

Cover Sheet

Overview

This is a chapter from the fourth edition of the e-book “**In Search of the Turkey Foot Road: Unraveling the mystery, charting new history, plotting the route**” (2014). To access other chapters, see the [online table of contents](#).

As described on pages 3 to 6 of [Addendum A](#), the fourth edition mistakenly claims that a dashed line route on the 1755 Fry and Jefferson map is an antecedent to the Turkey Foot Road. Shortly after publication, I realized that the dashed lines actually represent Christopher Gist’s second Ohio Company Tour. If that or another known mistake affects this or another chapter of the book, the relevant text will be highlighted in yellow, and the mistake will be briefly described in a comment that is accessible via a clickable comment icon.

In this and other chapters of the book, any supplemental information will be provided via clickable comment icons, inserted yellow sheets, or other readily identifiable means.

L. Dietle

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Comment specific to this chapter

Fort Cumberland, the subject of this chapter, is covered in more detail in my 984-page, two-volume book “**Fort Cumberland**,” which is published by the Allegany County Historical Society.

40. Fort Cumberland

Some thoughts on its origin

There has been a great deal of undocumented, conflicting information published about Fort Cumberland. According to Page 83 of Lowdermilk's 1878 book "**History of Cumberland**", ([Appendix 0002](#)) Colonel Innes began construction on a stockade fort at the mouth of Wills Creek on September 12, 1754. The resulting structure was known as Fort Mount Pleasant. Ultimately, a fort at that location was named Fort Cumberland. Some sources say that the original fort was simply renamed, while others suggest that Fort Cumberland was a second, larger fort. Some sources even state that the fort was erected by the Ohio Company, or was an expansion of an Ohio Company structure.⁷⁹⁴ While far from comprehensive, this chapter provides some thoughts on the subject.

Governor Dinwiddie instructs Colonel Innes to set up a defense

In August 1754, Virginia Lieutenant Governor Dinwiddie provided instructions to Colonel Innes as follows:

There are six swivels at Will's Creek belong to the Ohio Company, which is all we have. You must make use of them...

This is a reference to swivel guns ([Figure 0755](#)). A swivel gun is a small cannon that is mounted on a swivel ([Figure 0725](#)) that resembles the oarlock of a rowboat.

On August 30, 1754, Dinwiddie issued an order to Colonel Innes as follows:

...take possession of the Ohio company's warehouse at Will's creek for your provisions; get your great guns up there, mount them for defence. Can you make sheds round it for accommodating your people in case of bad weather?

In a September 5, 1754 letter to Governor Sharpe, Dinwiddie wrote:

I have ordered Colo Innes to take Possession of the Ohio Company's Warehouse which will make a very good Magazine, & we had better pay rent than begin to build, have directed a Breast Work & the great Guns to be mounted for Defence; & if they can build a Shed round it, may be proper for the Soldiers to lodge in; & to proceed to the Mountains to build a Fort to secure a Pass by the Time we can collect a sufficient Force to attack the Enemy...

Dinwiddie's order to Innes may be part of the reason why some books report that Fort Cumberland was based on an Ohio Company structure. Various documents prove that the fort and the Ohio Company storehouse were actually located on opposite sides of the Potomac River, including contemporaneous maps that show both the fort and the storehouse.

⁷⁹⁴ For example, the 1969 book "**History of Allegany County, Maryland**", by Thomas and Williams indicates that Fort Cumberland was built by the Ohio Company in 1750.

October 1754 references to the fort

George Croghan mentions Fort Mount Pleasant on October 16, 1754

The minutes of the December 3, 1754 Provincial Council of Pennsylvania record an October 16, 1754⁷⁹⁵ letter that was written by George Croghan. A sentence in that letter reads:

Colonel Innis has Built a Fortification at the Mouth of Wills' Creek opposite to the New Store called Fort Mount Pleasant.

This letter clearly and unambiguously states that the original fort had already been completed and named by October 16, 1754, and was not an enlargement of the Ohio Company storehouse.

October 1754 letters mention the fort

In an October 25, 1754 letter to Sir Thomas Robinson, Governor Sharpe mentions several forts, including “...one that is already begun at a Place called Wills-Creek on Potomack River, designed to be a Magazine for the Troops that shall be employed in the Service...”

