not three hundred. Colonel Armand, Colonel Laumoy, the Chevaliers, Duplessis and Gimat, were the Frenchmen who went with me. A scout of my men with whom was Mr. Duplessis, to see how near were the first piquet from Gloucester, found at two miles and a half of it a strong post of three hundred and fifty Hessians

with field pieces, (what number I did know by the unanimous deposition of their prisoners), and engaged immediately. As my little reconnoitring party was all in fine spirits, I supported them. We pushed the Hessians more than a half a mile from the place where was their main body, and we made them run very fast. British reinforcements came twice to them, but very far from recovering their ground, they always went back. The darkness of the night prevented us then to push that advantage, and, after standing upon the ground we had got, I ordered them to return very slow to Haddonfield. The enemy knowing perhaps by our drums that we were not so near, came again to fire at us; but the brave Major Morris, with a part of his riflemen, sent them back, and pushed them very fast. I understand that they have had between twenty-five and thirty wounded, at least that number killed, among whom, I am certain is an officer, some say more, and the prisoners told me they have lost the commandant of that body; we got yet this day fourteen prisoners. I sent you the most moderate account I had from themselves. We left one single man killed, a lieutenant of militia, and only five of ours were wounded. Such is the account of our little entertainment, which is indeed much too long for the matter, but I take the greatest pleasure to let you know that the conduct of our soldiers is above all praises. I never saw men as merry, so spirited, so desirous to go on to the enemy, whatever forces they could have, as that small party was in this little fight. I found the riflemen above even their reputation, and the militia above all expectations I could have. I returned to them my very sincere thanks this morning. I wish that this little success of our's may please you, though a very trifling one, I find it very interesting on account of the behaviour of our soldiers.

"Some time after I came back, General Varnum arrived here; General Greene is too, in this place since this morning; he engaged me to give you myself the account of the little advantage of that small part of the troops under his command. I have nothing more to say to your excellency about our business on this side, because he is writing himself. I should have been very glad, if circumstances had permitted me, to be useful to him upon a greater scale.

"With the most tender affection and highest respect, I have the honor to be

"LAFAYETTE.

"I must tell, too, that the riflemen had been the whole day running before my horse, without eating or taking any rest.

"I have just now a certain assurance that two British officers,

besides those I spoke you of have died this morning of their wounds in a house; this and some other circumstances, let me believe that their loss may be greater than I told to your excellency." (h)

"The news of this action was extremely gratifying to General Washington, because it encouraged the militia by an example of their usefulness to the service and was a proof that they had soldierly qualities worthy to be compared with those of older troops inured to war—an encouragement greatly needed to stimulate enlistments, which was lagging; and, besides this, it was in accord with the policy of the commander-in-chief at that time—namely to annoy and embarrass the enemy at every point, to cut off their supplies, to attack their foraging parties, and, in general, to make their occupation of the country as uncomfortable as possible." (i)

General Greene in his report to Washington said: "The Marquis, with about four hundred militia and the rifle corps, attacked enemy's pickets last evening, killed about twenty, wounded many more, and took about twenty prisoners. The Marquis is charmed with the spirited behavior of the militia and rifle corps; they drove the enemy about half a mile, and kept the ground until dark. The enemy's pickets consisted of about three hundred, and were re-inforced during the skirmish. The Marquis is determined to be in the way of danger." (k).

As pertinent to the subject, the following facts in reference to Lafayette are of interest in connection with the skirmish. Marquis de-Lafayette was born September 6, 1757, was married when he was seventeen, and the father of two children before he was twenty years old. When but nineteen years of age he became interested in the struggle of the colonies for liberty. "The enthusiasm which impelled Lafayette thus to espouse the cause of the American people arose from his ardent love of freedom." (l). In December, 1776, he sought an interview with Silas Deane, American Commissioner to France, and there and then entered into an agreement with Mr. Deane to fight for American independence. On account of his rank and influence, notwithstanding his youth, Mr. Deane contracted with him to be made a Major General in the Continental army, his commission to bear date of Dec. 7, 1776. (m).

Owing to his youth and his great rank, every influence was exerted to have him remain in France, and as the Americans had no ships at their command in France, he did not leave his native country for America until the following spring. We had no vessels then and Lafayette, out of his own fortune, bought and equipped a ship which he called *La Victoire* (The Victory) and

having escaped from France into Spain, sailed Sunday, April 20, 1777 and arrived in South Carolina on June 13th.

From South Carolina to Philadelphia, he traveled by carriage and when that broke down, the rest of the journey was made on horseback. On July 27, he appeared before the Foreign Relations Committee of Congress, and on account of his youth and of the opposition of certain of the American generals he was turned down and Silas Deane's agreement was ignored. The next day he was presented to Washington, and his admiration for the Commander-in-Chief was so great, that he relinquished his right to a command and volunteered to serve without pay or emoluments of any kind. This offer was immediately accepted by Washington, and he appointed Lafayette one of his aide-de-camps, and made him a member of his official family.

These facts were laid before Congress by Washington, and Lafayette's generous offer, together with the great sacrifices the young marquis had made, completely won the hearts of Congress, and a resolution was passed July 31, 1777, accepting his services, and giving him a commission with the rank of Major General. (n) (p).

