**Brandywine Valley Scenic Byway Introduction**

There is a valley lying in a small corner of the mid-Atlantic, where the bounty of the climate, the land, and the waters has long nourished nature and man. The valley is a strategic crossroads of commerce, of agriculture, of artistic creativity and of political thought. It is here where one can discover many of the significant events that have shaped our history from before the founding of the Nation until the present time. The Brandywine Valley, and its natural resources, made those that passed through it recognize it as a special place. Many decided to stay and partake of the abundance that this valley afforded and to preserve its intrinsic values.

During a visit in the 1860s, Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote, “The grazing pastures were so green ... the houses were so comfortable, the barns so ample, the fences so well kept, that I did not wonder, when I was told that this region was called the England of Pennsylvania.”

Today its 350 square miles seem little changed from that era, including its rolling hills, manicured estates and the sparkling Brandywine River, offer visitors a seductive trip through history. Here George Washington faced the British at the September 11, 1777 Battle of the Brandywine, the largest troop engagement of the Revolutionary War.

These days, one can canoe down the River, past the banks where Washington placed his troops and visit the house in which he prepared for the battle. The perfectly preserved estates and mills that became the symbols of America’s rise to a global industrial power still exist and provide the settings for the world-class cultural attractions of horticultural gardens, industrial achievement, American furnishings, country estates, and American artists. The landscape inspired Howard Pyle’s Brandywine School, an artist colony in Wilmington and Chadds Ford. Pyle’s most famous student, N. C. Wyeth (1882- 1945) was one of America’s foremost illustrators in the 20th century. His renowned images of swashbuckling pirates, armor-clad knights and hard-riding cowboys fired the imaginations of readers for generations and can be seen at the Brandywine River Museum. All of this landscape is protected by nearly 65,000 acres conserved open spaces in the Valley.

The Brandywine Valley Scenic Byway is historically significant for five reasons.

First, physical evidence of the settlement and development patterns still exists throughout the Byway region. Starting in 1686 the first settlers were agriculturalists and established the patterns that formed the basis for the rural landscape that exists today along much of the Byway. Many structures from these settlements, including the Barnes-Brinton House (1714), can be visited today. Many of the villages and hamlets that still exist are relatively unspoiled by modern development.

Second, the Byway passes through the landscape where the Battle of Brandywine was fought in 1777. Many of the sites associated with this pivotal Revolutionary battle are still extant and visible from the Byway. These resources include the John Chads House (1725), the Birmingham Meeting House (1722) which was used as a hospital both during and after the battle, and the Gilpin House (1754) which served as General Howe’s headquarters after the battle.

Third, the Byway is associated with the Underground Railroad. Many structures that physically represent the Underground Railroad are located within the Byway area. The Longwood Progressive Friends Meetinghouse, built in 1854 was the forum for Lucretia Mott, William Garrison, and Frederick Douglas as they advocated for the abolition of slavery. The Meetinghouse is located along the Byway at the entrance to Longwood Gardens and houses the Chester County Visitor Bureau.

Fourth, much of the Byway has provided the subject for works of art by many artists including those of the Brandywine School of Art. Farmhouses, studios, mills, barns, springhouses, and other structures, represent the focus of this important American school. Many subjects and scenes that are depicted in paintings are still extant today. N.C. Wyeth’s studio is the most famous example of this type of building.

And fifth, within the Byway is an enclave of country estates that represent the apex of the agricultural development of the area and an important era in the social history of the region. The country estate landscape, including the houses, barns, and other buildings, thus created is still visible today. The foremost example is Longwood Gardens. Pierre DuPont bought the Peirce’s Park in 1906 and by the time of his death, his Longwood became a world-famous horticultural garden.