The Iowa Compatriot

The Journal of the Iowa Society, Sons of the American Revolution January 1, 2019

We the descendants of the heroes of the American Revolution, who by their sacrifice established the United States of America, reaffirm our faith in the principles of liberty and solemnly pledge to defend them against every foe.

Wreaths Across America Honors 3800 Deceased Veterans

Over 2800 wreaths were placed at the Iowa Veterans Cemetery in Van Meter. Several days later, volunteers placed 1000 wreaths at veterans' graves at Des Moines cemeteries.
(l): Color Guard Commander Mike Rowley and members of the American Legion, with Puppy Jake dogs in training.
(r): Mike Rowley and George DeMoss, Iowa SAR Sec/Treasurer
(below center): SAR President Doug Frazer

Earliest known painting of George Washington comes home to Mt. Vernon

by Michael E Ruane, Washington Post, December 13, 2008

Young Col. Washington came home to Mount Vernon packed in a foam-lined wooden box that was fastened with 14 screws and labeled “keep dry.”

He had been away for 216 years, but inside his gilded frame he still looked soldierly in his red waistcoat and pale sash. Around his neck he wore a silver officer’s pendant, marked with the British royal coat of arms.

And his face was that of a confident man, accustomed to command.

This was the youthful George Washington painted in his 40s by the artist Charles Willson Peale. The famous portrait returned to display at Mount Vernon on Thursday for the first time since 1802.

The painting, “George Washington as Colonel in the Virginia Regiment,” was uncrated and hung with care in Mount Vernon’s Donald W. Reynolds Museum and Education Center, where it opened to the public Thursday. It will be on display for the next two years.

Greenwood Remembered on Pearl Harbor Day

The Iowa S.A.R. was represented at the annual Pearl Harbor Day remembrance in Des Moines Iowa on 07 December 2018. The event was special this year, as the name of Seaman First Class Leo Greenwood was added to the Iowa monument.

Greenwood served 77 years ago when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. He was aboard the USS West Virginia when it sank. He swam below flaming water to get to shore along with a number of other survivors. His name was added to the monument and unveiled for the first time.

Mike Rowley of the Iowa SAR Color Guard stands next to the monument.

Opportunities to Serve

Please consider serving the Iowa SAR by volunteering for one of the following state and/or chapter positions. Most of them do not take a lot of time. **New members** are especially encouraged to serve. Compatriots Mike Rowley and George DeMoss will be happy to answer any questions you may have about the leadership positions listed below. Both are willing to spend time with you in person to show you what they do. Don't worry about "being thrown into" a position without any help. We all help each other. Should you decide to volunteer for a position, you would not need to start right away.

Registrar: (state society): receives membership applications; assists applicants with genealogy
Contact Mike Rowley for more information. MJR1825@gmail.com

Secretary-Treasurer (chapter and state society): maintains membership and financial records; works closely with the Registrar regarding membership records.
Contact George DeMoss for more information. geodemoss62@gmail.com