It was impracticable to place Lafayette immediately at the head of a fighting force. It would have been unjust to the American officers who had nobly led their men during the two years of hardship already endured. (n). Lafayette remained with Washington, and later took part in the battle of the Brandywine, September 11, 1777, where he was wounded while rallying the troops. After that battle, he was sent to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and there he was nursed back to health by the Moravians. Before his wound had entirely healed he went back to Washington's headquarters, received permission to report to General Greene at Mount Holly, and it was shortly after that the battle of Gloucester occurred.

In conclusion, let us remember that while this battle may be considered only a skirmish, it was important for three reasons. First—Because it convinced Cornwallis that his troops could not longer forage at will, plundering farms and storehouses, and escape harmless. Second—It established the fact that the Jersey militia would fight bravely if skillfully commanded. Third—It gave Lafayette an opportunity to show his ability in handling troops in action.

Washington forwarded Lafayette's report to Congress, and intimated to that body the advisability of giving Lafayette a command as well as a commission. On December 1st, Congress complied with Washington's request, and passed the following:—

“Resolved, That General Washington be informed it is highly

agreeable to Congress that the Marquis de La Fayette be appointed to a command of a division in the Continental Army." (o).

On December 4, 1777, Washington appointed Lafayette to the command of the Virginia Division, just nine days from the time when the Marquis so skillfully led the Jersey militia to victory.

To complete the records, and as a matter of local pride it is but fair to add that the "Colonel Hite" to whom Lafayette refers, was Colonel Joseph Haight, Lieutenant Colonel of the Burlington County militia, (r) and the "Colonel Ellis" was Colonel Joseph Ellis, of the second battalion of the first division of Jersey militia, and a Gloucester County man. (s)

Colonel Ellis was one of the members of the Council of Safety from Gloucester County, in 1775 and 1776 (t) and while acting as a representative in the Provincial Congress was elected Colonel in the militia. On February 15, 1777 he was appointed a Brigadier General in the militia, but on February 21, 1777 he declined this commission, (u) and continued to serve as Colonel. Gloucester County had four companies of 64 men each in the militia.

To make this sketch more interesting we have taken from Lafayette's original chart of the engagement and surrounding country, and have placed on this map the old road from Westville to Cooper's Ferry in Camden, also the positions occupied by the Hessians, the British, and the Continental riflemen, militia, and light horsemen, at the first, second and third attacks, and the routes taken by the British when they retreated to Gloucester, and the route to Haddonfield, taken by the Americans, at the close of the engagements. We have also outlined the route probably taken by Lafayette and his scouting party of light horsemen when they started from the Continental camp in Haddonfield, and went through Collingswood, City Line, Ferry avenue and Sweet Potato Hill (in the lower part of Camden) to Sandy Point, at the intersection of Newton Creek and the Delaware River where the first reconnoitering was accomplished. (This map was presented to the Society, and will, when framed, be hung up in the Court House.)

Taking the present bridge over Timber Creek on the Woodbury and Gloucester Turnpike as a starting point, the old road, called at that time the King's road, crossed Timber Creek about seven hundred and fifty feet eastward of the present bridge, proceeding from thence northward it passed between the houses now occupied by the Vesper Country Club and across the road leading from Westville to Mount Ephraim, just east of the spot where the school house used to stand, directly back of the present house at Browning, formerly owned by Daniel Thackara, in a nearly straight line to little Timber Creek, from thence over

the bridge, directly east of River View Heights in Gloucester, to the westerly line of Cedar Grove Cemetery, as at present laid out, from thence through to Market street, Gloucester, and out Market street to Gloucester Point, which in Revolutionary times was at the foot of Market Street, about fifty yards from the spot where the wreck of the frigate *Augusta* now remains. Market street, Gloucester City, at the point where the West Jersey Railroad crosses it, as now laid out is from ten to fifteen yards north of the old King's highway. The brick house on the Kay Farm on Timber Creek, about 250 yards Eastward from the old King's highway, was used as a hospital to care for the wounded Hessians after the engagement, and tradition says the ghosts of the Hessian officers who died there, haunted the house for many years afterward.

REFERENCES.

- a*—Barber's Historical Collections, page 221. ,
- b*—Irving's Life of Washington, Knickerbocker edition, vol. 5, page 281.
- c*—Prowell's History of Camden County, page 55.
- d*—Prowell's History of Camden County, page 63.
- e*—Brook's True Story of Lafayette, page 130.
- f*—Lossing's Field Book of the Revolution, vol. 2, page 93.
- g*—New Jersey Archives, second series, vol. 1, page 497.
- h*—Tower's Life of La Fayette, vol. 1, page 249.
- i*—Tower's Life of La Fayette, vol. 1, page 251.
- k*—Letters to Congress by General Washington, Baltimore Edition, page 176, vol. 2.
- l*—Tower's Life of La Fayette, vol. 1, page 2.
- m*—American Archives, 5th series, vol. 3, 1776, page 1090.
- n*—M. L. N. in Encyclopedia Britannica, vol. 7, page 201-2.
- o*—Journals of Congress, December 1st, 1777.
- p*—Journals of Congress, volume 3, page 303.
- r*—Officers and Men of New Jersey, in the Revolutionary War, page 338.
- s*—Officers and Men of New Jersey, in the Revolutionary War, page 341.
- t*—Minutes of Provincial Congress and Council of Safety, 1775-76, page 569.
- u*—Officers and Men of New Jersey in the Revolutionary War.