



AMY NEWMAN/THE RECORD

Leslie Agard-Jones, right, looks at the letter George Washington penned from his headquarters near the Great Falls in Paterson on Oct. 22, 1780. In it, Washington describes the poor state of his army to his friend, statesman George Mason.

Paterson is visited by the past

Washington's 1780 note on loan to city of origin

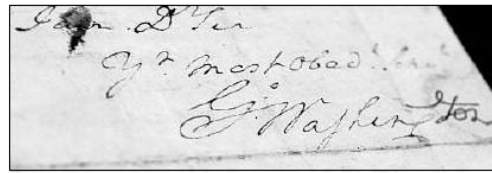
By Kamana Shrestha
THE RECORD

A 230-year-old letter written by George Washington at his headquarters near the Great Falls in Paterson returned yesterday — on his birthday — and will be displayed through mid-March at the Paterson Museum, just yards from where it was written.

The return of the letter — in which Washington laments the state of his underfed and poorly provisioned army at a gloomy time in the Revolutionary War — comes as the Great Falls is prepared to become a national historical park.

The event was attended by dozens of city school students, Rep. Bill Pascrell Jr. (D-8th Dist.), Leonard Zax, head of the Hamilton Partnership for Paterson, and Seth Kaller, whose archive company has lent the artifact to the museum until March 12.

Zax, a Paterson native whose Hamilton Partnership



George Washington's signature on the Oct. 22, 1780, letter, which is on loan from Seth Kaller Inc. Its visit follows the Great Falls' designation as a national park.

was established to help create private-sector business opportunities in the city associated with the park, called Paterson "the most historic place in America that virtually no one in America has heard of."

Kaller read the letter, written on Oct. 22, 1780, after Washington's armies had suffered two serious military defeats, yet only a year before the general's 1781 victory over British forces at Yorktown. Washington tells his friend, the wealthy statesman and Virginia planter George Mason, a change in leadership in Congress is essential if America is to defeat the British; that Congress, as head of the "federal union," must have sufficient power to

order a well-equipped, permanent army to pursue the war.

Washington wrote the letter that fall at the house he occupied near the Great Falls, then called the Passaic Falls. President Obama last year signed legislation that will turn much of the Great Falls district into a national historical park.

Conceding that Paterson's people often take its history for granted, Pascrell said, "Today we are here to recognize our history, not to put purple ropes around it so nobody touches it. ... If we know where we have been, we have a better idea of where we are going."

Kamana Shrestha may be reached at shrestha@northjersey.com.