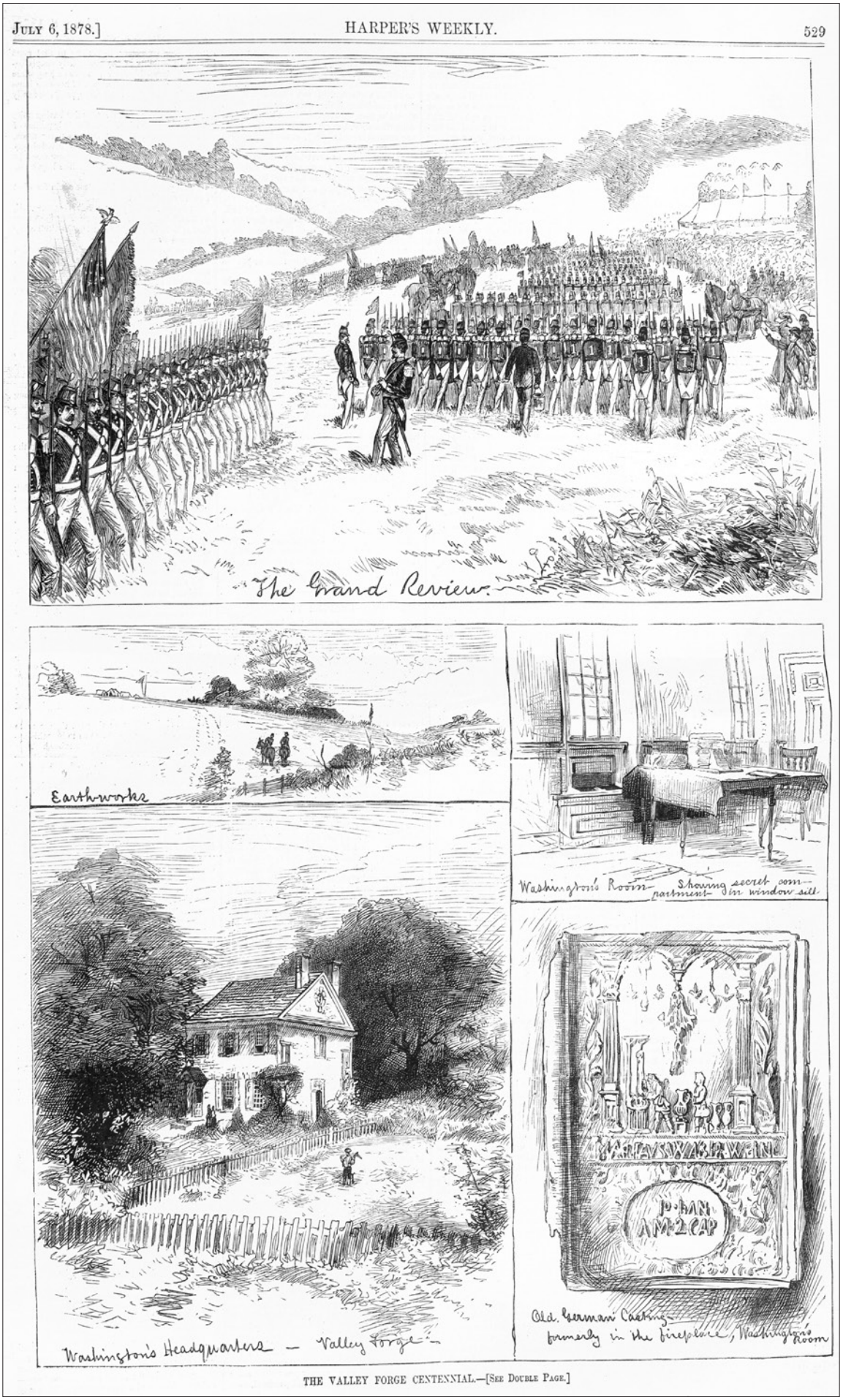


Illustration from *Harper's Weekly* July 6, 1878, page 529. Artist's interpretations of scenes from the Centennial Celebration. *Courtesy of Jim Brazel.*

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The Centennial Celebration of The Evacuation of Valley Forge, June 19, 1878

James P. Brazel

Dedicated to Sharon A. Brazel (1943 – 2022)

On July 16, 2021, I purchased on eBay an interesting illustration titled "The Valley Forge Centennial"—an original page from the *Harper's Weekly* of July 6, 1878. It was a set of five sketches on page 529 of that issue. The page is reproduced in the accompanying figure. Please note that these are artist's interpretations and may not be strictly accurate.

I had been clicking on this illustration for several years, wondering what it was all about, and if worthy of taking on one more distraction. Noticing the number of troops parading in the largest sketch—"The Grand Review"—it occurred to me that this must have been done on a much grander scale than anything I had ever observed at Valley Forge Park, including the Bicentennial Celebration of The Declaration of Independence in 1976 or the Boy Scout Jamborees of 1950, 1957 and 1964. But I had never heard of this "Valley Forge Centennial."

