

Docent Dispatch

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In This Issue

- Book Review:
Braddock's March
- Calendar of Events
- Happy Hour

CARLYLE HOUSE

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Notes from Braddock's March

Book review by Derek Hoffman

Thomas Crocker's book [Braddock's March](#), available in the Carlyle House library, provides some interesting historical context for tours of the house. On a grassy embankment at the west end of the National Mall in downtown Washington, just across the street from the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP), sits a stone cairn that marks where Gen. Braddock and his troops embarked to fight the French and Indians. I was always puzzled by its location until I read Crocker's book. He explains that Braddock's forces moved out over a number of days in several detachments, taking different routes before they converged again later in the journey. Some marched west out of town on what's now known as "Braddock Road," although the general himself didn't take that route. Instead, he and some forces took boats across the Potomac near what we now call Theodore Roosevelt Island, landing on the opposite bank at a rocky outcropping that was a local landmark, now covered by earth (the point that the cairn commemorates). The maneuver was not without peril. During the crossing, near the modern-day bridge where so many commuters inch along comfortably en route to work, a soldier drowned. Braddock

continued up that route, stopping in Georgetown where the locals feted him.

Crocker also reminds us that despite Braddock's 1755 campaign, the British did not officially declare war on the French until the following year. According to Crocker, Braddock's march fit into a larger grand strategy that initially did not involve a larger war. The British had hemmed in the French with a system of alliances in Europe and hoped to repeat that success in North America by mounting a "quick, decisive action to restore the preexisting balance in the Ohio basin and other 'English' areas that had suffered French encroachments without precipitating a general war between England and France. Caught off guard in North America and diplomatically hobbled in Europe, France would be brought to heel through a negotiated solution to the North America problem." (Crocker, p. 42)

There is also some detail about Braddock's burgundy-colored military sash, which officers used to carry him off the battlefield after he was grievously wounded. As he lay dying, Braddock gave the sash to Washington, and it re-

mains in Mt. Vernon's collection. Crocker relates that when Braddock's father died in 1724, the sash was the only known inheritance that the younger Braddock received. It is one of only three Braddock possessions that survive to the present day, the others being the brace of flintlock pistols he carried into battle, and the leopard skin saddle he rode on (Crocker, p. 25).

Crocker's well-researched book is worth a read to gain more information about the campaign and its historical context.