

Camp News

PATRIOTIC ORDER SONS OF AMERICA

ORGANIZED 1847



Vol. 156 – No. 3 &4– MAY–JUNE JULY-AUG 2023 – Sub. \$9.00 Per Year

Published from the Patriotic Order Sons of America Office

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DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE:

August 15, 2023

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Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 9 – 4 pm.
Closed to the public on Tuesday and Thursdays.

From the National Secretary.....

Greetings!

Our country at times appears to be in deep peril! Any newscast, any community discussion, any family get-together can lead to our country's present events. as well as future concerns, being hotly debated.

However, communications, discussion, town meetings, etc., are important to dispel rumors, confront the truths, and plan together to remedy our current situations.

The Patriotic Order Sons of America cannot become part of a silent majority. Stand tall and firm behind our "Platform of Principles." Promote good citizenship and patriotism by holding a planned discussion in your Camp rooms concerning current events. Invite the public and prospective members to engage in dialogue to improve our communities and our country by working together to find common sense solutions to those problems we all face.

Commonsense government of the people, by the people and for the people must prevail!

"Eternal vigilance"

"United we stand, divided we fall"

God Bless America, and the Patriotic Order Sons of America!

Donald R. Borkey

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Front page photo: On June 15, members of the Descendants of Washington's Army at Valley Forge visited Patriot's Hall in Valley Forge Park. In addition to tours of the building, the group was shown our recent project, "The Role of the POS of A in Saving Washington's Headquarters at Valley Forge."
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COMBINED ISSUES!! We hope you enjoy this expanded issue of the May/June and July/Aug issues of the Camp News. There's a lot of information contained in these pages, and a lot of upcoming events you won't want to miss!

Upcoming Events You Don't Want to Miss!

BETSY ROSS CLAYPOOLE MARKER REDEDICATION

While we may not draw 25,000 people to view the Betsy Ross Claypoole grave marker as happened in 1923, we hope to have a large gathering of POS of A members and the public to once again honor the contributions of Betsy Ross Claypoole!

The event of the Rededication of her grave marker will take place on **Saturday, August 26**, which is 100 years to the day of that initial unveiling in Mount Moriah Cemetery. As was reported in past Camp News, the POS of A placed a marker at the grave of Betsy Ross Claypoole with much fanfare on August 26, 1923 in that Philadelphia area cemetery. When her remains and those of her husband were moved to the Betsy Ross House in Philadelphia for the bicentennial celebration in 1976, her grave marker stone was relocated to Patriot's Hall, where it remains to this day.

Along with the rededication ceremony, there will be an ice cream social and special guests Betsy Ross and George Washington will be on hand, as well as some more surprises! This is an event you will not want to miss! The festivities will begin at noon, with the Rededication Ceremony at 2 pm. **Please plan to attend!**



Photo of the original dedication ceremony held on August 26, 1923 at Mt. Moriah Cemetery.

GRAVE VISITS TO HONOR STAGER, HELMS AND STEES

We are bringing back the grave site visits of POS of A stalwarts as had been done in the past. On **Saturday, August 12**, we will car pool to the Schuylkill Haven cemetery to pay respect to the burial sites of Henry J. Stager and James K. Helms, and then also visit the gravesite of Frederick Stees, located at the Pine Grove cemetery. At each monument, there will be a short memorial with a brief commentary of the life of the honored Brother and his contributions to the Order. A wreath will be placed on the gravesites. There will also be a stop for lunch at a place to be determined. If interested, plan to meet at the Leesport office at 9 am to carpool, or head directly to the Schuylkill Haven Cemetery to meet at 10 am.



