

BRADDOCK'S ROCK.¹

A STUDY IN LOCAL HISTORY.

AMONG the many striking incidents in our colonial history the story of the unfortunate expedition led by Braddock against the French in 1755 is the one that appeals to us who have our homes in the District of Columbia, most strongly. Of those events that have to do with the long struggle between the French and English for supremacy in the new world, and which terminated early in the autumn of 1759, when on the Plains of Abraham the brave Montcalm lowered the lilies of France to the victorious Wolfe, the only one, so far as I am aware, in which the forces of either nation came within the territory of the Federal District, is that, the memory of which we meet to perpetuate. It is therefore most fitting that your society which has among its objects the preservation of traditions of colonial history, should lend its aid towards saving from desecration the only existing memorial of that event.

In the settlement of the new world the adventurous explorers of many nations took part, but of those certainly in the eastern part of North America, which has become our country, the representatives of the French and English were most conspicuous. It is interesting to note that for the most part the English settled along the shores of the Atlantic, and of this fact Jamestown and Plymouth are conspicuous illustrations. On the other hand the French followed the courses of the great streams of the continent, and we find them ascending the St. Lawrence. As the English spread inland, so the French continued their explorations up the rivers until in time they reached the country of the Great Lakes, and with the cross of the Holy Church ever leading made their way to the Mississippi, and thence in 1682 La Salle, our first great pioneer of the west, with his flotilla of canoes, descended its mighty waters to the Gulf of Mexico, and Louisiana was added to the possessions of the King of France.

¹ A paper read before the National Society of Colonial Dames in the District of Columbia, on April 12, 1899.

In order to hold this territory of Louisiana, which was ceded to us in 1803 by France, and gave to us the "splendid empire west of the Mississippi,"² the French erected a series of forts, of which the one at the meeting of the Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers, where the city of Pittsburg now is, was called Duquesne, in honor of the Governor of New France. The growth of the English Colonies and the encroachment of the French on the domains claimed by the former, together with the depredations of the Indians could but lead to one result. The terrible struggle for supremacy between two great nations was about to begin, and the outcome would determine the possessions of a continent.

Meanwhile the colonial authorities realizing fully the condition of affairs, had received instructions from the home government to send a commissioner to the officer commanding the French forces to inquire by what authority he was invading the King's domain. Governor Dinwiddie chose for this dangerous and delicate mission his young and able adjutant general, George Washington. Of his perilous journey, of his marvelous escape, and his successful return he himself has told the story in his own journals.³ No more signal test could have been afforded of his various abilities and talents, which this expedition served at once to display and to develop. "From that moment," says Washington Irving,⁴ "he was the rising hope of Virginia."

In 1754, the year following, Washington was made commander of the little band of Virginia soldiers with which Governor Dinwiddie (whom Parkman⁵ calls "the most watchful

² *The Louisiana Purchase and Our Title West of the Rocky Mountain, with a Review of Annexation by the United States.* By Binger Hermann, Washington, 1868. p. 11.

³ *Journal of Colonel George Washington, commanding a detachment of Virginia troops, sent by Robert Dinwiddie, Lieutenant Governor of Virginia, across the Allegheny Mountains in 1754, to build forts and to defend the Ohio.* Edited with Notes by J. M. Toner. Albany, 1893.

⁴ *Appleton's Cyclopædia of American Biography*, New York, 1889, Volume VI, article George Washington, p. 200.

⁵ *England and France in North America, Part Seventh.* Montcalm and Wolfe. Boston, 1885, p. 137.

sentinel against French aggression and its most strenuous opponent"), hoped to arrest the advance of the French. An account of the battle at Great Meadows and its unfortunate ending is given in the Appendix⁶ to Washington's journal, and the history of the campaign is perhaps most interestingly told by that fascinating writer, Francis Parkman, in the seventh volume of his charming history of England and France in North America.

