

A BGES Revolutionary War Field University Program: Washington's Great Gambit, Christmas 1776

Presented by Gary Ecelbarger

October 13-17, 2021; from Princeton, New Jersey

With the exception of the Declaration of Independence's signing, 1776 was not a good year for George Washington. The general had been steadily denied and pushed away from the places he chose to defend. The British had left Boston but returned in force to New York, where battles on Long Island and Manhattan had truly routed the Continentals and shaken Washington's faith in his subordinates like Nathanael Greene and Charles Lee. The loss of New York and the subsequent retreat across New Jersey to the temporary safe haven along the Delaware River in Pennsylvania were accompanied by more bad news. The recruits that composed the bulk of Washington's main army were looking forward to the expiration of their enlistments and returning home to disappear in the woods and perhaps avoid accountability for a war that increasingly looked like it would be lost.

This program is about George Washington's greatest risk and his high point in a year that was mostly depressing. History tells us it was a success, but at the time the risk was more significant than we fully appreciate today. Immerse yourself in that critical period in America's birth process, as Washington scholar Gary Ecelbarger weaves the rest of the story for you.

Wednesday, October 13, 2021

6:00 PM. Meet at the meeting room in the Doubletree Hotel for nametags and maps and to take in Gary's introductory lecture discussing Washington's horrible summer and fall of 1776 and the very real possibility that William Howe will have successfully conquered America. He will finish by discussing Howe's plan to capture Philadelphia.

Dinner is on your own.

Thursday, October 14, 2021

8:15 AM: Load up for departure and four very full days. We will start in New Brunswick at the Raritan River and talk about Washington's three-day encampment there at the end of November 1776. Here Gary will reveal to you Washington's unknown plan to personally reinforce the divisions of Generals Greene and Stirling with an overnight march from Trenton. Leaving the Raritan camp, we will head to Trenton and stop in front of the old Seven Years' War structure, the Old Barracks, and discuss its use as a shelter for American troops early in December as well as for the Hessians beginning on December 8.

We will then visit an off-the-beaten path and unmarked site: Colvin's Ferry. It has a significant place in this campaign and beyond. From there, we head up the old ferry road to George Washington's Bucks County, Pennsylvania, headquarters. It is the only known house owned by two signers of the Declaration of Independence. After lunch, we will spend the afternoon visiting several sites important to "The Crossing," including the house where the plan to attack the Hessians was hashed out, plus both General Greene's and Lord Stirling's headquarters. The highlight of the afternoon will be a protracted visit to Washington Crossing Historical Park, ending our tour day at the dramatic and iconic riverbank site where George Washington and 2,400 Continental soldiers conducted the famous crossing of the ice-choked Delaware River on Christmas Night, 1776.

Lunch is included, but dinner is on your own.

Friday, October 15, 2021

8:15 AM: Departure to return to The Crossing site, which we now visit from the New Jersey side, including a brief walk within the same road trace followed by the Americans well after midnight as they began their nine-mile clandestine march to Trenton. The morning will be dedicated to the Americans' approach, the division of Sullivan's and Greene's forces, and the American artillery deployment overlooking the town of Trenton. We will be tourists accepting a guided tour of the Old Barracks. The rest of the tour day, we will cover the key elements of the Battle of Trenton, as well as Washington's planning and decision making during week following. Having stirred the hornet's nest, Washington now had to deal with the dual threat of a practically certain British response as well as the expiration of the enlistments for much of his army.

We will end the day by heading to Crosswicks, New Jersey, to discuss the actions of Brig. Gen. John Cadwalader and his 2,100 Pennsylvanians from December 29 to January 2. We follow their pre-dawn march to Trenton, and we will end with Washington's impassioned plea to hold his diminishing force intact for a bit longer.

Lunch is provided, but dinner is on your own.

Saturday, October 16, 2021

8:15 AM: We are off early and will spend this entire day on two battles fought on consecutive days: January 2 and 3, 1777. This morning we will follow Lord Charles Cornwallis and his portion of the Crown Forces advancing from Princeton to Trenton. They were harassed and delayed by well-placed American detachments at every creek crossing en route to Trenton.