NATIONAL CAMP CONVENTION

There's been a change in the National Camp Convention date and location of outgoing President James Borkey, Camp 446 Centerport. The Convention will now be held on **Saturday, September 30**, at the Morgantown Holiday Inn, Morgantown, PA. ****PLEASE MARK THIS CHANGE OF DATE AND LOCATION ON YOUR CALENDAR!** A Meet and Greet will be held Friday night, September 29, from 7 – 10 pm. After a Flag Presentation Ceremony Saturday morning, September 30, at 8:15 am, the Sessions will begin promptly at 9 am. A banquet and the Installation of Officers will be held that evening beginning at 5:30 pm, with entertainment by One-Man Band Nic DiSanto, a very entertaining performer. Camp Recording Secretaries will be receiving Delegate registration forms in the near future, and all Camps are encouraged to send Delegates to these important Sessions!

CONVENTION BANQUET RESERVATIONS! If you would like to attend the convention banquet only, please contact the office at posofaoffice@aol.com, or call 610-926-3324 and we will get the reservation form sent to you. The cost of the banquet is \$35 per person, and meal choices will be included in the reservation form.

HISTORY CAMP PRESENTATION – *The POS of A and Washington’s Headquarters*

Past State and National Presidents Scott M. Shultz and Donald R. Borkey represented the POS of A at “History Camp,” an event held at the Freedoms Foundation near our Patriot’s Hall building in Valley Forge in May. The multi-day event featured various historical programs for attendees to learn about perhaps the little known or forgotten stories of the past. Of special interest, of course, was our program, “*The Patriotic Order Sons of America and Their Role in Saving Washington’s Headquarters at Valley Forge.*”

After a brief introduction and information about the history of the POS of A, the slide presentation focused on the involvement of the POS of A and Washington’s Headquarters, and ended with the various other historical preservation projects the Order has done over the years, and continues to do even now.

The following is a written excerpt of that program. If you would like to see the slide presentation in its entirety, it will be shown at the upcoming Betsy Ross Grave Monument Rededication that will be held on Sat., Aug. 26, beginning at noon at Patriot’s Hall, so be sure to attend that event!

So how did the Patriotic Order Sons of America get involved with the formation of Valley Forge Park?

As with other historical sites, at first there was little interest to preserving the area as the significance wasn’t realized at the time. Once General Washington’s 12,000+ troops left after spending time from 1777 to 1778 at Valley Forge, the area reverted back to the normal usage prior to the encampment. The temporary housing used by the troops was removed; farmers again were using their fields; and life reverted back to how it had been prior to the encampment.

Fast forward to 100 years later in 1877, and several members of the local community expressed interest in the home that had been used by George Washington as his headquarters during the encampment. There was a renewed interest in General Washington at the time, as other Headquarters that Washington used in Newburgh, New York and Morristown, New Jersey were recently made into historic sites, and well as Washington’s home at Mount Vernon, which was saved by the Mount Vernon Ladies Association. So there was some excitement into making Washington’s Headquarters at Valley Forge into a historic site as well. The home was still owned by a descendant of the Isaac Potts family when Gen. Washington had been headquartered there, and had been well-preserved.

This desire to honor George Washington and the encampment at Valley Forge prompted the founding of the Centennial Association of Valley Forge. This was a group of 13 men who first met on Dec. 18, 1877 to plan a celebration to mark the 100th anniversary of the departure of George Washington’s troops from Valley Forge that coming June of 1878.

Two months later in February 1878, the Association decided their objective would be to also purchase the Washington Headquarter home and to hold the celebration there.

Looking to the success of the Mount Vernon Ladies Society in securing Mount Vernon, the group of men at that time decided to turn their fledgling organization over to a group of patriotic women. Mrs. Anna Holstein was named Lady Regent, and ten women were appointed to the organizational committee, which they renamed the Centennial and Memorial Association of Valley Forge. Mrs. Holstein negotiated with Hannah Ogden, the owner of the Headquarter building, for a purchase price of \$6,000 for the home and about 1 ¼ acres of surrounding ground. This was extremely high for real estate at the time, but the homeowner claimed the home was full of “precious memories” from Gen. Washington being there 100 years earlier.

