



GEORGE WASHINGTON'S HEADQUARTERS AND HOME CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

Longfellow House-Washington's
Headquarters
National Historic Site

Historic Resource Study

J. L. Bell

Department of the Interior
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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Cover illustration. This terra cotta bust of George Washington, copied from the original by Jean-Antoine Houdon at Mount Vernon, has been on display since 1844 in the house that is now Longfellow House–Washington’s Headquarters National Historic Site. It symbolizes how Washington has been remembered there: with great admiration but some distortion. Washington arrived at that house at the age of forty-three, untested on a continental scale. Houdon sculpted Washington ten years later in 1785, after he had proven himself as a general and national leader. Americans tend to view that success as inevitable and picture Washington as an older man. The bust rests on two slices from the Washington Elm, a Cambridge landmark thought in the nineteenth century to be where the new general assumed command over the Continental Army. The story of that tree is now considered to be largely a myth. This study attempts to examine Gen. Washington’s work in Cambridge as he and the people around him experienced it at the time. Photograph by Robert Cameron Mitchell.

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Northeast Region History Program

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Recommended:



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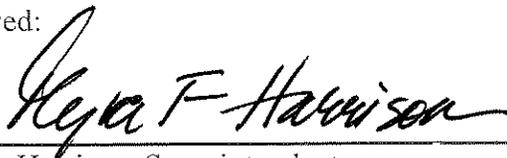


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Figure 2. Map of Cambridge and Charlestown in 1776, a detail of Henry Pelham's "A Plan of Boston in New England with its Environs," drawn in Boston and published in London in 1777. (On this map, north is towards the right.) After 17 June 1775 the British army held the Charlestown peninsula at bottom and built a large fort on Bunker's Hill. Over the following months, the Continental Army built forts on Winter Hill, Prospect Hill ("Mount Prospect"), Plowed Hill, Cobble Hill ("Miller's Hill"), and Lechmeres Point. Image from the American Memory Maps Collection, Library of Congress.

PREFACE

The siege of Boston does not lend itself to a tidy, stirring narrative. The biggest, most deadly event of those eleven months—the Battle of Bunker Hill—came toward the beginning rather than as a dramatic climax. The British won that battle, a Pyrrhic victory, and nonetheless lost the campaign. The leader of the force that succeeded, Gen. George Washington, was not even on the scene during that decisive fight.

As a result, popular historians have struggled to find a narrative shape for that stretch of time from April 1775 to March 1776. One solution has been to focus on isolated events, such as the Battle of Lexington and Concord, or Col. Benedict Arnold's march through the Maine wilderness. Alternatively, some historians widened the lens to include rest of 1776, ending with Washington's redemptive victories at Trenton and Princeton. But for the siege alone, this is the basic popular narrative that has developed:

George Washington, already the national hero though few people recognized it, arrived in Cambridge in July 1775 to find an undisciplined army under superannuated leadership. He imposed discipline on those troops and inspired them to think of themselves in new, national terms. With his keen eye for talent, Washington edged aside overrated generals and plucked out bold, intelligent, young men who would bring vital victories, such as Benedict Arnold, Nathanael Greene, and Henry Knox.

Knox's journey to bring heavy cannon from Fort Ticonderoga, working against great odds and dire warnings, offers the emotional climax of this narrative. That artillery empowered Washington's daring, decisive move to mount cannon on Dorchester Heights, forcing the British to give up their grip on Boston at last.

At least, that's how the story goes. Washington himself helped to shape that narrative in his reports to the Continental Congress. Authors happy to praise Washington and his chosen protégés have amplified it.

In fact, the history is far more complex, and full of awkward ironies:

- The British commanders were ready to leave Boston in the summer of 1775. They stayed until 17 March 1776 because of bureaucratic inertia, the length of time it took to communicate across the ocean, and the weather. The guns on Dorchester Heights made the British leave a few weeks early at most.
- For Washington, the move onto Dorchester Heights was a second choice, and the British army's departure without a major fight a disappointment. Throughout the siege he proposed ways to bring on a large battle that might have forced the enemy out of Boston—or might well have ended in a discouraging defeat for his own army.
- The New England army was not unusually undisciplined. In many ways those soldiers and Washington simply had different understandings of social and

military bonds. He saw their regional customs as lack of discipline, but they were fervently committed to the cause and effective when needed.

- Three of Washington's subordinate generals—Artemas Ward, Charles Lee, and Horatio Gates—were at different times rivals for his authority, and their relationships with the commander became strained. Many American historians have exalted Washington by emphasizing those men's faults. However, Ward was in command during the decisive battle of the campaign and formulated the plan that brought it to an end. Lee and Gates worked closely and well with Washington during the siege, offering him the benefit of years of professional military experience.
- Conversely, younger officers like Greene, Knox, and Arnold took terrible risks in the early years of the war, sometimes escaping just by luck and keeping their positions because of Washington's favor.
- Many of Washington's most important actions during the siege, such as launching schooners, approving the enlistment of black soldiers, and encouraging French agents to meet with the Continental Congress, were afterthoughts or minor decisions. Some of his major initiatives, such as plans to attack Boston, bore no fruit.

This study attempts to view Washington's activity in the siege of Boston based on what he and his colleagues knew in 1775-76, not through the hindsight of later developments. Most of the chapters, organized by themes rather than chronologically, lay out an alternative narrative of the general learning on the job.

When George Washington came to Boston, he was forty-three years old. He had never led more than a few hundred soldiers, participated in a large siege, or been the commander-in-chief of an army. The campaign was therefore a learning experience for him. Because of the British commanders' lack of aggression, Washington's situation was actually much less risky than he feared. He was able to make mistakes and gain experience, whether the challenge was picking the right staff or maintaining strict secrecy on intelligence.

As the siege of Boston began, the British army had several clear advantages: trained soldiers; weapons, gunpowder, and other military supplies; hard currency; and the support of a much stronger, larger navy. The Americans, on the other hand, had more men (though Washington did not always realize just how big his advantage was, and his army's numbers dipped low at the turn of the year); far better access to food, forage, and firewood; and enthusiastic civilian support. Each army's strengths corresponded to the other's weaknesses.

The classic strategy for conducting a siege was to cut off the enemy troops' resources from outside while gradually hemming them into a smaller area. Both goals were close to impossible for the new American military. The strength of the Royal Navy and the resources of the royal government, once London bureaucrats learned that war had begun, meant that the British garrison inside Boston was relatively well supplied. Furthermore, that royal army had excellent natural and manmade defenses because it was situated on two narrow-necked

peninsulas and a well-fortified island. The Continental Army was necessarily at a distance; short of heavy guns and powder, it could do little damage.

Washington was eager to *do something* to win the campaign because of his active temperament, his desire to please the Continental Congress, and his hope for a decisive early victory that would convince the government in London to back down. But he could see only one basic strategy available: forcing a battle. Much of the general's activity during the siege was directed toward that goal. In 1775-76, Washington had not yet learned the value of simply keeping the Continental Army together until it wore out the enemy, a strategy that did not bring him many glorious battlefield victories but in the end won the war.

REVIEW OF SOURCES USED

This study relies mostly on primary sources, particularly the correspondence of Gen. George Washington and other documents from his headquarters. In addition, it quotes from the letters and diaries of other people in the siege lines surrounding Boston, from selected sources within the town, and from memoirs and local traditions that preserve details not available anywhere else.

Many myths and traditions have stuck to Washington over the years. The hunger for details about his personal and domestic life in the nineteenth century led authors to repeat traditions that had little evidence behind them. Stories of meeting Washington or—even better—receiving a visit from him are legion in nineteenth-century family lore. This study attempts to peel off some of the myths about Washington's life in Cambridge, particularly those that circulated in nineteenth-century Cambridge itself. At the same time, it tries to focus on individuals who did cross paths with the general, from his household servants to the many people who came to headquarters on official business.

Where possible, quotations have been traced back to their earliest printed sources rather than later reprints or quotations. The internet has made that approach far easier than before—indeed, this study might have been impossible without online digital databases to provide early sources and leads to them. In some cases, that work reveals that the original sources are not as old or reliable as authors have believed; some secondary sources have distorted original meanings or left out crucial information. On the other hand, the same techniques have made it possible to document unlikely events and make unforeseen connections.

This study was prepared when the standard Washington corpus is in flux—but it has almost always been in flux. Jared Sparks, working at times in Elizabeth Craigie's Cambridge boarding house, prepared the first collected edition of George Washington's letters in 1834-37. Out of admiration, Sparks altered Washington's punctuation, spelling, and even wording to fit what he considered the best taste. Scholarly standards have grown considerably since then, and every generation or so a larger group of researchers have assembled to create a new, longer, and more accurate edition of Washington's papers. The latest version, *Papers of George Washington*, ongoing at the University of Virginia, includes letters *to* Washington as well as from him and his staff, and transcribes the letters actually sent from the general's

headquarters rather than the (often slightly different) transcripts created during the war. However, that project is not yet complete, and does not contain some information published in earlier references, which therefore remain useful.

Another major recent development is the digitization of such collections, in various forms. Google Books has made many public-domain editions (with their limitations and faults) easily available. Northern Illinois University put Peter Force's monumental *American Archives* volumes from 1837-53 online. The Online Library of Liberty has posted the 1889-93 edition of the *Writings of George Washington* by Worthington Chauncy Ford while the Library of Congress offers the transcripts of the 1930s John C. Fitzpatrick edition along with images from its microfilm, including reams of documents never transcribed and published. With support from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, the Founders Early Access project of the University of Virginia will provide digital editions of the Papers of George Washington, the Adams Papers, and other documentary collections from the U.S. founding. Digitization widens access to the Washington papers well beyond the large research libraries able to purchase the printed editions for their visitors. It also allows for faster searching and quoting, and often offers a look at handwritten documents.

As to secondary sources, while there have been many histories of the two battles at the start of the siege of Boston, there have been far fewer histories of the full siege. The two major studies are still Richard Frothingham's *History of the Siege of Boston* (4th edition, 1873) and Allen French's *The First Year of the American Revolution* (1934). Similarly, there have been many biographies and studies of Washington, but none focused on his command in Massachusetts. In fact, because he did so much else, biographers tend to treat the siege of Boston quickly before moving on to greater challenges and victories of the later war. This report therefore relies most on studies of Washington in his formative years, such as Paul K. Longmore's *The Invention of George Washington* and John Ferling's *The Ascent of George Washington: The Hidden Political Genius of an American Icon*, both eye-opening iconoclastic. Among the full biographies, that by Douglas Southall Freeman (1948-57) appears the most thorough and reliable, if never the most dramatic.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I began this study when I was about to turn forty-three, the same age that Washington was when he arrived in Boston as the Continental Army's commander-in-chief. It took him less than ten months to conclude his first campaign. It's taken me over three years to complete this study. My first thanks must therefore go to David Daly, Jim Shea, Anita Israel, Nancy Jones, Marty Blatt, Marcia Dolce, and many others in the National Park Service for their patience and encouragement as this study grew to its final size.

I am grateful for access, guidance, and resources from the Library of Congress, Boston Athenæum, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston Public Library, Newton Free Library, Concord Library, Minuteman Library Network, Houghton Library at Harvard, archive of Longfellow House—Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site, Cambridge Historical Commission, Cambridge Historical Society, Christ Church in Cambridge,

Preface

Bostonian Society, American Antiquarian Society, Clements Library, New-York Historical Society, New York Public Library, John Carter Brown Library, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, U.K. National Archives, and the British Library.

In addition, I feel a more than virtual gratitude for Google Books, whose massive database, though massively unorganized, makes it possible for a single researcher to dig deeper for quotations and anecdotes than ever before. The Internet Archive (archive.org), the Making of America Project from Cornell and the University of Michigan, and the American Archives database from Northern Illinois University also provided happy endings to unlikely searches.

Among my personal advisors, I am most grateful to Alfred F. Young, who helped pull me into this field, and Robert Cameron Mitchell, who pushed. Both gentlemen have always been encouraging and interested in what we found together. My thanks to Peter Ansoff, Benjamin L. Carp, Lynne M. Spencer, and Frederic C. Detwiller for lending their expertise, and to fellow researchers who provided pointers along the way: Judith Cataldo, Don Hagist, Chris Woolf, David Preston, Robert Winters, Bob Vogler, Thomas Macy, E. J. Witek, Charles Bahne, John Nagy, and many others. Special thanks to the scholars, known and unknown, who reviewed drafts and provided invaluable corrections and additions.

Finally, I must acknowledge my mother, who is always an inspiration whenever I try something new.

CHAPTER ONE

THE JOHN VASSALL ESTATE

John Vassall (1738-1797) had his house built west of the Cambridge town center in 1759 as a wealthy gentleman's country seat. He and his wife Elizabeth constructed a very comfortable life for themselves and their children based on enslaved labor, both in far-off Jamaica and right inside their homes. The Vassall mansion was an anchor in a network of households linked by blood, marriage, religion, and business ties.

For most of his life, John Vassall was not politically active. He stayed out of the controversies that roiled Massachusetts in the 1760s and early 1770s. But his upbringing, class, church, and extensive property in another colony all made him more loyal to the imperial authorities in London than to the local authorities who opposed Parliament's new taxes. Not until 1774 did John Vassall make a public gesture of support for the Crown. At that point, the divisions in Massachusetts society were deep and bitter. Furthermore, he volunteered for his first high political post at just the wrong time, and on 2 September 1774 saw through the experiences of nearby relatives just how angry the people of Massachusetts had become.

Shortly after that, the Vassall family left their Cambridge estate and moved into Boston, where army troops offered protection for friends of the royal government. They probably expected to return to their country home after order was restored. Instead, the Vassalls never saw Cambridge again. Still wealthy from their Caribbean holdings, they built a new life in England, and their sons fought for the British Empire.

1.1 JOHN VASSALL'S FAMILY BACKGROUND AND UPBRINGING

The Vassall family came early to Massachusetts, but did not stay. Samuel Vassall (1586-1667) was one of the Massachusetts Bay Company's founders, and his brother William (1592-1655) was an early settler as well. However, both became alienated from the dominant Puritan factions. Samuel Vassall was caught up in the English Civil War between Parliamentarians and Royalists in 1642-1651. A member of Parliament from London from 1640 on, he was purged from the legislature by more radical Parliamentarians in 1648 and lost the fortune he had gained through inheritance and Mediterranean trading; the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* says Samuel "died in obscure circumstances. . . , possibly in Massachusetts." William got into a religious dispute with fellow New Englanders and returned to London; in 1648 he settled in Barbados, and died there in 1655. From that point, the family built its wealth by running slave-labor plantations in the Caribbean.¹

¹ ODNB, 56:153, 155-6.

William Vassall's grandson Leonard (1678-1737) moved from Jamaica to Massachusetts by 1723, building a large house in Braintree and buying another in Boston.² His children settled on similar New England estates, living well off their West Indian income. Among Leonard Vassall's sons was John Vassall (1713-1747), who bought a house along the road from the center of Cambridge to Watertown (now Brattle Street) in 1736. John's children lived there as infants. He sold this property to his younger brother Henry in 1741 and later bought a larger house and farm across the road shortly before he died at the age of thirty-four. This John Vassall's only son, also named John, was then nine years old.³

Young John's mother had died in 1739, and his stepmother remarried two years after her first husband's death. As a result, the boy was raised mostly by his mother's father, Spencer Phips, lieutenant governor of Massachusetts from 1732 until his death in April 1757. The records Phips kept as legal guardian provide a detailed picture of John's upper-class upbringing. For instance, in 1752 Phips arranged to retrieve from Vassall's widow a collection of gentlemen's clothing and accessories that the late John Vassall had bequeathed to the son:

his library, watch, sword, and arms; a velvet coat, laced; an embroidered jacket, silk breeches, a blue velvet coat with gold lace, a camlet coat, a flowered-silk coat and breeches, a paduasoy waistcoat and breeches, scarlet breeches, a scarlet coat, a fustian coat, a cloth coat, an old waistcoat, a pair of new cloth breeches, a banyan, an old great-coat, eighteen pairs of white ribbed stockings, one pair of worsted stockings, a pair of boots, a pair of spurs, a trooping saddle, one laced hat, one plain hat, a pair of pocket-pistols, holsters and caps, saddle-girt, brass stirrups, a silver-hilted sword, a gun, riding-pistols, a silver watch, an old green coat, a black velvet jacket, a bookcase⁴

Phips kept records of how much of his grandson's inheritance he spent, including, among other payments, £11 "for a wigg and shaving said Minor's head" for half a year.⁵

A young man of means required a college education to become a complete gentleman, and John Vassall entered Harvard College in 1753. He graduated three months after his grandfather's death and later earned a *pro forma* M.A. While in college, Vassall traveled to Jamaica, viewing the source of his wealth; he may have made other trips as an

² Leonard Vassall's house in Braintree, later owned by John Adams and his descendants, is now an important part of Adams National Historical Park.

³ Authors sometimes add the suffix "Jr." to this John Vassall's name to distinguish him from his father, but that was not how his contemporaries referred to him. In the eighteenth century people used "Sr." and "Jr." to distinguish two living men with the same name (not necessarily father and son). John Vassall came of age well after his father had died, so he was the only gentleman with that name in Cambridge in 1759-1774.

⁴ MHSP, 4:65-6.

⁵ NEHGR, 17:122.

adult, but there is no evidence for them. Rather, on coming of age in 1759 John Vassall appears to have set to building a genteel life in Massachusetts.⁶

Vassall inherited his father's fifty-six acres in Cambridge, most of the land lying between the Watertown road and the Charles River. According to the town's 1765 census, the town contained 1,582 people in 237 households.⁷ Like most New England towns, Cambridge had developed around a Puritan meetinghouse and a common, and also had a courthouse nearby; these institutions defined the town center. The town was geographically larger than the city of Cambridge today, including significant villages at "Little Cambridge" on the south side of the Charles River (now Brighton, part of Boston) and Menotomy to the west (now Arlington). Three things set Cambridge off from other rural Massachusetts towns. The first was Harvard College, founded in 1636 and part of the town center. The second was the "great bridge" over the Charles River, the first upstream from Boston; that crossing made the town an important transit point for people and goods.⁸ The town's third distinction was one John Vassall took part in creating: in a region dominated by Congregationalists, it was home to a significant community of wealthy Anglicans.⁹

Vassall apparently ordered that his father's last house in Cambridge, north of the Watertown road, be torn down to make room for a new and grander home. He commissioned a mansion in the classic Georgian style, three stories tall and painted gray.¹⁰ The original building did not have its present porches, rear extension, and ell at the back, all added in the 1790s.¹¹ Nevertheless, John Vassall's estate was the largest and most elegant in the vicinity. Over the next fifteen years, Vassall bought parcels of adjoining land so that he eventually owned ninety acres.¹² Of course, a sociable country gentleman also needed a

⁶ *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, 14:230-2. It is not clear how John Vassall prepared for college; neither he nor any of his sons attended Boston's South Latin School, which left the only extensive enrollment list of any school in colonial Massachusetts.

⁷ Benton, *Early Census*, 78-9.

⁸ This bridge crossed the Charles at the site of the Larz Anderson Bridge today.

⁹ The term "Congregationalist" is a useful anachronism. New England Puritans referred to their meetinghouses as "independent," meaning independent of the Church of England. British army officers struggling to label the local denomination often called it "Presbyterian" because its governing structure was similar to the Church (Kirk) of Scotland, but most New Englanders wanted no ties to that institution, either. In most towns, the Congregationalist meetinghouse was the only place of worship, so people did not need further labels.

¹⁰ Phillips et al., *Historic Structures Report: Longfellow*, 4, could not offer positive evidence that the John Vassall house was erected in 1759, but that is the traditional date, and it fits with when Vassall came into his inheritance and started to expand the property. Perrault, *Historic Paint Colors for the Exterior of the Longfellow House*.

¹¹ See comparison of the original house's footprint and its expanded state in the 1790s in Evans, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 20.

¹² Evans, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 6. When Massachusetts sold Vassall's land to Nathaniel Tracy in 1781, the property consisted of 116 acres; Paige, *History of Cambridge*, 170. That might have included land confiscated from neighboring farms as well.

home in town, especially when winter weather made travel difficult. On 27 November 1759 John Vassall bought a brick house on the south side of King Street in the center of Boston.¹³

1.2 AN EXTENDED FAMILY

On 12 January 1761 John Vassall married Elizabeth Oliver, the daughter of a Dorchester gentleman whose fortune also came from Caribbean plantations—in his case, Antigua. Seven months before, John’s sister Elizabeth had married Elizabeth’s brother Thomas Oliver, so the two couples were firmly cemented. Both ceremonies took place at Trinity Church in Boston, one of the town’s three Anglican churches.¹⁴

In 1766 Thomas Oliver commissioned his own large Georgian house about a mile west of the Vassalls’ mansion in Cambridge.¹⁵ The Olivers were not the only relatives among John Vassall’s neighbors:

- His uncle Henry Vassall (1721-1769) lived across the road with his wife Penelope Vassall in the house where John had spent his earliest years. Their daughter Elizabeth had married one of John’s Harvard classmates, Dr. Charles Russell; the Russells lived in Lincoln, but after Henry Vassall’s death they appear to have visited his widow in Cambridge regularly.¹⁶
- Closer to Harvard College, John’s paternal aunt Anna and her husband, John Borland (1728-1775) were expanding the house they had bought from the Rev. East Apthorp in 1765.¹⁷
- Next along the road to the west was a home owned by Richard Lechmere (1727-1814), who had married Mary Phips, one of John’s maternal aunts.¹⁸
- Further west was Joseph Lee (1710-1802), a local judge who had married Rebecca Phips, another maternal aunt.¹⁹

¹³ Suffolk Deeds, 93:215, cited in Thwing, CD-ROM, item 59062. CSMP, 6:128. It is also possible that John Vassall bought this Boston home as a favor for his sister Ruth; see below.

¹⁴ *Records of the Churches of Boston*, CD-ROM. At some point, John and Elizabeth Vassall had their portraits painted. In 1912, Vere Langford Oliver wrote, “Some twenty years ago the late Capt. Spencer Vassall Henslow took me to the house of his aunt in Bayswater to see the portraits”; Oliver, *Caribbeana*, 2:306. It is possible that these portraits were made at Bath after the Vassalls had left America, and showed the Vassalls in later life. Their artist and present location are unknown.

¹⁵ Brattle Street was straightened so that it no longer runs past Thomas Oliver’s house, which now has the street address of 33 Elmwood Avenue. Later called Elmwood and home to the poet James Russell Lowell, the building is now the official residence of the president of Harvard University.

¹⁶ This Vassall house is now 94 Brattle Street.

¹⁷ The Borlands’ house, once again called Apthorp House, is now the residence of the master of Adams House at Harvard University. Surrounded by larger buildings, it is in the middle of the block defined by Linden, Bow, and Plympton Streets.

¹⁸ The house owned successively by Richard Lechmere and Jonathan Sewall was moved west along Brattle Street in the nineteenth century and otherwise altered. It is now at 147 Brattle Street.

¹⁹ The Lees’ house is now headquarters of the Cambridge Historical Society at 159 Brattle Street.

- Further still was the house of George Ruggles, a Jamaican merchant who had married Susanna Vassall, one of John's paternal aunts.²⁰

And then came Thomas Oliver's mansion.

In addition to these interrelated households, on the same road, close to the Cambridge town center, lived another wealthy gentleman, William Brattle (1702-1776).²¹ A Congregationalist, Brattle was far more active in government than his neighbors along the Watertown road: at various times a Cambridge selectman, town representative to the Massachusetts General Court, attorney general, member of the Council, and militia general.

The Vassalls and their neighbors transformed this section of Cambridge, once consisting of small farms, into one of the most elegant sections of rural Massachusetts.²² In 1777 the baroness Frederika Charlotte Riedesel lived in what had been Richard Lechmere's house, and she recorded what she had heard about the neighborhood:

Seven families, who were connected by relationship, or lived in great intimacy, had here farms, gardens, and splendid mansions, and not far off orchards; and the buildings were at a quarter of a mile distant from each other. The owners had been in the habit of assembling every afternoon in one or another of these houses, and of diverting themselves with music or dancing, and lived in affluence, in good humour, and without care. . .²³

Boston merchant John Rowe's diary for 17 February 1768 confirms how this proximity made visiting easy: "Dind at Major John Vassalls at Cambridge. I paid a visit to Colo. Henry Vassall & Family where I found Dr Russell who was married to Miss Betty [Vassall] on Monday Last."²⁴

Rowe's diary offers other glimpses of the Vassalls socializing with the province's mercantile elite. Often these were large gatherings for dinner, the midday meal. On 12 December 1766 John and Elizabeth hosted a dinner party for twelve. On 16 September 1768 Elizabeth was in a larger crowd when she "Spent the Evening at John McNeal Esq at a Rout being his Birth Day." Notably, many of the occasions when Rowe saw the Vassalls took place outside Boston. John dined at Edward Winslow's house in Plymouth in April 1765, and John and Elizabeth visited Benjamin Faneuil's house in Little Cambridge a month later. John enjoyed dinner with a gentlemen's club at a tavern in Roxbury in May 1767, fished at Spot Pond in June 1769, and attended a banquet during Harvard's commencement celebrations in July 1772.²⁵

John Vassall was the youngest of the householders along the Watertown road, and did not have the public prestige of his more politically active neighbors. But he had the most

²⁰ The house that Ruggles later conveyed to Thomas Fayerweather is at 175 Brattle Street.

²¹ Brattle's house is now 42 Brattle Street, owned by the Cambridge Center for Adult Education.

²² Paige, *History of Cambridge*, 168, 175.

²³ Riedesel, *Letters and Memoirs*, 195.

²⁴ Rowe, *Letters and Diary*, 152.

²⁵ Rowe, *Letters and Diary*, 118, 174, 81, 83, 133, 187, and 230.

valuable estate, as shown by what each homeowner paid as a tax on real property (land and buildings) in 1770²⁶:

John Vassall	£2.12.6
Thomas Oliver	1.16.5
John Borland	1.9.8
George Ruggles	1.5.8
William Brattle	1.0.6
Richard Lechmere	19.3
Penelope Vassall	14.4
Joseph Lee	13.4

An 1778 inventory of Vassall's property refers to "the mansion house with necessary house [i.e., outhouse], wood house, and barns."²⁷ In addition, records of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress in 1775 refer to "the stables of John Vassal, Esq."²⁸ A map created by the Boston-born artist Henry Pelham in 1777 for sale in London shows two larger structures behind the mansion, the outline of a formal garden, and other, unidentifiable features. The Vassall estate was a working farm, but because of their Jamaican wealth the family did not depend on its crops for either subsistence or most of their income. The farm was, rather, a necessary part of the lifestyle of a British country gentleman.

