

Baby Boom 1780

Mothers and babies are not people usually associated with the winter encampments at Morristown. But in reality, armies were like mobile cities with a wide variety of people, including mothers and their babies. Though records are scarce, we do know that at least five babies were born or conceived during the Morristown winter encampments.

Catherine Littlefield Greene, was in her seventh month of pregnancy, when she surprised her husband Quartermaster General Nathaniel Greene by showing up in camp at West Point in November 1779. She then accompanied him to Morristown and gave birth to their fourth child Nathaniel Ray Greene on January 31, 1780. The proud father reported on February 8, 1780, *“I am happy to inform you that Mrs. Greene is in bed with a fine boy not unlike George [their first son]. She was put to bed under as promising circumstances as heart could wish, but her delicate constitution, and her former ill treatment under the hands of the old women that attended her, I fear will not permit a very speedy recovery. She has been very ill, but is on the mending hand. This is the Ninth day since she was put to bed.”*

This was a time when most deliveries were handled by midwives or older women rather than doctors. Mrs. Green had difficulty following the birth of her third child, Cornelia, in September 1778, and presumably that was when the ill-treatment by “the women” had occurred. After the newest baby was born, Greene wrote General McDougall that he was very happy to have another son even if his family grew faster than his purse.

Lucy, the wife of the artillery commander General Henry Knox, also had a baby in Morristown. Their son Henry Jackson Knox was born on May 24, 1780. Henry and Lucy Knox would eventually have 13 children, but only three lived to adulthood.

Generals’ wives like Catherine and Lucy could visit their husbands during the winter and spring when the army was relatively safe and inactive in their encampments. When the campaign season neared they would return to the safety of their homes.

But there were other women who never left camp. Known as camp followers, they were wives of the common soldiers. In many cases, they had no home to return to. Instead they followed their husbands and the army everywhere. Unfortunately, information about camp followers rarely appears in the historical records.

But a look at the records of the Presbyterian Church of Morristown, gives us a small glimpse into their lives. These records note the baptisms of three babies born in the camp. On May 15, 1780 William Garr, *“a soldier”* and his wife had their daughter Sarah baptized. Sarah had been born on January 27, 1780 which means her mother walked into Jockey Hollow when she was about eight months pregnant. The following winter on December 21, 1780, two Pennsylvania soldiers, with their unnamed wives, brought their children to the church for baptism. Corporal John Smith’s daughter Ann had been born on January 12, 1780. While Edward Blake’s son Edward was born on October 29, 1780.

While the records don’t provide any more information, we can do a bit of speculation. If we work back nine months from the dates of birth, we can get an approximate date of conception. Three of the births occurred in May, so the conceptions probably occurred the previous Spring in April or May. For Mrs. Greene, Spring was the last opportunity to be with her husband before she returned home. For the camp followers, Spring provided a warmer opportunity for the couples to perhaps find some privacy in the outdoors away from a crowded hut.

Two of the other pregnancies started at what would seem less opportune times. Lucy Knox probably conceived in the Fall of 1779. However, the artillery was inactive at that time camped at West Point. Additionally, General Greene mentioned in a letter that Lucy had come to West Point in September to visit her husband. Edward Blake and his wife probably conceived their son in the midst of the hard winter of 1780 in perhaps January or February. While it was cold, at least the couple was together during a stationary period for the army.

Admittedly this is a very limited sample of babies born in the army. But logically winter encampments provided the best opportunities for conception. During the summer campaigning season, officers wives were normally home, away from their husbands and the dangers of potential battles. However, camp followers did not return home, they stayed with the army. But in many cases they were left behind in safer locations when the army was away marching or fighting. The quiet sedentary life in a winter/spring encampment gave couple far more opportunities to get together than the season of fighting.

The women and children were of the Continental Army were rarely ever mentioned in the documentation of the day. But, Lieutenant Elias Parker of the Third Artillery Regiment provides us with this rare and less than complimentary description of the camp followers of the Continental Army and their children from September 20, 1780 – *“we march by the time prescribed in yesterdays orders—the sight of the women with the Baggage was curious –were the ugliest in the world to be collected they could not be uglier than those of the Army – their Visage, dress etc. every way concordant to each other – some with two other with three & four children & a few with none – I could not help pitying the poor innocent creatures --- their way of living and treatment with the many low & scandalous examples every day shown them will make them imitate their Parents vices; and make many who have naturally good dispositions as vicious as the worst of them – the furies who inhabit the infernal regions can never be painted half so hideous as these women – Their deformity of Aspect & Shape is so excessive that those of the Sex who possess the delicacy that is naturally great in them must not only raise in those of the opposite Sex certain ideas , but must possess us with notions that their minds & persons are no way inferior to Angels –“*

Despite Parker’s opinion, mothers, whether the wives of generals or lowly privates, would strive to care for their children to the best of their abilities.

Happy Mother’s Day!

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The Papers of General Nathanael Greene

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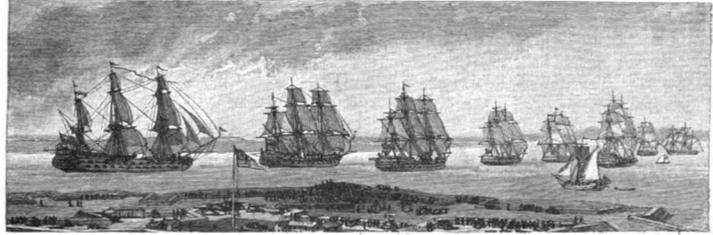
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Evacuation Day Nov. 25, 1783

By Eric Olsen, Park Ranger, Historian

November 25, 1783 was a day New Yorkers had looked forward to for over 7 years. New York City had been occupied by British forces since September 1776 and now they were preparing to leave.



The Continental Congress declared hostilities were at an end on April 11, 1783. The announcement of the peace was met with cheers by the Patriots. While in New York, among Loyalists, "...groans and hisses prevailed, attended by bitter reproaches and curses upon their king, for having deserted them in the midst of their calamities..."

But it would take some time before the British could leave New York City. British officials promised to transport American Loyalists to England or other British territories in Canada or the West Indies. But to keep these promises the British needed fleets of ships to transport the thousands of Loyalists, escaped slaves, soldiers, artillery, equipment and baggage. Eventually 29,000 refugees including 3,000 former slaves left New York for Nova Scotia and St. Johns in Canada.

All aspects of the evacuation had been negotiated between the British and the Americans prior to November 25th. Washington, New York Governor Clinton and 800 soldiers, the last remnants of the Continental Army, crossed over into northern Manhattan and camped on November 19th. Two different American processions would enter the city on the 25th. First a military procession to "occupy" the city followed by a civic procession made up of State and local officials who would take possession of the city.

The American military procession led by General Henry Knox, was made up of dragoons mounted on horses, infantry, and artillery. In a show of American pride, the artillery brought four bronze 6-pounders that had been captured from the British during the war. Each cannon had been engraved with the date and place of its capture. Perhaps, Morristown NHP's cannon captured at Princeton was part of this procession.

While the military parade halted on Broadway, a small company was detached to take possession of Fort George at the southern tip of Manhattan. Once there, they were to raise the American flag and fire a thirteen gun salute so that the Civic procession could enter and take possession of the city. But there was a problem. In a last bit of revenge, the British had removed the ropes from the flag-staff and greased it from top to bottom. After a brief delay, boards, nails, a saw and hammer were found and cleats were made. A young sailor nailed cleats to the pole as he climbed to the top where he set the rope back in its pulley. The American flag was raised, the cannon thundered while the crowds cheered. The civilian parade, with Governor Clinton and General Washington in the lead, entered the city. That night Governor Clinton hosted a dinner at Fraunces Tavern for various dignitaries while New Yorkers finally saw their city once again free from British control.

November 25th, Evacuation Day, was a holiday in New York City for many years. A major feature of the celebration included a competition among boys to tear down a British flag from a greased pole in Battery Park. Evacuation Day became a day related to the dedication of public buildings and monuments. Castle Clinton, a round sandstone fortification at the tip of Manhattan, was dedicated on Evacuation Day 1811. The George Washington Statue outside of Federal Hall on Wall Street was unveiled as part of Evacuation day celebrations on November 26, 1883.

However, over time the celebration of Evacuation day declined. It was overshadowed by the celebration of Thanksgiving which became a national holiday in 1863. Celebrating with family and food won out over parades and greased poles.

Happy Thanksgiving and Evacuation Day!

How Many Troops Did They Have?

Visitors are always curious how many troops the British had in New York, while Washington and his men were in Morristown during the 1779-1780 encampment.

In the past, I was never sure or I forgot the figures that I'd found. So I always said that even though the British had sent troops south to Charleston in December, the troops left behind in New York were still stronger than Washington's army.

While I was researching something, on a totally different topic, I ran across a statement of British troop strength in the diary of Loyalist William Smith. That got me interested and I checked out other primary sources and here is what I came up with

December 1779

British Regular Troops in the New York District

18,538

Continental Troops Present and Fit for Duty

10,785

Present Sick

1,003

Total Continental Army Troops Present [Fit & Sick]

11,788

February 1780

British Regular Troops

7000

Loyalist Militia

5865

Total of British Regular Troops & Militia

12,865

Continental Troops Present & Fit for Duty

8,944

For those who would like a fuller explanation, see the next pages.

Explanation of British Numbers

The main reason for the big drop in troops for the British is that in late December 1779 General Clinton took a force of 7,000 to 8,000 troops south to attack and eventually capture Charleston, South Carolina. General Clinton explained his plans for the defense of New York and for the attack on Charleston,

"In the calculation I was making of the making of the number of troops necessary to defend the many widely dispersed posts of the New York district, I did not neglect to take into consideration the usual extreme severity of the winters, which not infrequently renders their insular situation useless at that season towards their defense. And as the ordinary duties in the lines at King's Bridge [A bridge across the Harlem river connecting Manhattan and the Bronx] and the other works on New York Island [Manhattan], those of Setauket, Huntington, Brooklyn, etc., on Long Island, the security of Staten Island, and the garrison of Paulus Hook [Jersey City, N.J.] would take at least eight to ten thousand men, besides the militia which the town of New York might furnish on an emergency, I could not well leave behind me less than twelve thousand, ... Consequently, as I had still full 6000 sick in my hospitals, many of whom could not be fit for duty before the spring, I had not above 7000 men to take with me to the southward."

In a footnote, written by Clinton, he also said, *"The amount of the whole force in the district of New York on the 1st of December did not exceed 18,538."* This would be the total troop strength prior to the departure for South Carolina.

Numbers of soldiers for the Charleston expedition also come from two German sources. Hessian Captain Johann Ewald stated that the Charleston force, *"... numbered between 7,000 and 8,000."* While Adjutant General Major Baurmeister of the Hessian Forces reported that 88 transport ships carrying 8,708 men left New York on December 26, 1779. This force was made up of 7,200 British soldiers and 1,400 Provincial or Loyalist soldiers.

The February numbers come from the diary of Loyalist, William Smith who said the figures were reported in Rivington's newspaper.

"Perhaps he [Washington] is intimidated by our embodying the Militia within a Month past. Rivington published yesterday a true Roll at 5865 [militia]. The Regular Troops are on this Island [Manhattan] 7000.

5865
7000
12865"

Explanation of American Numbers

The figures for the Continental Army come from the monthly strength reports that the army made and were reproduced in the book, The Sinews of Independence. Any mathematical errors are the result of poor calculator skills on my part. It was a lot of figures to add up.

There are several reasons for the drop in the troop strength of the Continental forces. Many men's three-year enlistments ended in 1780. As a result, the number of available troops decreased every month. The number of discharges for December, January and February were 1,251 men. There were approximately 1,000 men who deserted during the entire encampment, and 723 men deserted in just December, January and February. The largest number of desertions seemed to occur when the frozen water around New York provided deserters with an escape route to British-occupied New York. Finally, a total of 62 men died in December, January and February. From just those three factors the Continental army lost 2,036 men.

Prior to establishing the winter camp at Jockey Hollow, General Washington also sent troops south. Both North Carolina and Virginia troops went south to join the Southern Division of the Continental Army but those troops were not counted even in the December strength report so their departure is not reflected in the troops decrease from December to February.

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By Carl P. Borick, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, South Carolina, 2003

[A former volunteer and seasonal interpreter at Morristown NHP. Now the Director of the Charleston Museum.]

Humor in Uniform

If this title sounds vaguely familiar, you might be almost as old as me. It comes from the old Reader's Digest magazines, my parents used to get. My favorite part of the magazine was the humorous stories sent in by the readers. They were usually grouped by topics like; Life in the U.S. , Laughter the Best Medicine, and Humor in Uniform.

Ironically, I can still remember the story about a Park Ranger at Yellowstone interpreting the eruption of Old Faithful while a nearby co-worker, turned a car steering wheel placed into the ground making it appear that he controlled the water of the geyser.

The stories usually didn't draw a big laugh but sometimes a small smile. So in the same spirit here is the 18th century version of Humor in Uniform. Enjoy!

Pennsylvanian, Samuel Deewes gave this description of a humorous open-air church service in the summer of 1780.

"Before an expedition of any kind was made, General Washington (if it was possible) would procure the services of a Minister of the Gospel to preach to the army upon the Sabbath.... When a Minister was obtained, it was customary to make some elevation (upon which the Preacher stood) by nailing up a board or two at some distance from the ground. Sometimes a few logs would be rolled together or piled up one upon the other. Sometimes an empty hogshead would be placed on end, and a board or two laid crossways upon the head, and a few steps of some kind erected along side of it to enable the Minister to get upon it. The soldiers would be formed into a large circle around the spot occupied by the Minister, and after stacking their arms they would stand up on their feet or sit down upon the ground as would best suit them until the Minister would deliver his discourse.

I recollect whilst upon this expedition [summer 1780], that General Washington had procured the services of a Minister who was quite a small man. A hogshead was placed on an end and the men formed into a large circle around it. The officers (among them Generals Washington and La Fayette) and music, within the ring and seated in groups immediately around where the Preacher was to stand. The man of God mounted the hogshead and after praying and singing commenced his discourse. He had proceeded to a considerable lengthy therein and being quite enlisted in his own discourse, feeling no doubt the force of what he said, and moving about with somewhat of a warmth upon the hogshead, the head of which (owing perhaps to its having stood in the sun sometime,) had become somewhat loose gave way and he fell down into the hogshead. He being of low stature the upper "chime" of which, almost hid his head from the view of the soldiers. He continued to jump up and to show his head above the hogshead, and still preached on. This caused quite a hearty and loud laugh among the soldiers. The officers immediately jumped to their feet and by the time that some assisted him in getting out and replaced him upon the hogshead, (which was done by placing a board across the top of it) others succeeded in quieting the soldiers, and restored order in all parts of the circle. This accident happened towards the heel of his discourse. When matters were again adjusted, the Minister mounted the hogshead again and proceeded with his discourse as if nothing had happened until he finished his sermon and made a final close of the exercises. The place where this happened I do not now recollect."

Samuel Dewees, Waiter & Fifer, PA Line

This incident occurred during the winter 1781-1782 when the New York Brigade was camped at Pompton, NJ. Chaplains, like Rev. Gano, normally conducted church services for the troops in the open air, because of the large numbers of men. This meant that services were often suspended during winter encampments. But in this story, they did use a nearby church in the spring for a service.

Reverend Gano was a Baptist minister who helped start the Baptist Church in Morristown before the Revolutionary War. This account comes from Col. Philip Van Cortlandt, the commander of the 2nd NY Regiment

“The troops being almost destitute of clothing, no money to purchase any, and often scanted for provisions, and obliged to labor hard to make the huts warm, and the weather extremely cold, so that it was attended with difficulty and almost cruelty to keep them exposed in the open air to hear preaching from our worthy Chaplain, Dr. John Gano. I therefore permitted him to return to his family until called for, which I found was not necessary until the breaking up of winter, when he returned of his own pleasure, and informed me that he had received a lecture from one of the soldiers whom he overtook as he came near the encampment. It appeared that the Doctor made inquiry of the soldier how the commandant (meaning me), the officers and men had enjoyed health during the winter while he was absent, &c. The soldier answered: Dear Doctor, we have had tolerable health, but hard times otherwise; we have wanted almost everything, scanted in clothing, provisions and money, and, hardest of all, we have not had even the word of God to comfort us. The Doctor then gave as a reason why he was absent, it being hard to oblige the men, badly clad, to attend worship. True, said the soldier, but it would have been consoling to have had such a good man near us. That remark, said the Doctor, was unanswerable. Shortly after he pointed out the soldier, who was a reprobate fellow, and had diverted himself with quizzing the Doctor.

The church on the low ground being obtained for Doctor Gano to preach in on the following Sabbath, on the Saturday evening previous I let him see the Brigade return, and observed it would be more pleasing if all the men were for the war, but there were several six months and nine months men which I wished to re-enlist. On Sunday, in his introduction to the sermon, he observed that it always gave him pleasure to preach to soldiers, especially when he had good tidings to communicate, and he could aver of the truth that our Lord and Saviour approved of all those who had engaged in his service for the whole warfare. No nine or six months men in his service. This had a fine effect, for many re-enlisted shortly after to silence the pleasantries of their companions.”

Col. Philip Van Cortlandt, 2nd NY Brigade

John Robert Shaw served in both the British and Continental Armies during the American Revolution. He must have enjoyed being a soldier because at the war's end he joined a Pennsylvania State Army which went on an expedition to the Wyoming Valley to drive out squatters/settlers from Connecticut. Shaw was an alcoholic and drank to excess whenever he could. By the way, in case you didn't know what "flatus" means it is a fart. It's an important part of this story.

“For my part I went to captain Hollowback's still-house one day, with two of my fellow-soldiers and having called for a quart of whiskey, we drank it before the fire. But upon attempting to rise, with an intention to return to the barracks, I fell down motionless, and to all

appearances dead; so that the alarm went to the barracks that Shaw was dead. A company then collected to my wake, and having procured a good cag of whiskey, were determined to have a merry frolick: but they were sadly disappointed; for as soon as the operation of the liquor began to abate, I rolled off the board upon which they had laid me, and uttered a heavy groan, accompanied by a loud explosion of flatus from beneath, which so startled the company, that they all run out swearing that the dead was come to life. However, they soon returned, and conveyed me to the barracks, where I was seized with a fit of insanity, and behaved in such an outrageous manner, that they were obliged to confine me with chains and take off my clothes. But by some means, I got loose, and ran through the fort like a Bedlamite, climbing up to the top of the roof of the barracks, and walking to the farther end of ridge, jumped down, without any injury, and ran out of the garrison, until I came to the cliffs by the side of the river, from whence I leaped down, (the distance not being less than 30 or 40 feet) to the bottom, seated myself naked as I was, on a cake of ice, and floated for a considerable distance down the river, before my fellow soldiers could get me off. I was then taken care of, and doctored up with a little more of the usquebaugh,[whiskey] which in the condition I then was, produced no bad effects, but seemed rather to contribute to the restoration of my health, and the recovery of my senses.”
John Robert Shaw

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Samuel Dewees

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John Robert Shaw, British Army, PA Line, and Post War service

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Lighting the Darkness in the 18th Century

Without modern electric street and home lighting, the eighteenth century was a very dark place once the sun went down. But the people found ways to cope with the darkness using both natural and man-made light.

Sometimes the light of the moon or even the stars would provide just enough light to navigate outside. The full moon gave off enough light to create shadows. A full moon rises at dusk and sets at dawn. Unlike most lunar phases, its glow lasts the entire night. But even without a full moon there still was some moonlight. For half of each month, 50 percent or more of the lunar face on clear evenings provides a significant source of reflected light. Additionally, moonlight reflected off of snow would provide more illumination for people walking outside on a cold winter night. But in the end, clouds regulated the amount of celestial light. On a cloudy night people had to resort to man-made light.

Man-made lighting in the 18th century included candlewood/fatwood, rush lights, oil lamps and candles. To save on resources these types of artificial lighting were only used once it got dark. It was considered wasteful to burn lights during daylight hours. This darkening period of the day was often known as “candle-lighting” time. To modern eyes the light provided by a candle would seem feeble. A single electric light bulb is one hundred times stronger than the light from a candle or oil light. But as the old saying goes it is better to light one candle than curse the darkness. Here are some more details on the various types of man-made light in the 18th century.

Kitchen Fire - In a room with a brightly burning fire, people could see to eat, wash, spin, iron clothes or accomplish any of a hundred other simple tasks. On a “bright moonshine evening,” especially when the ground was covered with snow, it might be light enough to read inside the house. Usually no more than a single candle was used for those who needed additional light.

