

Correction to the listing of Germantown and Cliveden in the W3R in PA Report

The site survey *The Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1781 - 1783. An Historical and Architectural Survey*. (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania Society of Sons of the Revolution, 2007) lists as

Resource 37: Chew House or Cliveden
6401 Germantown Avenue
Philadelphia PA 19107

*Cliveden is the most important landmark of the battle of Germantown fought on 4 October 1777. Although not decisive in military terms, the battle had vast political implications. Combined with the victory at Saratoga in the same month, it proved a major influence in the consummation of the French alliance that spelled final victory for the new American Nation.*¹

Cliveden is a National Historic Landmark, designation on 20 January 1961, #66000677.

Though an American defeat, the Battle of Germantown fought on 4 October 1777 was of enormous psychological importance for the American cause. Coming hard on the heels of the defeat at Brandywine on 11 September and the Paoli Massacre of 20 September, the very fact that Washington and his army would even dare to attack the British army came as a huge surprise to the British and French governments. French officers were aware of the battle and of the critical importance of British resistance at Cliveden, the home of Benjamin Chew. Washington's tactical mistake of trying to take Cliveden slowed down the American advance and gave Sir William Howe time to regroup and turn the tide of battle in his favor.

The first notable French visitor to Germantown was the chevalier de Chastellux, who visited Philadelphia in December 1780, he made a tour of the Germantown Battlefield as well on 2 December and devoted four pages in his travel account to a description of the battle and the critical role of Cliveden. Chastellux also points out an important French connection. Mauduit du Plessis was one of two officers who approached the house under heavy British fire and climbed into a window with straw in his hand which he intended to set on fire, but the attempt failed. Mauduit de Plessis was also one of two officers who approached the Chew House with a white flag demanding the British to surrender. Fire from the house killed the American officer but Mauduit du Plessis escaped unharmed."²

¹ Adapted from <http://tps.cr.nps.gov/nhl/detail.cfm?ResourceId=504&ResourceType=Building>

² Marquis de Chastellux, *Travels in North America in Years 1780-81* Howard C. Rice, Jr., ed. 2 vols., (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), vol. 1, pp. 137-141. Chastellux also traveled to Brandywine and Red Bank in December 1780.

A few months later, Generals Washington and Rochambeau and their staffs arrived in Philadelphia around 1:00 p.m. on Thursday, 30 August 1781, and proceeded to the home of French Ambassador the chevalier de la Luzerne, where they dined and lodged. Rochambeau wanted to use his stay in Philadelphia as a staff ride for himself and his aides-de-camp with Washington himself as tour guide. On 2 September, Washington obliged. Rochambeau, accompanied by his son and his aides-de-camp, rode out to Germantown.³ Thomas-Antoine de Mauduit du Plessis, who served as a volunteer in the Continental Army from 1777 to 1779. Mauduit served with distinction at Brandywine, Germantown, Red Bank and Monmouth and was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in the Continental Army before returning to France. He came back to the United States with Rochambeau as senior adjutant of the artillery park. He may have accompanied the group to Germantown.

Rochambeau's son the vicomte de Rochambeau, recorded somewhat tersely in his diary: "Also we felt obliged to visit the battlefields of Brandywine and Germantown (the defensive points of the river in 1777), and, last, the good winter quarters that Washington held from 1777 to 1778 at Valley Forge."⁴

Baron Closen, one of Rochambeau's aides-de-camp, wrote: "I went with the generals to see the battlefield of Germantown, where there was a very hot fight, October 4, 1777. ... This famous day could have had the most unfortunate consequences if the English (and Cornwallis especially) had profited by their advantages, as General Washington had the kindness to explain to us.⁵ After we followed the successive movements over the actual ground, we returned to dine at the home of M. Holker, the French consul, who entertained us magnificently in his charming country house, 3 miles from Philadelphia. I left as soon as possible with du Bourg, to continue our course in curiosities and kind attentions."⁶

➔ In the site survey *The Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1781 - 1783*, p. 130, the house where Closen dined

³ Neither the *Memoirs of the Marshal Count de Rochambeau, Relative to the War of Independence of the United States* M.W.E. Wright, ed., (New York, 1971; orig. Paris, 1838), nor his *Relation, ou Journal des opérations du Corps Français sous le commandement du Comte de Rochambeau: Lieutenant-Général des Armées du Roi, depuis le 15 d'Août* mention the excursion.

⁴ Jean-Edmond Weelen, *Rochambeau. Father and Son. A life of the Maréchal de Rochambeau and the Journal of the Vicomte de Rochambeau* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1936), p. 226.

