

## Washington Crossing State Park

Washington Crossing State Park lies seven miles above Trenton on Route #29 between Trenton and Lambertville. The area, which includes over 800 acres, was once the campground of the Lenni Lenap and the Delaware Indians. Later it was settled by farmers from England and the European mainland.

The idea for a park on the site where Washington Crossed the Delaware seems to have originated with Mr. William Doyle of Trenton. It may also be that the donation of a marker by the Society of Cincinnati aroused interest in establishing a park at the site. A committee of the Knights of Columbus held a public meeting at the Taylor Opera House in Trenton on October 12, 1909. At that time the resolution was passed recommending to the governor of New Jersey that a commission be appointed for the purpose of properly marking the point where Washinton Crossed the Delaware River preceding the Battle of Trenton.

The movement for establishing such a memorial was officially begun in 1910 with the appointment of a fifty-member commission for this purpose. Two years later a subsequent five-member commission purchased the first 100 acres of the Blackwell estate. In 1915 the functions of the Commission were merged into the Department of Conservation and Development which enlarged and developed the project. The celebration included the reconstruction of an Indian Village with <sup>some</sup> ~~some~~ local citizens dressed as Indians, while others appeared in Colonial dress. Unfortunately, rain forced the dedication ceremonies indoors to the Old Log Cabin where festivities continued to the tunes of Winklers Band.

M O R E

The original plans for the park included the construction of a substantial memorial bridge for both vehicular and foot traffic. The Park itself would be on both the Pennsylvania and New Jersey sides - not less than half a mile along the Delaware River and extending at least a quarter mile inland from the River on the New Jersey side. Also planned was the acquiring of Scudder's Falls, the purchase of the farmhouse where Washington had breakfast, the erection of a monument in the park, landscaping road construction and the use as a national military camp grounds.

More specific information on park plans are included in a <sup>1921</sup> letter from Mr. Charles Leavitt, landscapist, to Alfred Gaskill, then the Director of the Department of Conservation and Development.

"When the original plan was drawn by me in 1913 for the development of the park, land had been acquired east of the canal running along Pennington Road to Bear Tavern. The ferry house, the land immediately around it, the two adjoining house lots, the land between the high road and the canal and between the canal and the river's edge had not been obtained. All these, however, were indicated in my first design.

Now, however, that an area so much smaller is contemplated for the park, it is essential that the ten acres authorized for development be carefully chosen. My map shows the ground I recommend. This land extends north from the Pennington Road about twelve hundred and sixty feet on both sides of the State highway and paralleling it, in a strip approximately three hundred and fifty feet wide. The whole plot, as it should, has the effect of bordering the river bank. It commands the land to the east, over which the troops started their Trenton march of after landing, but more important, it commands the river and the river banks on both sides, and the McK

It commands the land to the east, over which the troops started their Trenton march after landing, but more important, it commands the river and the river banks on both sides and the McKonkey Ferry House.

I can see no objection to disposing of the property the State owns lying to the east of this acreage. It is superfluous from the historic standpoint of the actual crossing and the cost of upkeep would necessarily be high for so great an area. If this land, when sold, is subdivided, the house lots on the east end would have access to the indicated park road through rights-of-way and bring high valuations.

My design provides an entrance to the park at the intersection of the Pennington Road with the State Highway, which is the first warning coming up from Trenton of the crossing, and here I propose a treatment of Colonial gates and walls with a commemorative tablet. There is a dangerous curve, as the Mercer County Highway Engineer has already noted, in the Pennington Road, and this should be straightened. In fact, I show the Pennington Road brought in at right angles with the river road, not only for practical purposes, but to obtain a ~~xxx~~ balanced design. The park road of eighteen feet of pavement curves up the meadow in a graceful line, following the ground closely so as to avoid as much change in the original topography as possible.

M O R E

"About two hundred and sixty-five feet south of the McKonkey Ferry House, the road widens out to an overlook, which point is the natural crest in the topography and would provide with a termination and approach, well up on the hillside, the possible memorial bridge. Should the bridge cross the river parallel to the existing old bridge, it would reach the Pennsylvania side somewhere between the old Pennsylvania tavern and the old Pennsylvania Ferry House to the north. I cannot urge too strongly, in the development of Washington Crossing Park, the co-operation of New Jersey and Pennsylvania. With the overlook at elevation ninety-nine, the bridge would cross the railroad, the canal and the highway with sufficient head room.

A little Colonial garden is shown opposite the McKonkey Ferry House and to the North, the Lambertville gate, which is not accented as much as the Trenton gate to the south. The State Highway, to my mind, needs particular treatment to establish an old-time feeling. Bordering the pavement, strips of grass ten feet wide are shown, with large shade trees and low walls, which in some places would retain of the very beautiful native sandstone.

