

Introduction: Washington's Headquarters

“Our situation compels us to search for the cause of our extreme poverty. The citizens murmur at the greatness of their taxes, and are astonished that no part reaches the army. The numerous demands, which are between the first collectors and the soldiers, swallow up the whole.”

-Letter to Congress from “officers of the United States Army”

When George Washington needed a headquarters at the end of the war, a family willingly offered its home for the general. While there, he was given the chance to become King George I of the United States of America. When New York Governor Hamilton Fish signed “An act for the purchase of Washington’s Headquarters in the village of Tappan,” he became the first public executive to use taxpayer money to purchase and maintain an historic site, he too made history. If either man hadn’t been a visionary, the history of the United States would have been very different.

The years leading up to Washington’s occupation of Newburgh were certainly eventful. With Maryland’s ratification of the Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union in 1781 the country had a truly national government, albeit one called a “firm league of friendship.” Unfortunately, this one branch government had to rely on the states for its revenues. Congress also had to rely upon the states to furnish men to fill up the ranks of its armed forces. With the British surrender at Yorktown on October 19th of that year, Washington needed to maintain a defensive posture. Remember that the British occupied New York City until 1783, so Washington had to make sure that his position was secure.

His selection of Newburgh was part of George Washington’s strategy of defending the Hudson Highlands. Although the Americans suffered some defeats there, they also established and held the fortifications at West Point. West Point itself was almost compromised with the defection of Benedict Arnold, however, it remained a bulwark against British efforts to seize and maintain control of the Hudson Valley. In April of 1782, Washington and 7,000 of his soldiers occupied Newburgh, New Windsor, and across the river, Fishkill. He would remain there until August 1783. While New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts can each boast having a Washington’s Headquarters, Newburgh was where he stayed the longest.

Even today, Jonathan Hasbrouck’s Dutch farmhouse has a commanding view of the river. Washington’s staff immediately made some modifications. A kitchen, at one time supervised by Mrs. Washington, was added along with a more modern chimney for the general’s room. When the occupation ended, many of the modifications were removed.

A visitor today can very quickly see how the City of Newburgh grew around the property. Since it was acquired in 1850 one can still experience what Washington himself did. There may have been a spirited discussion about using tax dollars to purchase the property. Governor DeWitt Clinton had to fight for the funding to building his “ditch,” the Erie Canal, only a few years before. The federal government was loathe to spend its money on internal improvements, so who was going to support the purchase of a historic site?

In 1850, another visionary governor, Hamilton Fish, signed into law “An act for the preservation of Washington’s Headquarters.” This is the first time that a government entity in the United States used

tax payer money to purchase an historic site. According the journalist Jeffrey Kalman, the original owner's grandson was about to lose the house, Fish's grandfather had been with Washington at Yorktown, had helped Washington select the Purple Heart recipients, and had been friends with none other than the Marquis de Lafayette. Whatever his motivation, one can make the argument that our late governor was instrumental in getting state governments to assume responsibilities for historic preservation.

Even today, groups like the Friends of the Fishkill Depot are drawing attention to the need to preserve sites that were almost obliterated by the construction of malls and other commercial development. Archaeologists have confirmed what many have believed for a long time that the bodies of a large number of American soldiers lay in unmarked graves on land zoned for commercial development.

With massive deficits, what should the government's responsibility be regarding historic preservation? Should private companies or trusts take on more responsibility? If so, what would happen if they were to fail?

Primary Sources:

--Letter from George Washington to General Henry Knox

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/letter-to-henry-knox-4/>

--Documents pertaining to the Newburgh Conspiracy (Library of Congress):

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/amrev/peace/newburgh.html>

--Copy of the law establishing the nation's first publicly acquired historic site- *An act for the preservation of Washington's Headquarters* as signed by Governor Hamilton Fish in 1850:

<http://books.google.com/books?id=vtYZAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA670&lpg=PA670&dq=An+Act+for+the+preservation+of+Washington%27s+Headquarters+1850&source=bl&ots=S6nF8RQKM-&sig=ILG0IIA7KzqytjWtWISXHnUVuMY&hl=en&sa=X&ei=FVEGUrDvNOSbygGbuIBA&ved=0CCoQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=An%20Act%20for%20the%20preservation%20of%20Washington%27s%20Headquarters%201850&f=false>

Print/Web Resources:

--"A true story of the acquisition of Washington's Headquarters at Newburgh by the state of New York":

<https://archive.org/details/truehistoryofacq02cald>

-Pamphlet on Washington's Headquarters State Historic Site:

http://www.hudsonrivervalley.org/learning/pdfs/guide_books/american_revolution/washingtonshheadquarters.pdf

--"The Newburgh Conspiracy Reconsidered" C. Edward Skeen and Richard H. Kohn *The William and Mary Quarterly* Third Series, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Apr., 1974), pp. 273-29

--"The Inside History of the Newburgh Conspiracy: America and the Coup d'Etat" Richard H. Kohn *The William and Mary Quarterly* Third Series, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Apr., 1970), pp. 187-220