The terms of payment were \$500 on May 1; \$1,000 on August 1; \$1,500 on October 1; and to secure a mortgage for the other \$3,000. The initial \$500 downpayment was secured by a gentleman of the original Centennial board, Isaac Smith, who also happened to be a POS of A member.

The group of women met minimally twice a week from February 1878 until the date of the event on June 19, 1878. During that time leading up to the event, the women held numerous fundraisers for the purchase of Washington’s Headquarters, including the sale of photographs, maps, fruit, crackers, lemonade and other items.

History Camp Presentation, con't

By all accounts, the June 1878 event was a huge success. Neighboring towns had been requested to ring all public bells at 5 am, and there was a thirteen-cannon salute at sunrise. According to newspaper accounts, all roads leading to Valley Forge were thronged by visitors, and special trains started arriving around 8:30 am. The Gov. of PA and staff were present along with other government officials, and thousands of men in uniform performed military drills in the surrounding open fields. There was a large tent on the grounds to serve food, and when the event was over, a profit was made to repay Mr. Smith his \$500 loan for the downpayment and a bank mortgage was secured for the remaining \$5,500.

The success of this initial event energized the women, and in the ensuing years, several more events were held to raise funds and the annual celebration in June was held. However, between acquiring artifacts, the maintenance of the grounds, and a decline in attendance at events and fundraisers held on the property, by 1885 the Association still owed \$3,000 on the mortgage, plus interest. With this difficulty in raising funds, it was feared at one point Washington's Headquarters would face foreclosure. The Association approached masonic organizations for help, but to no avail.

This is where the Patriotic Order Sons of America stepped in to help. In August 1885, a delegation of women from the Centennial and Memorial Association delivered an appeal for help at the Pennsylvania State POS of A Convention which was being held in Norristown that year. A contingent of POS of A Officers delegates visited Washington's Headquarters one evening of the convention. Henry J. Stager, the POS of A State President at the time, agreed to adopt their cause and spearheaded the efforts to raise the needed funds from the POS of A Camps throughout the state.

With the POS of A entering the picture, the Centennial and Memorial Association was then reorganized with a board of 18 members, which included 13 men from the POS of A, and five women from the existing group. Mrs. Holstein retained her position as Regent, with Henry Stager assuming the role of Vice Regent.

A year later in 1886, through Stager's appeals to the POS of A membership, \$3,370.98 was collected to pay off the mortgage and all outstanding debts. This was just the beginning of a lucrative partnership with the POS of A in preserving Washington's Headquarters.

The male members on the Centennial and Memorial Association became a special committee within the POS of A, named the Valley Forge Trustee Committee, and reported directly to the POS of A Executive Committee. They also gave annual reports to the officers and delegates at the PA State Camp conventions and coordinated the fundraising and donations of the POS of A to the Association. Also in the beginning years of the POS of A's involvement, any shortfall in the Association's spending was covered by appropriations in the POS of A's annual budget.

Some Camps held their own fundraising events, but many of the initial funds raised by the POS of A were obtained by the purchase of 'stocks' for \$1, which were really ceremonial certificates acknowledging donations to the cause. Shown is one of those certificates, one in the name of Henry Stager himself. The vast majority of these certificates were issued to POS of A members and Camps. The POS of A would also help obtain an even more significant amount of money.

In January 1887, five representatives of the POS of A traveled to Harrisburg to solicit the governor's support for a state grant of \$5,000, which was approved by the state legislature in April of that year. The grant was appropriated for the "improvement, extension and preservation of the lands and buildings occupied by General George Washington as his headquarters at Valley Forge."

That money, along with an additional \$1,400 given by the POS of A, would be used to make Washington's Headquarters look like it had when Washington was there. Modern window frames were replaced with period reproductions, and the kitchen addition was altered to expose the original breezeway with an arched opening between the main house and kitchen. Other repairs were made to return the interior woodwork to original. Old wood that needed to be replaced with new was saved and manufactured into canes, wooden buttons, gavels, and other marketable souvenir items.