The Vassall family also owned human property. After his uncle Henry's death, John Vassall purchased his aunt's enslaved serving woman Cuba and some of her children.²⁹ He almost certainly already had some domestic and agricultural slaves of his own, as his uncles did, but there is no definite evidence on that question.³⁰ Nor is there evidence that the family was troubled long by the ethical issues of slaveholding. According to Massachusetts politician Samuel Dexter, sometime before 1752 John's uncle William Vassall wrote to Bishop Joseph Butler asking about the Christian morality of keeping the "great number of slaves on his West Indian plantations." Dexter said that the bishop "justified the practice of keeping them on Scripture ground; and Vassal, very willing to be convinced, acquiesced in the decision."³¹ Butler's writing on slaves emphasized their "religious instruction," acknowledging the fact "that they may be treated with the very utmost rigour, that humanity will at all permit, as they certainly are; and, for our advantage, made as miserable as they well can be in the present world."³² John Vassall lived well off of slaves' labor for his entire life, and there is no evidence he voiced any misgivings about that.

²⁶ The Borland estate was listed as "Mr. & Mrs. Borland." *Cambridge Historical Society Publications*, 10:41.

²⁷ Evans, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 8.

²⁸ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 576.

²⁹ *Cambridge Historical Society Publications*, 10:68.

³⁰ *Records of the Churches of Boston*, CD-ROM, lists marriages and deaths of "servants" and "negroes" belonging to William Vassall, Henry Vassall, and other members of the family.

³¹ Samuel Dexter to Jeremy Belknap, 23 February 1795, in MHSC, fifth series, 3:384.

³² Butler, *Works of Joseph Butler*, 2:286.

Like many country gentlemen, Vassall was a militia officer. When John and Elizabeth married, the *Boston Evening-Post* identified him as “first Major of his Excellency’s Troop of Horse Guards.”³³ This was an elite company, made up of wealthy men that escorted the governor on formal occasions; its captain had the honorary rank of colonel, and its second lieutenant the honorary rank of major. An almanac for 1772 lists “John Vassall, Esq; 1st. Lieut. with the rank of Lt Colonel” among that unit’s officers. David Phips (1724-1811), only son of the late lieutenant governor, commanded the troop at that time.³⁴ Among Vassall’s other neighbors, William Brattle was a militia major general, and in 1771 Gov. Thomas Hutchinson promoted Thomas Oliver to lieutenant colonel in charge of the First Regiment in Middlesex.³⁵ These posts involved overseeing periodic drills and parading on public occasions, but were largely ceremonial. Neither Vassall nor Oliver had fought in the French and Indian War, and their Cambridge neighbors probably valued them most for funding banquets on muster days.

John Vassall also held a commission as justice of the peace for Middlesex County, dated 9 May 1770.³⁶ As a low-ranking magistrate, Vassall ruled on minor legal matters. Like his militia commission, this appointment reflected his wealth and standing in the community rather than professional expertise. Eighteenth-century British-American society expected wealthy men to take on public responsibilities and enjoy their perquisites.

Vassall was a pillar of Cambridge’s small but wealthy Anglican church. Although his earliest ancestors in Massachusetts were Puritan dissenters, grandfather Leonard and his descendants were members of the Church of England. John Vassall was baptized in Boston’s Christ Church (now widely known as Old North Church). He married in Boston’s Trinity Church because there was still no Anglican church in Cambridge at that time. But in April 1759, when he was establishing his country seat, Vassall signed a petition to found such a church and volunteered for its building committee. He served as a warden of Cambridge’s new Christ Church in 1762-63 and 1767-71.³⁷ That Anglican church and the mansion commissioned by its wealthy first minister, East Apthorp, both close to Harvard College, provoked a great deal of controversy from some of Boston’s fiercely Congregationalist ministers in the 1760s, but Vassall was not directly involved.³⁸

As of the summer of 1774 John and Elizabeth Vassall had five sons and one daughter, ranging in age from twelve to infancy. They had also lost one daughter at the age of six

³³ *Boston Evening-Post*, 19 January 1761.

³⁴ *Fleeming’s Register for New-England and Nova-Scotia*. . . 1772, 72. Vassall’s name does not appear in the lists of the troop’s officers in some almanacs for years between 1761 and 1771, but those rolls have blank spaces. He does appear as first lieutenant/lieutenant colonel in *Mills and Hicks’s British and American Register*. . . 1774, 74. *Sibley’s* says that Vassall was known as “Major Vassall” even after this promotion, but there are many contemporaneous references to him as “Col. Vassall.”

³⁵ *Massachusetts Spy*, 1 August 1771.

³⁶ Whitmore, *Massachusetts Civil List*, 139.

³⁷ Paige, *History of Cambridge*, 307, 310.

³⁸ See Garrett, *Apthorp House*, for more on this controversy.

months. (Full genealogical details appear later in section 1.8.) It is not clear whether the Vassall children attended a Cambridge school or received private tutoring, but their father served on a committee on town schools on 3 May 1770 along with their uncle Thomas Oliver, their great-uncle Joseph Lee, and other gentlemen.³⁹

In 1765 John Vassall gave his King Street house to his sister, Ruth Davis, through Thomas Oliver as trustee.⁴⁰ He does not appear to have owned a home in Boston between then and 10 October 1772, when he bought “A large House in Boston with extensive Gardens & Stables” from the widow Mary Ann Jones for £1,800. This property was on the west side of Tremont Street near Queen Street (now Court Street), beside the Boston home of his uncle William. John would later tell the Loyalists Commission that the estate “was not quite finished at that time,” and he put another £1,356 into improvements, producing what people thought was one of the best houses in town.⁴¹ In the same year, Vassall became a vestryman at King’s Chapel, Boston’s most patrician Anglican congregation, and in 1773 he bought pew number 76 in that church.⁴²

By then Vassall also owned “A House and about Four Acres of Land in Dorchester,” the home where his wife had grown up. The couple had not inherited that property. Instead, Thomas Oliver did. In 1770, four years after he moved to Cambridge and sold his Dorchester farmland, Oliver sold the house and its plot to his wife’s uncle, Richard Lechmere. Lechmere soon sold the property to Ezekiel Lewis, and in 1771 John Vassall bought the property from Lewis.⁴³ Lastly, on 1 December 1774 Watertown assessed Vassall £26 for real estate he owned in the east side of that town, the largest tax bill for any non-resident.⁴⁴

1.3 THE POLITICAL CRISIS AFFECTS THE VASSALLS

Starting in the early 1760s, as John and Elizabeth Vassall’s family grew, Boston and the rest of British North America suffered a series of political disputes prompted by Parliament’s attempts to raise new tax revenue in North America and resistance to those measures from local elected authorities and crowds. For the most part, the worst of those disputes were confined to port towns. The issues rarely appear in the records of Cambridge town meetings.

John Vassall was not part of this public debate, or other politics. After the war he told the Loyalists Commission that “He never took a very active part” in the conflicts of the preceding decade. Instead, “He acted as a Magistrate & always resisted all popular

³⁹ Gozzaldi, *History of Cambridge, Massachusetts: Supplement and Index*, 664.

⁴⁰ Suffolk Deeds, 93:215, 181:215, and 101:35, cited in Thwing, CD-ROM, item 59062. NEHGR, 17:121. After Ruth Davis’s death in 1774, the property went to her husband Edward. In addition, in 1763 John and Elizabeth Vassall sold a house they owned on Salem Street, possibly a legacy, to Thomas Oliver.

⁴¹ Suffolk Deeds 122:84 cited in Thwing, CD-ROM, item 59062. Egerton, *American Loyalists*, 231.

⁴² Foote, *King’s Chapel*, 2:322, 327-8, 597, 608.

⁴³ Jackson, *History of the Oliver, Vassall, and Royall Houses*, 6-7.

⁴⁴ Watertown, *Watertown’s Military History*, 74.

Clamour.”⁴⁵ During the non-importation movement of 1769-70, customs documents indicate that Vassall received two shipments from Britain, but since he was not a major merchant and had never signed on to the boycott, the Whigs did not single him out as “an enemy to his country.”⁴⁶

John Rowe’s diary shows how the Vassalls socialized with officials who enforced the London government’s policies. On 12 August 1765, two days before North America’s first big public protest against the Stamp Act, John and Elizabeth and several others dined on board the man-of-war *Jamaica*. On 1 November 1768, shortly after army regiments arrived in Boston to protect the customs service, the couple was at a large social gathering with Gen. Thomas Gage and many top army officers. On 21 June 1771 they and the Olivers dined at Ralph Inman’s home in Cambridge with Gov. Thomas Hutchinson.⁴⁷

Like almost everyone in his religious and family circles, John Vassall leaned toward the royal government. His Anglicanism, his property elsewhere, and his reliance on British imperial trade all made him more loyal to the Crown than to the local demands for more autonomy. In the spring of 1774 Vassall made his political allegiances clear by signing a laudatory farewell address to Gov. Hutchinson, whom most of the province had come to revile. In July, Vassall lent his name to a protest against the Boston committee of correspondence’s Solemn League and Covenant, as did Thomas Oliver.

Patriots distributed a broadside identifying all the men who had signed those documents showing support for the Crown. Some of the names were followed by insulting designations: “Pettifogger,” “Collector of Taxes!!!”, “NOTHING.” The worst that broadside could say about Vassall and Oliver was to label each “Farmer,” not acknowledging their genteel status.⁴⁸ That shows how little offense they had given to the public so far.

In August 1774 Gov. Thomas Gage received new instructions from London which would drastically change the political situation for the Vassalls and their circle, and cause them to leave their Cambridge homes.

First of all, the Crown had appointed Thomas Oliver to be the new lieutenant governor. This must have come as a surprise. Oliver’s only previous high government post was militia colonel. He was known for his genteel manners; in a private letter, the Rev. Winwood Sarjeant at Christ Church called him “the pretty little dapper man.”⁴⁹ But Oliver was only forty-one, and there were at least a dozen older gentlemen who had done much more to support royal policies.

One explanation for the surprising appointment appeared in *The Journal and Letters of the Late Samuel Curwen*, published in 1842. Editor George Atkinson Ward wrote that

⁴⁵ Egerton, *American Loyalists*, 231.

⁴⁶ MHSP, 103:104.

⁴⁷ Rowe, *Letters and Diary*, 88, 178-9, 217. Ralph Inman’s home stood at what is now 15 Inman Street.

⁴⁸ MHSP, 11:392.

⁴⁹ Hoppin, *Re-opening of Christ Church*, 43. Hoppin described Oliver as “distinguished for his amiable and courtly manners.”

Oliver's "life had been previously so retired, and his habits and tastes so much in unison, as to give some color to the rumor of the day, that *Thomas* had been mistaken for *Peter* (the chief justice) in making out the commission."⁵⁰ Peter Oliver, Chief Justice of Massachusetts, was brother of the previous lieutenant governor and a relative and strong supporter of Gov. Hutchinson. The bureaucrats in London may have confused Thomas and Peter, or they might simply have assumed the two men were related—which they weren't. However it happened, on 8 August 1774 Thomas Oliver became Massachusetts's lieutenant governor, and he took his duties seriously.⁵¹

The other news from London was the Massachusetts Government Act, Parliament's attempt to make the obstreperous province easier to manage. Among other measures, this law changed the structure of the Council, which was both the upper chamber of the legislature and an advisory body to the governor. At the start of each legislative year the members of the new House and the outgoing Council voted on new Council members under the provincial charter of 1692. The governor then had the chance to "negative," or veto, any names he did not like. Councilors were gentlemen from the top echelon of society, so they were rarely as radical as the House, but they had the power to stymie some of the governor's actions. After conflicts with the Council in the late 1760s, Gov. Francis Bernard had recommended that the Crown change the Massachusetts constitution so its members were no longer elected but appointed in London, as in most other North American colonies. The Massachusetts Government Act made that change.

On 6 August 1774 Gov. Gage received the new law and a list of thirty-five gentlemen to be sworn onto the new Council. Since those men were summoned by writs of mandamus, they became known as "the mandamus Councilors" or "the new-fangled Councilors." Officials in London had chosen men who were reliably loyal to the Crown, as best they could tell at a distance. Thus, the new Council did not include William Brattle even though he had become a vocal supporter of Parliament's new measures; back when Bernard was governor, he had been a troublemaking Whig. The new list did include one man who was in Surinam and another who was dead.⁵²

Among the mandamus Councilors was William Vassall. His appointment made sense in some ways. He was a government supporter, a staunch Anglican, and the last male in his generation of Vassalls, thus head of an important family. However, he was not a politician, and former governor Thomas Hutchinson thought him "naturally timid."⁵³ William Vassall was not even living in Massachusetts most of the time since his new wife, Margaret Hubbard, had inherited a very nice estate in Bristol, Rhode Island. Other mandamus Councilors from John Vassall's circle included Thomas Oliver, Joseph Lee, Richard Lechmere, and Isaac

⁵⁰ Curwen, *Journal and Letters*, 515.

⁵¹ CSMP, 17:96.

⁵² CSMP, 32:465-6.

⁵³ Hutchinson, *Diary and Letters*, 1:537.

Royall of Medford, nephew of Penelope Vassall. Gov. Gage started to swear in the new Councilors on 8 August.

Meanwhile, the people of Massachusetts angrily protested the changes to their government. Coming on top of the Boston Port Bill and the arrival of troops in Boston, this Massachusetts Government Act galvanized resistance in the countryside. In August, crowds in western and central Massachusetts—hundreds of men lined up in their militia companies—closed down sessions of the county courts, demanding that justices of the peace not meet under the new law. In many places those crowds also demanded that any local mandamus Councilors refuse to be sworn in under the new law, or resign if they already had. Some gentlemen defied the demands, and crowds occasionally became violent, though they caused no fatalities or serious injuries.⁵⁴

On 25 August Gov. Gage wrote to the Secretary of State in London that several men had declined to sit on the new Council. Among them:

[Isaac] Royal's refusal is from timidity; [James] Russell, who is a good man, feared the loss of some post he enjoys; [William] Vassall, [Joseph] Green, and [Robert] Hooper, plead age and infirmities, but I believe choose to avoid the present disputes.

In addition, some Councilors already sworn in now sent their resignations. Gage decided to take action to lessen the chance that the unrest in the countryside could turn into an armed uprising.

1.4 THE "POWDER ALARM" OF SEPTEMBER 1774

On 1 September 1774 Gov. Gage moved to secure his position by taking possession of gunpowder and two small cannons assigned to the Middlesex County militia. Before dawn he sent 280 soldiers by boat up the Mystic River to Temple's farm, a portion of Charlestown that is now Somerville. Most of those men marched to the stone gunpowder storage tower that still stands in Powderhouse Square and loaded the 250 half-barrels of powder inside onto eight wagons. Twenty soldiers were detached to go to Cambridge common and pick up two small cannons from Middlesex County sheriff David Phips. The soldiers trucked all that ordnance through the Cambridge town center, over the Charles River bridge, and down through Dorchester to Castle William (now Castle Island).⁵⁵

The operation went smoothly, meeting no protests or obstacles, and was over by midday. Gage could feel reassured that Massachusetts radicals did not have a large supply of gunpowder to use rashly. He even issued a call for towns to elect representatives to a new session of the Massachusetts General Court, to be held in Salem in October. Gage had the legal authority to give those orders; as governor, he was commander-in-chief of the Massachusetts militia, as well as the highest-ranking army officer in the colonies.

⁵⁴ The best history of these developments is Raphael, *The First American Revolution*.

⁵⁵ Richmond, *Powder Alarm 1774*, is a basic overview of the event.

Nonetheless, Patriots in the countryside interpreted his move as an attempt to leave them defenseless just as they were trying to regain their political rights.

John Vassall probably heard about the soldiers' activity during the day on 1 September, like most other people in Cambridge. It is conceivable that he had heard something in advance from Sheriff Phips or Lt. Gov. Oliver, but no one foresaw the anger that the action would provoke, or the massive reaction that historians later labeled the "Powder Alarm."

By the evening of 1 September people in Cambridge had learned that William Brattle had drawn Gage's attention to that stored gunpowder. According to Abigail Adams, "no sooner did he [Brattle] discover that his treachery had taken air, than he fled not only to Boston, but into the camp for Safety."⁵⁶ The next day he wrote a public letter of apology, but remained unwelcome and never returned to his home on the Watertown road.

Some people in Cambridge were not content with chasing Brattle away. They hiked past the Vassalls' estate to the house that Richard Lechmere had recently sold to Massachusetts attorney general Jonathan Sewall (1729-1796), known for his "Philanthop" newspaper essays supporting the royal government. The *Boston Gazette* reported:

Some. . .surrounded the Attorney-General's house, . . .; and being provoked by the firing of a gun from a window, they broke some glass, but did no more mischief. The company, however, concerned in this, were mostly boys and negroes, who soon dispersed.⁵⁷

It was common for the Whig press to highlight violence by friends of government while dismissing violence by its own side as the work of overexcited boys, blacks, sailors, or other people deemed to be outside respectable society. Even Edmund Quincy, Sewall's Patriot father-in-law, told his family that he understood that "a Gun or pistol was disch[arge]d. from ye. house [and was] ye sole Cause of ye Violence wch. ensued."⁵⁸

The Cambridge crowd went home, but rumors of the troops' activities were spreading across the countryside, and getting worse. People in other rural towns heard that the soldiers had attacked people, that Boston was in flames. Thousands of men took up their muskets, gathered in their militia companies, and marched east. The New England militia system was designed for just this sort of fast, concerted response in an emergency. The last such alarm had come in 1757 at the fall of Fort William Henry, when thousands of armed men set out for the west. On 2 September 1774 militiamen marched east, many on the road through Watertown into Cambridge.

Lt. Gov. Oliver described his first interaction with the crowd for the Secretary of State the next day:

⁵⁶ Abigail Adams to John Adams, 2 September 1774, AFC, 1:147. For the revelation, see John Andrews to William Barrell, 1 September 1774, in MHSP, 8:350-1.

⁵⁷ *Boston Gazette*, 5 September 1774.

⁵⁸ Edmund Quincy to Katherine Quincy, [2?] September 1774, in MHS Misc.

Many of the inhabitants of this and the neighbouring towns came to me, desiring I would use my influence to make them [the militiamen] return peaceably home.

They were to pass by my house; as soon as they arrived I went out to them, enquiring the cause of such an appearance. They respectfully answered they came peaceably to enquire why they had been deprived of their Rights and Priviledges. I addressed them upon the impropriety of such embodied multitudes, spoke to the different subjects on which they founded their complaints, and imagined I had quieted them, from the respectful manner in which they expressed their thanks, and promising they would conduct themselves in the most orderly manner.⁵⁹

The companies proceeded to the common. Boston merchant John Andrews described what he had heard of the scene:

At eight o'clock this morning there were about three thousand [men] under their regular leaders at Cambridge common, and continually increasing; had left their arms at a little distance.

The *Boston Gazette* likewise emphasized that these men, once they realized there was no military emergency, had laid aside their guns. They were "armed only with sticks."⁶⁰

The Cambridge committee of correspondence tried to figure out how to respond, sending messages to the committee in Charlestown, which in turn sent a message to the committee in Boston. For several years the Boston Whigs had sought to rouse the whole province to protest laws that primarily affected the port towns and upper class. Now the farmers of Massachusetts were on the march, and no one knew what they would do. As Dr. Joseph Warren explained to Samuel Adams, "a billet was brought, requesting me to take some step in order to prevent the people from coming to immediate acts of violence, as incredible numbers were in arms, and lined the roads from Sudbury to Cambridge."⁶¹

Furthermore, a rumor began that army troops "were on their march to disperse" the gathering, as Oliver wrote. He sent a letter into Boston advising Gage not to give such orders. Crowd leaders asked Oliver to intercede with the general personally, promising that they would keep people calm. So the lieutenant governor set off for the Charlestown ferry. Along the way, he met Dr. Warren and a few other members of the Boston and Charlestown committees, heading to Cambridge. According to Warren, the lieutenant governor "said he was going to the general, to desire him not to march his troops out of Boston. We thought his precaution good, and proceeded to Cambridge."

In Boston, Gage received Oliver's note and passed the news on to London:

A Vast Concourse of People assembled this Day from various Parts about eight Miles from hence, they have frightened and pursued many obnoxious People as they term them: No Body has asked Assistance, and I have just received, a Letter

⁵⁹ CSMP, 32:485.

⁶⁰ John Andrews to William Barrell, 2 September 1774, in MHSP, 8:351. *Boston Gazette*, 5 September 1774.

⁶¹ Dr. Joseph Warren to Samuel Adams, 4 September 1774, in Samuel Adams Papers.

from Mr. Oliver the Lieut. Governor to beg I wou'd on no Account send any Troops there, or it wou'd prove fatal to him.⁶²

When Oliver himself arrived, the *Boston Gazette* claimed, he assured the governor that the crowd “were not a mad mob, but the freeholders of the County.” Having heard Gage’s promise not to react with military force as long as the people remained peaceful, the lieutenant governor returned home.

By the time the Bostonians arrived on the town common, Dr. Thomas Young told Adams, there were “perhaps four thousand people.”⁶³ Like the crowds at western Massachusetts court sessions, they had determined to preserve the provincial constitution by demanding that Councilors who lived nearby resign, and that royal appointees refuse to act under the Massachusetts Government Act. This crowd’s targets were Judge Samuel Danforth (1696-1777), a moderate who had served on the Council for thirty-five years; Judge Joseph Lee; Sheriff Phips; and Lt. Gov. Oliver.

Danforth and Lee both assured the crowd that they had already tendered their resignations and wrote out new ones. The *Boston Gazette* reported:

Upon this a vote was called for, to see if the body was satisfied with the declarations and resignations abovesaid, and passed in the affirmative, nem. con. [without dissent]

It was then moved to know whether that body would signify their abhorrence of mobs, riots, and the destruction of private property, and passed in the affirmative, nem. con.

Sheriff Phips similarly promised, “I will not execute any precept that shall be sent me under the new Acts of Parliament for altering the Constitution of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay.”⁶⁴

At this point, the situation appeared to have been resolved to most people’s satisfaction, but then the Customs Commissioners happened to ride past Cambridge common on their way from Salem to Boston. These Commissioners oversaw the collection of the controversial duties on tea and other goods, and had asked for troops to be stationed in Boston in 1768. *Massachusetts Spy* printer Isaiah Thomas, a radical Whig, pointed out the least popular Commissioner, Benjamin Hallowell, who later reported: “some people from Boston. . . called to me, Dam you how doe you like us now, you Tory Son of a Bitch”?⁶⁵ As the *Boston Gazette* confirmed, “The sight of that obnoxious person so inflamed the people, that in a few minutes above 160 horsemen were drawn up and proceeding in pursuit of him on the full gallop.” Three committee of correspondence leaders—Thomas Gardner of

⁶² Gage, *Correspondence*, 1:372.

⁶³ Dr. Thomas Young to Samuel Adams, 4 September 1774, in Samuel Adams Papers.

⁶⁴ *Boston Gazette*, 5 September 1774.

⁶⁵ Benjamin Hallowell to Thomas Gage, 8 September 1774, in Thomas Gage Papers. Hallowell singled out Thomas in a private letter to Grey Cooper, 5 September 1774, in Davies, *Documents of the American Revolution*, 8:188.

Cambridge, Richard Devens of Charlestown, and Dr. Young of Boston—convinced most of the people to calm down, but a few chased Hallowell on horseback all the way to the gates of Boston.⁶⁶

The appearance of the Customs Commissioners angered the crowd enough that they decided not to disperse, but instead to force Thomas Oliver to resign from the Council. He had already given the crowd leaders his excuses for not doing so and recalled, “They considered my reasons, and Voted them satisfactory. . . . This left me entirely clear that I should have no further trouble with them upon this subject.” But the bulk of the assembly was not satisfied. They marched back along the Watertown road—once again passing John Vassall’s house—and surrounded the lieutenant governor’s home.

Oliver wrote a vivid and emotional description of what followed in a letter to the Secretary of State the next day:

I was just going into my carriage to proceed to Boston, when a vast crowd advanced, and in a short time my house was surrounded by 4000 People, and one 4th part in arms. Not apprehending any abuse designed to me, I waited in my hall, when 5 persons entered, with a decent appearance, who informed me they were a Committee from the body of the People to demand my Resignation as a Councillor. I reproached them with ingratitude & false dealings, and refused to hear them.

They answered that the People were dissatisfied with the Votes of their Committee in the morning, and now demanded my Resignation, as drawn up in a Paper which they held in their hands. I absolutely refused to sign any paper. They desired me to consider the consequences of refusing the demands of an iraged People. I told them they might put me to death, but I would never submit. They Populace growing impatient began to press up to my windows, calling for vengeance against the Foes of their Liberty.

The five persons appeared anxious for me, and, impressed with some humanity, endeavoured to appease the people; but in vain. I could hear them from a distance, swearing they would have my blood. At this time the distresses of my Wife and Children, which I heard in the next room, called up feelings, My Lord, which I confess I could not suppress. I found myself giving way. . . . I proposed that the People should take me by force; but they urged the danger of such an expedient. I told them I would take the risque; but they would not consent.

Reduced to this extremity I took up the paper, and casting my eyes over it with a hurry of mind and conflict of passion which rendered me unable to remark the contents I wrote underneath the following words:—

My house being surrounded with four thousand People, in compliance with their commands I sign my name.

Tho. Oliver

The five persons taking it, carried it out to the People, and found great difficulty in getting it accepted. I had several messages sent me, informing me it would not do. But I declared I would do nothing else, if they put me to death. The more respectable farmers used all their endeavours to reconcile the rest, and

⁶⁶ *Boston Gazette*, 5 September 1774.

finally prevailed, when they all marched off in their several companies, wishing me well, & cautioning not to break my Promise.⁶⁷

The weather probably encouraged the crowd to disperse. According to John Tudor's diary, written in Boston, "at 5 P.m. came on hard Thunder & Lightning with a great Shower."⁶⁸

John and Elizabeth Vassall must have seen the militiamen that day, and heard about their siblings' and neighbors' experiences in detail. Among the ominous details was how the committee of "persons. . .with a decent appearance" had been unable to convince the rest of the people to accept their recommendation; traditional deference to the higher classes was breaking down. William Brattle was already in the army camp. Lt. Gov. Oliver would go there in the morning, probably bringing his wife and children. David Phips "removed himself to Boston & his family soon followed him."⁶⁹ Jonathan Sewall and Joseph Lee also took refuge behind the town's newly fortified gates.

1.5 THE VASSALLS LEAVE CAMBRIDGE

The confrontation in Cambridge on 2 September 1774 made several things clear to all the political actors in Massachusetts. The countryside was united against the royal government and ready for a fight. His opponents, Gage realized, were "not a Boston Rabble but the Freeholders and Farmers of the Country."⁷⁰ Where he had troops, he could enforce Parliament's new measures. But the authority of the royal government now stopped at the gates of Boston.

As for John Vassall, there is no evidence that the Powder Alarm crowd ever made a move toward his house. Because he was not politically active and held no high royal appointments, the crowd saw no reason to address him. The next time Middlesex County magistrates convened a court of common pleas, a crowd would probably have forced Vassall and his colleagues not to hold a session, but that had not happened yet.

