

# Remember PAOLI!

September 20, 1777 was a day that would live in infamy, at least until memories receded, and we as a country were asked to “Remember” other things – the Alamo, the Maine, Pearl Harbor, and most recently 9-11. What are we being asked to remember? And do you remember anything about Paoli – other than for many years it was the last stop on the Paoli Local train line? If not, here is a primer.

Paoli was actually named for a man – an army general from the island of Corsica named Pasquale Paoli, who lived from 1725 to 1807. Corsica was one of the first countries to adopt a written constitution under the principles of the Enlightenment – and General Paoli was named its first president in 1755, 34 years prior to Washington’s election as the first U.S. president. Paoli’s Corsican Republic lasted about 14 years, until French troops invaded and conquered the island in 1769, and made it a province of France. General Paoli fled to exile in London, where he was welcomed and feted for his bravery and became a symbol for liberty and democracy, two ideas that were sweeping the Western world of the time.

In that same year, news of the fall of the Corsican Republic found its way back to Chester County. A man named Joshua Evans, whose family had bought 500 acres from William Penn through which the Conestoga road (later the Lancaster Turnpike) ran through, opened up a new inn on the main road from Philadelphia to Lancaster, near the present day Paoli post office. As much of the population did not read and write, inns were identified by signs hanging outside with recognizable items drawn on them – a plough, a sorrel horse, a unicorn, a carpenter’s square, etc. At the opening of the tavern on St. Patrick’s Day that year, (so the story goes), the men in attendance at the new tavern began a round of toasts. “To your health!” “To the ladies fair!” “To the King!” We don’t have a record of all of the toasts, but reportedly the 45th and final toast was “To General Paoli”. We know that Joshua Evans was still standing after 45 toasts, as upon hearing it he had the idea to name his new tavern after General Paoli. The tavern was well located – it was just about a day’s ride from Philadelphia for a wagon, and the busy Conestoga road eventually became the Lancaster turnpike, and delivered weary and thirsty

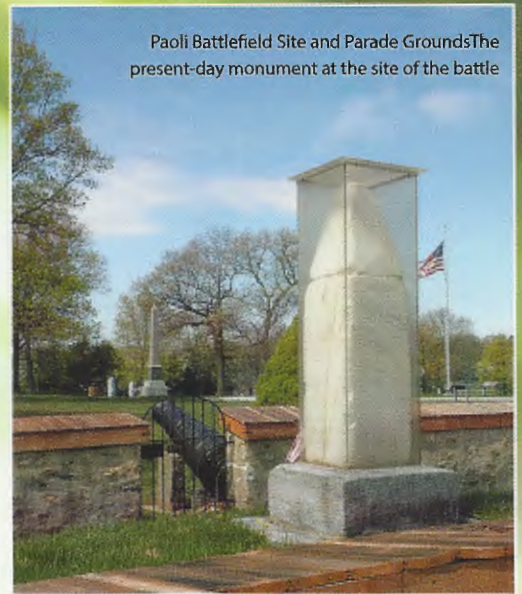
traveler’s directly to the door. It is likely he found a local artist who painted a rough portrait of General Paoli on a piece of wood to hang outside, and the tavern began its life as the “General Paoli”.

A few years later, the American Revolution came to a boil on July 4, 1776, and the fireworks started in earnest the next year, when the British army under General Howe landed at the northern end of the Chesapeake Bay in August of 1777 and began marching north. The American army rushed down to confront them, and they skirmished and maneuvered as the British moved slowly north. Rivers could be a strong defense when 17,000 men and their supply wagons had to cross over them; and so Washington looked to block the British at the local rivers. On September 11, 1777 at Chadds Ford, the British crossed the Brandywine river and came at Washington’s army from several directions, driving them back by the end of the day in the largest land battle of the Revolution – the battle of Brandywine. Both armies regrouped, and the British moved north towards the next barrier, the Schuylkill river.

There were several fords – areas where the water was not as deep and the current not as strong – in the river. Howe knew this because he marched with several Loyalists who were familiar with the countryside. The Fatlands ford (present day Valley Forge), and Swedes ford near present day Norristown, provided the best options. Both general knew this. And while Howe camped on September 20th along present day Swedesford road near the intersection with current Rt 252, Washington was across the river, his troops spread out to guard the various fords. But he had a body of troops behind Howe as well, General Anthony Wayne’s Pennsylvanians. Wayne was instructed to stay right behind Howe, and if the British started crossing the river, to attack and harass the troops and wagons seeking to pass over it.

Wayne’s men were camped that night in a field right off of Paoli Pike near present day Malvern Pep. Howe devised a plan to deal with the pesky Wayne and his troops. After dark, he sent a body of troops armed with bayonets only to surprise Wayne. The British found their way to Wayne’s camps, and achieved a

Paoli Battlefield Site and Parade Grounds  
The present-day monument at the site of the battle





Battle of Paoli fought on September 20, 1777

immediately upon fell upon the surprised troops with their bayonets. It was not a battle as much as a savage rout.

complete surprise. The position of the Americans was illuminated by their camp fires, while the British came out of the blackness of the surrounding woods and immediately

Several eyewitnesses recalled:

“The Enemy last Night at twelve o’clock attacked ... Our Men just raised from Sleep, moved disorderly — Confusion followed ... The Carnage was very great ... this is a bloody Month.”

“I with my own Eyes, see them, cut & hack some of our poor Men to pieces after they had fallen in their hands and scarcely shew the least Mercy to any... “

“...more than a dozen soldiers had with fixed bayonets formed a cordon round him, and that every one of them in sport had indulged their brutal ferocity by stabbing him in different parts of his body and limbs ... a physician ... examining him there was found ... 46 distinct bayonet wounds... ”



Sketch of Paoli Tavern

“The Annals of the Age Cannot Produce such another Scene of Butchery... “

A mass grave was dug to inter the bodies of 53 American dead found at the camp site. Years later a memorial stone was placed, and the memorial remains on the site in Malvern, adjacent to a local park. Money was raised to preserve some large parts of the battlefield and you can wander there today and remember the sacrifice of those who died that night.

On the 240th anniversary of the battle, September 20, 2017, the Newtown Square Historical Society is hosting a speaker who will tell the full story of what became known on the American side as the “Paoli Massacre”. That event will kick off our series of monthly Wednesday night programs on local history topics. Join us at Dunwoody Village auditorium at 7:00 p.m. that night and help us Remember Paoli!

*Doug Humes is a board member of the Newtown Square Historical Society. Visit our website at [www.historicnewtownsquare.org](http://www.historicnewtownsquare.org) for more information on membership and local history.*



## TERRA FIRMA BUILDERS, LLC

*“Building dreams on solid ground”*



**Commercial & Residential**

**New Construction**

**Renovations**

**Property Management**

**Property Maintenance**

**Owners Representation**

**Builder of Unique Custom Homes  
Premier Residential & Commercial Contractor  
for the Tri-State Area  
Fully Trained Staff equipped to address  
all your needs**

**Terra Firma Builders, LLC • 2090 Dutton Mill Road • Willistown, PA 19073  
[www.tfbuild.com](http://www.tfbuild.com) 484.427.7951 Fax 484.420.4763**