

## 5 Myths about Brookeville and the War of 1812

### 1. Dolley Madison came to Brookeville.

She didn't. When Dolley left Washington, she went first to Georgetown and then to Virginia, where she stayed at the homes of friends and a short time at Wiley's Tavern. Paul Jennings, in his autobiography, quotes Dolley's servant Sukey describing the route they took and Dolley, herself, described portions of her flight in a letter to her sister. (Dolley's correspondence can be found through "Digital Dolley" [rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/dmde/dolley-terms.xqy](http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/dmde/dolley-terms.xqy).) President Madison wrote to Dolley from Brookeville because she wasn't with him.

### 2. Henrietta Bentley was a friend of Dolley Madison.

This story is not substantiated by any contemporary evidence. It stems from one that strains credulity: Henrietta's granddaughter describing an alleged visit by her grandmother to the White House, noting that the laundry was strung in the Blue Room. That story had been told for years about Abigail Adams, who moved into the White House before it was finished. The myth probably emerged from the true story of local Quaker Deborah Pleasants Stabler, who was acquainted with Dolley Madison. Deborah wrote to Dolley asking for help in getting her son out of jail. (He'd been arrested for refusing to bear arms.) That letter is at Digital Dolley. Dolley replied in a letter that's at the Sandy Spring Museum. (President Madison did help the son.)

### 3. The U.S. treasury was brought to Brookeville.

In 1814, there was no money in the U.S. treasury. The war was being financed by debt from private sources (including John Jacob Astor). The Treasury building in Washington (which the British burnt) was an *office* building. The story probably came from reports that the money from at least two of Washington's banks was sent to Brookeville. The Presidents of the Bank of Washington and the Bank of Columbia sent the specie (the money in coinage—the paper money was virtually worthless) to the Postmaster, Mr. Bentley, as documented in letters from the bank presidents. The money was probably stored in the Post Office, which was a secure Federal facility protected by iron bars on the windows.

### 4. The Senate papers were stored in the Brookeville Academy.

Everything we know about the Senate papers being brought to Brookeville comes from a long letter by Lewis Machen (the clerk who saved them) to William Rives, as Machen applied for the job of Chief Clerk of the Senate. Machen took the papers first to his farm near Adelphi, Maryland, where a fellow clerk, John McDonald, told him that Brookeville was a more secure site. McDonald then brought the papers to Brookeville, where they stayed for weeks until the Senate had a place to meet. Neither Machen nor McDonald said where the papers were stored, but it is far more likely that they were stored in the

Post Office, like the specie from the banks, than in the Academy, which was not only not a secure facility but school was in session.

**5. Richard Thomas refused the President's request for shelter because he [Thomas] was a Federalist and would not shelter the President who was waging a war he despised.**

There are numerous versions of this story: Richard Thomas refused because he was a Quaker and a pacifist so he wouldn't take in a "war president;" Deborah Thomas refused, saying, "not with those muddy boots, you're not coming in my house!" The truth is less colorful: the house was already full and Thomas didn't know that the president was among the party. A correspondent who was present reported in the *Federal Republican* on August 31, 1814: the guide with the President's party approached Richard Thomas, asking, " 'if Gen Mason and suite, could have lodgings for the night,' taking care to avoid mentioning that the President was in company. He was told that he could not. 'Can you put them on the floor?' said the guide. 'No my house is filled with families who have fled from Washington and Georgetown,'" was the answer." The president then went across the street to the Bentley house.