



The Sword of Michael Whitley

IN EARLY DECEMBER, 1777, General Washington's army was preparing to leave its camp at Whitemarsh in order to take up a new position farther from Philadelphia and the British army. In an effort to attack the Americans while they were on the march, Howe moved forward, his advance guard reaching Chestnut Hill four miles southeast of Whitemarsh on the 5th. There the British came into contact with an American militia force under Brigadier General James Irvine. After desultory fighting, Irvine and sixteen other Americans were captured, among them, Captain Michael Whitley, forty-seven years old, company commander in the Fourth Battalion of Lancaster County militia.

Wounded in the action, Whitley was moved to Philadelphia by his captors where he died shortly thereafter, as evidenced by a strength report of the Fourth Battalion and a petition by Whitley's widow for a pension (located in the Pennsylvania Archives). For an account of the action see Boatner's Encyclopedia of the American Revolution under Whitemarsh, Pa.

By means not presently known, Whitley's family recovered the sword pictured herein which they preserved generation after generation for two hundred years. It is an American hunting sword or cuttue, 34½ inches in overall length, with a blade of 29 inches. The hilt and silver work were crafted by Charles Hall of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, according to the so-called "Philadelphia pattern" wherein the eagle has a long head with full beak and a rear tuft of feathers, circa 1770-1780. Note the American folk art etched into the silver. The handle is of bone, the blade probably of European manufacture. The scabbard boasts silver mounts and ring. We would be keenly interested in hearing from others who might also own Charles Hall weapons.

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