



The Linden Times

A bi-weekly newsletter for the members & friends of the Calvert County Historical Society – March 19, 2021



The Maryland 400 at the Battle of Brooklyn

This edition of The Linden Times is four pages in celebration of The Maryland 400. No, the Maryland 400 is not a NASCAR race held in Maryland; rather it is about Maryland's first and most distinguished Revolutionary soldiers. The Maryland 400, also called "*The Old Line*", were members of the 1st Maryland Regiment who repeatedly charged a numerically superior British force during the Revolutionary War's Battle of Long Island, NY. As the

leading conflict after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the fallen soldiers were the first to die as Americans defending their country, as opposed to colonial subjects rebelling against the monarchy. The Maryland 400 sustained very heavy casualties but allowed General Washington to successfully save the bulk of his nearly surrounded continental troops and evacuated them to Manhattan. This historic action is commemorated in the State of Maryland's nickname, "*The Old Line State*."

The lineage for the Maryland Regiment can be traced to June 14, 1775, when military units were formed to protect the frontiers of western Maryland. In August of that year, another two companies assembled in Frederick, Maryland. They then marched 551 miles in 21 days to support General Washington's efforts to drive the British out of Boston. Later, more Maryland militia companies, (armed with older, surplus British muskets and bayonets), were formed and then sent north to support Washington's battles for New York City.

In 1776 the British sent the largest armada in history (more than 450 ships and 10,000 men) across the Atlantic with the intent of putting an end to the American Revolution by crushing Washington and his band of colonial rebels. On the morning of August 27th, British forces surrounded the Continental Army in Brooklyn Heights and backed them up against the East River, where their armada of frigates was waiting to capture them if they tried to retreat. Washington met with his troop commanders at his headquarters to assess the dire situation and plan their next steps. Two options were discussed. One, was [*cont. on page 2*](#)

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to concentrate the Continental Army and attempt to hold off the British in a stalemate but risk the end of the Revolution if they failed. The other was to evacuate the army across the East River, but they needed time to gather boats to transport the 2,000 troops to the safety of the forts in lower Manhattan. Colonel William Stirling offered his 1st Maryland regiment of 400 volunteer militiamen to serve as the rear guard tasked with holding the whole British Army off long enough to give Washington the precious time needed. Washington agreed with Stirling's plan.

Stirling went to the commander of the Maryland regiment, Major Mordecai Gist, to give him the unpleasant orders, which he knew was a suicide mission. In an unexpected gesture, he said to Gist, *"One more thing ... I intend to remain with you and the Maryland Regiment."*



Major General William Alexander, Lord Stirling (1726 - January 1783)



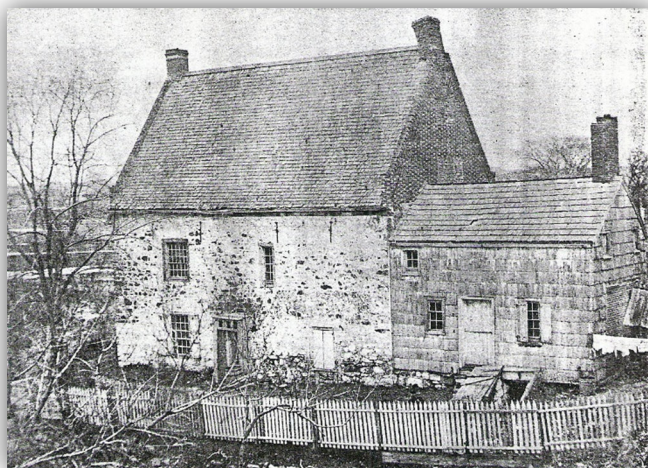
Brigadier General, Mordecai Gist (1743– September 1792)

The rest of that fateful day played out as the Maryland 400 did the unthinkable in a desperate act of courage and perseverance. Stirling and Gist fought side by side with their men throughout the battle. The British began to encircle the Americans and the only possible escape route was to cross Gowanus Creek, a marshy area about eighty yards wide in Lord Sterling's area of operations. To protect and hold the escape route, Lord Stirling ordered his troops to provide rear-guard action for Washington's army and hold back the overwhelming numbers of British troops. The Delaware and Pennsylvania lines broke leaving the battle to hold the line against more than 2,000 British troops to the Maryland 400. Instead of digging in, Lord Sterling ordered six separate attacks by the Marylanders. They attacked the entire British army at the Old Stone House throughout the afternoon. Their act of courage confused the British Army and distracted them from pursuing Washington. Washington's army was able to

withdraw across the East River under the cover of fog, avoiding the wrath of the British gunships.

After their sixth attack the remaining Maryland troops tried to retreat back across Gowanus Creek. Some of the men became bogged down in the mud and were shot, others who could not swim surrendered to the British (100 men). A total of 256 men were killed, practically wiping the regiment with only about a dozen or so, making it back to the American lines.