Aroused at the surrender of Fort Necessity at Great Meadows, the English authorities commissioned Sir Edward Braddock commander of all the King's forces in America. Leaving England late in the year 1754 he arrived in Hampton Roads in February, 1755, and ordered his transports to proceed at once up the Potomac to Alexandria, where a camp was to be formed. Braddock followed more leisurely and did not reach the camp till the end of March. Of the events that followed before the order was given to start on the expedition that was to terminate so unfortunately for himself, we need not concern ourselves, but it is of more than passing interest to mention the cruel apathy of the people whose homes this British soldier had come to protect. Says Parkman on this point: "Contracts broken or disavowed, want of horses, want of wagons, want of forage, want of wholesome food, or sufficient food of any kind caused such delay that the report of it reached England and drew from Walpole the comment that Braddock was in no hurry to be scalped. In reality he was maddened with impatience and vexation."⁷

It was Benjamin Franklin, then postmaster of Pennsylvania, who came to his rescue and made it possible for him to obtain the much-needed supplies and means of transportations. Braddock's comment on Franklin in a private letter is that he was "almost the only instance of ability and honesty I have known in these provinces."⁸

It was not until early in April that a forward movement was

⁶ An Appendix (to Journal of Colonel George Washington, 1754) supplying an account of the Battle of Fort Necessity. See note 2. By J. M. Toner. Albany, 1893, p. 133. *et seq.*

⁷ England and France in North America, p. 198.

⁸ *Idem.* p. 199.

possible, and fortunately for us the Orderly Book of Braddock has been preserved and published through the interest of a well-known resident of Washington. It forms an Appendix to the History of Cumberland by the late William H. Lowdermilk.⁹

Under date of April 7, it says: "Colo Dunbar's Regiment is to march at 5 O'clock on Saturday Morning for Rock Creek. Creek.

"Waggons will be ordered on Friday to carry the baggage and whatever Tents may be struck to the Boats destend for their Transportation and at Day break on Saturday morning Waggons will attend at the head of the Regiment for the mens Tents, &c.

"A Subaltern Officer with three Sergeants three Corporals and thirty men are to be sent on board the Boats as a Baggage Guard, and this Guard is to assist in conveying the Tents &c to the Boats to help in putting them on board.

"All the Boats upon that part of the River near Rock Creek are ordered to attend to cary the Troop over."

In the "After Orders" it says:

"March Rout of Colo Dunbars Regiment from the camp at Alexandria to Frederick in Maryland. To Rock Creek,— miles; to Owens Ordinary, 15 miles; to Dowden's Ordinary, 15 miles; to Frederick, 15 miles." (P. xviii.)

On April 8, the following orders appear:

"You are to leave at Rock Creek an Officer and 30 men who is to remain there till all the Stores of the Train and Hospital are put into the Waggons is then to march and form the Rear Guard of the whole.

"You are also to leave at Rock Creek a Subaltern and 20 men who are to wait there till the arrival of Mr. Johnston the Paymaster and to Escort him to Frederick.

"You will be joined at Rock Creek by an Officer and 30 Sea-

⁹ Major General Edward Braddock's Orderly Books, from February 26 to June 17, 1755, from the originals in the Congressional Library, in History of Cumberland (Maryland), from the time of the Indian town, Caiuctucuc, in 1728, up to the present day, embracing an account of Washington's First Campaign, and Battle of Fort Necessity, together with a History of Braddock's Expedition. By Will H. Lowdermilk. Washington, D. C., 1878.

men who you are to take under your command and give them your Orders and Regulations as they will want some conveyance for their baggage you will dispose of it as you find most convenient." (P. xx.)

On April 9:

"Colo Dunbars Regiment to send this forenoon two Sergeants and twenty men to Rock Creek to reinforce the Officer there." (P. xxi.)

On April 11:

"Colo Dunbars Regiment to hold themselves in readiness but not to march till further Orders."

Also:

As there are Boats provided to carry Colo Dunbars Regiments Baggage to Rock Creek the former orders relative to their march to be obeyed. (P. xxii.)

Under date of April 25, the orders read:

"Colo Dunbar's Regiment to hold themselves in readiness to March by the 29th."

And:

"One Corporal and four men to March to morrow Morning to Rock Creek with four Waggons that came up this Evening; when the party comes to Rock Creek they are to put themselves under the command of Ensign French." (P. xxvi.)

Again, under date of April 28, the following entry appears in the orders:

"To Ensign French, at Rock Creek. You are ordered by his Excellency Genl Braddock to forward with all Expedition the ammunition Stores &c at Rock Creek to Mr. Cresaps Conogogee taking care to send the ammunition Train Stores &c first, then the Hospital Stores and Salt Fish.