However, Vassall knew something which the crowd did not. After William Vassall had declined to serve on the mandamus Council, John apparently went to Gov. Gage and offered to serve in his uncle's place. On the morning of 2 September 1774, the same day that thousands of men with sticks were marching back and forth along the Watertown road, the general wrote to London:

I have given Your Lordship in my letter of this date, the names of several of the New Council who desire to resign their Seats; and I have now the honour to transmit you the names of Three Gentlemen who desire to be of the Council, vizt.—Mr. John Vassall of Cambridge, Mr. Eliakim Hutchinson, and Mr. Nathaniel Hatch.⁷¹

⁶⁷ CSMP, 32:485-7.

⁶⁸ Tudor, *Deacon Tudor's Diary*, 49.

⁶⁹ Egerton, *American Loyalists*, 230.

⁷⁰ Gage to Dartmouth, Secretary of State, 2 September 1774, in Gage, *Correspondence*, 1:374.

⁷¹ CSMP, 32:483-4.

John Vassall probably thought that by entering the political world he would not only be supporting his king, but also taking on the role of the head of the family. But the Powder Alarm made clear that seeking a seat on the new Council was a reckless move.

In 1784 John Vassall told the British government's Loyalist Commission: "He was afraid of the Mob who knew his principles & he went to Boston a Day or two after Govr. Oliver's House was attacked."⁷² In February 1775 the *Boston News-Letter*, which by then solidly supported the Crown, published a long article about how Loyalists had been driven from their homes. Among the stories:

Col. Vassall, of Cambridge, from intolerable threats, and insolent treatment to his friends and himself, has left his elegant seat there, and retired to Boston, with his amiable family, for protection.⁷³

Vassall probably felt that the Powder Alarm comprised "intolerable threats, and insolent treatment." Before the end of the month, two other incidents confirmed that fear.

First, on 7 September 1774 John's nineteen-year-old cousin Henry Vassall reported that someone had shot at him while he rode through Lincoln in the carriage of Dr. Charles Russell.⁷⁴ A week later Russell was in Charlestown talking about the incident. That town's committee of correspondence visited him, and then wrote to their colleagues in Lincoln urging an investigation that would show how the Patriot movement abhorred such violence.⁷⁵

On 20 September Henry Vassall wrote out this testimony for two justices of the peace from neighboring towns, Henry Gardner of Stow and Dr. John Cuming of Concord. Gardner was a firm Patriot who would soon handle the treasury of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress. Cuming was less closely associated with the movement, having refused to repudiate his daughters in Boston, who were importing goods for their shop, but was no friend of the royal government.⁷⁶ Vassall wrote out the following testimony for the two men:

Passing between the House of Mrs. Rebecca Barons [?] & Doct. Russell's between the Hours of 7 & 9 in the Evening of the 7 instant [i.e., this month] & to the best of my Knowledge as I rose [?] a little Hill a little a past the first Canopy [?] I heard the report of a Gun saw the light and a Ball Enter'd the Carriage which I was in being Doct. Russells. I immediately step'd out of the Carriage & stood about five or six Minutes & then stepp'd into the Carriage Again & road in haste to the

⁷² Egerton, *American Loyalists*, 231. Some accounts mistakenly suggest that John Vassall remained in Cambridge until shortly before the war began in April 1775.

⁷³ *Boston News-Letter*, 23 February 1775.

⁷⁴ The only Henry Vassall listed at this time in Howard and Crisp, *Visitation of England and Wales: Notes*, 13:43, was William Vassall's son, born in 1755. It is conceivable that Henry was living in Lincoln to study medicine with Dr. Charles Russell, his cousin Elizabeth's husband.

⁷⁵ MHS Misc, 15 September 1774.

⁷⁶ For more on Cuming's political situation, see Lemire, *Black Walden*, 85-103. Cuming and two of Gardner's brothers were physicians; perhaps they took on this investigation because Dr. Charles Russell knew and trusted them.

Doctor when I had gone a small Distance [*insert: from the Place where the Gun was discharged*] I met a person on Horse back when I had past a small Distance further I met several Persons riding on two Horses, whether the Ball was aim'd at the Carriage I can't say I further declare I do not know or even suspect who the Person was that Discharg'd the Gun as above mentioned . . . NB. The above affair I declar'd to no person in Lincoln but the Revd. Mr. Lawrence & desired him to keep it secret—Till the Friday Following.

Gardner and Cuming also gathered statements from Joseph Peirce and Luck, a slave of Dr. Russell. Both men declared that they had been traveling near young Vassall and had heard no gunshot.⁷⁷

That day, three members of the Lincoln committee of correspondence wrote back to Charlestown agreeing that, “we view the Crime of Assassination with the same Detestation & abhorrence which you do.” As for the investigation:

A great Number of persons have been examined, & some Depositions taken before two of his Majesties Justices of the peace, which depositions are inclosed, from which you & the publick must judge of this very mysterious affair as shall appear most rational, We shall only add that as the evening on which this event was said to have happened was very calm it is the general opinion here that it is very improbable if not utterly impossible that a gun should be Discharged at that time & place without being heard by many persons, you have Doubtless seen the impression in the Carriage & are able to judge & Declare whether it is the efect of a Bullet Discharged from a Gun or Not as well as any person in this town⁷⁸

This response could not have pleased Henry Vassall's relatives.

On the same day that the Middlesex magistrates wrapped up their investigation, Henry's parents had their own run-in with a mob. William and Margaret Vassall were visiting friends in Rhode Island. Newspapers reported:

We hear from Bristol, that on Tuesday, night last, William Vassal, Esq; of that place, in returning home with his Lady from a visit, was assaulted by a number of men, who threw stones at his chaise, which they much injured, and attempted to stop the carriage; but having a fleet horse, he got safe home, and next morning set out for Boston.—He was suspected by some to be unfriendly to the liberties of America, which we are told was the cause of his being assaulted.⁷⁹

In the fall of 1774 Loyalists from all over eastern New England were moving into Boston, where the troops from Britain offered protection.

⁷⁷ All these documents are filed in MHS Misc under the date 20 September 1774.

⁷⁸ MHS Misc, 20 September 1774. Loyalist essayists did not include Henry Vassall's experience among other political affronts and outrages they catalogued; perhaps it was too murky to publicize.

⁷⁹ News from Providence dated 24 September in the *New-York Journal*, 6 October 1774.

1.6 THE VASSALLS' DEPARTURE FROM AMERICA

John Vassall was wealthy enough to have a house waiting for him in Boston. He simply left his country estate in the hands of his enslaved workers, expecting to come back when the political turmoil had subsided. The family may have missed their farm that autumn, but at their house in Boston “The Garden was at least an Acre.”⁸⁰ The family probably attended King’s Chapel, where John Vassall’s fellow vestrymen serving in the spring of 1775 included his uncle William and Richard Lechmere.⁸¹

Some of the family’s Cambridge neighbors had to make other arrangements. George Ruggles reached a deal with the Boston merchant Thomas Fayerweather on 31 October 1774 to swap houses; Fayerweather moved out to the Watertown road and Ruggles moved in to Summer Street.⁸² Dr. Charles Russell did the same with the Patriot merchant Henderson Inches.⁸³ Seeing an opportunity, John Vassall tried to sell the mansion he owned in Dorchester. On 7 November 1774 the *Boston Gazette* ran this advertisement:

To be Sold or Lett, and may be entered upon immediately. A House and about Four Acres of Land in Dorchester, about four Miles from Boston) with every Accommodation suitable for a Gentleman. Enquire of John Vassall.

Since the *Gazette* was a Whig newspaper, it was unusual for friends of the royal government to advertise there, but it probably looked like a good way to reach gentlemen seeking an estate out of town. That house never sold, however.⁸⁴

On 15 December 1774 Gov. Gage wrote to the Secretary of State about how John Vassall had responded to news that his writ of mandamus had arrived: “Messrs. Erving, Vassal and Hatch have accepted the honour conferred upon them, but desire that it may be kept secret for a time, and that they may not be called upon till they are prepared.”⁸⁵ The governor did not call a Council meeting until 17 July 1775, and at that point Vassall evidently offered another reason to decline taking his seat. In 1784 he told the Loyalists Commission that “he was never sworn in owing to an Accident which made him lame.”⁸⁶

One source suggests that Mercy Warren satirized Vassall in her verse play *The Group*, which she started to distribute to friends in January 1775. The play lampoons friends of the royal government through exaggerated characters. Beau Trumps is a tremendous fop who once championed the opposition but now supports the governor. Notes written on a printed

⁸⁰ Egerton, *American Loyalists*, 231.

⁸¹ Foote, *King’s Chapel*, 2:322, 327-8, 597, 608.

⁸² Paige, *History of Cambridge*, 169; Thwing, CD-ROM, item 53122.

⁸³ Adams, *Town of Lincoln*, 143.

⁸⁴ *Boston Gazette*, 7 November 1774. Stark, *Loyalists of Massachusetts*, 184. Jackson, *History of the Oliver, Vassall, and Royall Houses*. Massachusetts later seized this property from Vassall and resold it. In 1794 the American statesman Edward Everett was born in that house; it is now gone, but the site is designated as Edward Everett Square.

⁸⁵ CSMP, 32:493.

⁸⁶ Egerton, *American Loyalists*, 231.

copy of *The Group* held by the Boston Athenaeum identify Beau Trumps as “Jno. Vassall.”⁸⁷ However, in another copy of the play Norton Quincy identified the same character as the Taunton lawyer Daniel Leonard, who was known for his luxurious tastes, once supported the opposition, and was a mandamus Councilor.⁸⁸ Leonard therefore seems like the more obvious target.

The war that both Patriots and Loyalists had been warning against and preparing for arrived on 19 April 1775. According to Thomas Oliver, Vassall “sent out one of his Horses which was a valuable one to assist Lord Percy in going to the battle of Lexington.”⁸⁹ Vassall himself played no part in military activity, and his name does not appear on any of Loyalist militia companies organized in Boston over the next year. He also did not sign the farewell address to Gov. Thomas Gage on 6 October 1775.⁹⁰

It is possible that a family health crisis was taking all of the Vassalls’ attention. On 7 November 1775 baby Leonard died. This child may have been sickly from the start, but his parents probably blamed being cooped up in the besieged town for Leonard’s death.⁹¹

That sad event is the last record of John Vassall’s family in Boston. He later said that his infirmity made him “unfit to live in a garrison’d town [so] he got leave to go to Halifax in 1775.”⁹² Some relatives had already left; William Vassall reached London in September 1775.⁹³ Dr. Charles Russell and his family went to the Caribbean with Penelope Vassall.⁹⁴ According to another summary of John Vassall’s claim, “An accident prevented him from active military service and consequently he removed with his family to Halifax, Nova Scotia, where he chartered at his own risk and expense a vessel to convey provisions and intelligence to [the besieged garrison at] Boston.”⁹⁵ There is no indication of which ship this was.

In March 1776 the British military evacuated Boston, bringing approximately one thousand Loyalist subjects along to Halifax. Shortly after this fleet’s arrival in Nova Scotia, John Vassall, Thomas Oliver, and their families sailed with several other “gentlemen of distinction” in five vessels to London.⁹⁶ They reached Dartmouth on 7 June 1776.⁹⁷ Five days later Oliver called on former Massachusetts governor Thomas Hutchinson, bringing news of the Vassalls and other refugees. Hutchinson wrote in his diary:

⁸⁷ Brown, *Mercy Warren*. 170.

⁸⁸ Adams, *Works of John Adams*, 10:99. Stark, *Loyalists of Massachusetts*, 326.

⁸⁹ Egerton, *American Loyalists*, 231.

⁹⁰ *Remembrancer for 1776*, 56-7.

⁹¹ *Records of the Churches of Boston* CD-ROM.

⁹² Egerton, *American Loyalists*, 231.

⁹³ Hutchinson, *Diary and Letters*, 1:537.

⁹⁴ Adams, *Town of Lincoln*, 143.

⁹⁵ Jones, *Loyalists of Massachusetts*, 283-4.

⁹⁶ News from Halifax reprinted in the *Pennsylvania Packet*, 1 July 1776.

⁹⁷ Hutchinson, *Diary and Letters*, 2:61.

All depend upon Govt. to support them. Advertisement in a Watertown paper, notifying the sale of Tho. Oliver, Junr. [Jonathan?], Sewall's, and other estates in Cambridge, at the house of Jno. Vassall; and if no purchasers for the fee, then to lease the estates to the highest bidders. This is tyranny beyond any instance in time of the Rebellion in England.⁹⁸

The Cambridge committee of correspondence rented out John Vassall's estate in 1776, along with other abandoned properties. The Vassall farm brought in £100, by far the largest of the incomes.⁹⁹

1.7 THE VASSALLS IN ENGLAND

Some Loyalists from Massachusetts had trouble establishing themselves in Britain, but the Vassalls' wealth insulated them from deprivation and embarrassment. On 9 July Thomas Oliver wrote to David Phips back in Halifax: "Colonel *Vassall* is at present in our neighbourhood [Brompton], but he means to take a house in *London*, at the court end of the town, and enjoy the comforts of a plentiful fortune, at least for one winter."¹⁰⁰

While in London, Elizabeth had a new baby, her last: Mary. The older boys appear to have been eager for military careers, probably inspired by their feelings about being forced out of their Cambridge home. In 1784 Vassall told the government that "He has two sons in the Army and one in the Navy," having bought officers' commissions for all three.¹⁰¹ (See section 1.9 on the military career of Spencer Vassall.)

On 20 June 1777 William Carmichael wrote from Paris to Charles W. F. Dumas about a British misinformation campaign:

You have seen a letter, said to be wrote by a Lieut-Col. Campbell, bitterly complaining of his cruel confinement. It is a forgery. A junto of refugees from various parts of the continent, who meet weekly in Pall-Mall, London, do this dirty work of government to earn the pittance but scantily afforded to each of them. At the head of this junto were Hutchinson, Cooper, Chandler, Vassel, and others who would not be named but for their infamy. They have forged letters lately under the name of Gen. Washington, which the good, silly souls of Europe will swallow as genuine, unless contradicted in different gazettes.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Hutchinson, *Diary and Letters*, 2:66-7. A search did not turn up any newspaper advertisements matching Hutchinson's description, and the Massachusetts legislature did not formally seize such properties until later in the war. The Oliver and Sewall estates were advertised for sale in the 17 October 1779 *Independent Chronicle*.

⁹⁹ Paige, *History of Cambridge*, 169. According to Tharp, *Baroness and the General*, 253, in 1777 the Vassall mansion was inhabited by a lady who had been "burnt out of Charles Town" and refused to move so that Gen. John Burgoyne could be held prisoner there. However, no confirmation of this was found in Tharp's only cited source, the William Heath Papers.

¹⁰⁰ *American Archives*, series 5, 1:135.

¹⁰¹ Egerton, *American Loyalists*, 231. Paying a retiring or promoted officer for his place in the army ranks was a normal way to enter military service in the eighteenth century. See the discussion of the careers of Gen. Charles Lee and Gen. Horatio Gates in sections 4.5 and 4.12.

¹⁰² NYHSC, 20:75.

Some authors have linked this “Vassel” to John Vassall. However, that name is more likely a mistake—by Carmichael or the transcriber of his letter—for the Rev. John Vardill of New York.¹⁰³

Vassall did contribute in a small way to Britain’s war effort, as the 18 May 1778 *Boston Gazette* noted:

Among the Names of Subscribers for raising Money for recruiting for his Majesty’s Service, is mentioned (from America) John Vassall, 100l. [i.e., £100] Governor Oliver 25l. Thomas Oliver 100l. Sterling.¹⁰⁴

That fall, the Massachusetts legislature passed a law confiscating the property of men who had worked for the royal government or had absented themselves from the state. With John Vassall’s property they made a special additional law on 23 June 1779 assigning the Christ Church parsonage, which he formally owned, to the Rev. Winwood Serjeant “for life.”¹⁰⁵ Vassall thus lost all his property in Massachusetts.

An article published in *The Royal Military Chronicle* in 1811 states that Vassall refused to seek any compensation from the government for his losses in America:

Though his family was large, and the losses which he had suffered in America were considerable, his high and noble spirit would not allow him to accept of any remuneration for the sacrifices, to which his adherence to Great Britain had compelled him to submit; and he contented himself with receiving back the advances which he had actually made for the services of government. On being pressed by Lord George Germain, then his majesty’s secretary of state for the colonial department, to bring forward his claims, he modestly answered, “It shall never be said, that I emigrated from my own country to become a charge to this.”¹⁰⁶

However, government records show that to be untrue.

When Britain set up the Royal Commission on the Losses and Services of American Loyalists, John Vassall applied for an annual pension and £11,895 to make up for the loss of all his Massachusetts property. He also mentioned damages to his plantations on Jamaica because of a hurricane, which hardly counted as military damage. Thomas Oliver testified to the commission about his brother-in-law’s support for the Crown, but also shared information that spoiled any chance for a pension. According to E. Alfred Jones’s *The Loyalists of Massachusetts*:

¹⁰³ See the argument in Ford, *Spurious Letters*, 29-31.

¹⁰⁴ *Boston Gazette*, 18 May 1778. The same item appeared in the 21 May 1778 *Independent Chronicle*, also published in Boston.

¹⁰⁵ *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, 14:232. Serjeant’s house, which stood on the south side of what is now Garden Street, had originally been built for him by Henry Vassall. The minister quietly left Cambridge for New Hampshire and died in 1780; see *Winwood Serjeant Letters*.

¹⁰⁶ “Life of Lieutenant-colonel Vassall,” *Royal Military Chronicle*, 2 (1811), 2.

On the strength of a communication by Lieutenant-Governor Thomas Oliver that Vassall's property in Jamaica now (1784) produced £1,000 a year, they refused to grant him the allowance asked for, adding that he ought to be ashamed of himself for making the application.

The commission still compensated Vassall for his lost property to the amount of £4,571.¹⁰⁷

John and Elizabeth Vassall were indeed very well off. They owned a house in the Royal Crescent at Bath, and a country home outside Bristol at Clifton. They continued to socialize with friends and family, and raised their surviving children in comfort. When John Vassall died on 2 October 1797 *The Gentleman's Magazine* offered this obituary:

At Clifton, almost instantaneously after eating a hearty dinner, John Vassall, esq. of the Crescent, Bath. He had very considerable property in America, where he lived in a princely style. Some time after the disturbances took place, having taken a very active part, and spared no expence to support the royal cause, he left his possessions there to the ravagers; and having, fortunately, very large estates in Jamaica, he came, with his family, to England. He carried his loyalty so far as not to use the family motto, "Saepe pro Rege, semper pro Republica." He had left four sons to inherit a very fine fortune.¹⁰⁸

The motto, adopted during the English Civil War, said, "Often for the king, always for the republic"—a sentiment Vassall had come to believe was too republican.

Elizabeth Vassall died ten years later. In the tower at St. Paul's Church in Bristol is this memorial to the family, which makes no mention of their life in Massachusetts:

In Memory
of JOHN VASSALL, Esqr.
of the Lower Crescent Bath,
& Newfound River,
in the Island of Jamaica,
who died at Clifton,
on the 24th Sept 1797, Aged 59.
And of ELIZABETH his Wife
who died at Clifton,
March 31st 1807,
Aged 63.
Also in Memory of JOHN their eldest Son
who died at Lyndhurst in Hants,
October 17th 1800 Aged 38.
And of MARY their youngest Daughter
Married to J. G. ARCHER, Esqr.
who died at Clifton Decr 27th 1806, Aged 29.
And of THOMAS OLIVER their third Son

¹⁰⁷ Jones, *Loyalists of Massachusetts*, 284.

¹⁰⁸ *Gentleman's Magazine*, 67:898-9. Vassall may also have changed his bookplate, which showed a ship, so that it would more clearly display the British flag; *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, 14:232.

who died at Wrexham in Denbighshire
October 8th 1807, Aged 40.¹⁰⁹

1.8 THE GENEALOGY OF THE JOHN VASSALL FAMILY

This section collects vital data for the Vassall family members who lived in the house at Cambridge.

There have been several attempts to trace all the descendants of the John Vassall who died in 1625. Edward Doubleday Harris's article "The Vassalls of New England," printed in the *New England Historic and Genealogical Register* in 1863, was mistaken about the line from the early Massachusetts settlers to the Vassalls of Cambridge, but provided valuable data on the generations of the eighteenth century. The most detailed family tree covering the next century, and thus the main source for the data below, appeared in volume 13 of Joseph Jackson Howard and Frederick Arthur Crisp's *Visitation of England and Wales: Notes*.

The information from those sources has been confirmed, corrected, and supplemented as far as possible with data from *Dorchester Births, Marriages, and Deaths to the End of 1825* (1890); *Cambridge, Massachusetts, Vital Records to 1850* (1914-15); *Records of the Church of Christ at Cambridge in New England: 1632-1830* (1906); and the *Records of the Churches of Boston* CD-ROM (2002).

PARENTS

John Vassall. *Born:* 12 June 1738 in Cambridge. *Baptized:* 10 December 1738 at Christ Church (Old North), Boston. *Married:* 12 January 1761 at Trinity Church, Boston. *Died:* 24 September 1797 at Clifton, Gloucester County, England.

Elizabeth Oliver. *Born:* 31 October 1741 at Dorchester. *Baptized:* unknown. *Married:* 12 January 1761 at Trinity Church, Boston. *Died:* 31 March 1807 at Clifton, Gloucester County, England.

CHILDREN

John Vassall. *Born:* 17 May 1762 in Cambridge.¹¹⁰ *Baptized:* 23 May 1762. *Married:* 13 June 1799 to Elizabeth Athill, daughter of an Antigua planter. *Died:* 17 October 1800, in Bath, Somerset County, England. *Children:* John, born 1800.

Spencer Thomas Vassall. *Born:* 27 April 1764 in Cambridge. *Baptized:* 26 May 1764. *Married:* 30 June 1795 to Catharine Brandreth Backhouse

¹⁰⁹ Oliver, *Caribbeana*, 2:306. Though that quotation says Elizabeth Vassall died at sixty-three years old, BTR, 21:96, shows that she was born in late 1741, meaning she was actually sixty-five.

¹¹⁰ Many genealogies state John's birthdate as 7 May, Spencer's as 7 April, and Thomas's as 12 April. Cambridge Vital Records, 1:722, offers the dates here. They fit better with the dates of the boys' baptisms, which apparently come from family records.

Evans (d. 1842), daughter of an Essex County minister.¹¹¹ *Died:* 7 February 1807 at Montevideo, Uruguay, as described in the next section. *Children:* Sir Spencer Lambart Hunter Vassall (1799-1846), captain in the Royal Navy; Honora Mary Georgina Vassall (1802-1834), wife of a chaplain in the Royal Artillery; Francis Vassall (d. 1803, Dublin); Rawdon John Popham Vassall, general in the British army (1804-1884); and Catharine Spencer Alicia Beresford Vassall (d. 1877), wife of a younger son of the Baron de Saumarez, a British admiral, and then of the vicar of Shirley.¹¹²

Thomas Oliver Vassall. *Born:* 13 April 1766 in Cambridge. *Baptized:* Unknown. *Married:* Mary, surname and date unknown. *Died:* 8 October 1807 in Wrexham, Denbigh County, England.

Elizabeth Vassall. *Born:* Unknown. *Baptized:* 5 July 1767 in Cambridge. *Died:* 5 January 1768 at Cambridge, and buried there at Christ Church.

Robert Oliver Vassall. *Born:* 28 May 1769 in Cambridge. *Baptized:* Unknown. *Married:* 26 March 1794 to Christian Barrett Tomlinson, daughter of a Jamaican planter. *Died:* 23 March 1827 at Abingdon Hall in Jamaica. *Children:* Elizabeth Vassall (1796-1880), married Dr. George Robert Johnson of Jamaica; John (1799-1833), born in England and died in Jamaica; and Mary (1800-1842), born and died in Jamaica.

Elizabeth Vassall. *Born:* 5 May 1771, presumably in Cambridge. *Baptized:* Unknown. *Married:* 6 March 1794 to John Gustavus Lemaistre (c. 1769-1840) at Bath. *Died:* 11 July 1857 at Cheltenham. *Children:* none.

Leonard Vassall. *Born:* 1773, presumably in Cambridge. *Baptized:* Unknown. *Died:* 7 November 1775 in Boston.

Mary Vassall. *Born:* 26 March 1777 in London. *Baptized:* Unknown. *Married:* 16 June 1800 to John Gytins Archer of Barbados at Bath. *Died:* 27 December 1806 at Clifton, Gloucester County, England.

1.9 SPENCER VASSALL: “EVERY BULLET HAS ITS BILLET”

Spencer Thomas Vassall (1764-1807) was the second son of John and Elizabeth Vassall, one of the children who grew up in their Cambridge mansion until September 1774. He became a respected army officer, fighting on three continents and dying in the service—the most significant British subject born at the John Vassall house.¹¹³

Spencer was ten years old when the “Powder Alarm” sent his family and several of his

¹¹¹ Burke, *Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Commoners*, 1:502, says Spencer Vassall married on 10 July 1795. Harris, “The Vassalls of New England,” *NEHGR*, 17:127, cites *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 65:614, for the earlier date, and gives the bride’s second name as Brandith.

¹¹² Date of Rawdon Vassall’s birth from *Journal of the Ex Libris Society*, 7:174.

¹¹³ ODNB, 56:153-4.

neighbors packing. He turned eleven in Boston in April 1775 as the American War for Independence formally started, and twelve in Halifax shortly before the Vassalls sailed for England. He was fourteen on 19 August 1778 when, according to the British War Office Succession Books, he was commissioned as an ensign in the 59th Regiment of Foot.¹¹⁴

Some confusion arose early about the date Spencer Vassall entered the army. In 1807 *The Athenaeum* published an item about him which says, “At twelve years of age he commenced his military career in the year 1779”—the year he actually turned fifteen.¹¹⁵ A biographical article from 1811 repeated the detail about Spencer joining the military at age twelve, but also stated that he had done so “after receiving a suitable education, first at a foreign academy, where he acquired a knowledge of the modern languages, and afterwards at a military establishment in England.”¹¹⁶ Putting the evidence together, it appears most likely that Spencer chose an army career soon after arriving in England, spent two years in military school, and took up his commission in 1778.

The 59th Regiment had been deployed to Massachusetts in August 1774 and its light infantry and grenadier companies had suffered casualties in the Battle of Lexington and Concord.¹¹⁷ On 10 December 1775 the regiment was “drafted,” meaning its enlisted men were distributed to other regiments and its officers sent back to Britain over the following months to recruit new soldiers.¹¹⁸ Thus, Spencer joined the 59th when it was in a rebuilding mode. An ensign was the lowest rank of army officer, the equivalent of a modern second lieutenant, and a fourteen-year-old ensign was not unheard of.

