



**The Continental Army's First Winter Encampment
January – May 1777**

**Lowantica Valley
Morris County, Chatham Township, New Jersey**

On Christmas night 1776, General George Washington and his Continental Army crossed the ice-choked Delaware River and marched to attack a Hessian force occupying Trenton, New Jersey. One week later, on January 2, 1777 Washington's troops successfully fought a British force near Trenton, and on the following day defeated the British at Princeton. After those decisive victories, Washington marched his army northward to Morris County bringing numerous prisoners, captured artillery and supplies with them.

General Washington made his headquarters in Arnold's Tavern on the Morristown Green and some of his officers were billeted in private homes. Most of the army was sent a few miles southeast to the Lowantica Valley (now called Loantaka) in present day Chatham Township. The site was ideal for a Winter Encampment because of its proximity to Lowantica Brook with its good source of fresh water. The lay of the land was a gentle, sloping ground which provided protection from the harsh northern winds. Numerous log cabins were constructed for the troops along with a parade ground for drilling. South of the cabins was the Commissary area needed for food preparation. Sheds were also constructed to protect the numerous horses which hauled the cannon. The Continental Army occupied the camp from January through May of 1777.

Shortly after the troops arrived at the Lowantica Valley, many soldiers and civilians in the area contracted Small Pox, a common deadly disease of the period. To prevent the disease from decimating his troops, Washington ordered a mass inoculation of the army. At this point in time, doctors did not understand the science behind inoculation, making it particularly risky. Many civilians were also inoculated including Martha Washington, who spent the winter with the General at Arnold's Tavern. The inoculation program was successful, and the epidemic was soon brought under control.

Nearly four score years after, in August 1855, the Reverend Samuel Tuttle of Madison, New Jersey, published a two-part oration in the *Newark Daily Advertiser* honoring those Continental Soldiers who suffered through the 1777 Winter Encampment. Reverend Tuttle wished to place a monument in the field where the encampment once stood. Unfortunately Tuttle's plan went unrealized and the Lowantica Encampment faded into history.

Afterwards, the encampment field was peacefully farmed for many decades and by the early 20th century the property was added to the Geraldine Rockefeller Dodge Estate. The field began to lay fallow and soon many trees grew and during the past few decades the area was taken over by invasive underbrush.

In 2016, the Morris County Park Commission and the Chatham Township Historical Society began working together to reclaim the area and create trails and apply for grants for informational signage. We are at the early stages of an exciting project which will honor the American Patriot—the common soldier who suffered for the cause of Freedom. After nearly 240 years, the First Winter Encampment of the Continental Army will finally receive the marked recognition it deserves.