BROOKLYN'S REVOLUTIONARY WAR PAST

Did you know that in August 1776, the first and largest battle of the American Revolution took place in what is now known as Brooklyn, New York?

This map highlights some of the pivotal sites connected to the War, its historical context and diverse perspectives, as well as monuments and memorials that Brooklynites have created over the past 250 years to commemorate their borough's Revolutionary War past. Visiting these sites not only brings the summer of 1776 alive but also provides a way to reflect on how the past remains present and relevant today.

The Battle of Brooklyn: Fought and Remembered at the Center for Brooklyn History explores this remarkable story in greater detail through using artifacts, archival documents and rare maps. The exhibit is free and on view until December 31, 2026.

SITE KEY

- BATTLE
- MEMORY
- HISTORY

Bklyn Public Library | CENTER FOR BROOKLYN HISTORY

CONTINENTAL ARMY PLAZA

This 1906 statue, located by the Williamsburg Bridge on the Brooklyn side, depicts Washington during his encampment at Valley Forge. Williamsburg also played an important role in the Revolutionary War; its waterfront was a staging ground for British troops following the Battle of Brooklyn.

WALLABOUT BAY

While the Continental Army managed to escape Brooklyn without surrendering, the battle was lost. The British would occupy New York City for the remainder of the war. Captured Continental soldiers and New Yorkers who refused to sign a loyalty oath to King George were held prisoner on boats anchored in Wallabout Bay, outside of today's Brooklyn Navy Yard.

PEBBLE BEACH

After a week of fighting, British General William Howe prepared to besiege the remaining American troops in Brooklyn Heights. Hidden by the cover of night and a dense fog, George Washington and the remainder of his men were able to escape the British by boat, sailing across the East River from Brooklyn to safety in Manhattan.

PRISON SHIP MARTYRS' MONUMENT

In 1808, Brooklynites first tried to construct a monument to those who perished aboard British prison ships in the East River. The project was largely unsuccessful. It was not until 100 years later that the Prison Ship Martyrs' Monument, a nearly 200-foot column, was opened to the public in Fort Greene Park in 1908.

COBBLE HILL FORT

As the overpowered American troops faced the British Army's wrath, Commander-in-Chief George Washington watched from his spyglass at the American fort. (Can you picture the Trader Joe's on Atlantic Avenue? That's where the fort was located!) Helpless to stop the massacre, Washington commended the bravery of his soldiers and prepared for the next British attack.

HOWARD'S INN

After landing in Brooklyn and skirmishing with American troops, a detachment of British soldiers was sent to the village of New Lots during the evening of August 26, 1776. Arriving at 2 am, they reached Howard's Inn (located near today's Cemetery of the Evergreens) and forced the inn's proprietors to help them.

FORT DEFIANCE

Revolutionary War General Nathanael Greene constructed the original Fort Defiance in 1776 in preparation for an imminent British attack on New York City. Soldiers stationed on Fort Defiance exchanged fire with the British warship H.M.S. Roebuck when the British landed in Gravesend, Brooklyn on August 22, 1776.

OLD STONE HOUSE

After the Battle of Brooklyn, the Vechte-Cortelyou House, often referred to as the Old Stone House, fell into disrepair and was gradually buried under landfill as the neighborhood of Park Slope developed. It was rebuilt nearby in 1935, using stones excavated from the original house.

WASHINGTON PARK

American soldiers fled British troops' surprise attack in Battle Pass, eventually arriving at Gowanus Creek (now buried beneath today's Park Slope). A large regiment of soldiers from Maryland launched a sacrificial strike on the British to allow other American soldiers to escape by swimming across the creek.

BROOKLYN MUSEUM

The Jan Martense Schenck House was built around 1675 on land seized from the local Canarsie Indigenous community in what is now Mill Basin. Occupied by the British during the war, the house was dismantled in 1952 and reassembled inside the Brooklyn Museum in 1964.

