

W3R[®] -US Auto Tour through Delaware

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Brief Overview of the French Military Presence

Imagine being a resident of Claymont, Delaware, in the first eight days of September, 1781, as hundreds of Continental Army troops rowed barges with the Continental Army's artillery down the Delaware River and thousands of Continental and French troops marched down Philadelphia Pike. Two thousand French troops set up tents where the Adams Mart shopping center now stands in Wilmington. There were twice as many troops as townspeople. Farmers from up to fifty miles away drove wagons-full of supplies to Wilmington and Christiana to supply food for the troops and feed for the horses and oxen. The Continental army paid with paper money while the French paid in silver for their purchases.

What might affect the profit from selling produce to these customers?

Immediately after the victory at Yorktown the Continental forces returned north to block possible move up the Hudson River by British Gen. Howe's forces in New York City. These troops passed through Delaware on November 29-30, 1781, camping in Newport.

After spending the winter guarding captured troops and materials in Virginia Rochambeau's regiments marched north nine months later, following the same path they took south. On August 29, 1782 the first division of the FEF (about 2,500 men) camped in the flood plain just south of Newport, and the second division camped there the following day.

In December, 1782, Lauzun's Legion of the FEF (about 600 men and 300 horses) returned to Wilmington and stayed until May, 1783, to help guard the shores of the bays leading to Philadelphia and Baltimore.

For more details on the 1781 history and march route click the History link in w3r-archive.org and choose the link to this state. The link to Historical Maps leads to ten NPS maps with a shaded path where the roads taken in 1781 are overlaid on a modern roadmap.

Auto Tour of the W3R[®]

1. Start at the Robinson House* at 1 Naamans Road in Claymont. This is about 0.5 miles south of the PA/DE state line.

2. Follow Philadelphia Pike (Rt 13) south. After 1.5 miles Rt 13 splits off to the left. After 5.4 miles more on Philadelphia Pike (note that its name changes to Market St.) Concord Ave. enters from the right at the Cathedral Church of St. John. On the street to your left is Brandywine Village* -- several restored Federal-era homes.
3. Continue on Market St. for three blocks to the bridge over the Brandywine River. On the far side of the river to the right you can see the old First Presbyterian Church. This building was once located in central Wilmington. It served as a hospital for British soldiers after the Battle of the Brandywine in 1777.
4. After crossing the river go straight ahead on King Street. In the sixth block look to the right to see the statue of Caesar Rodney. He rode from Dover to Philadelphia through a torrential rainstorm, arriving on July 2, 1776, just in time to cast the vote that allowed Delaware to support the Declaration of Independence and thus make the vote (counted by state) unanimous. He was the president (now called governor) of Delaware in 1778-81.
5. Two blocks later (just after 834 King St) stop at the park marking the site of the first African Methodist Episcopal Church in the U.S., located at GPS: N39-44.595; W075-32.862. Uphill to the right is the Grand Opera House*, former site of the Wilmington Academy which housed some 550 soldiers from Lauzun's Legion from 1782 Dec to 1783 May. About half of the soldiers were hussars (light cavalry). Downhill to your left was a stable for 300 horses.
6. After four more blocks turn right onto 4th St. and go six blocks to Washington St. In the last block look to the right to see the Wilmington Friends (Quaker) Meeting House, where John Dickinson, governor of Delaware in 1781-2 and of Pennsylvania in 1782-5 is buried.
7. Turn left on Washington St. and go two blocks to 2nd St., then turn right and go three blocks to Monroe St. The First French Division camped in this area on the night of September 6, 1781.
8. Turn left on Monroe St. and after two blocks turn diagonally right onto Maryland Ave. (Rt 4). After 1.2 miles you pass Canby Park on the right and cross Little Mill Creek. Note the millstone and commemorative plaque*.
9. Continue 2.1 miles on Rt 4 to pass under Rt 141. After 1.5 miles more you cross over the Red Clay Creek. Stay to the left and after 1.6 miles more go left at the stoplight onto the old Christiana-Stanton Road. In 0.1 mile stop at the Hale-Byrnes House*.
10. Because many roads intersect over the original route into Christina, it is best to take another route into that town.

11. Returning to Rt 7, take a left and immediately get into the right lane. After 0.15 miles turn right onto Rt 4. After 1.9 miles turn left onto Harmony Road. Go 0.7 miles and turn left onto Rt 273.
12. Stay left and at 0.9 miles go left at the light onto Brown's Lane and in about 0.1 mile go right onto Main St. for 0.4 miles to the center of Christiana (note firehouse on far right corner).
13. From the center of Christiana go SW on Old Baltimore Pike (Rt 281).
NOTE At 3.9 miles is Sunset Lake Road. Go left on that road 0.2 miles.
At right is the Pencader Heritage Museum*.
14. After 4.3 miles you will pass over Cooch's Bridge*, and see immediately to the right the monument to the battle* that took place here in 1777.
15. Continuing 3.0 miles further you cross into Maryland, where the road is known as Red Hill Road. [There used to be iron mines on Iron Hill, and some iron ore is red.]
Continue 3.5 miles on Rt 281 to the center of Elkton MD.

Pearls along the Necklace -- Nearby Revolutionary-Era Sites

CHRISTIANA: => The Hale-Byrnes House was used for staff meetings by General Washington when the British invaded Delaware on September __, 1777.

=> The Continental army's artillery and many of its troops came to Christiana from Philadelphia by row-barge

CLAYMONT: => The Robinson House is an historic inn at the junction of Naamans Road with the Philadelphia Pike (Rt 13). It is about a hundred yards south of the PA/DE border. In 1781 it was the home of Thomas Robinson, an officer in the Pennsylvania Continentals. This house is open only on Saturdays.

=> The Stone School is now a museum of local items.

NEWARK: During the American Revolution Thomas Cooch's mill was destroyed. Later the Cooch-Dayette Mill was constructed. It has been restored for tourism and education.

NEWPORT: Two 2,000-man French army units camped in this town while marching south on September 5 & 6, 1781. They stayed again when they returned north on Aug 29 & 30, 1782. Their food came from farms up to 50 miles away.

PENCADER: Thomas Cooch's house, mill, and Cooch's Bridge.

The Pencader Area Heritage Museum has a kiosk with extensive information on the France-U.S. alliance and the development of the allied armies' march to Yorktown. It is open on Saturdays. See <http://www.pencaderheritage.org>

WILMINGTON:

=> Bellevue Mansion

=> Cauffield Mansion

=> Brandywine Village was the home of millers and international trade agents for the port of Wilmington. The Brandywine River mills ground grain from Pennsylvania before it was shipped to ports around the world.

=> Ship's Tavern

Canby Park: Richardson's Mill no longer exists, and the miller's home is private property.

The main Continental army unit and the hussars of Lauzun's Legion camped here in September 1781. Read the plaque.