In the United States, memory of the War of Independence does not include the siege of Gibraltar as a major event; no Americans were involved. For Britain, that fight at the western end of the Mediterranean Sea was one of the most important campaigns of the war. Spain, with help from France, laid siege to Gibraltar in 1779 hoping to regain the territory it had lost in 1713. The British garrison held out for years through two periods of great deprivation, each time saved by Royal Navy ships running the French and Spanish blockade to bring supplies and new troops.

The 59th Regiment was part of Britain’s second reinforcement, arriving at Gibraltar in October 1782. According to his biographers, Spencer Vassall (promoted to lieutenant on 3 May 1780 according to that year’s army list¹¹⁹) distinguished himself during the final months of the siege. His name does not appear in general histories of the conflict, however. The

¹¹⁴ Don Hagist to J. L. Bell, email, 9 March 2010.

¹¹⁵ “Foreign Occurrences,” *The Athenaeum*, 1 (1807), 71.

¹¹⁶ *Royal Military Chronicle*, 2:2-3. This magazine includes an engraved portrait of Spencer Vassall as an adult. The phrase “foreign academy” appears to refer to Spencer’s early education in North America. This passage suggests that Spencer had private tutoring because “modern languages” were not part of a New England town school’s curriculum. The article’s text was reprinted in 1819 as *Memoir of the Life of Lieutenant-Colonel Vassall*.

¹¹⁷ Frothingham, *Siege of Boston*, 364. Fischer, *Paul Revere’s Ride*, 322-4.

¹¹⁸ NYHSC, 16:271 and following.

¹¹⁹ Chris Woolf to J. L. Bell, email, 7 March 2010, citing *A List of All the Officers of the Army* . . . , 1780 edition.

Spanish and French forces withdrew in the spring of 1783 and Gibraltar is still in British hands.

Among Vassall's comrade there was Capt. Joseph Budworth (1758-1815) who became a very minor Romantic poet. After Vassall's death, Budworth added lines about the young officer to the third edition of his *A Fortnight's Ramble to the Lakes*:

Yet hail, ye glorious fallen, mighty dead!
With whom in scenes of warfare he was bred:
He knew brave Vassall when a soldier youth,
Whose beardless face beam'd energy and truth;
Saw him when first he shar'd the cannon's roar,
And heard him wish the trifling danger more;
Like a tall plantain, as erect his form,
Fitted to meet or battle with the storm!
Peace to the honour'd ashes of the brave,
And hallow'd be the tear that wets his grave!

These couplets were printed in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in 1810, but do not seem to have been reprinted outside of Vassall's own memorials.¹²⁰

Vassall married in 1795 and had four children over the next five years, but Britain's wars against Napoleon kept him traveling. He served in Flanders, Antigua, France, Spain, and Holland; his chronicler wrote, "He was the first man that landed on the isle Dieu, and himself planted the British colours on that island."¹²¹ In 1801 Vassall became lieutenant colonel of the 38th Regiment—the highest rank he could achieve simply by purchase because the Crown reserved the position of colonel for favored officers.

Lt. Col. Vassall was stationed in Dublin in 1803; as field officer of the day on 23 July he helped put down an insurrection that killed the lord chief justice and others. The 38th regiment was part of Britain's attack on the Dutch colony at the Cape of Good Hope in 1806 and Vassall was briefly military governor of that African outpost.

On 3 February 1807 Lt. Col. Vassall led his regiment in an assault on Montevideo in the Spanish colony of Uruguay. In a letter dated 10 February his orderly sergeant J. B. Mathews described the action:

On our approach to the wall we missed the breach; the grape and musketry flew so hot it drove the men into confusion, and would have made numbers of them retreat but for his [Vassall's] exertions. When he observed any of the men stoop or flinch, he cried out as loud as possible, "Brave 38th, my brave men, don't flinch; every bullet has its billet. Push on, follow me, thirty eighth!" He rallied them repeatedly in this manner, until he got them inside the breach. He immediately directed a party to take possession of the corner battery next the sea, which was done in a few minutes, and another, under the command of Major

¹²⁰ *Royal Military Chronicle*, 2:3. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 80:143. For more on the poet, who changed his surname to Palmer near the end of his life, see "Memoir of Joseph Palmer, Esq., F.S.A.," *Gentleman's Magazine*, 85:388-91.

¹²¹ *Royal Military Chronicle*, 2:4.

Ross, to advance to the great church, and he was advancing himself to the main battery on the right, when a grape shot broke his leg, and as soon as he fell he cried out, "Push on, somebody will take me up, my good soldiers, charge them, never mind me; it's only the loss of a leg in the service." He sat up, and helped to tie on a handkerchief to stop the blood, and cried out all the time of the action, "I care not for my leg, if my regiment do their duty, and I hope they will." As soon as the town surrendered he heard the men cheer, he joined them with as great spirits as if nothing had happened, and called to me to have him carried to the head of his regiment. . . .

At half-past three on the morning of the 3rd, he received his wound; at one o'clock on the morning of the 7th, he departed, and at eight the same evening he was interred at the entrance of the great church, with all military honors.¹²²

Lt. Col. Vassall's body was later brought to Bristol and buried in the same church as his parents'. Amelia Opie (1769-1853) supplied this elegy:

Stranger, if e'er you honor'd Sidney's fame,
If e'er you lov'd Bayard's reproachless name,
Then on this marble gaze with tearful eyes,
For kindred merit here with Vassall lies!
But far more blest than France or England's pride,
In the great hour of conquest Vassall died,
While still undaunted in the glorious strife.
Content he purchased victory with life,
And nobly careless of his own distress,
He bade his mourning comrades onward press;
Bade them (the hero victor o'er the man,)
Complete the conquest which his sword began;
Then proudly smil'd amidst the pangs of death,
While thanks for victory fill'd his parting breath.¹²³

Lt. Col. Spencer Vassall's descendants were allowed to add a new motto to their family crest: "Every bullet has its billet."

¹²² *Gentleman's Magazine*, 77:481-2. *Royal Military Chronicle*, 2:9-10, gives a date and recipient for Mathews's letter and drops his first initial.

¹²³ Burke, *Genealogical and Heraldic History*, 1:502.

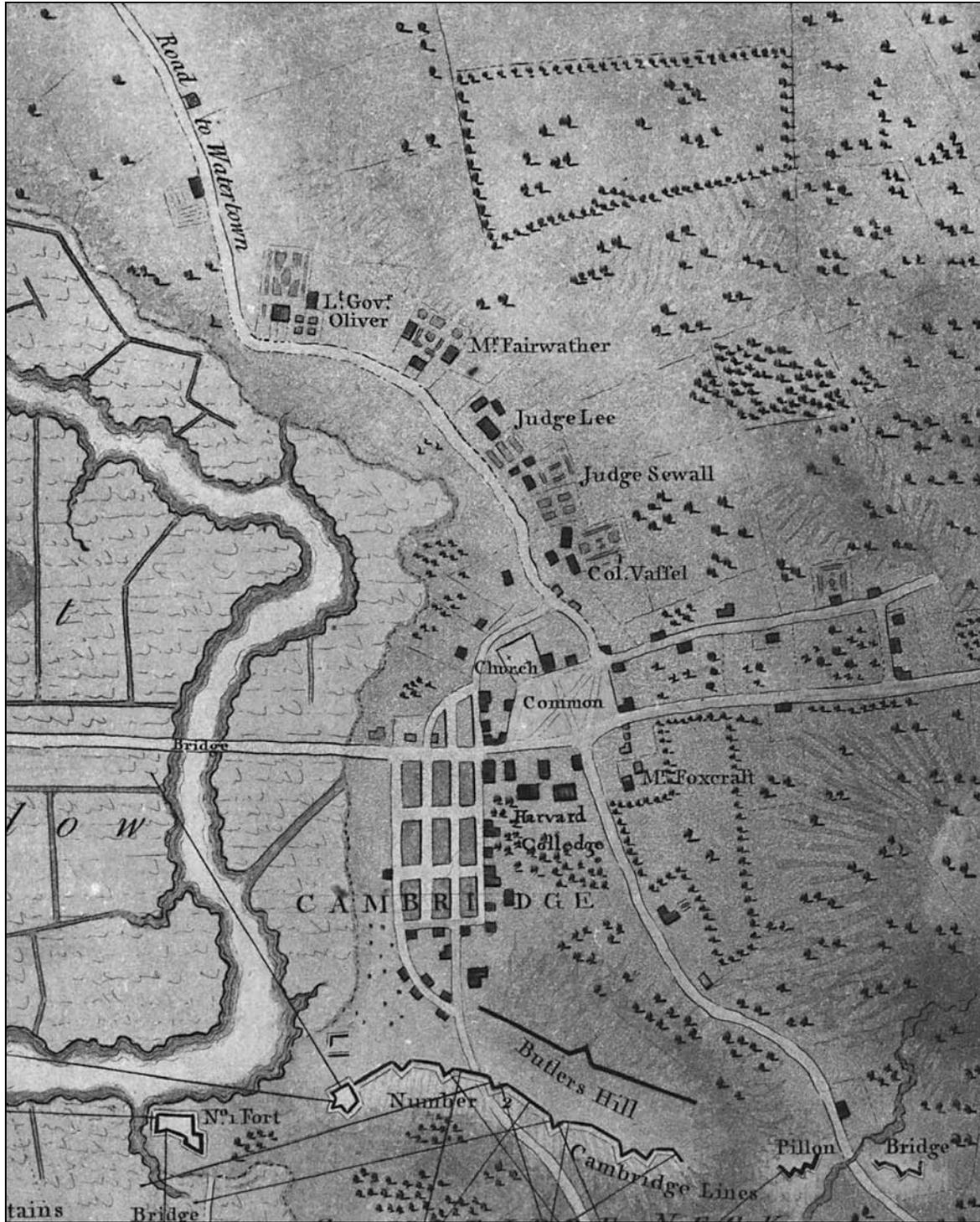


Figure 2. Map of John Vassall's neighborhood, a detail of Henry Pelham's "A Plan of Boston in New England with its Environs," drawn in Boston and published in London in 1777. (On this map, north is towards the right.) The estate of "Col. Vassel" overlooks the Charles River between Cambridge's common and Christ Church in one direction and the homes of "Judge Sewall," "Judge Lee," and other Loyalist neighbors in the other. Pelham depicted the area after George Ruggles sold his house to Thomas Fayerweather in late 1774. He did not label the houses of Penelope Vassall, William Brattle, and John Borland. Image from the American Memory Maps Collection, Library of Congress.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ARRIVAL OF THE PROVINCIAL ARMY ON THE VASSALL ESTATE

Life on John Vassall's estate between his departure for Boston in September 1774 and the arrival of Gen. George Washington in July 1775 is obscure. There are few surviving documents, and many gaps in that record. The winter was probably quiet, with some of the Vassalls' slaves maintaining the property. But when the Revolutionary War began on 19 April 1775 Cambridge entered a period of frantic activity: two major alarms causing many civilians to flee west, thousands of soldiers coming and going, the college shutting down.

The New England army needed shelter and food for both men and livestock. The Patriot government commandeered several large empty homes in Cambridge. Although documents are scarce about what happened on John Vassall's estate and when, it is clear that companies of soldiers lived in the mansion. The Massachusetts Committee of Safety directed the provincial military to use the estate's hay and stables. All the while, the Vassalls' slaves remained on site, trying to figure out their best course in the new social order.

2.1 ANTHONY AND CUBA VASSALL AND THEIR FAMILY

When John and Elizabeth Vassall departed Cambridge in September 1774, they left their home in the care of their enslaved servants. They had probably done the same when they spent winters in Boston; this time they were simply leaving earlier, and perhaps taking more of their furniture and valuables. They almost certainly expected to return after Gen. Gage had pacified the province.

John and Elizabeth's departure, and that of Penelope Vassall across the Watertown road, left both estates in the hands of another family that would eventually take the name Vassall: married couple Anthony (Tony) and Cuba, and their children. They were all the legal property of John Vassall or his aunt. The two farms might have been home to other slaves in 1774-75, but these Vassalls maintained a connection to Cambridge for the next several decades, allowing local historians to document details of their lives that have been lost for any others on those estates. (For an overview of Revolutionary Cambridge's African-American population, see section 9.1.

Most of the surviving information on this Vassall family was collected by Samuel F. Batchelder in his 1915 article "Notes on Colonel Henry Vassall (1721-1769), His Wife Penelope Royall, His House at Cambridge, and His Slaves Tony and Darby."¹ Batchelder's

¹ Originally published in the *Cambridge Historical Society Publications*, 10 (1915), 5-85. Later reprinted on its own and in Batchelder, *Bits of Cambridge History*. Batchelder listed as one of his sources the Rev. Nicholas Hoppin's notes of an interview with Darby Vassall in the mid-1800s; those are no longer in the Christ Church archives where Batchelder found them.

interpretation was hampered, however, by his period's lack of knowledge of African culture and lack of respect for African-Americans.

For example, Batchelder was baffled by how Cuba was "said, in spite of her name, to have been a full-blooded African."² An explanation appears in Edward Long's *History of Jamaica*, published in 1774: "Many of the plantation Blacks call their children by the African name for the day of the week on which they are born." Long listed "Cuba" as the name for a female born on Wednesday.³ Furthermore, he wrote that "Abba" meant a female born on Thursday, and Isaac Royall's 1738 will says Cuba's mother was "called Abba."⁴

A 1967 study in the journal *Language* stated, "This set of fourteen day-names occurs in several related West-African languages today." As a result, we can say that Abba and Cuba's given names are evidence of enslaved people carrying on a traditional African practice in the New World with their owners' approval. However, "it is not possible to determine exactly which dialect was spoken by those slaves who first carried the day-names to the New World," and thus the family's origin in Africa.⁵

Tony Vassall was born in Spain or part of the Spanish Empire in the Americas, his son told the Rev. Nicholas Hoppin in the mid-1800s. Batchelder wrote:

Tony, according to these traditions, was shanghaied from Spain at an early age, with the lure of "seeing the world." The particular portion of the universe exhibited to him was the island of Jamaica. Here he was bought for a coachman by young Harry Vassall, and his travels soon extended to Cambridge.⁶

Henry Vassall bought his older brother John's home on the south side of the Watertown road in Cambridge in 1741 when he turned twenty, and presumably Tony Vassall arrived in Massachusetts about that time.⁷ Tony, based on statements that he died in 1811 at age ninety-eight, was eight years older than his master.⁸ Henry Vassall's accounts indicate that he trusted Tony and other enslaved men with daily shopping. According to legal testimony from a slave named Robin, in 1752 Tony was even able to go into Boston and exchange some stolen silver dollars for copper coins.⁹

Cuba Vassall first appears in the historical record in 1738 when Isaac Royall of Antigua and Medford bequeathed to his daughter Penelope "one Negro Woman called Abba

² Batchelder, "Henry Vassall," 62.

³ Long, *The History of Jamaica*, 2:427. In addition, Edwards, *British Colonies in the West Indies*, 2:33, quotes a poem supposedly written on Jamaica in 1765 that includes several west African female day names, including "Cuba"; though that history does not hint at the names' original meanings, it confirms that British planters on the island were familiar (in every way) with women named Cuba.

⁴ Batchelder, "Henry Vassall," 62.

⁵ David DeCamp, "African Day-Names in Jamaica," *Language*, 43 (1967), 139-49.

⁶ Batchelder, "Henry Vassall," 62.

⁷ Batchelder, "Henry Vassall," 10.

⁸ *Cambridge Vital Records*, 2:772. It is possible that Tony, his family, and his neighbors exaggerated or miscalculated his age by a few years.

⁹ Batchelder, "Henry Vassall," 64, 67.

& her Six Children named Robin Coba Walker Nuba Trace & Tobey.”¹⁰ When Cuba died in 1812 she was listed as aged seventy-eight, meaning that she was four years old when she became the property of Penelope Royall.¹¹ There are reasons to doubt that age, however. Royall’s will probably named Abba’s children in birth order, and Cuba appears second on the list rather than near the end, as a four-year-old would. In a 1781 petition to the Massachusetts legislature, Tony Vassall said that “both himself and his wife have spent almost sixty years of their lives in slavery,” which suggests both had been born in the 1720s.¹²

Penelope Royall married Henry Vassall in 1742 and brought at least some of her slaves to Cambridge. According to Batchelder, “When the Colonel married Penelope Royall, his coachman espoused her maid ‘Coby,’ or Cuba.”¹³ If Cuba had been born in 1734 she would have been only eight years old when her owner Penelope married; it seems more likely that either she was born earlier or that she became Tony’s wife later, when she was in her teens. By the time of the Revolution, it is clear that Cuba was working as Penelope Vassall’s maid and bearing Tony’s children.

In September 1769, six months after Henry Vassall died, an inventory of his property included five enslaved “Servants”:

Tony £13.6.8
Dick £6.13.4
James £40
 [total] £60.0.0
Dorrenda £12
Auber £20
 [total] £32.

These entries, plus the “Servants Beds & Bedding £1.12,” appear between the category “In the Cellar” and the items “Rolling Stone & Garden Tools” and “6 Old Chairs in ye. Summer House.”¹⁴ That implies that the slaves lived either in the cellar or in an outbuilding—and suggests that the slaves at the John Vassall estate did the same.

Batchelder wrote of the widow Penelope Vassall, “to clear the estate from debts she even sold Cuba and the children to young John Vassall across the road.”¹⁵ However, Cuba and some of her known children do not appear in the estate inventory, even as others do. It is therefore possible that such a sale actually took place *before* Henry’s death, and did not involve all the children. All sources agree that when the Revolution began, Tony was still

¹⁰ Batchelder, “Henry Vassall,” 62. Cuba’s brother Robin may have been the man who testified about Tony in 1752.

¹¹ *Cambridge Vital Records*, 2:772.

¹² Petition discussed below and quoted at Batchelder, “Henry Vassall,” 70. Note also below, however, a petition that estimated Cuba’s age in 1778 as “about forty.”

¹³ Batchelder, “Henry Vassall,” 62.

¹⁴ Batchelder, “Henry Vassall,” 82. Batchelder guessed that “Auber” was a mistake for “Cuba.” But it could just as easily refer to Cuba’s mother Abba, or her sister Nuba, whom Penelope Royall had also inherited three decades before.

¹⁵ Batchelder, “Henry Vassall,” 68.

considered the legal property of Penelope Vassall, and Cuba and her children the property of John Vassall.

Based on the probate files of Henry Vassall and Tony Vassall,¹⁶ and Darby Vassall's recollections, Batchelder listed Tony and Cuba's children as:

James or Jemmy. He was Henry Vassall's most valuable slave in 1769, and thus probably in his late teens or early twenties and in good health. On 1 March 1809, a James Vassall married Abigail Hill in Boston.¹⁷ He appears to have died shortly afterward, and Abigail became one of his father's heirs.

Dorrenda or Darinda Vassall. Noted in the 1769 inventory of Henry Vassall's estate with a value that indicated she had survived infancy, she died in Cambridge in 1784.¹⁸

Flora, who on 4 October 1787 married Bristol Maranda (also written as Briston Morande) in Boston.¹⁹ She was a widow in 1811.

Darby (also spelled Derby) Vassall, discussed in the next section. He reported being born in May 1769, but does not appear on Henry Vassall's September 1769 valuation.

Cyrus. The 1798 tax valuation found Derby and Cyrus Vassall as owners of a property in Boston covering 4,000 square feet and valued at \$400.²⁰ On 14 April 1805, Cyrus Vassal married Lucy Jenkins at Boston's Trinity Church.²¹ His daughter Eliza Flagg was an heir of Tony Vassall in 1811.

Catherine, named in Tony Vassall's will.²² In the 1810s she married Adam Lewis and helped found Cambridge's first African-American community, called Lewisville.²³

In addition, the following people are possible children of Tony and Cuba, or of other women enslaved on the Vassall estates:

Nancy Vassall, died in Cambridge on 15 June 1802, at age twenty-seven—thus born around 1775.²⁴

Lucy Vassall, died in Cambridge on 13 December 1818. She was described as fifty-two years old, meaning she had been born about 1766, and had been "Brought from Boston," implying she had roots in Cambridge.²⁵

¹⁶ Batchelder, "Henry Vassall," 73.

¹⁷ BTR, 30:502.

¹⁸ *Cambridge Vital Records*, 2:772.

¹⁹ BTR, 30:126.

²⁰ BTR, 22:45.

²¹ BTR, 30:276.

²² Batchelder, "Henry Vassall," 73.

²³ Lewisville is discussed in Susan Maycock and Charles Sullivan, *Building Old Cambridge: Architecture and Development*, Cambridge Historical Commission, forthcoming.

²⁴ *Cambridge Vital Records*, 2:772.

²⁵ *Cambridge Vital Records*, 2:772. This Lucy Vassall could have been Cyrus Vassall's wife, which would mean she had married at age thirty-nine.

There are records of other African-Americans named Vassall in greater Boston in the early republic, who may have come from other Vassall family estates.

Just as John and Elizabeth Vassall and their relatives formed a social community along the Watertown road, so probably did their slaves. They worked alongside each other in the fields and gardens, shared recipes in the kitchens, and visited from house to house, especially if their owners were away in winter. The families undoubtedly followed the case of Richard Lechmere's slave James, who sued his owner for eleven years of bondage in 1769.²⁶ If Tony and Cuba did not live together before the winter of 1774-75, being the legal property of separate households, they almost certainly started to do so then.

In the summer of 1775 the Massachusetts legislature appointed a committee to consider what to do about properties left by people who had gone into Boston. Its members reported:

many of them who are left in possession under pretence of occupants are only negroes or servants &c and that in some instances the Officers Doctors and others belonging to the army have entered upon & taken possession & make waste on sd Estates.²⁷

Though not specifically directed at the Vassall estates along the Watertown road, that description fits their history after September 1774. Tony and Cuba and their remaining family were on the properties, maintaining the gardens and fields to the best of their ability, through most of the siege of Boston. They probably stayed in their usual quarters while the main houses were used as barracks, hospital, and military headquarters.

During the war, the Massachusetts authorities struggled to figure out how the law should treat Tony Vassall, just as he struggled to find a secure status for himself and his family. Simon Tufts managed Isaac Royall's property for the state, and his accounts show he paid "Toney Mrs. Vassall's Negro" four times between December 1776 and July 1777, with the final payment decided "by Arbitration."²⁸ At the bottom of the inventory of Penelope Vassall's estate dated 24 June 1778 is "one negro man Named toney"—but he is not assigned a monetary value.²⁹ The inventory of John Vassall's estate included "one negro woman of about 40 years of age" (Cuba), "one negro boy about 8 years" (probably Darby), and "another negro child about three months"—again with no monetary value.³⁰ The town of Cambridge listed Tony among its "polls" in 1777, but did not tax him.³¹

²⁶ The county court decided against James, but the parties settled before an appeal was heard. Decades later, some Massachusetts partisans considered this an anti-slavery precedent, but the actual outcome is murky.

²⁷ Massachusetts Archives, 154/30, quoted in Batchelder, "Henry Vassall," 68.

²⁸ Batchelder, "Henry Vassall," 69.

²⁹ Batchelder, "Henry Vassall," 85.

³⁰ Batchelder, "Henry Vassall," 69.

³¹ Batchelder, "Henry Vassall," 69. Cato Boardman, who had served in the Cambridge militia, was listed the same way. Blacks are simply numbered, with no names, in the list reproduced in Paige, *History of Cambridge*, 444-7.

The departure of the slave-owning Vassalls had left Tony Vassall and his family in a legal limbo. They were still legally slaves, but their masters (John Vassall at least) were unwelcome in Massachusetts. That situation offered some measure of freedom, but it also threatened the loss of support in their old age and a lack of legal rights. William D. Piersen's *Black Yankees* documents how older slaves—and Tony was supposedly over sixty in 1776—distrusted masters' sudden promises of freedom because they feared lack of care. One slave in Gloucester was recalled as telling her owner:

You have had the best of me, and you and yours must have the worst. Where am I to go in sickness or old age? No, Master, your slave I am, and always will be, and I will belong to your children when you are gone; and by you and them I mean to be cared for.³²

Perhaps influenced by New England's contractual culture, these slaves argued that their bondage was a contract between them and their owners: they would work for no pay, but in return they expected to be housed and fed until they died.

Local authorities were just as eager not to see poor freed slaves becoming public burdens because that would raise local taxes. During the war, it was possible to maintain those people on the proceeds of the confiscated estates where they had worked. In 1776, among the expenses of running Thomas Oliver's farm, the Cambridge committee of correspondence listed "supporting a negro man belonging to said estate, £3.12," which came out of the £69 rent.³³ Similarly, town official Thomas Farrington recorded paying "Anthony Vassall for supporting a Negro woman & two Children (3 Years,) belonging to the Estate of sd [John] Vassall £222.3."³⁴ At the time, it appears that this Vassall family "inhabited a small tenement on Mr. John Vassal's estate and improved [i.e., farmed] a little spot of land of about one and a half acres lying adjacent."³⁵

When Massachusetts prepared to sell off John Vassall's estate to the highest bidder, Tony Vassall became concerned that his family would lose that home and their livelihood. He apparently felt that he had a claim on that estate, as if he were an unpaid creditor. He found legal help and petitioned the state legislature for compensation. This was a bold move for a man who could sign his documents only with his initial T. Vassall warned officials that that he was "an old man," his wife was "sick," and they had "a large family of children to maintain." He hoped "that they shall not be denied the sweets of freedom the remainder of their days by being reduced to the painful necessity of begging for bread"—a warning that the public might have to pay for their sustenance.³⁶

³² Piersen, *Black Yankees*, 34-5. Quotation from Parsons, *Memoir*, 17.

³³ Paige, *History of Cambridge*, 169.

³⁴ Batchelder, "Henry Vassall," 71.

³⁵ Batchelder, "Henry Vassall," 69.

³⁶ Batchelder, "Henry Vassall," 70. Later, Cuba Vassall's attorney, Lemuel Shaw, characterized Tony's original argument as: "HE was no Tory, but a *friend of liberty*; and, having lived on the estate all his life, he did not see any reason why he should be deprived of his dwelling"; *MHSP*, 4:66.

On 6 February 1781 the Massachusetts legislature passed this resolution:

Resolved, That the prayer thereof be so far granted that the committee for the sale of confiscated estates in the county of *Middlesex* be, and are hereby directed, to pay out of the proceeds of the estate of *John Vassal*, Esq; late of *Cambridge*, in the county aforesaid, absentee, the sum of *twelve pounds* in specie, or a sum in bills of credit equivalent, to the said *Anthony*, taking duplicate receipts therefor, one of which to be lodged in the Secretary's office.

And it is further *Resolved*, That there be allowed and paid out of the public treasury unto the said *Anthony*, the like *sum of twelve pounds* annually for the above purpose until the further order of this Court.

