

NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

However, serious problems facing the state and nation had to be resolved before the United States could become a full-fledged member of the international community (Doc. 13). The War of Independence was over, but the American Revolution had not yet run its course.

1 Margaret Morris, A Woman's View of the War

[Margaret Morris, Private Journal Kept During a Portion of the Revolutionary War, Quaker Collection, Haverford College Library.]

Unfortunately, precious little is known about New Jersey women during the American Revolution. Excluded by both custom and law from the more visible roles played by men, most women received at best a rudimentary education and few recorded their thoughts and deeds for posterity. An outstanding exception was Margaret Hill Morris (1737-1816) of the city of Burlington. Upon the death of her husband, Philadelphia merchant William Morris, Jr., in 1766, she became the sole provider for the family. In 1770 they moved to New Jersey, apparently to be near friends and relatives, and she purchased a home formerly owned by Governor William Franklin. The excerpts from her private journal which follow provide intimate glimpses into how that courageous, pious, sensitive lady responded to the war as a mother, widow, head of household, Quaker, and woman. Politically neutral, Margaret Morris wanted no part of the warfare that raged about her. Like so many of her fellow citizens, she was able to endure the travails of war because of the strength of her convictions and her indomitable will to survive.

[December 6, 1776-January 11, 1777]

December 6th, 1776. Being on a visit to my fr[ien]d, M.S. at Haddonfield. I was preparing to return to my Family, when a Person from Philad[elphi]a told us the people there were in great Commotion, that the English fleet was in the River & hourly expected to sail up to the City; that the inhabitants were removing into the Country; & that several persons of considerable repute had been discover[e]d to have formed a design of setting fire to the City, & were Summoned before the Congress and strictly enjoin[e]d to drop the horrid purpose.¹ When I heard the above report my heart almost died within me, & I cried surely the Lord will not punish the innocent with the guilty, & I wished there might be found some interceeding Lotts & Abrahams amongst *our People*.² On my Journey home I was told the inhabitants of our little Town were going in haste into the Country & that my nearest neighbours were already removed. When I heard this, I felt myself quite Sick; I was ready to faint. I thought of my S.D.,³ the beloved Companion of my

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Widow[e]d State—her Husband at the distance of some hundred miles from her; I thought of my own lonely situation, no Husband to cheer, with the voice of love, my Sinking spirits. My little flock⁴ too, without a Father to direct them how to Steer. All these things crowd[ed] into my mind at once, & I felt like one forsaken; a flood of friendly tears came to my relief & I felt a humble Confidence, that he, who had been with me in six troubles would not forsake me now. While I cherish[e]d this hope my tranquility was restor[e]d, & I felt no Sensations but of humble Acquiescence to the Divine Will & was favour[e]d to find my Family in health, on my Arrival, & my Dear Companion not greatly discompos[e]d, for which favour I desire to be truly thankful. . . .

8th. Every day begins & ends with the same accounts, & we hear today the Regulars are at Trenton—some of our Neighbors gone, & others going, makes our little Bank⁵ look lonesome; but our trust in Providence still firm, & we dare not even talk of removing our Family. . . .

11th. . . a Canonade was, continued till almost dark in different directions, sometimes along the Street, sometimes across it.⁶ Several Houses were Struck & a little damag[e]d, but not one liveing Creature, either Man or beast, kill[e]d or wounded. About dark the Gondolas fell down a little way below the town & the night was pass[ed] in quiet. While all this Tumult was in Town, we, on our peaceful Bank, ignorant of the Occasion of the firing were wondering what it cou[l]d mean, & unsuspecting of danger, were quietly pursuing our Business in the Family, when a kind neighbour inform[e]d us of the Occasion, & urged us to go into the Cellar as a place of Safety. We were prevail[e]d on by him, & remain[e]d there till it ceas[e]d.

12th The people of the gallies, Suspecting that some troops were yet either conceal[e]d in Town or in the Neighborhood of it, have been very Jealous of the inhabitants, who have been often alarm[e]d with reports, that the City⁷ wou[l]d be Set on fire, Many have gone in haste & great distress into the Country, but we still hope, no Mischief is Seriously intended. A Number of Men landed on our Bank this Morning, & told us it was thier settled purpose to set fire to the Town—I beg[ge]d them not to set my house a fire. They ask[e]d which was my House, I show[e]d it to them, & they said they knew not what hinder[e]d them from firing on it last Night, for seeing a light in the Chambers, they thought there were Hessians in it, & that they pointed the Guns at it Several times. I told them my Children were Sick, which oblig[e]d me to burn a light all Night. Tho they did not know what hinder[e]d them from firing on us, I did, it was the Guardian of the Widow & the Orphan, who took us into his Safe keeping, & preserv[e]d us from danger, oh—that I may keep humble, & be thankful for this, as well as other favors Vouch safed to my little flock. . . .