History Camp Presentation, con't

A care takers cottage was constructed on the property, consisting of 4 small rooms and a kitchen. The caretaker received a yearly salary of \$300, which was \$25/mo. plus free rent, and was the only member of the Association ever paid for his work.

An adjoining 1 ½ acres to the south was purchased for \$1,200 in 1889, and a few years later, an additional 1 ¼ acres that included a house and stone barn to the west of the property was purchased for \$3,000. The barn was said to have been used as a hospital during the encampment.

Also in 1889, a contingent of three POS of A members, all lawyers, traveled to Washington DC to appeal to Congress for a \$25,000 appropriation to continue to expand the land holdings around Washington's Headquarters, but their efforts were unsuccessful. There were several ongoing negotiations with current landowners to purchase additional surrounding properties. In 1890, Association and POS of A member Col. Theodore Bean proposed that that POS of A appropriate \$100,000 to purchase additional land, however, Col. Bean died the following year in 1891 before his proposition could be fully considered.

In early 1893, the PA State legislature, again through efforts of the POS of A, appropriated another \$5,000 for the Association, but it was vetoed at the time by the Governor. Shortly thereafter on May 30, 1893, the PA State Legislature passed an appropriation bill of \$25,000 and appointed a Board of Park Commissioners to purchase and supervise the organization of a State Park at Valley Forge, including the old earth forts and entrenchments remaining at Mt Joy and the camp grounds of the Revolutionary Army. The wording specifically excluded the land holdings of the Centennial and Memorial Association, and "Is exempted from the right of pre-emption by the State." The Association felt having a new State Park in this location would add even more interest to old Headquarter's building.

From the time of the POS of A's involvement began in 1885, tours, fundraisers, and events held on the Headquarters ground greatly increased.

Visitors were charged 10 cents to tour the home, and various souvenirs were sold to raise funds. The most popular item sold was a souvenir spoon. We don't know the price of what the individual spoons were sold for, but we do have records that a total of over \$2,200 was spent to manufacture the spoons ordered through a 10-year period between 1893-1904. It was the most spent on any manufactured souvenir item to be sold, so one can assume it was a best-seller.

Groups also rented the grounds for large meetings and picnics, and several times photographs of the building were sold, as well as a commemorative book entitled "Footprints of the Revolution" about the Valley Forge encampment written by Col. Theodore Bean.

During this time, the POS of A also brought back large attendance for events held at the Headquarters house through POS of A sponsored events.

The Order held their first annual "Valley Forge Days" on June 18, 1887 at Washington's Headquarters, which continues to this day at a different location on Valley Forge Park. That first event drew over 5,000 to the Headquarters in a day filled with various speeches and military exercises.

Improvements continued to the grounds, although some were not original to the Headquarter building, but had significance to George Washington.

In 1888, the POS of A acquired an elm sapling for the grounds, certified by Mount Vernon's gardener to have descended from a tree planted by Washington himself at Mount Vernon. Unfortunately, this tree fell during a hurricane that hit the area on August 31, 1954.

A large 100' flag pole was erected by the POS of A and a garrison-size flag was flown on it. And when a bad storm in 1896 knocked down the pole, which had rotted below ground level, the POS of A had it replaced at a cost of \$225. This flag pole has since been removed. A small replica school house was placed on the property near the care takers house that was used in POS of A parades, but was also eventually removed.

Acquiring period furnishings and antiques for the Headquarters were also a goal.

In 1894, nine local women organized a Valley Forge Daughters of the American Revolution chapter. They set out to acquire antiques, and by 1900, they were granted permission by the Association to furnish

History Camp Presentation, con't

Washington's bedroom at the Headquarters. In 1902, the Chester County DAR furnished the other bedroom on the second floor, and the following year, the Merion DAR furnished the third floor room. Quite a number of artifacts were received throughout this time as well.