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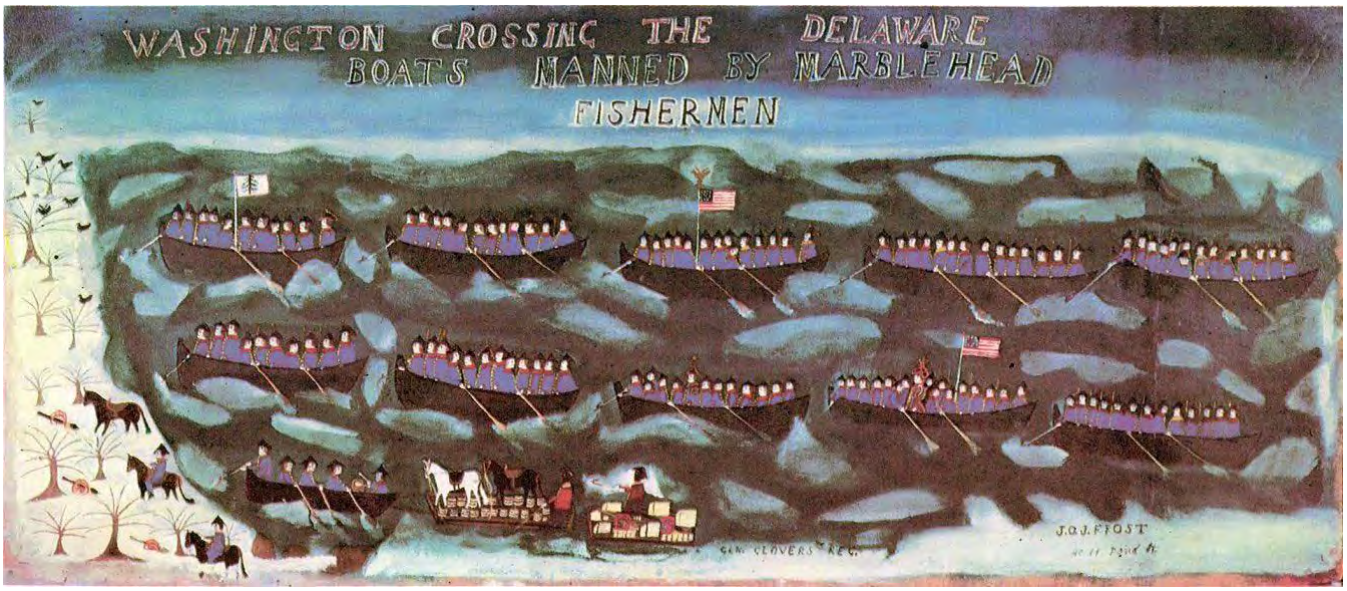
Let us remember our obligation to our forefathers, who gave us our Constitution, The Bill of Rights, an independent Supreme Court and a nation of free men.

Christmas Night, 1776: How Did They Cross?
By William M. Welsch
Journal of the American Revolution, December 24, 2018



When the two columns of the Continental Army slammed into Trenton at 8 a.m. on Thursday, December 26, surrounding and capturing most of the Hessian garrison, new life was breathed into a faltering revolution. But how did they get there?

In late 1776, Washington's greatest fear was that a hard freeze of the Delaware River would enable the British to march across and capture the colonial capital at Philadelphia. The river had frozen over lightly on December 23, but had broken up 48 hours later.[1] He also realized that enlistments for many of his troops expired at the end of the year. He and his advisors were cognizant of the need for a bold stroke to revive the war effort. In mid-December, the commander-in-chief began to formulate that bold strike—an attack against the 1500 Hessians garrisoned at Trenton. He wrote, "Christmas-day at night, one hour before day is the time fixed upon for our attempt on Trenton."[2] Washington's plan called for three coordinated, simultaneous river crossings, with two columns attacking Trenton, while the third provided security against an enemy counter-thrust from the south. Those efforts led by Col. John Cadwalader and Gen. James Ewing below Trenton were mostly unsuccessful.[3]

Detail from "Plan of the operations of General Washington against the King's troops in New Jersey, from the 26th of December 1776 to the 3d of January 1777," c. 1777, showing the three river crossings north of Trenton and the two columns making the attack. (Library of Congress)

While many participants wrote of the crossing in letters and memoirs, most soldiers mentioned only the weather or the icy river. Almost nothing seems to have survived about the actual mechanics of the event. I've arrived at many of the conclusions in this article after years of studying the literature of the crossing, many visits to the site, and conversations and correspondence with professional and avocational historians. Unfortunately, many of the details of this historic night will never be known.

The main element of the Continental Army under Washington was to cross the Delaware above Trenton and then march the approximately ten miles to their objective.[4] This would be a river crossing, not a contested amphibious assault such as the Normandy landing. Given the obstacles encountered, it is amazing that this part of the plan worked as well as it did.

