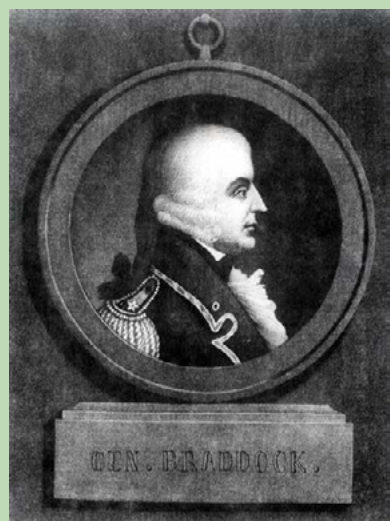


2019 SUMMER NEWSLETTER



Ever since the 250th anniversary of British Major General Edward Braddock's defeat in the French and Indian War, there has been a growing interest in the man and the 12-foot-wide military road his army built through the western Pennsylvania wilderness in 1755.

On July 7, 1755, Braddock's army, stretching nearly a mile long, with over 1300 men, supply wagons, horses and artillery, marched along Three Springs Road, just off Clay Pike in North Huntingdon. This peaceful residential street has never witnessed such an impressive sight since that hot summer day, 264 years ago.



Did You Know? Braddock's Gold Mystery or Myth in North Huntingdon?

by Bob Cupp

July 9, 2019 will mark the **264th ANNIVERSARY** of British Major General Edward Braddock's defeat at the hands of the French and Indians. The town of Braddock was named in honor of the battle, fought at that location. Much has been written about the tragic losses suffered by the British Army and Colonial Militia that day, as well as the remarkable military road they built from Cumberland, Maryland to Braddock's Field. Braddock's ill-fated expedition ended a few miles short of its goal, which was to capture the French-built Fort Duquesne at the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers.

An Indian Named Nemaquin

Most of the early Pennsylvania roads followed Indian trails because the natives chose their routes over the easiest terrain. In 1752, Christopher Gist and Thomas Cresap, acting on behalf of Virginia's Ohio Company, hired an Indian named Nemaquin to blaze a trail from Wills Creek (Cumberland) to the mouth of Redstone Creek at the Monongahela River. The route to Fort Duquesne, including this section, became known as Nemaquin's Path. The trail crossed Sewickley Township several miles from where Herminie is now located, continued past the site of the future Howell farm and west through North Huntingdon along Clay Pike.

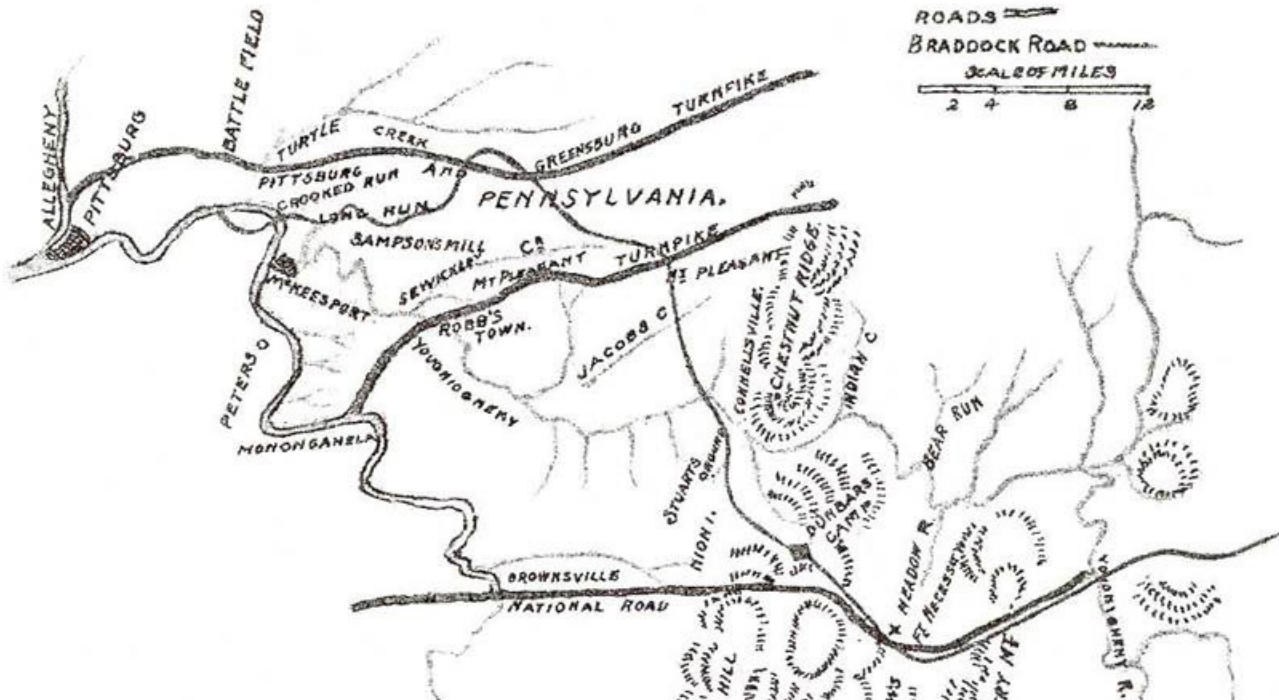
Circleville was "Three Springs"

