

GERMAN-AMERICAN HISTORY

PENNSYLVANIA GERMANS AT VALLEY FORGE

After their victory at Germantown the British marched into Philadelphia with blaring march music, to occupy Winter quarter and destroy the German Press because the Declaration of Independence was first printed in German before it was printed in English. They were also looking for German business people because they supported Washington, but they had disappeared. Had the business people been caught, they would have been hung as spies. The Continental Army was not marching but walking in groups of ten, fifty or hundred toward the far hills of Valley Forge, disappointed as it seemed the Lord had forsaken them. At Valley Forge the Army of about 10,000 encamped for the winter. Washington chooses this place partly for its defensibility and partly to protect Congress, then in session at York, PA. Owing largely to the incompetence of the quartermaster-general of the Commissary Department the men were left without adequate shelter, food and clothing, and consequently suffered terrible hardship, many dying of sickness, cold and starvation. At no time were more than half their number fit for active service, thousands died and were buried in unmarked graves at Valley Forge. When the Pennsylvania Germans of Valley Forge and the surrounding area became aware of the plight of the army, they established committees to go from house to house and ask for donations of warm clothing, underwear, boots, blankets and food, whatever they could spare. The response was so great it took hundreds of wagonloads to bring the collected items to the camp. They also built a hospital at the camp staffed by Pennsylvania doctors. Had it not been for the help of the Pennsylvania Germans of Valley Forge and the surround areas, the army would have disintegrated before the winter was over.

When von Steuben arrived at Portsmouth he offered his services to Congress and George Washington. In the middle of December he arrived at Valley Forge. His first act was to enforce Prussian discipline and reorganize everything. He then contacted the Prussian King, describing the existing conditions at Valley Forge. The King and Prussia were the first to recognize the United States as an independent nation and trade started at once. Baron von Steuben spent his last dollar to buy uniforms for the soldiers. The implements he needed to train the army came from the source. The United States, in appreciation for his help, named a town in his honor "King of Prussia" not far from Valley Forge.

The most outstanding officers at the camp were George Washington, Patrick Henry and Peter Muhlenberg. Peter Muhlenberg raised the 8th German Regiment of Virginia. His father, also at the camp was Heinrich Muhlenberg who founded the Lutheran Church of America. The bodyguards of Washington were Pennsylvania Germans. The village of Valley Forge was very active. The Forge itself produced iron and iron products and there were many tradesmen in this area.

When we honor General von Steuben, we should remember the Pennsylvania Germans of Valley Forge and the surrounding areas, without whose help there would be no United States.

Pennsylvania Germans at Valley Forge presented by
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