

NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

21. Major General Charles Lee, Continental army, who was later to earn infamy at the battle of Monmouth Court House, was captured by the British at the widow White's home in Basking Ridge on December 13, 1776.

22. The Reverend Dr. Alexander MacWhorter.

23. Wardsession, now part of Bloomfield.

6 The Reverend Nicholas Collin on the Ravages of War

[Amandus Johnson, trans., *The Journal and Biography of Nicholas Collin, 1746-1831* (Philadelphia, 1936), pp. 243-49. Bracketed material inserted by Johnson, my footnotes.]

Hoping to regain the momentum lost by the British army at the battles of Trenton and Princeton, General Sir William Howe assumed the offensive in June 1777 bent upon capturing Philadelphia. His march through New Jersey being thwarted, he returned to New York City, took to the sea, and landed at the northern end of Chesapeake Bay in late August. Inflicting defeats upon the American army at Brandywine Creek, Chadds Ford, and Paoli en route to the American capital, Howe occupied Philadelphia on September 26. After sustaining still another devastating setback at Germantown on October 4, General Washington and his discouraged army took up winter quarters at nearby Valley Forge. With British and American forces jockeying for position on the far side of the Delaware River, adjacent New Jersey became no-man's-land. As the Reverend Nicholas Collin, pastor of the Swedish Lutheran Church at Penn's Neck, observed, the tenuous state of affairs caused the simmering civil war to erupt with dire consequences for the people of southwest Jersey.

[February-June 1778]

On the last of February [1778] the American general Vain [Anthony Wayne] passed through here with a detachment of 300 men, of whom the greater part were miserably clothed, some without boots, others without socks.¹ He himself did not arrive until 12 o'clock at night and took up his quarters in my house. Just as he was about to go to bed, the sentries fired warning signals, but nothing happened, however. He was a well-bred gentleman and showed me great respect. He left the following day, and on the morning at 11 o'clock, a regiment of English infantry came to attack him, but he had then already escaped. These troops had come in running march the last [Swedish] half mile, and the militia in Swedesborough had hardly time to escape. I dressed in haste and stepped out, showed the Commander my commission² and requested not to be in any way molested. He answered

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politely, and I had no other inconvenience than that the soldiers killed some of my hens and ducks. They had posted guards at all the larger houses and also at my gate. When I hastened out, I did not hear, because of the noise and confusion, that the guard asked me to stop, whereupon he, who thought I intended to escape, was on the point of shooting me. Many people here were plundered on this occasion. The English soldiers are undisciplined and cannot always be controlled. This was one of the main reasons for their slight success, because often both friend and foe were robbed in the most despicable manner, and sometimes with the permission of the officers.

From this time on until the end of June when the English army left Philadelphia³ conditions here were in a rather wretched state. It looked as though America would soon be conquered. The people around here began, as early as last autumn, to trade with English in order to obtain specie coin, as well as sugar, tea, syrup and strong liquors, which are much used here. The location of the place on the river and around some navigable tributaries was very favorable for that purpose. The severest laws were passed against such trading and caused many people to suffer. These, in order to take revenge and others to avoid punishment, went over to the English side. A fort on the [New] Jersey shore,⁴ which commands the river, had already been seized by the Englishmen last summer, and later had been put in good condition for defense. This fort proved a convenient refuge for all those and others, who had changed their opinion, either from conviction or through fear and hope, so that as early as the middle of November a great number of so-called refugees had taken up arms for the King.⁵ Everywhere distrust, fear, hatred and abominable selfishness were met with. Parents and children, brothers and sisters, wife and husband, were enemies to one another. The militia and some regular troops on one side and refugees with the Englishmen on the other were constantly roving about in smaller or greater numbers, plundering and destroying everything in a barbarous manner, cattle, furniture, clothing and food; they smashed mirrors, tables and china, etc., and plundered women and children of their most necessary clothing, cut up the bolsters and scattered the feathers to the winds, burned houses, whipped and imprisoned each other, and surprised people when they were deep asleep.

At the end of March, 15 persons were arrested, who had traded with the English;⁶ half of them belonged to the congregation.⁷ They were kept imprisoned for one night in the schoolhouse at the Raccoon⁸ Church and the next morning they were marched off under guard to the country. Orders had been given to the guards that if they encountered any English troops [they] should shoot the prisoners and then retreat.

