



The Brandywine Dispatch



WINTER 2025

The Testimony of Phebe Mendenhall Thomas Child Witness to the Battle of Brandywine

Phebe Mendenhall Thomas was born on the 7th day of the 7th month of 1770 to a Quaker family who had emigrated from Mildenhall, Wiltshire, England, in 1686. It was at the age of seven that Phebe witnessed the Battle of Brandywine from her family's Concord Township, PA farm. Later written down by her granddaughter, Abigail Speakman, her testimony captures the fear and uncertainty felt by many Quaker families amidst the battle and its aftermath. From the startling echoes of booming cannons heard early in the day as the family was baking bread, to the desperately hungry and thirsty American soldiers wandering onto the family's Concord farm as they retreated towards Chester, it was a day that was forever etched into Phebe's memory. She recalled the empathetic reactions of her family, who offered sustenance to the beleaguered men. Phebe's account describes the precarity experienced by her Quaker family who despite the threat of British soldiers seeking revenge, put aside their existential fears and pacifist beliefs when confronted with the human tragedy unfolding before them.

"In the evening, a great company of American soldiers came. Father told us to shut up the front of the house and come back to the kitchen. They flocked into the yard and sat down on the cider press, troughs, and benches, every piece they could find. Father said get bread and cheese for them and feed them. The foot soldiers after they had eaten their bread and cheese went on to the Black Horse. They got all the bread and cheese we had, and we got no supper ourselves that night. When our bread was gone, Margaret, brother Stephen's wife, who lived close by, gave all they had." (*Memoir of Phebe Thomas*)



Phebe's father's worst fears were realized early the following day. Only moments after returning from his perilous ride to the Black Horse to transport a seriously injured American officer who had spent the night in the barn and couldn't mount his horse, the "Red Coats" showed up in Robert and Elizabeth Mendenhall's yard. Inwardly fearing for the safety of his wife and remaining children left behind in the home, the seven-year-old Phebe accompanied her Father as he obligingly responded to the British soldiers' request to help them avoid traveling over the big hill. "They had the poorest little rats of horses to draw their big guns. Father went to show them so they should not go over the growing grain." (*Memoir of Phebe Thomas*)

The Brandywine Dispatch is the newsletter for the Brandywine Battlefield Park and published by the Brandywine Battlefield Park Associates. "Keeping the Story Alive and Interesting!"

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The President's View

Greetings fellow *Dispatch* readers,

Do you know the old adage (I'm sure most of you do) that "time waits for no man?" That seems especially true this year, with 2024 all but in the rearview mirror and 2025 straight ahead.

While the year seems like it is coming to a close in the blink of an eye, as I write this, I'm truly impressed with how much both the staff and volunteers at Brandywine Battlefield Park accomplished from March, when

we opened for the season until now (and that doesn't even include all the prep work that was done to ready for the year!). If you can think of it, they did it:

- Open the battlefield to our youngest visitors, providing historical context for them to learn and room for them to use their imagination! Check.
- Continue our popular Revolutionary Speaker Series and introduce new programming like Rally the Troops! Yep, that too.
- Host our second-annual Brews at the Battlefield event that ended up being another sellout! Uh-huh.
- Keep up with maintenance around the park so visitors can have the best experience possible! You know it.

And these are just a few examples; they truly knocked it out of the park. The staff and volunteers did all this while simultaneously looking to the future and getting ready for events in 2025, 2026 (happy Semiquincentennial, America!), and our own 250th anniversary of the Battle of the Brandywine in 2027.

So even though the park might be getting ready to close for the year, I encourage you all to follow us on social media (if you don't already) to stay up to date on what great things are in store for 2025 and beyond.

On behalf of our staff and volunteers, I wish you and your family a happy and safe holiday season and a bright start to the new year.

Alexis Furlong
President, Brandywine Battlefield Park Associates



OUR MISSION

"To preserve, interpret and share the impact of the enduring story of the Battle of the Brandywine, the largest and longest single day land battle of the American Revolution."

Volunteer of the Year

It is with great appreciation and admiration that we recognize **Dr. Fred Magner** as our 2024 Volunteer of the Year. For many years, Dr. Magner has been a dedicated and passionate volunteer, generously sharing his time and expertise with our park and its visitors. His commitment to enhancing the visitor experience is evident in the many ways he contributes to our programs.

Dr. Magner is perhaps best known for leading our Saturday afternoon tours, where he brings history to life with his engaging storytelling and deep knowledge of the park's significance. His leadership extends beyond these tours, as he also conducts Guided Battlefield Tours, offering in-depth insights into the history of the site. His ability to connect with visitors of all ages, answering questions and sparking curiosity, showcases great appreciation to those who experience his tours.



In addition to his regular tours, Dr. Magner plays an invaluable role in school programs. As a colonial medical doctor, he accompanies school groups, providing a unique and educational perspective on 18th-century medicine. His engaging demonstrations and thorough explanations help students and visitors alike understand the practices and challenges of the colonial era, making history feel both relevant and fascinating.

If you join us for a Saturday tour, there's a strong chance you'll encounter Dr. Magner in full colonial uniform, ready to share his knowledge and enthusiasm for history. His dedication to preserving and sharing the past has made a lasting impact on everyone he meets, and we are incredibly fortunate to have him as part of our volunteer team.

We are deeply grateful for Dr. Magner's tireless commitment to our park. His contributions, both in terms of knowledge and enthusiasm, enrich our community and help make our programs a success. Thank you, Dr. Magner, for your unwavering support and for being such a vital part of our park family.



Remembrance Day

September 11, 2024.