. . . from the 13th to 16th we had various reports of the advancing & retireing of the Enemy—Parties of Arm[e]d Men rudely enter[e]d the Houses in Town, & diligent search made for Tories, the 2 last taken releas[e]d & sent on Shore. Some of the Gondola Gentry broke into & pillag[e]d R. Smiths⁸ House on the bank. About noon this day, (the 16) a very terrible account of thousands coming into Town—& now actually to be seen on Gallows Hill. My incautious Son⁹ catch[e]d up the Spy Glass, & was running to the Mill to look at them. I told him it w[oul]d be liable to misconstruction, but he prevail[e]d on me to let him gratify his curiosity, & he went, but return[e]d much dissatisfy[e]d, for no troops cou[l]d he see, as he came back poor Dick¹⁰ took the glass & resting it against a tree, took a view of the fleet. Both of

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these was obser[ve]d by the people on board, who suspected it was an Enemy that was watching thier Motions. They Mann[e]d a boat & sent her on Shore. A loud knocking at my door brought me to it. I was a little flutter[e]d & kept locking and unlocking that I might get my ruffled face, a little compos[e]d. At last I open[e]d it, & half a dozen Men all Arm[e]d, demanded the keys of the empty House. I asked what they wanted there. They said to Search for a D--d tory who had been spy[in]g at them from the Mill. The Name of a Tory so near my *own door* seriously alarm[e]d me—for a poor *refugee*¹¹ dignify[e]d by that Name, had claim[e]d the shelter of my Roof & was at that very time conceal[e]d, like a thief in an Auger hole.¹² I rung the bell violently, the Signal agreed on, if they came to Search, & when I thought he had crept into the hole I put on a very simple look & cry[e]d out, bless me I hope you are not Hessians—say, good Men are you the Hessians? Do we look like Hessians? Ask[e]d one of them rudely[?] Indeed I dont know. Did you never see a Hessian? No never in my life but they *are Men*, & you are Men & may be Hessians for any thing I know. But Ill go with you into Col. C[oxe's]¹³ house, tho indeed it was my Son at the Mill, he is but a Boy & meant no harm, he wanted to see the Troops. So I march[e]d at the head of them, open[e]d the door, & search[e]d every place but we cou[l]d not find the tory. Strange where he cou[l]d be. We returned; they greatly disapointed, I pleas[e]d, to think *my house* was not Suspected. . . .

19. . . This evening rec[eive]d a letter from Dr. C.M.,¹⁴ invit[e]ing me to move into his Neighbourhood, but my mind is easiest while I conclude to abide where providence has cast my lot—he has preserv[e]d us in great danger & I dare not distrust his future care. A letter from the brother & fr[ien]d of my heart¹⁵ gives me hope of his return. His advice must determine my future movements if I do remove—a fr[ien]d in need, is a fr[ien]d indeed.

20th A Snow storm last Night has almost stopt the Navigation, & sent our Guarda Costas out of our Sight, down the River, surely this will be a quiet day. Methinks I will call for my work Basket, & set myself down to sewing. But hark, a rap at the door; that face (J. V.)¹⁶ is full of intelligence, “well what News neighbor? Oh—bless *mee*, great news indeed, why hant you heard it? No—we have seen nobody from Town today, do tell us. Why the Hessians are actually Just here. Master P--, W. D.,¹⁷ &c, &c—are all gone out to see what they can do, well & will they bring them all into Town. Im sure we are but poorly provided Just now for a great deal of Comp[an]y. J. V. still goes on—Oh—Ah—you will have enough of them, I expect to have my house full. . . .

A friend from Town call[e]d in about 4 oClock & told us they were all acoming. We ask[e]d if he had seen them; no—but he heard they were Just here we ask[e]d him how we, at this distance from Town sh[oul]d know of thier coming, they might popp upon us here, & Scare us out of our Witts, as we had no Man in the house. he said, oh—you will know it fast enought I warrant, why the Noise of the Waggon, & rattling of the Cannon will be heard at agreat distance & I advise you to make good use of your time till they do come, & put all things of gold & Silver out of thier way & all linen too, or youll lose it. I said they pillaged none but Rebels & we were not such, we had taken no part against them, &c. But that Signified nothing, we shou[l]d loose all &c. After he has gone, my S. D. & myself ask[e]d each other why it was that all these Stories did not put us into a fright; we were not even discompos[e]d. Surely it is a favour never to be forgotten. We conclude to sit up a little

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later than usual to Night, but no Rattling cou[l]d we hear. . . .