The other sketches on the page are more prosaic, including the ones of "Washington's Headquarters - Valley Forge," "Earthworks," and "Washington's Room, Showing secret compartment in window sill." However, one could wish that the sketch of the "Old German Casting, formerly in the fireplace, Washington's Room" had been drawn with more definitive detail.

The reverse side of the page contains Chapter V, VI and the beginning of Chapter VII of Part First of a novel by Thomas Hardy (author of *Far from The Madding Crowd, The Return of The Native*, etc.), titled *An Indiscretion in The Life of An Heiress*—but nothing on the Valley Forge Centennial. Following the note at the bottom of the illustration page—"See Double Page"—I called on the generous assistance of some more computer-literate friends to track down the associated text.[1] This effort resulted in finding, on pages 534–5 of the same issue of *Harper's Weekly*, the following surprisingly short but informative text titled simply "Valley Forge."

VALLEY FORGE

The celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the evacuation of Valley Forge by the Revolutionary army after the severe winter of 1777–78 took place on the 19th of June. It was a great success. Between thirty and forty thousand people were present on the grounds. The site of the old camp is one of the loveliest spots in the State; and looking on the softly rounded hills, bright with the fresh verdure of June, it was difficult to clothe them in imagination with snow, and people them with the half-frozen, half–starved heroes of a hundred years ago.

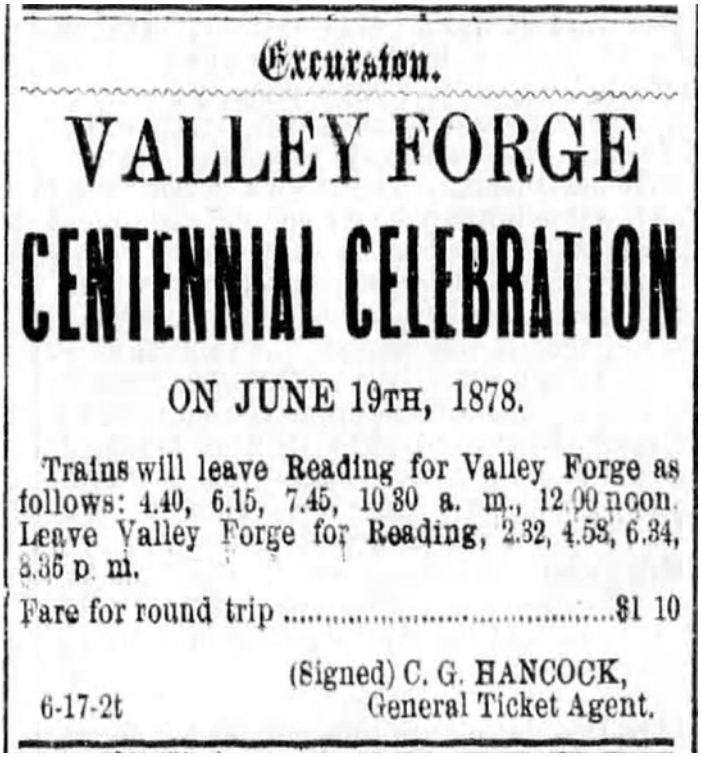
The Commemoration services were conducted under the direction of the Valley Forge Centennial Association. They began at sunrise with a Federal salute, and continued through the entire day. A tent had been provided, capable of accommodating ten thousand people, and the principal services were held beneath its shelter. There was a religious service at nine o'clock in the morning, after which there was a fine military review. As many as could gain admission then crowded into the spacious tent to listen to an interesting historical address by Colonel Theodore W. Bean, an oration by Henry Armitt Brown, and two commemorative poems. Colonel Bean's address was a graphic sketch of the privations and hardships which the patriot army endured with so much heroism during the memorable winter it was encamped there.

Our illustrations on page 529 give a view of the old house which served as Washington's headquarters during the winter, and a sketch of the military review at the recent celebration.

The same online search that found the *Harper's Weekly* text also uncovered a long, detailed and entertaining article from the *Philadelphia Times* newspaper, published the day after the event, June 20, 1878.[1] The newspaper article is reproduced here and casts much more light on the events of that day and time. Then, in some follow-up research prompted by references to the arrival of most of the attendees by excursion railroad trains, an additional abundance of information was found in the *Reading Times* newspaper published during the days before and after the celebration.[1] This article quotes selectively from the *Reading Times* reference and reproduces one of the original advertisements there for the excursion trains.

The *Philadelphia Times* article begins by informing us that "The scowling skies of Tuesday gave place yesterday to a delightful specimen of June weather, and all Montgomery county [sic], with many thousands from elsewhere, celebrated to their entire satisfaction the centennial anniversary of Washington's evacuation of the heights at Valley Forge." However, the article also tells us of several instances where "entire satisfaction" was not quite achieved during the day. And it records an incidental observation by the reporter that anticipates a tragic outcome for one of the primary participants.

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Excursion.

VALLEY FORGE

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

ON JUNE 19TH, 1878.

