

Eastchester and the Battle of Pelham

October 18, 1776

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George Washington must have been despondent the day he came to Eastchester and might likely have had a drink at Guion's tavern near Saint Paul's Church. Seven months before he had succeeded in forcing the British to evacuate Boston. But the battle for the city of New York in the late summer and early fall of 1776 had been a catastrophe. Washington had lost miserably in Brooklyn and at Kip's Bay and Harlem Heights in Manhattan. His retreating army had set fire to New York City. The remains of his ill trained and dispirited army of ragtag farmers was strung out from the present day Bronx at Kingsbridge to White Plains on the west bank of the Bronx River.

The end looked near. Commanding General William Howe force of 4,000 British and Hessian troops planned to disembark at Pelham and split Washington's army in half and most likely end the American Revolution. Washington dispatched four regiments of Continental troops (about 750 men) under the command of John Glover, a wealthy merchant from Marblehead, Massachusetts to stop Howe's advance. Glover's forces were stationed on the Eastchester side of the Hutchinson River and used the half completed St. Paul's Church as a storage facility.

On the fall morning of October 18, 1776 glover climbed a hill and spotted the British forces moving into Eastchester Bay. The British disembarked at Rodman's Neck between City Island and Orchard Beach. Glover quickly moved his troops to check the British in Pelham. A fierce battle ensued. The most intense fighting took place around the Split Rock, located near the intersection of the New England Thruway and the Hutchinson River Parkway.

Glover's brigade was able to inflict dozens of casualties on the enemy. But more important General Howe's advance to split Washington's army had been thwarted. Howe for the time being would station his army on the eastern side of the county. Washington would bring his army to White Plains. John Glover ordered a withdrawal of his troops across the Hutchinson River and then a redeployment north along the road to White Plains (today Rt. 22) to Tuckahoe. Saint Paul's Church in then southern Eastchester would be used as a military hospital for the wounded Hessians.

Eastchester played a prominent role in this often overlooked but important Battle of Pell's Point or Pelham. Some amateur historians called the Battle of Pelham the battle that saved the American Revolution. That might be an overstatement. But if Glover had not stopped the advance of Howe's army, Washington and his army would have suffered serious consequences.

Saturday, October 18th of this year is the 232th anniversary of the battle. Saint Paul's National Historic Site annually stages an encampment of revolutionary war enactors that is fascinating to both old and young. The encampment includes militia drill and musket firing demonstrations, historic children's games and activities, demonstrations on the use of the church as a wartime field hospital, talks on the American Revolution, and demonstrations of period's crafts, cooking and music, with dozens of costumed re-enactors representing the various armies that fought in the Revolutionary War. Sat., Oct. 18, 10 AM to 4 PM, free admission.

An additional Encampment related special program will be Friday night, Oct. 17, beginning at 7 PM, featuring a concert of 18th century folk musician the church, by the renowned Linda Russell and Company, and a candlelight tour of the historic cemetery. Admission is free and refreshments are served.