

I Once Heard...

The General Who was Killed by a Chicken



Henry Knox at age 28

Like many of the heroes that came out of the American Revolution, Henry Knox was an unlikely warrior. A portly, self-educated, Boston bookseller with no real military experience before the war, Knox went on to become a Major General in command of the Continental Artillery, and after the Revolution served as the country's first Secretary of War.

Knox served from the outset of hostilities to the end of the war, personally witnessing the Boston Massacre in 1770, participating in the Battle of Bunker Hill in 1775, serving at Yorktown, when British General Cornwallis surrendered in 1781, and leading the American forces into New York City as the British withdrew in 1783. But Knox is probably best remembered for his epic 300-mile trek in the winter of 1775-1776, in which he

brought the cannons from Fort Ticonderoga, on Lake Champlain in upstate New York, to Boston, where the fledgling Continental Army was besieging the British Army.

During the Revolutionary War years, Henry Knox was no stranger to New Jersey. He fought in the battles of Trenton, Princeton, and Monmouth, and one of his winter headquarters included Pluckemin, where he reportedly stayed at what is now the historic Jacobus Vanderveer House and Museum in Bedminster Township. During this encampment in 1778-1779, Knox is believed to have established America's first military academy, a forerunner to West Point, on ground now encompassed by the Hills residential community off of Route 206. In February 1779, a grand ball to mark the first anniversary of the Franco-American Alliance was held at the academy. Guests included George and Martha Washington, and a 100 foot Greek temple with thirteen arches and Corinthian colonnades was reportedly built for the occasion. During his stay in Pluckemin, Knox and his wife Lucy also lost an infant daughter named Julia, who is buried in the old Bedminster Reformed Church Cemetery.

In 1785, Knox retired to his home in Thomaston, Maine. A survivor of incredible hardships and torrents of shot and shell, in the end Henry Knox didn't fall on the battle field but was mortally wounded at the dinner table. In 1806, while visiting a friend in Union, Maine Knox swallowed a chicken bone which supposedly punctured his intestine. He died of peritonitis three days later, on October 25, 1806.