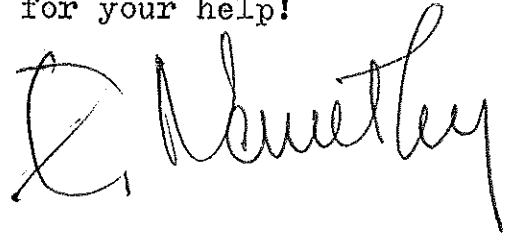


Dear Mr Van Dommelen =

This copy is for your files. Could you please check it, and let me know if there are any errors of fact? Would you be able to phone me - collect - at 10 AM Friday, let me know if it's OK, or if any corrections are needed? Thank you again for your help!

E Nemethy
(215) 297-5713



VOYAGE
MEMORIAL TO A SHORT ~~TRIP~~

George Washington just didn't live long enough to sleep in all the places he's said to have slept.

But if you'd like to see one authenticated spot where he did sleep ^{for one hour} it's over in Mercer County, N J at Washington Crossing State Park - and we'll come back to this later...

The park was originally authorized Jan 22, 1912 by N J Senate Bill 52, which said it was "...not to exceed five acres at or near the point where Washington crossed the river Delaware... (with) a suitable monument... at a total cost... not to exceed \$25,000..."

(It wasn't till a year later - according to a news clipping dated Jan 26, 1913 - that "two score prominent people" decided to establish a park or memorial on the Pennsylvania side, at Taylorsville.)

Since the N J Senate's authority to buy 5 acres, the park has grown mightily. The first tract of 100 acres was bought from A D Blackwell for \$18,000. More tracts were bought up, then in 1963 the state gave another 400 acres under the Green Acres program.

Today the park contains 800 acres ~~and~~ - with manicured lawns and drives, a nature center with woodland trails, a gem of an ^{open-} ~~open-~~ air theater, ~~the historic~~ the historic McKonkey Ferry House, and 35 acres of tree nursery, which raises over 750,000 seedlings of various types each year.

The man in overall charge of the park is Dirk Van Dommelen; he's also a director of the Washington Crossing Association. This group - which was founded in 1964 during New Jersey's 300th Anniversary year - is made up of 12 committees whose aim is to make the park's

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Wash Crossing

facilities bigger and better.

To date, their Nature Committee has set up the nature museum and planned the nature trails; the Cultural Committee worked on creating the ~~the open-air theater; and~~ the Historic Commission dreams of turning the McKonkey barn(?) into a Historama - with a film reenacting the crossing ~~the~~ of the Delaware, and a diorama of the Battle of Trenton. (This ~~is~~ is one of Van Dommelen's pet projects).

This year, the park added two naturalists to its staff - Joe Butchko and Harry Volker, both Biology majors. They've been building the nature trails, classifying and tagging ~~the~~ many varieties of trees and plants, and taking groups on nature walks. (Interested groups can make reservations for a guided tour by phoning (609) 737-0623.)

Recently, we paid a visit to the park and walked one of the nature trails with Joe Butchko. Our starting point was the spring-house and tiny pool at the Cedar Bliss section of the park, where about a dozen girls from Pennington Scout Troop #77 were wading knee-deep in the pool, cleaning it out. (It was obvious that the place had been used as a picnic spot, when you saw the beer cans and other rubbish the girls fished out of the water).

From there we followed a neatly-cut path about four feet wide, along which were white markers giving the names of some of the wild-flowers and trees. Portions of the path are paved with wood chips which come, Joe said, from the wood-chipping machines used by tree-trimmers. We soon learned he's a dedicated bug collector, for at intervals Joe would dart at the shrubbery and come back with a specimen for his collection.

We passed through a stand of cedar trees and underbrush. These, Joe said, show that the area had recently been meadowland. In time the cedars will die out, to be replaced by the deciduous trees of the climax forest. Soon we reached an open field with an old farmhouse at the other end; as we passed a stand of milkweed, Joe suddenly snatched an orange longhorn beetle from one of the plants. Holding it between his thumb and forefinger, he held it up to our ear, and we could hear beetle talk: a tiny, angry, chittering noise.

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Wash Crossing

The farmhouse at the end of the field is the park's nature center, and will be used as the starting point for the nature walks, for lectures, films etc. At one side of the house is a "bird garden", planted with birdseed and sunflowers.