The POS of A certainly took on this project of saving Washington's Headquarters and acquiring the surrounding land with its full support for all the years of their direct involvement.

And with the formation of a PA State Valley Forge Park Commission, the Centennial and Memorial Association and the POS of A had initially looked at it as a way to work with the state in coordinating efforts to form a State Park. And with the initial legislative Act signed in 1893 to form a Valley Forge Park Commission, it did appear that the Association would retain ownership of Washington Headquarters. So it came as a surprise to the Centennial and Memorial Association and POS of A when an amendment to the original Section 1 of the Act left out the excepting clause of Washington's Headquarters that protected the ownership by the Association. This amendment was passed by the State Legislature and signed by then-Governor Samuel Pennypacker on April 5, 1905. Also in the amendment was an additional appropriated amount of \$118,850 for use of the new Park Commission with a limit to purchase up to 1,000 acres for the new park, so things were moving along to expand the Park, although the Association would have to give up ownership of Washington's Headquarters.

After unsuccessful negotiations on a price, a judgement from the Court of Common Pleas of Montgomery County in 1906 ruled the Association would be paid \$18,000 for the property holdings and the Park Commission would immediately take over possession of the Washington Headquarters property. So \$18,000 was received by the Association. However, more questions arose as to what would be done with that money. The POS of A had the most monetary commitment in this endeavor, so there were various discussions within the Association and the POS of A as to where the money would go. Some suggested it should be divided among the certificate holders who had donated. But overwhelming majority of the Association and POS of A favored the money be used to build a lasting patriotic memorial to the contributions of the Association and POS of A to be placed on the grounds of the new park. But the newly formed Valley Forge Park Commission immediately petitioned the courts to have the funds returned to them with no stipulation of how those funds would be used. It would take six more years before it was finally resolved.

At this time, the Association commissioned Henry Stager to write a book detailing the Centennial and Memorial Association and POS Of A's involvement in preserving Washington's Headquarters to make sure their contributions would not be forgotten as the true founders of establishing the park. This book details the history of the Association, the meeting minutes of the Association, and the effort of the POS of A in securing Washington's Headquarters.

A plaque was also made acknowledging the contribution of the Association and POS of A, which after some trepidation on the part of the Park Commission, was installed on the front wall of the Headquarters on February 22, 1909. The plaque reads, "This tablet commemorates the Patriotic Service rendered by the Centennial and Memorial Association of Valley Forge, generously aided by the Patriotic Order Sons of America in acquiring, restoring and preserving these Headquarters, 1878 – 1906." Interestingly, this plaque was removed shortly thereafter when additional changes were made to the Headquarters, but was reinstalled in 1919. Once a Visitor's Center was built, it was on display there. From time to time it disappears when renovations are done, and currently the plaque is not on display, but there is an acknowledgement of the Association and POS of A's involvement on the wall in the newly renovated Visitor's Center today.

The settlement of how the money would be used by the Park Commission was ultimately determined by the court system, which through a series of delays and lower court appeals, was finally ruled upon in the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania on February 26, 1912.

The desire of the Association and POS of A to determine what those funds would be used for at the Park was declined by the judge, who ruled the original charter of the Association was to "purchase, improve and preserve the lands and improvements thereon occupied by General George Washington at Valley Forge

History Camp Presentation, con't

and maintain them as a memorial park for all time to come.” His ruling upheld the lower court ruling that the Valley Forge Park Commission would be in charge of determining how those monies would be used.

The judge, however, praised the Association and POS of A in their effort in preserving Washington’s Headquarters, stating the organizations “performed the duty as trustee for others who unselfishly and patriotically contributed to maintain an historic property for all the people at a time when help for that purpose was sorely needed.” He also ruled that the cost of the lawyer fees incurred, which was \$1,800, the cost of publishing the history book written by Henry Stager, and cost of a plaque could be taken out of the \$18,000 owed to the Park Commission, so in 1912, the remaining funds of \$15,566.50 were turned over to the Valley Forge Park Commission.