The Delaware River at the point of crossing is estimated to have been between 850 and 1,000 feet wide and between 5 1/2 and 7 1/2 feet deep, with a current of 11 to 12 miles per hour. Richard Paterson, director of the Old Barracks Museum, posits that the river was in flood, rising to the current visitor's center on the Pennsylvania side and over the current lower parking lot on the New Jersey side.[5] As water was not then removed from the river for other purposes as is now the case, the width and depth were likely greater than today.[6]

Two ferries and their adjacent houses or taverns served the traveling population at this site—McKonkey's[7] (the lower ferry) on the Pennsylvania side and Johnson's (the upper ferry, sometimes referred to as John's, but operated by James Slack) on the Jersey side. As ferries were licensed by the individual states, it was not unusual to have two such ferries in such close proximity with different names. But essentially, this was one ferry crossing, just north of the current bridge. The current stone walls along the bank are later additions, and there were no docks, but rather roads that sloped down to the landing to accommodate teams and wagons as they rolled on or off the ferry boats.

The Washington Crossing Bridge. Pennsylvania is on the left and New Jersey is on the right. (Delaware River Joint Toll Bridge Commission)

The ferry or flat boats themselves, which were to play a crucial role in the crossing, were usually between 40 and 50 feet long and up to 12 feet wide—large enough to accommodate the freight wagons and teams as well as the smaller farm vehicles that would constitute their regular customers. The boats were flat-bottomed scows with low sides and hinged front and rear ramps. Ferrymen propelled them across the river using cables fixed to the shore and a system of pulleys, ropes, and setting poles.[8]

Mort Kunstler's recent painting of the crossing clearly shows a cable connected to the ferry, as would have been the case under normal circumstances. However, as part of securing the river crossings, such cables would probably have been earlier cut or simply removed to deny access to the British. Whether they were restrung for Christmas night will likely never be known.

The boats most associated with the crossing are Mr. Durham's Boats, the work horses of the Delaware. Tradition says that Robert Durham built the first such craft in 1757, to serve the Durham Iron Works in Riegelsville, Pennsylvania. There is, however, no hard evidence to support this, and historian Richard Hulan suggests that the sleek craft were initially developed by Swedish and Finnish river men, not Durham. Either way, by the time of the revolution, perhaps as many as 100 such vessels served as the chief cargo boat on the Delaware, hauling iron, grain, whiskey, and produce.[9] William Stryker estimates the number much lower at 40.[10]

With both a sharp bow and stern, the boats varied in length from 40 to 66 feet, with the average probably about 60 feet, drawing between 20 and 30 inches of water when loaded. The beam was about 8 feet, the hold 3 to 3 1/2 feet deep, and the bottom flat. Eighteen foot oars, iron tipped setting poles, and sails propelled the craft, although there is no record of the latter having been used during the crossing. A 30-foot-plus stern sweep controlled the direction. The captain's name was usually painted on the hull.[11] The current reproduction boats at Washington's Crossing State Park in Pennsylvania are approximately 40 feet in length.

A reproduction Durham Boat at the 2005 reenactment. (Luke Jones/Wikimedia Commons)

The Durham was typically manned by a crew of five to seven. With the captain at the stern sweep, the rest would work the oars or walk the 12-inch wide boards along the gunwales, using the setting poles—much like a keelboat. If weather and current cooperated, a sail could be used.

One observer offered that, "She left the water almost as calm as she found it."[12] Washington wrote of the boats breaking a passage through the ice.[13] He had first seen these vessels in Philadelphia in 1775. Despite the depiction in the movie The Crossing, Washington did not wait until his retreating army reached the banks of the Delaware to begin collecting the Durhams. As early as December 1, from Brunswick, New Jersey, he wrote to Col. Richard Humpton of Pennsylvania, ordering:

> You are to proceed to the two ferries near Trenton and to see all the boats put in the best order, with a sufficiency of oars and poles and at the same time to collect all the additional boats that you can from above and below and have them brought to these Ferries and secured for the purpose of carrying over the Troops and Baggage. . . . You will particularly attend to the Durham Boats which are very proper for this purpose.[14]

Through purchase, hiring, and confiscation, Humpton, with the assistance of Hunterdon County, New Jersey, militia and New Jersey and Pennsylvania river men, did just that. Shortly after, similar orders were also dispatched to Brig. Gen. William Maxwell above Trenton.[15] These craft would first deliver the Continental Army out of harm's way into Pennsylvania on December 7-8, would then bring that same army back across the Delaware on Christmas night, and finally return soldiers and prisoners back to safety after the victory. They would also be used to return to New Jersey for the second phase of the winter campaign.

