

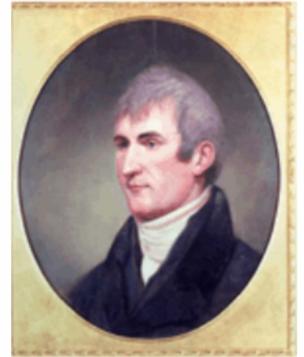
Meriwether Lewis and the Nemaocolin Trail Through Squirrel Hill

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The inspiration for this article is a project by the National Park Service that will link Squirrel Hill to the Lewis and Clark Expedition. The SHHS was contacted by the consulting group that created and maintains the website *Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Experience* (<https://lewisandclark.travel/>), regarding their desire to include the Neill log home in Schenley Park on their interactive map because of their belief that Meriwether Lewis passed near there in 1803. The link to this project will soon be put on the SHHS.

Perhaps no roadway in Squirrel Hill is more rooted in early American history than the Nemaocolin Trail, said to have passed closely by the historic Neill Log Home and Catahecassa Fountain in Schenley Park. The Nemaocolin Trail was created by a King's Man from Maryland and a Delaware Indian Chief who improved a network of hunting paths, first blazed by buffalo through the Cumberland Narrows in Maryland. And though

the original trail ended just outside of Brownsville on the Monongahela River, an extension of it is believed to have passed through Squirrel Hill. The Nemaocolin Trail also became Braddock's Road and parts of U.S. Route 40, the National Road. We will focus first on the most recent reference to the trail and its connection to Squirrel Hill.



Meriwether Lewis by

Charles Wilson Peale, 1807

Meriwether Lewis' Travel to Early Pittsburgh

The history of Meriwether Lewis' route to Pittsburgh on the Nemaocolin Trail is somewhat speculative. It is known that he arrived in Pittsburgh in May 1803 with two wagons of supplies and left in August with his keelboat and crew to meet William Clark in St. Louis. His exact route into Pittsburgh is not as well documented. In a letter he penned to President Jefferson from Harpers Ferry in 1803, he stated his intention to follow the Nemaocolin Trail—"I shall set out myself in the course of an hour, taking the route of Charlestown, Frankfurt, Uniontown and Redstone Old Fort to Pittsburgh " Redstone, also known as Redstone Old Fort, is a neighborhood of Brownsville, Pennsylvania, on the Monongahela River, the historic end of the original Nemaocolin Trail. The only reference found to the Nemaocolin Trail in Pittsburgh is in the application to the Pittsburgh Historic Commission of the Catahecassa Monument at the Neill Log Home. Those who continued their journey from the historic end of the trail at Redstone to the Point would have considered being on an extension of the trail. The application states that early travelers through the forest, on the "nearby Nemaocolin Trail," would water their horses at Snyder's Spring, which fed the fountain.

We can believe that Lewis favored a route into Pittsburgh with which he was familiar. Though he originally penned his "intention" to take the trail to Redstone Old Fort, it is more likely he settled on a more direct route to the Point on a section of the Nemaocolin Trail first improved by Braddock's forces. This is described below as a branch of that trail leading "sharply to the northeast," the direct route to Pittsburgh chosen as Braddock's Road to Ft. Duquesne. Lewis' first trip to the Point was as a young private in the Virginia Militia, sent there to suppress the Whiskey Rebellion. This was when he first traveled Braddock's Road to Braddock's Field in 1794. The Field, where those who assembled for the Whiskey Rebellion were encamped, was where General Braddock was earlier defeated.

On Lewis' later trip to prepare for his expedition, he reported "the weather has been warm and dry ... and the roads subsequently dusty." It was also documented that he ferried his wagons across the Monongahela River near Braddock. And, because the route along the river shore to the Point would have been swampy travel for his wagons even in dry weather, it is also likely he chose an overland route from Braddock's Field to the Point. This all lends credibility to his traveling close to the Neill log home before his last four miles to the Point. He could have traveled from the Mon Valley via an early extension of the Braddock Road, across Nine Mile Run, and uphill into what is now Squirrel Hill. An 1822 map of Pennsylvania that shows early roads in Pittsburgh (see map excerpt on page 1 OJ) suggests he could have traveled part of old Saline Street, an early wagon trail, to where he could have watered his horses at Snyder's Spring near the Neill house. From there he would have continued on an overland route shown on this map leading directly to the Point, roughly following a road preceding Forbes or Fifth Avenues. In 1755, it took Braddock's forces two months to make this trip from the Cumberland Gap to Western Pennsylvania. In 1794, the Virginia Militia made it in one month. With two wagons of supplies, Lewis made the trip in 13 days.

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Beginning of the Nemaocolin Trail

I would now like to go back to the very beginning of what came to be called the Nemaocolin Trail, before it became the Braddock Road or the National Pike. In 1750, Thomas Cresap, an agent for the King from Maryland, worked with Chief Nemaocolin from the Delaware Tribe to improve an ancient network of Indian trails first blazed by buffalo. This was to provide passage through the great barrier of the Allegheny Mountains running north and south, connecting the Potomac and Monongahela River watersheds. The passage is called the Cumberland Narrows.

