



## **General Thaddeus Kosciuszko (1746-1817)**



### **Freedom Fighter for Poland American Revolutionary War Hero and Founder of West Point**

General Thaddeus Kosciuszko

1746 - 1817

Hero of America and Poland

Thaddeus Kosciuszko was born in Poland on February 4, 1746, son of Ludwik and Tekla Kosciuszko. He attended school in Lubieszow and then the Cadet Academy in Warsaw before continuing his engineering studies in Paris, France. By the time Kosciuszko arrived in America from Poland in 1776, he was a skilled engineer who came to offer his services to the American colonies in their struggle for independence.

On October 18, 1776 Kosciuszko was commissioned as Colonel of Engineers by the Continental Congress and began his outstanding service of fortifying battle sites, many of which became turning points in America's fight for independence against the British.

Shortly after arriving in Philadelphia in 1776, Kosciuszko read the Declaration of Independence and was moved to tears because he discovered in this single, concise document everything in which he truly believed. When he discovered that Thomas Jefferson was responsible for drafting the Declaration, he felt compelled to meet him. A few months later, while moving south with the Continental Army, Kosciuszko stopped in Virginia to meet with Jefferson. After a very warm reception, the two men spent the day comparing philosophies and eventually became the best of friends.

In the early days of the war, Kosciuszko helped to fortify the Philadelphia waterfront at Fort Mercer. Shortly after, he was transferred to New York, where he helped with fortifications along the Hudson and planned the defense for Saratoga. The Battle of Saratoga became known as one of military history's most famous struggles for independence and proved to be a turning point in the war.

In 1778, Kosciuszko was made chief engineer of West Point, New York. This fortification became known as the American Gibraltar because it was unable to be penetrated by the British Army. Eventually West Point became a military academy, as suggested by Kosciuszko to General George Washington.

In 1783, Kosciuszko was appointed Brigadier General and was awarded the Cincinnati Order Medal by General George Washington, Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army. Washington also presented Kosciuszko with two pistols and a sword as gifts for his outstanding service to America.

After the colonies won their independence, Kosciuszko returned to Poland in 1784 to help his own country win independence from the surrounding European powers. Kosciuszko was wounded in the failed revolt and taken prisoner by the Russians. Upon his release from prison, he returned to America on August 18, 1797, which he considered his "second home." He received a hero's welcome when he reached the Philadelphia waterfront along the Delaware River. Afterward, he secured a residence at 3rd and Pine Streets, which is now the Kosciuszko House, a national memorial to this hero of the American Revolution.

Kosciuszko was admired by general and foot soldier alike, both for his technical knowledge and for his sympathetic understanding and generosity. Jefferson wrote of Kosciuszko, "He is as pure a son of liberty as I have ever known." Tragically, Kosciuszko, a devoted champion of the poor and oppressed, never witnessed the arrival of freedom in his homeland, Poland.

Kosciuszko was a firm believer of equality and requested that the money from his estate be used to buy freedom for slaves, help to educate them and provide them with enough land to support themselves.

Kosciuszko spent the last years of his life in Switzerland, where on October 15, 1817 he died at the age of 72. He is buried in Wawel Castle, in Krakow, Poland, among the tombs of the Polish Kings.

### *Kosciuszko's Advice to a Youth*

To do honor to your family and yourself and at my recommendation, you must reread what follows every day so that it will be engraved on your memory on which your well being will depend.

Rise at four in the summer and six in the winter. Your first thoughts must be directed towards the Supreme Being; worship Him for a few minutes. Set yourself to work with reflection and intelligence, either at your prescribed duty carried out in the most scrupulous manner, or perfect yourself in some science in which you should have true mastery. Avoid lying under any circumstances in your life, but always be frank and loyal and always tell the truth. Never be idle but be sober and frugal even hard on yourself while indulgent to others. Do not be vain nor an egotist. Before speaking or answering on something, reflect and consider well in order not to lose your point and say something stupid. Never fail to give due recognition under any circumstances to the person who is in charge of your well being. Anticipate his desires and his wishes. Pay close attention with proper humility. Look for an opportunity to be useful. As you are a foreigner in the country, redouble your concern and efforts to gain trust and preference over the natives legitimately by your merit and superior knowledge. If a secret is entrusted in you, keep it religiously; in all your actions you must be upright, sincere and open; no dissimulation in your speech, do not argue but seek the truth calmly and with modesty, be polite and considerate to everyone, agreeable and obliging in society, humane and helpful to the unfortunate according to your means. Read instructive books to embellish your mind and improve your spirit. Do not degrade yourself by making bad acquaintances, but rather those with high principles and