The boats were collected not only to transport the army across the river, but also to keep them out of British hands. Most were berthed in Knowles Creek (now Jerico Creek) and behind Malta Island (now connected to the mainland) below Coryell's Ferry (today's New Hope, Pennsylvania). Many histories speak of the boats as being "hidden" in these areas. As the British knew that the Americans had cleared the river of all serviceable craft and since there were spies up and down the banks, it seems less likely that they were hidden as much as simply collected in these locations. Plus, trees in December would be bare, offering little foliage for concealment.

On December 19, at Washington's direction, Maj. Gen. Nathanael Greene wrote to Brig. Gen. Ewing from Bougart's Tavern in Buckingham, Pennsylvania:

> Sir I am directed by his Excellency General Washington to desire you to send down to Meconkea ferry, sixteen Durham Boats & four flats. Youl send them down as soon as possible. Send them under the care and direction of some good faithful Officer. I am Sir your most obedient & very humble servant.[16]

While this document gives us the number of boats planned for the crossing, we are still uncertain about the exact number, as we cannot determine if the sixteen were actually sent and if McKonkey's and Johnson's flats were already on the scene or part of the four mentioned. A safe estimate is sixteen Durhams and four or five flats.

Some writers claim that any available small boat was used in the crossing. This makes little sense, as the artillery and horses would be too big for such vessels and the Durham boats were quite sufficient for the infantry. Plus, manning small craft would be an inefficient use of the experienced mariners, who would be better employed on the larger craft. But there is no way to know for certain. Maybe some small boats were used.

The Durhams and ferry boats would be crewed by the 177 officers and enlisted men of the 14th Continental Infantry, experienced mariners, supplemented by river men from New Jersey and Pennsylvania, who assisted in both the crossing and the landing on the Jersey side.[17] The 14th—Glover's Marblehead Regiment—were the Grand Banks fishermen who in late

August had evacuated the Continental Army across the mile wide East River from Brooklyn to New York. Capt. Alexander Graydon praised them: “There was an appearance of discipline in this corps. . . . Though deficient, perhaps, in polish, it possessed an apparent attitude for the purpose of its institution and gave a confidence that myriads of its meek and lowly brethren were incompetent to inspire.”[18]

Although never mentioned as such, the 27th Continental Infantry, under Maj. Ezra Putnam, was another unit of experienced seafarers who could have also contributed seasoned mariners, as did Capt. Joseph Moulder’s Philadelphia artillery company.

According to Henry Knox, eighteen guns were moved across the Delaware on that historic night. These cannon would be the deciding factor in the battle of Trenton, but would present the biggest difficulty at the crossing. The ferry boats would be critical in moving the guns and their accompanying ammunition wagons safely over the river, with each gun taking as much as an hour to load, secure, transport, and unload. Authors who write of the cannon being moved in the Durham boats are incorrect. They were hauled to the ferry landing and rolled or driven, not lowered, into the flats.

In addition to the men and guns, the critical horses had to be transported. Estimates vary as to just how many animals crossed. Historian Kemble Widmer suggests between 64 and 90.[19] Most other writers make no mention of the topic. My own estimate is a bit higher, broken down as follows: the artillery, 29 to 32; senior officers and aides, 35; Philadelphia Light Horse troop, 24; ammunition carts, 7 to 14. That totals 95 to 105, an estimate at best and perhaps a bit low. Given horses’ difficulty with open running water,[20] moving this many animals over the river would have been one of the major challenges and delays of the night, with estimates that three men were needed to control each horse. The flats would have been used for this purpose, not the Durhams as suggested by some chroniclers.

The weather initially cooperated with the American movement, but eventually turned nasty. The recorded temperature at 3 p.m. was 29 degrees. According to US Naval Observatory calculations, the sun set at 4:40 p.m. on December 25, with the moon rising at 5:31 p.m.[21] The moon had been full the previous day, so there was initially sufficient light to assist the troop movements, with a waning gibbous with 99 percent illumination.[22] Some snow from previous storms lay on the ground.