"You are not wait for the Beeves but as soon as the aforementioned things are gone up you will move with your party and join the Regiment at Wills Creek agreeable to the follow^g March Route; as you will find Provisions very scarce on the Road you must take with you as many days of salt Provisions as the Men can carry.

"From Rock creek to Owens Ordy, 15 miles; to Dowdens, 15 miles; to Frederick, 15 miles; on the Road to Conogogee, 17 miles; to Conogogee, 18 miles; to John Evan's, 16 miles;

to Widow Baringer's, 18 miles; to George Polls's, 9 miles; to Henry Enocks, 15 miles; to Mr Cox's, 12 miles; to Colo Cresap's, 8 miles; to Wills Creek, 16 miles; total, 174 miles.

"You must if you should find it necessary, take with you Guides from place to place, and make such halts as you shall find absolutely necessary being careful not to loose any time.

"If the Waggons should come in very slowly make your applications to the Civil Officers and if that should not succeed send Parties to fetch in any Waggons you shall hear off. Inform Lieut Breerton of the March Route, and tell him it is the Generals Orders that he make all imaginable dispatch.

As soon as the Paymaster arrives he must also victual his men when the last Stores of all kinds which are to be sent and dismissed from Rock Creek, you are to send a Letter to Capt Gates at Conogogee informing him of it.

The hand barrows and wheel barrows of the Train except 6 of each are to be left behind all but the Wheels and Iron Work which are to be forwarded." (P. xxix.)

No further mention of Rock Creek is made in the Orderly Book, but in that portion of Mr. Lowdermilk's work devoted to the march from Alexandria, he says:¹⁰

"General Braddock, although disappointed in the matter of recruits, as well as of transportation, left Alexandria on his march to Fort Duquesne on the 20th of April.

"On the 26th of April the command arrived at Fredericktown, in Maryland, where Washington then joined it."

Omitting entirely any mention of the landing at Rock Creek.

Besides the Orderly Book, from which quotations have just been given, the diary of General Braddock's aid, Captain Robert Orme, was carefully edited by Mr. Winthrop Sargent and published by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in 1855.¹¹ The following extracts are of pertinent interest:

¹⁰ History of Cumberland, etc., p. 111.

¹¹ History of An Expedition Against Fort Du Quesne, in 1755; under Major General Edward Braddock, Generalissimo of H. B. M. Forces in America, edited from the original manuscripts, by Winthrop Sargent, M. A., member of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Memoirs of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1855. Vol. V. p. 367.

"April 10, 1755. Moderate and fair but sultry weather; to-day we received orders to march to-morrow morning, and 6 companies of Sir Peter Halket's Regiment to march in their way to Will's Creek.

"April 11th. Our orders were countermanded, and to provide ourselves with 8 days provisions, and to proceed to Rock Creek, 8 miles from Alexandria, in the 'Sea Horse' and 'Nightingale's' boats to-morrow.

"On the 12th, agreeably to our orders we proceeded and arrived at Rock Creek at 10 o'clock. This place is 5 miles from the lower falls of Potomack, and 4 from the eastern branch of it. Here our men got quarters, and we pitched our tents: found here Colonel Dunbar, whose orders we put ourselves under.

"On the 13th: We were employed in getting the Regimental Stores into Wagons, in order to march to-morrow. This is a pleasant situation, but provisions and everything dear.

On the 14th: We began our March at 6, and were ordered with our Detachment to go in front, and about 2 o'clock at one Lawrence Owens, 15 miles from Rock Creek, and 8 miles from the upper falls of Potomack; and encamped upon good ground."

Thinking that possibly some information might be had in Alexandria as to the route following up the river by Braddock, Mr. William F. Carne, whose information on local matters is said to be unexcelled, was appealed to, and the following negative information elicited:

"So far as I know there is no reference in any printed matter about the local history of Alexandria as to what point Braddock's troops landed in 1755 on the Washington side of the Potomac.

"Dr. Toner made from some records, where I know not, an itinerary of Braddock's route, and Mr. Lowdermilk has published Braddock's Order Book; but I do not know how they, either of them, fixed 'Braddock's Rock' with any sort of distinctness."