reputation thus your conduct should be such that the whole world approves it and that wherever you may be it will be considered irreproachable.

T Kosciuszko

## **Milestones In The Life Of Tadeusz Kosciuszko**

**February 4, 1746** Andrzej Tadeusz Bonawentura Kosciuszko was born in Poland, the son of Ludwik Tadeusz Kosciuszko, and of Tekla, nee Ratomska.

**1755-1760** Attended the school in Lubieszow.

**December 18, 1765** Entered the Corps of Cadets in Warsaw, where after a year he received an officer's brevet; became instructor taking part in engineering courses.

**Fall, 1769** Left for France on a royal scholarship to pursue art and engineering studies.

**1774** After a tour of England, Italy, Switzerland and Germany, returned to Poland.

**1775** After an unsuccessful love affair with Ludwika Sosnowska, he left for France again.

**August, 1776** Arrived in Marblehead (near Boston, Mass.) and went to Philadelphia to offer George Washington his services in the struggle for freedom of the United States. On October 18, was appointed an engineer with the rank of colonel in the American Army.

**Oct., 1776-April, 1777** Fortified Philadelphia

**August-Sept., 1777** Fortified hills near Saratoga, NY, before a battle which became a turning point in the War of Independence.

**1778-1780** Fortified the fortress in West Point, NY.

**1780-1782** As chief engineer in General Green's army, he took part in its campaigns in the south of the United States.

**1783** After more than six years of service, he was appointed Brigadier-General in the American army and was awarded the Cincinnati Order.

**July, 1784** After a stay of eight years he left the United States and returned to Poland.

**1784-1789** Retired from public life, spending most of his time on the small family estate of Siechnowicze (near Brest Litovsk in Polesie).

**October 12, 1789** Appointed major-general of the Crown troops.

**1792** Took part in the Polish-Russian war in defense of the May 3rd Constitution, commanding the Polish forces in the Battle of Dubienka (July 18); awarded the Virtuti Militari Order; after cessation of the hostilities he resigned (July 30) and then emigrated.

**1793** In emigration (mainly in Leipzig and Dresden), maintaining contacts with the conspirators in Poland preparing the out-break of an insurrection.

**March 24, 1794** Took command of the insurrection proclaiming in Cracow as Commander in Chief of the National Armed Forces; fought the first battles near Raclawice (April 4, with Russians), near Szczekociny (June 6, with Russians and Prussians); defended besieged Warsaw (July-September); suffered defeat near Maciejowice (October 10) where, seriously wounded, he was taken prisoner by the Russians.

**1795-1796** In captivity in Petersburg and, on release, left Russia.

**1797** Via Finland and Sweden he arrived in Great Britain from where he left for the United States.

**1798** After a year's stay in the United States, he returned to Paris, France.

**1800** In Paris, a political brochure came out entitled "Can the Poles Win Independence?", containing Tadeusz Kosciuszko's thoughts about the possibility of independence using the nation's own forces.

**1806** Rejected Napoleon's proposal to form Polish units under his auspices.

**1801-1815** Stayed at Berville, near Paris.

**1815-1817** Spent the last years of his life in Soleure, Switzerland, where on October 15, 1817, after a brief illness, he died at the age of 72. He is buried in Wawel Castle, in Krakow, Poland, among the tombs of the Polish Kings.

You can learn more about General Thaddeus Kosciuszko when you visit the Kosciuszko House, Third and Pine Streets, or the Polish American Cultural Center Museum, 308 Walnut Street, both in historic Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.