Gist was among a dozen men to make it back to the river and safely make it back across to the safety of the forts in lower Manhattan. Stirling was captured by the British and would later be returned in a prisoner exchange. The rest of the Maryland 400 were killed, wounded and captured that day. Many were buried in anonymous graves under the streets of Brooklyn. Washington, as he witnessed the daring attacks from his post, was quoted as saying, *"Good God! What brave fellows I must lose this day!"* *cont. on page 3*



Photograph of the original Vechte-Cortelyou "Old Stone House" (c.1699) in Brooklyn, New York by John L. Pierrepont

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After the battle the 256 dead troops of the Maryland 400 along with 31 Delaware soldiers were buried by the British in a mass grave on Adrian Van Brunt's farm land, on the outskirts of the marsh. This mass grave is believed to be in New York City around the southwest corner of what is 3rd Ave. between 7th and 9th Streets. The six mass military burial ditches had a North/South orientation, so that the bodies would be "facing east", noting a praiseworthy and honorable burial. In the 1890s, the entire grave site was covered by 12 feet of fill dirt and turned into a coal yard. Following the coal yard the site then became the location for a paint factory. In 1956 Dr. Nicholas Ryan, a Brooklyn Heights physician, is quoted stating that in the 1890s that his father, a building contractor, had found in the course of digging cellars for apartment buildings, *"the bones of some thirty bodies in regular, or military order,"* at the northeast corner of Seventh Street and Third Avenue.



In 1957, the U.S. National Park Service did a historical site survey and a report to Congress identified a, *"plaque commemorating what was thought to be a mass grave on Third Avenue between Seventh and Eighth Streets."* Three other limited archeological digs did not turn up any other human remains, and a determination was made, at the time, to not preserve the site.

The current location of the mass grave site is now believed to be underneath an auto repair shop parking lot in Park Slope, Brooklyn. At this time, a group of historians are currently seeking to purchase the property to again mount a search of the site for the graves of the Maryland 400.

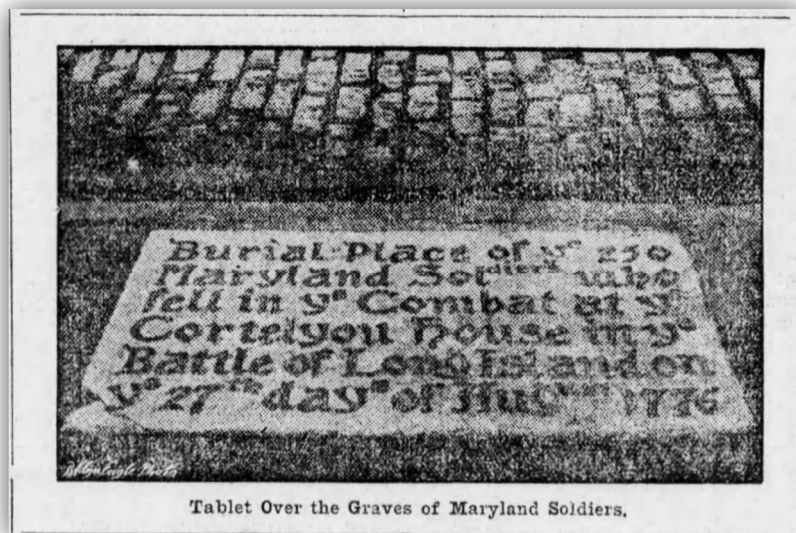
Noted above, is the 175th Infantry Regiment Coat of Arms symbolic of the Maryland 400. The bayonet on the coat of arms of the 175th Infantry Regiment is representative of its introduction to American arms at the Battle of Long Island by the Maryland Line in 1776.

The Maryland Monument is located in Prospect Park, in Brooklyn, New York City was built for \$3,000, all of which donated by an organization by the name of "The Maryland Society of the Sons of the American Revolution." Dedicated on August 27, 1895 (the 119th anniversary), the monument is 27 feet tall, faces southwest, and is enclosed by a wrought-iron fence. It contains a 12-foot polished granite Corinthian pillar with a marble orb on top.

On the east face of the monument's square is an inscription: *"In honor of the Maryland 400 who on this battlefield on August 27, 1776 saved the American army."* The west face of the pedestal has another inscription attributed to George Washington: *"Good God! What brave fellows I must this day lose."*



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In 1897 a plaque was placed close to the actual location of the graves, directly in front of the Wildhack Coal Yard. The plaque was covered over around 1915 when Third Avenue was widened. In 2008, the plaque was removed when the former Red Devil Paint Factory was torn down. That plaque in Old English reads:

"Burial place of ye
Maryland Soldiers who
Fell in ye – Combat at ye
Cortelyou House in ye
Battle of Long Island on ye
27th day of August, 1776"

The Revolutionary War was almost lost, if not for the courage and sacrifice of these 400 young men and boys from Maryland. Many Marylanders are actively tracing their family roots and genealogy back to the Maryland 400. Of significant value for this effort is the website: <https://msamaryland400.wordpress.com/> That website has biographies of the soldiers and an online roster of every known Maryland 400 combatants.

Additional article sources: <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/the-maryland-400.htm>, <https://www.macpa.org/the-day-maryland-saved-america-the-maryland-400/>, <https://time.com/5617055/battle-of-brooklyn/> & <https://www.macpa.org/the-day-maryland-saved-america-the-maryland-400/>



The CCHS launched our new YouTube channel in December last year with our Holiday Sales event video created by our very own Tassia Weems.

This year, we're proud to announce the first of many videos in the works. Starting us off is a **Brown Bag Lunch** presentation by **Mary B. Rockefeller** of her book, *Early Schools of Calvert County Maryland*. This volume represents four years of research and details the establishment and development of schools from Colonial times to approximately the 1970's. Enjoy the video and come in and get your copy in our bookstore today!

Click on the link below ↓↓↓

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCFUHby3DqLZ5GnVTOUD8ow/videos>

or, go to www.youtube.com and type "Calvert County Historical Society" in the search field. Like & subscribe!



"When you go home, tell them of us and say, for their tomorrow we gave our today."

John Maxwell Edmonds, Poet (January 21, 1875 – March 18, 1958)