The January 1755 “**Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure**” includes an extract from an October 29, 1754 letter from Virginia that states:

Ever since our last defeat the remains of our small army have been employed in building a fort at Will's Creek, about sixty miles to the backward of our settlements, which is supposed to be designed for a place of general rendezvous for the forces.

At the time of the October 29, 1754 letter, the “last defeat” was Washington’s July 3, 1754 surrender at Fort Necessity.

Barracks were being constructed in November 1754

Governor Sharpe’s December 15, 1757 message to the Lower House of the Maryland Assembly indicates that barracks were being constructed in November 1754. Here is the pertinent excerpt:

When the Officers had recruited about fifty Men, some of them were ordered to march with them, and encamp on Colonel Cresap's Plantation, where they continued until November, and then proceeded to join his Majesty's Three Independent Companies, that were then employed in building Barracks at the Place since known by the Name of Fort Cumberland.

According to Scharf’s 1882 book “**History of Western Maryland**”, an officer wrote the following from Fort Cumberland on November 21, 1754: “We now have got a fort completed, with barracks for our men at the back of it, well built, comfortable for the winter. We had the pleasure of being joined three days ago by his Excellency Col. Sharpe, with one company from Maryland.”

A Fort and barracks are mentioned in an April 1755 letter

In an April 19, 1755 letter to his brother John Sharpe, Governor Sharpe describes a trip made after September 1754, writing:

Upon my Return to Annapolis I called a new Assembly to meet the 10th of Decem^r with sanguine hopes of finding them well disposed to grant sufficient Supplies & in the intervening time I paid a

⁷⁹⁵ This date is erroneously reported as October 26, 1754 in Volume XII of Hazard’s “**Pennsylvania Archives**”.

Visit to the Independant Companies who were encamped & building themselves a kind of Fort & Barracks at Wills-Creek.

Sharpe's December 10, 1754 letter describes Fort Mount Pleasant

According to the 1888 book “**Archives of Maryland Correspondence of Governor Horatio Sharpe Vol. I. 1753-1757**”, on December 10, 1754, Governor Sharpe of Maryland wrote the following to Lieutenant Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia:

I returned last Thursday from Wills Creek where I found the Independants preparing for themselves Barracks, having already compleated the small Stoccado Fort about which you were advised they had been employed; but as the Fort they have finished is exceedingly small its Exterior Side not exceeding 120 feet I conceived it requisite or rather absolutely necessary to have another much larger raised on an adjacent & more elevated piece of Ground which I have ordered the Maryland Company to proceed on & I hope they will be able to finish it this winter. The Eminence on which it will be situated gives it an entire Command of that already compleated & will defend a Face of that small Fort to which an Enemy might at present approach without being much annoyed or hardly seen from within. however That on which The Troops have been employed may be useful at present & will serve to enclose Store Houses or a Magazine after the other is compleated which I think by an advanced Out Work or two will be easily defended against a considerable number of Troops that may presume to attack it with only a light Train.

This eyewitness account suggests that the initial fort structure did not have storehouses in December 1754. This helps to prove that the fort was not an expansion of an Ohio Company storehouse. The statement about the 120-foot length of the exterior sides is an exact match to the east-west dimension of the bastioned portion of Fort Cumberland that is illustrated on drawing 122/38 of the “*King's Maps and Drawings*”. A June 20, 1874 copy of that drawing ([Figure 0967](#)) is in the possession of the Darlington Memorial Library, and is available online via the Darlington Digital Library. It is titled “*A PLAN OF FORT CUMBERLAND on Will's CREEK & POTOMACK River with a View of the Store Houses belonging to the OHIO COMPANY on the other Side of the RIVER.*” The fort structure is described as follows: “*This Fort is made of Puncheons of Wood cut 12 Feet and set three Feet in the Ground. There is 10 Pieces of Cannon mounted in the Fort & Bastions. 1 Pounder and 4 Smal (sic) Swivels*”. The fort is protected on the east by Wills Creek and by a bluff described on the map as “*The bank from here is very steep, and about 20 feet Perpendicular Height*”. The north side of the fort is protected by “*Stony RUN*”. The map identifies the location of parade grounds, officer's houses, storehouses, guard rooms, the magazine, and the commanding officer's house. One building on the south side of the Potomac River is illustrated as a three-bay two-story structure, and the other has the appearance of a tall blockhouse.

