

The 1777 Philadelphia Campaign: Bloody Battles and Momentous Maneuvers of September

A BGES Field University Program
with Gary Ecelbarger and Mike Harris
July 23-27, 2025; from Exton, PA

When can a program boast two guides who have redefined the history of its subject with 13 publications—6 books and 7 articles and essays—nearly all within the past six years? BGES has done just that, bringing together the two most prolific and provocative modern scholars of the 1777 Philadelphia Campaign for a unique offering as we approach the 250th anniversary of the Revolutionary War.

This program, led by Gary Ecelbarger and Michael C. Harris, focuses on the first month of the Philadelphia Campaign. Not only have these scholars reshaped the “whats, whens, wheres, hows, and whys” of this critical campaign of The Cause, but their extensive experience leading battlefield tours—incorporating newly accessible lands and structures—ensures a special experience for both novices and seasoned enthusiasts of the American Revolution.

Participants will also receive free online access to select *Journal of the American Revolution* articles detailing campaign history specific to this program.

Itinerary

Wednesday evening July 23, 2025

Meet at the headquarters hotel at 6 p.m. to greet all the members of the program as well as pick up your nametags and handout packets. Harris & Ecelbarger will present an introduction to the summer of 1777 and follow up with an overview of the program, including a Q&A session.

Dinner is on your own.

Thursday July 24, 2025

Departing the hotel at 8 a.m., we begin our journey at a rarely visited vantage point—one overlooked by most organized tours—offering a direct view of the landing site where Adm. Richard Howe’s enormous armada of 260 vessels anchored, allowing 18,000 British troops to disembark. From there, we will travel to “Head of Elk” (today’s Elkton, MD) to discuss Gen. George Washington’s Head of Elk Reconnaissance. Our stops include Gray’s Hill and the “Hermitage,” one of three colonial homes used as headquarters by opposing campaign commanders Washington and Sir William Howe.

A brief stop at Iron Hill sets the stage for the first of four engagements between these armies in September: the Battle of Cooch’s Bridge—the only battlefield in Delaware—where Maxwell’s light infantry clashed with British forces on September 3.

After lunch, we continue to Quaker Hill to visit the gravesite of John Dickinson, the Penman of the Revolution, just 100 yards from where Alexander Hamilton and others served as Washington's "Pen Men" from September 27 to September 6, 1777. From there, we proceed to the Hale-Byrnes House on White Clay Creek, the site of a crucial Council of War. We then analyze the American defensive position along Red Clay Creek, where a formidable line of 18,000 Continental and militia soldiers stood between the British army and Philadelphia in early September.

Next, we follow Howe's movements as he pressed Washington on September 8, forcing the Continental Army's strategic withdrawal to the Heights of the Brandywine. We end our tour day by retracing Washington's steps into Pennsylvania to understand why the Benjamin Ring House was chosen as his headquarters on September 9, 1777.

We will return to the hotel by 5 p.m.

Lunch is provided, but dinner is on your own.

Friday July 25, 2025

Our entire day will be dedicated to the September 11, 1777—the Battle of Brandywine.

Departing the hotel at 8 a.m., we will begin by examining the American and British/Hessian positions at dawn's first light on the day of battle. We will follow the action of Gen. Knyphausen's division against Maxwell's light infantry at Welch's Tavern and Kennett Meeting House. Additionally, we will trace Washington's movements as he inspected his lines along Chadds Ford, including a rare look at the primary American artillery position.

From there, we will track Howe and Cornwallis's 14-mile flank march from Kennett Square to Osborne Hill, with special attention to newly identified locations where Howe's 9,000-man maneuver was sighted—convincing Washington that he was being outflanked. We will follow the British march along colonial roadbeds, stopping near the Trimble's Ford crossing site and the exact location of Jefferis's Ford, before continuing along Howe and Cornwallis's route to Osborne Hill.

After lunch, we will visit the Visitor Center (if open) and discuss Washington's afternoon meal with his military family on September 11, during which he attempted to clarify the conflicting intelligence reaching headquarters. Next, we proceed to Birmingham Hill, where Cornwallis's Hessians and Redcoats shattered three divisions of Washington's Continentals. We will access the site of the American defense, including the precise location where Lafayette was wounded.

The battle's final moments will come into focus as we visit the Brinton House, where we will discuss Gen. Nathanael Greene's last efforts in the engagement and the broader implications of the largest and longest single-day battle of the Revolution.

Before returning to our hotel, we will visit Howe's headquarters, where he stayed for five nights, and examine the strategic options before him—along with his decision to hold this position.

BGES will sponsor a group dinner near the hotel this evening. Lunch is also included.

Saturday July 26, 2025

Departing the hotel at 8 a.m., we will spend the day immersing ourselves into the pivotal week following the Battle of Brandywine. We begin at the site of Washington's encampment south of Germantown, where we will examine the momentous decision made in council on September 13—one that set Washington on the offensive for the remainder of the campaign.

From there, we take a short jaunt to Manayunk to overlook the modern water breaks of Levering's Ford, the crossing point Washington used on September 14 to move his army over the Schuylkill River from Philadelphia to the Lancaster Road. We then retrace two days of the hoof and footsteps of Washington and the Continental Army as they sought favorable terrain from which to strike General Howe. Along the way, we will make a slight diversion to visit the grave of Anthony Wayne, a division commander in the Continental Army and a future general of the U.S. Army.

