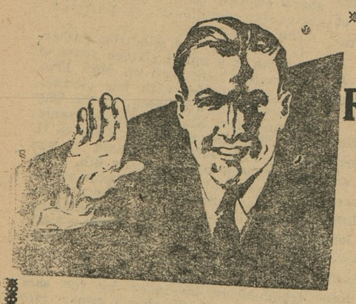
Kent News.

VOL. 86. CHESTERTOWN, MD., SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 1926



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April–1yr.

INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT GEO. WASHINGTON COMPILED BY DR. PAUL E. TITSWORTH OF WASHINGTON COLLEGE

These many interesting facts were compiled by Dr. Paul E. Titsworth, president of Washington College, in a three day search through the Diaries and letters of George Washington at the Congressional Library, Washington, D. C.

Dr. Titsworth searched these records in an effort to determine George Washington's connections with Washington College as written in his own diaries and letters. This paper is indebted to Dr. Titsworth for this interesting article showing the importance of the Eastern Shore of Maryland especially the northern counties, in the Revolutionary War, and the early government of the United States, of which too little has been written in early histories.

The articles follow with references from which they were taken.

East of the lordly Chesapeake are situated nine counties of Maryland, a storied land, one flowing with milk and honey—if the Biblical metaphor may be stretched to cover wheat, tomatoes, oysters, and crabs in abundance,—beloved of every native and dweller, the Eastern Shore. Settled early in the seventeenth century by sturdy middle-class and courtly cavalier stock of purest English growth this territory was in the middle of the stage during the colonial period and only just off stage, in the wings, during Revolutionary times.

Geographically speaking, the Eastern Shore begins at the Susquehanna River and winds gently about the head of the Bay and stretches away down the Chesapeake for some two hundred miles to Cape Charles, Virginia.

In travelling to and from Mt. Vernon and Virginia and Philadelphia and New York, George Washington almost always passed over the soil of the Eastern Shore. Going north he frequently entered its territory near Perryville on the Susquehanna, going on thence through or staying in Elkton—frequently referred to as Head of Elk—and leaving the Shore near Iron Hill on the Delaware line. Going south, he reversed this itinerary.

His diaries and letters mention a second route he sometimes used when, headed northward, he crossed the Chesapeake from Annapolis to Rock Hall in Kent County. In this event he broke his journey at Chestertown, Kent's county seat, where he ate, or lodged the night, or both. Journeying outward over this route, he entered the Shore either at Warwick or Iron Hill, and, passing through, or staying in, Chestertown, he shipped from Rock Hall to Annapolis.

His diaries afford no evidence that his foot ever touched any part of the Eastern Shore south of Chestertown, although vague local legends exists to the contrary. The records show that he paid at least six different visits to Kent County.

Washington honored Chestertown especially when, in April, 1785, he attended, as a member of the Board of Visitors and Governors, the third commencement of Washington College.

Head of Elk, mention of which recurs frequently in the Washington papers of the Revolutionary years, was a landing on Big Elk Creek, a main branch of Elk River which flows into the Chesapeake a few miles below Elkton, in Cecil County. Here, at this strategically convenient yet rather secluded spot, General Washington maintained practically throughout the war a supply depot. Remains of the old wharf can still be seen near the abutments of the present cement bridge just outside Elkton on the Glasgow Road to Wilmington, Del.

1. Fitzpatrick, George Washington Diaries; September and October, 1774 and March, 1791.

From this point stores could be hastened to the north when the British were harrying New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania and south when they threatened Baltimore and northern Virginia.

As the visitor looks at Elk River and its confluent, Big Elk Creek, today it seems incredible that these two insignificant streams could ever have been of military importance. Yet twice particularly Head of Elk must have seen some feverish activity.

In 1777 Lord Howe embarked troops at New York, sailed with them down the Atlantic Coast, ran in between the Virginia Capes, and came full speed up the Chesapeake to catch and destroy Washington's army and to take Philadelphia. He disembarked his men at Head of Elk, but found Washington informed of his movements. Skillfully the Continental Commander-in-Chief withdrew out of Howe's reach, keeping, however, almost always in sight of the British. At last, after considerable jockeying for position, the American forces withdrew from Maryland soil and took their stand at the Brandywine.

Again in 1781, at the time of the battle of Yorktown, while Count de Grasse, the French fleet commander, held off the British at the mouth of the Chesapeake, Washington swooped down the Bay to aid Rochambeau who was worrying Cornwallis.

The American General moved from the Head of the Elk whence he had previously sent orders down the Eastern Shore for boats to convey men and supplies from Baltimore to Yorktown. The union of the Continental troups with their French allies being more quickly effected by Washington's transporting his men by water. The two armies were able to close in on Lord Cornwallis, administer a decisive defeat, and thus bring the British king to sue for peace.

1. Smith, Life of Rev. William Smith, D. D.

2. Conrad, "Manoeuvering for Battle Ground," Motor Travel, May and June, 1925.

Evidently Washington looked upon Head of Elk as a military position of considerable importance. When, in 1777, Lord Howe had sailed from New York for nobody at first knew where, the Americans were rather inclined to suppose that the British were going to throw a line of forces across the twelve-mile wide neck of land separating Delaware from Chesapeake Bay waters.