The comte de Lauberdiere, Baron Closen and Cromot du Bourg rode with Rochambeau's son to Brandywine in September 1781. None of them mention travelling to Valley Forge.

⁵ No American account of the staff ride to Germantown has been located. Washington did not keep a diary during his stay in Philadelphia, the diary of his private secretary Jonathan Trumbull Jr. is silent about the excursion as well.

⁶ Evelyn Acomb, ed. *The Revolutionary Journal of Baron Ludwig von Closen, 1780-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1958), pp. 119/20.

with Holker is incorrectly identified as Cliveden. Cliveden, however, is more than six miles from Philadelphia City Hall; Holker's "charming country house" was most likely in Fairmount Park.

➔ Research identifying the home has not yet been conducted; the answer is most likely either in John Holker Papers in the Library of Congress (microfilm Shelf no. 14,488) BOX 15 REEL 8, 1 May-29 Oct. 1781 or BOX 16 REEL 8, 3 Nov.-31 Dec. 1781, or in the John Holker Papers in the John Holker Papers in the William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Box 1, Folder 10, holds correspondence from May 17-September 12, 1781. Folder 11 holds the correspondence from September 20-October 19, 1781.

Cromot du Bourg, Closen's travelling companion and fellow aide-de-camp, on 2 September "rode to Germantown, where there was an engagement, the 4th of October." The follows a long description of the battle, including the role of Mauduit du Plessis and Cliveden, ending his account how "on my return I dined with Mr. Holker, the French Consul. He entertained us excellently at a little country house which he occupies, three miles from the city, on the road to Germantown."⁷

The comte de Lauberdie was the third aide-de-camp to Rochambeau who went to Germantown: "Mr. de Rochambeau, whom I accompanied, had us see the battlefield of Germantown which is six miles from Philadelphia. Mr. Washington took it upon himself to give us a detailed account of the battle on the site." Now follows a detailed account of the battle, pointing out numerous details of the role of Mauduit du Plessis.⁸

Three days later, on 5 September, his aides accompanied Rochambeau on a staff ride down the Delaware River. The group consisted of Rochambeau, his son, Baron Closen, the comte de Lauberdie, and Cromot du Bourg. This time Mauduit du Plessis, who had been in command of the American artillery at Fort Mercer during the British siege of 1777, served as their guide. Lauberdie wrote that "General Washington, having observed the courage and intrepidity of the Chevalier de Mauduit-Duplessis at the Battle of Germantown, then assigned him the defense of Red Bank."⁹

⁷ Cromot du Bourg, Marie-François baron, "Diary of a French Officer, 1781" *Magazine of American History* Vol. 4 (March 1880), pp. 205-214, (April 1880), pp. 293-308, (May 1880), pp. 376-385, (June 1880), pp. 441-452, pp. 381-82.

⁸ Norman Desmarais, *The Road to Yorktown: The French Campaigns in the American Revolution, 1780-1783*, by Louis-Francois-Bertrand du Pont d'Aubevoye, comte de Lauberdie (El Dorado Hills: Savas Beatty, 2021), pp. 137-39.

⁹ Desmarais, *Lauberdie*, p. 143. His account of the Battle of Fort Red Bank of 22 October 1777 is on pp. 142-43. All the accounts by Rochambeau's aides-de-camp contain long accounts of the battle.

An officer who may have traveled to Germantown by himself is the comte de Clermont-Crèvecoeur.¹⁰ He wrote into his journal: "Six miles from Philadelphia is a small town called Germantown, consisting of a single street about three-fourths of a league long. It is notable for the battle fought there on 4 October 1777 ... The road leading to this village is very wide and quite beautiful." Then follows his account of the battle, including the role of du Plessis.

This overview of visitors to Germantown and Cliveden is incomplete; additional sources may still come to light. Even so it shows that Washington, Rochambeau, Chastellux, and a host of other officers toured the battlefield of Germantown; the list of names reads almost like a who's who of Rochambeau's army. After Germantown this same group visited other sites of the 1777 Campaign such as Red Bank and Brandywine. These sites are important in explaining the reasons for France's decision in 1778 to openly join the American rebels, including them in WARO helps to tell the whole story of the war between 1778 and 1783.

¹⁰ Clermont-Crèvecoeur's journal is published in Howard C. Rice, Jr., and Anne S. K. Brown, eds., *The American Campaigns of Rochambeau's Army 1780, 1781, 1782, 1783* 2 vols., (Princeton and Providence, 1972), vol. 1, pp. 1-99, his account of Germantown is on pp. 49/50.