Candlewood/Fatwood – Splinters of pine with high resin content that burned easily and brightly but also quickly were a quick and cheap light source. Knots of pitch pine, called “candlewood” were saved and burned at the side of the hearth for additional light. Splinters of this wood could be used as a candle or to help speed up starting a fire [fatwood].

Rush light – A rush light was made from the inner pith of marsh reeds. They were stripped of their bark, except for one small stripe left in place to hold it together. The rush was then coated with tallow [animal fat]. Rushes gave off a weak light but it had the advantage of being cheap and was easy to make. A well-made specimen, 28 ½ inches long burned for 57 minutes. A smaller one, 15 inches long, lasted for about half an hour. Rush lights lasted for about half the time of a tallow candle. But unlike a candle, rush lights did not require the constant attention of “snuffing” like a candle.

Oil lamp – Oil lamps were metal or ceramic containers holding oil and supplied with a wick that burned to provide the light. The simplest form looked like a small bowl with a spout. Oil or even fat scraps filled the bowl and a simple wick or rag laying in the spout fed off the oil in the bowl to provide the light. These simple lamps were often called Grease lamps or Crusie Lamps. Some versions had two bowls making it look like stacked oil lamps. The bottom bowl caught the dripping grease from the top lamp protecting the floor underneath the lamp. Some of these

double versions could even be separated into two lamps. An improved oil lamp known as a Betty lamp appeared in the late 1700's. This version included a v-shaped or tubular support for the wick and a hinged cover over the oil container. A small hook was often attached by a chain to the Betty lamp to help pull out the wick to make it burn brighter.

In the 18th century the oil used came from animal or plant sources. Refined petroleum products did not appear until the mid-nineteenth century. Whale oil burned the best and was used in street lamps. More commonly available oils included: bear fat, deer fat, fish oil, passenger pigeon fat, nut or plant oils.

Oil lamps were more common in countries where there weren't many sheep to provide the tallow or where warm temperatures caused candles to melt. Conversely, in colder northern climates oil lamps were less popular because the oil could congeal during the winter months.

Candles – Candles in the 18th century were made of a number of different substances, but not paraffin which is another petroleum based product. Most candles were made of animal fat known as tallow. Tallow candles lasted longer than rush lights and gave off a bit more light but they were more expensive than rushes. Tallow was primarily sheep fat with some bull's fat mixed in. Hog fat was not used because it smoked more and gave off a bad smell. Tallow candles could also give off a rancid smell from impurities in the fat. Better candles were made of beeswax or bayberry. Both gave of a pleasant odor and a clear flame. Being more expensive, these candles were used in churches and in formal spaces in homes such as the parlor or the dining room. The best and most expensive candles were made of Spermaceti, which was a waxy substance found inside the head of sperm whale. These candles, burned 3 times brighter than a tallow candle. They also lasted longer and didn't smell bad while burning.

There were no self-consuming wicks in 18th century candles. About every fifteen minutes while a candle burned, the wicks which grew longer and longer had to be "snuffed." This consisted of trimming off the burned remains of wick, [which was called snot] using a scissor – like device with attached box to hold the snuff [Candlesnuffer]. If the wicks were not trimmed the long wick would eventually fall over and cause uneven burning of the candle known as "guttering", which consumed the candle at a higher rate.

Candles were relatively expensive, in terms of the beef tallow and household labor that went into making them. Almost all Americans used candles sparingly; in a group of central Massachusetts inventories taken between 1790 and 1810, for example, over half of the households owned only one or two candlesticks, and those having four candles were very rare. Wealthy families could awe others with an excessive lighting display of nine or a dozen candles. Locally, the inventory of Henry Wick's possessions from 1781 do not list any candlesticks, but this entire inventory is very short on details. **However, the 1787 inventory of Mrs. Wick's possessions does include candlesticks. It mentions 1 iron candlestick and 2 brass candlesticks. All three were valued at 5 shillings.**

Many people walked through their homes at night without candles. They had walked those familiar routes so often they could get by without the light. People who were less confident moving around a dark house would use a candle mounted in a special candleholder known as a chamber stick. Chamber sticks were specially designed to make it safer to carry candles from room to room. They had broad drip pans to catch running wax or tallow and offset handles to prevent burning one's hands if the candle dripped badly. Of course, the user had to walk slowly as they passed through the house so that the motion of the passing air did not blow out the candle.

People needing light outside of the home carried candles in lanterns. Lanterns were usually made of tinned iron. One version was a pierced tin lantern that resembled a round cheese grater. The tiny piercings provided air to keep the flame going. A small open door allowed more light to shine out in one direction but also exposed the flame to wind. Better lanterns had one or more glass sides to allow the light to shine out while still protecting the flame. In addition to providing illumination, lanterns also helped prevent the spread of sparks in highly flammable areas like a barn. The poor fashioned makeshift lanterns, using paper or hollowed out turnips for protection from the wind and rain. The popular Halloween pumpkin can trace its origins back to the poor turnip lantern.

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The Last New Jersey Winter Encampment

Visitors to Jockey Hollow learn all about the Continental Army's winter encampment of 1779-180. Many also come away from the park knowing about the smaller camp in 1780-1781. Some might even learn a little about the earlier camp at Middlebrook. Few visitors, staff, or historians realize, however, that there was one more time when New Jersey hosted an army for the winter in log huts.

The year was 1799. The United States was experienced rising tensions with France. France had had a revolution in 1789 and its radical new government sparked hostilities with the United States. The good feelings of the days of the French alliance were gone. In late 1798, President John Adams and the Federalist-party dominated Congress authorized the expansion of the military to face the French threat. The following year, a force of twelve regiments, dubbed "The New Army" began to take shape. George Washington came out of retirement as its leader with the rank of lieutenant general. Washington acted mostly as an advisor, however, and remained at Mt. Vernon. Alexander Hamilton, Washington's former aide-de-camp and prominent Federalist politician, served as second-in-command. In reality, he was in charge.

As the cold season approached, the New Army would need winter quarters. Billeting troops in major cities promised to disrupt civilian life and spread disease, so the army needed an alternative. In December 1798, Washington had recommended against housing recruits in "great cities" for fear of causing disorders and exposing "the morals and principles of the soldiers." Yet, coastal cities needed protection from a potential French amphibious attack. Therefore, soldiers were to winter in camps built within a few days' march of Boston, New York, and Washington. Hamilton planned three cantonments: Oxford in Massachusetts, Harpers Ferry in Virginia, and Green Brook in New Jersey. The latter hosted the 11th, 12th, and 13th Infantry Regiments, comprising the Union Brigade.

Like Valley Forge and Jockey Hollow, soldiers would rely on a familiar form of shelter. Hamilton recommended the method he had experienced during the last war. He declared "it may be found most eligible to hut the troops during the ensuing winter." Washington outlined specifications for huts that copied exactly those used at Middlebrook and Morristown: sixteen feet square, made of logs, and accommodating twelve men each. Eight non-commissioned officers were apportioned to a hut, while captains and regimental staff officers each received a hut to themselves. Reflecting wartime experience, Hamilton prescribed using boards for hut roofs, with a strong preference for those cut in Albany for their uniform fourteen-foot length that made for convenient hut dimensions. Washington stated explicitly that "troops should be hutted in the manner they were in the late war."

The Union Brigade made camp in New Jersey from October 1799 until early 1800. An early 20th century historian determined the camp site at the current location of Green Brook Park in Plainfield. It was commanded by William S. Smith, John Adams son-in-law. Although Smith has been derided as a political appointee, he had served as an aide to Washington late in the Revolutionary War. The Orderly Book of the 13th Regiment provides a look at daily life in the

Green Brook camp. There is a lot that is similar to the Revolutionary War cantonments. There are also some interesting differences. Below are a few highlights:

Brigade Orders give much more detailed instructions for the basics of felling trees and building huts than is commonly seen during the Revolution. It is possible that more recruits came from urban areas, and were inexperienced with timber working. The 13th seems to have been recruited mostly near New Haven, Connecticut. William Smith expected his soldiers to complete their winter quarters in two weeks or less through “persevering industry.” To further this goal he made sure to give detailed instructions in for his novice troops. Through brigade orders these men learned to fell trees so “that they fall outward and are toppled regularly.” Companies each appointed an artificer to mark the logs in equal parts before cutting them to ensure no timber went to waste. Each regiment was allocated specific grounds for both their huts and their winter timber supply, not to be “trespassed upon.” Smith also took particular care to allocate unskilled troops to where they could make themselves useful. Soldiers “not well acquainted” with handling axes were sent instructed to saw off tree tops and assemble this “smallwood” in front of the huts for “usual purposes.” Each regiment received “strong cant hooks” to drag logs, saving the men from “accidents which commonly attend” rolling timber.ⁱ The recruits had to learn other parts of their craft as well. Soldiers had over-kindled their fires, leading the flames to rise “beyond the chimneys and carried through the roof.” An accident on the night of November 27 served as a reminder to the soldiers to avoid this practice in the future. Masons were urged to finish their work on the chimneys while weather remained good. Soldiers were reminded that boards must first be used to build their roofs; ground cover and bunks would come later.ⁱⁱ

A month later the brigade addressed issues of fuel and food supply

“that fuel is not lavishly used or unnecessarily expended by economy in the beginning of the winter it is probable there will prove a sufficiency it would be advisable for the troops in the first instance to consume all the brush and chips in front of the cantonment and in the first second and third streets and to cut away the stumps close to the surface. The brush should be cut and formed into fascines of three feet upon a cradle. A sample will be given in the course of the day on the grand parade. How those cradles are to be made and the fascines formed they can then be piled close to the front of the houses and used occasionally in future there will be a field officer of the day who will superintend with the captain of the day the general economy and cleanliness of the cantonment. They will together inspect the days of issue the provisions furnished by the contractor and be particularly attentive that the troops are supplied with good and wholesome provisions. The contract is a liberal one on the part of the government and the troops must be supplied fully up to the letter and spirit of it. Should the officer of the day at any time find that the provisions are poor, bar, or unwholesome they will immediately report their opinion to the commanding officer who will take prompt measures to remedy the debt. The soldier is entitled to every comfort the government has promised to afford him and it is the duty of the officer to see that his comfort and convenience to promoted to the full extent of his allowance. And the commanding officer has no doubt but attention to this

point on the part of the officers of the brigade will be initially given. The field officer of the day will arrange the guard post the sentinels for the hours of the patrols which will vary every night and call on the commanding officer for interior instructions.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Some Union Brigade’s soldiers proved a nuisance to the civilian residents of the region. On the night of November 15, Smith called the regiments out for a late evening assembly on the parade ground. The following day he praised their “perfect sobriety, silence, and military deportment.” Nevertheless, he found some men lacking. He declared “offenders against the peace and tranquility of the inhabitants of the adjacent country will be promptly punished and also be considered tarnishing the dignity of the brigade.” Smith’s threat was not a preemptive one, for he convened regimental courts martial to try “those soldiers whose disorderly conduct last night disturbed the tranquility” of nearby Plainfield. The commanding officer also informed Plainfield’s residents of this impending trials, likely to assuage any civilian complaints about the army. Indeed, he invited civilians to attend the courts and identify the culprits, thereby aiding in “checking any further licentiousness or disorder.” Smith expected that soldiers would refrain from plunder and disorder and that “all good citizens will lend their aid in securing the peace of the village.” He prohibited all soldiers and officers from absenting themselves from camp after evening tattoo. Much like brigade officers during the mutinous winter of 1781, Smith reminded his men to “consider the camp as their home.”^{iv}

The Union Brigade also found itself at the center of the nation’s growing racial divide. On November 26, Brigade Orders stated the following:

“The commanding officer requests of the officer of the day & the officers of the camp guard the most pointed attention to prevent the Negroes of the adjacent country entering camp. His feelings as a soldier was very unpleasantly affected on Sunday last when he noticed some of the men playing at pitch penny with Negroes. He hopes they will hereafter recollect more the dignity of their station and not disgrace the garb of a soldier by such low amusements and with such base associates. No negro is permitted to sell anything in camp without a pass from his master sanctioned by the officer of the day with his signature and articles offered for sale by negroes without permits must be seized and the negroes consigned until his master may be informed of his situation. The articles seized will be deposited with the officer of the day until the master comes for them. The frequent disorders of the blacks robbing their masters of their poultry is so frequently laid to the troops and the commanding officer hopes when the negroes find that they cannot dispose of stolen articles they will cease to plunder their master and keep themselves more at home. Certainly their company must be disciplined with in this camp.”^v

The above is particularly striking in comparison to camp orderly books during the Revolution. Few if any regulations of race in camp are evident at Middlebrook or Morristown. There are a few possible explanations for this. The Continental Army was *de facto* integrated while the New Army was apparently not. The enslaved population in New Jersey grew after the Revolution,

particularly in the Raritan Valley. The Haitian Revolution during the 1790s heightened white racial anxieties. Finally, the Jeffersonian Republicans in New Jersey supported gradual emancipation, and would get the state's first emancipation law passed in 1804. The New Army was largely a Federalist Force, so its discrimination may have been politically motivated. Or, Colonel Smith and his officers may have been slightly more outwardly racist in writing their orders than their Revolutionary forebears.

The Union Brigade's winter ended early. Washington died in December, and the New Army camps put on elaborate funeral processions in his honor. In early 1800, the US and France normalized relations. President Adams opted for peace over war, and the New Army became redundant. The camps and the army broke up by spring 1800. Today they remain a footnote (in some cases literally) in history. However, documents like the 13th Regiment's Orderly Book show that officers and soldiers treated their job seriously and professionally. At least two more orderly books from the 1799 camps exist, one in the collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, the other at the College of William and Mary. When all three are examined together they may shed further light on this forgotten army. The 13th's Orderly Book nevertheless provides good insights. The day-to-day operations of the camp differ little from the previous war. The Green Brook camp also reveals the influence of cantonments like Middlebrook and Morristown. In 1799, again in 1812, and later still in 1861, when soldiers needed winter shelter in the field, they turned to log huts like those standing at Jockey Hollow.

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ⁱⁱ Brigade Orders, December 2, 1799, 13th Regiment Orderly Book, Gilder Lehrman Collection.

ⁱⁱⁱ Brigade Orders, December 2, 1799, 13th Regiment Orderly Book, Gilder Lehrman Collection.

^{iv} Brigade Orders, November 16, 1799, 13th Regimental Orderly Book, Gilder Lehrman Collection.

^v Brigade Orders, November 28, 1799, 13th Regimental Orderly Book, Gilder Lehrman Collection.

Nighttime in the Eighteenth Century

When the sun went down in the 18th century the world turned dark. Most people headed inside and gathered around the comforting warm glow of a kitchen fire. Within a few hours everyone was asleep.

You didn't want to be outside in the night. There were all sorts of dangers both real and imaginary out there in the darkness.

Superstitious people feared witches, ghosts and other things that went bump in the night. Then there were unexplained phenomenon like the glowing will-o-the-wisps or jack-o-lanterns that moved through the night. Seen by travelers at night, especially over bogs, swamps or marshes. It resembled a flickering lamp and was said to recede if approached, drawing travelers from safe paths. Modern science believes it is caused by the ignition of various swamp gases including methane. Private Joseph P. Martin saw several in his lifetime and gave this description of an encounter in Pennsylvania in 1778: *"It was cloudy and a low fog hung all night upon the meadow, and for several hours during the night there was a jack-o-lantern cruising in the eddying air. The poor thing seemed to wish to get out of the meadow, but could not, the air circulating within the enclosure of trees would not permit it. Several of the guard endeavoured to catch it but did not succeed."*

But there also could be real danger in the night. Wild animals, robbers and Indians could be hiding behind every tree. If the army was nearby, there could be deserters, or hungry soldiers looking to steal a chicken or pig. Plus, there might be enemy spies or even an enemy preparing to attack. While in cities, most people out after dark were suspected of being up to no good. There were thieves looking to break into homes and robbers lurking in the darkness to mug passersby. Plus darkness helped prostitutes ply their trade to drunken men making their way home from the taverns.

To combat the evil-doers some cities established street lighting. Glass lanterns protecting oil lamps perched on ten foot high posts every fifty feet provided along some, but not all streets. Despite heavy fines drunks found breaking street lamps especially appealing. In an attempt to curb night disturbances cities also had a night watch. Men who patrolled the streets at night announcing the hour, the weather and watching out for fires as well as crime. But in many cases the night watchmen were old, drunk or asleep.

Despite these civic improvements cities were still dark and dangerous places according to this account from Loyalist Nicholas Cresswell while walking in New York City after midnight: *"As I went down St. John's Street I heard something floundering in the Ditch [open storm sewer usually in the middle of the street]. I stopped and **by the light of the moon could perceive** something like a human being stirred the mud a little. I plunged in and found it to be a man, whom I hauled to the shore quite insensible. I pulled the dirt out of his mouth with my fingers and in a little time I could perceive him make a noise. I then went to the next sentry, who happened to be a hessian. I told him of the situation of the man below in the Street, but he did not understand English.*

*After we had sputtered at one another for some time, the Sergeant of the Guard came who could speak English. He very civilly **called a light** and went with me to the man who by this time could speak, and told us that he had been insulted by a Girl of the Town [prostitute] and had been imprudent enough to treat her rather indelicately [sexually assaulted her?]. One of her*

bullies [pimps] had cut him in several places in the head, knocked him down and dragged him into the ditch. He desired that we would help him to his lodgings in Queen Street, which the Hessian Sergeant and I did. The bruises he had received and the muddy stinking water he had swallowed made him very ill. I went as soon as we had got him to bed and called Doctor Smith to him who immediately let him blood [bleeding was a popular cure-all]. He appears to be a genteel, well-behaved man [despite the whoring and sexual assault], returned me thanks in the most polite terms for saving his life. I am happy that I have been an instrument of preserving it.”

Besides the night watchmen there were other people out at night who were earning a living honestly. There were lamplighters who lit the street lamps at dusk and extinguished them in the morning. Link Boys were poor boys hired to carry “links” or torches to light your way down the street. Additionally there were the night men, who cleaned out people’s privies. Due to the smell, this work was done at night while most people slept. Along a similar vein, walkers at night needed to be wary because people often threw the contents of their chamber pots out the window onto the street. Custom called for people to call out Gaurdy Loo before tossing to warn passers-by. The phrase is believed to be derived from a French phrase and is considered the origin of the British term Loo for bathroom.

The army also had folks up at night. Everyday a portion of the soldiers are assigned to guard duty. They were on guard duty for 24 hours and did several two-hour tours walking their guard post followed by four hours on stand-by in the guard house. Guards are assigned to protect army stores, officers and the camp perimeter. Guards not only protected the camp from enemy attack and spies but also from their own soldiers who might be trying to desert or steal from nearby farms.

Outside of cities there were also some people who had to work at night. When an iron furnace was “in blast” in order to sustain the intense temperatures, furnaces burned around the clock 24 hours a day, seven days a week for as many months of the year as possible. The same around the clock work was also required by glassmakers, charcoal burners and operators of lime kilns.

Others might work late occasionally to complete a special job. Benjamin Franklin in his early days as a printer wanted to make a good impression and worked into the night as he described in his autobiography: *“But so determined I was to continue doing a sheet a day of the folio, that one night, when, having imposed my forms [set type in frames] I thought my day’s work over, one of them by accident was broken, and two pages reduced to pi [all the letters were scattered falling from the frame or form], I immediately distributed and composed it over again before I went to bed; and this industry, visible to our neighbours, began to give us character and credit; ...Dr. Baird...gave a ...opinion: “For the industry of that Franklin, “ says he, “is superior to anything I ever saw of the kind; I see him still at work when I go home from club, and he is at work again before his neighbours are out of bed.”*

Among the hardest workers – night in, night out – were women. Men did their work when daylight provided the most illumination. Farmers, usually worked outside of their homes in the fields or with the livestock. But women spent most of their time working inside. Even when the sun went down the light provided by a kitchen fire allowed women to continue their domestic chores. As the old adage said: “Men work from sun to sun, but women’s work is never done.”

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Plundering Staten Island 1780

The Short Version

Taking advantage of the bridge of ice between New Jersey and Staten Island, American forces, under the command of Lord Stirling, raided Staten Island in January 1780. With the war at a stalemate, raids were the only way Washington could strike back at the British. Successful raids, like the victory at Stony Point in 1779, helped boost Patriot morale and garnered additional supplies by means of captured weapons, ammunition and other needed supplies.

Washington and his generals knew that they couldn't hold Staten Island against a British counterattack once the iced over harbor broke up. But with the British ships frozen in place the Americans could cross over to Staten Island and destroy enemy fortifications. Additionally they would return with prisoners and plunder.