On September 7, 1777, Washington wrote Major General Health from Wilmington:

"Since General Howe's debarkation in Elk River he has moved on about seven miles; his main body now lies at Iron Hill, and ours near a village called Newport. In this position the armies are from eight to ten miles part. It is yet very uncertain what General Howe's plan of operations will be. Some imagine that he will extend himself from the head waters of the Chesapeake to the Delaware, and by these means not only cut off the counties on the Eastern Shore of Maryland and two of those belonging to Delaware State but will secure the forage, cattle, and forage of which there are considerable quantities in that country.

1. Washington Letters for September and October, 1781, M. S. Division Library of Congress.

Losing the Delmarva Peninsula which provided goodly supplies, not only of grain, cattle, and horses, but also of men and boats, would have been a serious loss to Washington.

More vital than his relations to the terrain of the Eastern Shore of Maryland were, of course, his relations to Eastern Shoremen. A number of the outstanding figures of Washington's life time, particularly from about the opening of the Revolution on,—men of war, men of peace, counselors and cooperators in the great adventure for the independence of the Colonies—sprang from, or were connected with, this trans-Chesapeake country.

One of the glories of the American Revolution was the bravery displayed by the Maryland troops in the ill-starred battle of Long Island when the British drove the Americans out of New York and vicinity, forcing them to retreat down through New Jersey. The Maryland men received Washington's warmest commendation for their costly loyalty on this occasion. Eastern Shoremen played a distinguished part in this fight with the British, the independent companies from Kent, Queen Anne's, and Talbot Counties making up a considerable part of Colonel (later General) William Smallwood's command. Indeed, Smallwood himself was a son of Kent County.

1. Washington Letters, M. S. Division, Library of Congress.

2. Buchholz, Governors of Maryland.

In thinking of Washington and Eastern Shoremen, one needs to include in the roster of those in whom the General and President was interested and on whom he relied, the names of James Rumsey, the inventor of the steamboat, the trial trip of which upon the Potomac engaged Washington's keen attention and enlisted his approval; William Carmichael, a friend of Washington and Lafayette, who was secretary of the American Commissioners in Paris; John Dickinson, whose wisdom and patriotism elicited the remark from the Earl of Chatam "that all attempts to impose servitude on such men must be vain;" Commodore James Nicholson, one-time rank ing officier of the Continental navy; Samuel Chase, signer of the Declaration of Independence, whom Washington appointed associate judge of the Supreme Court of the United States; and William Paca, [illegible]

a tried and conspicuous patriot.

Chestertown claims as its son Charles Willson Peale who, with Gilbert Stuart, enjoys the honor of most frequently having painted portraits of Washington. Indeed, Peale painted Washington's first portrait in May, 1772. One of the most famous of all pictures of Washington is that by Peale which hangs in Nassau Hall at Princeton University. The diaries for July 3, 1787 mention Washington's sitting for this artist to paint a portrait from which a mezzotint was to be made.

1. Fitzpatrick, George Washington Diaries; September 1784 and August 1785.

2. A letter from Washington to William Fitzhugh, dated New York, December 24, 1789, M. S. Division, Library of Congress.

3. Fitzpatrick, George Washington Diaries; May 1772.

Not an Eastern Shoreman but a man evidently well acquainted with and enjoying the confidence of Eastern Shore folks, who lies taking his last sleep in old Shrewsbury churchyard in Kent County, was General John Cadwalader, whom Washington several times sent down the Shore on most important errands. He was an aide of the Commander-in-chief. He is partly famous because he gave the coup de grace to the disgraceful "Conway cabal," which for a time threatened Washington's prestige.—by shooting—not mortally—General Conway in a duel. Conway congratulated Cadwalader, it is said, on his marksmanship, and later, apologizing to Washington, fled the country.

In June, 1786, Washington wrote to James Tilghman regarding his son Col. Tench who had just died:

"Of all the numerous acquaintances of your lately deceased son, I may venture to assert (That excepting those of his nearest relatives) none could have felt his death with more regret than I did. because no one entertained a higher opinion of his worth or had imbibed sentiments of greater friendship for him that I had one. Amidst all your grief, there is the consolation to be drawn; that while living no man could be more esteemed, and since dead, none more lamented than Col. Tilghman."

1. Washington's letter to President of Congress, dated Wilmington, Del Sept. 1, 1777; M. S. Division, Library of Congress.

2. June 5, 1786; quoted from Tilghman, Worthies of Talbot.

Writing to Thomas Jefferson on August 1, 1786, Washington lamented again the early death of his friend Tie "as formerly of my family. (Washington meant of his military family.) He died lately and left as fair a reputation as ever belonged to a human character."

High praise this! Through the lately eighteenth century phaseology, one can see the great heart of Washington letting itself go in uttering his sorrow at the untimely death of Colonel Tench Tilghman who had been his aide from August, 1776. to the end of the war. Washington hardly spoke of any man, not a relative, in more affectionate terms.