To me, it seems most essential, from an historic and sentimental standpoint, that the park, as a memorial, in addition to the ten acres for the whole park frontage, for as far as New Jersey was concerned, the waters edge and the ferry house were the stage on which this most important drama was enacted. Already bungalows and other undesirable buildings are creeping down the river bank. Yet it is the very essence

Yet it is the very essence of the memorial that the shore should be kept as in Washington's day. To date the State has not acquired the shore. That should be the next legislative actionx."

The first land to be purchased by the state was the Blackwell estate. Later in 1912 the state purchased the McKonkey Ferry House and the present Flag Barn which was a barn on the farm. Much of the land that was held for the state by Mr. Strittmatter was given to Roman Catholic Dioces of Trenton after the state decided to keep not to purchase additional land. St. George R.C. Church now stands on part of that ground. More recently over 300 acres have been acquired under the Green Acres program.<sup>1.</sup>

The buildings and grounds within the Park have a deversified history. The Blackwell home is currently the residence of the Park Superintendent, It was originally the home of the family which owned the estate purchased for the park. The farm nursery is the present Sullivan Grove picnic area and the Park office was one a chicken coop. The Barn still stands today and is used as a garage and for storage. A wagon barn alos existed but it burned down during the 1930s when sparks from a wood stove ignited a fire.

The Nelson House, located near the rifer in Washington Grove, dates to the Colonial Period. At one time it was a hotel owned by the Nelson family, The main building with its nineteen rooms and ballroom was torn down by the W.P.A. after a projecting iron beam from a passing railroad car demolished part of the building. Hopes for saving the hotel were abandoned and the building torn down leaving the original structure as it stands today. Inside the house is a large fireplace and to the right near the water pump is an opening

in the wall the reportedly served as a "refrigerator". Food was placed in the opening on top of a block of ice, which drained into the icehouse behind the wall as it melted.

The building is thought to have been the original Johnson Ferry House on the New Jersey side, which later developed into a hotel. The DELEWARE & RARITAN feeder canal basin was constructed near the building.

#### Bear Tavern

This house located on the crossing of Ets. 579 and 546 was reportedly once a tavern owned by the Bear family. It was supposed to have been a stop-over point for farmers taking their goods and animals to market along the Great Road to Trenton. They corralled their animals across from the tavern in what is now park property.

#### Spring House

This structure along the canal was once a milk house. It is currently a pumping station.

#### Plaza

There were once three houses in the area of the current plaza. One made of stone was torn down. The other two were moved by horses and windlass and now stand across from the Park Office entrance on Rt. 546.

#### Washington Grove

The original shoreline of the is supposed to have been much higher than it is today

### Washington Grove

The original shoreling of the Delaware supposedly reached the area where the fireplaces are today in Washington Grove. A natural levy of large flat stepping stones reportedly extended into the river and was most likely used as part of the gerry stop. The stones were removed during the 1930s by the W.P.A.

### Outdoor Theater and the Washington Crossing Association

The idea for an outdoor theater originated in 1962 with an idea which the superintendent had for an area in the park for outdoor performances. Part of that area was once a cow pasture of the Niederer farm and included a pond and a natural dell. The area had been devastated by a tornado but after clearing and grading offered an ideal natural area. The idea took hold with several persons and particularly with a group which had formed to further park development. The possibilities of using the outdoor performances as part of its fund-raising activities interested members of the Washington Crossing Association and the first performances of were held in the summer of 1964 to celebrate the New Jersey Tercentenary. The Pennington Players under the direction of Don Hope and guidance of Mr. Jack Rees presented G.B. Shaw's THE DEVIL'S DISCIPLE.

With the assistance of Mr. Weisener of Twin Pine electric and Mr. Chris Hansen of Wright Electric, two large generators for lights and cable for electric wiring were made available.

Mr. Arno Safran saw the last production of The Devil's Disciple and talked about the possibility of continuing the project the next year with a festival of the performing arts. Mr. Safran along with Mr. Rees, Mrs. Mitchell Carter and Mr. Dirk van Rommelen succeeded in arranging a program which was then accepted by the Board of the W.C.A. The State agreed

Mr. C. Hansen intalled lights in a light shack constructed by Park personnel from ~~x~~ old lumber. ~~Backxxx~~ The back stage building was constructed by members of the Association. The Stage was leveled by Park personnel and covered with woodchips and the prison crew installed terraces . Additional benches were furnished by the State. From 1965 to the present performances in the park have consisted primarily of musicals and drama presented by little theater groups.