Trains will leave Reading for Valley Forge as follows: 4.40, 6.15, 7.45, 10 30 a. m., 12.00 noon. Leave Valley Forge for Reading, 2.32, 4.58, 6.34, 8.35 p. m.

Fare for round trip $1 10

(Signed) C. G. HANCOCK,
General Ticket Agent.

6-17-2t

Providing Cars for To-Morrow's Excursion

The Reading Railroad Company have been distributing passenger cars at different points along their main line and branches, for the purpose of providing sufficient accommodations for the large number of persons who are expected to attend the Valley Forge Centennial celebration to morrow. A train of eight empty passenger cars was sent down the railroad from this city yesterday morning, and a similar train yesterday afternoon.

The Arrival

On June 18th, 1878 the *Reading Times* ran an advertisement by the Philadelphia & Reading Railroad with the schedule for excursion trains leaving Reading on June 19th for Valley Forge—see the accompanying reproduction. The round trip fare was $1.10 and trains would leave Reading beginning at 4:40 AM. On June 24th, that paper would report under "Local Dashes" that "The number of excursion tickets sold by the Reading Railroad Company to Valley Forge, on the 19th inst, from all stations, was 23,400." The same column informed that "Forty-five barrels of Lauer's lager beer was sold at Valley Forge last Wednesday."

The *Philadelphia Times* reporter describes the arrival, primarily by excursion trains, of "... more people than had ever been there before and probably than ever will be there again."[2]

The Village

The first attraction was encountered upon leaving the "Valley" Philadelphia & Reading Railroad station, "... almost within hop, step and jump from Washington's headquarters ... Everybody stopped to look at the famous old pointed-stone farm-house ..." The placarded "Admission, Ten Cents" charge appears to have discouraged many excursionists from the tour. But the reporter defends the property owner Mrs. Hannah Ogden and Mrs. W.H. Holstein, Lady Regent of the Centennial Association for their efforts "... to help defray the cost of the celebration and the intended purchase of the property by the Centennial Association."

Mrs. William H. "Anna" Holstein would miss the festivities up the hill because she was busy in the headquarters area with her lady assistants dishing up lunches by the hundreds. Unfortunately, for a while during the day, no soldiers were posted at the headquarters to maintain order and the ladies spent a good deal of effort fending off souvenir hunters intent on breaking pieces off the stone building to keep as personal mementos.[3]

The article is replete with the names of persons who were there and contrasts their participation in the Celebration with their other, better-known professional, social, and political activity. For example, Mrs. Anna Holstein (1824–1900) of Upper Merion Township had been a Civil War battlefield nurse and served in the Civil War Sanitary Commission, securing supplies to improve medical care for wounded and ill soldiers. She was the founding Regent of The Centennial and Memorial Association of Valley Forge which purchased Washington's headquarters from Mrs. Ogden in 1878, conserved the building, and subsequently acquired more acreage and artifacts, leading to the establishment of the first Pennsylvania State Park in 1893.[4] Her husband, William Haywood Holstein was one of the founding members (initially restricted to men) of the Historical Society of Montgomery County in 1881. She also became a member when membership was opened to women, and many of her artifacts were donated there.

Colonel Theodore W. Bean (1833-1891) was a native of Norristown and fought with Company L of the 17th Pennsylvania Cavalry in the Civil War. After the war, he became a lawyer. He authored three books: a history of Valley Forge, a history of the 17th Pennsylvania Cavalry and the classic History of Montgomery County published in 1884, for which he is best remembered. He was also instrumental in the founding of the Historical Society of Montgomery County

Montgomery County natives Governor John Hartranft and Major General Winfield Scott Hancock arrived by train from Norristown about eight o'clock. A tent had been erected near Washington's headquarters for the accommodation of the governor and his party.

The *Philadelphia Times* reporter, after describing some of the arriving excursionists, commented on the 'entire satisfaction' with the day's planning:

> *One of the earliest birds in the village was an individual that Valley Forge had never known before—the professional bootblack, and the Philadelphia bootblack*

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at that, who had come up numerously during the night, some as coal train dead-heads, but most of them, with a lot of camp followers, afoot, the entire twenty-three and a half miles. These with a formidable array of Jehus on improvised hacks and a countless army of visiting vendors, were astir before daylight. Most of the fast-arriving crowds of people started without delay on the road to the heights, but several thousand remained in the village, attracted by the printed programme's announcement that at half-past eight the Governor would hold a reception at his headquarters and at nine a memorial service would be conducted at the picnic grounds, nearby. But from his arrival until half-past nine the Governor and his companions sat upon the porch fronting the residence of Mr. Smith, president of the Centennial Association, while his tent sat deserted on the opposite side of the road. The Gubernatorial party were looking at a procession of the military which had formed at General Gregg's headquarters and was moving to the tented woods, where the troops decorated with flowers the graves of the Continental soldiers. 'The Governor's reception' did not take place for the simple reason that, according to his own words, he knew nothing about it until after the appointed hour. The crowd, tired of waiting for the event, began moving toward the more southern places of attraction, and, in consequence of this those who were to conduct the memorial service packed up and started for the big tent.