Cresap worked for Christopher Gist, a prominent figure in Western frontier exploration. Their goal was to create a passage to the Ohio Lands, or Ohio Frontier, to secure rights for England. This quest was the reason for the later French and Indian War between England and France. A map referenced under "Plates and Maps" in the sources at the end of this article is the earliest known version of the Nemaocolin Trail, probably drawn by George Washington himself before Ft. Duquesne was erected. It starts at Wills Creek, traveling to what the locals call the "true" end of the trail at Redstone Old Fort on the Monongahela River in Brownsville. Portions of this route would later become the National Road, or Route 40, the first federally funded highway in the U.S.

Cresap would have pursued this westerly route because, as a Maryland agent, he would have wanted to divert trade from Pennsylvania by creating a more direct route to the lucrative Ohio Lands. Other branches off this "true" route of the Nemaocolin Trail lead sharply to the northeast, later chosen by Braddock for his march to Ft. Duquesne. The first branch is at a location where Christopher Gist once operated a plantation just past a landmark called "Half-King's Rocks" outside Uniontown, just beyond Big Meadows where Washington was later defeated at Ft. Necessity. The 1754 map referred to above shows this north-east branch, probably still an unimproved hunting path, proceeding all the way to Turtle Creek and the Delaware Indian village called Shannopin Town, in present day Lawrenceville.

The March toward Fort Duquesne and Braddock's Road

In 1755, General Braddock set out to travel north to Ft. Duquesne from Virginia with an expeditionary force of 600 men to drive the French from the fort and the Ohio country. He came across the Nemaocolin Trail somewhat by accident in attempting to cross the mountain chain from Maryland into Pennsylvania. After destroying several wagons in the rugged terrain, one of his lieutenants found a passage blazed through the Cumberland Narrows, the beginning of the Nemaocolin Trail. His forces widened the trail to 12 feet as they advanced on the northeast branch toward Connellsville to McKeesport on the Monongahela River, just south of Ft. Duquesne. West of Chestnut Ridge, Braddock used sections of the Catawba path and other Indian paths for his route. History records that he only made it as far as Braddock's Field, in present-day North Braddock, where his forces were defeated and he was mortally wounded.

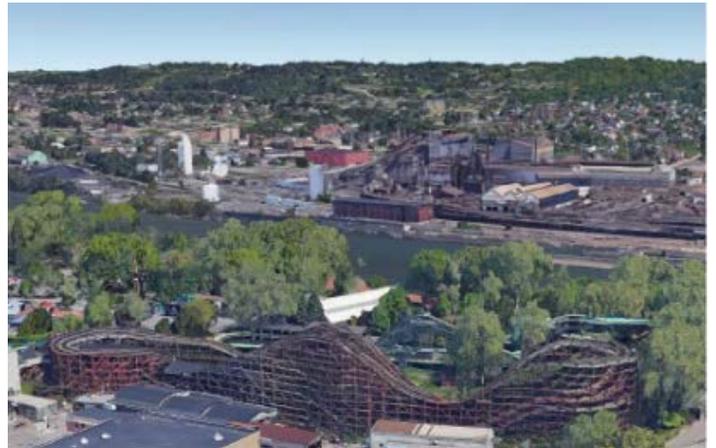
The entire course of the Nemaocolin Trail has been painstakingly documented in the book, *Indian Paths of Pennsylvania*, by Paul A. W. Wallace. And for reconstructing the probable course of Braddock's route, there is no better source than early 19th century Harvard historian John Henry Lacock. He researched the ancient Nemaocolin Trail to Braddock's Field and back again to where Braddock died and was buried, near Great Meadows and Fort Necessity. This research from 1908 and 1909, published in 1910 with his map of Braddock's Road, stands as the definitive authority of what started out as Indian and buffalo paths.

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The map to the right is an excerpt from an 1922 map of Pennsylvania in the Library of Congress. It shows a route across Squirrel Hill that appears to be an extension of Braddock's Road, possibly following Nemacolin's trail along an old alignment of Saline Street into Four Mile Run valley. If Lewis used this route to travel to Pittsburgh, he might have traveled close to the Neill house. The map shows Pittsburgh at the Point. The word "PITT" is diagonally in the middle of the map. Until 1833, Squirrel Hill was part of Pitt Township.



A picture of what Braddock's Battlefield looked like before the Edgar Thompson Steel Mill covered the area.



A screen shot from Google Earth showing the location of the battle across from Kennywood Park today.

Sources:

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Hulbert, Archer Butler. *Washington's Road (Nemacolin's Path): The First Chapter of the Old French War*. Arthur H. Clark Company: Cleveland, Ohio, 1903.
Wallace, Paul A. W. *Indian Paths of Pennsylvania*. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Pa. Historical and Museum Commission: Harrisburg, 1987. Lacock, John Kennedy. "Braddock Road." *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*. 1914, Vol. 38, No. 1., pp. 1-38.
Web Source/"Legends of America. Historic Highways of America." Volume 3: Nemacolin's Trail in Pennsylvania and Maryland.
Wikipedia.org/"Nemacolin's Path. Historic Highways of America." Volume 3.

Plates and Maps:

Braddock's Road by John Kennedy Lacock

Map: Wiki/Braddock Road (Braddock Expedition)

"Map of Nemacolin Trail from Wills Creek, drawn before the erection of Ft. Duquesne, evidently on the basis of Washington's information secured in 1753." (p. 109, above reference: Hulbert, Archer Butler. *Washington's Road*) 1822 Map of Pennsylvania, Library of Congress