

Crossing the Delaware



In 1776, the war for American Independence was not going well for George Washington and his troops. Malnourished, poorly clothed, lacking many of the basics that would keep an army strong, they had been handed a number of defeats and morale was at a low point. On top of all that, winter and its harsh weather conditions had arrived. Washington knew he needed a victory.

He concocted a bold and daring plan. Learning of a garrison of Hessian troops located in and around Trenton NJ, he decided that a surprise attack on Christmas by an overwhelming force would give his troops a quick victory and bolster support for the cause. The problem? The Delaware River which stood between him and his enemy was treacherous and needed skilled, experienced hands to navigate the winter waters.

Col. John Glover's regiment contained a number of New Englanders with extensive experience as seaman. To aid them, Washington mobilized about 100 locals who had first hand knowledge of the river. Among them was James Henry Slack, the 6th great grand uncle of my niece's husband. According to family lore, 20 year old James and his friends were standing by the shore, curious about why the soldiers were gathering. He walked up to one of the generals and asked, "What can we

do?" The general replied, "What do you know about the river?"
"Oh, we know all about it."

James and his two brothers became oarsmen who ferried Washington's troops across the partially frozen Delaware providing the future president the victory he so badly needed. There is evidence that James continued with Washington after this event. He was at Valley Forge in June 1778, White Plains in August 1778, Fort Schuyler from August to December of 1780, and at the High Hills of Santee in 1781. He eventually returned to his family farm in Bucks County PA where he married Alice Torbert and had seven children, the first in his family to be born under a newly independent American flag.

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