MONUMENT TO THE MARQUIS DE LAFAYETTE

Daniel Chester French's bas-relief sculpture of Marquis de Lafayette, a French military officer who served in the Continental Army, includes a figure believed to be James Armistead, an enslaved African American who served as Lafayette's groom (and as a spy for the Americans) during the war.

BATTLE PASS

The hills of today's Prospect Park were the site of heavy fighting on August 27, 1776. Hessian troops (German mercenary soldiers) opened fire on the Continental Army in a surprise attack. American soldiers fled across the Long Meadow towards the Gowanus Creek.

MARYLAND MONUMENT

In August 1895, the Maryland Society of the Sons of the American Revolution donated a 12-foot Corinthian column topped with a bronze cannonball to be placed in Prospect Park. The column still stands in the park today, close to the exact location of the Maryland soldiers' last stand.

DONGAN OAK MONUMENT

During the Battle of Brooklyn, Continental soldiers cut down a large white oak tree to delay the advancing British Army. The oak tree had been documented since 1685. The St. Nicholas Society commissioned a monument to the fallen tree, which was dedicated in Prospect Park in 1922.

BATTLE HILL

On August 27, 1776, Washington sent 1,600 soldiers to meet 7,000 advancing British troops atop a high hill, today's Battle Hill in Green-Wood Cemetery. They faced off in battle formation, for the first time in the Revolutionary War, fighting bloodily for several hours.

RED LION INN

After landing on the evening of August 26, British troops marched from Denyse's Ferry in Gravesend towards Martense Lane Pass in Green-Wood Cemetery. British scouts outside of the Red Lion Inn were spotted by American riflemen, who managed to send messengers to alert the Americans before they were captured. The Red Lion Inn stood on the present-day site of Melody Lanes bowling alley.

ALTAR TO LIBERTY - MINERVA STATUE

Battle Hill is located in today's Green-Wood Cemetery. In 1920, local businessman Charles Higgins bought the plot of land as a burial site for his family, and commissioned a statue of Minerva, the Roman goddess of warfare and wisdom, to commemorate the site of the Battle of Brooklyn.

CANARSIE PARK

Originally called Keskachauge or Kestateuw by the Canarsie Native people, today's Canarsie Park was once home to Revolutionary War captain Nicholas Schenck, who built a homestead there in the 1770s. In 1929, the Nicholas Schenck House was moved to the Brooklyn Museum, which also houses the Jan Martense Schenk House.

WYCKOFF HOUSE

The Wyckoff House is the oldest surviving structure in New York. Pieter Wyckoff moved his family to the house in 1652. At the time of the Battle of Brooklyn, his grandson Peter A. Wyckoff was living there with his young family and the enslaved residents of the house.

VERRAZZANO-NARROWS BRIDGE

On July 4, 1976, America celebrated the bicentennial of the country's founding. Operation Sail brought more than 200 ships through New York Harbor before crowds of hundreds of thousands. After centuries of having been Lenape waterways, these same waters brought Giovanni da Verrazzano to New York in 1524.

NEW UTRECHT REFORMED CHURCH

This church congregation was active for nearly a century before the Revolutionary War when the area was still known as New Utrecht. Buried in the church's graveyard is Egbert Benson, whom George Washington appointed to coordinate the evacuation of British Loyalists in New York City following America's victory in the war.

HENDRICK I. LOTT HOUSE

Brooklyn loyalties were split when the Revolutionary War broke out. After the Battle of Brooklyn, during which British soldiers camped on the Lott farm, the Lotts were divided in their affiliation. Johannes Lott remained loyal to the British, while his wife Jannetje personally donated funds to the Patriot cause.

JOHN PAUL JONES PARK

John Paul Jones Park is located near the British troops' arrival point during the Battle of Brooklyn. Named for Revolutionary War naval commander John Paul Jones, it is also known as "Cannonball Park" for the Civil War era cannon and cannonballs on display throughout the green space.

DENYSE WHARF

On the morning of August 22, 1776, a fleet of British ships descended on Gravesend Bay, where today's Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge connects Brooklyn to Staten Island. An American soldier, awed at the sight, wrote, "I thought all London was afloat."