According to Lowdermilk a very satisfactory description of Braddock's route, written from Cumberland by Mr. T. C.

Atkinson in 1847, is contained in the "Olden Time,"¹² but an examination of that work shows simply that

"General Braddock landed at Alexandria on the 20th of February, 1755. * * * After numerous delays, and a conference with the Royal Governors, we find Gen. Braddock enroute on the 24th of April, when he had reached Fredericktown, in Maryland. Passing thence through Winchester, Va., he reached Fort Cumberland about the 9th of May. Sir John Sinclair, Deputy Quarter-Master General, had preceded him to this point about 2 weeks.

"The army struck a Little Cacapehon (though pronounced Cacapon,) about 6 miles above its mouth, and following the stream, encamped on the Virginia side of the Potomack, preparatory to crossing into Maryland. The water is supposed to have been high at the time, as the spot is known as Ferryfields, from the army having been ferried over. This was about the 4th or 5th of May. The army thence pursued the bank of the river, with a slight deviation of the route at the mouth of the south branch to the village of Old Town."

The Orderly Book of General Braddock and the diary of his aide-de-camp, Captain Robert Orme, as has been shown, established the fact that the landing of the British soldiers was at a place designated by them as Rock Creek. No contemporary records so far as I have been able to learn mention the exact spot where the landing was made, but if tradition be of any value then the following statement gathered from various sources settle the matter beyond any reason of doubt.

The first of these to which I invite your attention is by that learned scholar, Professor Joseph E. Nourse, so long a resident of Georgetown, who, in 1871, in discussing the site of the old United States Naval Observatory, writes:¹³

"The earliest trace of the records identifying the lands now occupied is in connection with the march of General Brad-

¹² The Olden Time, a monthly publication devoted to the preservation of documents and other authentic information in relation to the early explorations of the settlement and improvement of the country around the head of the Ohio. Edited by Neville B. Craig. Pittsburg, 1848, Vol. II, p. 540.

¹³ Washington Observation for 1871. Appendix 4, p. 27.

dock against Fort Duquesne in the Colonial Wars. It seems clear that his troops landed and encamped on this hill."

"The record is this (Braddock's Expedition, by Winthrop Sargent, p. 367):

"April 11, 1755. Four companies of the Forty-fourth Regiment, under Lieutenant (afterward Governor) Gage, and a detachment of seamen from Alexandria, landed from the boats of the 'Sea Horse' and the 'Nightingale,' and pitched their tents 'at Rock Creek.' April 14th, General Braddock arrived at Rock Creek and gave orders for transporting the stores; the troops marched from 'Rock Creek' to Owen's house, fifteen miles onward to Frederick." (Rockville.) Traditions are strong as to the camping on this hill.

"Washington's letters show that he afterward crossed here also from Alexandria to join Braddock at Frederick."

"The late Colonel Peter Force, of Washington, so well known for his historical collections, repeatedly pointed out the large rock, which yet stands, in the southern part of the original Reservation, which the Observatory occupies, as the rock on which these landings were made. The northern channel of the Potomac, it is well known, was good here until our day—until the causeway for the Long Bridge was made."

At the time when improvements along the Potomac River were being agitated, Mr. Michael Delaney, who was for many years connected with the Quartermaster's Department of the United States Army, described the early history of the river and the changes that took place in its channel during a series of years, in a letter written¹⁴ to the late Captain James B. Eads.

In the course of this communication he said:

"My mother was born in Washington during the latter part of the last century, and I first saw light in the same place, April 12, 1819. My grandfather had charge of the grading of that city, so that by tradition, at least, I have reason to believe that I can give some hints, that, if acted upon, may restore at least a portion of the usefulness of the river and harbor in front of the city."