The Darlington library also has a June 20, 1874 copy of drawing 122/39, which is “*A Plan of the Fort and Barracks at Mount Pleasant in Maryland*”. Drawing 122/39 is more detailed than 122/38. Each bastion has four cannon; one for each exposed wall. This means that two of the cannon point into the barracks section of the overall fortification. The drawing has labels for the commanding officer's house, storehouses for provisions, sentinel's guardroom, magazine, sally port, company's parade, officer's quarters, men's barracks, commissary's house, hospital, places of defense for small arms, fort parade grounds, grand parade grounds, north and south gates, and water gates. The commissary's house and hospital are separate structures, located outside the fort. Three houses are

shown west of the fort. The “*New Store*” is illustrated as being due south of the fort proper, on the opposite side of the Potomac River.

The May 10, 1755 Seamen’s journal entry describes a large fort

Page 373 of Winthrop Sargent’s 1855 book “**An Expedition against Fort Du Quesne in 1755; Under Major-General Edward Braddock...**” includes the May 10, 1755 journal entry of a Detachment of Seamen, which describes Fort Cumberland as follows:

At 2 we arrived at Will’s Creek, and encamped to the Westward of the Fort on a hill, and found here 6 Companies of Sir Peter Halket’s Reg^t., 9 Companies of Virginians, and a Maryland Company. Fort Cumberland is situated within 200 yards of Will’s Creek, on a hill, and about 400 from the Potomack; its length from east to west is about 200 yards, and breadth 46 yards, and is built by logs driven into the ground, and about 12 feet above it, with embrasures for 12 guns, and 10 mounted, 4 pounders, besides stocks for swivels, and loop holes for small arms.

Clearly, by the time of the May 10, 1755 Seaman’s journal entry, the structure was already named “*Fort Cumberland*”.

The 200-by-46-yard (600-by-138-foot) estimate by an eyewitness is radically different from the 400-by-160-foot estimate that Lowdermilk gives in his 1878 book “**History of Cumberland...**” ([Appendix 0002](#)). Scaling map 122/38 ([Figure 0967](#)) with dial calipers, and using a scale established by averaging the dimensions on the map, yields an estimate of 412 by 165 feet. This result is similar to Lowdermilk’s estimate, and suggests that Lowdermilk’s estimate is based on scaling map 122/38.

The May 21, 1755 entry in the Seamans’ journal states:

There are 100 Carpenters employed, under the Carpenter of the “Sea-horse,” in building a Magazine, completing a Flatt, and squaring timber to make a bridge over Will’s Creek; the Smiths is making tools; the Bakers baking biscuits; and Commissaries getting the provisions ready for marching.

Captain Charles Lewis describes a small fort on October 26, 1755

Another, much different eyewitness account is provided in the journal of Captain Charles Lewis that is reprinted in Volume one of the 1833 “**Collections of the Virginia Historical & Philosophical Society**”.

October 25th—Marched from Patterson’s Creek. Passed many deserted houses. I was this day very curious in the examination of the mischief done in the houses, and was much shocked at the havoc made by the barbarous, cruel Indians at one Mecraggin’s⁷⁹⁶. I found the master of the family, who had been buried but slightly by his friends after his assassination, half out of the grave, and eaten by the wolves; the house burnt, the corn-field laid waste, and an entire ruin made. At half-past 6 we arrived at Fort Cumberland, cold and hungry. We had this day, by Major Lewis’s order, two women ducked⁷⁹⁷ for robbing the deserted houses. Twenty miles. ...

⁷⁹⁶ According to the Fry and Jefferson map (Chapter 6), Mecraggins’ place was located south of the fort, at a fork in “*Pattisons Creek*”. The residence is identified as “M. Krakens” on the 1755 map “*Carte de la Virginie et du Maryland*”.