The primary ~~xxxx~~ purpose of the Washington Crossing Association was and still is to obtain an appropriate building at Washington Crossing to house a museum or displays related to the Revolution and the Crossing of th e Delaware, possibly to extend this with data on the March to Trenton, the Battle of Trenton- Princeton. A plan was presented to the group featuring an exact replica of a 60 ft. Durham boat around which other displays were to be grouped and room left for interpretation. The Association has continued to sponsor outdoor theater in the Park as well as support of the Nature Center, and plans are continuing to develop historic sites within the Park.

In 1965 improvements were made in the theater and stage and a summer festival of the performing arts was presented. From the middle of May to September thrity nights were scheduled for performances. This became a very successful event and was expanded into a combination of performing arts groups and l ttle theater groups. From 1967 to 1969 performances consisited primarily of little theater g oups.

#### Flag Barn

The present Flag Barn with the diorama of the Crossing of the Delaware and the display of American flags was once the barn on the Johnson farm. The barn was renovated in the 1930s and once housed a drafting room for



for the Trenton Park Development staff. The original meetings of the Washington Crossing Association were held in this building which once also housed park files and records. The Barn today is operated by volunteers from the W.C.A.

#### Nature Center

Plans for the Nature Center came into being after the Harbourt tenant house was acquired. Through the efforts of the superintendent, the Natural Areas Section of the Bureau of Parks and the Trenton Naturalists Club the center was opened on . The state subsequently hired two naturalists, Mr. Joe Butchko and and on member of the Trenton Naturalists Club, Mrs. Rachel Horne, volunteered.

Displays were prepared with the help of groups such as the 4-H, and Boy Scouts. Washington Crossing Association members helped to survey the first nature trail. Rails were built with the naturalists' and park summer help. In 1967 the Center was moved to the former Lippincot House. The display area was enlarged and more trails cleared.

Throughout the years many gifts have been presented to the Park.

In more recent years gifts have been given to the Park's Nature Center.  
and their donors

The main contributions/to the Park are listed below.

Colonial Garden	Daughters of the American Revolution (Ferry House)	1926
Flag Pole	N.J. Sons of the Revolution	1926
Thirteen Elm Trees	(Thirteen original Colonies - between the Ferry House and the Church)	1926
Monument-N.J.	Society of D.A.R. (between Nelson House and The River Bridge)	1926
Native Stone Monument	The N.J. Society of Cincinnati (along main road)	1909 (?)
Pump	Sons of the American Revolution ( just northeast of the Plaza)	1927
Honeyman Memorial Fountain	N.J. Patriotic Order Sons of America	1930
Elm Trees	George Washington Chapter of D.A.R. (opposite Ferry House west)	1932
Elm(ØØ)-Oak(1)	N.J. Garden Clubs	1932
George Washington Memorial Arboretum	Charles Lathrop Pack & Arthur Newton Pack	1932
Gateway to Canal Ramble & Tablets	N.J. Society of Colonial War	1932
Gateway to Canal Ramble & Tablets	Colonial Dames of America	1932
Maple Tree (from Mt. Vernon)	Bicentennial Commission (large Triangle plot in formal park)	1932
Trees along Sullivan Drive to Sullivan Grove		1932
	1. Daughter of American Colonists (elm)	
	2. Mercer County S-H Clubs (oak)	
	3. Jenny M Jackson Society (oak)	
	4. N.J. Daughters of the Revolution(oak)	
	5. O.U. American, Trenton District (oak)	
	6. Mercer County Pamona Grange (elm)	
	7. Jr. O.U.A.M., Centruy Council (elm)	
	8.,9.,10,11 Dept. set out (oak)	
	12. Burlington Council of P.O. S. of America (elm)	

Scudder Oak	Large triangle formal park--Sullivan D. Julia Scudder in memory of Amos Scudder	1932
Sun Dial	McKonkey Gardens - General Society - Daughters of the Revolution	1932
Stone Gateways (2)	Nursery	
Charry Tree	Mercer Furrier 4-H Club (between McKonkey Ferry House & Flagy Pole)	1964

### Memorial Arboretum

The George Washington Memorial Arboretum located adjacent to the the State Forest Nursery, was donated by Charles Mathrop Pack of Lakewood and his son Arthur Newton Pack, of Princeton to the citizens of New Jersey. to commemorate the 200th Anniversary of the birth of George Washington and to stand as a living and growing monument to the man who fought for the life and growth of a new nation.

The area for the arboretum took about three months for three park employees to clear by hand. Afterwards each section was spaded, rolled raked and seeded. Once the mowing began that also was done by "hand" with one man pulling the mower as two others steered. While working on the arboretum workers found several arrowheads, spearheads and at least one Indian Hatchet.