Continuing, he said:

"By standing upon the aqueduct that spans the Potomac

¹⁴ Washington Post, August 3, 1890.

above Georgetown, and looking east, you will perceive that the force of the current must strike against the Washington bluffs, from where it ricochets to Analostan, or Mason's Island; from thence rebounding, it swept over to the Washington side and passed by what is known as Easby's Point, or Shipyard; thence along the foot of Observatory Hill; thence past the mouth of Tiber Creek, with the same erosive force upon its mouth that it had upon the Anacostia, over to and around the 'point' upon which the Washington Monument now stands, thence hugging the bluffs around and down by the arsenal. The water, at the time of Braddock's ill-fated expedition, was so deep that his vessels landed the troops at what was known as the 'Big Rock,' at the foot of 'Observatory Hill,' direct from the vessels which were laid alongside, and up to the time of the building of the Observatory the hill was one known as 'Camp Hill,' from Braddock's Army having camped there prior to starting for Pittsburg again."

In 1891, a writer,¹⁵ in an elaborate account of Braddock's Expedition, says:

"Alexandria, then a colonial village, eight miles down the Virginia side of the Potomac, was the recruiting point of Braddock's Army. Thither his little fleet of two war ships and half a dozen transports, under Commodore Keppel, had proceeded from Hampton with two regiments of five hundred men each, to be augmented later by four hundred Virginia troops. Braddock himself, with his own personal retinue, got separated from the remainder of his party and landed on this side of the river opposite Analostan Island, at what is now the foot of Twenty-fourth Street, Northwest, then a stretch of woods. Braddock's vessel was drawn close up to shore and moored to a big boulder protruding from the bank, upon which, as we can imagine, he stamped his booted feet and struck a dramatic attitude in disembarking. Curiously enough, this spot marks the right wing of a huge crescent, from which the Capital City curves, as seen from a birds-eye view, away around southeastward to the Congressional Cemetery. Or, considering Georgetown with its extensions as a part of Washington, it forms almost the center of a similar

¹⁵ Washington Star, June 20, 1891.

crescent drawn between the extreme limits of the District of Columbia.

"The boulder has ever since been known, to those who have known of it at all, as 'Braddock's Rock,' and to this day it is still intact and unmolested by stone chipper or relic hunter."¹⁶

In 1896 several accounts of the rock were published in the daily papers of Washington, and at that time, in a letter to the District Commissioners, Dr. G. Brown Goode, President of the Society of the Sons of the American Revolution, made the following statement:¹⁷

"Braddock's Rock is upon the site occupied by the British and provincial troops in April, 1755. The British troops landed here from their transports, the 'Sea Horse' and the 'Nightingale,' and here pitched their tents on April 14, 1755. It is a matter of tradition that Washington, then an officer of Virginia colonial troops, and later aide-de-camp to Braddock, was camped also on this very hill, and was so impressed with the beauty of the site and of the surrounding country that he was subsequently led to choose it for the location of the National Capital. This is the very spot which he, in 1796, designated as the location for the University of the United States.

"Braddock's rock has been known by this name ever since the time of Braddock's departure, and is still so known by old inhabitants of the vicinity, among whom are several who remember when it was touched by the waters of the Potomac, since diverted farther southward. In the report of the Washington Astronomical Observatory for 1871, appendix No. 4, is a reference to Braddock's Rock under this name, and to the

¹⁶ Rarest of Landmarks, Washington Times, May 30, 1896. In this article it says: At that time, however, the country on both sides of the creek was very low and marshy, having been filled in since. Then, too, there were two bridges that crossed the creek, not far from the mouth, and a road through the timberland led almost directly from this hill. The rock afforded a firm and convenient landing, the hill a magnificent spot for a camp, and the road to be traversed from there led directly on their intended line of march. In view of these facts it is not improbable that the soldierly foresight of the commander led him to choose this spot for a landing.

¹⁷ Washington Star, April 9, 1896.

fact that it was from this point that Braddock marched toward Fort Duquesne. It is also recorded here that Colonel Peter Force, the well-known antiquary, during his lifetime repeatedly pointed out this as the rock on which Braddock's landing was made. Further authentication can be found in Braddock's journal of this expedition."

In response to a letter addressed to the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey, asking for information as to whether their files of maps gave any information concerning the early use of the name of Braddock's Rock, the following reply¹⁸ was received:

"I have pleasure in informing you that the position of this rock was plotted on an original hydrographic sheet, executed, in 1867, by Clarence Fendall. The sheet is now in the archives of the Survey, but has never been published. The point described as Braddock's Rock on this sheet is located at the exact edge of the old canal and almost due south of the Naval Observatory. Mr. Henry Lindenkohl, of this office, who is well read upon matters of this kind, informs me that the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal was cut through this rock, leaving half of it only standing. He states that the army, in crossing the river, could go directly to the rock, as the existing marshes had not then made their appearance."