⁷⁹⁷ Ducking was the lowering of a person into a body of water as punishment, sometimes by using a chair on a long lever. The punishment is described in Volume 2 of Adolphus’ 1818 book “**The political state of the British empire**” as follows: “*DUCKING STOOL. Formerly, but not now-a-days, there was in every parish, near a pond, an engine of correction called*

October 26th—*This day Lieutenant Walter Stewart showed me the fort. 'Tis a Quad^r fort, with four Bast^{ns}; about one hundred feet in the square; has eleven four pounders and two smaller, mounted. 'Tis situated on the north side of the Potomack, in Maryland, on a hill; very pleasant: more so, I think, than advantageous; has a romantick prospect from the mountains, and is very healthy. I was this day ordered to return to Fredericksburg, but my horses being tired, I was excused.*

Lewis describes a fort that was a four-sided enclosure (a quadrangle) that had four bastions, and was “*about one hundred feet in the square*”. Bastions are projections at the corners of a fortification that allow fire to be directed along the outer faces of the curtains (i.e., along the straight palisade walls).

The estimate by Lewis provides a dimension that is reasonably close to the dimensions given for the bastioned portion of the fort on map 122/38. Clearly, the length estimate in the Seamen’s journal includes all of the fort, while the Lewis estimate only includes the bastioned portion.

In a November 26, 1755 journal entry regarding a day trip, Lewis makes very clear that the New Storehouse was on the other side of the Potomac from Fort Cumberland, and an entirely different structure from Fort Cumberland. He writes:

We found here an Indian cap made of bear skin, and then we proceeded on our march to the new store, built by the Ohio Company, from whence we crossed the Potomack river, and before night got into Fort Cumberland.

Captain Snow’s map mis-illustrates the location of the storehouse

Captain Snow’s distorted, out-of-scale 1754 map of western Pennsylvania ([Figure 0005](#)) shows a road leading from the Ohio Company’s new storehouse at Wills Creek to Trent’s fort at the present-day location of Pittsburgh. Snow shows the storehouse to be on the north side of the Potomac River. Snow’s map may be part of the reason why some books report that Fort Cumberland was based on an Ohio Company structure.

Lewis’ November 26, 1755 journal entry and Gist’s November 4, 1751 journal entry indicate that the new storehouse was on the south side of the Potomac River. Evans’ and Gist’s firsthand accounts state that the new storehouse was a separate building, and NOT incorporated into Fort Cumberland. George Croghan’s October 16, 1754 letter indicates that the fort and the storehouse were on opposite sides of the Potomac River. These men’s views harmonize with the [Figure 0155](#) “*Sketch of the Situation of Fort Cumberland*”, endorsed by George Washington, that shows the New Store and blockhouse on the south side of the Potomac River, and Fort Cumberland on the north side. These reliable eyewitnesses and map 122/38 correct Snow’s mistake.

Harmonizing the Seamen and Lewis journals with Sharpe

Page 144 of the 1855 book “**Braddock’s Expedition: A Monograph**” states that the barracks were “*arranged in the manner of a fortified camp, flanking and flanked by the fort*”. While the book is not in itself original documentary evidence, the quoted statement seems possibly to have been

the trebucket, castigatory, or cucking stool, which in the Saxon language is said to signify the scolding stool, for the punishment of common scolds, who after conviction on indictment, might be sentenced to it. The name is frequently corrupted into ducking stool, because the residue of the judgment is, that she who is so placed therein is plunged in the water for her punishment.”

referencing some original document that related to a visit to the fort by Governor Sharpe on January 26, 1755.

[Figure 0154](#) is an original British plan of Fort Cumberland that is reprinted in Lowdermilk's 1878 book "**History of Cumberland**". The representation of the fort appears to be based on map 122/38, but the surrounding landscape does not. The plan in Lowdermilk's book shows an elongated structure that consists of a small quadrangle fort with four bastions that is flanked by, and connected to a large fortified camp. Two of the bastions face the fortified camp, and are **interior** to the overall structure. The fact that two bastions face the interior of the overall fortified structure strongly suggests that the small quadrangle fort with four bastions was the original Fort Mount Pleasant that was described in Sharpe's December 10, 1754 letter, and described again in the October 26, 1755 journal entry of Captain Charles Lewis. Without being an expert on Fort Cumberland, one still may surmise that the Fort Cumberland structure consisted of the 120-foot-square Fort Mount Pleasant structure and an addition. The addition appears to have been a fortified camp that was added on the lower (eastern) side of the fort, and enclosed two of the bastions.