This law still referred to Anthony Vassall by his first name only, reflecting his status as a former slave.³⁷

In the following decade, Tony Vassall acquired property of his own. He bought a small house on a quarter-acre of land in 1787, a small tract nearby in 1791, and five acres in 1793.³⁸ The national tax valuation from 1798 records Anthony Vassall as owner of five acres of land valued at \$290, comprising "Home Lot / Barn 25 by 20 / Carra [carriage house?] *do.* 10 by 10."³⁹ He was known in Cambridge as a "farrier," looking after horses.⁴⁰

Tony Vassall died in 1811. He was prominent enough that the 3 September 1811 *Boston Repertory* reported: "Dead at Cambridge Mr Anthony Vassall, (A man of colour) Funeral from his late dwelling house, tomorrow afternoon, at 3 o'clock." The 7 September *Columbian Centinel* also noted the death of "Mr. Anthony Vassall, *Æt.* XCVIII [age 98]."

As Lemuel Shaw remembered, Tony's death prompted Cuba Vassall to make her own case to the government:

About 1810 (after Tony's death), Cuba, his widow, went to the State Treasurer to get her stipend; but it was found that the resolve did not include herself. Mr. Shaw, then a member of the House, presented her petition for the continuance of the grant.⁴¹

Among her arguments was that John Vassall had been her master, not her husband's.⁴² On 28 February 1812 the Massachusetts legislature passed a "Resolve on the petition of Cuby Vassall, granting an annual pension" of \$40 every February.⁴³ Cuba Vassall died of consumption in Cambridge the following 16 September.⁴⁴

³⁷ *Acts and Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1780-81* (1891), 262.

³⁸ Batchelder, "Henry Vassall," 71.

³⁹ Massachusetts Tax Valuation List for Cambridge, 1798, consulted through americanancestors.org.

⁴⁰ Batchelder, "Henry Vassall," 72.

⁴¹ MHSP, 4:66.

⁴² Batchelder, "Henry Vassall," 73-4.

⁴³ *Resolves of the General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1812*, 376.

⁴⁴ *Cambridge Vital Records*, 2:772.

2.2 DARBY VASSALL: FORMER SLAVE

A story told in the mid-nineteenth century held that one of the first people Gen. George Washington met as he came to his new headquarters was a young boy who had been born in that house as a slave. The first appearance of this encounter in print was in an article about Longfellow House published in 1871:

An anecdote is related of one of these [slaves], called Tonie Vassall, who, when Washington in 1775 took possession of Mr. Longfellow's house, was found swinging on the gate. Learning that Tonie belonged to the place, the General, to set his mind at rest for his future, told him to go into the house and they would tell him what to do and give him something to eat. Feeling the value of his freedom, Tonie inquired what would be the wages, at which Washington expressed surprise at his being so unreasonable at such a time as to expect to be paid. Tonie lived to a great age, and when on one occasion he was asked what he remembered of Washington, said he was no gentleman, he wanted [a] boy to work without wages.⁴⁵

Decades later, the Cambridge historian Samuel F. Batchelder pointed out that Tony Vassall was thought to be over sixty years old in 1775, and thus could not have been a “boy . . . swinging on the gate” that July. The long-lived former slave who told this anecdote about Washington must have been Darby Vassall (1769-1861).⁴⁶

The transmission of that anecdote is obviously hazy. Nonetheless, it probably contains a germ of truth because in nineteenth-century America George Washington was so revered that there was no advantage to making up stories that put him in a bad light. Given the risk to a poor old black man to tell such an anecdote, Darby Vassall must have been strongly motivated to do so, most likely by his memory of a difficult encounter. Vassall's unusual perspective on Washington is probably also why people recalled and repeated the tale.

Batchelder gathered more details of Darby Vassall's life from notes of the Rev. Nicholas Hoppin of Christ Church, Cambridge.⁴⁷ The former slave had told the minister that he was born in John Vassall's house in May 1769, a couple of months after Col. Henry Vassall's death—which would explain why he does not appear on the inventory of the latter's estate. Batchelder stated:

At a tender age he was “given” to George Reed of South Woburn, a recent convert to Episcopalianism and one of the group who from that distant township occasionally attended Christ Church, Cambridge. That worthy patriot, when the Revolution broke out, threw to the winds his half-assimilated Church of England principles, joined the provincial forces, marched to Bunker Hill, was there stricken by “a surfeit of heat,” and in a few days expired.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ NEHGR, 25:44-5.

⁴⁶ Batchelder, *Bits of Cambridge History*, 218-21.

⁴⁷ For these details Batchelder relied on “Hoppin MS.” then at Christ Church, Cambridge.

⁴⁸ Batchelder. *Bits of Cambridge History*, 218.

Batchelder's account appears to mix two men from Woburn named George Reed, who were father and son. The elder (1723-1804) listed himself among the town's Anglicans as early as 1752.⁴⁹ Town records state that a "Negro woman of George Reed" died on 15 May 1775 at the age of twenty, so he was definitely a slaveholder.⁵⁰ The younger George Reed, born in 1749, died soon after the Battle of Bunker Hill, with his funeral on 26 Jun 1775.⁵¹ It is conceivable that Darby accompanied the younger Reed to the siege lines as a personal servant and returned to his own family after his master was mortally wounded. In any event, Darby was apparently at the house of his birth in the following month.

In 1796 the brothers Darby and Cyrus Vassall bought a house and property in Boston covering 4,000 feet on May Street, valued two years later at \$400.⁵² Darby married Lucy Holland on 4 April 1802; she was twenty-eight years old, according to her reported age at death. On 4 December 1796 Darby had been "baptized at the table" of the Brattle Street meetinghouse, and Lucy joined the same meeting on 3 March 1805.⁵³ Cyrus married Lucy Jenkins in 1805.⁵⁴ Darby and his Lucy had these children:

William, born 30 January 1803 died young.

Charles-Ward and Rhoda-Goosby, baptized 8 July 1804 at King's Chapel.

William, born 21 April 1805, baptized 3 May at the Brattle Street meetinghouse, died 26 August of "Internal Fits."

Francis Holland, born 9 November 1806, baptized 7 December at the Brattle Street meetinghouse.

Sally Campbell or Kimball, born 18 March 1810, baptized 6 May at the Brattle Street meetinghouse.

Unnamed child born around June 1812, died 20 October 1813 at age "17 mo."

Richard Chardon, born 13 September 1814.⁵⁵

Darby Vassall apparently worked as a caterer for some of Boston's wealthy families. He built a "New Brick mansion house" on the May Street land in 1807. After his father's death, he bought out the other heirs to the family's Cambridge property and in 1827 built a new house there. Batchelder also stated that "In 1824 he was living in the household of the wealthy Samuel Brown of Boston, . . . who by will not only left him wearing apparel, fuel and

⁴⁹ Sewall, *History of Woburn*, 500.

⁵⁰ Finding Aids, Town Clerk's Office, Burlington, Massachusetts, <<http://www.burlington.org/clerk/archives/findaid/123/123m.htm>>.

⁵¹ Sewall, *History of Woburn*, 573.

⁵² Batchelder, *Bits of Cambridge History*, 220. BTR, 22:45.

⁵³ *Records of the Churches of Boston*, CD-ROM.

⁵⁴ BTR, 30:477, 276. Cyrus and Lucy Vassall were married and had their children baptized at Trinity Church; *Records of the Churches of Boston*, CD-ROM.

⁵⁵ BTR, 24:352-5. *Records of the Churches of Boston*, CD-ROM. The record of the death on 26 August 1805 reads, "A child of Derby Vassall. (black) 5 weeks Internal Fits"; this does not match with the second William's birth four months before, but Lucy could not have had another child that summer.

provisions, but also released him from a mortgage of two thousand dollars on the May Street property.”⁵⁶

Darby Vassall was active in Boston’s early civil-rights community. He and his brother Cyrus were both founding members of the African Society in 1796.⁵⁷ On 23 August 1825 he was 2nd Vice President of a banquet to celebrate the anniversary of Haitian independence, and offered this toast:

Freedom—May the freedom of Hayti be a glorious harbinger of the time when the color of a man shall no longer be a pretext for depriving him of his liberty.⁵⁸

When William Cooper Nell organized a commemoration of the Boston Massacre in 1858, highlighting African-American contributions to American liberty as part of the Abolitionist cause, he invited “Father Vassal, aged 88,” to attend as one of the event’s “living relics of the coloured population of revolutionary days.”⁵⁹ Vassall probably told the story of his encounter with Gen. Washington at events like these.

Darby Vassall made at least one visit back to the estate where he was born. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s diary for 22 March 1855 stated:

[Publisher James T.] Fields comes out to hear some parts of “Hiawatha”. Read to him the Introduction, and “The Peace Pipe.” Then we are interrupted. Lundy Lane, and old Mr. Vassal, (born a slave in this house in 1769.) come to see me, and stay so long, that Fields is driven away; and there is no [an?] end of the reading.⁶⁰

Lunsford Lane was a leader of Cambridge’s African-American community.

By that decade, Darby Vassall’s wife and most of his children were dead; Lucy had died of “dropsy” at age 54 on 11 December 1828.⁶¹ He had become dependent on the Brattle Square Church in Boston. A biographical notice of the Rev. Samuel Kirkland Lothrop, minister of that church, mentions his kindness to Vassall:

The poor old negro Darby Vassall, born in slavery, and in his latter years supported by the Brattle Square Church, of which he had been long a member, had no enjoyment equal to his not infrequent half-hour in his pastor’s study, where he was received as cordially as if he had been a stranger of distinction. Indeed, it was through his pastor’s agency, to the discomfort of some fastidious

⁵⁶ Batchelder, *Bits of Cambridge History*, 220.

⁵⁷ Grover and Da Silva, *Boston African American National Historic Site*, 76; citing the *Liberator*, 4 August 1832, which noted that Darby Vassall was the only founding member still alive.

⁵⁸ *Columbian Centinel*, 31 August 1825.

⁵⁹ Nell, *Selected Writings*, 516.

⁶⁰ Journal, September 1853–December 1855, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard. When the poet’s brother published this diary entry, he transcribed “Mr.” as “Mrs.”—an easy mistake, given the casual handwriting; Longfellow, *Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, 2:255.

⁶¹ *Records of the Churches of Boston*, CD-ROM.

pewholders, that he was brought down from his solitary place in the negro-loft above the organ, and comfortably seated beside the pulpit.⁶²

Vassall chose to be buried under Christ Church, Cambridge, however, in the tomb of the family that had held his parents captive before the Revolution. For the later years of his life he carried a statement from Catherine Russell, a granddaughter of Henry and Penelope Russell (see section 1.2), which read:

I have promised Darby Vassall that he and his family shall be placed in my grandfather's tomb under the Church in Cambridge, built by Henry Vassal & owned by me, his grand daughter, Catherine Graves Russell; in said tomb all my family now are & there I expect to be placed myself. Darby Vassal's family consists of two grandchildren and one daughter. Given him this paper by Catherine Graves Russell, this day Apr. 12th 1843.⁶³

Darby Vassall's funeral on 15 October 1861 was widely reported in Boston, for two reasons. First, there was the historic irony of it occurring one hundred years to the day after Christ Church had opened. Second, with the Civil War under way, the local press was pleased to show a Massachusetts family and church treating former slaves well.

Other death notices, including one published as far away as Philadelphia, highlighted Darby Vassall's life rather than his interment:

At Boston, Oct. 12th, Darby Vassall, aged 92 years. This worthy colored man was well known, He was born in the house in Cambridge distinguished as WASHINGTON'S Head-quarters. He was the oldest member of the Church in Brattle square, (Boston), and was universally respected for his general intelligence and excellent character.⁶⁴

2.3 CAMBRIDGE AS THE WAR BEGAN

On 19 April 1775 two columns of British soldiers marched northwest through Cambridge, one under Col. Francis Smith in the middle of the night and the other under Col. Percy in the morning. They did not pass the Vassall estates, but took the Lexington road. By the time those soldiers returned in the late afternoon, the Revolutionary War had begun. Provincial militiamen were firing at the regular troops. Most Cambridge men had reported to

⁶² MHSP, 23:169.

⁶³ Transcript of Edward Doubleday Harris to Samuel F. Batchelder, Jr., 21 April 1862, in Folder E-07-7, "Vassall Tomb closing--1865," archives of Christ Church, Cambridge. Harris reported that this text came from a copy owned by "Mrs. C. P. Curtis, 19 Mt. Vernon St. Boston"—probably Margaret Stevenson Curtis (1811-1888), wife of a prominent attorney and abolitionist. Darby Vassall's daughter and grandchildren were not interred in the Vassall tomb before it was closed. According to Amory, Darby Vassall received the promise of space in the Vassall tomb from "one in whose employment he had been and whose wife's uncle had married Henry Vassall's daughter"—i.e., the husband of a niece of Dr. Charles Russell; NEHGR, 25:45. Perhaps that person provided Vassall with an introduction to Catherine Russell.

⁶⁴ *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 5 November 1861.

their militia companies or fled with the women and children.⁶⁵ Again, the redcoats did not approach the Vassall farms, but some of the provincials chasing them probably traveled east along the Watertown road into Cambridge center.

By the evening of 19 April Cambridge was full of armed men. It was the last town before Charlestown, where the British column had found safety under the protection of Royal Navy warships. Cambridge was also unusual in having many large buildings where militiamen could sleep overnight: the halls of Harvard College, two churches rather than the usual one, and some large mansions abandoned by their owners. However, there is no evidence that visitors took advantage of the John Vassall house that night; the only people probably living on that property, Tony and Cuba Vassall's family, left no account of the aftermath of the Battle of Lexington and Concord.

The leaders of Massachusetts scrambled to take control of the situation. Massachusetts general William Heath (see section 4.8) was the highest-ranking officer in the field that day, directing some of the last parts of the fight with Dr. Joseph Warren of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress's Committee of Safety. But the militia companies had really responded on their own. As in the Powder Alarm the previous September (see section 1.4), men had mustered in their town companies and marched without receiving explicit instructions from their commanders, much less the civil authorities.

Gen. Artemas Ward (see section 4.4), who had been sick on the day of the alarm, rode into Cambridge to take command of the army on 20 April. He made his headquarters in the house of Jonathan Hastings, beside the college.⁶⁶ By 24 April the Committee of Safety was also meeting in "their chamber, at Mr. Steward Hastings's house."⁶⁷ Jonathan Hastings (1709-1783) had been Harvard College's steward since 1750. This job was not a servile role, but an important administrative responsibility. Hastings was a Harvard graduate, justice of the peace, and son-in-law of the Rev. John Cotton of Newton.⁶⁸ His house was substantial—though it would soon seem crowded.

One of the first challenges of that command was finding a way to house the Massachusetts soldiers near enough to Boston and Charlestown to ensure the British troops did not come out again. Lessons at Harvard College were "broken up" and did not resume until 1 October, when the whole institution had moved to Concord.⁶⁹ In January 1776 the Continental Army counted 1,520 soldiers housed in three college buildings.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Hannah Winthrop to Mercy Warren, [April or May 1775], MHSC, 73:409-11; also printed in MHSP, 14:29-31. Cleary, *Elizabeth Murray*, 171.

⁶⁶ Martyn, *Artemas Ward*, 89-91. The Hastings house, later the boyhood home of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., was where Harvard's Littauer Hall now stands.

⁶⁷ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 521.

⁶⁸ CSMP, 10:55, 14:24. A capsule biography of Hastings as a member of the Harvard class of 1730 appears in Sibley's *Harvard Graduates*.

⁶⁹ *New-England Chronicle or Essex Gazette*, 7 September 1775; Shattuck, *Concord*, 120.

⁷⁰ *American Archives*, series 4, 4:844.

Other, sparse evidence suggests that companies stayed in taverns and the homes of people who supported the Patriot cause. Samuel Haws of Wrentham kept a journal of the first days of the war which described stopping at such places for refreshment (and in one case to haze suspected Tories). His company ended up at “Mr. Slaks house” in Roxbury—the home of John Slack and his family—and remained there through June.⁷¹ A member of Col. John Stark’s New Hampshire alarm company remembered that they gathered at a tavern in Medford.⁷²

According to an 1836 account, when Capt. Benedict Arnold arrived in Cambridge with the Connecticut Footguards in response to the Lexington alarm, “they took up their quarters at a splendid mansion owned by Lieut. Governor Oliver, who was obliged to flee on account of his attachment to the British cause.”⁷³ There is no other documentation of militia troops taking over an empty Loyalist house in Cambridge in April 1775. They may have kept away from those mansions out of respect for private property and a lingering sense of social deference. The houses along the Watertown road may also have been too far from the crucial areas to be useful. Alternatively, militia companies might have slept in or even looted those mansions, and there was simply no one around to complain.

Troops did camp on the Ralph Inman estate east of the Cambridge town center, closer to the British positions. Inman himself was in Boston, but his wife Elizabeth—a substantial property-owner in her own right, due to her businesses and previous marriage—was managing the farm with relatives and servants. The provincial headquarters sent an officer to check on her, and by 27 April Gen. Israel Putnam (see section 4.6) had come to visit. Elizabeth Inman turned over part of her house to militiamen guarding the approaches from the river. Then one of the Inman slaves, a man named Job, described his mistress as a Tory, and the troops responded by refusing to let her visit her husband at the lines, presumably out of fear she might pass on sensitive information. To further mollify the soldiers, Inman turned over more of her kitchen, rooms, and other resources. She also sought help from Putnam, who provided a written pass, a small guard, and by mid-May his own son Daniel to keep her secure.⁷⁴

There are also examples of provincials menacing private citizens in late April, apparently without official orders. A musket-carrying man threatened Christian Barnes of Marlborough, whose Loyalist husband had left town; he demanded dinner and tried to take a horse, claiming to act on behalf of the militia but not showing any paperwork.⁷⁵ In early May Gen. Ward complained to the Committee of Safety about specific men in Roxbury seizing

⁷¹ Lyon and Haws, *Military Journals*, 51-2, 54, 60.

⁷² Stark, *Gen. John Stark*, 29.

⁷³ Barber, *Connecticut Historical Collections*, 168.

⁷⁴ Cleary, *Elizabeth Murray*, 174-6.

⁷⁵ Cleary, *Elizabeth Murray*, 174.

guns from citizens; he was upset that they were acting in his name without his authorization.⁷⁶

One reason the militiamen might not have taken over the John Vassall house in April 1775 is that a lot of them began going home. They had come out with enough supplies for only a day or two, and the immediate emergency appeared to have passed. The Massachusetts Provincial Congress discussed the major step of creating an official army with soldiers enlisted through the end of the year. On 23 April Gen. Ward sent a plea to the congress:

My situation is such, that if I have not enlisting orders immediately, I shall be left here all alone. It is impossible to keep the men here, excepting something be done. I therefore pray that the plan may be completed and handed to me this morning, that you, gentlemen of the Congress, issue orders for enlisting men.⁷⁷

The congress responded immediately, even on a Sunday. Massachusetts's *de facto* government approved enlisting 13,600 men right away, with an eye toward an army of 30,000.⁷⁸ Some of the militiamen already on the front lines, like John Stark's New Hampshire regiment and Samuel Haws and many of his comrades, agreed to form parts of this new army. In towns across the colony, leading Patriots began to sign up soldiers; any man who enlisted enough captains and soldiers to fill a 598-man regiment could be a colonel.⁷⁹ These new Massachusetts regiments, and similar units from the other three New England colonies, started to arrive in Cambridge and the other front-line towns in early May. With due deliberation the Provincial Congress appointed Joseph Pearse Palmer as quartermaster general, John Pigeon as commissary general, Asa Whitcomb as muster master, and other administrators necessary to provide food and drink, sanitary facilities, clothing, gunpowder, and further military supplies.⁸⁰

2.4 THE HOUSING CRUNCH

Those new soldiers also needed long-term housing—not just a night or two in an inn or the house of an indulgent farmer, but barracks where they could stay until the royal troops left Boston or surrendered. Some regiments, such as Col. Ebenezer Larnard's, came with tents, which would offer shelter for at least the summer months.⁸¹ But others did not; the Connecticut council of war was still discussing how to supply Gen. Putnam's regiment with tents on 19 June, and believed that their commissary general could buy cloth and hire "some

⁷⁶ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 206.

⁷⁷ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 148. Martyn, *Artemas Ward*, 94. Other sources, including Frothingham, *Siege of Boston*, 93; *American Archives*, series 4, 2:384; and Smith, "Rise of Artemas Ward," 225, date this letter on 24 April.

⁷⁸ *American Archives*, series 4, 2:765.

⁷⁹ Martyn, *Artemas Ward*, 95.

⁸⁰ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 530, 362, 208.

⁸¹ MHSP, 14:285, 15:82. But note that Larnard's men soon had a barracks to sweep out.

of the poor tent-makers escaped from Boston”—just when other units would be wanting the same things.⁸² That need for shelter made the provincial troops take a new look at nearly empty estates like John Vassall’s.

On 2 May the Committee of Safety recorded the first signs of “persons unknown”—but almost certainly soldiers—entering the mansions along the Watertown road. They were not looking for treasure or beds:

The quarter master general having informed that some persons unknown had made spoil of liquors in the cellars of General Brattle, and Mr. Borland, and others, whereupon, *Voted*, that he be directed to take possession of those liquors, and other stores, immediately, in all the houses which are deserted, and that a particular account of such stores be taken, and that they be then committed to the care of the commissary general.⁸³

The William Brattle and John Borland houses were the most accessible, near the center of Cambridge and the college. It is possible that John Vassall’s cellar was among the “others” that people had entered. In any event, the committee’s order empowered the military authorities to search “all the houses which are deserted.”

Only the next day did the committee vote:

That the quarter master general be directed to pay the strictest attention, that the household furniture of those persons, who have taken refuge in the town of Boston, may be properly secured, and disposed of in places of safety.⁸⁴

And the day after that, the committee told a colonel “to take possession of all the arms and ammunition that he shall find in Mr. Borland’s house, and bring them to head quarters.” There the quartermaster or a member of the Committee on Supplies appraised the weapons and noted down their value, leaving compensation for later.⁸⁵

New Hampshire records indicate that six weeks before the Battle of Bunker Hill, or in the first week of May, Col. John Stark’s regiment started to use the resources “at Colonl. Royall’s.”⁸⁶ Stark’s descendants offered this understanding of how he came to be in that Medford mansion:

a gentleman named “Royal,” who, on retiring to the city, had left his lady, with a family of beautiful and accomplished daughters, in possession of his abode. The mansion being conveniently situated for his “head quarters,” Colonel Stark called upon the family, and proposed, if agreeable to them, his occupancy of a few rooms for that purpose; to which Madame Royal most cheerfully assented, being

⁸² *American Archives*, series 4, 2:1038.

⁸³ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 532.

⁸⁴ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 534.

⁸⁵ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 538; guns from Borland’s house are mentioned on 540 and 567. “Two small arms” were taken from the Brattle house: 562.

⁸⁶ *New Hampshire, Provincial and State Papers*, 7:598.

well aware that the presence of an officer of his rank would afford her family and premises the best protection against any possible insult or encroachment⁸⁷

However, Isaac Royall's "lady" had died in 1770, and his daughters all married before the war.⁸⁸ Stark probably just invoked military necessity and moved in.

By 13 May Col. Stark had possession of "provisions and [a] chest of medicines belonging to Madam Vassal." Penelope Vassall had probably sent these things to her brother's house in Medford. She asked the Patriot authorities to let her goods, probably including some at her Cambridge home, be moved into Boston. The provincial government agreed that "the other packages may pass," but the food and medicines were too important to give up.⁸⁹

As more New England troops arrived, they began filling more Loyalist houses. On 12 May according to the diary of Pvt. Caleb Haskell, his company from Newburyport "arrived at Cambridge at half after 11 o'clock; [and] took our quarters at Bolin's (a tory) house."⁹⁰ Five days later, Pvt. Nathaniel Ober recorded that his unit enjoyed "good Quarters" at "Judge Lees house at Cambridge."⁹¹ On 30 May Pvt. Samuel Haws recorded "Captain Ponds company moved to comodore Lorings house" in Jamaica Plain.⁹²

The journal of Lt. Col. Experience Storrs of Connecticut shows how impromptu this quartering could be. On 2 June 1775 he had led an unspecified number of companies as far as Waltham. Storrs and one lieutenant went ahead into Cambridge to look at "Col. Lee's house, where we expected to have tarried"—apparently the house that Joseph Lee had vacated on the Watertown road and that Pvt. Ober's company was enjoying. Storrs "found 3 companies" already there. The lieutenant colonel proceeded to headquarters to consult with his Connecticut commander, Gen. Putnam; "he came with us to our proposed quarters, looked for accommodations for my companies."

The next day, Storrs wrote, Putnam conducted the regiment "to the house of Mr. Fairweather, where we make our quarters." Thomas Fayerweather (see section 1.6) was not home at the time. Over the next four days Storrs kept busy attending Sunday service on Cambridge common, viewing the fortifications, learning the routine of the camp, and fighting off a "bad cough." On 8 June the regiment's unwitting host appeared, presumably from a retreat to the west:

Mr. Fairweather came home last night out of humor as they tell me. No wonder, his house filled up with soldiers, and perhaps his interest suffers as it really must. Sent for me, yet appears to act the part of a gentleman.

⁸⁷ Stark, *Gen. John Stark*, 348.

⁸⁸ NEHGR, 39:355-7.

⁸⁹ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 544.

⁹⁰ "Bolin" was how Haskell heard the name "Borland." Quoted in Roberts, *March to Quebec*, 460.

⁹¹ Nathaniel Ober diary, Massachusetts Historical Society; page images and transcription visible at <http://www.masshist.org/online/siege/doc-viewer.php?item_id=1900>.

⁹² Lyon and Haws, *Military Journals*, 56.

Storrs's diary entry for the next day offers a whiff of daily life in Fayerweather's house: "my company uneasy for want of beer and soap for washing; many visitors from Windham" back home.⁹³

A Norwich, Connecticut, soldier stated how many men were sleeping in just one Cambridge house that spring:

There is about 250 soldiers in this House, and we are not much crowded, but I wish they were out, all except our company. This building that we are in belonged to one of the Tories, but he has gone and left this building for us. It is the finest and largest building in town...⁹⁴

Such housing was usually spartan, with the household furnishings moved or stored away; the best rooms and beds would have been reserved for officers. Former fifer John Greenwood recalled enlisting in late May 1775 in a company "quartered in the house of the Episcopal minister, who, with his family, had deserted it at an early period of the disturbances and gone into Boston. . . ." This veteran wrote:

There we stayed; to call it living was out of the question, for we had to sleep in our clothes upon the bare floor. I do not recollect that I even had a blanket, but I remember well the stone which I had to lay my head upon.⁹⁵

The provincial army also continued to use public buildings. On 17 June Capt. John Chester wrote, his Connecticut company "were in the church for barracks"—the now unused Christ Church. He himself was apparently in separate "lodgings"—a typical arrangement for armies of the time.⁹⁶ The next day, Samuel Haws's company was sent from Roxbury to Cambridge to reinforce positions there. He wrote, "we reached their about twelve o'clock at night and Lodged in the meeting house until break of day being Sunday we turned out."⁹⁷ Cambridge's Congregationalists still needed their place of worship.⁹⁸

The Battle of Bunker Hill prompted the military authorities to order more regiments into Cambridge. It also sent another alarm through the civilian population, prompting more families to leave. Elizabeth Inman moved out to Brush Hill, a larger estate she owned in Milton. Gen. Putnam then took over her Cambridge house as his headquarters, with Col.

