

**2021 SUMMER
NEWSLETTER**

Did You Know?

**A Brief History of
Circleville, Pennsylvania**

BY BOB CUPP

EARLY EXPLORATION

Circleville, Pennsylvania is an unincorporated village located in North Huntingdon Township/Norwin School District, Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania. The village had its beginnings around 1752. Early traders passed through the land but did not settle it. There was increasing necessity to ward off French encroachments upon the area and to find a more direct route to Fort Duquesne at the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers at what is now Pittsburgh.



Most of the early Pennsylvania roads followed Indian trails because the natives chose their routes over the easiest terrain. In 1752, Christopher Gist and Thomas Cresap, acting on behalf of Virginia's Ohio Company, hired an Indian named Nemacolin to blaze a trail from Wills Creek (Cumberland, MD) to the mouth of Redstone Creek at the Monongahela River. The route to Fort Duquesne, including this section, became known as Nemacolin's Path.

In 1753, Virginia's Governor Dinwiddie sent George Washington to Fort LeBoeuf, which was located at what is now the town of Franklin, Pa., to warn the Commander of the French forces to leave the area. Washington used Nema-

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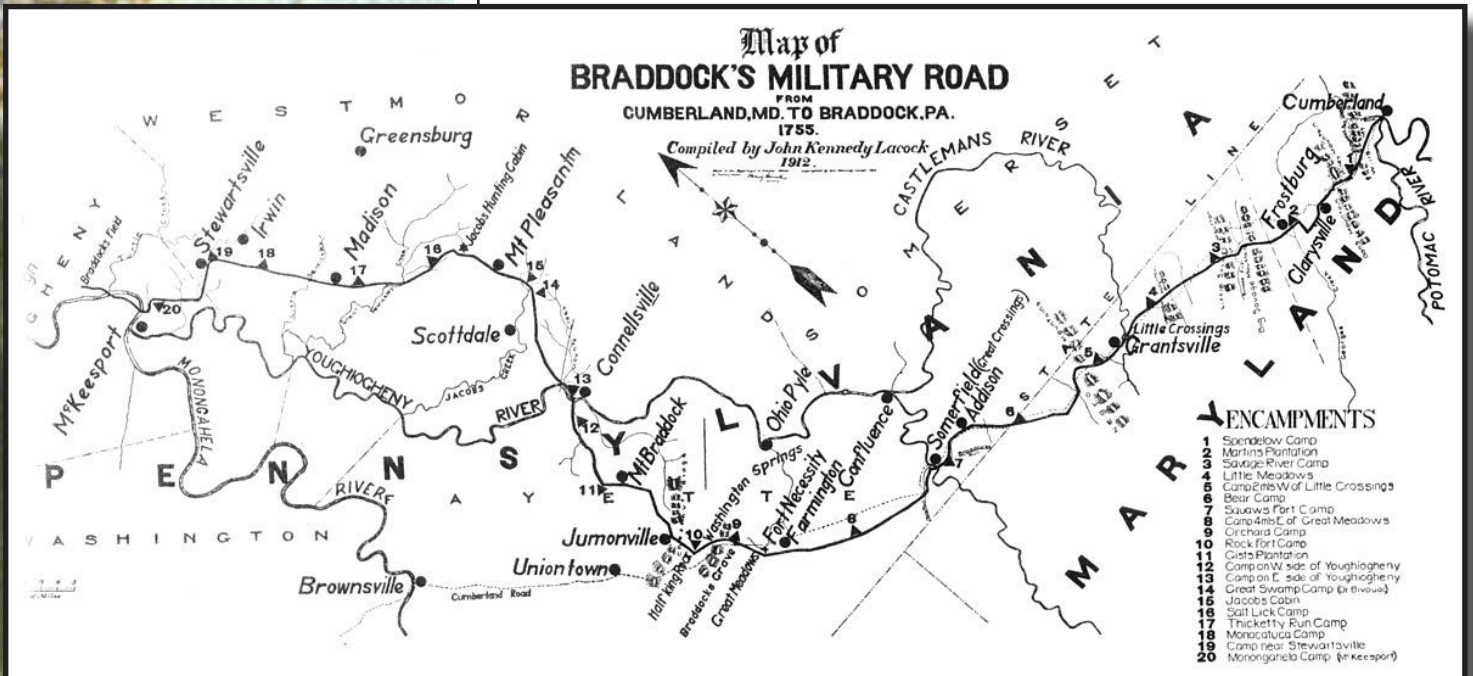
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colin's Path on that journey and camped near present-day Circleville. That area was then known as "Three Springs."