Page 89 of Lowdermilk's book states:

The fortifications were drawn to a scale, but the proportions were not preserved in mapping out the river, creek, and surrounding grounds. This fact made it somewhat difficult to establish the exact lines of the work, and compelled a resort to the memory of our oldest inhabitants. Mr. Jesse Korn's has a distinct recollection of climbing over the remaining earth-works when a boy, and he fixes the easterly lines of the fort—that portion of it which runs to a point nearest Wills Creek—some forty feet east of Emmanuel Church. The conformation of the ground at that spot is strongly confirmatory of his opinion...

That church is located at Latitude 39.650614°, Longitude -78.765321°. [Figure 0626](#) shows the location of the church, as seen from Ridgeley, West Virginia. According to Page 254 of the 1949 book "**The Genealogy of Michael Korn, Sr. of Somerset County Pennsylvania**", Jesse Korn was born 1809, and died 1888.

Tunnels

At least one tunnel from Fort Cumberland survives ([Figure 0634](#)) beneath the Emanuel Episcopal Church building. Additional information on the tunnels is provided on pages 5 and 7 of the February 1972 "**Heritage Press**". In a quote from the "*Greensberry series on Maryland*", page 5 mentions a tunnel that went to the library basement, and another tunnel with an ammunition storage room. Page 7 has a photo of the storage room ([Figure 0710](#)).

A 1756 council of war at Fort Cumberland adds to the description

A "Council of War" was held at Fort Cumberland on October 30, 1756, "*To consult whether it is most for the advantage of His Majesty's Service, to keep or demolish Fort Cumberland.*" The minutes state "*In the first place, the particular situation and structure of the Fort was considered, namely,—Its being built of stockades bout nine feet high above ground and never intended for defence against artillery. ... that the Barracks are without the fort; ill-built, & easily set on fire by the enemy... That there is no water to be had except the river or creek—to the latter of which there is a subterraneous passage opened lately, but not to be depended on, without a strong Garrison to defend it.*"

Governor Sharpe describes the fort in 1756

A 1756 letter from Governor Sharpe to the Secretary of State derisively describes Fort Cumberland, and indicates it was a stockade fort with 10 cannon:

There are no works in this province that deserve the name of fortifications; just behind, and among our westernmost settlements, are some small stoccado or pallisadoed forts, built by the inhabitants for the protection of their wives and children; and besides these, there is one larger, though in my opinion not much more capable of defense, on Potowmack; about 56 miles beyond our settlements. It has been distinguished by the appellation of fort Cumberland, and is at present garrisoned by three hundred men from Virginia. It is made with stoccadoes only, and commanded almost on every side by circumjacent hills; a considerable quantity of military stores, that was left by General Braddock, still remain there, and ten of the carriage guns that his majesty was pleased to order to Virginia, two years ago, are mounted therein...

This letter was used against Governor Sharpe later, on December 15, 1757, when he requested money for garrisoning Fort Cumberland. The preface to Volume 55 of Maryland's "**Proceedings and Acts of the General Assembly, 1757-1758**" states:

In a lengthy address to Governor Sharpe under date of December 15, 1757, the Lower House gave its version of the original establishment of Fort Cumberland on the Potomac at Wills Creek, declaring that it had been informed that it was originally built, not as a fort but by "some Gentlemen of the Ohio Company, as a Store-House for their Goods, designed for the Ohio Indian Trade, and never was Garrisoned by Troops stationed there by Direction of any Law of this Province, but commonly by Virginia Forces". This address then went on to say that the Governor himself in 1756 had described Fort Cumberland as a mere stockaded enclosure, difficult to defend as it was commanded on all sides by nearby hills, and that the Fort then contained military stores left there in 1756 by Gen. Braddock, and 10 carriage guns, with a garrison of some three hundred Virginians (pp. 357-358). In a sharp reply the Governor bluntly informed the Lower House that its opinion that Fort Cumberland should be abandoned would in no wise influence Loudoun. He concluded by saying that as regards the assertion of the Lower House that "Fort Cumberland was first begun by some Gentlemen of the Ohio Company as a Store-House whoever gave you that Information told you a Falsehood, not that it is Material who began it" (pp. 386-387). Unfortunately Sharpe did not state what was in his opinion the origin of Fort Cumberland.