⁹³ MHSP, 14:84-5.

⁹⁴ Asa Fitch to Theophilus Fitch, date unknown, Cambridge, printed in *Historical Magazine*, 3 :7. Fitch's other letters indicate that his company reached Cambridge before the fight on Noddle's Island in late May 1775. His undated letter does not offer enough clues to suggest which large Cambridge house he stayed in.

⁹⁵ Greenwood, *Revolutionary Services*, 9. As noted in section 1.7, the Rev. Winwood Sarjeant and his family had not gone into Boston but headed to New Hampshire. Greenwood later settled in New York and became Washington's favorite dentist.

⁹⁶ John Chester to Rev. Joseph Fish (?), 22 July 1775, in Frothingham, *Siege of Boston*, 391.

⁹⁷ Lyon and Haws, *Military Journals*, 58.

⁹⁸ The Cambridge first parish's meetinghouse was on the present site of Harvard's Lehman Hall.

Sergeant's regiment on the grounds.⁹⁹ By January 1776 an inventory of available barracks listed this property as "26 rooms, will hold twenty men each; Mr. Inman's house for officers."¹⁰⁰

The New England army thus started using abandoned Loyalist houses before the Massachusetts authorities made any formal move to confiscate those properties. On 22 May that congress urged "that no person within this colony shall take any deed, lease, or conveyance whatever, of the lands, houses, or estates of" mandamus Councilors and other supporters of the royal government.¹⁰¹ That meant Loyalists could not sign over their properties to friends in the countryside or people moving out of Boston, who might then put up a fuss about the army using the houses. But that was as far as the congress went before summer.

2.5 THE COMMITTEE OF SAFETY AND THE VASSALL ESTATE

The first clear evidence that there were soldiers stationed in the John Vassall house appears in the records of the Committee of Safety for 15 May 1775:

Voted, That the quarter master general be directed to remove as many of the three companies now at Mr. Borland's, to the house of Doct. Kneeland, as the house can accommodate, and that the three companies at Mr. Vassal's house, be placed at Mr. Foxcroft's house, and that Mr. Borland's house be cleared and cleansed as soon as possible.¹⁰²

In the new provincial army, companies were supposed to number fifty-nine men.¹⁰³ That figure included officers, and not all units were at full strength, but three companies would mean about 150 men squeezed into the Vassall house.

The Committee of Safety's 15 May order explains why it had decided to move those soldiers out. It had resolved that "Mr. Borland's house be appropriated for the use of the committee of safety." The committee was still doing its business at Gen. Ward's "Head-quarters," but the Hastings house was probably getting crowded. That first order stated no plan for using the Vassall house. However, toward the end of the day the committee voted "That the clearing Mr. Borland's and Mr. Vassal's houses be suspended till further orders."¹⁰⁴ Committee members may have decided they did not have enough authority to give those orders, or at least not enough to overcome objections from the army or practical obstacles.

⁹⁹ Cleary, *Elizabeth Murray*, 181-2.

¹⁰⁰ *American Archives*, series 4, 4:844.

¹⁰¹ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 249.

¹⁰² Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 548-9. Kneeland's house then held part of the Middlesex County probate records, and Foxcroft's the "records of the county," so all those papers were to be moved to yet another home.

¹⁰³ Martyn, *Artemas Ward*, 95.

¹⁰⁴ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 548-9.

The next action came at a higher level. On 19 May the entire Provincial Congress set up a committee “for providing a house for the abode of Joseph Trumbull, Esq., of Connecticut, and another for the chairman and the other members of the committee of safety.”¹⁰⁵ Trumbull was the commissary general for the troops from Connecticut, as well as the son of that colony’s governor (see section 5.4). The committee suggested that Trumbull use the Borland house and the Committee of Safety use the Vassall house, “as soon as General *Ward* shall provide for the soldiers in said houses in some other places.”¹⁰⁶ The Committee of Safety followed up with a resolution on the same day “that the quarter master general be directed to clear the said [Vassall] house, immediately, of the soldiers now lodged there,” so that it could move in.¹⁰⁷

On 19-20 May the Provincial Congress elected a new Committee of Safety—though really it reelected many members already serving on that committee or the Committee on Supplies. The first member named, who usually served as chairman, was John Hancock, but he was in Philadelphia. The next was Dr. Joseph Warren, followed by Dr. Benjamin Church; they were thus probably the acting chairmen.¹⁰⁸ On the next day Congress enlarged the powers of this committee, giving it formal authority to direct the Massachusetts army.

Did this Committee of Safety actually use the John Vassall house as its base of operations? That property was on the road between Gen. Ward’s headquarters and the Watertown buildings where the Provincial Congress and Committee of Supplies were meeting.¹⁰⁹ But the committee’s incomplete records end in July 1775 without providing an answer. Correspondence from the committee is datelined simply “Cambridge.”¹¹⁰ Pvt. Haskell’s diary confirms that his company left the Borland house on 19 May: “We removed from Bolin’s to Wigglesworth’s”—the house of Harvard professor Edward Wigglesworth.¹¹¹ That makes it more likely that the soldiers in John Vassall’s house also moved. But it is conceivable that the army could not find suitable new quarters for those three companies. It is also possible that they vacated some of the rooms, but not others.

By mid-June, the Committee of Safety realized that its army needed a better solution to the housing crunch. On 13 June it

¹⁰⁵ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 240.

¹⁰⁶ *American Archives*, series 4, 2:811.

¹⁰⁷ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 557.

¹⁰⁸ Other members were Benjamin White, Joseph Palmer of Braintree, Richard Devens of Charlestown, Abraham Watson of Cambridge, John Pigeon of Newton (formerly of Cambridge), Azor Orne of Marblehead, Benjamin Greenleaf, Nathan Cushing, Samuel Holten, and Enoch Freeman. Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 240.

¹⁰⁹ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 570.

¹¹⁰ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 571.

¹¹¹ Quoted in Roberts, *March to Quebec*, 459-60. Wigglesworth’s house was across the road from Borland’s on land now under Harvard’s Widener Library. On 21 June, Wigglesworth lodged with the Rev. John Marrett of Burlington; Hurd, *History of Middlesex County*, 1:676.

earnestly recommended to the honorable Congress, that the representations from the quarter master general, be taken into immediate consideration, especially as the committee, from their own knowledge, find the rooms too much crowded, and the healths and lives of the soldiers thereby greatly exposed; and if tents cannot be immediately furnished, that some barracks be forthwith erected.¹¹²

The next day, the Provincial Congress created a committee to consider “providing tents or barracks for the army at Cambridge” (Another committee was formed “to consider the propriety of supplying the generals of the Massachusetts army at Cambridge and Roxbury, with some necessary household furniture.”)¹¹³

Then came the Battle of Bunker Hill. The Committee of Safety’s chairman, Dr. Warren, was killed. The army suddenly needed hospitals for the wounded. The British advance also provoked a new sense of alarm, so the committee ordered more troops into Cambridge, which in turn meant a need for more housing. On 28 June Gen. Ward ordered “That Lieut.-Colonel [William] Bond occupy one room, in the south-east corner of Col. Vassall’s house, upon the second floor, for the sick belonging to said regiment, till a convenient place can be procured elsewhere for the above-said purpose.”¹¹⁴ This was the regiment of Col. Thomas Gardner, then dying from a wound at Bunker Hill; its men came from Cambridge and nearby towns. On 5 July the Provincial Congress approved Dr. Abraham Watson, Jr. (1752-1804), of Cambridge as surgeon of that regiment and Dr. William Vinal (1752-1781) of Watertown as his mate.¹¹⁵ Watson and Vinal, classmates in the Harvard class of 1771, had probably been treating the men in the Vassall house. Watson’s father had served alongside Col. Gardner in several political roles, including the provincial Committee of Safety.¹¹⁶ It is not clear how all the other rooms of the mansion were being used at this

2.6 THE MARBLEHEAD REGIMENT TIME.

Gen. Washington’s account book contains this entry for 15 July 1775:

To Cash paid for cleaning the House wch/ was provided for my Quarters & wch. had been occupied by the Marblehd. Regimt.¹¹⁷

¹¹² Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 566.

¹¹³ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 322-3.

¹¹⁴ MHSP, 15:112.

¹¹⁵ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 449. *American Archives*, series 4, 2:1481. For profiles of the young doctors, see *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, 17:654, 670. Eliot, *History of Cambridge*, 90.

¹¹⁶ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 78, 240, 679-80. Drake, *History of Middlesex*, 1:106, 339.

¹¹⁷ Page in Washington’s expense notebook visible at <<http://memory.loc.gov/mss/mgw/mgw5/116/1800/1805.jpg>>, and reproduced in Washington and Kitman, *George Washington’s Expense Account*, 42.

That is the sole evidence that soldiers from Marblehead were in the John Vassall house in the summer of 1775. Presumably there were at least three companies inside. More may have stayed in tents on the grounds, but it is impossible to say.

The Marblehead regiment had started the year, as the *Essex Gazette* reported it, “upon the respectable American Establishment.” Its members had voted for officers who owed no allegiance or favors to the royal governor and supported the Patriot cause. In fact, they chose the same officers as before, but now those gentlemen’s authority came from the bottom up, with no connection to the “new-fangled” government. The commanders were Col. Jeremiah Lee, Lt. Col. Azor Orne, Lt. Col. John Glover, Maj. John Gerry, and Maj. William Russell Lee of the “train,” or artillery company.¹¹⁸

In 1765 Marblehead had just under five thousand inhabitants, making it the second-largest town in Massachusetts and the sixth-largest in British North America.¹¹⁹ It was populous enough to field an entire regiment within the Essex County militia. Marblehead stood out from typical Massachusetts towns. Its economy depended more on fishing and shipping than on farming, and since its founding it had attracted immigrants more interested in making a good living at sea than in building a Puritan religious community. Along with its neighbors Salem, Beverly, and Gloucester, Marblehead had been early to protest the enforcement of British customs law—the region revived tarring and feathering before that public punishment spread to Boston—but had not been so fervent about other grievances. Parliament may have hoped that the Boston Port Bill would make Salem and Marblehead grateful to take over Boston’s transatlantic business; instead, in 1774 the towns became more militant, and the region became a center for gathering and smuggling in military equipment.

Col. Lee was a leader of the Massachusetts Committee of Supplies, which was responsible for gathering that matériel. Lt. Col. Orne served on the Committee of Safety, along with the Marblehead merchant Elbridge Gerry. Two other wealthy merchants, Jonathan Glover and Joshua Orne, represented Marblehead in the Provincial Congress.¹²⁰ Those political responsibilities meant the leadership of the town’s militia regiment fell to its third-in-command, John Glover (1732-1797)—especially when Lee took sick after hiding (probably unnecessarily) from British army officers on 18-19 April and died on 10 May.

Col. Glover was a shoemaker, ship owner, and trader. He had married Hannah Gale on 30 October 1755 and their first child was born five months later on 23 March—a common circumstance for New England couples in the 1700s. Eventually they had eleven children.¹²¹ John Glover had been an officer in the Marblehead militia since 1759 and a member of the Marblehead Committee of Correspondence starting in December 1772.¹²² In November 1774 he bought a wharf across the bay in Beverly, which may have been used to bring in

¹¹⁸ *Essex Gazette*, 24 January 1775.

¹¹⁹ Billias, *John Glover*, 27.

¹²⁰ Billias, *John Glover*, 20. Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 8, 78, 274.

¹²¹ Billias, *John Glover*, 22-3.

¹²² Billias, *John Glover*, 22, 31-2.

proscribed military goods and certainly became a base of American naval operations later in 1775 (see chapter 12).

After the war began and the Provincial Congress resolved to raise an army enlisted through the end of the year, Glover set out to organize a regiment. Diary entries printed in *The Marblehead Register* in 1830 provide a glimpse of his activity. On 22 May 1775 the diarist wrote, “Drums and fifes go about town; fishermen enlisting for Continental Army.” There was a Royal Navy schooner in the harbor, and on 30 May a rumor spread through town: “soldiers said to be landing at the ferry; Glover with the Regiment turn out; himself with a short jacket on; alarm false.” A week later, on 6 June, Glover’s 45-ton schooner *Hannah* arrived from the Caribbean. He had himself rowed out to meet his ship. At the same time, the naval sloop *Merlin* launched a barge with an officer demanding that the schooner stop and be searched. Glover shouted to his captain to keep sailing, “and so run her into Gerry’s wharf; much people collected to see the fray.”¹²³

On 2 June “Colonel Glover, and the sons of the late worthy Colonel Lee, of Marblehead,” came to Cambridge with a bag of mail which the London government had sent in one of Lee’s schooners. Newspapers reported, “In the bag are letters from administration to General Gage, the Admiral, and to almost all the tories in Boston.” That correspondence dated from early April, but might still have contained valuable intelligence.¹²⁴

The Provincial Congress granted John Glover a commission in its new army on 8 June.¹²⁵ A week later it certified that:

Col. Glover has levied ten companies, making in the whole 505 men, inclusive of officers, and about three quarters of the said number armed with effective firelocks; who are willing and choose to serve in the said army, under him the said Glover; all now at Marblehead¹²⁶

The congress certified four other colonels at the same time, though two of them had enlisted under 400 men. Those four regiments were all on the siege lines, but the Committee of Safety had decided that “for the safety of this colony said [Glover’s] regiment should continue for the present at said Marblehead.”¹²⁷ A regiment stationed there could discourage British raids on the province’s biggest Patriot port.

After the Battle of Bunker Hill, however, those orders changed. Gen. Ward summoned troops to the front, fearing another push by the besieged British. The Marblehead

¹²³ “Marblehead Reminiscences,” *Marblehead Register*, 17 April 1830, reprinted in Upham, *Memoir of Glover*, 4-6. The original publication has not been located. The diary shows some signs of being edited to insert significant events elsewhere, but its entries of local events seem authentic. Pierce, *Foster Genealogy*, 2:732, quotes Robert S. Rantoul of Salem as identifying the diary’s author as “Dr. Slory,” perhaps Dr. Elisha Story of Marblehead.

¹²⁴ Item datelined “New-London, June 9,” in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 21 June 1775.

¹²⁵ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 314.

¹²⁶ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 338.

¹²⁷ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 562.

diarist wrote: “June. 21st. A general muster in town; orders came for the Regiment to march. June 22nd. The Regiment march for Cambridge.”¹²⁸ Azor Orne, once a Marblehead militia officer and now busy on the Committee of Safety, might have helped to obtain quarters for his townsmen. Historian George Athan Billias wrote, “For a brief time Glover’s men lived in luxury. Upon their arrival they were billeted in the handsome mansion of the wealthy Loyalist, John Vassall.”¹²⁹ However, if the Vassall house had been stripped as clean as the minister’s home where John Greenwood slept (see section 2.4), it was a crowded, empty shell. As noted above, within a week one room was assigned to the sick of another regiment.

The History and Traditions of Marblehead contains a complete roll of the Marblehead regiment, undated but apparently from the second half of 1775. It then contained 584 men, all but seven listed as coming from Marblehead. One private appears as “Romeo, a negro,” and there may have been other men of color as well.¹³⁰ The Rev. William Bentley, an adolescent Harvard student in 1775, recalled of this regiment:

They were chiefly seamen, a hardy race, but most extravagantly eccentric & sportful. . . . The men were not vitious, but all the time in motion, inventing & contriving amusements & tricks. I was frequently among them when at Cambridge.¹³¹

Like most soldiers in the first Continental Army, Col. Glover’s men were not dressed in uniforms, but their civilian clothing made most of them stand out from the farmers who filled other regiments. In about 1845 Israel Trask, who had been a ten-year-old boy helping his father in the Cambridge camp, recalled the Marblehead regiment wearing “round jackets and fishers’ trousers.”¹³² In May 1776 officers in Glover’s regiment advertised in the *New-England Chronicle* for some enlisted men who had run away, and those ads described what the men had been wearing when last seen:

Silas Sawen: “a light-colored coat, with red lapels, buck-skin breeches, blue stockings.”

Phineas Goodale: “wears a white cap, frock and trowsers.”¹³³

John Holmes: “a blue coat, with leather buttons, tarred trowsers, and had on his back four blankets.”¹³⁴

¹²⁸ Upham, *Memoir of Glover*, 5. Billias, *John Glover*, 67.

¹²⁹ Billias, *John Glover*, 68.

¹³⁰ Roads, *History and Traditions of Marblehead*, 393-404. There are other renditions of the officers’ roll, differing mostly because of the flexibility of eighteenth-century spelling and the challenge of transcribing it. One lieutenant is variously called Sinecross, Signcross, and Lignerass.

¹³¹ Bentley, *Diary*, 4:529.

¹³² Dann, *The Revolution Remembered*, 408-9. Benson J. Lossing did not provide a source for this often-repeated statement: “The uniform of these men, until they were attached to the Continental line, consisted of blue round jackets and trowsers, trimmed with leather buttons”; Lossing, *Pictorial Field-Book*, 2:606.

¹³³ *New-England Chronicle*, 9 May 1776.

¹³⁴ *New-England Chronicle*, 30 May 1776.

Long baggy trousers, rather than breeches, and clothing treated with tar, to resist water, were maritime garments.

Tradition holds that the colonel himself was known for his handsome dress. At the end of the siege, when he left for New York, his wardrobe included:

two broadcloth coats, one of which was fully trimmed with silver lace and faced with velvet, eight shirts from Holland, ten jackets of various shades and materials, six pairs of breeches, and pure silver buckles for his shoes and stockings.¹³⁵

Besides Col. Glover, the regiment's top officers in June 1775 were:

John Gerry, Lieut.-Colonel.
Gabriel Johonnot, Major.
Caleb Gibbs, Adjutant [see section 5.10].
Nathaniel Bond, Surgeon.
Nathaniel Harrington, Surgeon's Mate.
Joseph Stacy, Quartermaster.¹³⁶

Gerry was with the regiment at least through 30 June, when he served as officer of the day.¹³⁷ He departed sometime that summer, creating an opening for Johonnot to become lieutenant-colonel and William Russell Lee to rejoin these men as a major by 15 July. (As late as 23 June Lee had been wrestling with whether to serve under Glover or, as the Committee of Safety had invited him to do, to take command of an artillery company.)¹³⁸

On 2 July 1775 the Committee of Safety recorded:

One hundred small arms were delivered Col. Glover, for the use of his regiment, amounting, as by appraisal, to one hundred ninety-two pounds eleven shillings, which guns he engaged should be returned in good order, unless lost in the service of this colony, as by his receipt in the minute book.¹³⁹

This was one of the committee's largest assignments of firearms, and meant that nearly the entire regiment was armed. The following year, the colonel Glover classified his soldiers' weapons as "old ones," "ordinary Cambridge," and "King's arms."¹⁴⁰

That same day, Gen. Washington arrived in Cambridge, and the next afternoon the commander issued his first orders for the Marblehead regiment:

It is ordered that Col. Glover's Regt. be ready this evening, with all their accoutrements, to march at a minute's warning to support Gen. Folsom of the New Hampshire Forces, in case his lines should be attacked.

It is also ordered that Col. Prescott's Regiment equip themselves to march this evening & take possession of the woods leading to Lechmere's Point, and, in

¹³⁵ Billias, *John Glover*, 70.

¹³⁶ MHSP, 15:85-6. Upham, *Memoir of Glover*, 6.

¹³⁷ MHSP, 15:112.

¹³⁸ Lee, *Colonel William Raymond Lee*, 11. *American Archives*, series 4, 2:775.

¹³⁹ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 584.

¹⁴⁰ Billias, *John Glover*, 70.

case of an attack there, Col. Glover's Regiment to march immediately to their support.¹⁴¹

Soon Washington and the Massachusetts Provincial Congress agreed that the John Vassall house would be his headquarters (see section 3.9). Whatever companies of Glover's regiment were living inside had to leave. According to Bentley, "This regiment was stationed at the [Ship] tavern one mile from Cambridge towards West Cambridge or Menotomy."¹⁴²

2.7 JOSEPH SMITH: KEEPER OF THE VASSALL ESTATE

On 27 May 1775 the Committee of Safety issued these instructions:

Joseph Smith, keeper of John Vassal, Esq's farm, had orders to secure any creatures that might be put into his inclosures by ill-disposed persons, and to inform the committee thereof.¹⁴³

Identifying an eighteenth-century man with such a common name as Joseph Smith is often impossible, but in this case an important clue appears in the same committee's orders for 6 July, which refer to "Joseph and Parsons Smith."¹⁴⁴ The latter name is uncommon, and allows a likely identification of these two men.

Joseph and Parsons Smith were brothers, born in Cambridge of Ebenezer and Ann (Bissel) Smith. Joseph was baptized on 2 July 1740 and Parsons on 2 January 1743.¹⁴⁵ They both served in the Massachusetts military during the French and Indian War.¹⁴⁶ By 1775 both had married and fathered children.¹⁴⁷ Parsons Smith's name appears in Gen. Washington's headquarters accounts on bills for milk dated 12 March and 3 April 1776.¹⁴⁸ He also appears as "Person Smith" on a list of Cambridge polls in 1777.¹⁴⁹ It therefore seems likely that Joseph and Parsons Smith were yeoman farmers who lived in Cambridge near the Vassall farm, and that the provincial authorities assigned Joseph to look after that property.

On 10 June 1775 someone from the Committee of Safety, possibly after a trip out to the Provincial Congress in Watertown, observed that pastures had not been mowed. The committee enacted this resolution:

¹⁴¹ Upham, *Memoir of Glover*, 41.

¹⁴² Bentley, *Diary*, 4:529. This tavern has been identified as what was later called the Davenport Tavern, taken down to make room for St. James's Episcopal Church.

¹⁴³ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 558.

¹⁴⁴ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 587.

¹⁴⁵ *Cambridge Vital Records*, 1:651-2. Joseph and Parson's father was not the Ebenezer Smith who owned lots of real estate in Little Cambridge at this time.

¹⁴⁶ Paige, *History of Cambridge*, 405.

¹⁴⁷ *Cambridge Vital Records*, 1:649-52, 2:361.

¹⁴⁸ George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 5 Financial Papers, Revolutionary War Accounts, Vouchers, and Receipted Accounts 2, images 85 and 109 of 480. Fitzpatrick, *George Washington's Accounts of Expenses*, annotations for April 1776.

¹⁴⁹ Paige, *History of Cambridge*, 445.

Whereas, sundry pieces of mowing land, belonging to persons who have left this town, have upon them considerable quantities of grass, which, if not cut soon, must diminish much in quantity, and as hay will be wanted for the use of this colony, therefore, *Resolved*, that it be recommended to the honorable Provincial Congress, that they appoint a committee of Congress to view said pieces of land, and act thereon as to them, in their wisdom, shall seem meet.¹⁵⁰

In the usual fashion, the congress followed up two days later by appointing a committee to consider “the grass growing on the estates of the refugees at Cambridge, Charlestown, Roxbury and Milton.” Those three members in turn recommended that the congress authorize the Committee of Safety to handle the issue and “appoint some person, or persons. . .to cut the grass and secure the hay. . .for the benefit of the colony,” a measure duly enacted.¹⁵¹

On 5 July the Committee of Safety authorized Joseph Bates “to cut thirty hundred of hay, on John Vassal, Esq’s estate.”¹⁵² The next day, the committee granted a similar boon to the Smith brothers:

Voted, That Joseph and Parsons Smith, be allowed to cut, each, one ton of English hay, and one ton of black grass [used for salt hay], on the estate of John Vassal, Esq., in Cambridge, they to be accountable therefor: and that Mr. David Sanger be directed accordingly.¹⁵³

Men named Fisk and Wesson received the same responsibility for the Sewall and Oliver farms, respectively.¹⁵⁴ Capt. Samuel Fletcher was allowed to cut “three tons of *English Hay*, and all the black Grass and salt Hay” on the Oliver lands.¹⁵⁵ The pay for the mowers, the Provincial Congress resolved on 11 July, was “half a pint of rum, each, per day.”¹⁵⁶

The Smiths and other men were to deliver most of the hay they harvested to David Sanger, who was in charge of collecting and distributing fodder for the army’s horses. On 1 July 1775 the committee ordered Sanger to deliver two-thirds of that hay to headquarters and the rest to the committee of supplies in Watertown. Three days later, Sanger was told “to fill the widow Vassal’s barn with hay.” Finally, on 15 July the committee ordered Sanger to “put as much hay into the general’s barns. . .as they will receive, any order to the contrary notwithstanding.”¹⁵⁷ In effect, as Gen. Washington moved into his new headquarters, the

¹⁵⁰ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 563.

¹⁵¹ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 337.

¹⁵² Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 587.

¹⁵³ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 587.

¹⁵⁴ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 588, 558.

¹⁵⁵ *American Archives*, series 4, 2:1370. Fletcher appears to have come from what is now Townshend, Vermont; see Hall, *History of Eastern Vermont*, 640-3.

¹⁵⁶ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 486.

¹⁵⁷ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 584, 586, 597.

committee chose to supply him with all the hay his horses could need, setting aside other possible uses.

Joseph Smith vanishes from Cambridge records after the baptism of a son in June 1777.¹⁵⁸ Parsons and Waitstill Smith had children in 1777 and 1780.¹⁵⁹ The couple then drop from sight until they died in the Cambridge poorhouse, Waitstill in 1808 and Parsons “of dropsy” on 23 July 1816.¹⁶⁰

2.8 SETH INGERSOLL BROWNE: KEEPER OF THE COLONY HORSES

The name of another worker on the John Vassall estate in this period appears in the Committee of Safety’s orders for 24 June 1775:

Ordered, That the commanding officer who has the charge of the hay on John Vassal, Esq.’s estate, be directed to supply Mr. Seth Brown, who has the care of the colony horses, with as much hay as they may need for their consumption. . . .

Ordered, That Mr. Brown, the keeper of the colony horses, do not admit any horses into the stables of John Vassal, Esq., but such as are the property of this colony.¹⁶¹

And again on 6 July:

Mr. Seth Brown was directed and empowered to clear the widow Vassal’s barns, for the reception of hay and horses for the colony service; and also to prevent horses feeding in the pastures owned by said widow.¹⁶²

As with the committee’s orders on hay, it sought to ensure that the Vassall property’s resources were reserved for the war effort.