At daybreak on April 4, 300 refugees and English troops arrived in three divisions to surround the militia, which escaped with great difficulty. They burnt down the schoolhouse for the simple reason that their friends had been kept prisoners there. I remonstrated with them how unchristian and wicked this behaviour was, and that it was the worst disservice they could do to their King. The officers agreed to this, but said that they were unable to keep proper military discipline. The militia returned after a while, took up their position in a wooded hill [close by] and began to fire [on the English]. A terrible alarm ensued. I and some others went out to look on, but both parties aimed so badly, that the bullets flew in all directions, so that it was best to stay inside.

In the morning on Easter Day a terrific cry was heard near the church. When

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I came out I saw a terrible sight. A man, married to a woman of Swedish parents and in a way belonging to the congregation, was tied to a pine tree and was being whipped. He fainted at times, but when he recovered, the flogging continued both on [his]sides and back, so that the flesh was said to have been entirely crushed [and cut up]. Some days later he died. His crime was that he had profited by the forbidden trade.

In the month of May a division of American troops was stationed in Swedesborough for some weeks. Although the weather was fine, they, nevertheless, took up their quarters in the church and filled it with filth and vermin, so that no Divine services could be held. I therefore had to preach in private houses, wherever the best opportunity was found. Many members of the congregation (especially Raccoon) of both parties suffered injury in various ways by this frenzy.

James Stillman, a strong old Swedish Republican, very rich, lost most of his cattle. Peter Loch, the widow Henricson, also Swedes, Thomas Batton, an Englishman, and many others also suffered much. Doctor Otto's⁹ house was also burnt down by refugees and a good deal of his property taken. Southerland, a Scotchman, son-in-law of the above-mentioned Stillman, together with a young Swede, Henricson, and some others [were] taken to New York as prisoners and retained there for several months. In Pensneck a Swedish widow, Dahlbo, lost many of her sheep, cattle and household goods; [so did] one Stanley, [an] English [man], and others. One Biddle, of a Swedish mother, lost his house through fire laid, as was thought, by a night party of refugees and Englishmen, who mistook him for his uncle, a zealous Republican, who robbed, whipped and imprisoned people in a tyrannical manner.

On the opposite side the militia pillaged [the following]: Jan Dericson, an old kind and quiet man, Jacob and Anders Jones who had traded with the English, a sea captain Jan Cox, who had lived in Raccoon for two years, whose beds were cut up, and his mirrors, china, tea tables, bureaus, etc., smashed to pieces by bayonets and musket stocks; Isac Jöstason, a Swede, who had gone over to the Royal Army, after he had begun to trade, but had for a long time previously been a strong Republican and officer in the militia. This one, who had as yet scarcely been missed by this former friends, arrived on the above-mentioned 4th day of April with the others, and helped to pillage the militia captain Brown's house in Swedesborough, whereupon the militia pillaged all his property and hardly left the wife and her old kindhearted mother the necessary wearing apparel and bedclothes.

[They also pillaged the home of] John Halton,¹⁰ a native Englishman, belonging to the Episcopal Church, an inspector of the customs in the lower part of [New] Jersey, who had for some years lived near to the Raccoon Church. This man had for a long time been unpopular, simply because of his occupation, and was truly devoted to his King and nation. Already in 1776 he had been kept a prisoner for some time, now he was again threatened and went over to the army in Philadelphia. Thereupon his wife was robbed in the most dishonorable manner, of cattle, household goods, clothing, etc., and when she obtained permission the following July to go to her husband in New York, the man who brought her there had to give assurance that he would bring back the bed on which she was lying and without which she could not travel, being weak by sorrow and illness. After the English army had evacuated the place a commission was held concerning all who in any way had aided it. Many had to pay fines; among them Robert Clark and his two brothers,

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James and Thomas, paid heavy fines, and the two last-mentioned were also in prison for a couple of months. The son of the first-mentioned had gone over to the Royal Army. All three had for some time been among the best members of the English congregation. Thomas was married to a Swedish wife, but his father-in-law and brothers-in-law were rather enthusiastic for the other party.