The Grand Review

Following some detailed descriptions of the activities in the camp area and the memorial service held in the large tent, the *Philadelphia Times* reporter continues some remarks on the military review:

With great difficulty the Washington Troop, of Paoli, constantly galloping along the boundaries of Todd's field, managed to keep the fast swelling mass of humanity forming a square from pressing beyond an imaginary line inside and six or seven feet from the sides. The fence, entirely covered by squatting men, women and children, that suggested so many crows, gave way at many points to the weight, prostrating all in a promiscuous heap, to be laughed at by others, who would no sooner finish their 'ha, ha', then they would meet with the same ludicrous mishap. At half-past ten a barouche, containing Governor Hartranft, General Hancock, Adjutant General Latta, and Mr. George Bullock, rolled into the field and took a position near Washington's oak….. The line and the people that followed hid the road for nearly a mile.

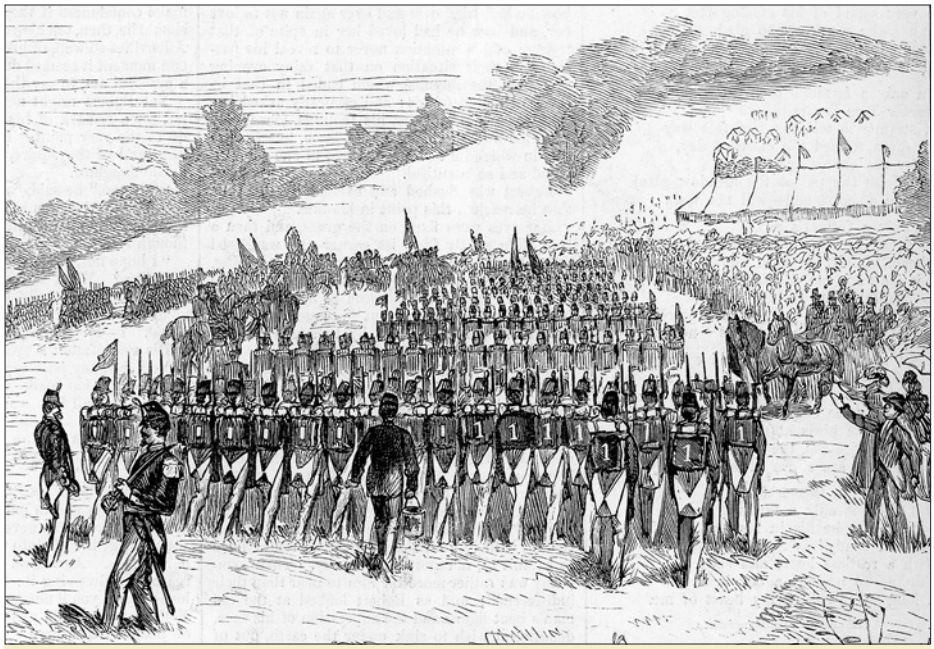
The article lists the names of the military units, mostly Pennsylvania militia, that would participate in the marching that took place. After the military marching there were "… about one thousand employe[e]s of the Phoenix Iron Works, in their working clothes, classified according to the nature of their employment and carrying designs of buildings and models of engines, machinery, etc., illustrating the entire business, from the mines up to the shipping department."[4]

It finishes with "The great variety of shape and color in dress and the good marching rendered the review a magnificent spectacle."

The *Reading Times* of June 20, 1878 reported: "The Reading Rifles was one of the best looking military organizations." And "… many an amateur military man among the crowd was heard commending the wisdom of the immortal George in choosing a place where there was such a fine prospect and where it would be easy to shoot down redcoats."

The variety of the units, and probably their uniforms, is not reflected in the *Harper's Weekly* "Grand Review" sketch, where uniformity in dress is depicted. There is no reference in the newspaper accounts to regular U.S. Army units participating.

However, there is an indication in the upper right corner of the sketch of a large tent, situated beyond the marching troops, the observing officials' barouche carriage and the crowd.



