

Gen. Edward Braddock's Men Build A Well and Blacksmith Shop at Prospect Hill

Washington family tradition holds that men under Gen. Braddock in 1755 built a well and blacksmith shop on JAW's 613-acre parcel farmed under overseer Farrell Littleton.

A Letter About The Well

A letter appeared in the "Spirit of Jefferson" newspaper in Charles Town, WV, November 6, 1935 by Susan G."Zan" Gibson who grew up in another home standing today on the Huntfield property, called "Marquee," about 600 yards southeast from the site of a hand-dug well, near the Norfolk & Western railroad track. She was the daughter of John T. Gibson and Frances W. Gibson, his wife. They owned the house and property that constitutes much of the eastern portion of what in 2000 is called "the Huntfield Property."

The letter reads as follows:

"Much surprise has been manifested by those who have lived all their lives in this county and their ancestors before them for generations, at the erroneous statement that appears in the list of places to be marked by the State Marker Commission that Braddock's Well is on the "Blakeley" farm.

One can only wonder when, and by whom, the Well was moved from its site on the old Winchester road a mile or more west of Charles Town - 'The spot where General Braddock camped in 1755 and dug his well and put up a blacksmith shop.'

"I lived a goodly part of my life near this Well. I played about it as a child with my neighbor children. Two soldiers of the American Revolution lived across the field from this Well. They taught their children and grandchildren

that it was Braddock's Well. All our visitors were taken to see this Well. There we would meet other people with their visitors. Until of late it was a shrine.

"It is rather absurd to locate it on the Blakeley farm. Had the General been making camp in the wilderness as Blakeley was then, he would not have needed a well, he was so near two or more big springs."

"Mr. Bushrod C. Washington, of Ashville, N.C. says: 'Your letter regarding Braddock's Well is the first intimation that the position of the Well was ever questioned. It was handed down for several generations that General

Braddock and his army, en route west through the wilderness that prevailed in our fertile Valley, camped about a mile west of the present site of Charles Town and his men dug a well.

"My ancestors owned a considerable estate and it was divided into farms, and one was named 'Braddock farm.' In 1872, my father built a house on this farm and the two house sites divided honors as to name. One was the 'Old Braddock farm,' the other the 'New Braddock farm.' It would seem out of place to locate the Well elsewhere."

"Mr. Washington continues: 'If Braddock had camped near the Bullskin with its source on the property that also belonged to my ancestors, there would have been no need to dig a Well.'

"It looks as if the Marker Commission will have to allow Braddock's Well to remain on its original site."

Another source repeats this account: "Braddock's army, in their route to the west, passed through this region; one mile west of the village, on the land of Bushrod Washington, Esq, there is a well dug by them." (J. E. Norris, ed., "The History of the Lower Shenandoah Valley: The Counties Frederick, Berkeley, Jefferson, Clarke," A. Warner, Publishers: Chicago, 1890, P. 341)

A Hunter Finds The Well

(Re-interview with Dale Mills, Nov. 4, 2000. Address: 507 E. 11th Ave., Ranson, WV 25438. Phone: 304 725 1105)

In 1979, while hunting, Mr. Mills said he discovered in a rock brake in the southeastern section of today's "Huntfield" property the remains of a well. Mr. Mills, who is an experienced mechanic and builder, said the well is hand-dug. It is five to six feet in diameter with bricks about five layers deep. A cover made of wood had apparently disintegrated and no longer exists.

He discovered the well when, while pursuing a doe, he jumped over the rock brake and nearly fell into the open well. Mr. Mills dropped a large rock in it and heard no impact sound at the bottom. With a machete, he and a friend took a fallen, very straight poplar tree, cut off the roots and limbs. It was about fifty feet in height. They pushed the clean trunk into the well, that disappeared into its depth. The rock brake and well are not at the lowest ground in its vicinity. He said it still exists as of 2000

Hunter #2 Finds The Well

Roy Bradford, Mills' son-in-law, also reported that he has seen the well too.