Aware of the intended raid, the British withdrew to the safety of their fortifications. While the American forces spent a freezing night camped out on the island until they could withdraw to New Jersey the following day. During their stay on Staten Island the forces of the Continental Army were joined by New Jersey militia whose primary goal was plundering the enemy.

While the Continental Troops returned with "*A number of tents, arms, and a quantity of baggage, with several casks of wine and spirits*" the militia took anything they could steal, including jewelry off women's necks.

Apprised of the plundering, the American commander Lord Stirling attempted to gather up the plunder from the militia and some of his own troops as they returned to Elizabethtown. He appointed the Reverend James Caldwell with gathering up any other plunder he could locate and then returning it to the British. Eventually three sleigh loads were brought goods back to the Loyalists on Staten Island. But everyone was certain other items were never returned.

British and Loyalists looking for revenge soon after raided New Jersey. They burned down an academy building in Newark and the courthouse and Caldwell's own church in Elizabethtown. The cycle of raids and counterattacks would continue throughout the war.

The Full Version Complete with Quotes

Plunder could be controversial. Equipment and supplies taken from enemy forces such as cannon or muskets were considered legitimate plunder. Often the monetary value of these captured goods would be distributed among the victorious soldiers. Plundering the personal possessions of a captured enemy soldier was a frequent but debatable occurrence. But plundering civilians, even enemy civilians was frowned upon. The plundering of the people of New Jersey in 1776 by British and German troops was loudly decried by the Patriots. Even British officers issued orders against it, knowing that the ill treatment by their men often would turn people's allegiance to the Patriot cause.

Plundering of civilians was a big factor in the 1780 Staten Island raid. A raid that Quartermaster Joseph Lewis said, *"answered no valuable purpose except to show the inclination of our inhabitants to plunder..."* While his boss Quartermaster General Nathaniel Greene said the raid was, *"a noble attempt; but a fruitless expedition. The Enemy have more than doubly punished us for our presumption, and still threaten us with further mischief."*

Before the raid, Greene had high hopes of gaining supplies for the army. He wrote to Washington *"The whole of the day if the enterprise succeeds, should be employed in getting off Stores, Provisions, and so fourth, that may be found belonging to the Enemy. The Inhabitants I think should not be plunderd, only of their fat Cattle and Sheep.* Greene wanted the plunder of civilians limited to meat that his army desperately needed.

Plunder was a major reason for the raid and was brought up frequently in the planning. Washington wrote about plunder to Lord Stirling, *"In case of success, The value of everything that is public property or lawful plunder shall be divided in just proportion among the Officers and Men. And if any Officer or Soldier attempts to appropriate any thing to his own particular use, he shall be compelled to deliver it up, shall forfeit all pretensions to a common share and shall be punished at the discretion of a Court Martial for disobedience of Orders. No private property to be brought off on any pretence whatever, except fat Cattle &c. as before mentioned.* Washington wanted the plundering limited to legitimate military goods and food. As an encouragement to the soldiers, a monetary reward was offered for the military plunder. But at the same time, soldiers were warned not to steal for personal gain or to take any private property.

These same thoughts regarding plunder were repeated in Washington instructions for the raid issued on January 12, 1780,

"The Genl. Promises in case of Success that the Value of everything that is public property or lawfull plunder shall be divided in just proportion among the Officers and men, and if any Officer or Soldier attempts to appropriate any thing to his own Particular use, he shall be compelled to deliver it up, shall forfeit all pertentions to a Common Share and shall be punished at the Discretion of a Court Martial, for Disobedience of Orders.

Any man Quitting his post or Ranks in Order to plunder is to be punished with Instant Death. No private property of the Inhabitants is to be Medled with or brought off, on any pretense whatever, excepting fat Cattle & Sheep of which regular accounts are to be taken with the names of the persons from whome taken, and to whome delivered...."

Washington had also gotten word that the local militias were interested in participating in the raid. Since it normally was difficult to get the militia to turn out, Washington was unwilling to turn them away and instructed Lord Stirling to have them follow the same instructions, *"If any parties of Militia of the Country will Joine either of the Columns, they are to be admitted and are to be under the same regulations."* But two days later on the 14th Washington expressed some concerns about the militia, *"I have reason to believe that many of the inhabitants, suspecting something in agitation, are preparing to go upon the Island with intent to plunder. Every thing of this kind should be prohibited as far as possible. If any of the Militia will embody themselves regularly and put themselves under your Lordships command, (and share the fatigues of the Soldiers) I think they should be encouraged in such case and admitted to an equal share with the Continental Troops of whatever shall be brought off by authority...."*

Washington also thought Stirling should give a warning to the civilians of Staten Island, *"I think it will be advisable when you get upon the Island to let the Inhabitants know that such as are found in Arms must expect to be treated as Enemies, and their effects given up as plunder. I would be understood to hold out this by way of Threat, rather than put it in execution, as to taking their Effects, such as are found in Arms they must be brought off as prisoners of war."*

Joseph Lewis, Assistant Deputy Quartermaster at Morristown, was charged with gathering civilian sleighs to transport troops to the raid and to bring back plunder. His recruiting of sleighs went better than expected, *"A secret expedition was plann'd; in consequence of which I received General Green orders last Wednesday afternoon to procure three hundred sleds or sleighs to parade Friday morning at this post & at Mr. Kimbles, ... I did not fail to exert myself on this occasion & the Magistrates gained deserved applause. About 500 sleighs and sleds was collected..."* Perhaps the prospect of plunder was able to draw sleigh drivers out in droves during a period of incredibly cold conditions. Lewis had high hopes for the raid and his sleighs, *"These sleds and as many more are to Return loaded with stores from the British Magazines on Staten Island except some few that are to be loaded with wounded British Prisoners. About 3000 Troops are gone over under the Command of Lord Stirling with a determination to remove all Staten Island bagg and Baggage to Morris Town"*

But things did not go off as planned. Even though the British became aware of the proposed attack, the American forces decided to go ahead with the attack. Unfortunately they found that the British forces had withdrawn behind the walls of their fortifications. Lacking heavy artillery the Continental troops could not drive them out and both sides spent the night warily watching one another. The next day the American forces returned to New Jersey with the British nipping at their heels. Despite the lackluster raid the troops did return with some lawful plunder. Ensign John Barr reported, *"our Troops returned off the Island with 500 Sleigh Loads of divers Articles and burnt 9 Sloops Loaded with Wood &c."* While Doctor James Thacher was a little more specific, *"they, however, brought off a quantity of blankets and stores... A number of tents, arms, and a quantity of baggage, with several casks of wine and spirits, were brought off, with seventeen prisoners."*

However, with the British troops hiding in their forts the local civilians lacked protection and were plundered by the militia and some of the Continental forces. Sylvanus Seely, of Chatham and a Colonel in the Morris County Militia wrote in his diary, *"Captn. Day and my self went to Deharts Point ower People got on the Iseland about sun rise this Morning the Enemy retired to there fort without fighting the weather more moderate Came hom in the Evening the inhabetenc on the Iseland are sorely Plundered"* Rhode Island Captain William Allen blamed the militia for

the plundering, *“Great numbers of Militia followed in the rear of the Army who plundered all the inhabitation without distinction to Age or Sect, those only excepted who were protected by the Continental Troops! Necklaces off the Ladies Necks, Buckles from their Shoes (shirts from Mens Backs) was taken by those Hell deserving Villians.”*

Though the militia got the majority of the blame for the plundering of the people of Staten Island, we know of at least one case involving the Continental Army. The General Orders for February 19, 1780 mention the court martial of a Continental officer for plundering, *“Lt. Porter of the 7th Maryland Regiment was tried for “unofficer, unsoldierlike and Villainous conduct upon Staten Island vizt. Robbing and plundering a Woman of money &c.”, found Guilty of the charge being a breach of Art. 21, Section 13 of the Rules and Articles of War and Sentenced to be cashiered. The Commander in Chief approves the sentence and orders it to take place immediately.”* Since he was an officer, Porter was only dismissed from the army [cashiered]. If he had been an enlisted man he could have been whipped or hanged. However, British Major Charles Cameron laid more blame on the Continental troops in a letter to Patriot minister James Caldwell, *“The Continental troops where they went were guilty of the greatest Enormities even to stripping women of their body cloaths and beating them when resisting. I must confess the banditta that took the opportunity of your troops being on this island did the greatest mischief.”*

Lord Stirling summed up the plundering in his January 16th report to Washington, *“While the troops were upon the Island a number of persons from this side took advantage of the occasion to pass upon the Island and plunder the people there in the most shameful and merciless manner. Many of them were stopped on their return their booty taken from them; in addition to which I have sent an order for publication requiring those who had eluded the search to restore the articles in their possession and exhorting the good people at large to assist in detecting them. All the soldiery on recrossing the ice, were searched, and the little plunder they had taken from them, and their names noted that they may be brought to punishment. The articles recovered are and will be deposited with the Reverend Mr. Caldwell (who is exerting himself in this affair) to be returned to the owners. I am happy to inform your Excellency that a very inconsiderable part indeed of the troops dishonored themselves by participating in these enormities.”*

William Barber, Lord Stirling's aide then had the following notice published in the newspapers,

“By order of the fourteenth instant, all officers, soldiers, militia men, and followers of the army, were positively prohibited from plundering or insulting the inhabitants of Staten Island; notwithstanding which many of the inhabitants of this state took advantage of the opportunity, while the army kept the enemy within their works, and acted in open violation thereof; Major-General Lord Stirling therefore positively requires, that all persons possessed of any articles of plunder, taken on the island, do immediately deliver the same to Doctor Caldwell, at Springfield, to the end that they may be returned to the proper owners, otherwise they will be proceeded against with military severity: - The very few of the soldiery who were guilty of the same misconduct have been already compelled to restore what they had taken, and will be most severely punished. All the good people of this state who know any persons within the above description, are desired to give immediate information thereof.”

Tasked with returning the illegal plunder, Reverend James Caldwell wrote to Washington on January 19th, *“As the care of sending it back was committed to me, I went this day to Town to obtain a flag for that purpose. But was told by the officer commanding there that he could not grant a flag without your Excellency's order. If it is your pleasure that the General order*

aforesaid be obeyed you will please to give the necessary orders by the bearer. We apprehend the sooner that it is done the better, as it may soften the bitterness of their minds who have been stripped if our borders should come into their power.

I should be very happy to know your Excellency's pleasure respecting those persons who are known to have plunder in their possession, whether the officers commanding nearest to such shall grant parties either upon my application or the application of a magistrate to take the articles from them when milder measures will not avail.

From the vast multitudes who greedily rushed to plunder our country has received such disgrace as will not easily; I may say possibly wiped off. Vigorous exertions on the part of those in office appear to me the only method to prevent universal depravity and reproach."

Washington replied on the 21st, *"It is fully my intention to do everything in my power to promote the operation of Lord Stirling's General Order respecting the plunder taken from Staten Island. I inclose you a permission for a flag to return what you may have collected"* He also ordered Colonel Moses Hazen to assist in recouping the illegal plunder. Washington told Hazen *"Mr. Caldwell has represented to me, that it may be necessary to have some parties from your detachment the better to recover the plunder of Staten Island, from such persons as are known to have it in possession, but who will not deliver it up. To avoid as much as possible an appearance of military interposition on our part, you will only grant parties on the application of a magistrate; and further to prevent any ill effects to the inhabitants who may have the plunder, you will put them under the command of discreet officers, attentive to the rights of citizens and forbid in the most pointed terms all insult or abuse whatever."* Not wanting to overstep his boundaries with the civil authorities Washington ordered Hazen to wait for local magistrates to ask for his help before he went after the hidden plunder.

The British sent three sleighs over to Elizabeth on January 25th to pick up the returned plunder. But the British doubted that everything was being returned. Loyalist William Smith relayed information gathered from Continental deserters, *"Lord Stirling has published his Orders for delivering all the Plunder to Parson Caldwell at Springfield to be returned to the Inhabitants of Staten Island, but 'tis supposed this is a Finesse, and the Deserters say it is for the Sale and Equal Distribution of it among the Party"* Later the Royal Gazette in New York published the following letter supposedly written by American Deputy Quartermaster General Benjamin Brown on February 1, 1780, which also references plunder being left behind.

"I was at Elizabeth-Town this morning, and found a good many articles of the Staten Island plunder in Mr. Shutes house. Mr. Ben Williamson says he cannot procure sleighs sufficient to take it to Morris Town. There are some articles, such as matrasses and blankets, which I sewed up in a blanket for our family's use; Mr. Ben Williamson will send two sleigh loads of what are there, to-morrow; Major Williamson wrote me that there were some goods lodged at Springfield, if you know where they are, I wish you would send them to Morris-Town, directed to me: Such things as you may think, at Elizabeth Town, unnecessary to send to Morris, I could wish you to dispose of, and transmit the accounts with the sales to me, as I am to be accounted for all of them. I wish you would send a sleigh or two to Elizabeth Town, to fetch up what goods that may be worth sending, as soon as possible, so that the things may be appraised and settled." While the British published this letter because they thought Brown was referring to plundered object from Loyalist civilians, he may actually be talking about what the Americans considered legal plunder. Finally, Washington wrote again to Caldwell about the plunder problem, *"the less said on the plunder taken from Staten Island, the better. The returning simply what can be recovered, in my opinion, is the best exculpation.[Acquittal, Pardon, Absolution]"*

But the British and their Loyalist supporters were not content with the return of just a couple of sleighs full of odds and ends. They wanted revenge. Colonel Moses Hazen on outpost duty warned Washington, *“A woman also came from Staten Island yesterday who confirms that of the Inhabitants being plundered by the militia – Who swear revenge that a Detachment of Troops have moved up from the Watering Place and taken post near the Ruins of Deckers House that the Inhabitants are very Desirous of joining the British Troops in revenging the Injuries which they have received from the Militia.”*

Speaking for the British General commanding on Staten Island, Major Cameron wrote to Reverend Caldwell, *“The general wishes as an individual to carry on this contest but at the same time looks on himself as called upon to retaliate for the injuries done to those under his protection.”* Caldwell forwarded the message to Washington and added, *“I inclose your Excellency a letter from General Sterling’s BM in answer to one I wrote to them respective the plunder. I believe what he says is true and that he has very sufficient reason for severe retaliation. If we did right in burning boats which were private property and some of them the property of good friends because occasionally taken into the service of the enemy I do not see why they may not take a house or a wagon or burn a house because the same hath been made of them on our side. Burning churches seems indeed quite out of the line of military operations I did think of mentioning on my next to him that unmilitary piece of savageness. But if your Excellency could think it consistent, I had much rather you would call upon him to declare the avowel or disavowel of that conduct...”* Washington replied. *“...if Mr. Stirling, burns churches, the severest recrimination will be contained in the action.”*

British and Loyalist struck back with a vengeance on the night of January 25th raiding both Newark and Elizabethtown. In Newark they burning an academy building being used to house Continental soldiers. In Elizabethtown they burned down the courthouse. And just as Reverend Caldwell feared, they also burned a church. It was Reverend Caldwell’s church. Loyalist William Smith wrote, *“The Jersey People near the Shore are disgusted with Lord Stirling’s late Expedition to Staten Island. It cost Newark its Academy, and Elizabeth the Court House and Presbyterian Church. They fear more damage and many are moving away.”*

In a feeble attempt to calm the situation, the Magistrates of Essex County published the following in the newspapers, *“The Magistrates of the county of Essex, abhorring the savage and detestable practice of plundering, resolved unanimously, at a meeting held the 23 ult. at Newark to exert their influence and authority to detect and convict all the inhabitants of the county of Essex, who were guilty of so much baseness, in the late incursion upon Staten–Island, contrary to the previous general orders of Major-General Lord Stirling, and contrary to every feeling of humanity, and to assist in collecting and sending back every thing they possibly can which was stolen from the inhabitants of Staten Island, agreeable to the general order of Lord Stirling, issued upon his return, and published in this paper.”*

General Greene summed up the situation in a letter on February 8th, *“The Enemy have more than doubly punished us for our presumption, and still threaten us with further mischief.”*

But still people in New Jersey wanted to continue raiding Staten Island. Governor William Livingston wrote this reply when he received another request to raid Staten Island, “*I was disinclined to grant a permission to go to Staten Island to seize some obnoxious persons there, & some of their moveable Property, because those kind of parties had generally been guilty of indiscriminately plundering both Whigs & Tories; & that in such kind of warfare the Enemy had manifestly the Advantage of us, & were greatly provoked thereto by our Example, ... Could we confide in any competent Number to go & take Prisoners & abstain from plundering (by the latter of which this State has already been eminently disgraced) I should have no objection; but by the Samples I have seen of such parties I think there is no dependence to be made on their Promises; that instead of the public good, which is always their pretence, they generally mean only to load themselves with booty, & that very frequently the property of our Friends who circumstances did not permit them to move out of the Enemy’s Lines & who are sufficiently distressed by being obliged to remain within them.*”

The cycle of raids and counterraids would continue throughout the war.

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Silvanus Seely, Merchant, Farmer, Militia Colonel, Resident of Chatham[?]
Diaries of Silvanus Seely
Collection of Morristown NHP Library

Captain William Allen, Second [Angell’s] Rhode Island Regiment
Photocopies of Allen’s Letters in the Photocopy Collection of Morristown NHP Library

The Papers of William Livingston, Vol. 3,

Plunder, Booty, Prizes and Spoils

The words, “plunder, booty, prizes and spoils” bring up visions of pirates and privateers capturing ships on the high seas, but they also apply to the activities of 18th century armies during the American Revolution.

Plunder can be grouped under two categories. The first type of plunder would be captured military supplies that benefited the army. While the second category of plunder would be the theft of personal items, that enriched an individual. Plunder of an individual can be further broken down into plunder against the enemy which was generally allowed and then there was indiscriminate plunder any nearby civilian. While generals continually issued orders against plundering civilians it remained a constant problem.

Plunder of an Army

When an enemy force surrendered, it also surrendered all its arms, ammunition, food and other supplies. All military related items were taken by the army. Occasionally the soldiers were paid prize money for the value of the captured items. For example, after the capture of the British fortification at Stony Point in 1779 Washington wrote to Congress, *“Congress will perceive that some pecuniary rewards were promised by General Wayne to his corps. This was done with my concurrence; and in addition to them, as a greater incitement to their exertion, they were also promised the benefit of whatever was taken in the fort. The artillery and stores are converted to the use of the public; but in compliance with my engagements, it will be necessary to have them appraised and the amount paid to the captors, in money.”*

Unfortunately, some soldiers plundered on their own and even sold their ill-gotten gains according to the General Orders of July 22, 1779, *“Every Soldier who has been guilty of Plundering at Stony Point, and applying to his own use any part of which was intended for the common benefit assailants, is to be excluded from a share of the above estimate; and, moreover, on conviction of the crime, to receive corporal punishment as a court martial shall think proper to sentence.*

And whereas, some officers have purchased articles from the soldiers, under a mistaken idea that they had a right to sell, without considering the pernicious consequences to which such a practice leads, and that it intends to encourage a spirit of plundering in the most critical moments, by which the best concerted plans are often defeated. The General desires that all such practices may be given up, the money being refunded to them, and that practices of this kind be discountenanced in future by officers of every denomination.”

Other items captured at Stony Point, that were not needed by the army, were auctioned off to the highest bidder, *“among which are 3 Negroes and horses.”* Captain Samuel Richards of the Connecticut Line attended and noted, *“I was present: at the auction sale of the articles captured and saw the coat of a Captain Tew who fell in the assault—and noticed a bullet hole in it near the breast.”* Apparently, not everything was sold at the auction because three months later in the orders for October 26, 1779 it stated, *“The Negro boy Sandy and the mare taken at Stoney Point will be sold tomorrow at 10 o'clock in the morning. The boy for the term of ten years only, after which he is to be a free man. The conditions will be inserted in the orderly book and signed by the purchaser.”* Either the officers had some misgivings about buying a slave, or more likely they

lacked the money to buy either the slave Sandy or the horse because the sale was postponed for another month and then unfortunately disappears from the records.