In 1753, Virginia's Governor Dinwiddie sent George Washington to Fort LeBoeuf, which was located at what is now the town of Franklin, Pa., to warn the Commander of the French forces to leave the area. Washington used Nemaquin's Path on that journey and camped near present-day Circleville. That area was once known as "Three Springs." The original Three Springs Road, behind Clay Pike's "Earl's Dairy Whip," remains as a lasting reminder of that bygone era.



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Braddocks Route. A.D. 1755.



Nemacolin's Path crossed Sewickley Township, through Herminie and North Huntingdon.

Journeying Around Kennywood Park

Two years later, General Braddock's army followed the same route, carving a 12-foot-wide road through the wilderness. On July 7, 1755, Braddock's expedition marched along Three Springs Road and camped at Washington's Three Springs Camp. The next day, after finding the terrain near Skellytown too rugged, the army turned south at Stewartsville, following a route that took them down present-day Colonial Manor Road, paralleling Long Run toward McKeesport. Their final encampment became known as the Monongahela Camp at what is now White Oak.

Although Washington accompanied Braddock on this expedition, he did not camp with the army near Circleville. He had become ill during the journey and was left behind with the slow-moving "baggage train." He later rejoined the expedition on July 8th at the Monongahela Camp, the day before they were attacked by the French and Indians. The army forded the Monongahela to what is now Duquesne. They started down the river valley and passed the mouth of Turtle Creek, then re-crossed the river near today's Kennywood Park to a point now known as Braddock.

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According to the "Legend of Braddock's Gold," a British money chest, containing the army's payroll, remains buried under a walnut tree near the Youghiogheny River in North Huntingdon.

The French and Indian surprise attack resulted in a near-massacre.



The Legend Begins

The passage of time has clouded the events leading up to the battle since that historic day, over two-and-a-half centuries ago. One of the more colorful stories which evolved from that fateful occasion is the "Legend of Braddock's Gold." The legend originated with Ensign Britnel Robbins, who served in the Revolutionary War; it was handed down through generations of the Robbins family, one of early North Huntingdon's most prominent.

According to the legend, during Braddock's march through North Huntingdon, while resting at the "Three Springs" Camp, the General sent two scouts to locate the river which he knew was nearby. These scouts traveled down the valley along Crawford Run and finally came to the Youghiogheny River.

After this discovery, believing it was the Monongahela, the two scouts returned to the camp and told Braddock they had found the river. According to the map George Washington had drawn for the General, they were not too far away from their destination at Fort Duquesne where the French and their Indian allies were awaiting their arrival.