The Arboretum, as designed by H.B. Fiske of Passaic, N.J., ~~xxxx~~ contained about 1,000 trees and 1,500 small bushes and shrubs, all of which were native to New Jersey or so commonly found within the borders of the state as to be considered as typical New Jersey species. Winding paths were set out throughout the area.~~xxx~~

Park Use

Throughout the years since its dedication in 1926, the Park has served a variety of uses. Primarily a picnic and recreation area for several years, it became important to local residents during the Second World War. At that time the YMCA sponsored film programs and dances in Sullivan Grove pavillion since most people could not travel during the blackouts.

Other more recent activities in addition to the outdoor theater and nature program include the National Campers and Hikers Rally, the Wally Byam Travel Trailer Camp Convention, Trenton Kennel Club Dog Show, Boy Scout Camporee and summer day camp and cross-country ~~running~~ track meets. Special celebrations have included a costumed Christmas march to Bear Tavern, reenactment of the March to Trenton and a Washington's Birthday Celebration.

Future plans for park use include expanding the multiple uses of the park ~~to include~~ with a general recreation area for boating, equestrians, tennis, swimming ~~and~~ ; camp sites, picnic area and a natural area and nature center.

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## Outdoor Historic Drama

The present plans for an outdoor historic drama are an outgrowth of activities at the open air theater. Because the 1967 outdoor theater season operated at a loss due to rain, the Supt. van Dommelen began to seek ~~more~~ additional means to support the theater activities. At the end of 1967 and the beginning of 1968 he contacted The N.J. Council on the Arts through the advice of Assemblyman Farrington. Byron Kelley Executive Director, was contacted via Samuel Pratt and a grant for a historic play or symphony was requested. Kelley agreed, but the Council advised to produce an historic pageant.

The superintendent, Mr. Rees and Annette Carter looked for talent to write a pageant or historic drama. Paul Green of the Institute of Outdoor Drama was sent an outline of the project. This did not find sufficient support. Contacts were made in Princeton ~~at~~ at the suggestion of William McCleery, Editor of the Princeton University Magazine. Suggestion were also received from many prominent historians - Mr Macanneny,

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Mrs. Carter spoke to Prof. Lynn of the Westminster Choir College who suggested Mr. Frank Lewin. Mr. Lewin, an admirer of the theater and many of its productions, agreed to compose the music if a playwright could be found Mr. Arthur Lithgow, Director of the McCarter Theater ~~was contacted~~ expressed interest. His first thoughts were of a folk opera. As more information was gathered from the Institute of Outdoor Drama, the form of the production became an outdoor historic drama or as Paul Green calls it, a symphonic drama. Meetings followed with Mr. William Boyan, Pres. Jack Rees, ~~Mr~~ Annette Carter, Dirk van Dommelen and Messrs Lewin and Lithgow. The Council on the Arts offered \$ 2000,00 seed money but stipulated that the State would reserve the rights. Agreement

OHD \* 2

In October 1968 Messrs. Lewin and Rees attended the yearly conference of the Institute of Outdoor Drama at Chapel Hill, N.C. Both returned very enthusiastic about the project. The costs for a full production, however, were quoted as well over \$100,000 for 60 nights plus improvements of the physical theater plant. A meeting was held with the advisory board of the W.C.A.. Those present included Mr. Joseph Truncer, Mr. Kemble Widmer, Mr. Donaldson, Mr. Numan, Br Falcey, Mr. Boyan, Mr. Rees, Annette Carter and Supt. van Dommelen. Mr. Falcey said he would carry on the project.

To continue the project, meetings followed in 1969 at Frank Lewin's residence. Mary Rosbling expressed interest after being contacted by Dirk van Dommelen and Mrs. Hazel Herman acted as her representative. The results were to create a steering committee to possibly form a separate corporation to carry out the plans. Possibly a larger and better theater plant would be needed to carry out these plans and to save the present dell for more intimate theater productions.

On September 28, 1969 a meeting was held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Carter. \* The sixteen persons at the meeting decided to form a corporation for the purpose of establishing an outdoor historic drama in Washington Crossing State Park. Support and encouragement was received from Mr. Joseph Truncer, Chief of the Bureau of Parks, F.,R. and from Byron Kelley of the N.J. Council on the Arts. Temporary officers included Annette Carter, temp. pres; Jack Rees, temp V. Pres.; Charlotte Tomaszewski, temp. sect. and temp. treas. -

Mrs. Carter attended the annual Outdoor <sup>+</sup> theater conference in October and relayed vital information at the ~~xxxxxx~~ <sup>first</sup> meeting of the newly-formed group.