The British and Germans also expected rewards from captured enemy goods. German Major Carl Baurmeister complained after the capture of New York City in 1776, *“All the captured guns, ammunition, provisions, and flags in the army were carefully listed, and the list turned over to the Commandant of New York, General Robertson.*

No one received the slightest remuneration, and when the question of rewards came up, we were told there would be none in this war. Otherwise, much of the remuneration would have been due to the First Company of Hessian Jagers...” He also complained about the money that was captured, *“I wish the Hessian troops could have taken as much in coin as they did in paper money (which had to be turned in at the English headquarters). Time alone will show whether any of it will be redeemed.”*

But later there were some rewards for the troops. Following the battle of Brandywine British Lieutenant Henry Stirke reported, *“...we pushed the Rebels from ye heights, in about 15 minutes, with great loss; besides most of their Cannon which fell into our hands... The loss of the Rebels we can't ascertain; but have reason to believe it to be, about 1000 men in kill'd, wounded and taken prisoners – with 17 pieces of Cannon. The 1st Battalion of Light Infantry took 5 of the number [cannon]; and the General is pleased to make a present of 100 Dollars for each gun taken.”* When the Queen's Rangers captured a number of American baggage wagons outside of Philadelphia in April 1778, their commander, Lt. Col. J.G. Simcoe proudly noted, *“The commander in chief ordered the baggage to be sold, for their benefit; it produced a dollar a man.”* While Major Baurmeister reported on November 9, 1778 – *“Lord Cornwallis has been paid the value of the frigate Delaware, which was captured when we took possession of Philadelphia. Since both British and Hessian grenadiers were at that time under his command, he gave the Hessian grenadiers, from privates up to noncommissioned officers, some 820 pounds sterling.”*

But plunder was more than big ticket items like frigates and cannon. Anything that could be useful to the army was saved. German Private Johann Carl Buettner remembered that after the battle of Brandywine, *“The field of battle was strewn with rifles and powder pouches. We remained in camp here eight days... The abandoned rifles and powder pouches were picked up, piled in wagons, and driven after the army.”* After a raid on the British camp during the siege of Fort Stanwix in 1777, the Americans returned with many useful items and some trophies as well. Ensign William Colbrath of the Third New York Regiment gave this accounting of the plunder, *“Our party returned Immediately and brought in a Number of Blanketts, Brass Kettles, Powder and Ball, a Variety of Clothes, and Indian Trinketts and hard Cash together with four Scalps the Indians had lately taken, being entirely fresh and left in their Camp. Two of the Scalps taken are supposed to be those of the Girls, being neatly Dressed and the Hair platted. A bundle of Letters [was] found in the Enemy Camp which had been sent by one Luke Casady [a courier] for this Garrison, who tis supposed is either killed or taken. The Letters were not broke open. Four Colours were also taken & Immediately hoisted on our Flag Staff under the Continental Flagg as Trophies of Victory.”*

Captain Johann Ewald, of the Field Jager Corps complained that he was cheated out of a prize of 20 ships that he and his men captured in the Elk River in August 1777, *“I had the ships boarded by an officer and twenty jagers. I learned from the sailors and passengers that the ships were partly loaded with all sorts of personal effects belonging to the fleeing inhabitants of Elktown, and had been prevented from running out of Cheasapeake Bay by our fleet. I asked*

several sailors about the value of their cargo, because it was indeed an excellent prize for us. They assured me that it surely had loadings for a hundred thousand piasters, which, besides the effects, included much indigo, tobacco, sugar, and wine. I ordered the officer not to touch anything, and reported it at once to the Commanding General, who accompanied the Jager Corps. The jager detachment was replaced by Englishmen, and that was the end. I found here that my honesty was carried too far; they laughed at me, and I learned from my mistake.”

Plundering by Individual Soldiers

Individual soldiers plundered for their own enrichment. It seems to have been a tradition in European armies that was readily adopted by American troops. Soldiers most likely justified their actions because of their poor pay and hard work with so much danger and so few benefits. Plundering was also justified because in many cases the people being plundered were the enemy. In other cases, when civilians were plundered soldiers felt justified because of their hunger or poor living conditions, while the local farmers appeared to be living quite well.

Plundering of the enemy was usually sanctioned by their officers. Plundering of civilians was often overlooked. In other cases, orders against plundering were read to the troops and severe cases of plundering were punished.

Individual soldiers looked for plunder on raids and after battles. Captain Enoch Anderson allowed his men to plunder a British colonel's quarters during an August 1777 raid on Staten Island. He recalled, *“I drew up my men on the pavement and entered the house. An old female was here, and no more. I soon found this was a colonel's quarters, with his officers. She told me I had come so quickly upon them, that they had run half-naked out of the house. I found the house full of lawful plunder. I went out to my soldiers and told them there was plenty of fair plunder inside. “Go in, all of you,” I said, “I will stay here, but when you hear me beat the drum, come out in a moment.” I waited a due time and then beat the drum. They came out, each one had something.”* He later complained, *“The Jersey troops got much spoil, - fair game. The Delaware Regiment got nothing, save what was taken by my company. One of the officers in my troops gave me a share of his spoils, but it was not much.”*

Plunder of Prisoners of War

Prisoners captured in raids or battles were often stripped of their valuables by their captors. Ebenezer Fletcher, Fifer, New Hampshire Regiment, captured in July 1777 at the Battle of Hubbardton reported, *“Some of the enemy were very kind; while others were very spiteful and malicious. One of them came and took my silver shoe-buckles and left an old pair of brass ones, and said exchange was no robbery; but I thought it robbery at a high rate. Another came and took off my neck handkerchief. An old negro came and took my fife, which I considered as the greatest insult I had received while with the enemy. The Indians often came and abused me with their language; calling us Yankees and rebels; but they were not allowed to injure us. I was stripped of everything valuable about me.”*

J. F. Wasmus a German surgeon captured at the Battle of Bennington suffered a similar fate at the hands of his American captors, *“I remained lying on the ground until the enemy urged me rather impolitely to get up. One grabbed me by the arm and another said he would kill me, whereupon he placed the bayonet of his gun with tightened trigger on my chest. He asked*

whether I was a Britisheer or a Hessian. I told him I was a Braunschweig surgeon, shook hands with him, and called him my friend and brother; for what does one not do when in trouble. I was happy they understood me for that helped so much that he withdrew his gun. But he now took my watch, looked at it, held it to his ear and put it away [in his pocket]. After this, he made a friendly face and was so human that he urged me to take a drink from his wooden flask. He handed me over to his comrades, who started anew to search my pockets. One of them took nothing but my purse in which, however, were only 14 piasters. He continued eagerly looking for money but then left, whereupon the third began searching my pockets. This one took all my small items as my knife, my paper, my lighter, but he did not find the best; they were so dumb that they did not see the pocket in my overcoat. Thus, I saved my Noble pipe. If I had put my watch and moneybag into this pocket, I would not have lost anything.”

Poor American soldiers even took the clothes of their prisoners according to this account from British private John Robert Shaw who was captured in North Carolina in 1781, *“But we were obliged to submit, for the officer drew his sword and swore if we did not comply he would run us through. So they took our clothes, not leaving us even our leggings or shoes; and God knows, they wanted them badly; for such ragged mortals I never saw in my life before, to pass under the character of soldiers.”*

Plundering often followed unwritten rules, such as the captor was entitled to the booty of his prisoner and did not have to share with his fellow soldiers. Hessian Captain Ewald noted, *“...my flankers captured the American Major Pierce, who had ridden out to reconnoiter. The poor man had a thousand pounds in paper money and a particularly beautiful gold repeater [watch that chimes] in his pocket, all of which, along with his very fine horse, was taken as booty by a single man.”*

Lt. Col. J.G. Simcoe, of the Queens Rangers mentioned rules that were instituted regarding plunder to maintain harmony among his men as well as protect the lives of prisoners. *“Serjeant Kelly dismounted an officer, and in pursuit of another man, left him; the officer gave his watch to another dragoon; it was however adjudged to the serjeant, as he was the person who dismounted him, spared his life, and pursued his duty. It is not improper here to observe, that formerly Major Simcoe had forbidden the soldiers to take watches, and indeed did so after this, ‘till he accidentally overheard a man say it was not worth while to bring in a prisoner; he therefore made it a rule, that any one who took a prisoner, if he publicly declared he had his watch, should keep it; so that no soldier was interested to kill any man.”*

In other cases, especially when whole armies were surrendered, the prisoners were sometimes protected from being plundered. As was the case at Yorktown as described by Hessian Private Johann Conrad Dohla *“Nothing of our equipment and uniform items was taken or even touched, instead we were treated according to law and fairness and the customs of war.”* He attributed their good fortune to the French, *“Mostly the French behaved well towards us, but of the Americans, no one except the officers was permitted in the city or in our lines, because the French Grenadiers had formed a ring entirely around our positions and occupied Yorktown with a strong force, and they allowed no one to enter for fear that the American militia, which is always ready to steal, might also steal or plunder or otherwise abuse us as is their usual practice.”*

The British and Germans also tried to destroy some of their equipment prior to the surrender. German Private Dohla noted, *“The Light Infantry in the Hornwork began to cut up their new tents, and in general, much was destroyed, as it was believed there would be a surrender soon.”*

American Colonel Richard Butler grumbled about the lack of plunder. *“I observe the greatest villainy practiced by the British; they don’t appear to have an idea of honor in any of their actions. They have completely plundered every thing in their power, and do not pay the least regard to any treaty.”*

But in terms of plunder, two civilians turned the tables on the hated British officer, Banstre Tarlton, recapturing a horse and watch, *“One in particular who dismounted Col. Tarleton & another took his watch from him which Tarleton had taken when plundering in this State.”*

Plundering the Battlefield, the Wounded and the Dead

Not just the prisoners were plundered. The victors would pick up anything left on the battlefield and plunder the dead as well. Following the defeat at Kip’s Bay, New York on September 15, 1776 Joseph Plumb Martin recalled, *“I came to the spot where the militia were fired upon, the ground was literally covered with arms, knapsacks, staves, coats, hats, and old oil flasks, perhaps some of those from the Maderia wine cellar in New York. All I picked up of the plunder was a block-tin syringe, which afterwards helped to procure me a Thanksgiving dinner...”*

Sometimes soldiers looked to upgrade their gear with things left on the battlefield as noted by American Fifer John Greenwood at the battle of Trenton, *“I passed two of their [Hessians] cannon, brass 6-pounders, by the side of which lay seven dead Hessians and a brass drum. This latter article was, I remember, a great curiosity to me and I stopped to look at it, but it was quickly taken possession of by one of our drummers, who threw away his own instrument. At the same time I obtained a sword from one of the bodies, and we ran on to join the regiment...”* While William Lloyd remembered this incident from the battle of Monmouth and mentioned it in his pension application. *“The enemy then retreated precipitately, throwing away many of their guns. I was, I believe, the foremost in following, got as many of their guns as I could conveniently manage on my horse, with their bayonets fixed upon them. Gave them to the soldiers as they stood in rank. They threw away their French pieces, preferring the British.”*

While weapons were popular items of booty, soldiers also took anything of value from the dead as noted by Aaron Barlow during the 1775 American invasion of Canada, *“We found one Regular and two Indians dead.... We stripped the Regular and found a very fine gun and sword – the gun with two Barrels the neatest I ever saw, a fine watch some money and very neatly dressed.”* Wounded German Private Johann Carl Buettner also mentioned the popularity of watches and money as plunder after the failure of the assault on Fort Mercer in 1777, *“Soon after this they [Americans] came down to the battle-field, and took away from some of the wounded Hessian officers their purses and their watches. American officers seeing this ran out and drove the plunderers back within the fortification, in fear, I think lest the attack by the Hessians be renewed. But this did not happen; and on the following morning all the wounded soldiers were carried on stretchers inside the earthworks...”*

Helpless wounded soldiers were often plundered. Pennsylvanian John Adlum gave this account in his pension application of the fall Fort Mifflin, *“Ens. Jacob Barnitz of Strake’s company was shot through both legs and lay on the field of battle all night naked, having been stripped by the Hessians or their trulls.”*

The dead were also plundered before burial. Philip Van Cortlandt gave this account following the siege of Yorktown, *“Here one of my small drummers asked me if he might remove a vest from*

a dead British soldier, whom I had ordered to be buried, in which he found eleven guineas, so he was well paid for his attention to the dead soldier.”

Plundering the Civilian Population

But it wasn't just combatants who were plundered. The civilian population was often plundered for food and supplies to support an army or valuables to enrich a poor soldier.

Surrounded by American troops and short on supplies in occupied Boston, the British plundered nearby civilians and rewarded the troops for their efforts according to this quote from Captain W. Glanville Evelyn, of the 4th British Regiment, *“Our men, in returning to the boats, carried off a dozen head of cattle, which sold for 150 pounds. The money was divided among the soldiers and sailors, and General Howe gave them a present of porter.”* Sometimes plundering soldiers could pick up food as well as other valuables that could be sold later. German Private Stephan Popp, Bayreuth Regiment wrote on September 11, 1777 – *“The Grenadiers made a foray in Jersey and brought back many head of cattle and negroes.”* Since he lumps the “negroes” in with the cattle, Popp is probably thinking of them more as a valuable commodity rather than people liberated from slavery. Most likely these slaves would be sold to new masters and the profits divided among the plunderers.

General Washington was so annoyed that his soldiers were not turning in captured horses that he issued the following orders from Morristown on January 15, 1777,

“Notwithstanding repeated Orders for all Horses, Plunder &c. taken from the Enemy to be delivered to the Quarter Master General, who was directed to accompt with the Soldierly for them; the General understands, that some individuals are so lost to obedience, as to hold up and conceal, from the rest of the Army several valuable Horses, for their own private emolument taken in the Action of 3rd. Instant at Princeton, and on the march from thence; He therefore strictly orders all such persons, to bring in any Horses, or other Plunder they may have in their possession, and deliver it to the Quarter Master General, for the good of the whole; as they may depend on examples being made of those, who presume a contrary Conduct, so prejudicial to the service.”

But it was the plundering of civilians of their valuables that garnered the most comment and problems for both sides during the American Revolution. It appears by the following quote from German Captain Ewald, that the plundering of enemy civilians was an accepted practice among European armies.

“...the owner of the plantation where I stayed was a captain with the enemy. Consequently, I had nothing to hope from these people but that they would get the enemy on my neck. To be sure, I could plunder these prosperous inhabitants according to our rules, but to convince these people that there were humane persons in our army, and to invite their good will and gratitude, I gave them every protection, and they forfeited nothing by my visit but several dozen chickens and one young ox.” Even though he considered plundering legal “under our rules,” Ewald refrained hoping to gain the “good will” of the people. However, it's interesting how Ewald considers the loss of several chickens and a young ox “nothing.”

While on the American side, hoping to win the hearts and minds of the civilian population, General Washington issued the following orders on January 1, 1777 to discourage plundering, *“His Excellency General Washington strictly forbids all the officers and soldiers of the Continental army, of the militia and all recruiting parties, plundering any person whatsoever, whether Tories or others. The effects of such persons will be applied to public uses in a regular*

manner, and it is expected that humanity and tenderness to women and children will distinguish brave Americans, contending for liberty, from infamous mercenary ravagers, whether British or Hessians."

The most notorious plundering by the British and Germans took place during the campaigns of 1776 and 1777.

Upon landing in Staten Island in 1776, Lieutenant Jakob Piel, of the Lossberg Regiment observed, *"Almost all of the houses which we passed on our march had been abandoned by their owners and completely plundered."* While on Manhattan, plundering was also noted by Lieutenant Johann Heinrich von Bardeleben, of the Hesse-Cassel von Donop Regiment, *"The rural homes in this region suffered some, even much damage. All their livestock was seized; also all other useful items were not left lying about. And never before have so many geese, chickens, ducks, cattle, and pigs been slaughtered as were killed during the night from yesterday evening to this morning."* Jager Captain Ewald found plundering in New Jersey as well, *"During the night all the plantations in the vicinity were plundered, and whatever the soldiers found in the houses was declared booty."* While in New Rochelle, N.Y. the Americans tried to hide their valuables according to Chaplain Heinrich Kuemmell, *"Behind the house in the garden was a cemetery in which a chest full of magnificent silver utensils had been buried, and which some English soldiers dug up during the night."*

Plundered alcohol had bad consequences upon the German soldiers in Mount Holly in December 1776 according to Captain Ewald, *"Since the majority[of civilians] had fled and the dwellings had been abandoned, almost the whole town was plundered; and because large stocks of wine were found there, the entire garrison was drunk by evening. Luckily for me, my quarters were in the section most poorly stocked, by which chance the jagers remained fairly sober. Meanwhile, the grenadiers were bringing in so much wine that the majority of the jagers became merry toward midnight, and I had trouble to keep them together."*

Artist and militia Captain Charles Willson Peale also complained about Hessian plundering in Crosswick, New Jersey, *"We got quarters with Mr. Cooke, who made us very welcome. The Hessians had taken every shirt he had, except the one on his back; which has been their general practice wherever they have been. They have taken hogs, sheep, horses and cows, everywhere: even children have been stripped of their clothes – in which business the Hessian women are the most active – in short, the abuse of the inhabitants is beyond description."*

The plundering, as well as assaults and rapes, committed by British and German troops in 1776 caused many neutral and even Loyalists to turn to the Patriot cause. Lt. Colonel Stephen Kemble, a British officer and son of Jockey Hollow's Peter Kemble noted in November 1776, *"The Country all this time unmercifully Pillaged by our Troops, Hessians in particular, no wonder if the Country People refuse to join us..."*

Plundering continued during the Philadelphia campaign of 1777 and did little to help the British cause. Kemble wrote in December 1777 that the plunderers *"all thought first of themselves and not of the commonweal. In fact, many deserve being openly accused and punished without consideration. In this, as well as in several other things, we have been going too far and have done infinitely more to maintain the rebellion than to smother it. These excesses, though we gain but little by them, may have very serious consequences."*

Even the neutral Quakers suffered according to Elizabeth Drinker, *"These are sad times for thieving and plundering; tis hardly safe to leave the door open a minute. A number of Friends to Government, about ye country, have lately been plundered and ill-used by the British."* Drinker also provided us with this eyewitness account of plundering in Philadelphia in December 1777,

“Last night about 11 o’clock, as we were going to Bed, we saw 2 soldiers in ye alley, standing by ye Fence. We went down stairs again, and into ye yard. We asked Harry aloud if John and Tom were yet in bed? Harry answered, Yes. Sister ordered him to untie ye Dog and then come in. While we were contriving in this manner down stairs, Jenny saw them from my room window, move off with a large Bundle which she took to be a Bed. After we had been in Bed about an hour we heard a great noise in ye alley. Jenny, Sister and ye children ran to ye window, and saw ye Baker next door running up ye alley in his shirt, with only a little red Jacket on; ye rest of his family were with him. We did not discover ye cause of ye uproar until this morning, when we found the Baker had been robbed of some of his wife’s clothes – which we suppose was ye bundle ye Fellows went off with some time before.”

We also have an account of plundering from a plunderer. In this case the diary accounts come from Private Johann Conrad Dohla, of the Bayreuth Regiment. He gave his account of plundering during a raid of Hackensack, New Jersey in March 1780.

“...I went on a strong command...we reached Hackensack, a large and beautiful settlement consisting of about two hundred houses. This village was attacked and all houses were immediately broken into and everything ruined; doors, windows, boxes, and chests, everything lumped together and plundered. All the males were taken prisoners, and the townhall and some other splendid buildings were set on fire. We took considerable booty, money, silver pocket watches, silver plate and spoons, as well as furniture, good clothing, fine English linen, good silk stockings, gloves, and neckcloths, as well as other expensive silks, satins, and other materials...”