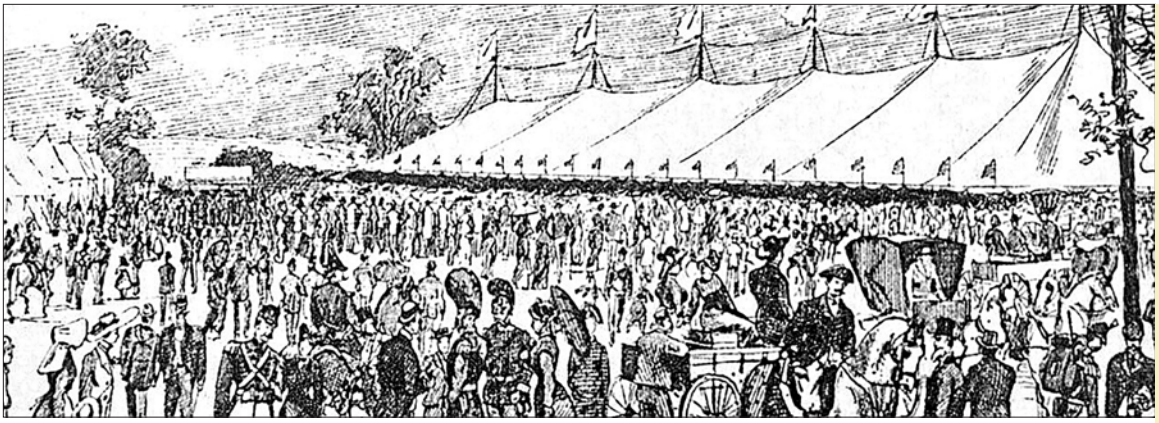
Detail from enhanced digital scan of "The Grand Review" drawing from *Harper's Weekly*, July 6, 1878. Note barouche carriage for reviewing officials including Governor Hartranft and General Hancock and the large tent at upper right.

The Large Tent

In addition to the village and the Grand Review marching, the third center of attraction for the day was

…the two heights, half a mile south of the village, containing the principal entrenchments, and upon the eastern one of which was erected the large tent, capable

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LEFT: Detail from the large background image found on the interpretive sign (see below) showing the large tent and the crowds present at the event. *Courtesy of Valley Forge National Historical Park.*

BELOW: Interpretive sign presently located near the train station in VFNHP. *Photo courtesy of John O. Senior © 2022.*



of accommodating nine thousand persons, in which the chief ceremonies of the day were held.

In the meantime, the memorial service was going on in the large tent, having begun at ten o'clock, but without a great audience as the people, many thousands of whom had never seen the place before, were scattering here and there to look at the entrenchments and forts.

At one o'clock the tent near Fort Huntingdon was literally packed with people, and at least three more tentsfull were left outside to amuse themselves with fat-woman shows, lottery wheels, 'greatest snake exhibitions on earth'… All these and other centennial adjuncts and humbugs lined the roads, covered the hills and swarmed in the valleys. With the earthworks, the beer booths and the booths of all kinds of knick-knacks, they attracted larger crowds than could the proceedings within the limited bounds of the densely thronged tent. There was not less than thirty-five thousand people on the grounds.

On the grand stand were seated the Governor, as presiding officer; the other distinguished officials and the orators and poets of the day.

After several musical pieces, hymns and "a long poem by the Rev. J. G. Walker", the proceedings came to

…a historical paper by Colonel Theo. W. Bean. Although the tent was open at the sides the air was oppressive, and the people, who had all long been restless, began to go out in large numbers. When Colonel Bean finished the tent was little more than half full. Governor Hartranft, when introducing the historian, said that the latter, on account of the heat, would only read some extracts. As the Colonel kept at the extracts for over half an hour, the article must have been quite exhaustive. To make matters worse, the inch pine board forming the seats kept up a continual cracking, their supports being so badly arranged as to give way to swaying, and land spectators upon the grass.

The Oration

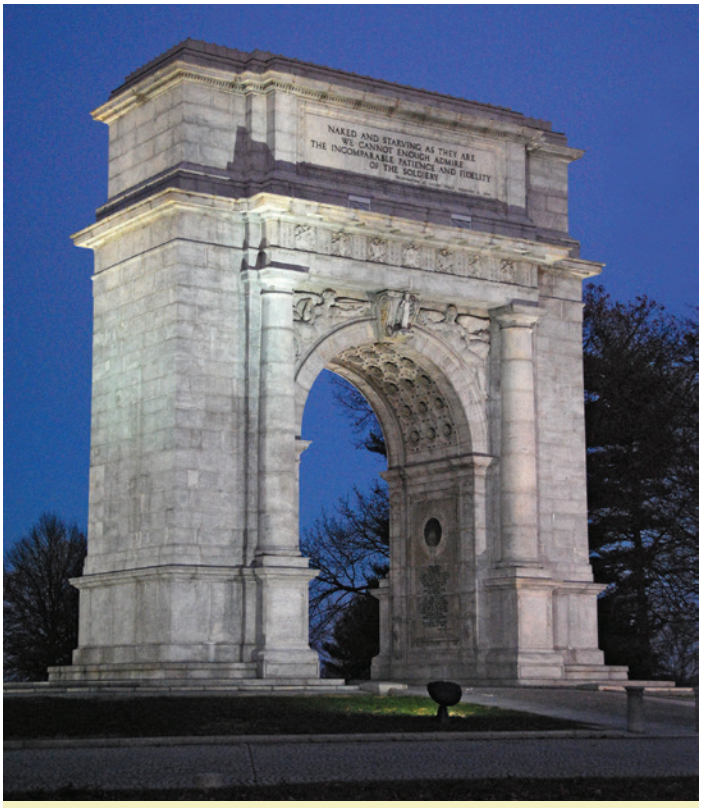
The chorus went on with "Hail, Valley Forge (to the tune of "America"), composed by Mr. Robarts, and then followed a pretty poem from the pen of Mrs. M.E. Thropp Cone. Next came the oration of the day, by Mr. Henry Armitt Brown, whose appearance was greeted with special applause. He spoke with his usual eloquence, ***although with a voice much impaired by a cold****.* [NOTE: emphasis added by author of this article.]