According to Henry Knox, “Floating ice in the river made the labor almost incredible.”[23] Ice moving from upriver presented a challenge, especially along the shores where passages for the boats had to be broken. The boat crews would battle the floes all night—but successfully.

Weather quotes abound. Sergeant Thomas McCarty said that the 26th was “the worst day of sleet rain that could be.”[24] Knox wrote of a cold and stormy night “that hailed with great violence.”[25] Another writer stated that, “About eleven o’clock at night it began snowing, and continued so until daybreak when a most violent northeast storm came on, of snow, rain, and hail together.”[26] “The storm is changing to sleet and cuts like a knife.”[27] Fifer John Greenwood wrote, “After a while it rained, hailed, snowed, and froze, and at the same time blew a perfect hurricane.”[28] At about 11 p.m., a nor’easter had struck, hiding the moon and considerably hampering visibility. Weather historian David Ludlum describes the events as a cyclonic disturbance that created a storm beginning as snow, but soon changing to a mixture of snow and sleet.[29]

By 2 p.m. on Christmas day, the first troops were in motion toward the river, with all moving by 3 p.m. The brigades of Brigadier Generals Lord Stirling and Roche deFermoy moved down from the north, while Brig. Gen. Hugh Mercer’s came from the south. Maj. Gen. John Sullivan’s division of three brigades moved in from the west. Brig. Gen. Adam Stephen’s brigade was already in the area of McKonkey’s. The troops assembled about a mile back from the ferry in the area of the Wright’s Town Road to await darkness. Maj. James Wilkinson said that the, “route was easily traced, as there was a little snow on the ground, which was tinged here and there with blood from the feet of the men who wore broken shoes.”[30]

"The Passage of the Delaware," by Thomas Sully, 1819. (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

In total, 28 infantry regiments in seven brigades, seven companies of artillery, and a troop of light horse needed to be moved over the icy waterway. While 2,400 is the usually quoted number of men who marched on Trenton, the actual number is harder to determine. Force's Archives, William S. Stryker, and Sinews of Independence all present detailed breakdowns of the troop numbers, and none of them agree![31] One count is as high as 4,500. On December 28, Henry Knox wrote to his wife that "about 2500 or three thousand pass'd the River."[32] If Knox, who supervised the crossing, was uncertain, it's unlikely that an exact count will ever be known. Not all men on a regiment's muster role participated, but only those who were physically able and minimally equipped.

Gen. Greene's second division crossed first, in the following brigade order: Stephen, Mercer, and Stirling. DeFermoy, who would initially operate independently, crossed next. The three brigades of Gen. Sullivan's first division followed, Gen. Arthur St. Clair's first, followed by Col. John Glover's, and finally Col. Paul Dudley Sargent's.[33] As soon as darkness partially covered their movements, probably around 5 p.m., the troops marched to the ferry landing, eight men abreast. Each man carried sixty rounds of ammunition and three days rations. Officers affixed a piece of white paper in their hats to mark their rank; and according to John Greenwood, everyone, including officers, carried a gun.[34]

Gen. Stephen's initial assignment was to secure the landing area on the Jersey side, detaining anyone attempting to either enter or exit the perimeter. This security net would expand as more of his troops landed, eventually reaching a mile beyond Johnson's Ferry, forming "a chain of sentries round the landing place at a sufficient distance from the river to permit troops to form."[35] They would also protect the in-progress crossing. Torches and lanterns likely lit the scene once Stephen was across, as maintaining any degree of secrecy would be impossible with 2,400 men and 100 horses involved. There was now no real need or means to maintain silence, although it was mandated. The old military axiom of "hurry up and wait" would have certainly applied.

The larger-than-life figure charged with overall supervision of the crossing and the main architect of its success was Col. Henry Knox, commander of the artillery regiment. Wilkinson wrote of Knox's stentorian lungs and deep voice that could be heard above the storm's roar.[36] Col. John Glover was the other prime mover, with responsibility for the boats, and he usually receives due credit along with Knox. Glover was also a brigade commander, responsible for five regiments, so it is impossible to know just where his main efforts lay. Tradition offers that Knox and Ferryman Samuel McKonkey "tested" the water at the start. It's unclear what that entailed.

