

# Washington Crosses The Delaware

George Washington and his Continental Army crossed the Delaware River's ice-choked waters on Christmas night, 1776, ambushing roughly 1,400 Hessian troops in and around Trenton, N.J. Also present at the crossing was another future president, James Monroe. It was a turning point in the Revolutionary War.

The spot where General Washington led this group of 2,400 heroes across the Delaware River in pursuit of freedom is commemorated every Christmas Day during a mid-day reenactment. Unlike the actual evening crossing, where the troops faced a howling nor'easter with freezing rain, snow, strong winds, and temperatures ranging from 29 to 33 degrees, the annual reenactment now takes place when conditions are deemed safe for the participants.

At the visitor's center on the Pennsylvania side of the river, you can view a replica of the famous 1851 painting by German artist Emanuel Leutze, *Washington Crossing the Delaware*. Although not entirely accurate in its depiction (for example, the ice more closely resembles what one would observe on the Rhine River in Germany, not the Delaware), it remains one of our nation's most recognized paintings. The original, which is on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, was described by one newspaper in 1851 as "the grandest, most majestic, and most effective painting ever exhibited in America."

A 3.5-mile drive north of the crossing site along Pa. Route 32 and then a short walk across the Delaware Canal will take you to a memorial cemetery overlooking the Delaware River. The simple plaque erected in 1929 reads, "In memory of many unknown soldiers of the Continental Army who died from sickness and exposure while encamped in these fields before the Battle of Trenton and buried at this spot Christmas Day 1776." James Moore, a 24-year-old captain from Alexander Hamilton's New York company of artillery, is the only veteran buried here whose identity is known. These graves along the Delaware are thought to be the final resting place for some of America's first unknown soldiers.

The Crossing of the Delaware continues to inspire our nation. American patriotism was unfurled on the Delaware River shortly after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States when a small rowboat displaying our flag appeared one morning where the crossing took place so many years ago. More recently, it was referenced in President Barack Obama's First Inaugural Address:

*"So let us mark this day with remembrance of who we are and how far we have traveled. In the year of America's birth, in the coldest of months, a small band of patriots huddled by dying campfires on the shores of an icy river. The capital was abandoned. The enemy was advancing. The snow was stained with blood. At the moment when the outcome of our revolution was most in doubt, the father of our nation ordered these words to be read to the people: 'Let it be told to the future world ... that in the depth of winter, when nothing but hope and virtue could survive ... that the city and the country, alarmed at one common danger, came forth to meet [it].'"*



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