This “keeper of the colony horses” appears to be Seth Ingersoll Browne (1750-1809), a poor carpenter whose family recalled him working in the army’s commissary department. Most of the information we have about Browne comes from family lore and genealogical data collected by his granddaughter Harriet Hanson Robinson. She supplied information for Francis S. Drake’s chronicle of the Boston Tea Party, published an article in the *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, and left a notebook of genealogical writings that her own biographer used as source material.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸ *Cambridge Vital Records*, 1:650.

¹⁵⁹ *Cambridge Vital Records*, 1:648, 653.

¹⁶⁰ Paige, *History of Cambridge*, 656. *Records of the Church of Christ at Cambridge*, 515.

¹⁶¹ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 576.

¹⁶² Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 587.

¹⁶³ Drake, *Tea Leaves*, xcvi-c. Harriet H. Robinson, “Nicholas Browne of Reading and Some of His Descendants,” *NEHGR*, 44 (1890), 281-6. Bushman, “*A Good Poor Man’s Wife*,” 4-7. Robinson and her husband William both rose from working-class families to positions of fragile gentility. Harriet Robinson’s memoir *Loom and Spindle: or, Life Among the Early Mill Girls* (New York: T. Y. Crowell, 1898) is a major source on the life of factory workers in Lowell around 1840. She mentions memorizing large chunks of Henry W. Longfellow’s poetry in the evenings: 45-6.

Robinson never knew her grandfather, who died sixteen years before she was born. For details of Seth Browne's activity during the Revolution, she relied on her mother, who as a very young girl had heard his stories as he tended the Punch Bowl Tavern in Roxbury. Barroom tales and family anecdotes that children retell decades later are unreliable historical sources, and Browne's adventures do not break that pattern. Nevertheless, the Committee of Safety records suggest that he did in fact work for the provincial army in 1775.

Seth Ingersoll Browne was born in 1750 and baptized on 8 July in Cambridge.¹⁶⁴ His family lived in Little Cambridge, now Brighton. Seth's father was sixty-eight years old, his oldest half-brothers in their forties, and his mother considerably younger. The elder Browne died in 1768 and within a year Seth's mother married a mariner and moved to Britain. Seth, then close to his majority, and his oldest sister wrote to Cambridge judge Samuel Danforth about whom they wanted to be their guardian:

Cambridge June the 12 1770

Mr. Samuel Danford Esquer

Sir, if it is agreeable to youre honer we have chose Mr. Ephraim Jackson for
owre gardean
Seth Ingersoll Browne,
Mary Browne.¹⁶⁵

When Seth Browne came of age, he apparently set up a carpentry shop in Charlestown, near where the Warren Bridge was later built. His family recalled him as "a thick-set man with a fierce look...[and] white, even 'double' teeth, which he gritted in his sleep. He had black hair and blue eyes."¹⁶⁶

According to his granddaughter, Browne participated in the Boston Tea Party on 16 December 1773 and helped store gunpowder in his shop in 1775; neither of those statements can be verified. She also stated that Browne fought in the Battle of Bunker Hill as a non-commissioned officer; he "was wounded in the leg, and also received an injury to his eye." After the war he used to sing this verse to the tune of "Yankee Doodle":

We marched down to Charlestown ferry,
And there we had our battle:
The shot it flew like pepper & salt.
And made the old town rattle.¹⁶⁷

However, the family's anecdotes of the Bunker Hill battle do not match the historical record in nearly any detail.

¹⁶⁴ *Records of the Church of Christ at Cambridge*, 160; Seth's middle name is transcribed as "Ingerson."

¹⁶⁵ NEHGR, 44:284.

¹⁶⁶ Bushman, "A Good Poor Man's Wife," 4-5.

¹⁶⁷ Drake, *Tea Leaves*, xcix. Bushman calls these verses "bad enough to be genuine"; "A Good Poor Man's Wife," 5.

It seems more credible that Seth Browne was among the inhabitants of Charlestown who evacuated the town for fear of fighting and then saw their homes and workshops burned during the battle. Deprived of his livelihood and possibly injured in one eye, Browne sought employment from the government. The provincial authorities appear to have been eager to employ refugees from Charlestown so they would not become public burdens.

According to Harriet Robinson, “Mr. Brown served as an assistant commissary during the siege of Boston.”¹⁶⁸ Browne might have had that title, or that might be how the family preferred to remember his position. In any event, in having “the care of the colony horses,” Browne worked for the Patriot cause. According to his descendants, he “later ran a riding school and stable,” which suggests that he was comfortable working with horses.¹⁶⁹

Browne did not keep his provincial position for long, however. On 7 July 1775 one day after he was ordered to clear Penelope Vassall’s barns, the Committee of Safety reported that “Mr. Seth Brown, who has had the care of horses for the cannon [i.e., the artillery regiment], has resigned that employment.”¹⁷⁰ Perhaps he chafed at the supervision, or saw better prospects in other departments. Robinson wrote that Browne later “was one of the company of picked men to transport on horseback” money that France had sent to the Continental Army; again, this cannot be confirmed.¹⁷¹ In 1777 a Cambridge tax list located Browne living “on the South Side of Charles River” with two other men eligible for the poll tax.¹⁷²

Seth Ingersoll Browne is not a major figure in the history of either the Revolutionary War or the Vassall house. But he is a rare example of a poor, working-class man caught up in history whose personal life can be traced, however imperfectly.

¹⁶⁸ Drake, *Tea Leaves*, xcix.

¹⁶⁹ Bushman, “*A Good Poor Man’s Wife*,” 6.

¹⁷⁰ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 590, 596.

¹⁷¹ NEHGR, 44:284.

¹⁷² Paige, *History of Cambridge*, 446.

CHAPTER THREE

GEN. WASHINGTON COMES TO THE VASSALL ESTATE

In July 1774 George Washington was a prosperous Virginia planter and moderately distinguished legislator, respected locally for having commanded the colony's regiment in wartime fifteen years before. Twelve months later, he was in Cambridge, commander-in-chief of an army largely made up of New Englanders, facing off against the British military.

In those months, Washington prepared himself carefully for his new role as an American general. The Continental Congress's unanimous choice of him to command its army was a big step in unifying Britain's rebellious North American colonies. The new commander-in-chief traveled to Massachusetts on a tide of rising expectations. Within a week of his arrival at Cambridge, Gen. Washington chose John Vassall's abandoned house to be his headquarters. He was only beginning to grasp the depth of the challenges ahead.

3.1 WASHINGTON'S FIRST MILITARY CAREER

In 1759, as John Vassall oversaw the construction of his Cambridge mansion, George Washington had just finished a military career. He had begun in the footsteps of his brother Lawrence, adjutant-general of Virginia at his death in 1752. Only twenty years old, George lobbied the governor to be named adjutant of the colony's Northern Neck, with the rank of major.¹ After two difficult campaigns against the French, Washington became colonel in charge of all the Virginia troops in the Seven Years' (French and Indian) War.

In many ways Washington's military experience was frustrating. He resented how officers in the regular British army treated American officers and troops as inferior. He failed to obtain a regular army commission, or at least official recognition that as a Virginia colonel he ranked alongside British colonels; his resentment was probably a factor in his later decision to join the political movement against the London government. In five years as a full-time soldier, Washington commanded no more than one regiment. He never saw a large battlefield victory or siege, and the biggest campaign he took part in—Gen. Edward Braddock's push against the French at Fort Duquesne—ended in disaster.

Nevertheless, Washington's first military career was entirely successful in establishing his standing in society, which had been far from assured for a younger son of a middling planter. His leadership let him win a seat in the Virginia House of Burgesses. Land grants to veterans and his knowledge of western territories helped him to amass a fortune in

¹ Longmore, *Invention of George Washington*, 17, 231.

real estate. Most important, as a colonel Washington had the social status to propose marriage to the wealthy widow Martha Custis. He retired from the Virginia army at the end of 1758 and married on 6 January 1759.²

More than any other milestone in his life, Washington's wedding appears to have cooled the ambition that drove him in his early twenties. Having become the master of vast plantations, he was never again so demanding or disingenuous in his letters to government officials. As historian Peter Henriques wrote, the young officer had "resigned once, threatened to resign a half dozen times, and left his men for long periods of time. . . . He betrayed two superiors, Governor Robert Dinwiddie and General John Forbes, both of whom had his best interests at heart."³ As a general, Washington would chide his own officers for similar behavior.

In leaving the Virginia regiment, Washington presented himself as leaving the public arena, at least in a major role. To one friend he wrote in September 1758: "That appearance of Glory once in view—that hope—that laudable Ambition of Serving Our Country, and meriting its applause, is now no more!"⁴ A year later he told a London merchant: "I am now I believe fixd at this Seat with an agreeable Consort for Life and hope to find more happiness in retirement than I ever experienced amidst a wide and bustling World."⁵ He was twenty-seven years old.

Washington's military career had left him with a small amount of fame in the British Empire, for three actions:

1. After he made a diplomatic/military trip through the wilderness to the French outpost of Fort Le Boeuf for Virginia's governor in 1753, his detailed report was reprinted in many American and British newspapers.⁶
2. In 1754 Lt. Col. Washington brought on an embarrassing skirmish that eventually helped to spark the Seven Years' War. His 31 May letter to his brother John Augustine (Jack) Washington about that first combat ("I heard the bullet's whistle, and believe me, there is something charming in the sound. . .") was reprinted in the August *London Magazine*. Even George II commented on it: "He would not think so, if he had been used to hear many."⁷

² Ferling, *Ascent of George Washington*, 43-4.

³ Henriques, *Realistic Visionary*, 11.

⁴ Washington to John Robinson, 1 September 1758, PGW:Colonial, 4:432-3.

⁵ Washington to Richard Washington, 20 September 1759, PGW:Colonial, 6:359.

⁶ Ferling, *Ascent of George Washington*, 18.

⁷ Longmore, *Invention of George Washington*, 20. Horace Walpole included the king's response in his *Memoires of the Last Ten Years of the Reign of George II*. The Rev. William Gordon wrote that a gentleman—possibly himself—asked Washington about this quotation when they were conversing alone at Cambridge. The general answered, "If I said so, it was when I was young." Gordon, *History of the Rise. . .*, 2:203.

3. Caught in the attack on Braddock's column in 1755, Washington was the general's only aide not killed or wounded. He helped to lead the surviving British forces to safety, keeping the disaster from being even worse. That episode repaired the damage of his earlier boasting; the Earl of Halifax wrote, "I know nothing of Mr. Washington's character, but that we have it under his own hand, that he loves the whistling of Bullets, and they say he behaved as bravely in Braddocks action, as if he really did."⁸ Americans had even more praise for his actions, and the Rev. Samuel Davies built a sermon on how providence had preserved him from harm.⁹

Washington's work as head of the Virginia regiment for two and a half years gave him as much experience in wartime military administration as any other Patriot born in America. He was therefore a natural choice when the Continental Congress came to choose a commander-in-chief.

3.2 WASHINGTON PREPARES FOR WAR

One myth of Washington's selection as commander is that the appointment came as an unwanted surprise to him. The chief source of this myth was Washington himself. In proper eighteenth-century genteel fashion, he made no overt statements of interest in the job, and responded to the offer with disclaimers of his ability. However, Washington prepared for a military command throughout early 1775, did not propose any other names, and would undoubtedly have felt disappointed if the Congress had chosen someone else.

In fact, Washington appears to have been one of the first colonists to openly consider the possibility of armed rebellion against the London government. In 1777 the Virginia diplomat Arthur Lee wrote to him: "I never forgot your declaration when I had the pleasure of being at your House in [July] 1768 that you was ready to take your Musket upon your Shoulder, whenever your Country call'd upon you."¹⁰ On 5 April 1769 Washington wrote to his neighbor George Mason:

At a time when our lordly Masters in Great Britain will be satisfied with nothing less than the deprivation of American freedom, it seems highly necessary that something shou'd be done to avert the stroke and maintain the liberty which we have derived from our Ancestors; . . . That no man shou'd scruple, or hesitate a moment to use a-ms in defense of so valuable a blessing, on which all the good and evil of life depends, is clearly my opinion; Yet A[r]ms I wou'd beg leave to add, should be a last resource, dernier resort.¹¹

⁸ Halifax to Sir Charles Hardy, 31 March 1756, quoted in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1896*, 689.

⁹ In 1775, Dr. Benjamin Rush had *Dunlap's Pennsylvania Packet* reprint this sermon; Longmore, *Invention of George Washington*, 196.

¹⁰ Arthur Lee to Washington, 15 June 1777, PGW:RW, 10:43-4.

¹¹ PGW:Colonial, 8:178.

Washington had played no role in the Virginia legislature's ground-breaking debate about the Stamp Act in 1765, though he later introduced a law to circumvent the closing of the courts. However, he and Mason took the lead in promoting non-importation, or a boycott of most goods from Britain, in 1769. This was, biographer John Ferling wrote, "the first major piece of legislation for which he was responsible."¹²

In the summer of 1774 the House of Burgesses reached a deadlock with its royal governor, Lord Dunmore, and formed itself into an independent Virginia Convention. Washington participated in this shadow legislature, and its members chose him to be one of the colony's seven delegates to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. The other six men were all active legislators; Washington seems to have been chosen for his military experience.¹³

The records of the First Continental Congress do not show Washington speaking or serving on any committee.¹⁴ Nevertheless, he made a strong impression, especially among the New England delegates. Silas Deane wrote home to his wife in Connecticut:

Col. Washington is nearly as tall a man as Col. Fitch, and almost as hard a countenance; yet with a very young look and an easy, soldierlike air, and gesture. He does not appear above forty-five, yet was in the first actions in 1753 and 1754 on the Ohio, and in 1755 was with Braddock, and was the means of saving the remains of that unfortunate army. It is said that in the house of Burgesses in Virginia, on hearing of the Boston Port Bill, he offered to raise and arm and lead one thousand men himself at his own expense, for the defence of the country, were there need of it. His fortune is said to be equal to such an undertaking.¹⁵

Likewise, on 31 August John Adams wrote in his diary of hearing a similar rumor from Thomas Lynch of South Carolina:

He told us that Coll. Washington made the most eloquent Speech at the Virginia Convention that ever was made. Says he, "I will raise 1000 Men, subsist them at my own Expence, and march my self at their Head for the Relief of Boston."¹⁶

That rumor was false. (Washington's silence at the congress should have raised doubts about "the most eloquent speech...that ever was made.") But it added to his reputation.

On 17 October Washington "Spent the evening at Mr. Mifflin's," according to his diary.¹⁷ Dr. Benjamin Rush recalled this event as also including the retired British colonel

¹² Ferling, *Ascent of George Washington*, 69. Longmore, *Invention of George Washington*, 80.

¹³ Ferling, *Ascent of George Washington*, 76-7. Vote totals appear in Longmore, *Invention of George Washington*, 263.

¹⁴ Ferling, *Ascent of George Washington*, 78.

¹⁵ LoD, 1:28.

¹⁶ DAJA, 2:117. See also William Black of James River County, Virginia, to the Massachusetts delegates, 22 December 1774, in *MHS Collections*, series 4, 4:186-7.

Charles Lee (see section 4.5), the Massachusetts activists Samuel and John Adams, and others.

After supper several of the company looked forward to the probable consequence of the present measures, and state of things. John Adams said he had no expectation of a redress of grievances and a reconciliation with Great Britain, and as proof of this belief, he gave as a toast “Cash and Gunpowder to the Yankees.” The war which he anticipated, it was expected would begin among the New Englandmen who were then called Yankees both by their friends and enemies.¹⁸

There is no indication of what Washington thought of such talk, but he was socializing with some of the Congress’s most radical members.

Meanwhile, back in Fairfax County, George Mason chaired a convention that formed an independent militia company. Those men sent a letter asking Washington to be their captain, to choose colors for their uniform, and to buy flags, drums, fifes, and other military supplies. He chose buff and blue, the traditional colors of England’s Whigs. The retired colonel also bought himself a sword chain, sash, gorget, and epaulettes—the insignia of an officer.¹⁹ After returning home to Mount Vernon, Washington accepted similar invitations from independent militias in Prince William, Fauquier, Richmond, and Spotsylvania Counties. He helped other companies order gunpowder.²⁰

From November 1774 through February 1775 Washington corresponded with the Philadelphia merchant William Milnor about buying officers’ insignia, muskets, and guides to military drills for those independent companies. The retired colonel was very specific in his orders. For example, on 23 January he specified that the Prince William Independent Company needed:

Shoulder Knots. . .for the Sergeants and Corporals, also made of Gold; but not so showy, finishing at the point of the Shoulder with a round rose of gold fringe, the rose to be a little broader than the double of the Lace which it is on.

Milnor ordered military books from Boston, sent along the latest political pamphlets without being asked, and even made a trip to Mount Vernon in February.²¹

As winter ended, Washington was busy inspecting and drilling the militia in nearby Alexandria. The 12 January 1775 John Pinkney’s *Virginia Gazette* of Williamsburg published a song with a verse showing that force was supposed to oppose the royal army:

¹⁷ DGW, 3:286.

¹⁸ Rush, *Autobiography*, 111.

¹⁹ Longmore, *Invention of George Washington*, 146. Henriques, *Realistic Visionary*, 40.

²⁰ Longmore, *Invention of George Washington*, 147.

²¹ PGW:Colonial, 10:270-1, 294.

In spite of Gage's flaming sword,
Or Carleton's Canadian troop,
Brave Washington shall give the word,
And we'll make them howl and whoop.²²

In February, Mason and Washington rewrote the Fairfax Independent Militia Association's charter so that it left out mention of the king, an extraordinary move.²³ On 2 March, Washington's old friend George William Fairfax wrote from England, "It is reported in London, that you are Training the People of Virginia to the Use of Arms."²⁴

For five days starting on 30 December Col. Charles Lee stayed at Mount Vernon. Washington and Lee had probably met during Braddock's campaign, and again during the First Continental Congress. Despite his recent arrival on the continent, the retired British officer had become a forceful voice in American politics. While Washington's diary offers no details about his conversation with Lee, beyond lending the man £15, they almost certainly talked about the prospects of an American military.²⁵ In October Lee had started to draw up a plan for organizing American battalions; letters in early 1775 from Thomas Johnson of Maryland show that Lee was still preparing that plan for publication and that Washington wanted to see the result.²⁶ Lee went on to visit another British army officer who had retired to western Virginia, Maj. Horatio Gates (see section 4.12).²⁷

Washington remained busy with military and political work in the winter of 1775. He drilled the Fairfax County militia, chaired county committee meetings, and won reelection to the Virginia Convention.²⁸ In February he wrote of news from London: "The King's Speech and Address of both Houses, prognosticate nothing favorable to us."²⁹ American Whigs' had hoped that George III would realize how corrupt government ministers were harming the relationship between Britain and its colonies, and lead an effort at reconciliation. The king's own words showed that he did not share the colonists' perception of the problem.

²² Pinkney's *Virginia Gazette*, 12 January 1775. The previous month, a Pennsylvanian had written to a Member of Parliament naming "Col. [Israel] Putnam and Col. Washington" as "men whose military talents and achievements have placed them at the head of American heroes," who would be Americans' first choices to lead their army. Letter dated 26 December 1774, printed in 25-27 April 1775 *London Chronicle*, quoted in Longmore, *Invention of George Washington*, 149.

²³ Longmore, *Invention of George Washington*, 150.

²⁴ PGW:Colonial, 10:281-286.

²⁵ Alden, *General Charles Lee*, 69.

²⁶ Alden, *General Charles Lee*, 61. Johnson to Washington, 24 January and 25 February 1775, PGW:Colonial, 10:243-4, 274-6.

²⁷ Alden, *General Charles Lee*, 69.

²⁸ Longmore, *Invention of George Washington*, 153.

²⁹ Washington to John Connolly, 25 February 1775, PGW:Colonial, 10:273-4. Connolly sided with the Crown once the war began; see section 14.7.

Another Virginia Convention at Richmond in March 1775 reelected the same delegates to the Second Continental Congress. Reflecting the move toward military action, Washington received an even greater percentage of the votes than before, just one fewer than House of Burgesses speaker Peyton Randolph.³⁰ That same month, Gov. Dunmore abruptly voided Washington's claim to large swaths of prime land to the west on the grounds that he had not commissioned proper surveys, handing him another major grievance against the royal government.³¹

On 16-20 April 1775 Charles Lee returned to Mount Vernon, where George Mason and eighteen-year-old Henry ("Light-Horse Harry") Lee were also visiting.³² Soon after the British colonel left, Washington received word of two momentous developments:

1. On 21 April Gov. Dunmore had a Royal Navy contingent seize Williamsburg's supply of gunpowder. This prompted a militia uprising similar to Massachusetts's Powder Alarm in September 1774 (see section 1.4). Hundreds of armed men gathered in Fredericksburg on 29 April. Some of the independent militia companies wanted Washington to lead them on a march to the colonial capital, but he, like speaker Randolph, urged the men to go home and wait for a more opportune moment to defend their liberties.³³
2. On 26 April messengers brought news of the Battle of Lexington and Concord, and the start of the siege of Boston.³⁴ Washington's immediate response has not survived, but on 31 May he commented to George William Fairfax in Britain:

Unhappy it is though to reflect, that a Brother's Sword has been sheathed in a Brother's breast, and that, the once happy and peaceful plains of America are either to be drenched with Blood, or Inhabited by Slaves. Sad alternative! But can a virtuous Man hesitate in his choice?³⁵

Horatio Gates visited Mount Vernon on 2-3 May and undoubtedly discussed the new military situation and what role each man might play.³⁶ As he left, Richard Henry Lee arrived to ride with Washington to Philadelphia. On 4 May the two delegates set off in Washington's chariot, with coachmen and postilion riding outside. The planter had spoken indirectly with his wife Martha about the prospect of being away for several months (see

³⁰ Longmore, *Invention of George Washington*, 152, 268.

³¹ Henriques, *Realistic Visionary*, 32.

³² Alden, *General Charles Lee*, 71.

³³ Longmore, *Invention of George Washington*, 157.

³⁴ Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride*, 272.

³⁵ PGW:Colonial, 10:368.

³⁶ Nelson, *General Horatio Gates*, 39.

section 7.1) and even planned his will.³⁷ Clearly Col. Washington had prepared to resume his military career.

3.3 THE SECOND CONTINENTAL CONGRESS

The Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina delegations arrived together in Philadelphia on 7 May 1775. Along the way at Baltimore, one man recorded, “Colo. Washington Accompanied by the rest of the delegates reviewed the Troops.”³⁸ Several more militia companies were training in the Pennsylvania capital. Everyone understood that a war had begun outside Boston, discussing how it might spread and how the community should respond. On 9 May, Samuel Curwen, a Salem merchant and Vice-Admiralty official visiting Philadelphia, wrote in his diary:

passed the evening at Joseph Reed’s, in company with Col. Washington, (a fine figure, and of a most easy and agreeable address,) Richard Henry Lee, and Col. [Benjamin] Harrison,—three of the Virginia delegates. . . . I staid till twelve o’clock, the conversation being chiefly on the most feasible and prudent method of stopping up the channel of the Delaware, to prevent the coming up of any large [Royal Navy] ships to the city. I could not perceive the least disposition to accommodate matters.

Three days later, Curwen, a Loyalist, went on board a ship bound for Britain, where he would spend the next several years.³⁹

Washington was certainly “a fine figure.” Back in 1760 George Mercer had described Washington this way:

He may be described as being straight as an Indian, measuring 6 feet 2 inches in his stockings, and weighing 175 lbs. . . . His frame is padded with well developed muscles, indicating great strength. . . . His head is well shaped, though not large, but is gracefully poised on a superb neck. A large and straight rather than a prominent nose, blue-grey penetrating eyes which are widely separated and overhung by a heavy brow. His face is long rather than broad, with high cheek bones, and terminates in a good firm chin. . . . A pleasing and benevolent tho a commanding countenance, dark brown hair which he wears in a cue. . . . His features are regular and placid with all the muscles of his face under perfect emotions. In conversation he looks you full in the face, is deliberate, deferential and engaging. His demeanor at all times composed and dignified. His movements and gestures are graceful, his walk majestic, and he is a splended horseman.⁴⁰

³⁷ Longmore, *Invention of George Washington*, 167-8.

³⁸ Richard Caswell to William Caswell, 11 May 1775, LoD, 1:340. Longmore, *Invention of George Washington*, 158.

³⁹ Curwen, *Journal and Letters*, 28.

⁴⁰ Henriques, *Realistic Visionary*, 15-6.

Fifteen more years of comfortable living had probably softened the planter's body, but in eighteenth-century society age made a man look more impressive. Furthermore, Washington chose to remind fellow delegates of his military experience and recent activity in Virginia by wearing his buff and blue militia uniform.⁴¹

On 10 May the delegation from Massachusetts arrived to public acclaim for having supposedly escaped the redcoats, and Peyton Randolph called the Second Continental Congress to order. The next day, John Hancock presented a request for support from the Massachusetts Provincial Congress; as recorded in Rhode Island delegate Samuel Ward's diary, the delegates quickly agreed to keep their deliberations on that issue secret:

Doors to be shut & the Members under the Ties of Secrecy untill &c. . . . A Letter from the provincial Congress of Watertown inclosing an Acct. of the late Action at Concord &c. Congress to be resolved into a Comee. of the whole on Monday to take into Consideration the State of America⁴²

As a result, information on much of the congressmen's debates that spring is limited. Nonetheless, it is clear that Washington became more prominent.

Having been on no committees of the First Continental Congress, Washington not only served on committees in the Second, but chaired them.⁴³ All of his committees dealt with military matters, so sensitive that each time Washington and his colleagues brought in their report the Congress referred it to the "committee of the whole," which could debate confidentially without taking minutes. Each committee of the whole typically needed several days to talk through the report. Once the delegates agreed on resolutions, they soon made Washington chairman of another committee. Though the body was also drafting one more petition to the king in London during this period, each of Washington's committees moved it one step further toward supporting military opposition to the royal government.

Washington's committees in the Second Continental Congress were:

- 15 May: to advise New York about defending against an invasion from Canada. Ten days later, the Congress adopted resolutions about fortifying posts in upstate New York.⁴⁴
- 27 May: "to consider of ways and means to supply these colonies with Ammunition and military stores."⁴⁵ On 2 June, the Massachusetts delegation

⁴¹ John Adams to Abigail Adams, 29 May 1775, AFC, 1:207. As Peter Henriques wrote, "When you are over six feet tall, of imposing martial bearing and wearing a brand-new uniform, and you know there is virtual unanimity among the delegates that an army is to be formed, it can't come as a total shock to discover that you are being seriously considered for a leadership position"; *Realistic Visionary*, 40.

⁴² JCC, 11 May 1775, 2:24; LoD, 1:345.

⁴³ In eighteenth-century legislative records, the first man listed as being named to a committee was typically its chairman.