He confirmed its location on a map of the immediate area on a current USGS map and a USGS map from 1916. On the latter map, there still is shown a lane running north to south and perpendicular from the Old Summit Road to the site of the well. This location would also have been along the "Charles Town Road" as shown in the Hannah B. Washington Division of Estates plat in 1810.

Mr. Bradford grew up hunting and walking the Huntfield property, and for at least five years has had an agreement to enter the adjacent Claymont property to fell trees and cut up firewood. He can be reached c/o Mr. Mills' address.

Well Is Like Ft. Loudon's Well

This well's design closely fits the design of a well built by soldiers under Braddock who, in the fall of 1755, built a well at Fort Loudon near Winchester. On P. 70 in Samuel Kercheval's "The History of the Valley" first published in 1833, reprinted in 1902. It reads. "Immediately after the defeat of Braddock, Washington retreated to Winchester in the county of Frederick, and in the autumn of 1755 built Fort Loudon . . . Our highly esteemed and venerable general, John Smith, who settled in Winchester in 1773, informed the author that he had seen and conversed with some of Washington's officers soon after he settled in Winchester, and they stated to him that:

"Washington marked out the site of the fort, and superintended the work; that he bought a lot in Winchester, erected a smith's shop on it, and brought from Mt. Vernon his own blacksmith to make the necessary iron work for the fort. . . It covered an area of about half an acre, within which area, a well, one hundred and three feet deep, chiefly through a solid limestone rock, was sunk for the convenience of the garrison. The labor of throwing up this fort was performed by Washington's regiment, so says Gen. Smith." Like the Prospect Hill well, this well was on unusually high ground with properties that nevertheless drew water well.

The well and black smith shop appear to have been dug by Braddock's men on JAW's 613-acre parcel either in late

April-early May, with George and JAW present, This would have been during Braddock's men's march to Fort DuQuesne, consistent with Washington family tradition.

Digging of the well and blacksmith shop made sense in the spring, 1755 in light of the severe drought,

May 28, 1755 - Winchester, VA. - GW wrote JAW : "The Drought in this County, if possible, exceeds, what we see below, so that it is very reasonably conjectur'd they won't make Corn to supply the Inhats; and as for Tobacco, they have given any hope of making any."

Col. Washington was in a position to have all of JAW's wheat flour sold to feed his men, who would be stationed in Winchester later that year." (Papers, Colonial Series, Vol. 1, PP. 288-289),

Widespread Indian attacks in the area that fall gave Col. Washington authority over several thousand men to build stockades and fortifications to farmers who refused to leave their farms for the stockades. He even brought his blacksmith from Mt. Vernon and was reimbursed for his services to these ends.

Such circumstances make the creation of a well and blacksmith on his brother's property reasonable, doable, and fortuitous for all parties.

The creation of the well and a blacksmith shop, to repair weapons and build fortifications, also makes sense in that one of two of Braddock's commissary officers had a producing farm next door.

Charles Dick (1715-1782), a Fredericksburg merchant, then owned a 1279-acre farm immediately to the north of the well site. (Frederick County Deed Book 3, PP. 22-23, March 5, 1753 for 353 acres; PP. 25-25, March 5, 1753 for 526 acres; PP. 317-321 October 1, 1754 for 400 acres).

Lt. Gov. Robert Dinwiddie appointed Dick Dec. 28, 1754 to provide beef, butter and other supplies to troops via Fort Cumberland, Winchester, and Fredericksburg. (Papers, Colonial Series, Vol. 1, PP. 303, FTNT. 1),

April 23-24-first week of May, 1755 - Mt. Vernon to Bullskin - JAW accompanied his brother, Col. George Washington, from Mt. Vernon to their properties on the Bullskin. The journey is en route to Winchester, where Col. Washington went alone with Gen. Braddock's troops to Wills Creek and ultimately Fort Duquesne. ". . . John Augustine Washington apparently went with GW as far as Bullskin plantation." (Papers, Colonial Series, Vol. 1, PP. 259, 261),

April 27, 1755 - Bullskin plantation - GW and JAW arrive. (ED NOTE: We cannot know if this refers to either JAW's farm, George's or both. They are both adjacent and on the Bullskin Run. April 30, 1755 - Bullskin Plantation - GW writes Sarah Cary Fairfax, covering many small matters.