The property of some was confiscated, especially that of the above-mentioned Jöstason, Cox and Halton. Several were kept in prison for a long time, especially Thomas, the son of Jacob Jones, who was kept a prisoner for a whole year at a place 20 [Swedish] miles from here, and David Lojd, a Swede, who had been made a prisoner in May and was not released until December. This man was almost dying in July in a prison 2½ [Swedish] miles from Raccoon, where I visited him. He told me that he had suffered indescribable misery in other more distant prisons; among other things that two of his fellow prisoners had died and were not carried out until the stench was unbearable. Among those who had fought for the King, 19 were condemned to death, of whom some in a way belonged to the congregation, especially the above-mentioned person and another Swedish youth by the name of Lars Cox. These were often visited by me in said prison. The journeys were rather difficult, especially in the autumn and winter, and from and to the place [the distance] amounted to 7 [Swedish] miles, because the bridges over several creeks had been destroyed during the war, so that a long round-about way had to be taken.

From all this it is apparent how terrible this Civil war raged, although during the whole time only one man was shot because both parties fought not like real men with sword and gun, but like robbers and incendiaries. The fact that no important detachments were stationed here contributed greatly toward such barbaric licence, as the province was too wild and of less importance, so that straggling parties under lesser and poor officers were allowed to proceed according to pleasure.

1. In the early months of 1778, while the American army shivered and starved at Valley Forge and the British garrisons in the Delaware Valley suffered from want of provisions, the residents of Burlington, Gloucester, and Salem Counties endured a series of raids by rival foraging parties. Neither the Americans under General Anthony Wayne nor the British under Lieutenant Colonel Robert Abercromby were especially successful in rounding up food-stuffs and supplies, but they did succeed in inflaming the passions of the local citizenry. For an incident associated with this action, see Sec. X, Doc. 6.

2. That is, certification of ministerial standing.

3. As part of the new British military strategy, Philadelphia was evacuated on June 18. Subsequent events associated with the evacuation led to the battle of Monmouth Court House (see Doc. 7).

4. Fort Mercer, an earthwork fortification at Red Bank, Gloucester County, which, along with its west bank counterpart, Fort Mifflin on Port Island, controlled the Delaware River and Valley. The British take-over of Philadelphia required the capture of the strategic fortifications. Two thousand Hessians under Colonel Karl Emil von Donop stormed Fort Mercer on October 22, but were repulsed with heavy losses by the 400-man garrison under Colonel Christopher Greene of Rhode Island (distant kinsman of General Nathanael

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Greene). But the valiant effort was in vain. Fort Mifflin fell to the superior forces of General Cornwallis on the night of November 15-16, and Fort Mercer was abandoned on the night of November 20-21.

5. During the winter of 1777-1778 a number of Jerseymen joined the West Jersey Volunteers, a Loyalist unit commanded by former Gloucester tavern owner Daniel Cozens and attached to General Howe's forces.

6. Martial law prevailed in the region. In December the Continental Congress, which had fled to York, Pennsylvania, instructed General Washington to bring to trial by court-martial anyone apprehended within thirty miles of any British garrison in Pennsylvania, New Jersey; or Delaware on suspicion of trading with or supplying information to the enemy.

7. Collin's congregation.

8. Now Swedesboro.

9. Bodo Otto, German-born Continental army surgeon whose residence in Pennsylvania was interrupted by a brief sojourn in New Jersey, 1760-1766. His son Bodo, Jr., served as surgeon with the Jersey militia during the war.

10. John Hatton, customs collector of the port of Salem and Cohansey from 1764 to 1776, who was despised as much because of his obnoxious personality as because of the controversial position he held. He earned the title "King of the Tories" for his Loyalist activities; his son, John, Jr., joined the British army. The elder Hatton was imprisoned in Pennsylvania August 5-20 for complicity in the escape of an inmate from the Philadelphia jail; he was released on bond.

7 General George Washington Recounts the Battle of Monmouth Court House

[John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington* (39 vols., Washington, D.C., 1931-1944), 12:156-58.]

Pursuant to revised British strategy calling for major campaigns in the South and only limited coastal raids in the North, General Sir Henry Clinton, who had replaced General William Howe as commander of crown forces in May, evacuated Philadelphia on June 18 and began to march his troops across New Jersey to New York City. Washington followed a parallel course thirty miles to the north with the finest army he had ever had in the field. Hampered by American snipers and inclement weather as well as an enormous baggage train, Clinton's progress was slow. After covering a mere sixty miles in eight days, he halted on the twenty-sixth near Monmouth Court House (now Freehold) to rest. Opportunistic as always, Washington ordered an advance unit under Major General Charles Lee to attack while he brought up the main army. At 10 a.m. on Sunday, June 28, the Americans attacked Clinton's rear