During the retreat to New York the following day he stated, *“...we slowly pulled back under a steady fire, which last more than six hours. During this time we threw away or discarded most of our furniture booty...”* Dohla then gave an inventory of the booty he collected but had to throw away, *“On this day my life was exposed to many hundreds of bullets. My booty, which I had been fortunate enough to retain, consisted of two silver pocket watches, three silver buckles, one pair of woman’s white cotton stockings, one pair of men’s summer stockings, two mens’ and four womens’ shirts of fine English linen, two fine tablecloths, one silver food and tea spoon, five Spanish dollars and six York shillings in money, eleven complete mattress covers of fine linen, and more than two dozen pieces of silk fabric, as well as six silver plates and one silver drinking cup, all tied in a pack which, because of the hasty march I had to throw away.”*

American troops plundered civilians too. Early in the war, their victims were Tories, or at least that’s what the soldiers claimed to justify their thefts. But as the war continued, Tories fled American lines. The victims of the plundering by American soldiers were now Patriot or neutral civilians living near American camps. Fences, which supplied the soldiers with a quick and easy source of dry firewood, were a common target. Washington realized that plundering of the civilian population would decrease popular support for the army and he constantly issued orders against plundering such as this order issued on December 3, 1779, *“...The General prohibits, in the most positive terms, every species of destruction or waste of the fences and inclosures of the Inhabitants; this, as well as any other Injury offered to their Persons, or Property will draw the most certain and rigous punishment on the offenders.”*

Much of what the Continental soldiers stole were items to serve their immediate needs such as wood, food or clothing. The majority of the thefts at Morristown during the 1779-1780 encampment were of food. Once new food supplies arrived in late January thefts dropped off dramatically. But plundering had its dangers, as noted by Major General William Heath at the Hudson Highlands on March 10, 1782, *“an inhabitant, apprehending that some soldiers were about to rob his hen-roost, discharged a musket out of a window, by which a soldier was killed.”*

Continental soldiers didn't just plunder for food. Some stole anything of value. Those that were caught, suffered the consequences as noted in these general orders from September 12, 1780, "*David Hall, a soldier in Col. Stewart's Battalion of Light Infantry, convicted at a Genl. Court Martial, whereof Col. Courtland is President, of plundering an inhabitant of money and plate, and being condemned to death, is to be executed at half past 4 o'clock this afternoon.*" In the same orders Washington also called on the "*officers and soldiers of every rank to pay the closest attention to the conduct of their men and to use every precaution to prevent the soldiers from rambling and committing such outrages, the subject of daily complaint and representation to him. It is highly incumbent on them to do this, to prevent the consequences which will follow as he is determined to show no favor to soldiers who are convicted of these pernicious and disgraceful offences*

Soldiers' wives, known as camp followers, also engaged in plundering. Sarah Osborne, the wife of a New York soldier, in her pension application, gave this account of her activities in the ruins of Yorktown after the siege. "*On going into town...She had the curiosity to go into a large building that stood nearby, and there she noticed the cupboards smashed to pieces and china dishes and other ware strewed around upon the floor, and among the rest a pewter cover to a hot basin that had a handle on it. She picked it up, supposing it to belong to the British, but the governor came in and claimed it as his, but said he would have the name of giving it away as it was the last one of twelve that he could see, and accordingly presented it to deponent, and she afterwards brought it home with her to Orange County and sold it for old pewter, which she has a hundred times regretted.*"

In December 1778, Captain Walter Finney of the 6th PA Regt. mentioned that they had received so many complaints of stolen items from the local civilians that the entire Pennsylvania Line was paraded and their packs searched. Several thieves were discovered and punished. The thieves included a woman who was "*whipped and Drum'd out for thift.[theft]*" Colonel Israel Angell, Second Rhode Island Regt. in 1777 saw, "*...one womans being Drummed out of Camp to day by order of a Court martial for stealing.*" He also gave this more detailed account on December 1, 1779 of a theft by a camp follower in his own regiment, "*this forenoon in the afternoon one of the Serjts. Viz. Serjt Hight brought a very handson patch Gound [Gown] to my Quarters which he had taken from one Mrs Thomas a Soldiers wife in the Regiment. Which She had Stolen from a woman at Updikes Newtown in the State of Rhode Island. I took the Gound in order to Send it to the owner. And ordered all the Drums and fifes to parade and Drum her out of the Regt. with a paper pind to her back, with these words in Cappital letters, "A THIEF" thus she went off with Musick*"

The attitudes towards soldiers plundering varied between the different armies. General Washington was opposed to plundering civilians. He constantly issued orders against plundering such as this example from July 1777, "*How disgraceful to the army is it, that the peaceable inhabitants, our countrymen and fellow citizens, dread our halting among them, even for a night and are happy when they get rid of us? This can proceed only from their distress at the plundering and wanton destruction of their property. To prevent these evils is the manifest duty of the officers; and were they closely attentive to that discipline and order, which should ever be established in a camp; they, for the most part, certainly might prevent them. The Commander in Chief therefore expects, that officers of every rank, will exert themselves, and put a stop to such practices in future. And if no other means are sufficient, that they post Sentries round their encampments, who shall take prisoners, every man who is guilty of them: And the guilty will most assuredly meet the punishment due to their crimes. Two soldiers in General Sullivan's*

division found guilty of plundering the inhabitants, have lately been condemned to die, and one of them executed --- At all events such practices must be prevented ---for 'tis our duty to protect the property of our fellow citizens. Despite his best efforts some soldiers continued to plunder civilians throughout the war but as discipline improved plundering decreased.

British and German troops seemed more prone to plundering civilians, especially if they were perceived as being enemy civilians. Captain Ewald pointed out in 1776, *"I could plunder these prosperous inhabitants according to our rules..."* However, Ewald seemed to be a man of principles who avoided indiscriminate plundering. In October 29, 1776 Ewald was posted at the home of Governor William Livingston, the head of the Patriot government in New Jersey. This made the home a legitimate target for plundering but Ewald instead wrote, *"Someone gave me a hint that this man was one of the first and most fiery rebels. But I was not inclined to turn robber, and everything was left undisturbed save for a few provisions."*

Not all the soldiers shared the same views. Frederick Mackenzie, an officer in the Royal Welch Fusiliers wrote in his diary on September 7, 1776, *"The troops having committed great irregularities of late, the Commander in Chief has authorized the Provost Marshal to execute upon the spot any Soldier he finds guilty of Marauding, and to take up all Soldiers he shall find one mile from their posts."*

Stephen Kemble, a New Jersey native and a lieutenant colonel in the British army lamented the plundering and particularly blamed the Hessians, *"The Country all this time unmercifully Pillaged by our Troops, Hessians in particular, no wonder if the Country People refuse to join us..."* A few days later on November 7, 1776 he continued, *"...8 or 10 of our People taken Marauding; Scandalous behavior for British Troops; and the Hessians Outrageously Licentious, and Cruel to such a degree as to threaten with death all such as dare obstruct them in their depredations. Violence to Officers frequently used, and every Degree of Insolence offered. Shudder for Jersey, the Army being thought to move there Shortly; think it very probable."* The Hessians continued to be blamed for plundering in 1777. Major John Andre noted on June 14, 1777, *"Great symptoms of a disposition to plunder being perceived in the Troops, the Commander-in-Chief sent a message to General DeHeister, desiring him to warn the Hessians not to persist in such outrages, as they would be most severly punished. Most of the Brigades received the same instructions from the Officers commanding them."* While some British soldiers were punished for plundering Major John Andre felt there was a double standard when compared to their German allies. He wrote on June 21, 1777, *"General Howe referred the affair of the soldiers of the 5th Regiment, confined for plundering a house, to a regimental Court Martial. It is worth notice that the Hessian Officer who exclaimed against this depredation confessed the Hessians had been concerned, yet confined none, but complained of the British to General DeHeister. A Hessian Subaltern's Guard was next door to the house plundered."*

But the Germans had a different idea who was responsible for plundering according to this statement from Major Carl Baurmeister, *"In the first onrush the rigid orders against plundering were not strictly observed. This made General Howe sentence some to be hanged on the spot and others to be flogged within an inch of their lives. On the other hand, the Hessian troops under Colonel von Donop and Lieutenant Colonel von Wurmb were warmly thanked in the orders of the 28th for observing the necessary discipline in every way."* During the march across New Jersey in 1778 plundering continued but according to Baurmeister it wasn't the Germans, *"Although the men were never in need of salt or fresh provisions, there was much plundering, which disturbed General Clinton. There is much new evidence of it in Jersey. It has made the*

country people all the more embittered rebels. There was no pillaging and plundering on the part of the Hessians”

Plunder, though lamented and restricted in orders, continued through much of the war. Poor soldiers saw plundering as a way to improve their lot. They justified their actions as punishing the enemy or ungrateful allies who failed to support the army. While armies plundered to gain food, forage and weapons. Plundering was also a means to rob the enemy of valuable resources.

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Plundering Morristown 1779-1780

Summary

The “plundering” or robbing of the civilian population of Morristown by Washington’s soldiers was a major problem during the winter encampment of 1779-1780. Desperate soldiers stole a variety of items to help them survive.

Food was the most popular thing to steal. Especially small animals such as chickens, geese, sheep and calves that could be easily carried away by one man. These animals were usually slaughtered in hiding on the return to camp and the meat hidden as they entered camp.

Soldiers also stole clothing, though much of it seems to have been women’s clothes for the camp followers who did not have the benefit of uniforms issued by the army. Additionally, fence rails were taken as a quick and dry source of firewood and tools were taken to help build the log huts.

Most things stolen were used to help the soldiers and camp followers survive the brutal period of December and January. Only occasionally were things, like money stolen, for personal profit.

The majority of the thefts took place in December and January when food supplies were extremely low and camp discipline was reduced due to the distractions of hut building.

Washington imposed quotas on New Jersey which improved the food supply in late January through early March. This drastically cut down on soldiers stealing food.

After complaints by local magistrates Washington ordered increased attention to guard duty and camp discipline. Soldiers caught outside the lines could be whipped on the spot without a court martial. Men caught plundering were whipped or sentenced to be hanged.

As a result of better discipline and more food, the plundering of the people of Morristown decreased remarkably in the latter months of the encampment.

Full Article

A farmer shivered in the morning cold as he headed outside to feed his sheep. When he got to the pen, he noticed one of his sheep was missing. There were tracks in the new snow heading away from his farm to the nearby army encampment. In the woods he found the bloody remains of his slaughtered sheep. A good part of the meat was gone, but the head, legs and intestines; the offal remained. The tracks in the snow continued on into the camp but he lost the trail when the tracks mixed in with all the other soldiers’ footprints.

Elsewhere, a small party of soldiers had been given shelter overnight in a farmhouse near the camp that was being built in Jockey Hollow. The men were little trouble, just sleeping on the kitchen floor and they were so grateful to be out of the cold for the night. In the morning they split some wood for the kitchen fire and then were on their way. But later in the day the farmer noticed his ax was missing and his daughter discovered that two of her shifts were gone.

These two scenarios are based on actual claims filed by neighbors to the camp in Jockey Hollow. As Washington's troops settled into their winter camp in Jockey Hollow in December 1779, the local citizens began to complain about stolen property; primarily poultry and other livestock, but also clothes, tools and fence rails.

Citizen Complaints & Washington's Response

General Washington responded to the complaints and addressed the plundering in the General Orders of December 29, 1779, *"It having been represented that the property of the Inhabitants in the vicinity of camp is a prey to the plundering spirit of the soldiery insomuch that they can keep neither poultry, stock nor any other article on their farms, the General most earnestly exhorts the officers to use their utmost exertions to put an effectual stop to a practice not more oppressive to the country, than disreputable to the army, better becoming a band of robbers than disciplined troops called forth in defence of the rights of the Community."*

He called on the officers maintain order in the camp by making frequent roll calls and having non-commissioned officers *"to visit the men in their huts at different hours of the night, to report all absentees, who are without fail to be brought to immediate trial and punished as they deserve."*

What Did They Steal?

A look at the claims for damages and losses filed by local citizens at the end of the war can give us a better idea of what the soldiers were stealing and perhaps why. December 1779 has the most claims for losses of any month of the 1779-1780 winter encampment with 23 claims. The high rate of plundering was probably due to the fact that as the troops were arriving and setting up camp there were more opportunities for the soldiers to roam outside of camp looking for plunder to improve their situation. In fact, because Washington was so concerned about getting the soldiers into huts, in the General Orders for December 4, 1779, he instructed, *"The ordinary guards to be reduced as much as practicable for the present, that the least possible interruption may be given to hutting."* Fewer guards, of course, provided more opportunities for soldiers to sneak out of camp to plunder the countryside undetected.

Based on the claims, food was the thing soldiers were stealing the most. This makes perfect sense based on the conditions in camp. As Washington mentioned in his December 29th orders, poultry was the most frequently stolen item with the loss of 20 geese and 55 fowl [chickens]. Additionally, 24 sheep and 7 calves were taken. Soldiers must have had a sweet tooth because 11 bee hives were also stolen. Not surprisingly, all the animals taken were small ones that could be carried away quickly. Other food stolen included wheat, corn, potatoes and turnips. But animals were the primary target because they were more accessible since they lived outside the home.

Sometimes soldiers gained access to the inside of homes and stole other things. The soldiers stole clothing but not necessarily for themselves. Much of the clothing taken was women's clothing including, one worsted Gown, two linen petticoats, three shifts [chemises] and a new checked apron. Stolen men's clothing was limited to five shirts and one pair of linen trousers. Other stolen clothing could potentially be used by either sex. These included seven pairs of shoes, four coats, one wool hat and a silk handkerchief. More women's clothing was stolen

probably because the men were issued clothing by the army but the women got nothing except what could be liberated from the neighborhood.

Additionally, items of bedding or cloth were stolen including; a sheet, a blanket, a window curtain, a table cloth, a towel and thread. Some of these items may have been taken to repair worn clothing. Soldiers even stole leather for repairs. Sixteen men from Major Parr's Corps of Riflemen stole the leather from two bellows at an iron forge so that they could re-sole the men's shoes.

The last category of items taken was tools including four axes one draw knife and a shovel. All were probably taken to use in hut construction. In fact, Captain Samuel Richards, of the 3rd Connecticut Regiment mentioned that his men lacked proper tools. While Joseph Plumb Martin recalled, *"The soldiers, when immediately going about the building of their winter huts, would always endeavor to provide themselves with such tools as were necessary for this business (it is no concern of the reader's, as I conceive, by what means they procured their tools), such as crosscut saws, handsaws, frown, augers, &c. to expedite the erection and completion of their dwelling place. Do not blame them too much, gentle reader, if you should chance to make a shrewd Yankee guess how they did procure them; remember, we were in distress, and you know when a man is in that condition he will not be over scrupulous how he obtains relief, so he does obtain it."*

All of these stolen items; food, clothing and shelter were related to the survival of the soldiers and their wives. Surprisingly, few items were stolen purely for profit. The only items mentioned in the claims were some pewter, a candlestick and some Continental paper money. Four bags were also stolen, but bags were of little value and they were most likely taken to help carry stolen grain or potatoes.

Citizens Claims

People filing claims for damages were also required to provide a statement as to why they felt the loss was caused by the soldiers. These claims also provide us with a glimpse into the thefts. In a few cases, people witnessed the thefts, such as John Whitenach who stated that he *"detected them in the very act of stealing the fowls."*

While the majority of the thefts were not witnessed, there were various reasons people felt that their losses were related to the army. Sometimes it was because soldiers were quartered in their homes. For example, Penimah Guren [Guerin] testifying for Joshua Guren stated that items were stolen by soldiers because, *"some of the Soldiers lodged in the House that Night."* While Joseph Pierson noticed something was missing because *"he discovered it was gone directly after one of them left the house & he saw it there before the said soldiers came in."* Others blamed the soldiers because, *"at the time the Army encamped near his house"*

Many knew the thieves had to be the soldiers because they followed the footprints in the snow from their farms to the camp. Abraham Canfield stated that his sheep were *"taken by the Soldiers of the Continental Army for tracks of Men were afterwards discovered leading towards their Guard House..."* While Daniel Freeman testified that Joshua Guerin had lost sheep, *"he believes by the Soldiers of the Continental Army for he afterwards found the Offal of the Creatures a distance from his house on the way towards their Encampment from thence."* Soldiers could not bring a live animal into camp without drawing a great deal of suspicion, so they usually slaughtered the animal on the way to camp. They took out the best parts of meat and left the offal which was the less desirable parts such as the intestines.

While the damage claims provide a wonderful window into the things stolen by the soldiers, it doesn't cover everything. Not everyone filed a claim. Some may have been unaware of the law while others failed to file because they lacked the documentation or witnesses to prove their claim.

Evidence of Theft through Orders

Another insight into soldiers' stealing comes from orders telling them not to steal. For example, an order that was constantly repeated during the Morristown encampment and throughout the war regarded fence rails. Soldiers constantly stole fences rails because they were convenient sources of cut and dry wood for campfires. On December 3, 1779, Washington issued the following General Orders,

"...The General prohibits, in the most positive terms, every species of destruction or waste of the fences and inclosures of the Inhabitants; this, as well as any other Injury offered to their Persons, or Property will draw the most certain and rigous punishment on the offenders."

Then on January 29, 1780 the Division orders for Starks & the New York Brigades stated, *"Altho there is a plenty of fire wood near the hutts complaints have been frequently made that some of the soldiers practice burning the inhabitants fences all officers in the division are call'd upon to exert themselves in preventing such unnecessary destruction of property & any soldier that may be found guilty of burning rails in future will be severly punis'd for disobedience of orders."*

Washington brought up the problem again on March 3rd, *"The Genl. in the most positive terms again forbids the burning or removing the fence rails in the environs of the camp upon any pretense whatever. Any person found trespassing against this order will be severly punished."*

Then orders were issued in the New Jersey Brigade on April 11th, *"Frequent complaints having been made to the Brigadier that many of the soldiers are daily pulling down and destroying the fences near camp, the General requests that every officer will exert himself to detect and bring to punishment all who may be found guilty of such irregularities and all centinals are strictly ordered to prevent any rails being brought into camp."*

Food Shortages and a Temporary Solution

Food shortages continued into January. A four day blizzard stopped all shipments of supplies into camp. Joseph Plumb Martin was *"absolutely, literally starved."* Desperate soldiers continued plundering farms near the camp. Colonel Israel Angell, the commander of the Second Rhode Island Regiment, quartered in a home near camp, reported the following in his diary on January 26, 1780. *"This Evening Some villins came and killed a yerling for [of] mr. Primrose at the barn within 20 rods of the hous Carried off one half before they were discovered. Then they run off and made their Escape Leaving one half of the beef behind, and the hide."*

Washington wrote to the Magistrates of the various counties of New Jersey looking for aid. He told them on January 8th, *"The present situation of the Army with respect to provisions is the most distressing of any we have experienced since the beginning of the War. For a Fortnight past the Troops both Officers and Men, have been almost perishing for want. They have been alternately without Bread or Meat, the whole time, with a very scanty allowance of either and frequently destitute of both."* Then he confessed, *"Their distress has in some instances prompted the Men to commit depredation on the property of the Inhabitants which at any other period would be punished with exemplary severity, but which can now be only lamented as the effect of*

an unfortunate necessity.” He placed quotas of meat and grain on each county in the state of New Jersey promising payment for the food they provided.

The people of Morris County were the ones who suffered the most from the army’s “*unfortunate necessity*” of stealing food and their Justices sent a written protest to Washington on January 25, 1780. They had contributed food to the army after Washington’s January 8th request and hoped, “*that when the necessity ceased, the Depredations committed on the property & the Insults offered to the Persons of the Inhabitants when Hunger pinched the Troops would cease also.*” They complained about the “*backwardness of the Officers in punishing while the distress continued when the complaints were made.*” As a result, “*the Soldiery continue in parties to wander abroad from Camp, chiefly under cover of the night not only to Plunder and Steal provision, but money Cloathes &c, &c*” They called on Washington to issue orders limiting the soldiers, “*from wandering about without proper officers.*”

Washington replied two days later on the 27th. He thanked the Magistrates for their efforts to feed his army and apologized for the continued plundering. He went on to say, “*There is nothing Gentlemen I wish so much, as security to the Subjects of these States in their persons and property; and any events that interrupt this affect me sensibly. Those you represent I feel in a peculiar manner, and I entreat you to be satisfied, that no means in my power shall be wanting to put a stop to every species of such practices in future. If any in the mean time should unfortunately take place, the Offenders if they can be pointed out by the Inhabitants, shall be subjected to the most condign punishment.*”

Punishment to Deter Plundering

The following day Washington issued orders to his troops that included his, “*most condign [deserved] punishment.*” He wrote, “*...The General is astonished and mortified to find that notwithstanding the order issued on the 29th. of last month and his exhortation to the officers to prevent it, that the Inhabitants in the vicinity of camp are absolutely a prey to the plundering and licentious spirit of the soldiery. From their daily complaints, and a formal representation of the Magistrates on the subject, a night scarcely passes without gangs of soldiers going out of camp and committing every species of robbery, depredation and the grossest personal Insults. This conduct is intolerable and a disgrace to the army, and if any thing can aggravate it, it is that these violences are committed on the property and persons of those who on a very late and alarming occasion, for the want of provisions, manifested the warmest attachment to the army by affording it the most generous and plentiful relief. It has also been reported that when detachments are relieved and are returning to camp, the soldiers straggle, maraud and plunder in the most shameful and injurious manner; The General trusts and insists that the officers will exert themselves and take effectual measures to prevent all such practices in future.*”

Proper Camp guards agreeable to the Regulations are to be immediately appointed, from which patrols are to be sent to the environs of camp; If any soldiers are found straggling out of the chain of centinels after retreat beating they are to be brought by the patrol to the officer of the guard, who is authorized and required to give them one hundred lashes upon the spot; and if any are found perpetrating robberies or other violences they are to receive from one hundred to five hundred lashes at the discretion of the officer.”