Although James Tilghman, the father, was a loyalist throughout the Revolution, Tench Tilghman, the son enjoyed in an unusual degree Washington's confidence and esteem. It appears that Colonel Tilghman wrote more of Washington's correspondence during the war than any other of the four or five of the General's aides To Tilghman Washington assigned the difficult but delightful task of bearing the official news of Cornwallis' surrender to the Continental Congress

The trip of Tilghman from York town to Philadelphia, involving a ride from Rock Hall through Chestertown and Kent County to the Quaker City, lacks only a great poet's touch to become as famous as that of Paul Revere.

1. Quoted from Tilghman

One more personality of interest—of an Eastern Shoreman, to be sure, but one whose career is inextricably bound up with life on the Shore—is the Rev. William Smith, D. D., the first provost of the University of Pennsylvania and a friend of the first President. On December 28, 1778, Washington attended in Philadelphia "the celebration of the festival of St. John the Evangelist by the 'most ancient and worshipful Society of Free and Accepted Masons,' being honored with the chief place in the procession... In the sermon... by the Rev. Brother William Smith, D. D., Washington was alluded to as the Cincinnatus of America." In the procession to Christ Church, Dr. Smith walked beside General Washington.

The contacts between Washington and Dr. Smith were likely frequent for Washington was much interested in the University of Pennsylvania and seems to have met Smith often in Philadelphia. On January 19, 1781, Dr. Smith proposed Washington's name for membership in the American Philosophical Society. He was elected [illegible] August 1780. D

estant Episcopal Church in the states of Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and South Carolina."

1. Baker, Itinerary of George Washington.

2. Lippincott. "George Washington and the University." in The General Magazine and Historical Chronicle of the University of Pennsylvania for January 1926

3. Baker, Washington After the Revolution.

And once again: General and Mrs. Washington were present in Philadelphia in 1791 at a meeting of this same Philosophical Society when Dr. Smith pronounced an encomium on the lately deceased president of the Society, Dr. Benjamin Franklin.

By themselves these facts might point to only a casual relationship between Washington and Smith, yet they will gain in significance in the light of what follows.

The story of Washington's relations to the Eastern Shore remains incomplete without a discussion of his connection with one of the venerable institutions of the Shore, Washington College.

In 1780, Dr. Smith left Philadelphia and settled in Chestertown, Maryland, as rector of the Chester Parish Church. Deeply interested in education as well as in religion and seeing that Maryland boys would longer be hardly welcome at their former haunts in Cambridge and Oxford. he contrived in 1782 to secure local and legislative support for elevating the Kent County School to the rank of college. Of this institution, which had been in existence as early as 1725, he became first president and retained the office for seven years.

1. Baker, Washington After the Revolution.

A very pleasant chapter in the career of George Washington, that of his thoroughgoing interest in education, is yet to be written. He watched carefully over the college training, first of his nephews, and then of his step-son. He also contributed generously of his means to the support of many educational efforts in the nascent nation.

Dr. Smith, as president of the new college in Chestertown enlisted Washington's cooperation in his venture Therefore, in the roster of contributors for the infant college Washington's name leads, like Abou Ben Adem's, all the rest. In a letter to Dr. Smith, the General expressed great pleasure that the new institution was to bear his name. Washington College enjoys the distinction of being the first educational institution and the only college to oposses the name by Washington's express consent.

Furthermore General Washington accepted a place on the first Board of Visitors and Governors. He presided at its deliberations when, in April, 1785 he attended the third commencement of the college at Chestertown.

Over the desk of the president of the college hangs a photostatic copy of an old mildewed diploma which bears witness that, on June 24, 1789, Washington College conferred on George Washington the degree of Doctor of Laws, honoris causa. The original of this document may be seen in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress.

1. Washington College Catalogue.

2. Smith, Life of Rev. William Smith, D. D.

That General—just become President—Washington deeply appreciated this token of distinction and esteem from his name-sake college may be seen in the letter which he wrote Dr. Smith and the Board from New York on July 11, 1789 after the reception of the diploma:

"Gentlemen: Your very affectionate address. and the honorary Testimony to your regard which accompanied it, all forth my grateful acknowledgement.

"A recollection of past events, and the happy termination of our glorious struggle for the establishment of the rights of Man cannot fail to inspire every feeling heart with veneration and gratitude toward the Great Ruler of Events, who has so manifestly interposed in our behalf.

"Among the numerous blessings which are attendant upon Peace, and is one whose consequences are of the most important and extensive kind, may be reckoned the prosperity of Colleges and Seminaries of Learning.

As, in civilized societies, the welfare of the state and happiness of the people are advanced or retarded, in proportion as the morals and education of the youth are atended to; I cannot forbear, on this occasion to express the satisfaction which I feel on seeing the increase of our seminaries of learning through this extensive country. and the general wish which seems to prevail for establishing and maintaining these valuable institutions.

"It affords me peculiar pleasure to know that the Seat of Learning under our direction hath attained to such proficiency in the Science[illegible] Peace; and I sin[illegible]

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