

A History of de Kalb, a Revolutionary War Soldier

BY CAROL KALOS, ST. ANDREWS RESIDENT WRITER AND WISSAHICKON VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESIDENT

Through much construction, residents drive up and down U.S. Route 202, called Dekalb Pike, but we do not appreciate its long history and the brave soldier it is named after.

Started in 1724, the roadway was completed in 1738 between the Gwynedd Friends Meeting in Lower Gwynedd Township (near the William Penn Inn) to Swedes Ford at the edge of present-day Norristown. By 1830, it was called State Road, and it ran from New Hope, through Whitpain Township, to West Chester and the Maryland border.

The present Dekalb Pike (a modern spelling) honors the contribution of Yohann Kalb (1721-1780) to the American Revolution. German-born, he moved to France and became Baron de Kalb, a spy for the French against the Colonies. However, he was so sympathetic to the Colonists' desire for liberty that he returned from Europe with Lafayette to fight alongside Lafayette and General Washington after spending the awful winter of 1777 together at Valley Forge.

The American people dearly loved Major-general de Kalb, and he loved the American cause. Washington was reported to have said that de Kalb "watered the tree of liberty" with his blood. At de Kalb's death in South Carolina, the hero stated, "I die the death I always prayed for: the death of a soldier fighting for the rights of man."

Carol Kalos is president of the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society and a resident of Saint Andrews Place. The historical society offers monthly speakers, free and open to the public, and the museum is open by appointment. Please visit www.WVValleyHS.org.