Next, we rejoin the Old Lancaster Road, passing the historic Warren Tavern before pausing for a view of Malin Hall, one of the still-standing homes occupied by Washington on September 15-16, 1777.

After lunch, we return to the battlefield, where more than 30,000 soldiers once clashed. Our first stop is South Valley Hills at Immaculata University, where we will analyze the initial American deployment and receive an updated interpretation of the day's tactical history—both what transpired and what did not. We then cross the Great Valley to study the final American defensive position at Battle of the Clouds Park.

We then will head over to another colonial structure and a major feature of this region in the 1770s—White Horse Tavern. Although it is fairly hidden today, we will access the property for an exclusive viewing, including the very room where Thomas Jefferson stayed just two months after drafting the Declaration of Independence.

The final adventure of this big day is to follow the American retreat from the Battle of the Clouds to Yellow Springs Tavern, where Washington's troops endured a relentless nor'easter. With any luck, we won't have to relive that same weather pattern. At Yellow Springs, we will uncover another hidden gem—the original foundation of the main hospital used to care for the sick and wounded American soldiers at the campaign's conclusion.

We will return to the hotel by 5 p.m.

Lunch is included, but dinner is on your own.

Sunday July 27, 2025

Our final day of the program begins with a dramatic near-miss that could have altered history—the narrow escape of two influential Americans. We visit the site where a British advance party ambushed and nearly killed Alexander Hamilton and “Light Horse Harry” Lee (the future father of Robert E. Lee) as they attempted to clear supplies from a depot at a foundry known as Valley Forge.

From there, we follow Washington’s route over French Creek and proceed to the newly cleared and now-visible remains of Warwick Furnace, a site of historical innovation that produced the Franklin Stove and where Washington’s army resupplied and encamped on September 18. Then its onward to Parker’s Ford, where Washington’s soldiers locked arms to steady themselves during a treacherous crossing of the Schuylkill River on September 19. From there, we proceed to Gordon’s Ford, one of ten key crossing points that Washington effectively blocked in an attempt to checkmate Howe’s advance.

After lunch, we head to the Paoli Battlefield in Malvern, Pennsylvania, where we dissect the infamous midnight assault led by Charles “No Flint” Gray—an attack now remembered as the Paoli Massacre. Our tour ends on the British side of Fatland Ford, where we break down the history behind a miraculous reversal of fortune that granted General Howe an uncontested 13-hour crossing of the Schuylkill on September 23, which led to his capture of Philadelphia three days later.

We will get back to the hotel by 5 p.m.

Lunch is provided.

About the Faculty

Gary Ecelbarger is an award-winning author of ten books on 18th- and 19th-century figures and events, as well as more than three dozen monographs, essays, and articles on Revolutionary War and Civil War-era topics. A seasoned historian, symposium speaker, and tour guide, he has led BGES programs for the past 25 years, guiding his audiences through complex campaigns with expertly researched, thought-provoking narratives. He takes pride in crafting immersive, chronologically compelling programs that highlight lesser-known historical sites and offer fresh, engaging perspectives.

Michael C. Harris is a graduate of the University of Mary Washington and the American Military University. His career in historical interpretation includes work with the National Park Service in Fredericksburg, Virginia, Fort Mott State Park in New Jersey, and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission at Brandywine Battlefield. He has led tours and staff rides across numerous East Coast battlefields. Michael is certified in secondary education and currently teaches in the Philadelphia region. He is the author of four books on the Philadelphia Campaign.

Hotel Information

The headquarters hotel is the Hampton Inn Exton, 4 North Pottstown Pike, Exton, PA 19341. Call 610-363-5555 for reservations. Ask for the Blue and Gray Education block. The rate is \$119 plus tax. Cutoff date for the block rate is June 23, 2025.

Transportation

The servicing airport is Philadelphia International Airport (PHL). It is 32 miles (50 minutes with no traffic) to the hotel and is easily accessed by I-476 and US-1.

Recommended Reading

The following books are suggested to enhance your readiness for the program.

Gary Ecelbarger. *George Washington's Momentous Year: Twelve Months that Transformed the Revolution*, 2 Volumes (Volume 1 dedicates nearly half of its chapters to the September portion of the campaign). Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing, 2024. ISBN: 978-1594164224.

Michael C. Harris: *Brandywine: A Military History of the Battle that Lost Philadelphia but Saved America, September 11, 1777*. El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2017. ISBN: 978-1611213225.

Michael C. Harris: *Germantown: A Military History of the Battle for Philadelphia, October 4, 1777* (The first chapters of this book detail the September portion of the campaign). El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beattie, 2017. ISBN: 978-1611215199.

Michael C. Harris: *The Philadelphia Campaign, 1777*. Havertown, PA: Casemate, 2023. ISBN: 978-1636242644.

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Name (s): _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Registration includes four lunches, one dinner, maps, the academic program, support of professional historian(s), tour director, and transportation. We will also provide snacks and cold bottled water.

_____ Current BGES member: \$975

_____ Non-BGES member: \$1025

_____ 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).

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