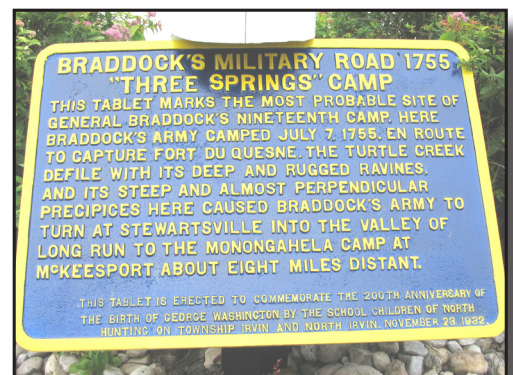
BRADDOCK'S ROAD

Two years later, British General Edward Braddock's army followed the same route, carving a 12-foot-wide military road through the wilderness. On July 7, 1755, Braddock's expedition marched along Three Springs Road and camped at Washington's earlier Three Springs Camp. The original Three Springs Road remains as a lasting reminder of that bygone era.



According to legend, the next day the army turned north, planning to follow the Sewickley Old Town Path. However, finding the terrain too steep and rugged for their wagons and cannon, they "circled back" and turned south at what later became Stewartsville, making their way down the Long Run Valley to the Monongahela River. **And that's how Circleville got its name!**

Many of Braddock's camp sites have been identified by historical markers, placed along the route of Braddock's Road by the state, school children or patriotic organizations. Circleville's "Three Springs" Camp historical marker was erected in 1932, near what is now the intersection of Clay Pike and Robbins Station Road at the site of Circleville's First National Bank office.



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Adam Saam's military discharge document from 1764 can be seen at the Norwin Historical Society on Main Street, Irwin.



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EARLY SETTLEMENT

Although land in North Huntingdon Township was opened for settlement in the late 1760's, Three Springs, later to be named Circleville, was not substantially settled until after 1788. Pioneers, particularly Revolutionary War veterans, were often given patent rights to large tracts of land. In 1788, William Elliott and his wife Barbara were given the patent rights to over 308 acres in the Three Springs area. In 1795, the Elliotts sold their property to John and Isabella Hindman.

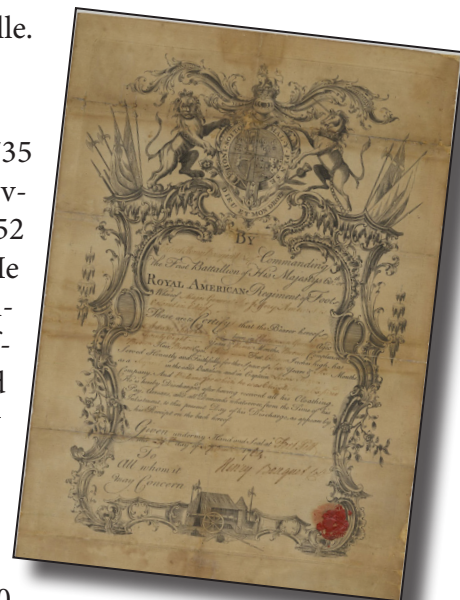
Clay Pike, originally known as the Mt Pleasant Pike, and the Pittsburgh - Philadelphia Turnpike, which later became the Lincoln Highway, met at Circleville. These roads opened the way for settlement in the area and facilitated a steady volume of traffic through Circleville.

ADAM SAAM

German immigrant Adam Saam, Sr. (1735 - 1809) was an early pioneer in the Circleville area. Saam came to America in 1752 on a ship called "Richard and Mary." He fought in the French and Indian War under the command of Major General Jeffrey Amherst for 6.5 years, and served under Colonel Henry Boquet at Bushy Run. He was discharged as a Sergeant at Fort Pitt on September 24, 1764.

Following his discharge, Saam went to Westmoreland County to claim over 290 acres of land near Circleville. The deed for his land, called "Ever-sham," was signed by Benjamin Franklin. The blockhouse on his farm on Robbins Station Road, near the Long Run Presbyterian Church, served as the primary place of refuge for settlers.

Adam Saam's German riflemen were valiant defenders of the area's early settlers during the Revolutionary War. Unfortunately, most of his men lost their lives at the hands of the Indians, who were allies of the British. An historical marker was erected along Clay Pike near Maus Drive in honor of Adam Saam, Sr. He was an outstanding patriot during both the



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French and Indian War and the Revolutionary War. Sadly, the marker has fallen victim to reckless drivers and, after being damaged multiple times, has been removed.

Upon Adam Saam's death in 1809, he was buried in Brush Creek Cemetery. His farmland passed through many generations of his descendants. Willow Spring Acres near Circleville is believed to be the center of his original property. The old landmark known as the "Saam Homestead" was torn down around 1900.

INDIAN MASSACRE

A tragic story from the Circleville area is the heartbreaking massacre of the William Marshall Family who lie buried in the Long Run Cemetery. Their home, destroyed in an Indian raid, stood on property later donated to the Long Run Church.