The cornerstone of the house bears the date "ad 1764" but the interior has been so "modernized" by previous owners that very little remains of its original atmosphere. In the ground-floor rooms are displays of insects, a stuffed owl, and some dried plants (which were prepared by being covered with silica gel powder. This removes all the moisture, but the colors stay bright and fresh).

On the way back to Cedar Bliss, Joe told us he enjoys taking interested youngsters on the guided walks. To keep noise and straggling to a minimum, he prefers to work with no more than a dozen - larger groups tend to get out of hand and make so much noise you don't see any birds, because they've been scared off. "You couldn't see a mastodon, with some of the kids," Joe said.

We stopped off at the Open Air Theater, which is a natural amphitheater carved out of a cleared and terraced hillside, facing a stage at the foot of a wooded hill. To one side is a man-made pond, and its overflow runs over a dam through a narrow moat which separates the audience from the stage. Park benches provide comfortable seating - and it looks like a wonderful place to spend a ~~pleasant~~ summer evening.

Next we visited the tree nursery, which for 35 years has been under the supervision of Charles Dansbury. There he and a group of high school students were ~~busy~~ weeding beds of sturdy little conifer seedlings about an inch high. The nursery, which is part of the N J Conservation Service(?) raises young trees from seed, ships them out when they're two years old. The nursery's main function is to reforest idle land throughout the state, and recently, they furnished the young trees for plantings at Round Valley and Spruce Run reservoirs, near Lebanon, N J.

At present, the nursery's inventory includes (in thousands of trees): white pine, 300; Norway spruce, 200; Austrian pine, 150; pitch pine, 40; Japanese larch, 35; and smaller quantities of red

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and black oak, black locust and tulip poplar. During their first year, the spruce and larch seedlings are protected by slatted shades; the other varieties don't need shading.

When the seedlings are two years old, they're prepared for shipment in "jelly rolls". These are sheets of treated paper in which 250 seedlings are packed in wet sphagnum moss. Mr Dansbury showed us an electrically-run counting table which he built from plans furnished by a state nursery in New York. Down the center of the table is a continuous conveyer belt. The workers stand alongside the table, with boxes full of seedlings next to them, each man counting out bundles of ten seedlings which he drops onto the belt. At the foot of the belt, the seedlings are scooped off in bunches of 50s, which are then packed into "jelly rolls". Mr Dansbury told us the men get a five minute break at regular intervals, since the continuous motion of the belt tends to affect one's sense of balance. Every so often, some joker will stop the belt suddenly, just to see the men at the table lurch and stagger around until they've regained their equilibrium.

Our final stop was the McKonkey Ferry house, where Mrs Bama Cocker is curator and hostess.

At 6 PM Christmas night, 1776, Washington's army of about 2400 men began crossing the Delaware in a fleet of Durham boats; because of foul weather and ice conditions on the river, it took nine hours to get all the troops across. At about 3 AM, Washington stopped in at McKonkey's tavern for a hot drink in front of the fire, then took an hour's rest in the upstairs bedroom. At 4 AM, the army began its march through the slippery woodland to Bear Tavern (now a private home) then on to ~~the~~ victory at the Battle of Trenton. Their probable line of march was along Continental Lane, marked by a plaque about a hundred yards from the McKonkey house.

Inside the house, Mrs Cocker will show you the old glass-bottomed pewter mug used by the bartender. "Gentlemen," he'd say, "bottoms up --- and here's looking at you!" (In this way, he could keep an eye on his customers at all times). Hanging in a rack at the fireplace

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is a long-stemmed clay pipe, which could be rented for a half-penny per evening. When the guest had finished his smoke, he'd break off an inch of the stem, so the next smoker could have a clean mouthpiece.

In the dining room, the fireplace holds an assortment of quaint old-time implements; one that caught our eye is a toaster that could be swiveled, to brown the bread on both sides.

~~On~~ the dining table (made of a single piece of cherry wood) is ~~setting of~~ ^{with} pewter plates and two-tined "dagger forks". The forks were used to hold the meat while it was being cut; the meat was then eaten off the knife.

In the upstairs bedroom where Washington slept, you can see a typical Colonial high-legged bed, with a movable trundle bed nested beneath it. There are dozens of priceless old items in the house - and Mrs Cocker knows the story of each one.

So when you visit the park, don't miss visiting the McKonkey House - and Mrs Cocker. Tell her we sent you.

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