I add also a letter written to me by the venerable Mr. Edward Clark,¹⁹ who is so well known as the architect of the Capitol, and who in his earlier years paid much attention to the history of Braddock:

"I have been informed by Mr. W. W. Corcoran and Dr. John B. Blake that they, as boys, went swimming at Braddock's Rock, which at the time was near the water's edge. They also informed me that one of their companions was a colored boy, who was, at the time they spoke, a messenger in this office.

"I became interested in the subject, and asked why it was called Braddock's Rock, and was told, because parties of Braddock's troops frequently landed there and moored their boats at the rock.

¹⁸ Under date of March 18, 1899.

¹⁹ Under date of March 29, 1899.

"Isaac Johnson, the boy mentioned above, who was brought up in the neighborhood, confirmed what these gentlemen said, that this stone was always known as Braddock's Rock, because when the British came up from Alexandria in their boats, they always 'fastened' them to this rock. He, as well as Mr. Corcoran, said that he heard some of the older people say, that they had heard older people than themselves say, that they had seen Braddock's men land there."

No paper on this subject would be complete without a mention of the careful and scholarly article by Mr. Hugh T. Taggart, that appeared²⁰ in 1896. Mr. Taggart traces the history of the rock almost from the year 1632, finding it early described as 'a large rock lying at and in the river Potomack, commonly called the Key of all Keys.' He quotes George W. Hughes, who was Superintendent of the Long Bridge, and in a report to the Secretary of the Treasury, dated January 30, 1835, makes the following statement:

"It is a matter of history that General Braddock disembarked at a rock, which still bears his name, near the glass house, from a sloop-of-war, on his unfortunate expedition against the French and Indians in 1755."

Mr. Taggart concedes that the rock "might have been utilized by the expedition as a landing place," but he adds as:

"All indications point to the road to the ferry landing on the Virginia side as the one traveled by the regiment in its march from Alexandria, from which transportation directly across the river alone was needed to reach the road to Frederick; this road, no doubt, extended easterly to Saw Pit Landing, which point would have been the most convenient one for the landing of the baggage, and for this reason it may have been used for that purpose."

In other words, he offers a well argued hypothesis for a tradition which, according to his own account, existed undisputed in 1835. History is not established by such methods.

In conclusion, the evidence presented before you may be summarized as follows: While it is true that no positive evidence that General Braddock ever landed at the rock which bears his name has been found, still the tradition is so strong

²⁰ Washington Star, May 16, 1896.

and is confirmed by so many writers, whose opinions are worthy of acceptance, that it seems to me that we are justified in accepting it as true.

I do not wish to take upon myself the responsibility of urging upon this body the marking of that rock as the place where General Braddock landed in 1755, but I believe that it is your duty in view of the evidence here submitted to preserve it from further desecration, and therefore do most earnestly urge upon you the great desirability of causing an inscription to be placed upon it, containing the following information:

KEY OF KEYS.

Commonly Called Braddock's Rock.

This legend has been inscribed by the National Society of Colonial Dames in the District of Columbia, in commemoration of the landing of General Edward Braddock, at the beginning of his march to Fort Duquesne in 1755.

1899.

Finally, I am under many obligations to various persons for assistance in the preparation of this paper. Mr. O. H. Tittman, of the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey, most kindly had the maps of that office searched for me. Mr. P. Lee Phillips, of the Library of Congress, continued the search among the maps under his charge. Mr. W. B. Bryan, of the *Washington Star*, extended to me the courtesies of his rich collection of early works on the District of Columbia, all of which were examined, but no satisfactory references were found. Mr. F. H. Parsons kindly searched the records of the United States Naval Observatory for me and called my attention to publications elsewhere, some of which proved most fruitful of results. Also others who, by their advice and suggestions have enabled me to follow clues which might not otherwise have been considered. To these and all others to whom I am indebted, it is a pleasure to extend my sincere thanks for their interest.

MARCUS BENJAMIN.