-“The First Historic House Museum” Dorothy C. Barck *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* Vol. 14, No. 2 (May, 1955), pp. 30-32 Published by: University of California Press on behalf of the Society of Architectural Historians Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/987787>

-“Hamilton's Quarrel with Washington, 1781” Broadus Mitchell *The William and Mary Quarterly* Third Series, Vol. 12, No. 2, Alexander Hamilton: 1755-1804 (Apr., 1955), pp. 199-216 Published by: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1920506>

http://www.hudsonrivervalley.org/review/pdfs/hrvr_27pt1_bookreviews.pdf

<http://www.hudsonrivervalley.org/review/pdfs/hrvr28pt1online.pdf>

--“The Fish Connection to Washington’s Headquarters” Did Hamilton Fish Make the Preservation Possible?” <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1982&dat=19890722&id=Le5GAAAIBAJ&sjid=zDMNAAAAIBA&pg=1658,1726391>

-Documents and Research that pertain to the Fishkill Depot: <http://www.fishkillsupplydepot.org/research.html>

Teaching about Washington's Headquarters

Lesson Plan Introduction

There are a number of ways to address the topic of historical preservation. Students at all levels will appreciate the historical importance of Washington's Headquarters. Each of the activities below can be adapted according to the student's needs and abilities.

Suggested Grade Level: Grade 8

ACTIVITIES MENU:

Activity 1: Lobby your governor or the President of the United States to preserve a historic site.

-Proposal Format:

- Write a **persuasive letter** that illustrates the main reasons why this place should become a public historic site. Be specific. Be sure to mention the pamphlet that you are creating in the letter.
- Create a **three-fold pamphlet** that advertises the main points of your historic site. If images from the Internet are not available, then draw images yourself. Make the pamphlet attractive and interesting.

-Enrichment:

- **Invite a representative from an organization** like Friends of the Fishkill Depot to speak about their efforts to preserve the encampments. The visit might help your students become more familiar with the efforts of private citizens to preserve the remains of Revolutionary War soldiers.
 - Students may take notes to use in persuasive writing.

Activity 2: Compare one of the "other" Washington's headquarters to the headquarters at Newburgh.

-Venn Comparison:

- Using the **Internet** look up another one of Washington's Headquarters. Research the importance of this headquarters.
- Create a **Venn diagram** that compares Washington's Newburgh Headquarters and the second site you researched. Be sure to include information about the organization that runs the second historic site. Is it private or public? If it is public is it a state or national site?

-Evaluate:

- After you have compared the two sites, **identify** the one you think is more important historically and explain why you think this is so.

- Possible locations include:

- Headquarters of George Washington, Cumberland, Maryland (1755 to 1758, 1794)
- Longfellow House–Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site, Cambridge, Massachusetts (July 1775 to April 1776)
- Morris-Jumel Mansion, New York, New York (September to October 1776)
- Moland House, Hartsville, Pennsylvania (August 10 to August 24, 1777)
- Washington's Headquarters (Valley Forge), Pennsylvania, winter and spring 1777–1778
- Jacob Purdy House, White Plains, New York (July 23 to September 16, 1778, 1776?)
- John Kane House, Pawling, New York (September–November 1778)
- Morristown National Historical Park, Morristown, New Jersey (1779–1780)
- Dey Mansion, Wayne, New Jersey (July, October and November 1780)
- Berrien Mansion, Rockingham, Kingston, New Jersey (September to November 1783)

Activity 3: Research other historic sites in your town county

- **Research** historic sites in your county or region.
- **Choose one** from your research.
- Using **PowerPoint**, detail the following:
 - **Show pictures** of significant buildings or other attractions in the park.
 - **Identify** the agency: local, federal, state; that is responsible for establishing and operating the site. If possible, explain why the site was created and why it's historically significant.

Activity 4: Analyzing documents on the Newburgh Conspiracy

-**Read** the letter from George Washington to General Henry Knox:

http://www.pbs.org/georgewashington/collection/war_1783mar12.html

- [What does the letter reveal about Washington's understanding of the conspiracy?](http://www.pbs.org/georgewashington/collection/war_1783mar12.html)

-Read the document called "The memorial from the officers of the army":

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/amrev/peace/newburgh.html>

- What were the officer's grievances?

-Read the document called "Cantonment, 15 March, 1783":

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/amrev/peace/newburgh.html>

- What was General Washington's response?

EVALUATIONS:

-Why do think that George Washington responded this way?

-How would the country have been different if we had marched on Congress?

Activity 5: Arlington National Cemetery

-**Research** the origins of Arlington National Cemetery. Be sure to identify the reasons for the United States government's confiscating the property.

-**Visit** the Friends of the Fishkill Depot site. Explain the significance of the burial sites that the Friends wish to preserve.

-Visit the following site:

<http://votesmart.org/public-statement/609996/schumer-announces-important-step-forward-in-legislation-to-preserve-fishkill-supply-depot-and-honor-fallen-revolutionary-war-heroes-bill-to-promote-hudson-valley-tourism-earns-support-of-national-park-service#.UgZnz23AHps>

- **Explain** how Chuck Schumer is trying to change the laws concerning the burial sites of Revolutionary War soldiers. Would you support what he is trying to do?