A portion of this oration was printed in the *Philadelphia Times* article (which is reproduced with this article) in a smaller type size than the account of the rest of the day's proceedings. The *Reading Times* article, also published the next day, June 20, had an even longer excerpt. Both of these beg the question as to how the reporters produced their copy, including transcriptions of Henry Armitt Brown's oration, in time to appear in print the next day.

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The *Harper's Weekly* short summary and the *Philadelphia Times* extended article were my first contact with the name of Henry Armitt Brown. By sheer coincidence, I was also recently re-reading Christopher Morley's 1920 book *Travels in Philadelphia*, a reprint of "sketches all written for the *Philadelphia Evening Public Ledger*."[6] One of them is titled "Valley Forge" and describes an automobile trip there c. 1919.

> *... My idea of jovial destiny would be to be turned loose (about the turn of the scrapple season) somewhere in the neighborhood of The King of Prussia—no one but an idiot will ever call him by his new name of Ye Olde King! ---with a knapsack of tobacco, a knobby stick and a volume of R.L.S.*
>
> *Going down the road from Devon, the first thing one sees is the great equestrian statue of Anthony Wayne on its pink pedestal. It stands on a naked ridge, which was formerly groved with fine oaks. The Caliph who had me in charge told me with blood in his eye that the trees had been slaughtered in order to give a wider view of the statue. It seems a serious pity. Beyond this one comes to the National Arch, designed by Paul Cret, of the University of Pennsylvania, who has so gallantly served his native France on fields of battle far more terrible than Valley Forge. From this arch,* ***with its fine inscription by Henry Armitt Brown****, there is a serene view across yellow fields of stubble where a big bay wagon was piled high with its fragrant load.* [NOTE: emphasis added by author of this article.]



An evening view of the National Memorial Arch in VFNHP. *Photo courtesy of John O. Senior © 2022.*

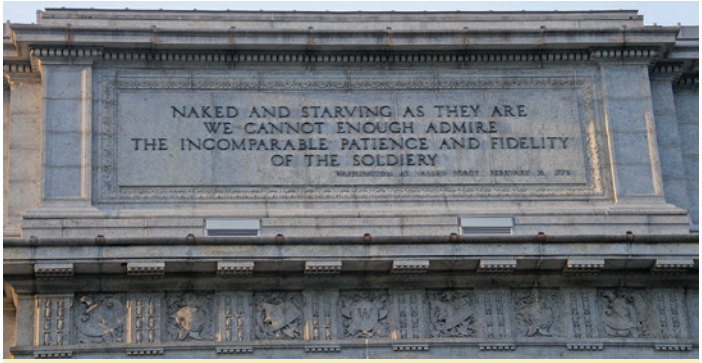
By reference to a Wikipedia article, I learned that Henry Armitt Brown (December 1, 1844 – August 21, 1878) had graduated from Yale College in 1865 and, although he studied law and was admitted to the bar of Philadelphia in 1869, was more interested in writing and oratory than law.

> *It was after a long day at Valley Forge, on June 19, 1878, where he had delivered an oration, that he returned to Philadelphia to complete his preparation for a similar engagement at Monmouth. His illness gradually developed into typhoid fever. About the first of August he rallied, and seemed likely to recover; but successive relapses ensued, and he died on the 21st of that month at the age of 34.*[7]

How perceptive was the *Philadelphia Times* reporter to note that "He spoke with his usual eloquence, although with a voice much impaired by a cold."

The inscription of the face of the National Memorial Arch, a quote from George Washington's letter to Governor George Clinton while at Valley Forge, is familiar to those of us who have often visited the Park:

Naked and starving as they are
We cannot enough admire
The incomparable Patience and fidelity
Of the Soldiery



The inscription on the south face of the National Memorial Arch in VFNHP. *Photo courtesy of John O. Senior © 2022.*

The following quote, referred to by Christopher Morley, is from the oration given by Henry Armitt Brown on June 19, 1878, and is inscribed within the arch of the monument:

> *And here, in this place of Sacrifice, in this vale of Humiliation, in this valley of the Shadow, of that Death out of which, the Life of America rose, regenerate and free, let us believe, with an abiding faith, that to them, Union will seem as dear, and Liberty as sweet, and Progress as glorious, as they were to our fathers, and are to you and me, and that the Institutions, which have made us happy, preserved by the virtue of our children, shall bless, the remotest generation, to the time to come.*[11]

The *Reading Times* of January 20, 1878 published "… liberal extracts" of Brown's oration under the heading "A THRILLING ORATION." The quote selected for the National Arch is a portion of the last paragraph which had the heading "The Impenetrable To Be."