In the camp, Doctor James Thacher, of Stark’s Brigade, commented, “*As if to make up the full measure of grief and embarrassment to the commander-in-chief, repeated complaints have been made to him that some of the soldiers are in the practice of pilfering and plundering the*

inhabitants of their poultry, sheep, pigs, and even cattle, from their farms. This marauding practice has often been prohibited in general orders, under the severest penalties, and some exemplary punishments have been inflicted. General Washington possesses an inflexible firmness of purpose, and is determined that discipline and subordination in camp shall be rigidly enforced and maintained. The whole army has been sufficiently warned, and cautioned against robbing the inhabitants on any pretence whatever; and no soldier is subjected to punishment without a fair trial, and conviction by a court-martial. Death has been inflicted in a few instances of an atrocious nature; but in general, the punishment consists in a public whipping, and the number of stripes is proportioned to the degree of offence”

In looking through the court-martials during the 79-80 encampment there are only a small number of men charged with stealing. On February 6th Ensign John Barr of the 4th New York Regiment reported, *“Alexander Richey try’d by a Regimental C. M. for Stealing was found Guilty & sentenced to receive one hundred Lashes on his bare Back. And James Connoley Corpl. For buying a Pair of Shoes of Said Rickey, forfeited the Price of the Shoes, viz, 18 Dollars reserved for the Benefit of the Sick of the Regt. Sentences put in Execution this Evening.”*

An even harsher punishment was announced in the General Orders of February 18, 1780 – *“By a division General Court Martial held in the Pennsylvania line by order of Colonel Johnston, Commandant of the division, Colonel Walter Stewart, President, James Hammell and Samuel Crawford, soldiers of the 5th. Pennsylvania regiment were tried, “On suspicion of robbery” and found guilty of the charge being a breach of the 21st. article, 13th. section of the articles of War and sentenced to be hanged (more than two thirds of the Court agreeing.)*

The Commander in Chief confirms the sentence and orders the execution thereof tomorrow between the hours of three and four o’clock in the afternoon. The officers of the day and all others whose duty it is will attend at that hour.

The corps of Artillery will send a band of Music to attend the Criminals to the place of execution.

The Pennsylvania division will furnish an escort of a Captain, one subaltern, four serjeants, four corporals two drums and fifes and fifty privates, and each division will send two hundred men and the corps of Artillery one hundred men properly officerd to the place of execution.”

Doctor Thacher described the execution on February 20th, *“Two soldiers were brought to the gallows for the crime of robbery. One of them was pardoned under the gallows, and the other executed. The poor criminal was so dreadfully tortured by the horror of an untimely death, that he was scarcely able to sustain himself, and the scene excited the compassion of every spectator. It is hoped that this example will make such an impression as to deter others from committing similar crimes.”* James Hammell was executed and Samuel Crawford was the one pardoned. Along with the pardon order Washington stated, *“The frequent occasions the General takes to pardon, where strict justice would compel him to punish ought to operate on the gratitude of offenders to the improvement of their morals.”*

Plundering Decreases

Cases of soldiers plundering dropped off dramatically for the remainder of the encampment. This drop is most noticeable in the damage claims. After a high of 23 claims for thefts committed in December 1779, the numbers go down greatly in the following months. There were 3 claims for January, 2 for February, 3 for March, 1 for April and 2 for May. We can also assume that there was a drop in plundering because there were no other court-martials during the

encampment that mention soldiers stealing. Plus there are no other petitions from the citizens regarding plundering and Washington doesn't mention plundering again in his orders.

What Caused the Change?

Why was there such a dramatic change? There are probably several factors that influenced the change.

One was an improvement in the camp guards and camp discipline. In December, Washington reduced the guards as much as possible to allow men to work on their huts. But he improved camp discipline after receiving civilian complaints of plundering. First he called on officers to have more frequent rolls calls and have the non-commissioned officers make random checks on the men's quarters at night. Then he called for "*Proper Camp guards agreeable to the Regulations.*" Finally he ordered harsh punishments for those caught outside the lines and even harsher punishments, including death, for those caught plundering.

Another factor in the reduction of theft was once the huts were constructed the soldiers fell into a normal camp routine of fatigue duty, guard duty and eventually drill. As a result, there were less opportunities to roam outside the camp and overall camp discipline improved.

Once hut construction was done, there was probably an abundance of cut wood available, so now the farmer's fence rails were relatively safe from pilfering.

Finally, a major factor in the reduction of plundering was the improvement in the soldier's food supplies. The majority of the plundering was for food. Once Washington put quotas on the various New Jersey Counties the food situation changed drastically. This abundance of food began in late January and corresponds with the drop in plundering. The availability of food supplies would remain good until mid-March.

Then, not surprisingly, when meat was in short supply on March 23rd Colonel Angell wrote in his diary, "*...Last Night Mr. John Primrose, a Man living in the hous where I was Quartered, had a Cow that was near Calving kill'd by the Soldery and hackt to peaces and part Carried off. The Army Seems to have become a band of Robbers and theaves, but beleave maney are Drove to it by not having but little then half an allowance Delt them, wheather this is Owing to the Neglect in the Commissary Is a matter to be Inquired into. Search was made through the brigade for the Said Cow but nothing of it Could be found. There was a Number of Robberies of the like kind Committed the Same night in different Parts of the Country round the Camps.*"

But at that point plundering rates remained low compared to December and January because of the improvement in the camp guards and camp discipline.

Plundering on the Outposts

However, plundering continued to be a problem on the outposts. On February 25, 1780, Private Jas. Lighthall of the 3rd New York Regiment was found guilty of "*stealing a piece of brown Linen from an Inhabitant at Paramus.*" He was "*sentenced to receive 100 lashes on his bare back & return a shift made of that Linen to the owner.*" Here is confirmation of soldier's stealing to provide women with clothing. Though in this case the woman had to make her own shift from the stolen linen. Then in April six New Jersey soldiers were accused of stealing money from a civilian. Two were found guilty and were "*sentenced to be put under Stoppages until full compensation be made to the man from whom the money was stolen.*" Additionally, one man received 100 lashes on his back and the other got 200 lashes.

April 1780 was a bad month for Benjamin Scudder who worked as a Miller on East Branch of the Rahway River between Springfield and Connecticut Farms, NJ. On April 11, 1780 he noted in his diary *“Mr. Thief Stole my Piggs 7 weeks old.”* Then on April 15th he suffered again, *“att Night Mr. Thief Stole my Smoked Meat out of the Smoke House about 60 Weight I judged.”*

And as was typical throughout the war, the soldiers on outpost stole fence rails because they were dry and convenient firewood. The thefts were noted in the Division Orders of the Connecticut Line posted at Springfield. *“Complaints are made by the inhabitants of the soldiers burning fence. The officers are desired to see that their men have wood provided & to punish the man who wantonly destroy the fences.”*

More Punishments for Plundering

More serious crimes resulted in a more serious punishment as noted in the General Orders of March 13th. These orders announced the results of a court-martial of men who plundered on outpost duty in Bergen County, *“By a Division General Court Martial of the Pennsylvania line held the 22nd day of February last Col. W. Stewart President – Samuel Bell and Robert Powers, soldiers of the 10th Pennsylvania regiment and Thomas Brown and Jacob Justice soldiers of the 7th Pennsylvania regiment confined for “Plundering Mr. Bogart an Inhabitant near Paramus” were tried and found guilty of a breach of the 21st article, 13 section of the articles of war and sentenced each of them to be hanged, more than two thirds of the Court agreeing.*

The Commander in Chief approves the sentence.”

But once again the criminals were pardoned by Washington because of the intercession of their officers and even Mr. Bogart, the man who was robbed. It said, *“a representation from their officers that they had previous to the commission of the above crime behaved like good soldiers, and on the earnest intercession of Mr. Bogart in their behalf; His Excellency the Commander in Chief is pleased to pardon them.”*

Thomas Brown, one of the pardoned men, did not learn from his near brush with death. General Orders on July 22, 1780 show him condemned again for *“Plundering the Inhabitants while on Command at Paramus and abusing a Woman.”* Brown pled guilty and the court *“considering the great irregularity of his general Conduct, that he was lately capitally condemned for the same Crime and pardon’d Sentenced him to suffer Death.”* If this name and story sounds vaguely familiar, there was another Thomas Brown who served in the Second New Jersey Regiment. He was sentenced to hang in May 1780 for the crime of desertion. He was also pardoned by Washington but then deserted again and was executed in June 1780. So same name, different crimes, different regiments, same fate.

The continued plundering on the outposts were most likely due changes in the soldier’s situation. Food supplies were often short on the outposts leading to Mr. Scudders lost pig and smoked meat. But more importantly discipline was reduced. The men were now in quarters in private homes away from the direct supervision of their officers. Additionally, the men had little to do when they weren’t on guard duty. Idle hands and little supervision resulted in the theft of linen, money and fence rails.

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Dangerous Games

Soldiers Pranks and Improvised Fun

The soldiers and sailors serving during the American Revolution were primarily young men who were easily bored and looking for some fun. Sometimes the fun that they had was improvised on the spot, either into some type of game or a prank.

Here are some examples of improvised fun and pranks from American and British soldiers as well as American prisoners of war. Be advised most of the pranks and improvised fun in these accounts were dangerous. Many involved black powder. Be safe and don't try this at home! Also be advised that most of the pranks, by modern standards aren't that funny. Many are actually cruel. But that's just one of the differences between young men of the 18th century and today...or is it? Somehow I see a bunch of fraternity guys thinking all this is quite funny. Of course, I never did anything like this when I was in school.

Improvised Fun

After leaving Morristown in June 1780, Joseph P. Martin was out in the Short Hills in the period between the battles of Connecticut Farms and Springfield. He almost killed himself while having some fun on guard duty.

“During these operations, we were encamped at a place called the Short Hills. While lying here, I came near taking another final discharge from the army in consequence of my indiscretion and levity. I was one day upon a camp guard. We kept our guard in the fields, and to defend us from the night dew we laid down under some trees which stood upon the brink of a very deep gully. The sides and tops of the banks of this gully were covered with walnut or hickory saplings, three, four or five inches diameter, at their butts, and many of them were fifty or sixty feet in height. In the morning before the guard was relieved, some of the men (and I among the rest, to be sure, I was never far away when such kind of business was going forward) took it into our heads to divert ourselves by climbing these trees as high as they would bear us, and then swinging off our feet; the weight would bring us by a gentle flight to the ground, when the tree would resume its former position.

After exercising ourselves some time at this diversion, I thought I would have one capital swing. Accordingly, I climbed one of the tallest trees that stood directly on the verge of the gully, and swung off over the gully. When the tree had bent to about an horizontal position, it snapped off as short as a pipestem. I suppose I was nearly or quite forty feet from the ground, from which distance I came, feet foremost, to the ground at quick time. The ground was soft, being loamy and entirely free from stones, so that it did me but little hurt, but I held the part of the tree I had broken off firmly in my grasp, and when I struck the ground with my feet I brought it with all the force of my weight and its own directly upon the top of my unthinking skull, which knocked me as stiff as a ringbolt. It was several minutes before I recovered recollection enough to know or remember what I had been about, but I weathered the point, although it gave me a severe

headache for several days afterwards, as a memento to keep upon the ground and not attempt to act the part of a flying squirrel.”

J.P. Martin, Connecticut Line

Prisoners of War had too much free time on their hands just waiting to be exchanged. Levi Hanford was a prisoner in New York City in the fall of 1776 and here is what he and his fellow prisoners did to pass the time.

“In the prison yard there was a large bar of pig-iron, which the prisoners, for pastime, would amuse themselves by throwing, and their contests for superiority would often be attended by considerable excitement. One day, while they were thus engaged, the sentry on duty, a stout, good natured man, after gazing for some time upon the performances of the prisoners, became at length emulous of their efforts, and, upon the impulse of the moment, ventured to enter the list and compete with them. Laying down his gun, he made one trial, and coming but little short of the best of them, was encouraged to try again. Throwing off his cartridge box and bayonet, he again grasped the bar, and though he did better than before, yet he still fell short. Stimulated by his success, and determined to gain his point, he now threw off his stock and coat. At this instant, an officer suddenly came in, and noticing the condition of the sentinel, said to him in a stern authoritative tone, “Walk this way, sir.” They left the prison together, and we learned that for this breach of duty, the sentinel was sentenced to run the gauntlet and receive three hundred lashes.”

Levi Hanford, POW

Samuel Dewees, a fifer in the Pennsylvania Line entertained his officers with his running ability substituting for a fox being pursued by other soldiers who were the hounds.

“It had been the delight of many of the officers at various military posts ...to start me as a fox. After I would start off to personate Reynard, they would send out a dozen or two other soldiers to personate hounds in the chase. I was swift of foot and could always elude my pursuers, and could return to camp before them without being caught. I was always called the young quaker, owing to my saying THEE and THOU. Oftentimes when the officers wanted me to gratify them in bearing a part in fox and hound sport, they would call out “Quaker,” “Quaker;” I would answer, what does thee want? They would then sing out “Thee and thou, the quaker’s brown cow,” (I thought it quite a shame to say you to any person, it was all thee and thou with me, instead of sir,) we want you to be fox, for we have some fast hounds to send out in pursuit to day. I knew I could run fast and was therefore ready generally to turn Reynard.”

Samuel Dewees, Waiter & Fifer, PA Line,

Long Bullets was a popular sport in Pennsylvania particularly among the Irish. It involved throwing a small iron ball as far as possible. A grapeshot ball could easily be improvised for this game. Here are two accounts. One from Fifer Samuel Dewees and the other from John Robert Shaw, a British deserter who had enlisted in the Pennsylvania Line. Shaw’s account points out the dangerous aspect of Long Bullets for spectators.

“In a few days after we arrived at York, a soldier of the name Jack Smith, and another soldier whose name I do not now remember, were engaged in playing long bullets. Whilst thus engaged some of the officers were walking along the road, where they were throwing the bullets. The bullets passing near to the officers they used very harsh language to Smith and his comrade, who

immediately retorted by using the same kind of indecorous language. A file of men was immediately dispatched with orders to take Smith and his comrade under guard and march them off to York jail.”

Samuel Dewees, Waiter & Fifer, PA Line

“My head- shews to this day the bad effects of such practices. A party of us had agreed to go one Sunday morning to Capt. Huston’s (commonly called Hornet’s) tavern, in order to drink bitters, and take a game at long-bullets close by the Dutch meeting-house. And while the good people were at sermon, and praying to the Great Author of all things to turn our hearts from those evil ways, I was chosen to look out for the bullets, and on a sudden one of the bullets struck me on the head, and knocked me down, where I lay, to the great consternation of all, for some time before the company could tell what was best to be done with me. But at length some signs of life appearing, they removed me to the tavern in a very dangerous situation; for by this unlucky accident a fracture was made in my skull which so disturbed my brain, that ever after, if I drank spirituous liquors, a temporary phrenzy was produced, which caused me to conduct in a most extravagant and outrageous manner.”

John Robert Shaw, escaped British POW, later soldier in Continental Army

Samuel Dewees and his friends truly defined “improvised fun” with their “King of the Fortress” game in the Hudson River near West Point.

“When this duty of practicing upon the Fife and Drum was ended (it being done early in the forenoon in general, or else late in the afternoon) we were then at liberty generally to amuse ourselves by strolling out in different directions and for various purposes. Oftentimes we made up companies and went to the river to bathe, or to fight a sham battle in the river. There was a large round rock (flat upon the top) in the Hudson river, and which stood within 30 or 40 yards of the shore. It was quite a perpendicular rock at the sides. When the tide was out it was generally bare for the most part. Sometimes when the tide was not very high, a foot or so of some parts of its surface would show itself above the water. We called this our Fort. We musicians and others of the younger soldiers would often make up companies, appoint our Captains and other officers, and repair to this rock to have sport in taking and retaking this Fort from each other. I being among the best of the swimmers, was always chosen to belong to that company which was to act the part of the besiegers. We made large balls of grass by twisting it, and winding it like yarn into a ball. One party would take possession of it, and the men of the other party would swim up as a squadron abreast, and endeavor to take it by storm. When we came near, our bombardment and a general action took place. We would “pelt” those upon the rock with our grass balls, whilst they in return would pelt us. If we could succeed in getting upon the rock we would grapple with its possessors and defenders, and succeeded often in pushing them off from the top of the Fort. Sometimes when “clinched” thus, several pairs would plunge over its sides into the water together. When this happened to be the case, all knew their duty to themselves and to each other, and would instantly relinquish their holds one upon the other. If a number succeeded in reaching the top of the rock, all those upon it would often (after consuming their ammunition) jump off into the water. Which done, the besiegers became the besieged in turn, and besieged (that was) became the besiegers. This mode of warfare afforded us much good sport. Sometimes we would dive from off its top. Other times we would stand on its edge and turn somersets into the water.

Owing to the hill rising very bluff and high from the shore, the water at this place was very deep. I recollect in diving down along side of this rock, that its sides were perpendicular like to the wall of a house. Sometimes when we were there and in the midst of our pleasant sport, the "Orderly Drummer" at camp would beat up "the Drummer's Call;" each musician would (upon hearing the first tap of the drum) plunge into the water, swim swiftly to shore, and then be all splutter, for after picking up his clothes each would dress the best way he could as he ran for camp.

When the tide made strong to the shore it acted as conqueror in taking possession of our Fort, and would not permit us to play upon its surface. At such a time its top would often be many feet under water. When this was the case, we recreated ourselves by performing in some other way. Hopping, jumping and running often afforded us plenty of amusement."

Samuel Dewees, Waiter & Fifer, PA Line

Pranks

George Ewing and officer in the New Jersey Brigade witnessed this prank on April 7, 1778 at Valley Forge after playing an early form of baseball that he called "base."

"Attested to my Muster Rolls and delivered them to the Muster Master exercised in the afternoon in the intervals playd at base this evening some Rogueish chaps tied a sheaf of straw to the tail of (Brigade Quartermaster) Joseph Anderson's horse and set it on fire and let him run which very much offended him and he set out to the Genl to enter a complaint."

George Ewing, NJ Brigade

Christopher Vail was a captured sailor being held as a prisoner of war on an island in the West Indies. With lots of time on his hands, he blew up and burned a Spanish prisoner and later overset the tubs being used as toilets in their prison room. [Fun guy!]

"As observed before the French, Spaniards and Negroes &c. had the liberty of the yard in the day time, and was locked up with us in the night, as soon as they were locked up with us they would immediately take their tinder box, strike fire and go to smoking, and continue nearly all night, which made it very disagreeable to the Americans, and I was determined to put a stop to it. And one day when the Spaniards were all out I went to one of their bags, took out the tinder box. I then requested the centinel to give me a cartridge telling him at the same time what I wanted it for. He immediately gave me one. I opened the tinder box and put in about half of the cartridge of powder and stirred it up, put it back into his bag and about sunset as usual they were put into our room again & the door lockt. And as soon as they came in they went immediately to their bags, took out the tinder box, opened it and struck fire to it. He then put it up to his mouth and blew the fire. It immediately went out. He again placed the box between his knees and struck fire into it which communicated to the powder and blew up with an explosion as loud as a pistol and capsized the old Spaniard and left him bottom upwards in one corner of the room. And his face all in one solid blister. The report of the tinder box brought together 10 or 12 of the British officers. They immediately opened the door and demanded who the person was who did the action, damning him at the same time with threats &c. Others of them was more mild

observing that it was not probable that any person would do such a thing in earnest. The goaler immediately observed to a prize master and a gunner's mate that they were the damnedest rascals that there was in the prison, took them out and put them into the dungeon for three days, then returned them back again. The doctor was a mind to take the poor don to the hospital, but he would not go but staid on purpose to hector us. A few days after this our tubs not being emptied and running over nearly enduced a Mr. Ebenezer Williams of Saybrook to lay a stick on the tub to raise him up. And he stript off his shirt and sat on the tub [in each room stood 2 necessary tubs for our use which never was removed until filled which was very nauseus.]. I at this time seeing him sit in this situation took hold of his two great toes, not thinking any harm and gently raised his feet. And by so doing it made the stick roll which he sat on. He fell over and knocked over the tub which run thereby all over the floor. By that means the door was opened and all hands had the liberty of the yard for the day until the room was cleansed. During the time some person affronted the old Don who immediately took up a brickbat and let fly at his head which it narrowly escaped. The gaoler saw it and took his cane and gave the old Spaniard a severe drubbing, and carried him off to the hospital. By that means we got rid of a troublesome companion."

