

John Moore's Notes for Pidcock Reunion 1962

As the frontier in the Delaware River Valley was pushed north of Easton, the settlers could turn their attention to the problem of developing the natural resources of the valley. The pushing back of the frontier was done by men such as John Stacy and John Pidcock who left the main settlements for land further upstream. By the late 1720's villages that had been settled in the preceding few decades were transforming to towns as the frontier economy based on agriculture was changing to one based on industry, the river being the lifeline of the valley's entire operation. Iron mined and processed at Durham, Pennsylvania some eight miles south of Easton, was shipped down river Philadelphia by boats sixty feet long and eight feet wide, able to carry several tons of pig iron. These vessels took the name of the foundry, and have come down in history as the Durham Boats. Perhaps their most dramatic use was when they were employed in transporting Washington's Army across the Delaware before the attack on Trenton on Christmas Night in 1776. But their importance rests with the fact that they were the most serviceable vessel for commercial transport that could be used on the Delaware, which unlike many of the other rivers of the Eastern Seaboard, was not navigable more than forty miles inland by sea-going craft, and its many rapids and shallow water which made travel impossible by vessels which drew more than three feet of water.

Jonathan Pidcock, son of John, the first settler, had a small fleet of these Durham boats that he used for commercial transport between Coryell's Ferry (Lambertville) and Philadelphia. His son, Charles, continued and enlarged this fleet, with several anecdotes of its operation surviving.

Catharine Pidcock's Notes for 1962 Reunion

In the closing months of 1776 the American cause was in a sorry plight. They retreated across New Jersey, Cornwallis close on their heels and avoided capture only through the removal of all the boats in and around Trenton on the Jersey shore. If any of Charles Pidcock's Durham boats were home, they were doubtlessly poled to the Pennsylvania side and hidden. Cornwallis then decided to pitch winter quarters, and leaving Col. Rahl and his German mercenaries, he retired to the gay social life of New York. He was later to regret this and after his surrender he recalled..."And when the illustrious part your Excellence General Washington has borne in this long and arduous contest becomes a matter of history, fame will gather your brightest laurels rather from the banks of the Delaware than from those of the Chesapeake". With enlistments running out the week after Christmas, Washington had to strike. He was quick to see the flaw in the German fortifications and to realize that the Delaware could serve the dual purpose of an American Defense and a spring board for an amphibious attack on Trenton.

The night of December 24 was freezing cold, the heavens sending down alternately rain, hail, and snow (which rendered the men's muskets useless and increased the importance of the cannon which because of their weight were very difficult to ferry across the swollen Delaware filled with grinding crunching ice floes). Gen. Knox barked loading orders, but it was on a tough little terrier of a man, Col. John Glover that Washington relied to ferry the troops, horses, and artillery in the Durham boats that Knox had collected from both sides of the river earlier. The drive, intelligence, and ambition that in

war had made him a capable officer, later enabled him to amass a small fortune as a shipowning merchant.

Tradition avers that Washington turned to Glover to ask if his Mariners could navigate the ice-choked river. Glover had murmured quietly his lads could manage the task. Only after this assurance, it was said, did Washington proceed with his plan. Navigating the 1,000 feet at McKonkey's Ferry required all skill ... great chunks of ice surged down the river, gear froze, and oars and poles slipped from numb fingers. The snow, which began to fall around 11 p.m., camouflaged the ice floes further, but by 5 a.m. (only 5 hours behind schedule) the Mariners ferried the troops, horses, and cannon across the Delaware - a feat none of the other three divisions ordered by Washington to cross the Delaware and join him in a pronged attack had been able to perform. Although Washington's attack on Trenton was not under the cover of dusk originally planned, it was a surprise, due partly to the over confidence of the Hessians, partly to a heavy fog which shrouded the approaching Army, and partly to the maritime ability of Glover's 14th Regiment and their handling of the 60 ft. Durham boats whose size enabled whole regiments to be ferried over at a time.