21st More snow last Night, no danger of Gondolas now, more Ambassadors gone out to day to the Hessians, not much to be expected from one of them. A great deal of *talk* in the neighborhood about a Neutral Island, wish with great earnestness it may be allow[e]d. Wonder the Men in Town dont think it worth while to step down here & tell us what they are after. Get quite in the fidgets for News, send Dick to Town to collect some, he returns quite Newsless, good mind to send him back again. W. D. comes at last, tells us all we expected to hear, pleases us by saying we shall have timely notice of thier coming, gives a hint that the feeble & defenceless will find safety & protection, rank ourselves amongst the Number having no Man with us in the house. Determine not to be unprovided again, let them come, or not, as the Weather is now so cold, provisions will keep good several days. We pity the poor fellows who were oblig[e]d to be out last Night in the Snow. Repeat our Wishes that this may be a Neutral Island. Quite sleepy—go to Bed, & burn alamp all Night—talk as loud as usual & dont regard the creaking of the door. No Gondola Men listening about the Bank. Before we retur[n]ed to bed this Evening, an attempt was made to teach the Children to pronounce “Vicates”¹⁸ like a Dutch Man.¹⁹ Our good Neighbor a little concern[e]d to think there is not one in Neighborhood that will be able to interpret for us when the Hessians are quarter[e]d on us. At last by meer dint of Conjuraton, I discover that his Maid is a Dutch Woman & we resolve, Nemi. Con: that she shall be the interpreter of the bank—& her Master thinks it will be a *great thing* to have one that can speak for us. . . .

27th aletter from Gen Read²⁰ to his B[rothe]r²¹ informing him that Washington had had an engagement with the Regulars on the 25th early in the Morning, taking them by surprize, kill[e]d fifty, & took 900 prisoners. The loss on our side not known, or if known, not suffer[e]d to be publick.²² It seems this heavy loss to the Regulars was oweing to the prevailing custom among the Hessians of getting drunk on the eve of that great day which brought peace on Earth & good Will to Men—but oh, how unlike Christians is the Manner in which they Celebrate it, can, we call ourselves Christians, while we act so Contrary to our Masters rules. He set the example which we profess to follow, & here is a recent instance that we only profess it, instead of good will, envy & hatred seem to be the ruling passions in the breasts of thousands. This evening the 27th about 3000 of the Pensylvania Militia, & other Troops landed in the Neck, & march[e]d into Town with Artillery, Baggage &c, & were quarter[e]d on the inhabitants. . . . We were so favor[e]d as not to have any sent to our House. . . .

28th Early this Morning the Troops March[e]d out of Town in high spirits. . . . My heart sinks when I think of the Numbers unprepar[e]d for Death, who will probably be sent, in a few days, to appear before the Judge of Heaven. . . .

January the first, 1777 This New Years day has not been usher[e]d in with the usual Cerimories of rejoicing &c, & indeed I believe it will be the beginning of a sorrowful Year to very many People Yet the flatterer hope, bids me look forward with Confidence & trust in him who can bring order out of this great Confusion. . . .

3d This Morning between 8 & 9 oClock we heard very distinc[t]ly, a heavy firing of Cannon, the sound came from towards Trenton, about noon a Number of Soldiers, upwards of a thousand came into Town in great Confusion, with Baggage & some Cannon. From these Soldiers we learn there was a smart engagement Yesterday at Trenton,²³ & that they left them engaged near Trenton Mill, but were not able

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to say which side was Victorious. They were again quarter[e]d on the inhabitants, & we again exempt from the Cumber of having them lodged in our house. Several of those who lodged in Col C[oxe's] house last Week, return[e]d to Night, & ask[e]d for the key—which I gave them. About bed time I went in the next house to see if the fires were safe, & my heart was melted with Compassion to see such a number of my fellow Creatures lying like Swine on the floor fast a Sleep, & many of them without even a Blanket to cover them it seems very strange to me that such a Number shou[ld] be allow[e]d to come from the Camp at the very time of the engagement, & I shrewdly Suspect they have run away for they can give no account why they came, nor where they are to March next.