While the soldiers slept, Braddock summoned all the officers to his tent for a secret meeting regarding the King's gold they were carrying for the payroll. Braddock explained that he planned to delay distribution of the payroll until after the anticipated battle because a number of their men would be killed and therefore, he reasoned, there would be fewer to divide the gold. Braddock then suggested they hide the gold, instead of taking it into battle, to prevent it from falling into the hands of the French and Indians.

It was decided that the two scouts, with General Braddock as witness, would retrace their trail to the river, bury the gold, and retrieve it after the battle. The three followed Crawford Run to the river, buried the expedition's money chest under a walnut tree and returned to camp. The chest contained funds to pay the soldiers and purchase supplies after they captured Fort Duquesne. The original value has been estimated between 10,000 and 25,000 pounds sterling by both historians and legend-makers.

The French and Indians Attack

Two days later, the French and their Indian allies surprised Braddock and his army. The result was a near-massacre, with General Braddock mortally wounded. The remnant of the army hurriedly retreated up the Monongahela River Valley in total disarray. The surviving officers decided to return to the site of their North Huntingdon encampment to search for the buried payroll. However, their poor knowledge of the area, as well as confusing the Monongahela with the Youghiogheny, prevented them from finding it.

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General Braddock died of his wounds and was buried along the new military road near Fort Necessity. This monument was erected in 1913 to identify the location of his grave and honor the man who became known as the "Ill-Starred General."

Braddock died of his wounds during the retreat to Fort Cumberland. His body was buried along the new military road in Fayette County, not far from Fort Necessity. To prevent the Indians from finding Braddock's body, the soldiers marched over the grave, eliminating any traces of it. Buried with him was his knowledge of the gold's value, as well as its secret location.

Whatever happened to Braddock's gold? Some say it never existed – that the troops were paid before they left Cumberland. Others believe the gold was actually Braddock's personal funds that he carried with him in his private money chest. Some theorize that the money chest was left behind in a wagon at the battle site with no horses left to pull it.

It's believed that the Indians did not pursue the completely disorganized British and Colonials because they were more interested in plundering the extensive possessions left behind. Washington described the army's retreat: "At length in despite of every effort to the contrary, (they) broke and ran as sheep before the hounds, leaving the artillery, ammunition, provisions and every individual thing we had with us a prey to the enemy. And when we rallied them in hopes of regaining our invaluable loss, it was with as much success as if we had attempted to have stopped the wild bears of the mountains."

Of course, early settlers were anxious to recover such a treasure. There was an abundance of tales involving searches for the gold, including many on the Robbins property in North Huntingdon, as recently as 1910. In 1878, Dr. Frank Cowan of Greensburg wrote that, "There was hardly a foot of ground between Cumberland and Pittsburgh which hadn't been dug up in the hunt."



This "Braddock's Military Road" historical marker was erected to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the birth of George Washington by the school children of North Huntingdon Township, Irwin and North Irwin, November 23, 1932. It's located in North Huntingdon near the corner of Clay Pike and Robbins Station Road at Circleville's First National Bank office.

Many of Braddock's camp sites have been identified by historical markers, placed along Braddock's Road by the state, school children, or patriotic organizations. However, modern historians believe that these signs, at best, approximate the actual location of the camps. This is particularly true of North Huntingdon's "Three Springs" Camp. In 1932, a marker was erected near the intersection of Clay Pike and Robbins Station Road at the site of Circleville's First National Bank office. However, research has indicated that this camp may have actually been located on the north side of Route 30, along Brownstown Road, northwest of Jacktown.

Pinpointing the exact location of the camp sites isn't nearly as important as recognizing the historical significance of Braddock's Military Road. It served as an early highway, opening the colonial frontier to settlers from Virginia. Some say Braddock's gold still remains buried near the Youghiogheny River at Robbins Station under a walnut tree, but the real treasure lies in the rich history left behind by Braddock's expedition through the region 264 years ago. Preserving our local history, heritage and legends is even more important than discovering buried gold!

The Legend Continues...

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2019 SUMMER NEWSLETTER



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