



Historic Landscapes

The Valley Forge area was largely forested prior to the arrival of European settlers and was progressively cleared through the mid-1700s for agriculture. About 30% of the area was wooded when the Continental Army arrived in December 1777. During the encampment, to establish and sustain the camp, every tree within several miles of the area was cut and used for hut construction and earthworks or burned as fuel. Removal of the trees also provided clear defensive views of the river and surrounding area. A few trees managed to escape this devastation and still survive today. One, called the “Lafayette Sycamore”, is over 350 years old and was alive when William Penn first landed in Philadelphia in 1682.

In 1893, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania established Valley Forge State Park. During the early 1900s the Commonwealth reforested some areas of the park. Wayne’s Woods, where you are now standing, was planted in 1927 with white pines, red oaks, elms and white ash seedlings. Today, the park is again about 30% forested.

Many of the types of trees that were present here historically can still be found in the park, such as oak, hickory, tulip polar, elm, ash, maple, and dogwood trees. Others are missing. The dominant tree species in the forest during the time of the encampment was the American chestnut, many growing over 100 feet tall. In the early 1900s, this tree was attacked by a fungus that killed almost every American chestnut in the Eastern United States by 1950. Today, park staff are working toward healthy forests through management of disease, browsing, and exotic plant species.