Again, tradition suggests that Washington crossed early in the evening on a boat commanded by Capt. William Blackler of the 14th with Private John Russell as an oarsman. There is no evidence as to whether this was a Durham or a flat. There is also an anecdotal story that suggests Knox crossed with Washington.[37]

This raises the vital question of when Knox, with overall responsibility, actually crossed. Again while no documentary evidence exists, Clay Craighead, Senior Curator at Washington's Crossing State Park in New Jersey, has posited that Knox made a number of trips back and forth across the river to monitor the critical action on both banks. This is a logically reasoned possibility.[38]

So did the troops stand or sit? As with many other aspects of the night, we just do not know. David H. Fischer says that they would not sit due to the slush and icy water in the boat bottoms.[39] But given the Durham's stability, standing troops could be a problem. Perhaps they stood, squatted, and sat. The ferry boats would also offer all these options.

Washington had hoped for the operation to be complete by midnight, but it quickly fell behind schedule. It was likely the artillery and its wagons and the horses that caused the greatest delay. Subtracting approximately 300 to 400 artillerymen in the seven companies and the light horsemen leaves about 2,100 infantry to move. Using Greene's number of sixteen boats, each Durham needed to ferry about 130 to 135 men. Taking a low average capacity of 30 to 35 troops, each boat would need to make four or five round trips to move all the infantry. The average crossing time is hard to determine, with estimates

ranging from ten to fifteen minutes, although the rough river conditions could certainly have extended the trip. We can, I believe, safely speculate that loading, crossing, unloading, and returning could take an hour for each trip. It's unknown how wide a front the crossing encompassed—how many boats were crossing at one time and how quickly the next wave pushed off.

Knox later wrote that all the troops were in New Jersey by 2 a.m., without the loss of a man.[40] But a few did take an unwanted swim. Washington stated that the artillery was over by 3 a.m. That means the entire crossing lasted between nine and ten hours, or three hours longer than planned.

An intriguing question is just how difficult was the crossing. With no intention of disparaging the heroic efforts of the boat crews and realizing the icy conditions they faced, this might not have been a particularly arduous task for these experienced mariners and fishermen who regularly plied the stormy Atlantic. This crossing was about one-fifth the length of the earlier East River crossing, also made under difficult weather conditions.

What of the commander-in-chief, after landing in Jersey? According to a suspect "Diary of an Officer on Washington's Staff," he stood on the bank wrapped in his cloak supervising the landings. Another account says that he sat on an old beehive, but staff on the New Jersey side can find no such documentation.[41] As the hours passed and the crossing fell behind schedule, he contemplated cancelling the entire operation, but decided, "As I was certain there was no making a Retreat without being discovered, and harassed on repassing the River, I determined to push on at all Events."[42] He need not have worried. Again Greenwood, "The noise of the soldiers coming over and clearing away the ice, the rattle of the cannon wheels on the frozen ground, and the cheerfulness of my fellow-comrades encouraged me beyond expression, and, big coward as I acknowledge myself to be, I felt great pleasure."[43] By 4 a.m., with a small rear guard likely remaining at the river to protect the boats, the troops were on the march to Trenton. It is possible that the 260 men of the 6th Battalion of Connecticut State troops under Col. John Chester of Sargent's Brigade filled this role. They did not march to Trenton. Washington would certainly never leave the critical boats and landing site without protection, for even a small enemy raiding party could have easily torched any unguarded boats.

"Victory or Death!" Dr. Benjamin Rush observed Washington writing this on a scrap of paper before the crossing.[44] With that as the watchword for the night, and after marching the ten miles to Trenton, the army would ultimately capture over 900 Hessians and then re-cross the Delaware using those same boats. The return trip was supposedly more difficult.

At a dinner after Yorktown, Lord Cornwallis toasted Washington with, "When the illustrious part that your Excellency has borne in this long and arduous contest becomes a matter of history, fame will gather your brightest laurels rather from the banks of the Delaware than from those of the Chesapeake."[45] Certainly well spoken.

[Footnotes are available upon request: dlfrazer@yahoo.com]