This doesn’t quite end the POS of A’s involvement with the Valley Forge Park.

Washington Camp 150 of Valley Forge had a Camp hall building on the north side of Gulf Road. That stone and stucco building was built by Camp 150 members in 1874, with the first floor used as a social center for the Valley Forge village, with a church and school programs being held there. The second floor was the Camp’s meeting room. In 1918, the state condemned the building in order to take possession of the land for expansion of the Valley Forge Park. The building was torn down in 1920. From written accounts, there were new Park Commission members, and they were more favorable to acknowledge the contributions of the POS of A to the Park’s beginnings.

The Park offered the use of the former “Rogers House” also referred to as the “Riddle Mansion” to Camp 150, and an agreement was signed on December 4, 1919 for the lease of that mansion and approximately 2 acres surrounding the building. The Camp received \$7,000 for their old hall, and, adding an additional \$3,000 of Camp funds and permission from the Park Commission, did a major renovation in order to change the outside appearance to resemble the Mt Vernon home of George Washington. The dedication of the renovated building was held on Nov. 27, 1920.

Although Camp 150 closed in 1959, the POS of A still maintains that building to this day, over 100 years later, on the grounds of the Park. We consider it our “National Headquarters” and refer to it as “Patriot’s Hall.” The first floor houses many artifacts and historical items of the POS of A as a museum and has recently undergone a major renovation. The second floor serves as a meeting hall.

The POS of A holds several meetings and events at the building throughout the year and we encourage you to visit our building on the grounds of Valley Forge National Park!

The POS of A continues to support the Valley Forge National Park, from their membership in the Valley Forge Alliance, to providing flags for the large flag pole at the Arch inside the Park. Shown below (left) is the recent flag presentation that was held on Valley Forge Days, June 10. In the photo below, right,



POS of A members await visitors to our building, Patriot’s Hall, in order to provide tours and information about our Order!



PATRIOT'S DAY

Camp 113 Berville held their 3rd Annual Patriot's Day on Saturday, April 15. The event this year featured guest speaker Christian Leinbach, the Dedication of the Flag Retirement site, a Flag Retirement ceremony, a demonstration by Civil War 53rd Regiment re-enactors, and a special visit from George Washington himself!



NEWS AND NOTES FROM THE CAMPS.....

Camp 387 Schwenksville honored two members as their "Man of the Year" for the past two years at their annual banquet April 15. Receiving the honors (photo, right) were Michael Hess (left) and Michael Frederick (right). On hand at the banquet was George Washington, aka Curt Radabaugh, a member of Camp 446 Centreport.



George Washington also attended Camp 113 Bernville's annual Patriot's Day on April 15, (photo below) as Camp 113 president Scott Wagner (center) presented a flag to North Heidelberg Township supervisor Bob Klinger. Shown on the right is National Vice President Randy Yarnall, also a member of Camp 113.



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In the photo below, Camp 523 Eagleville presented a 6'x10' flag to Sanatoga Ridge Community Center, near Pottstown. Lee Biscombe, a member of Camp 523, presented the flag to Air Force veteran Fred VanRyn, and staff member Helmi Stepnowski.



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Camp 523 Eagleville presented three new flags to brothers Charlie and Lou Alba, supporters of the POS of A and owners of Lou's Sandwich Shop in Norristown, PA. Also shown in the photo below with the owners is Stanley Sarnocinski, (center) Past President and National Trustee who is a member of Camp 523.



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Camp 104 Boyertown, with some help from National Secretary Donald Borkey, had the large flag pole painted in Cannon Hill Cemetery. The Camp brothers maintain the area of the cemetery with the pole and cannons.