The rest of the morning will be spent developing and dissecting the Battle of Assunpink Creek (2nd Trenton) on January 2, a very bloody defeat for Cornwallis. We will then stand in front of the Alexander Douglas House, where Washington held a post-battle Council of War. Here he hatched a plan to march upon Cornwallis's rear. After lunch, we will follow Washington's route and cover the Battle of Princeton. This blow-by-blow

account will incorporate new findings and will include a unique opportunity to follow the trace of the original road used by the Americans to enter the battle.

Lunch is included, but dinner is on your own.

Sunday, October 17, 2021

8:30 AM: After the successes at Princeton, we head to Morristown to study Washington's winter encampment, which he held from January 6 through May 29, 1777. We will show that his force was very active throughout the winter and spring months of 1777 in what is known as the "Forage War." A total of 58 engagements were fought within an 84-day period. Here spirited and efficient fighting, primarily by New Jersey militia, continuously frustrating Howe and preventing him from moving overland toward Philadelphia. The day ends about 1:30 PM as Gary talks about Howe's decision to use a water route to take Philadelphia in 1777.

Read this Tour Talk about "[Washington's Desperate Gambit](#)," published on the BGES Blog.

About the Faculty:

Gary Ecelbarger has developed a reputation for enthusiastic presentations and excellent history. Although he refers to himself as an "amateur historian," Gary's books are well researched, well written, and extremely well received. Constantly pushing the envelope by asking new questions and finding new answers, he has tackled a wide variety of America's wars and is highly sought in the touring community. Gary's fascination with the Civil War is primary and matches his Revolutionary War focus—a voracious student of history. BGES could not bring you a better scholar or educator.

Hotel Information:

This program will be based at the Doubletree Hotel, 4355 US Route 1, Princeton, NJ 08540, Call 609-452-2400, select option 1, and ask for the Blue and Gray Princeton Tour. The room rate is \$130 per night, plus tax (just under \$150 per night). The room block is open until September 20. After that date, reservations will be at the rack rate, and it will be the option of the hotel to honor the block rate.

Transportation:

The servicing airports are Philadelphia [PHL] and Newark Liberty [EWR]. If you fly, you will surely need to rent a car or arrange a limo.

Recommended Reading:

You will be provided maps upon arrival. The following books are suggested to enhance your readiness for the program. Amazon.com has a program to support non-profits IF YOU SIGN UP to support Blue and Gray Education Society (EIN 54-1720582) at [AmazonSmile](#). When you sign up there rather than the normal Amazon site, one-half of one percent of your purchase price will be provided to BGES as a donation from Amazon. This will apply not only on this purchase but others you may make at other times.

David Hackett Fischer: [*Washington's Crossing*](#)

Douglas Southall Freeman: [*Washington*](#) (Abridged from 7 volumes into one. While Executive Director Len Riedel recommends the original narrative in the unabridged series, this recommendation will suffice for this program.)

Edward J. Lowell: [*The Hessians in the Revolutionary War*](#)

Richard Ketchum: [*The Winter Soldiers: The Battle for Trenton and Princeton*](#)

Thomas Paine: [*Common Sense*](#)

Registration Form

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Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Registration includes four lunches, maps, the academic program, all admissions, support of a professional historian, tour director, and transportation appropriate to the registration numbers. We will also provide snacks, bottled water, and a limited selection of sodas.

_____ Registration \$825

_____ Current BGES member \$776

_____ I am not a member but would like to join so that I can get the member's rate; or I am a member who is past-due to renew. Please accept my donation of \$_____ (must be \$75 or more, which is tax-deductible).

_____ I am sending a deposit of \$300 plus full payment for any memberships. Total enclosed is \$_____.

_____ I will pay the balance due before the event.

_____ Check enclosed

Charge my (circle one) MC VISA AMEXP Discover \$_____

Exp: _____ CVV: _____

Signature: _____

Mail to BGES Seminars, P.O. Box 1176, Chatham, VA 24531; or fax credit card registrations to 434-432-0596. You may also register online at blueandgrayeducation.org.