The ceremony included raising the U.S. Flag, which was flown over the U.S. Capitol on July 4, 2022. The flag was raised by representatives of the Daughters of the American Revolution and Sons of the American Revolution.

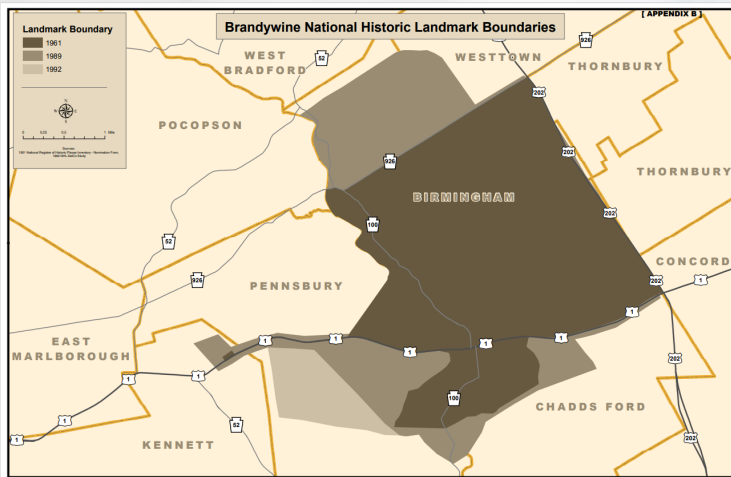


The Field Report



As open space in the counties around Philadelphia has continued to shrink, municipalities and conservation groups have endeavored to preserve land, particularly in those areas with great historic significance such as the Brandywine Battlefield. The efforts to preserve the Brandywine Battlefield have led to some remarkable achievements but at considerable cost. According to National Park Service records, preservation of the Battlefield could have come sooner and perhaps at a lower price.

The first attempt to preserve the Battlefield came in 1925 after a bill was introduced in the Pennsylvania legislature seeking to purchase Washington's Headquarters, and the surrounding ten acres, for \$10,000. Unfortunately, the legislature's session came to an end before a vote could be taken. Two years later, virtually the same bill was introduced, which passed both houses, but was vetoed by Governor John Fisher. The Governor cited opposition from the local community – many of whom were Quakers averse to glorifying war - in his decision. Regrettably, Washington's Headquarters would be devastated by a fire on September 16, 1931.



Interest in preserving the Headquarters and surrounding battlefield regained momentum in the mid-1930s, even reaching the desk of President Franklin Roosevelt. Dr. Henry Pleasants, Jr., a West Chester physician and local historian frustrated by the "ineffectual" efforts of Pennsylvania, wrote to the President on May 8, 1937 to plead his case for making the Battlefield a National Battlefield Park. Pleasants' letter was referred to the National Park Service, which completed a feasibility study for the purchase and operation of a park that contained Birmingham and Kennett Meeting, the Battlefield area, Washington's Headquarters, and other sites (roughly 600 acres). The study concluded that the cost, estimated at a "quarter of a million dollars or possibly more" (almost \$5.5 million today), was "very high."

Ultimately, the National Park Service never acquired the property, but it did deem the Brandywine Battlefield nationally significant by designating it a National Historic Landmark in 1961. To date, the Commonwealth and other municipal and local interest groups have collaborated to preserve an astonishing 3,100 acres of the 6,400-acre National Historic Landmark.

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While the family was spared vandalism, they were not without grief. Phebe's aunt, Ann, married the great botanist John Bartram, who tragically passed away shortly after the battle. His granddaughter recounts that he was "exceedingly annoyed and agitated," and thought his days were shortened, by the approach of the British army, after the Battle of Brandywine. That army had been ravaging various portions of the revolted colonies and he was apprehensive it might also lay waste to his darling garden, that he cherished and nursed for almost half a century. Bartram's Garden on the lower Schuylkill River was built by father and son, who, during their travels, as plant hunters, identified and cultivated hundreds of native North American plants. (Darlington, *Memorials of John Bartram and Humphry Marshall* p. 44)

Phebe was a famous horsewoman who traveled the countryside alone in her chaise, led by her "staid old horse, Prince," who knew her routes and nudged her if she dared to stray. Phebe rarely missed a first-day, mid-week, or Quarterly Meeting until she was 95, when she reluctantly went to live with family. Phebe died on 19 January 1875 at 104 and was buried in the Concord Friends Cemetery, Delaware Co, PA.

Kris Barone

Board Member, Brandywine Battlefield Park Associates

Sources:

Darlington, W., Bartram, J., Collinson, P. (1849). *Memorials of John Bartram and Humphry Marshall: with notices of their botanical contemporaries*. Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston. <https://archive.org/details/memorialsjohnb00darl/mode/2up?q=brandywine>

Futhey, J. Smith, Cope, Gilbert, *History of Chester County, Pennsylvania: with genealogical and biographical sketches*, Everts, 1881.

Memoir of Phebe Thomas, by her granddaughter, Abigail Speakman Bye Family Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College.

SAVE THE DATE!

December 14, 2024

11:00 a.m. Annual Meeting of the Membership

ALL MEMBERS WELCOME

12:00 Volunteer Appreciation Program

The program includes lunch for our great volunteers and the Volunteer of the Year award presentation

4:00 p.m. Brandywine Battlefield Park will close for the winter season

February 22, 2025

12:00 noon Revolutionary Speaker Series

"Researching War Ancestors" This virtual program will be provided by the Pennsylvania State Archives.

March 9, 2025

Brandywine Battlefield Park reopens. (This is currently a tentative date. More information will be available on our website.)

Please visit us at [Brandywine Battlefield Park](#) for more information about our events, hours of operation, activities and programs!

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