Christopher Vail, Naval POW

This account from 1778 was written by John Robert Shaw. At the time he was an enlisted man in the British Army and they had just made a raid into Westchester, N.Y. While Shaw said the incident "*afforded us a good deal of amusement*" I doubt the campfollower thought it was funny.

"In this excursion, among other plunder, we took a store of molasses, the hogheads being rolled out and their heads knocked in, a soldier's wife went to dip her camp kettle in a hoghead of molasses, and while she was stooping in order to fill her kettle, a soldier slipped behind her and threw her into the hoghead; when she was hauled out, a bystander then threw a parcel of feathers on her, which adhering to the molasses made her appear frightful enough; - This little circumstance afforded us a good deal of amusement."

John Robert Shaw, British Army, PA Line, and Post War service

Connecticut soldiers camped in western Connecticut in January 1779 played this trick on their officers as a means of protest.

"We got settled in our winter quarters at the commencement of the new year and went in our old Continental line of starving and freezing...Our condition, at length, became insupportable. We concluded that we could not or would not bear it any longer...But hunger was not to be so easily pacified, and would not suffer many of us to sleep. Martial law was very strict against firing muskets in camp. Nothing could, therefore, raise the officers' "lofty ideas" sooner, or more, than to fire in camp; but it was beyond the power or vigilance of all the officers to prevent the men from "making void the law" on that night. Finding they were watched by the officers, they got an old gun barrel which they placed in a hut that was unfinished. This they loaded a third part full and putting a slow match to it, would then escape to their own huts, when the old barrel would speak for itself, with a voice that would be heard. The officers would then muster out, and some running and scolding would ensue; but none knew who made the noise, or where it came from. This farce was carried on the greater part of the night; but at length the officers getting tired of running so often to catch Mr. Nobody, without finding him, that they soon gave

up the chase, and the men seeing they could no longer gull the officers, gave up the business likewise.”

Private Joseph Plumb Martin, 8th Connecticut Regiment

For J.P. Martin and his friends the target of their pranks always seem to be their officers. This incident happened in New Jersey in 1781.

“This afternoon we passed a place where, on our march to Virginia the past summer, a funny incident occurred, which, at the time it happened and at this time, excited considerable merriment. Our captain, who we always took pains to discommode, had placed himself on the top of an old rail fence, during a momentary halt of the troops. The rail upon which he sat was very slender. Behind him was a meadow and from the fence, for about a rod, was a bank almost perpendicular. I was sitting on the other end of the rail, when our sergeant major, observing the weakness of the fence, came and seated himself by my side, and giving me a hint, we kept wriggling about till we broke the rail and let the captain take his chance down the bank, among the bushes, quite to the bottom, taking good care ourselves not to go with him. When he came back he did not look very well pleased with his Irish hoist. Whether he mistrusted that we had been the cause of his overturn I do not know; he said but little, whatever he might think.”

Sergeant Joseph Plumb Martin, Corps of Sappers and Miners

Martin’s friends really didn’t seem to like their captain. In September 1782 while on Constitution Island opposite West Point, the men almost blew up the captain in what would today be called fragging. Fortunately Martin stopped them.

“In the month of September, while we lay here and our tents were pitched about promiscuously, by reason of the ruggedness of the ground, our captain had pitched his marquee in an old gravel pit, at some distance from the tents of the men. One day, two or three of the young hotheads told me that they and some others of the men, whom they mentioned, were about to have some fun with “the old man,” as they generally called the captain. I inquired what their plans were, and they informed me that they had put some powder into a canteen and were going to give him a bit of a hoist. I asked them to let me see their apparatus before they put their project in execution. Accordingly, they soon after showed me a wooden canteen with more, as I judged, than three pounds of gunpowder in it, with a stopper of touchwood for a fuse affixed to it, all, they said, in prime order. I told them they were crazy, that the powder they had in the canteen would “hoist” him out of time, but they insisted upon proceeding. It would only frighten him, they said, and that was all they wished to do – it would make him a little more complaisant. I then told them that if they persisted in their determination and would not promise me on the spot to give up their scheme, I would that instant go to the captain and lay the whole affair before him. At length, after endeavoring without effect to obtain my consent to try a little under his berth, they concluded to give up the affair altogether, and thus, I verily believe, I saved the old man’s life, although I do not think that they meant anything more than to frighten him. But the men hated him and did not much care what happened to him.”

Sergeant Joseph Plumb Martin, Corps of Sappers and Miners

Still on Constitution Island in the Fall 1782, Martin's men once again tried to use black powder "to discommode" their captain. I believe their captain was David Bushnell, the inventor of the submarine, "Turtle." It seems from the incident above and this one that the men were rather inventive themselves.

"There was the foundation of some barracks which the British had burnt in their excursion up the North River in the year 1777; it was composed of stone and lime, perfectly level and, perhaps, a hundred feet long. The bushes had grown up around it, excepting the side next the river; the place formed a very pretty spot for a contemplative evening's walk. The captain used frequently, in fine weather, to be seen pacing backward and forward upon this wall, between sunset and dark. The men observed him and itched to discommode him, but, since they had made me privy to their roguery, they dare not play any of their tricks upon him without consulting me, for fear of being discovered. They therefore applied to me for my consent to "cut some caper" with him, as they called it. Their plan now was to set an old musket, which they had obtained, in the manner that hunters set them to kill wild animals, charged only with powder. I consented to let them try this experiment, but, after all, it never took effect. Either the captain discovered it or it failed by accident or from some other cause, for I never heard anything more about it. I did not wish him to receive any personal injury from their roguery, but I cared very little how much they frightened him. I did not consider myself as being under very heavy obligations to him for his civilities to me, and many of the men considered themselves under still less."

Sergeant Joseph Plumb Martin, Corps of Sappers and Miners

Black powder was a popular tool in soldiers' pranks. In 1779, two soldiers from Colonel John Topham's Rhode Island Regiment were court-martialed for, "Stealing cartridges out of the soldiers' boxes on guard and burning them under the pots of the men cooking." But they both were acquitted. I wish we had more for this story but that's all that appeared in the records. I do find it interesting that they allegedly obtained the black powder from "the soldiers' boxes on guard." This confirms my theory that only men who were on guard duty had cartridges. When they returned from guard duty their weapons were unloaded and all their cartridges were turned in. The men were not permitted to keep cartridges in camp because they might fire a gun in camp which was against regulations since musket fire was considered an alarm signal. Or the men might steal the cartridges to trade with civilians for food or drink. Or they might use the black powder for pranks around the cooking fires or to try to blow up their officers.

Finally, Samuel Dewees describes a soldier's parade to protest their poor rations. "At all times when we drew biscuit, we were scarce of every thing else, and were then in the midst of hard times I do assure my readers. Sometimes we had one biscuit and a herring per day, and often neither the one nor the other. Sometimes we had neither the one nor the other for two days at a time, and in one or two instances nothing until the evening of the third day. This was previous to our drawing a biscuit and a herring each day, the biscuit was made of shipstuff, and they were so hard that a hammer or a substitute therefore was requisite to break them. This, or throw them to soak in boiling water, upon these, a biscuit and a herring each day, the soldiers lived until their mouths broke out with scabs, and their throats became as sore and raw as a piece of uncooked meat. This was very annoying and oppressive, and was called the "scurvy." The soldiers at length determined to kick against the receipt of herrings. We all drew our herrings and saved them for a day or two, and then collected them at one place on the parade ground and fastened them upon long poles, and some of the soldiers carried them upon their

shoulders around and up, and down the parade ground, whilst we (the musicians) played and beat “the rogue’s march” after them. After we had endeavored to fish drill our officers enough, we left our fish lying upon the parade ground to undergo an official inspection, and repaired quietly and orderly to our quarters.

The officers made a great ado about the matter, but the soldiers were determined not to yield any thing. This course of independent burlesquing, at the expense of the funny tribe of unwelcome guests, brought us a load or two of dried clams in a very few days thereafter. Draw near ye lovers of your country – of old veteran patriotic soldiers of the revolution, and hear how these were dealt out to the soldiery. These had been taken out of the shells and then put upon strings and dried as farmer’s wives dry their apples in the chimney corners and in the sun. Every man drew so many inches of these; inches of dried clams! To the young reader and perhaps to many of the older ones, these seem funny rations for soldiers to be sustained on, and to enable a patriot army to do its duty in beating the great “Bull” of Europe. Funny! Yes! So many inches of string dried clams to each soldier; perhaps each soldier drew 4 or 5 inches of those. They were very dry and would rattle one against another like to pebble stones, and were seemingly as hard; when boiled however, they would swell out and become soft, and as large nearly as when they had been first strung. Our process was to boil them, and to break up some ship-biscuit and throw them into our camp kettles and would make a kind of soup out of them, and believed ourselves to have been blessed with pretty fair living considering the times and situation of the army...
Samuel Dewees, Pennsylvania Line.

From these few examples it would seem that soldiers could find ways to have fun with whatever was around them. They also seemed quite willing to pull ranks on others as a way to seek revenge. Remember to be safe out there!

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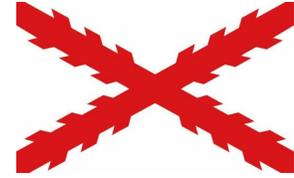
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Spain's Role in the American Revolution Outside of North America

By Eric Olsen, Park Ranger, Historian



If today's article sounds familiar, it's because last month we featured an article dealing with Spain's North American colonies during the American Revolution. But Hispanic Heritage month spans both September and October, so our articles will as well. This article will deal with all of Spain's other colonies during the American Revolution as well as the siege of Gibraltar.

Spain controlled a vast empire during the American Revolution. Not just the previously mentioned North American lands but also much of South America, Central America, and islands in both the Caribbean and the Pacific. Spain entered the war because of a desire for vengeance against Britain. But its main goal was to gain more territory including: Gibraltar, Florida, Jamaica, and other territories lost to England in earlier wars.

Spain joined the war as an ally of France, but it never was officially allied with the United States. American independence was seen as menacing to Spain because an independent United States might begin to occupy Spanish possessions in Louisiana and Mexico. It was also a threat because of the example American independence might set for Spain's colonies, inspiring them to seek their own independence.

One of Spain's primary territorial goals was to regain a spit of land on Spain's Mediterranean coast known as Gibraltar. Spain had lost Gibraltar to England in the early 18th century and it desperately wanted it back. The Spanish and their French allies laid siege to Gibraltar for 3 years [June 24, 1779 to February 7, 1783] but never captured it. It was the longest siege endured by the British Armed Forces, as well as being one of the longest continuous sieges in history.

In Central America, the British had a few isolated outposts that harvested mahogany used in fine furniture and logwood that was used in dyeing cloth. From Spain's entry in the war in 1779, these British outposts would come under attack leading to counter attacks by the British. The most ambitious British attack would be against Nicaragua in 1780. The plan was to send an expedition up the San Juan River to the Lake of Nicaragua and beyond establishing a chain of posts across Central America. There were even speculation of using the river and lake as part of a future canal connecting the Pacific with the Gulf of Mexico. But after initial victories, the expedition failed because the troops were taken down by tropical diseases. When the expedition's commander fell ill, the command went to Lt. Col. Stephen Kemble, son of Morristown's Peter Kemble. Who decided to halt the expedition and withdraw to ships under the command of Captain Horatio Nelson for a return to the British island of Jamaica.

Nearby in the Caribbean, the major Spanish possessions were Cuba, Santo Domingo and Puerto Rico. American ships did engage in trade through these islands during the war. The Spanish hoped to attack and conquer Jamaica but the expedition fell apart after the defeat of a combined Spanish and French invasion fleet at the Battle of the Saintes in 1782. However, late in the war the Spanish did capture the Bahamas.

Further south, most of South America was also Spanish territory. Economic and political reforms along with increased sale taxes caused unrest in South American. This led to a series of revolts from 1780 to 1782 in what would be present-day Peru, Bolivia, Columbia and Venezuela. These were primarily revolts by the native people and mixed race lower classes against the Spanish controlled government. Some of these rebel armies exceeded the size of Washington's army. It is estimated that more than 80,000 Indians and mestizos were killed during two of the rebellions and nearly 10,000 Spaniards were killed.

Far to the west in the Pacific, the Philippines were Spain's main source of trade goods from China. Here Mexican silver was traded for Chinese silk and porcelains as well as spices from Indonesia. The protection of trade conveyances between the Philippines and Mexico were a major Spanish concern during the war. In 1742 British Captain George Anson captured a Spanish Manila galleon worth over 400,000 pounds. Later during the Seven Years War Great Britain occupied Manila between 1762 & 1764. Fearing another British attack on their China trade, the Spanish diverted most of the Pacific fleet to the protection of the Philippines and the Manila galleons. The new mission and presidios in California suffered shortages of food and other supplies because of the diversion of Spanish ships to Manila.

In the end, after all parties had signed the Treaty of Paris, Spain made some gains but did not get their biggest goal of the return of Gibraltar. The Mediterranean island of Minorca was added to the Spanish empire and East and West Florida were once again under Spanish control. But the ideas of rebellion and independence were growing in their colonies and would be a problem for the Spanish later in the 19th century.

A Symbol of Patriotism, A Symbol of Oppression

Courthouses and the American Revolution in New Jersey

Summary

For a brief period from late 1779 to early 1780, four northern New Jersey courthouses were attacked in raids primarily led by Loyalist forces. Loyalists attacked these courthouses in some instances to free Loyalist prisoners. In three cases during these raids Loyalists sought revenge for past Patriot abuses by burning down the courthouses. Many Loyalists had been confined and abused in the jails within the courthouse building. Some faced trials there. A few were even executed. Other Loyalists who had fled Patriots lines later had their lands confiscated and sold to benefit the Patriot government. As a result, Loyalists saw the courthouses as a symbol of the Patriot government and their destruction as a convenient source of revenge.

Full Text

Courthouses saw a wide variety of uses and abuses during the American Revolution. Being one of the few large public buildings in a county, a courthouse often served as a public meeting place for rallies by patriots protesting British rule. Courthouses also served the military as storehouses, hospitals and prisons.

Courthouses became a symbol of the Patriot cause due to their use by the military and the Patriot government. But for people loyal to the British cause, these courthouses became a hated symbol of oppression due to the treatment they received there. Loyalists were rounded up by Patriot militias and confined in courthouse jails. Here they suffered overcrowding as well as diseases such as smallpox and typhus. They were held in jail cells for long periods until they could face the Council of Safety. Facing the Council was similar to a Grand Jury proceeding in which evidence of treason was presented. If there was enough evidence to warrant a trial, the accused Loyalist was given the choice of declaring allegiance to the Patriot cause or facing a trial for treason. If they were found guilty of treason, the Loyalist could be executed. Many Loyalists fled the state to avoid abuse and possible trial by their Patriot neighbors. But Loyalists who fled the state were not immune from the long arm of the Patriot courthouse. Their property within Patriot lines could be confiscated and sold at public auction with the proceeds going to the state of New Jersey.

As a result of this abuse, courthouses became targets during Loyalist raids into New Jersey. What better way to show their contempt for the Patriot government than to burn down their courthouses. During the years 1779 and 1780 four courthouses in northern New Jersey were raided and three of them were burned to the ground.

The first raid occurred in October 1779 against the Somerset County Courthouse. Lieutenant Colonel John Simcoe led a band of Loyalist cavalry in a raid from Staten Island through Perth Amboy into Somerset County. Their target was a number of Continental Army boats stored in Somerset County for a potential invasion of New York City. After burning the boats which were stored near present-day Somerville, they proceeded towards the county seat which was in

Millstone. Simcoe described what happened. *“He proceeded to Somerset court-house; three Loyalists, who were prisoners there, were liberated; one of them was a dreadful spectacle, he appeared to have been almost starved, and was chained to the floor; the soldiers wished, and it was permitted to burn the court-house”* During the raid a Dutch Reformed Church, which was being used as a military storehouse, was also burned. In 1782 the church and the county joined together to build a new courthouse which was also used by the county and the Dutch Reformed Church until 1788, when the church constructed a new building.

The next raid that involved a courthouse occurred in January 25, 1780. In retaliation for the American raid on Staten Island, British and Loyalist forces struck back at Newark and Elizabeth Town. The raiding party that attacked Elizabeth Town was an all Loyalist force commanded by Lt. Colonel Buskirk. Here they burned the Presbyterian Church of Reverend James Caldwell, a noted Patriot and army quartermaster. Additionally, they burned the courthouse. Buskirk reported to his commanding officer, *“It was impossible to prevent the refugees [Loyalists] from burning the Presbyterian meeting house & the court house, against both of which (especially the former) the refugees had particular resentment, - Otherwise little injury was done to the inhabitants.”* The courthouse destroyed in Elizabeth served as the courthouse for Essex County.[Note: Some sources say that the courthouse was a borough courthouse rather than a county courthouse] During the Revolutionary War, Essex County included present-day Union County. A new courthouse was not constructed until 1797. After much dispute the county seat was moved to Newark in 1807. After Union County was created in 1857, Elizabeth became its county seat.

Two months later another courthouse was burned during a British raid. In this case the British raided Bergen County in March 1780. Primary sources don't mention a reason for the raid but it seems it was a raid merely to harass the Americans. A force of 400 British and German troops marched to Hackensack where they took some prisoners and burned the courthouse and a couple of homes. According to the diary of German Private Johann Dohla, the soldiers were more interested in plunder, *“This village was attacked and all houses were immediately broken into and everything ruined; doors, windows boxes, and chests, everything lumped together and plundered. All the males were taken prisoners, and the townhall and some other splendid buildings were set on fire. We took considerable booty, money, silver pocket watches, silver plate and spoons, as well as furniture, good clothing, fine English linen, good silk stockings, gloves, and neckclothes, as well as other expensive silks, satins, and other materials. This village of Hackensack lies sixteen English miles from New York and has rich inhabitants.”*

Interestingly, there were no Loyalists on this raid who were looking for revenge against the Bergen County Courthouse. The destruction was committed by British and German troops. While these troops probably didn't have a personal grudge against the courthouse, it still was a symbol of the Patriot government and an obvious target for a raid of harassment. Bergen County later set a value of 500 pounds for the lost building and its furnishings. They also claimed a loss of 57 pounds, and 12 shillings for the town clock that was part of the building. A new courthouse was not built until 1784.

The final raid involving a New Jersey Courthouse occurred in June 1780 in Sussex County. The raid was led by James Moody, a Loyalist officer who had formerly lived in Sussex County. Moody was a notorious spy and raider, who often wandered through New Jersey, recruiting Loyalists, gathering intelligence, and even attempting to kidnap Governor William Livingston. A newspaper article written after the raid claimed that this raid was *“lately sent from New York with a party of ruffians for the purpose of burning Sussex goal, of taking or assassinating*

Governor Livingston and the persons who were active in apprehending the three spies lately executed, and of inlisting our inhabitants in the service of the British tyrant”

But Moody’s own account noted a different purpose for the raid, “Returning again into Sussex County, he now heard that several prisoners were confined, on various suspicions and charges of loyalty, in the jail of that county; and that one of them was actually under sentence of death. This poor fellow was one of Burgoyne’s soldiers, charged with crimes of a civil nature, of which, however, he was generally believed to be innocent.....it was determined, if possible, to release both him and his fellow-prisoners.”

It was a jail break and Moody gave this detailed description of the affair. “For this purpose, Mr. Moody took with him six men; and, late at night, entered the country town, about seventy miles from New York. The inhabitants of the town were but too generally disaffected. This suggested the necessity of stratagem. Coming to the jail, the keeper called out from the window of an upper room, and demanded what their business was? The Ensign instantly replied, “He had a prisoner to deliver into his custody.” “What! One of Moody’s fellows,” said the Jailor? “Yes,” said the Ensign. On his enquiring, what the name of this supposed prisoner was, one of the party, who was well known, by the inhabitants of that place, to be with Mr. Moody, personated the character of a prisoner, and spoke for himself. The jailor gave him a little ill language; but, notwithstanding, seemed highly pleased with the idea of his having so notorious a Tory in his custody. On the Ensign’s urging him to come down, and take charge of the man, he peremptorily refused’ alleging, that, in consequence of Moody’s being out, he had received strict orders to open his doors to no man after sun-set; and that therefore he must wait till morning. Finding that this tale would not take, the Ensign now changed his note; and, in a stern tone, told him, “Sirrah, the man who now speaks to you is Moody: I have a strong party with me; and if you do not this moment deliver up your keys, I will instantly pull down your house about your ears.” The jailor vanished in a moment. On this, Mr. Moody’s men, who were well skilled in the Indian war-whoop, made the air resound with such a variety of hideous yells, as soon left them nothing to fear from the inhabitants of New Town, which, though the country town, consists only of twenty or thirty houses. “The Indians, the Indians are come!” said the panic-struck people: and happy were they who could soonest escape into the woods. While these things were thus going on, the Ensign had made his way through a casement, and was met by a prisoner, whom he immediately employed to procure him a light. The vanished jailor was now again produced; and most obsequiously conducted Mr. Moody to the dungeon of the poor wretch under sentence of death.