The December 15, 1757 address may also be part of the reason why some books report that Fort Cumberland was an enlargement of the Ohio Company storehouse, or was originally built by the Ohio Company.

A 1758 magazine explosion at Fort Cumberland

A November 3, 1758 letter from Governor Sharpe to Baltimore describes a September 27, 1758 magazine explosion at Fort Cumberland:

On my Arrival at Fort Cumberland the Virginians evacuated it & encamped but they did not march towards Raes Town till late in Sept the 27th of that month I had the misfortune to lose one of our Militia Captains & a Young Gentleman that I had appointed Adjutant by the following Accident; Some of the People who were sick being in great want of Bedding the abovementioned Gentlemen went into a Store Room for some old Tents &c. which had been heretofore left there by the Virginia Troops, it happened that among a great many other Stores which had been deposited

in this Place there were three or four Barrells or Parts of Barrells of Powder & some useless Arms some of which were probably loaded, while the Gentlⁿ were pulling out the Tents I imagine that one of the Firelocks must have fallen down & gone off otherwise I cannot account for the unhappy Accident. All that we know for certain is that the Store was blown up the Captain & Adjutant killed & the Fort in an Instant set on fire in several Places particularly in one a very few Yards only from the grand Magazine of Powder, the Door of which was burst open.

The fort was demolished by 1775

An eyewitness says the fort was dilapidated in 1766

On Sunday, June 22, 1766, Charles Mason (of Mason and Dixon fame) wrote the following in his journal:

Went to see Fort Cumberland: It is beautifully situated on a rising ground, close in the Northwest fork made by the falling in of Wills Creek into Potowmack; The Fort is in bad repair; has in it at present only 10 Six Pounders. Going to the Fort I fell into General Braddock's Road, which he cut through the Mountains to lead the Army under his command to the Westward in the year 1755, but fate; how hard: made through the desert a path, himself to pass; and never; never to return.

An eyewitness says the fort was no longer standing in 1775

According to the 1924 book “**The Journal of Nicholas Cresswell**”, Fort Cumberland was no longer standing by 1775. Cresswell’s October 12, 1775 journal entry states: “...*Fort Cumberland now deserted and demolished on Wills Creek and Potowmeck River.*”

An 1816 description of Fort Cumberland and the site of the Ridgeley area blockhouse

Uria Brown’s 1816 journal, which is reproduced in Volume X of the 1915 “**Maryland Historical Magazine**”, describes the town of Cumberland, the site of Fort Cumberland, and the former location of the Ohio Company blockhouse, as follows:

The Town of Cumberland is a handsome little place with many good brick buildings in the same, it is situated on the North Branch of the River Potomac, Wills Creek a large Stream of Water running through the Town (directly emptying itself in the River) affords an opportunity for the erection of several Merchant Mills, One large New Brick Mill looks well is an acquisition to the place, is bounded in the front by Spurs of the Alegany Mountain, on the rear, the right & the Left by those Little Bull dog Mountains, the whole Afford when on the neighboring hills a pleasant lively romantick appearance (no scarcity of Romanticks in this world).

There is a handsome Bridge hung upon Chains which carry over Wills Creek into the other part of Town, directly ascending the Hill after crossing bridge on an high yes very high Eminance stand the ruins of the old fort (which takes the mind to Braddocks War) it has full command of the river Down the same for a mile & up about ½ a Mile, the river here makes a very quick short Bend in the form of a horse Shoe, the fort directly standing on the out side of the Shoe at the Toe of the same, which gives comand on both sides of the Shoe, or other wise both up & down the River; directly opposite this Fort over the River in Virginia Hampshire County, within the Shoe or in the Bend of the River on an high Eminance was erected another Fort which had good command of the River up & down where this fort was, now, stands a large & spacious Brick Dwelling...

The large brick home that Brown describes at the site of the blockhouse is the circa 1794 Calmes mansion. For a circa 1870 photo of the mansion, see the article “*The Ridgeley Triangle*” in the 2012 issue of the “**Journal of the Alleghenies**”.

