Q&A
Washington history isn’t all monuments, ANDREW CARROLL says.

For the last 15 years, Andrew Carroll has traveled to military bases and V.F.W. halls across the country for the Legacy Project, a repository for American war letters he founded in Washington.

Along the way, he would present a challenge to himself: find a forgotten historic site in each city. After filling 24 cabinets with notes on places, ranging from the Paisley Caves in Oregon, which contain human DNA from more than 12,000 years ago, to the spot in front of New York Hilton Midtown, where the first cell phone call was made, Mr. Carroll decided to turn his hobby into a book.

"Here is Where: Discovering America’s Great Forgotten History." Of all his discoveries, Mr. Carroll said those closest to his home in Washington captured his interest the most. Below are edited excerpts from a conversation with him on forgotten historic sites around the nation’s capital. EMILY BRENNAN

On the heels of the Fourth of July, can you recommend any other historic sites of the revolution?
This one is in Baltimore. En route to Fort McHenry, the fort that witnessed an assault by the British in 1814 and prompted Francis Scott Key to compose “The Star-Spangled Banner,” you’ll pass by 125 East Baltimore Street. You’ll find a Rite Aid there now, but that’s where, in January 1777, a printer named Mary Katherine Goddard published the first broadside of the Declaration of Independence with all the signatures. Remember, at the time, printing the Declaration of Independence was an act of treason. It was by no means guaranteed that we were going to win the war, and you would have been held accountable if the war had gone differently. Goddard’s a true American heroine who’s been overlooked.

How can others go about finding forgotten historic sites?
The thing I always say to parents and teachers is, put the kids in charge. They’re all very savvy about the Internet, and it’s easy: type in the city’s name and key words like “forgotten history” and “secret” to see what comes up. Be sure to double and triple check results.

Q. Was there a site that you had long known, but didn’t realize held historical importance?
A. The Chain Bridge over the Potomac River. During the War of 1812, when the British came to torch the city, I learned that a quick-thinking government clerk named Stephen Pleasonton grabbed the country’s essential documents, including the Declaration of Independence, smuggled them out of the city, crossed the Chain Bridge, an earlier version of the one there today, and stashed them in a grist mill in Virginia. To think of this lone man crossing the bridge, being all that separates the British from getting a hold of those documents, it completely transformed how I saw it.

Any forgotten aspects you discovered of a well-known landmark?
The Statue of Freedom on the top of the Capitol’s dome has a fascinating history. As the story goes, the Italian sculptor hired to assemble the plaster model of the bronze statue demanded more money, so he was fired. But because of the way it was done, the mold could have easily broken apart, and the only person who figured out how to transport it to the foundry for casting was Philip Reid, a slave. Now where Reid.