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The *Philadelphia Times* article does not capture this paragraph in its partial transcription of the oration. But it ends with a candid description of the conditions in the tent during Brown's oration:

> *While Mr. Brown was speaking, the "crack! crack!" of boards and consequent screams and confusion in the audience continued. One lady was rendered unconscious by the fall of a board, which caught and severely crushed her. Before the orator finished, seats enough to accommodate over two thousand had fallen. This annoyance to the speaker and his hearers was augmented by the playing of bands outside, which none of the arrangement committees seemed to think it worthwhile to stop. The orator having concluded and been heartily applauded, "The Heroes of Valley Forge", composed by the Rev. Sidney Dyer was sung by the chorus and the audience – all standing – to the tune of Old Hundred, and was followed by a chorus of Handel's Hallelujah.*

And with a description of the departing trains:

> *The scene at the railroad station, with many thousands waiting for trains and all wanting to get away at once, reminded one of the evening of Pennsylvania Day at the Centennial. The Reading Company had put on for passenger traffic all their improvised Centennial cars and many freight cars, but the accommodations could not meet the wants of the home-going crowds. The last of them got home, however, and safely, but not until long after the close of the ceremonies at four o'clock. The Governor seemed pleased with what the county of his home had done; and at the close of the greatest of the extra centennials, everybody seemed to think that Valley Forge, at least, would never see its like again.*

A few days after the celebration Anna Holstein wrote: "That was indeed a grand oration of Armitt Brown. It thrills one to read it; what must it have been to have heard it, amid such surroundings." [8]

Epilogue

Shortly after "finishing" this article, I was giving some thought to how obscure the subject of the "Valley Forge Centennial" seemed to me when I happened upon the July 6, 1878 *Harper's Weekly* page of sketches with that title. And even more so, to how little awareness I had of the orator Henry Armitt Brown, so revered in his own time and in later memory, which culminated in the inclusion of an extract from his oration on the National Arch, in company with the more familiar words of George Washington. It occurred to me to check the *History Quarterly Digital Archive* on the Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society's website to see if anyone there, so close to Valley Forge, had ever written anything on this subject.

I found an article [recommended reading] by Tredyffrin Easttown History Club co-founder S. Paul Teamer under the title "Valley Forge field trip itinerary – an interpretation," published in 1938, Vol. 1, No. 2—the second issue of the *Tredyffrin Easttown History Club Quarterly*.[10]

Teamer wrote:

> *This field trip is the lesson on United States History on Valley Forge given by the writer at Tredyffrin-Easttown Joint High School. For years, on glorious October days he taught about Valley Forge in a warm classroom. About five years ago it dawned upon him that at his doorstep lay a fine laboratory for the study of Valley Forge—the field itself. Since then he has taken his classes in busses to the observatory, and from there hiked over the field as follows. "Come on along."*

In the portion of his article extensively covering the "The Arch," he discusses the texts engraved on it. After a "centrally placed inscription draws the eye" (Washington's quote, cited above):

> *Naked and starving, as they are, we cannot enough admire the incomparable patience and fidelity of the soldiery.*

Teamer continues "... moving around the arch we read these words taken from The Book"

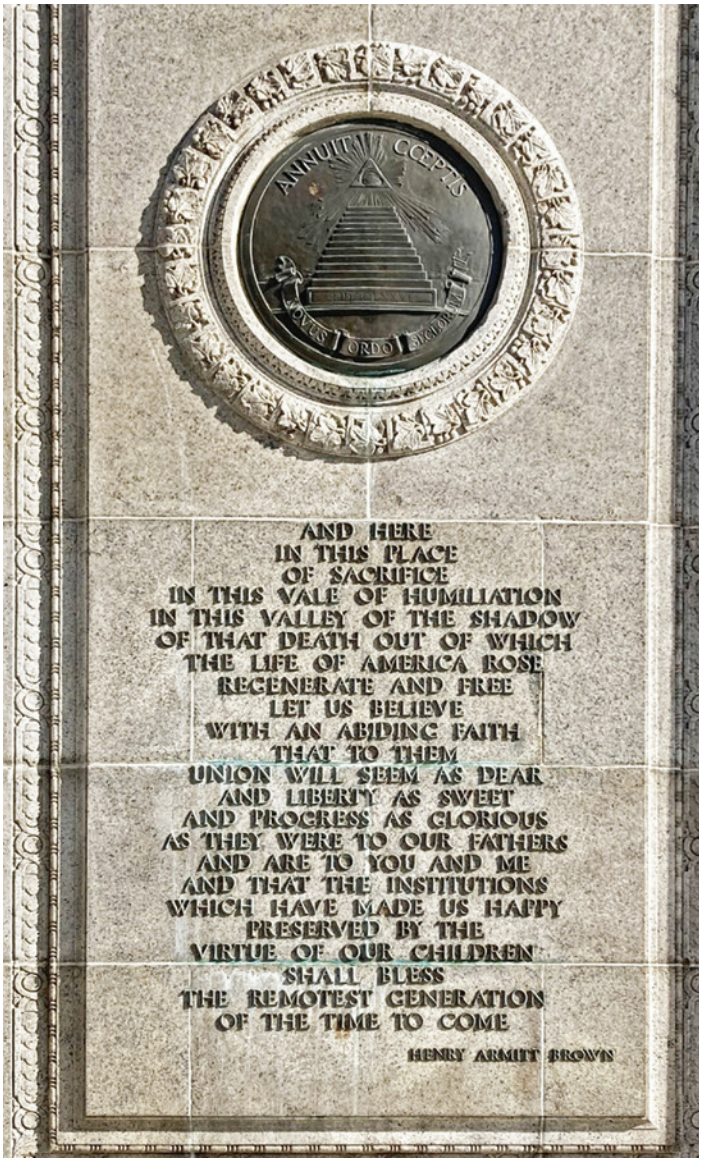
> *They shall hunger no more neither shall they thirst any more.*