It may seem incredible, but it is an undoubted fact, that, notwithstanding all the horrors and awfulness of his situation, this poor, forlorn, condemned British soldier was found fast asleep; and had slept so sound, as to have heard nothing of the uproar or alarm. There is no possibility of describing the agony of this man, when, on being thus suddenly aroused, he saw before him a man in arms, attended by persons, whom, though they were familiarly known to him, so agitated were his spirits, he was utterly at a loss then to recognize. The first, and the only idea that occurred to him was, that, as many of the friends of Government had been privately executed in prison, the person he saw was his executioner. On Mr. Moody’s repeatedly informing him of his mistake, and that he was come to release him in the name of King George, the transition, from such an abyss of wretchedness to so extravagant a pitch of joy, had well nigh overcome him. Never before had the Writer been present at so affecting a scene. The image of the poor soldier, alternately agitated with the extremes of despair and rapture, is at this moment, present to his imagination, as strong almost as if the object were still before him; and he has often thought,

there are few subjects on which a painter of taste and sensibility could more happily employ his pencil. The man looked wild; and undoubtedly was wild, and hardly in his senses: and yet he laboured, and was big with some of the noblest sentiments, and most powerful passions, by which the human mind is ever actuated. In such circumstances, it was with some difficulty that the Ensign got him away. At length, however, his clothes were got on; and he, with all the rest who chose to avail themselves of the opportunity, were conducted into safety, notwithstanding a warm pursuit of several days..."

So in this case the courthouse was not burned down but Moody did threaten to, "*pull down your house about your ears.*" The jailor probably gave into Moody's demands since jailors made their homes in the jails. If the jail was burned or pulled down, the jailor would have lost his home. But like Simcoe's raid on the Somerset County Courthouse, the raid resulted in the freeing of British and Loyalist prisoners.

At the time of the American Revolution, New Jersey had 13 counties: Sussex, Bergen, Essex, Morris, Somerset, Hunterdon, Middlesex, Monmouth, Burlington, Gloucester, Salem, Cumberland and Cape May. But I have only been able to find accounts of attacks against courthouses in four cases. Other county courthouses saw service during the Revolution. Monmouth County's courthouse served as a military hospital following the battle of Monmouth. Jails at the courthouses in Trenton [Hunterdon County] and Burlington [Burlington County], were used to confine loyalists. But in most cases there is no information about what was happening at New Jersey's other courthouses during the war. All the courthouses would have performed their normal legal proceedings as well as additional duties related to the war such as recruiting, dealing with the Loyalists and providing pensions for widows and disabled soldiers. But lacking the drama of an enemy raid these vital war related activities were quickly forgotten.

One reason for this lack of drama is that for much of the war, there was little or no fighting in many of New Jersey's counties. Except for the brief British occupation in late 1776 into 1777 as well as the British retreat across the state in 1778, the enemy were not a presence in most of New Jersey.

The attacks on the courthouses all took place in the northern portion of the state within striking distance of British-occupied New York City. Morris County's courthouse was the only northern courthouse that was not attacked and this was probably due to its secure location 30 miles from New York behind the Watchung Mountains.

The only time western counties along the Delaware River were vulnerable to attack was during the British occupation of Philadelphia in late 1777 to early 1778. And except for some raids looking for food, the British confined their activities to Pennsylvania. Southern counties along the Atlantic coast saw little action except for privateers or raids on salt works. The county courthouses were too far inland to be attacked from water-borne troops.

Interestingly, all the courthouse attacks took place in a very small window of time from October of 1779 to June 1780. Why weren't courthouses attacked earlier, especially when enemy forces occupied the state? My guess would be that these occupations were earlier in the war when the British were more concerned with a reconciliation with the rebels. Burning down public buildings would be counterproductive. Additionally, during this early period of the war the British were more concerned with defeating the Continental Army as opposed to attacking the civilian population. By 1779 and 1780 the focus of British war efforts had shifted to other parts of the world. The war in America was stalemated. Frustrated Loyalists saw their chances of returning to their homes rapidly diminishing. British and Loyalists forces would continue to raid New Jersey to gain supplies and boost morale but they could not occupy territory for any length

of time. So what better way to seek revenge and boost morale than to burn down a Patriot courthouse? A place that had jailed and abused Loyalists. A place responsible for the execution of some and the confiscation of the property of many others. After 1780 the British forces focused most of their efforts in America's southern states. Military activity in the north diminished and the remaining north Jersey courthouses in Morris, Middlesex and Monmouth counties were just out of reach of a Loyalist raid and the courthouses previously burned down would not be rebuilt after the war. As a result, the attacks on New Jersey's courthouses ceased.

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The first raid occurred in October 1779 against the Somerset County Courthouse. Lieutenant Colonel John Simcoe led a band of Loyalist cavalry in a raid from Staten Island through Perth Amboy into Somerset County. Their target was a number of Continental Army boats stored in Somerset County for a potential invasion of New York City. After burning the boats which were stored near present-day Somerville, they proceeded towards the county seat which was in

Millstone. Simcoe described what happened. *“He proceeded to Somerset court-house; three Loyalists, who were prisoners there, were liberated; one of them was a dreadful spectacle, he appeared to have been almost starved, and was chained to the floor; the soldiers wished, and it was permitted to burn the court-house”* During the raid a Dutch Reformed Church, which was being used as a military storehouse, was also burned. In 1782 the church and the county joined together to build a new courthouse which was also used by the county and the Dutch Reformed Church until 1788, when the church constructed a new building.

The next raid that involved a courthouse occurred in January 25, 1780. In retaliation for the American raid on Staten Island, British and Loyalist forces struck back at Newark and Elizabeth Town. The raiding party that attacked Elizabeth Town was an all Loyalist force commanded by Lt. Colonel Buskirk. Here they burned the Presbyterian Church of Reverend James Caldwell, a noted Patriot and army quartermaster. Additionally, they burned the courthouse. Buskirk reported to his commanding officer, *“It was impossible to prevent the refugees [Loyalists] from burning the Presbyterian meeting house & the court house, against both of which (especially the former) the refugees had particular resentment, - Otherwise little injury was done to the inhabitants.”* The courthouse destroyed in Elizabeth served as the courthouse for Essex County.[Note: Some sources say that the courthouse was a borough courthouse rather than a county courthouse] During the Revolutionary War, Essex County included present-day Union County. A new courthouse was not constructed until 1797. After much dispute the county seat was moved to Newark in 1807. After Union County was created in 1857, Elizabeth became its county seat.

Two months later another courthouse was burned during a British raid. In this case the British raided Bergen County in March 1780. Primary sources don't mention a reason for the raid but it seems it was a raid merely to harass the Americans. A force of 400 British and German troops marched to Hackensack where they took some prisoners and burned the courthouse and a couple of homes. According to the diary of German Private Johann Dohla, the soldiers were more interested in plunder, *“This village was attacked and all houses were immediately broken into and everything ruined; doors, windows boxes, and chests, everything lumped together and plundered. All the males were taken prisoners, and the townhall and some other splendid buildings were set on fire. We took considerable booty, money, silver pocket watches, silver plate and spoons, as well as furniture, good clothing, fine English linen, good silk stockings, gloves, and neckclothes, as well as other expensive silks, satins, and other materials. This village of Hackensack lies sixteen English miles from New York and has rich inhabitants.”*

Interestingly, there were no Loyalists on this raid who were looking for revenge against the Bergen County Courthouse. The destruction was committed by British and German troops. While these troops probably didn't have a personal grudge against the courthouse, it still was a symbol of the Patriot government and an obvious target for a raid of harassment. Bergen County later set a value of 500 pounds for the lost building and its furnishings. They also claimed a loss of 57 pounds, and 12 shillings for the town clock that was part of the building. A new courthouse was not built until 1784.

The final raid involving a New Jersey Courthouse occurred in June 1780 in Sussex County. The raid was led by James Moody, a Loyalist officer who had formerly lived in Sussex County. Moody was a notorious spy and raider, who often wandered through New Jersey, recruiting Loyalists, gathering intelligence, and even attempting to kidnap Governor William Livingston. A newspaper article written after the raid claimed that this raid was *“lately sent from New York with a party of ruffians for the purpose of burning Sussex goal, of taking or assassinating*

Governor Livingston and the persons who were active in apprehending the three spies lately executed, and of inlisting our inhabitants in the service of the British tyrant”

But Moody’s own account noted a different purpose for the raid, “Returning again into Sussex County, he now heard that several prisoners were confined, on various suspicions and charges of loyalty, in the jail of that county; and that one of them was actually under sentence of death. This poor fellow was one of Burgoyne’s soldiers, charged with crimes of a civil nature, of which, however, he was generally believed to be innocent.....it was determined, if possible, to release both him and his fellow-prisoners.”

It was a jail break and Moody gave this detailed description of the affair. “For this purpose, Mr. Moody took with him six men; and, late at night, entered the country town, about seventy miles from New York. The inhabitants of the town were but too generally disaffected. This suggested the necessity of stratagem. Coming to the jail, the keeper called out from the window of an upper room, and demanded what their business was? The Ensign instantly replied, “He had a prisoner to deliver into his custody.” “What! One of Moody’s fellows,” said the Jailer? “Yes,” said the Ensign. On his enquiring, what the name of this supposed prisoner was, one of the party, who was well known, by the inhabitants of that place, to be with Mr. Moody, personated the character of a prisoner, and spoke for himself. The jailor gave him a little ill language; but, notwithstanding, seemed highly pleased with the idea of his having so notorious a Tory in his custody. On the Ensign’s urging him to come down, and take charge of the man, he peremptorily refused’ alleging, that, in consequence of Moody’s being out, he had received strict orders to open his doors to no man after sun-set; and that therefore he must wait till morning. Finding that this tale would not take, the Ensign now changed his note; and, in a stern tone, told him, “Sirrah, the man who now speaks to you is Moody: I have a strong party with me; and if you do not this moment deliver up your keys, I will instantly pull down your house about your ears.” The jailor vanished in a moment. On this, Mr. Moody’s men, who were well skilled in the Indian war-whoop, made the air resound with such a variety of hideous yells, as soon left them nothing to fear from the inhabitants of New Town, which, though the country town, consists only of twenty or thirty houses. “The Indians, the Indians are come!” said the panic-struck people: and happy were they who could soonest escape into the woods. While these things were thus going on, the Ensign had made his way through a casement, and was met by a prisoner, whom he immediately employed to procure him a light. The vanished jailor was now again produced; and most obsequiously conducted Mr. Moody to the dungeon of the poor wretch under sentence of death.

It may seem incredible, but it is an undoubted fact, that, notwithstanding all the horrors and awfulness of his situation, this poor, forlorn, condemned British soldier was found fast asleep; and had slept so sound, as to have heard nothing of the uproar or alarm. There is no possibility of describing the agony of this man, when, on being thus suddenly aroused, he saw before him a man in arms, attended by persons, whom, though they were familiarly known to him, so agitated were his spirits, he was utterly at a loss then to recognize. The first, and the only idea that occurred to him was, that, as many of the friends of Government had been privately executed in prison, the person he saw was his executioner. On Mr. Moody’s repeatedly informing him of his mistake, and that he was come to release him in the name of King George, the transition, from such an abyss of wretchedness to so extravagant a pitch of joy, had well nigh overcome him. Never before had the Writer been present at so affecting a scene. The image of the poor soldier, alternately agitated with the extremes of despair and rapture, is at this moment, present to his imagination, as strong almost as if the object were still before him; and he has often thought,

there are few subjects on which a painter of taste and sensibility could more happily employ his pencil. The man looked wild; and undoubtedly was wild, and hardly in his senses: and yet he laboured, and was big with some of the noblest sentiments, and most powerful passions, by which the human mind is ever actuated. In such circumstances, it was with some difficulty that the Ensign got him away. At length, however, his clothes were got on; and he, with all the rest who chose to avail themselves of the opportunity, were conducted into safety, notwithstanding a warm pursuit of several days..."

So in this case the courthouse was not burned down but Moody did threaten to, "*pull down your house about your ears.*" The jailor probably gave into Moody's demands since jailors made their homes in the jails. If the jail was burned or pulled down, the jailor would have lost his home. But like Simcoe's raid on the Somerset County Courthouse, the raid resulted in the freeing of British and Loyalist prisoners.

At the time of the American Revolution, New Jersey had 13 counties: Sussex, Bergen, Essex, Morris, Somerset, Hunterdon, Middlesex, Monmouth, Burlington, Gloucester, Salem, Cumberland and Cape May. But I have only been able to find accounts of attacks against courthouses in four cases. Other county courthouses saw service during the Revolution. Monmouth County's courthouse served as a military hospital following the battle of Monmouth. Jails at the courthouses in Trenton [Hunterdon County] and Burlington [Burlington County], were used to confine loyalists. But in most cases there is no information about what was happening at New Jersey's other courthouses during the war. All the courthouses would have performed their normal legal proceedings as well as additional duties related to the war such as recruiting, dealing with the Loyalists and providing pensions for widows and disabled soldiers. But lacking the drama of an enemy raid these vital war related activities were quickly forgotten.

One reason for this lack of drama is that for much of the war, there was little or no fighting in many of New Jersey's counties. Except for the brief British occupation in late 1776 into 1777 as well as the British retreat across the state in 1778, the enemy were not a presence in most of New Jersey.

The attacks on the courthouses all took place in the northern portion of the state within striking distance of British-occupied New York City. Morris County's courthouse was the only northern courthouse that was not attacked and this was probably due to its secure location 30 miles from New York behind the Watchung Mountains.

The only time western counties along the Delaware River were vulnerable to attack was during the British occupation of Philadelphia in late 1777 to early 1778. And except for some raids looking for food, the British confined their activities to Pennsylvania. Southern counties along the Atlantic coast saw little action except for privateers or raids on salt works. The county courthouses were too far inland to be attacked from water-borne troops.

Interestingly, all the courthouse attacks took place in a very small window of time from October of 1779 to June 1780. Why weren't courthouses attacked earlier, especially when enemy forces occupied the state? My guess would be that these occupations were earlier in the war when the British were more concerned with a reconciliation with the rebels. Burning down public buildings would be counterproductive. Additionally, during this early period of the war the British were more concerned with defeating the Continental Army as opposed to attacking the civilian population. By 1779 and 1780 the focus of British war efforts had shifted to other parts of the world. The war in America was stalemated. Frustrated Loyalists saw their chances of returning to their homes rapidly diminishing. British and Loyalists forces would continue to raid New Jersey to gain supplies and boost morale but they could not occupy territory for any length

of time. So what better way to seek revenge and boost morale than to burn down a Patriot courthouse? A place that had jailed and abused Loyalists. A place responsible for the execution of some and the confiscation of the property of many others. After 1780 the British forces focused most of their efforts in America's southern states. Military activity in the north diminished and the remaining north Jersey courthouses in Morris, Middlesex and Monmouth counties were just out of reach of a Loyalist raid and the courthouses previously burned down would not be rebuilt after the war. As a result, the attacks on New Jersey's courthouses ceased.

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What's in Your Pocketbook II?

Early in the book Guiliver's Travels, the Lilliputians took an inventory of Gulliver's possessions, in particular the contents of his pockets. Swift used it as a device to describe everyday objects as if someone had never seen them before, such as this description of a pocket watch,

"We directed him to draw out whatever was at the end of that chain; which appeared to be a globe, half silver, and half of some transparent metal; for, on the transparent side, we saw certain strange figures circularly drawn, and though we could touch them, till we found our fingers stopped by the lucid substance. He put this engine into our ears, which made an incessant noise, like that of a water-mill: and we conjecture it is either some unknown animal, or the god that he worships; but we are more inclined to the latter opinion, because he assured us, (if we understood him right, for he expressed himself very imperfectly) that he seldom did any thing without consulting it. He called it his oracle, and said, it pointed out the time for every action of his life."

What I found most fascinating was that unintentionally Swift was providing the reader with an inventory of what an 18th century man might carry in his pockets. While this sounds trivial, for people involved with interpreting 18th century life it's a treasure trove of information. In case I've piqued your interest, Gulliver was carrying in his various pockets and on a belt, the following items: Pocket Watch and Chain, Handkerchief, Snuff Box, Journal Book, Comb, Razor, Pocket Knife, Coins made of Gold, Silver and Copper, Pocket Pistol, Bag with Pistol Balls and Gunpowder and a Sword. Admittedly more than an average man might have but not unusual for a gentleman traveling the world.

Just recently I ran across a non-fiction, first person account of the personal items carried by an 18th century man. In this case, the account comes from J.F. Wasmus a German surgeon captured at the Battle of Bennington. Wasmus's captors plundered him of anything that took their fancy and Wasmus inventoried his losses in this diary account, "*I remained lying on the ground until the enemy urged me rather impolitely to get up... he now took my watch, looked at it, held it to his ear and put it away [in his pocket]. After this, he made a friendly face and was so human that he urged me to take a drink from his wooden flask. He handed me over to his comrades, who started anew to search my pockets. One of them took nothing but my purse in which, however, were only 14 piasters. He continued eagerly looking for money but then left, whereupon the third began searching my pockets. This one took all my small items as my knife, my paper, my lighter, but he did not find the best; they were so dumb that they did not see the pocket in my overcoat. Thus, I saved my Noble pipe. If I had put my watch and moneybag into this pocket, I would not have lost anything."*

Like Gulliver, Wasmus had a watch, a purse [pocket book] with money, a knife, paper and a pipe [instead of Gulliver's snuff].

My research has provided me with another window into the world of 18th century men's possessions. In this case it's a man's pocket book. Today, the term pocketbook is associated with a woman's purse but in the 18th century a pocketbook was essentially a man's wallet.

But instead of using a Lilliputian inventory, we'll use lost and found advertisements from orderly books as our source. Apparently, when an officer lost his pocket book he could place an advertisement in the orderly books. The ad was later read to the men as part of their daily orders

plus a written version remained in the orderly book for reference. Additionally I've also found a couple of references to pocketbooks in letters, diaries and memoirs.

These advertisements provide us basically with three pieces of information: a description of the pocket, its contents and a potential reward.

The majority of 18th century pocketbooks that I have seen, including one on display in our museum, are of paperboard covered with an elaborate embroidery called Bargello. But the advertisements indicate that officers seemed to favor various types of leather, including parchment, and morocco. Red was the most popular color followed by black.

In terms of the contents of the Pocketbook, money was the most popular item. Primarily paper money; including both Continental and paper money from various states. The amount of money ranged from "a small sum," to 60, 80, 100 and 400 dollars. The high figures are partially due to the inflation of the paper money and the fact that officers were paid more. Poor Private Joseph Plumb Martin lost just five dollars when Pennsylvania soldiers stole his pocketbook. One officer also carried coins in his pocketbook claiming the loss of, "*3 half Joes, two Guneas,*" which were Portuguese and English coins. Another officer even carried a diamond ring in his pocket book.

If you were to look inside these pocketbooks the other thing that you'd see were various kinds of papers. A number of officers carried paper copies of their commissions, basically an equivalent of a military identification card. A French officer had both a French Commission, and his Commission from the Continental Congress. One carried a letter from his wife. Another had a Continental Lottery ticket and one officer lost a number of receipts. Other officers were less specific saying they lost: "*sundry valuable papers,*" "*all his papers of consequence*", and "*a few other papers.*"

Hoping to get their lost pocketbooks back, officers offered rewards. Some offers were vague such as: "*shall be handsomely rewarded*" or "*Shall receive a Satisfactory reward.*" Others offered rewards of 10, 20, 30 and 50 dollars. One officer was more worried about his lost papers rather than the Continental paper money and stated that he would give all the money in the pocketbook [\$104] "*to any one who will bring him the Pocket Book and Commissions.*" One lucky officer whose pocketbook was returned said that he "*offered the soldier all his paper dollars, and lamented he had no hard ones to reward him with.*"

Pocketbooks filled with money, ID and papers; sounds sort of like our modern wallets. But if you lost your wallet right now could you be able to say what was in your wallet? Or would it be just sundry papers and money?