According to Winthrop Sargent's "A History of an Expedition against Fort Duquesne in 1755, under Major-General Edward Braddock," (Lippincott & Co.: Philadelphia), 1856, P. 198:

"It may not be amiss to trace here the exact line of route which they followed. By St. Clair's advice, the army was to start from Alexandria in two divisions; one regiment and a portion of the stores to Winchester, Va., whence a new road was nearly completed to Fort Cumberland; and the other regiment with the remainder by way of Frederick in Maryland."

"A portion of the stores were to be conveyed in part by water-carriage on the Potomac."

"Accordingly, on the 8th and 9th of April, the Provincials and six companies of the 44th regiment under Sir Peter Halkett, set out for Winchester . . . Halkett's command marching by the Winchester route seem to have no difficulty." (Sir Peter Halkett was born 1695, served as a Scottish baronet, and was killed July 9, 1755 at Fort Duquesne).

May 3, 1755 - "Dick's Plantation" - Peter Halkett's 44th Regiment encamped on May 3rd at Charles Dick's Frederick County Plantation just north of JAW's lands, where the prospective Braddock Well exists. He wrote: "1 Corpl & 9 men to mount Guard on the Artillery and Baggage. 1 serjt to take the Number of horses as the(y) Are put into the pasture. 1 Tent to be pitched in the Front of the Artillery & another in ye Rear of the Baggage. The genl to beat to morrow morning (at) 4 O'Clock & march Immediatly." ("Halkett's Orderly Book," Charles Hamilton, Ed., University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, 1959, P. 86). Halkett had 500 men that was increased by 200 Colonial volunteers. (Ibid., P. 7, FTNT. 1)

On May 1- 4th latest, 1755 - Bullskin - JAW remains in that area while brother George rides to Fredericktown, Maryland to meet Gen. Braddock and return through the Bullskin area further south to Winchester. (Papers, Colonial Series, Vol. 1. PP. 266-7).

September-November, 1755 - Bullskin - The well and blacksmith shop may, instead, have been built during the vigorous efforts of a regiment under GW in the fall of 1755 to build protective enclosures for farmers and central forts, such as Fort Loudon, against a tidal wave of Indian attacks.

Remote stockades were required because many farmers, wanting to protect their winter food stores, cattle and sheep refused to leave their farms for the safety of the central forts. If the blacksmith shop and well were part and parcel of a small stockade, it would have served the tenants, enslaved persons, and overseers from both the Washington brothers' plantations and that of Charles Dick across the Winchester Road or "Old Hite Road".

GW would later contract both his Mt. Vernon blacksmith and use of a wagon to the building crews at Ft. Loudoun and environs. His blacksmith, an enslaved man named "Peter" was, thus, more available to work on either his or JAW's plantation about twenty miles away.

Chief builder Charles Smith wrote GW from Fort Loudon Oct. 12, 1758: ". . . I have Employ'd Your Waggon 7 Days in fetching Stone, Lime & Water for the Masons & timber for Covering the Barricks."

"What GW received at this time for the use of his wagon and the work of his smith has not been determined, but it may be noted that in his cash accounts, he records at Mount Vernon on 11 April, 1758 having received 80 pounds.4.10 on his smith's account and 13 pounds. 1.10 'for waggonage;' and on 20 May at Winchester, near the

Bullskin plantation, he records 17 pounds.0.3 in his smith's account ledger. (Ledger A, 36, 39, Library of Congress, GW Papers; Diaries, Vol 6., PP. 75-77).