[4th] The accounts hourly coming in are so Contradictory & various, that we know not w[hi]ch to give credit to. We have heard our people have gain[e]d another Victory,²⁴ that the English are fleeing before them, some at Brunswick, some at Princeton. . . . A Number of Sick & wounded brought into town, calls upon us to extend a hand of Charity towards them. Several of *my* Soldiers left the next house, & return[e]d to the place from whence they came; upon my questioning them pritty close, I brought several to confess they had run away, being scared at the heavy firing on the 3d. There were several pritty innocent looking lads among them, & I simpathized with thier Mothers when I saw them preparing to return to the Army. . . .

11th. The Weather very cold & the River quite shut. I pity the poor Soldiers now on thier March, many of whom will probably lay out in the fields this cold Night. What cause have I for gratitude that I & my household are Shelter[e]d from the storm! Oh that the hearts of my offspring may learn to trust in the God of thier *Mother*—he who has condescended to preserve us in great danger & kept our feet from Wandering from the habitation his goodness has allotted to us.

1. For the military situation at the time, see Doc. 2, headnote.

2. Reference to the contentions between the rival herdsmen of Abraham and his nephew, Lot; the strife was resolved by Abraham's removing to Canaan and Lot's to Sodom. Gen. 13:1-12.

3. Sarah Dillwyn, Margaret Morris's sister, wife of Quaker missionary George Dillwyn.

4. Four of the six children born to Margaret Morris between 1759 and 1766—John (1759), Deborah (1760), Richard Hill (1762), and Gulielma Maria (1766)—were at home during the Revolution; the other two children—Richard (1759) and Mary (1764)—died in infancy.

5. The Morrises lived at Green Bank, near town.

6. On December 11 Colonel Karl Emil von Donop and a small detachment entered Burlington to discuss cantonment with town officials. When the crews of the row-galleys and gondolas ordered by Washington to patrol the Delaware River from Bordentown to Philadelphia saw the Hessian guards, they shelled the town with small ship guns.

7. Philadelphia as opposed to the "town" of Burlington.

8. Richard Smith (see Sec. 1, Doc. 14).

9. John Morris.

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10. Richard Hill Morris.
11. The Reverend Jonathan Odell, rector of St. Mary's Church in Burlington, a prominent Loyalist (see Sec. VIII, Doc. 4).
12. A secret chamber which was actually a windowless attic in the rear of the house.
13. The opulent home of Colonel Daniel Coxe, who died in 1739.
14. Physician Charles Moore of Montgomery Square, Pennsylvania, the husband of Margaret Morris's youngest sister, Milcah Martha.
15. George Dillwyn, husband of Sarah, who was then in England.
16. James Verree.
17. William Dillwyn, brother of Sarah's husband George.
18. "Wie geht's": literally, "how are things going?"
19. Germans were frequently called "Dutch," a corruption of "Deutsch."
20. Colonel Joseph Reed (see Sec. I, Doc. 10).
21. Bowes Reed, colonel of the First Regiment, Burlington County Militia.
22. The battle of Trenton, which took place on December 26 (see Doc. 2).
23. The second battle of Trenton, which featured a strong cannonade by Washington's artillery (see Doc. 2).
24. The battle of Princeton (see Doc. 3).

2 An Aide-de-camp To General Washington Recounts the Battle of Trenton

[Printed in William S. Stryker, *The Battles of Trenton and Princeton* (Boston, 1898), pp. 360-64.]

Though dilatory in pursuing the Americans through New Jersey, the British arrived on the east bank of the Delaware only hours after the last of Washington's army had crossed the river on December 8. Unable to continue pursuit because Washington had swept the region clear of boats, they considered the campaign at an end. General William Howe returned to New York City, and Lord Cornwallis went into winter encampment in New Jersey with garrisons strung across the state from Bergen to Burlington Counties. Two Hessian brigades, one under divisional commander Colonel Karl Emil von Donop at Bordentown and the other under Colonel Johann Gottlieb Rall at Trenton, manned the front line along the Delaware. But Washington decided to seize the initiative. Given considerations of time and weather, the plan devised on the twenty-fourth was ambitious: Washington and his main force of some 2,400 men would attack Rall at Trenton from the north, while Colonel John Cadwalader would cross the river at Bristol for a diversionary assault on Bordentown and General James Ewing would land at Trenton Ferry pursuant to preventing escape southward over the Assunpink Creek. On Christmas Day, the