After a discussion of the rationale for the Arch and its location, and the list of names of the generals who served at the encampment, he states "On the opposite wall is an extract [previously cited] from Henry Armitt Brown's Valley Forge Centennial Oration:"

AND HERE
IN THIS PLACE
OF SACRIFICE
IN THIS VALE OF HUMILIATION
IN THIS VALLEY OF THE SHADOW
OF THAT DEATH OUT OF WHICH
THE LIFE OF AMERICA ROSE
REGENERATED AND FREE*
LET US BELIEVE
WITH AN ABIDING FAITH
THAT TO THEM
UNION WILL BE AS DEAR*
AND LIBERTY AS SWEET
AND PROGRESS AS GLORIOUS
AS THEY WERE TO OUR FATHERS
AND ARE TO YOU AND ME
AND THAT THE INSTITUTIONS
THAT HAVE MADE US HAPPY*
PRESERVED BY THE
VIRTUE OF OUR CHILDREN
SHALL BLESS
THE REMOTEST GENERATION
OF THE TIME TO COME

[*Note: Several words as quoted by Teamer in his article are slightly different than those that appear inscribed on the monument.]

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Inscription on the inside of the west side of the arch. *Courtesy Roger D. Thorne*

Teamer then adds: "(completed)" and writes "This does not appear on the wall. It is the closing line of the oration."

AND UNTO HIM
WHO HOLDS IN THE HOLLOW OF HIS HAND
THE FATE OF NATIONS,
AND YET MARKS THE SPARROW'S FALL,
LET US LIFT UP OUR HEARTS THIS DAY,
AND INTO HIS ETERNAL CARE COMMEND
OURSELVES, OUR CHILDREN, AND OUR COUNTRY.

This close reading of Brown's Centennial Oration, and the particular texts selected for inclusion as patriotic sentiments engraved on the Valley Forge National Arch, reveal to us S. Paul Teamer's appreciation of their exceptional merit.

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge and thank the following persons for their generous and skillful assistance in researching and preparing this article.

First of all, Marianne Hooper Furman and Richard Bates for finding the texts online for the original Philadelphia and Reading newspaper articles describing the June 19, 1878 Centennial Celebration of the Encampment.

Mike Bertram transcribed the text from the digital image of the *Philadelphia Times* article into the more legible script which is included with this article.

Roger Thorne applied his computer graphics skills to extract and enhance the drawing of "The Grand Review" from the July 6, 1878 issue of *Harpers Weekly*, and to the extraction and enhancement of the photograph of "The Grand Review," originally taken as a stereoscope view by Norristown photographer S.R. Fisher.

Dona McDermott, Archivist at Valley Forge National Historical Park, who helped us obtain the drawing image of "The Great Tent" which had also appeared in the July 6, 1878 Harper's Weekly.

Finally, Mr. Robert Cohen of Norristown, Pennsylvania and the Historical Society of Montgomery County, who was particularly generous in allowing us to scan many previously unknown photographs of Valley Forge from his collection.

References

1. Computer searches by Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society members Richard Bates and Marianne Hooper Furman.
2. This prediction probably held true until the Boy Scout Jamboree of June 30–July 6, 1950, when approximately 47,000 Boy Scouts from the United States and other nations camped there; and to that number were added thousands of visitors.
3. Woodman, *History of Valley Forge*, pp.126-127, as referenced in Valley Forge Park History online: **https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/vafo/treese/treese2.htm**
4. "Centennial and Memorial Association of Valley Forge", Wikipedia article.
5. My great-grandfather John Diamond, who was employed at Phoenix Iron at that time as a "puddler," may have participated in this parade.
6. Morley, Christopher, *Travels in Philadelphia*, "Valley Forge", pp. 178–83, 1920, David McKay Company, Philadelphia, PA.
7. Wikipedia article at **https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Armitt_Brown**
8. Woodman, *History of Valley Forge*, pp. 49–51, 67, 163–5, as referenced in Valley Forge Park History online: **https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/vafo/treese/treese2.htm**
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