On a fateful day in 1771, Marshall's hired hand, John Acklen, was working in a field below the Marshall house when he noticed crows circling the Marshall cabin site on the adjoining hill. He also saw wisps of smoke rising from the trees that hid the cabin from his sight.

Soon the flames from the burning log cabin leaped above the trees. Acklen sounded the alarm when he heard the dreaded Indian war whoops. Pursued by the Indians and running as fast as he could, Acklen warned others in the area to flee to the safety of the nearby Adam Saam Blockhouse.

The Indians encountered the settlers running for their lives to the protection of the blockhouse. They killed the last fleeing settler - the little Marshall girl. Then they continued down the valley toward present day McKeesport, where they lost the pursuing settlers who were determined to get revenge. Investigation at the smoking ruins of the Marshall cabin revealed that the rest of the family had been murdered and scalped.

EARLY CIRCLEVILLE SCHOOLS



In 1836, the Byerly School was built on land donated by Jacob Byerly. After serving as a school for 23 years, in 1859, another building was erected which served until 1929.

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One of the oldest schools in the Circleville area was the Wray School, often called Master Wilson's School. The log structure, located near Long Run Church, was later replaced by a frame building named after General Larimer on whose land it stood. Several years later, another one-room school was erected nearby on the Jones farm and it was also known as the Wray School.

On the Muse property (at the entrance to the Joseph Funk farm) stood a one-room school called Point Pleasant, abandoned about the same time as the second Wray School was abandoned. Students from both schools were sent to the new Point Pleasant School on the Peter Lazar farm. Though the building has been torn down, traces of the foundation remained as recently as 1973.

In 1876, a one-room school building was constructed on the site of the most recent Circleville School. During the summer months, it was used for "selection" school classes. Students in these classes were from families who did not want their children to attend school with any and all others in the community. Such was a common practice among many of the early settlers who objected to the public school system.

In 1915, the one-room building was replaced by a four-room structure, the second brick school in the district. Four classrooms were added in 1929. For some time, the building accommodated pupils from the abandoned schools of Byerly, Thompson, Robbins, Point Pleasant, Stewartsville, Skellytown and Jacksonville.

LARIMER HOUSE - If These Walls Could Talk

In Circleville, on the corner of Maus Drive Clay Pike, stands the stately Larimer House. A brass historical marker is posted next to the front sidewalk, which states:

"Larimer's Mansion Farm. This house on the 'King's Highway' was built by William and Anne Larimer, Sr., circa 1790. It was the homestead of Gen. William Larimer Jr., one of the founders of Denver Colorado. Here William Henry Harrison (Old Tippecanoe) and Aaron Burr were entertained." That marker only scratches the surface of the history that 50 Maus Drive has observed from its hilltop.

Upon entering the two-story dwelling, its elderly elegance is welcoming and comfortable. The nine room house has eight fireplaces of various sizes and styles throughout and traces of ser-

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vants' quarters in the attic have been uncovered over the years. Amazingly, only minimal structural changes have been imposed on this home, and its last major renovation was done in 1870. Since that time, the home has been maintained and preserved well. A vivid imagination is not required to envision life in this home over 200 years ago; history radiates from every corner and every hearth.

The Larimers settled here at a time when land sold for 13 cents an acre, and the bartering of items like a barrel of salt for a cow was considered a fair trade. Westmoreland County was wilderness and living conditions were crude and harsh.



Historical accounts on the Larimer family focus primarily on William Larimer, Jr. due to his successful entrepreneurial ventures, such as the Conestoga Wagon System, which he and John Irwin (founder of Irwin) started as early as 1830. This "System" transported goods by wagon between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia many years prior to the arrival of the railroad across Pennsylvania.

If the walls of the Larimer House could talk, they would speak about visits from famous political figures of the time (William Henry Harrison, the ninth President of the United States, and Aaron Burr, the third Vice President of the United States.) Hopefully, the home and its heritage will be preserved for many generations to come.

References:

- 1) *Braddock's Gold*, Tribune-Review, 06-24-05, By Bob Cupp
- 2) *10 Score*, North Huntingdon Twp.: 1733-1973, Published 1973, By Multiple Authors
- 3) *In Celebration: Irwin - 1864-1989*, By the 125 Years Celebration Committee
- 4) *Who We Are: Celebrate 2000 Norwin Area*, Presented by the Norwin Chamber of Commerce
- 5) *Norwin Library Local History Series*, Friends of the Norwin Public Library, Edited by Bill Mausteller, Taken from various 1890 editions of the Irwin Standard Newspaper
- 6) *Norwin Historical Society Newsletter*, February 1995, Larimer House, By Susan McLean Russak
- 7) *Recall: Norwin Community History*, 1964 (Irwin, North Irwin, North Huntingdon)



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