

W3R[®]-US Auto Tour through Pennsylvania

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Historical Overview

In December 1775 U.S. representatives met with a French agent to discuss how France might aid in the U.S. struggle for independence. France initially provided covert aid, but in early 1778 signed a treaty and moved to provide direct military assistance. Since Philadelphia was the national capital of the U.S. the chief French diplomats lived there and managed the finances of the French Expeditionary Force from here.

In 1781 August some 7,000 soldiers in the allied U.S. Continental and French armies crossed the Delaware River from Trenton and marched south. They marched through Philadelphia, passing in review for the Continental Congress and the French embassy staff (the only embassy to the U.S. during the Revolution).

From here they continued into Delaware -- about half of the Continental troops went by row-barge.

After the victory at Yorktown the Continental forces returned north immediately. The French came north nine months later, following the same path they took south.

Consider the economic benefit to Pennsylvania farmers and merchants from providing provisions for 5,500 French troops and 2,000 Continentals for five days going south and another five days going north. Consider the effect on the Continental Congress of reviewing the entire French Expeditionary Force (FEF) marching past them and of receiving from the French ambassador sufficient funds (brought with the FEF) to pay the Pennsylvania Continental regiments, who were threatening to disband.

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 through Pennsylvania

1. From Trenton NJ cross the Lower Free Bridge on Rt 32.
After 0.3 miles turn left on Delmorr Ave.
After 0.3 miles turn right on Philadelphia Ave., becomes Bristol Pike.
2. At about 1.3 miles there is a kink to the right and then left as it crosses Tyburn Road.

3. Continue 2 miles more on Bristol Pike and (when that becomes one-way north) go right on Mill Creek Road for 0.5 mile and then left onto Fallsington-Tulleytown Road for 1.5 miles into Tulleytown.
4. The F-T Road ends bearing right onto Main St., which becomes Radcliffe St as you continue south three and a half miles into Bristol.
5. Turn right onto Market St, go two blocks and go left on Wood, then right onto Mill St under the railroad bridge and left on Otter St.
6. After 0.7 miles on Otter St get onto Rt 13 South (Bristol Pike)
7. After 6.3 miles Rt 13 crosses the Poquessing Creek, where it becomes Frankford Ave. On 1781 Sept 2 the French first division camped on the hilltop to the right of the Poquessing Creek. This was in the town of Red Lion.
8. Go straight on Frankford Ave. for another 11.0 miles
9. After the road crosses under I-95 take a right onto E Laurel St and after 0.3 miles turn left onto North Front St.
10. After 1.0 miles on North Front St. go right (west) onto Market St.
11. Stop in a parking garage in the next several blocks if you want to spend some time visiting the many historic sites near Independence Square. See notes below for attractions to visit while in Philadelphia.
12. After 1.0 miles on Market St. follow the traffic flow to the right around Penn Square (City Hall) until you are back at Market St. on the other side.
13. After 0.7 miles more on Market St. -- and just before the bridge over the river -- take a left onto 23rd St.
14. The French army's first division camped along the riverbank near the PECO building on 1781 Sept 3 and 4 (a day of rest).
15. After 0.4 miles on 23rd St. and just after crossing South St. bear right onto Gray's Ferry Ave.
16. After 1.8 miles Gray's Ferry Avenue crosses a bridge and ends at Woodland Ave.

17. Go left on Woodland Ave. After 0.5 miles it crosses a bridge, turns right, and becomes Main St. in Darby.
18. After 1.0 miles on Main St. turn left onto Rt 13 (south).
19. After 5.5 miles on Rt 13 south cross under I-95 Chester. On the way north in 1782 the French army camped at a place (now called Washington Park) next to Weidner Univ. To make a side-trip there continue 1.0 mile more on Rt 13 and turn right onto Melrose St. After 0.5 miles on Melrose St. turn right onto East 18th St.
20. After the bridge continue for 3.8 miles to where Rt 13 jogs left and then after 4 blocks jogs right. At about this place the French First Division camped on 1781 Sept 5. This is the town of Marcus Hook, where Washington received word that French Adm. de Grasse's fleet had entered the Chesapeake Bay without encountering any British warships.
21. Continue 2.6 miles more on Rt 13 and enter the state of Delaware shortly before the road dips to pass under a railroad track. To the right just after the underpass you will see the Robinson House (before the intersection with Naamans Road). This was an inn during the Revolution -- Rochambeau and his officers probably had lunch there in 1781. It has been restored for use as a museum.
22. The route north (Continental in 1781, French in 1782) is essentially the same path in reverse.

Pearls along the Necklace -- Nearby Revolutionary-Era Sites

CHADDS FORD: The site of the Brandywine Battlefield, fought on September 11, 1777, battle. This had the largest number of combatants of any battle during the Revolution. See <http://brandywinebattlefield.org>

GERMANTOWN: This was the site of a major battle on October 4, 1777. Visit Cliveden (the Benjamin Chew House), an historic mansion at 6401 Germantown Avenue. This is a National Historical Landmark.

PHILADELPHIA: The Independence Hall Visitors Center website at <https://www.phlvisitorcenter.com> can help you plan a day or more of activity at such places as

- Carpenters' Hall -- site of the First Continental Congress and the initial (1775) negotiations for French support for U.S. independence

- Constitution Center -- The National Constitution Center in historic Philadelphia is America's most interactive history museum. Located just two blocks from the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall, it is the only museum devoted to the U.S. Constitution and the story of we, the people.
- Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell
- Independence Seaport Museum has several old-style sailing ships.
- Museum of the American Revolution - an excellent recently-constructed museum with many artifacts and audio-visual displays that include material on the allied march and siege of Yorktown.

PHILADELPHIA: After British forces captured Philadelphia in October 1777 Fort Mifflin's guns prevented supply ships from reaching the city, buying time for the Continental Army to fortify Valley Forge. It held out for six weeks before being over-run. The restored fort is located just north of the Philadelphia International Airport.

VALLEY FORGE: The Continental Army spent the winter of 1777-78 at this encampment. The Valley Forge Convention and Visitors Bureau can help you plan a day or more of activity. See <https://www.valleyforge.org>

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