FORT LE BOEUF CHAPTER, DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN COLONISTS

By Maude Kuhns*

On December 11, 1953, the Fort Le Boeuf Chapter, Daughters of the American Colonists, held “open house” in commemoration of the visit of George Washington to Fort Le Boeuf two hundred years before.

Recently in Pittsburgh Mr. Stanton Belfour spoke on the “Pennsylvania Story,” telling of the settlement of the northwestern part of Pennsylvania. He began his story with the tale of George Washington’s trip to Fort Le Boeuf, and went on to pay special tribute to the small group of women who had purchased the site of Fort Le Boeuf when both town and State were indifferent to its historical value.

Waterford owes a great deal to the Daughters of the American Colonists. Were it not for them, there would now be a gasoline station on the site of Fort Le Boeuf. There would be no national shrine and no museum.

Fort Le Boeuf Chapter, D.A.C., was organized in 1923, with Mrs. George Pierce of North East as Regent. The members included: six women from North East; one from Girard; four from Corry; one from Edinboro; and four from Erie. Of this group Mrs. A. J. Culbertson of Edinboro, Mrs. T. C. Hill of North East, Mrs. J. D. Sterrett and Mrs. A. A. Deming of Erie, are still members of the Chapter. These people took the name, Fort Le Boeuf, because of its colonial significance.

Between 1924 and 1926, the society grew. Among the women who joined in this period were Mrs. A. C. Ensworth of Waterford, Mrs. Anthony Farnsworth of North East, Mrs. J. R. Clark, and Miss Helen Cushman of Edinboro; Miss Harriet Chapman of Springboro; Mrs. J. B. Patterson of Corry; and Mrs. Marion Nagle, Mrs. B. B. Nagle, Mrs. A. E. Freeburg, Mrs. Dana Jones,

*Mrs. John F. Kuhns is National Corresponding Secretary, Daughters of the American Colonists.
Mrs. J. F. Kitchen, Miss Treva Drake, Mrs. Vivian Wiselogel, and Mrs. John F. Kuhns, all of Erie.

In 1926, when the site of the Fort was purchased, there were only two members from Waterford: Mrs. A. C. Farnsworth and Mrs. Paul Thompson, who is no longer with us. Shortly after the purchase, Mrs. Cora Putnam and Miss Eve Lyde Patten joined. It was in 1926 that a gasoline company wished to buy the site of Fort Le Boeuf, but the man who owned the site was persuaded to sell instead to the Fort Le Boeuf Chapter, D.A.C., which, in order that it might own property, became incorporated. The price
was seven hundred dollars. Just how this small group raised the money is something of a miracle. Mrs. Charles M. Hatch of Erie and Mrs. Carlton Pierce of North East were Chapter Regents during this period.

Mrs. J. D. Sterrett, of Erie, was our fourth Regent, and Mrs. A. C. Ensworth of Waterford, our fifth. During this time, the Chapter was trying to interest the National Society, D.A.C., in their project. In the end the National Society gave them a thousand dollars to use in cleaning up and landscaping the site. In 1932 the National Society accepted the site as its first national shrine; Mrs. Marion Nagle of Erie, who was the Regent at this time, presided at the dedication ceremonies.

Mrs. Lynford Phelps and Mrs. R. P. Barnes both worked very hard on this project, as did other Waterford women who joined later. Mrs. Phelps is to be specially commended for her many years as chairman of landscaping.

Under Mrs. J. R. Clark of Edinboro, who followed Mrs. Nagle in office, a plan was formed to get money from the State for, as it was then intended, a "replica of the fort." Mrs. Fred Coon of Waterford, during her term as Regent, worked to get a bill started in the State Legislature. While Mrs. John F. Kuhns, of Erie, was Regent, Mr. Homer Cook did actually get this bill passed, and the State appropriated $20,000 to buy land in Waterford.

Now began the task of getting the State to use this money. Mrs. C. Dean Klahr, all during her term in office, worked to this end. The details were finished, and it seemed that land would be bought, when the man with whom Mrs. Klahr was working suddenly died, and the project had to be started all over again.

It was while Miriam Kuhns of Erie was Regent that the deed was actually signed. She was privileged to be present when the Deputy Attorney General of Pennsylvania personally brought the check to Erie and purchased the Judson house for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Mrs. A. C. Ensworth was again elected Regent in 1950, in recognition of her many years of service. In 1953, the chapter elected Mrs. Helen Stone Schluraff, who now serves in this office.

The National and Pennsylvania State Societies, D.A.C., have honored Fort Le Boeuf Chapter. Four members have served as State Regent: Mrs. Livingston A. Hunter of Tidioute, Mrs. Fred
C. Eaton of Warren, Mrs. Burton A. Crane and Mrs. John F. Kuhns of Erie. Mrs. Livingston A. Hunter was the second National President, and Mrs. John F. Kuhns now serves as National Corresponding Secretary.

This is what a small group of women all working together can do. The result of their work, the National Daughters of American Colonists Shrine and the Fort Le Boeuf-Washington Museum, stand as a memorial to their efforts.