⁴⁴ JCC, 2:59-61. Those resolutions were kept "as secret as the nature of the services require"; JCC, 2:64.

raised the stakes by passing on a letter from their Provincial Congress which concluded: “As the Army now collecting from different colonies is for the general defence of the right of America, we wd. beg leave to suggest to yr. consideration the propriety of yr. taking the regulation and general direction of it.”⁴⁶ In other words, would the Continental Congress take over the army outside Boston? The next day, as delegates were still debating how to respond, the Congress resolved to borrow £6,000 for “the purchase of gunpowder for the use of the Continental Army.”⁴⁷ Officially, there was no Continental Army yet, but the body was clearly moving toward creating one.

- 3 June: “to bring in an estimate of the money necessary to be raised.”⁴⁸ While that resolve did not specify what the money was to be raised for, the purpose was clearly to fund an army. This committee reported on 7 June, and its report was once again referred to the committee of the whole.⁴⁹ On 10 June, John Adams told his wife: “In Congress We are bound to secrecy: But, under the Rose, I believe, that ten thousand Men will be maintained in the Massachusetts, and five thousand in New York at the Continental Expence.”⁵⁰
- 14 June: “to bring in a dra’t of Rules and regulations for the government of the army.”⁵¹

On 14 June after days of committee discussion, the Congress formally committed itself to the war. It authorized raising six rifle companies from Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia, these soldiers to enlist in the “American continental army” and be paid by the Continental government rather than the states.⁵² Furthermore, by that day the delegates were coming to agreement on two further steps, as one of the Virginia delegates described in a letter home:

Col. Washington has been pressed to take the supreme command of the American troops encamped at Roxbury, and I believe will accept the appointment, though with much reluctance, he being deeply impressed with the

⁴⁵ JCC, 2:67, 74.

⁴⁶ JCC, 2:78.

⁴⁷ JCC, 2:79.

⁴⁸ JCC, 2:80.

⁴⁹ JCC, 2:81.

⁵⁰ AFC, 1:214.

⁵¹ JCC, 2:90.

⁵² JCC, 2:89-90.

importance of that honourable trust, and diffident of his own (superiour) abilities.⁵³

There is no formal record of the debate leading to this decision, and delegates were circumspect in their journals and letters. However, it appears that once the Congress agreed to appoint a commanding general, there was little controversy about choosing Washington for that role. The New Englanders wanted to cement Virginian support for the war, and the Virginians were naturally pleased to promote one of their own. Though some delegates had been wary about committing their colonies to the war in New England, they evidently came around in the first month, and saw no better candidate for leadership. (See appendix A for a more detailed discussion of this choice.)

On 15 June the Congress took the crucial votes on a commander-in-chief:

Resolved, That a General be appointed to command all the continental forces, raised, or to be raised, for the defence of American liberty.

That five hundred dollars, per month, be allowed for his pay and expences.

The Congress then proceeded to the choice of a general, by ballot, when George Washington, Esq. was unanimously elected.⁵⁴

Though the official record does not state the fact, Thomas Johnson of Maryland nominated Washington to be general.⁵⁵ The phrase “by ballot” indicates that the delegates voted in writing, making the unanimous choice all the more impressive. The Congress then adjourned for the day, allowing members to prepare for a formal commissioning ceremony. It seems likely that Washington sat out this session of the Congress.

On 16 June, the morning after the Congress’s vote, John Hancock officially informed Washington of his appointment “to take the supreme command of the forces raised and to be raised, in defence of American Liberty.” The Virginian rose from his seat and made the following speech:

Mr. President,

Tho’ I am truly sensible of the high Honour done me, in this Appointment, yet I feel great distress, from a consciousness that my abilities and military experience may not be equal to the extensive and important Trust: However, as the Congress desire it, I will enter upon the momentous duty, and exert every

⁵³ Purdie’s *Virginia Gazette*, 23 June 1775. This letter went on to repeat Adams’s statement that the Congress would “keep ten thousand men in Massachusetts-Bay, and five thousand in different parts of the New-York Government, at the expense of the Continent.”

⁵⁴ JCC, 2:91.

⁵⁵ In the 1830s Johnson’s relatives wrote letters declaring that he had described the event, as quoted in appendix A; see letters from George Johnson in *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 7 June 1834. John Adams, while claiming that he was the first to raise Washington as a candidate, acknowledged that Johnson made the formal nomination; DAJA, 3:323. See also Adams to Timothy Pickering, 6 August 1822, Adams, *Works of John Adams*, 10:513.

power I possess in their service, and for support of the glorious cause. I beg they will accept my most cordial thanks for this distinguished testimony of their approbation.

But, lest some unlucky event should happen, unfavourable to my reputation, I beg it may be remembered, by every Gentleman in the room, that I, this day, declare with the utmost sincerity, I do not think myself equal to the Command I am honored with.

As to pay, Sir, I beg leave to assure the Congress, that, as no pecuniary consideration could have tempted me to have accepted this arduous employment, at the expence of my domestic ease and happiness, I do not wish to make any proffit from it. I will keep an exact Account of my expences. Those, I doubt not, they will discharge, and that is all I desire.⁵⁶

Washington's choice to refuse a salary made a deep impression on his fellow delegates and other Patriots. It reflected the Whig ideal of a statesman acting above self-interest—though delegates also expected the Congress to support Washington and his household in a genteel style.

The Congress then chose a committee to “draught a commission and instructions for the general.” It consisted of his close friend Richard Henry Lee, John Adams, and Edward Rutledge of South Carolina. Adams had been among the delegates most eager for an aggressive response to the Crown and Rutledge one of the most reluctant, so their cooperation helped to further unify the body. The text of the commission was recorded in the Congress's records on 17 June and the instructions three days later (see appendix B). Hancock signed the commission on 19 June, at which point the Virginia planter formally became a general.

It is difficult to discern Washington's private feelings about these developments. His diary for the month of June 1775 is no more than a record of where he dined at midday and where he spent each evening, sometimes working on committee business. A parallel set of notations recorded the weather. He left no observations about the business in Congress, private conversations, or personal worries, even on the momentous days when he became commander-in-chief of the new army:

- June 1. Dined at Burns's and Spent the Evening in my own Room.
2. Dined at Mr. Josh. Shippens & spent the Evening at Mr. Tilghman's.
3. Dined at the City Tavern & spent the Evening at my lodgings.
4. Dined at Mr. Robt. Morris's on the Banks of Schoolkill & Spent the Eveng. at the City Tavn.
5. Dined at Mr. Richard Penns. On a Committee all the Afternn.

⁵⁶ JCC, 2:92. As preserved in the Papers of the Continental Congress, this speech is in the handwriting of Edmund Pendleton of Virginia, “with a single line added by Washington.” That suggests that Washington, who had already asked Pendleton to draft his will (see section 7.1), had his fellow Virginian's help in composing the speech.

6. At Mr. Willm. Hamiltons & Spent the Evening at my Lodgings.
7. Dined at the City Tavern and spent the Evening at home.
8. Dined at Mr. Dickensons and spent the Evening at home.
9. Dined at Mr. Saml. Pleasants and went to hear Mr. Piercy preach.
10. Dined at Mr. Saml. Griffens. Spent the Evening in my own Room.
- 11th. Went to Church in the forenoon & then went out & Dined at Mr. H. Hills.

Returnd in the Afternoon.

12. Dined at the City Tavern & Spent the Evening at my lodgings.
13. Dined at Burn's in the Fields. Spent the Evening at my Lodging's.
14. Dined at Mr. Saml. Merediths. Spent the Evening at home.
15. Dined at Burns's in the Field. Spent the Eveng. on a Committee.
16. Dined at Doctr. Cadwaladers. Spent the Evening at my lodgings.
17. Dined at Burns's in the Fields. Spent the Evening at my Lodgings.
18. Dined at Mullens upon Schookill. Spent the Evening at my lodgings.
19. Dined at Colo. [Joseph] Rieds. Spent the Evening at Mr. Lynch's.⁵⁷

Having received his commission, Gen. Washington apparently stopped keeping his diaries for several years; none survives for the following months.

Decades later, Dr. Benjamin Rush wrote in his autobiography:

A few days after the appointment of General Washington to be commander in chief of the American armies, I was invited by a party of delegates and several citizens of Philadelphia to a dinner which was given to him at a tavern on the banks of the Skuilkill below the city [probably the dinner Washington noted on 18 June]. Dr. Franklin, Mr. Jefferson, James Wilson, Jno. Langdon of New Hampshire and about a dozen more constituted the whole company. The first toast that was given after dinner was "The Commander in chief of the American Armies." General Washington rose from his seat, and with some confusion thanked the company for the honor they did him. The whole company instantly rose, and drank the toast standing. This scene, so unexpected, was a solemn one. A silence followed it, as if every heart was penetrated with the awful, but great events which were to follow the use of the sword of liberty which had just been put into General Washington's hands by the unanimous voice of his country.⁵⁸

Rush also wrote: "About this time I saw Patrick Henry at his lodgings, who told me that General Washington had been with him, and informed him that he was unequal to the station in which his country had placed him, and then added with tears in his eyes "Remember, Mr. Henry, what I now tell you: From the day I enter upon the command of the American armies, I date my fall, and the ruin of my reputation."⁵⁹ Washington's words might have been

⁵⁷ DGW, 3:333-6.

⁵⁸ Rush, *Autobiography*, 112-3.

⁵⁹ Rush, *Autobiography*, 113.

garbled in transmission from Henry to Rush, and in Rush's memory. The general did not display such doubts publicly, but of course he would not have dared to.

It is hard to discern Washington's emotions even in his letters home. On the one hand, he did not want to alarm his wife Martha by dwelling on the risks ahead; on the other, he needed to maintain genteel modesty. Washington wrote first to his wife with news of his appointment on 18 June. (See section 7.1 for the full text.) The next day he asked his stepson, Jack Custis, to keep her company, and to take full control of his own estate for the first time.⁶⁰ On 19 June Washington wrote to Burwell Bassett back in Virginia that he had "no expectations of returning till Winter," and hoped he too would visit Mount Vernon. The general opened that letter by stating, "I am now Imbarkd on a tempestuous Ocean from whence, perhaps, no friendly harbour is to be found."⁶¹ He used nearly the same phrasing in a letter to John Augustine Washington the next day, and probably in other letters as well.⁶² It was both a public pose and a reflection of the uncertainties ahead.

3.4 SPREADING THE NEWS

As the new American generals prepared to depart for Boston, the New England delegates to Congress were busy sending the news to their political colleagues at home. They tried to dispel any possible resentment or worry about a powerful new general from Virginia by emphasizing Washington's personal qualities:

- Silas Deane of Connecticut, 16 June: "The more I am acquainted with, the more I esteem him. . . . His Virtues do not shine in the View of the World by reason of his great Modesty but when discovered by the discerning Eye, shine proportionately brighter."⁶³
- Eliphalet Dyer of Connecticut, 17 June: "He seems discret & Virtuous, no harum Starum ranting Swearing fellow but Sober, steady, & Calm. His modesty will Induce him I dare say to take & order every step with the best advice possible to be obtained in the Army."⁶⁴
- Thomas Cushing of Massachusetts, 21 June: "He is a compleat gentleman. He is sensible, amiable, virtuous, modest, & brave. I promise myself that your acquaintance with him will afford you great pleasure, and I doubt not his agreeable behaviour & good conduct will give great satisfaction to our people of all denominations. General Lee accompanies him as Major General; I hope his appointment will be agreeable to our people, & that he will be received with all due respect."⁶⁵
- John Adams of Massachusetts, 17 June: "I can now inform you that the Congress have made Choice of the modest and virtuous, the amiable, generous and brave George

⁶⁰ PGW:RW, 1:15.

⁶¹ PGW:RW, 1:12-3.

⁶² PGW:RW, 1:19.

⁶³ LoD, 1:494.

⁶⁴ LoD, 1:499-500.

⁶⁵ Cushing to James Bowdoin, 21 June 1775, LoD, 1:532.

Washington Esqr., to be the General of the American Army, and that he is to repair as soon as possible to the Camp before Boston. . . . I hope the People of our Province, will treat the General with all that Confidence and Affection, that Politeness and Respect, which is due to one of the most important Characters in the World.”⁶⁶

- John Adams, 18 June: “There is something charming to me in the conduct of Washington. A gentleman of one of the first fortunes upon the continent, leaving his delicious retirement, his family and friends, sacrificing his ease, and hazarding all in the cause of his country! His views are noble and disinterested.”⁶⁷
- Robert Treat Paine of Massachusetts, 18 June: “. . .the heroic & amiable General Washington. . .will be with you soon I expect, to strengthen yr. hands & rejoice your hearts.”⁶⁸

Even John Hancock told colleagues back home, “He is a fine man,” and, “he is a Gentn. you will all like.”⁶⁹

These letters succeeded in making some New Englanders pleased to have the generals coming. On 22 June Joseph Webb of Wethersfield, Connecticut, replied to Deane: “We greatly rejoice to hear of the coming of the good, the brave, and great general WASHINGTON. We shall receive him with *open arms*.”⁷⁰ That letter was in turn reprinted in Pinkney’s *Virginia Gazette* 13 July 1775 reassuring Virginians that the New Englanders were grateful. Such coverage put Washington on his way to becoming a nationally unifying figure.

Washington himself wrote a public letter to the independent militia companies of Virginia on 20 June stating:

I am now about to bid adieu to the companies under your respective commands, at least for a while. I have launched into a wide and expansive field, too boundless for my abilities, and far, very far, beyond my experience. I am called, by the unanimous voice of the colonies, to the command of the continental army; an honour I did not aspire to, an honour I was solicitous to avoid, upon a full conviction of the service. The partiality of the Congress, however, assisted by a political motive, rendered my reasons unavailing; and I shall, to-morrow, set out for the camp near Boston.⁷¹

Newspapers all along the coast republished this letter, often adding “Go, gallant WASHINGTON——” and these poetic lines:

⁶⁶ John Adams to Abigail Adams, 17 June 1775, AFC, 1:215.

⁶⁷ LoD, 1:503-4.

⁶⁸ Paine to Artemas Ward, 18 June 1775, in Paine, *Papers*, 3:63.

⁶⁹ Hancock to Elbridge Gerry, 18 June 1775, Austin, *Life of Gerry*, 1:82-3. Hancock to Dr. Joseph Warren, 18 June 1775, LoD, 1:507.

⁷⁰ Webb, *Correspondence and Journals*, 1:70-1.

⁷¹ PGW:RW, 1:16-7.

And when (all milder means withstood)
Ambition, tam'd by loss of blood,
Regains her reason; then, on angels wings,
Shall *peace* descend, and shouting greet,
With peals of joy, these happy climes.⁷²

That verse was adapted from the British poet Edward Young's "Ode the Second: in which is The Sailor's Prayer Before Engagement," published in *A Sea-Piece* in 1733.⁷³

In fact, Washington was not ready to depart the day after writing that letter. He had been busy since his appointment, asking Horatio Gates to hurry to Philadelphia and John Adams to describe the political situation in Massachusetts. All through June he had continued to prepare for a military campaign. Early in the month, for example, he bought "a tomahawk, several cartouch boxes, and new coverings for his holsters."⁷⁴

By 19 June Washington had sent his "Chariot & Horses back" to Mount Vernon, along with some of the men attending them.⁷⁵ He replaced them with a new team and vehicle purchased on the Continental Army account: five horses "for my journey to the Army at Cambridge—and for the Service I was then going upon." These animals came as two paired teams for £200 Pennsylvania money (one of which was "had on credit" from merchant James Mease), and "a bay, warranted sound," for £39. They had to be housed briefly at Benjamin Hemmings's stable. On 22 June the general recorded buying a "light Phaeton" from Dr. Peter Renaudet (£55), a "double Harness" including "chair saddle" from harnessmaker William Todd (£7.15), and £29.13.8 worth of other goods from various suppliers: leather canteen, saddle, stirrups, letter case, maps, spy-glasses, and more "for the use of my Command."⁷⁶

3.5 WASHINGTON'S MILITARY BOOKS

On 7 June, as the Continental Congress discussed whether to adopt the army in New England, Washington recorded the expense of buying "5 books—military."⁷⁷ He did not specify what those books were, but he undoubtedly intended to use them in his duties of setting up the Continental Army and, most likely, commanding it.

In November the general wrote to William Woodford, an acquaintance from Virginia who had just been appointed an officer there, with recommendations of five military books: "Bland (the newest edition) stands foremost; also an Essay on the Art of War; Instructions for

⁷² Purdie's *Virginia Gazette*, 14 July 1775.

⁷³ Young's lines end with "Britannia's fleet" instead of "these happy climes," and are part of a much longer poem; Young, *Works of the Author of the Night-Thoughts*, 1:252.

⁷⁴ Henriques, *Realistic Visionary*, 41.

⁷⁵ PGW:RW, 1:13.

⁷⁶ Fitzpatrick stated, "Benjamin Hemmings, a Philadelphia stableman... appears to have accompanied Washington to Cambridge," but it is unclear why he reached that conclusion.

⁷⁷ Longmore, *Invention of George Washington*, 276.

Officers, lately published at Philadelphia; the Partisan; Young; and others.”⁷⁸ Scholars have identified those books as:

- Humphrey Bland, *A Treatise of Military Discipline*, as revised in 1762. Washington ordered an earlier edition as a young officer in 1756, and a copy was in his inventory when he died.⁷⁹
- Count Launcelot Turpin de Crissé, *Essai sur l'Art de la Guerre*, published in Paris in 1754, translated by Capt. Joseph Otway as *An Essay on the Art of War* and published in London in 1761.
- Roger Stevenson, *Military Instructions for Officers Detached in the Field*, newly published in Philadelphia by R. Aitken in 1775.
- *The Partisan; or, The Art of Making War in Detachment*, by Capt. “de Jeney” (possibly Jacques Marie Ray de Geniés); another French manual, translated and published in London in 1760.
- Maj. William Young, *Manoeuvres, or Practical Observations on the Art of War*, published in London, probably in 1771. This collection included 62 copperplate diagrams, an essay on impromptu log fortifications, and General James Wolfe’s “Instructions to Young Officers.” Washington made notes on a back page of his copy.

Washington’s copies of the last four books are in the collection of the Boston Athenæum.⁸⁰ In addition, a copy of the 1770 London edition of Stevenson’s *Instructions* is among Washington’s books at the Morgan Library and Museum in New York.

It is tempting to assume that the five books Washington recommended to Woodford are the same as the five he bought for himself in June, and there was probably some overlap. Washington’s mention of the recent Philadelphia edition of Stevenson’s *Military Instructions* shows that he had seen that edition, and it appears that he tried to order Bland’s *Treatise* for the Virginia militia companies.⁸¹ However, *The Partisan* would not have been useful in the Boston siege; it focused on the type of backwoods warfare that Washington had experienced as a young Virginia officer, which is why he might have recommended it to Woodford.

⁷⁸ Washington to Woodford, 10 November 1775, PGW:RW, 2:346.

⁷⁹ Spaulding, “The Military Studies of George Washington,” *American Historical Review*, 29 (1924), 675- 680. Bean, “Washington’s Military Library,” *Journal of the Military Service Institution of the United States*, 35 (1904), 416.

⁸⁰ Griffin and Lane, *Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenæum*.

⁸¹ Washington did business with Aitken in June 1775, buying a leather letter case shortly before departing Philadelphia. Washington and Kitman, *George Washington’s Expense Account*, 107. Washington asked William Milnor to supply a “Treatise on Military Discipline,” but Milnor could find only Lt. Samuel Webb’s *Treatise on Military Appointments of the Army*; Milnor to Washington, 29 November 1774; PGW:Colonial, 10:189-90.

3.6 THE JOURNEY NORTH

Washington, Lee, and Philip Schuyler, appointed general of Continental troops in northern New York and Canada, finally left Philadelphia on the morning of Friday, 23 June 1775. John Adams described their departure:

The Three Generals were all mounted, on Horse back, accompanied by Major [Thomas] Mifflin who is gone in the Character of Aid de Camp. All the Delegates from the Massachusetts with their Servants, and Carriages attended. Many others of the Delegates, from the Congress—a large Troop of Light Horse, in their Uniforms. Many Officers of Militia besides in theirs. Musick playing &c. &c. Such is the Pride and Pomp of War.⁸²

Rush recalled that “Thousands thronged to see him [Washington] set off from his lodgings,” and that “Mifflin held his stirrup while he mounted his horse.”⁸³ In addition to Mifflin, a Philadelphia merchant (see section 5.5), Washington was accompanied by lawyer Joseph Reed (see section 5.8), body servant William Lee (see section 9.9), and other, unnamed servants to care for the horses and carriage. Charles Lee (see section 4.5) traveled with his first aide de camp, Samuel Griffin (1746-1810); his Italian servant, Guiseppi Minghini; and his dogs.⁸⁴ After “no farther than about five miles,” the Philadelphia militiamen turned back, and the generals dismounted and rode on in the carriage through New Jersey.⁸⁵

The generals spent that night at New Brunswick and considered how to enter New York. As Schuyler wrote to the president of the New York Provincial Congress, “The situation of the men-at-war at New York (we are informed) is such as to make it necessary that some precaution should be taken in crossing Hudson’s river.” No one knew if the Royal Navy might try to arrest the new generals before they reached the rebellious army. A committee from the New York congress came out to Newark to escort the Continental generals into the capital. They crossed the Hudson from Hoboken to a point about a mile north of the city, arriving in mid-afternoon on Sunday, 25 June. *Rivington’s Gazetteer*, a Loyalist newspaper, reported: “they were conducted into the city, by nine companies of foot, in their uniforms, and a greater number of the principal inhabitants of that city than ever appeared on any occasion before.”⁸⁶ Later the same day the royal governor, Lord Tryon, entered New York City from the south, greeted by spectators of his own.

⁸² John Adams to Abigail Adams, 23 June 1775, AFC, 1:226.

⁸³ Rush, *Autobiography*, 113.

⁸⁴ Griffin, a Virginian who had settled in Philadelphia, was formally appointed Lee’s aide on 4 July 1775 and remained through the winter. PGW:RW, 1:55, 58. This unusual spelling of Minghini’s first name comes from NYHSC, 5:368; see also Langworthy, *Memoirs of the Late Charles Lee*, 190-2.

⁸⁵ Baker, *Itinerary of General Washington*, 5.

⁸⁶ Baker, *Itinerary of General Washington*, 6-7. Janet Montgomery later wrote that Washington “drove a sulky, with a pair of white horses; his dress was blue, with purple ribbon sash,—a lovely plume of

While in New York, Washington met a dispatch rider on his way to the Congress. He explained his response to Hancock:

Upon my Arrival here this afternoon I was informed that an Express was in Town from the provincial Camp in massachusetts Bay; and having seen among other papers in his possession a Letter directed to you as president of the Congress I have taken the Liberty to open it.

I was induced to take that Liberty by several Gentlemen of New York who were anxious to know the particulars of the Affair of the 17th Inst. and were agreeable to the Orders of many Members of the Congress who judgd it necessary that I should avail myself of the best Information in the Cour[s]e of my Journey⁸⁷

The letter offered an early report on the Battle of Bunker Hill, confirming that the war had risen to a new level of destruction. Washington had ridden to Boston once before, back in March 1756.⁸⁸ Lee, Mifflin, and Reed had each visited more recently. But with this news, none of the men knew what they would now find in Massachusetts.

On Monday, 26 June the New York Provincial Congress gave Gen. Washington an official welcome, adding the Whiggish hope that “You will chearfully resign the important Deposit committed into Your Hands, and reassume the Character of our worthiest Citizen.”⁸⁹ Possibly using words written by Lee, Washington replied, “When we assumed the Soldier, we did not lay aside the Citizen, & we shall most sincerely rejoice with you in that happy Hour, when the Establishment of American Liberty. . . shall enable us to return to our private Stations.” The legislature later published both its address and the general’s reassuring reply.⁹⁰

In New York, Washington probably stayed at Robert Hull’s tavern.⁹¹ He bought wine on his expense account, and upholstery for the carriage. He also paid for a trunk, writing paper, sealing wax, and other supplies necessary to set up the headquarters office.⁹² Most of

feathers in his hat.” Quoted in Olin, “The Widow of General Montgomery,” *The Ladies’ Repository*, 17 (1857), 141; and published in Montgomery, *Biographical Notes Concerning General Richard Montgomery*. Following Douglas Southall Freeman, many authors have repeated those sartorial details, but they do not appear reliable.

⁸⁷ PGW:RW, 1:34-5. This letter was dated 24 June, but its content and newspaper reports make clear that Washington must have composed it on 25 June. On most of the journey to Massachusetts, the general and his staff were off by one day.

⁸⁸ Clifford K. Shipton speculated that during that 1756 visit Col. Washington’s hosts took him across the river to view Harvard College, but there is no definite evidence for such a trip. *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, 12:501.

⁸⁹ Longmore, *Invention of George Washington*, 178.

⁹⁰ Longmore, *Invention of George Washington*, 179.

⁹¹ PGW:RW, 1:33.

⁹² Washington and Kitman, *Expense Account*, 111.

the party's cash appears to have been handled by Mifflin. At the end of the trip, the commander's accounts say he had paid out £34.8 himself while Mifflin paid £129.8.2 "in which the Expences of General Lee, Colo. Reed &c were included."⁹³

The three generals pressed on that afternoon, staying the night in Kingsbridge. The next day at New Rochelle they met with David Wooster of Connecticut, whom the Congress had appointed as a brigadier general. Washington and his company left Schuyler to give Wooster orders for defending New York and continued to New Haven. According to Noah Webster, then a student at Yale College, they stayed at the tavern of Isaac Beers.⁹⁴ In the morning, reported the *Connecticut Journal*, "They were escorted out of town by two companies dressed in their uniform, and by a company of young gentlemen belonging to the Seminary in this place [Yale], who made a handsome appearance, and whose expertness in the military exercises gained them the approbation of the Generals."⁹⁵ Washington and Lee continued north through Wethersfield and Hartford, Connecticut, and into Massachusetts.⁹⁶

3.7 THE RECEPTION IN MASSACHUSETTS

On 18 June, two days after Washington accepted the responsibility of commander-in-chief, John Hancock sent the news to Dr. Joseph Warren as head of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress:

The Congress have Appointed George Washington Esqr. General & Commander in Chief of the Continental Army, his Commission is made out, & I shall Sign it tomorrow, he is a Gentn. you will all like. I Submit to you the propriety of providing a suitable place for his Residence, & the mode of his Reception. Pray tell Genl. Ward of this with my Respects, & that we all Expect to hear that the Military Movements of the Day of his Arrival will be such as to do him & the Commandr in Chief great honour.⁹⁷

Hancock did not know that the doctor had died the day before he wrote. James Warren, a merchant from Plymouth, chaired the congress when the letter arrived (see section 5.6).

The legislature began to consider how to receive the new officers. On 24 June they ordered:

That the president [James Warren], Mr. [Elbridge] Gerry, Major [Joseph] Hawley, Deacon [David] Cheever, Col. [Joseph] Gerrish, Col. [Benjamin] Lincoln and Col. [Elisha] Porter, be a committee to consider what steps are proper to be

⁹³ Washington and Kitman, *Expense Account*, 40-1.

⁹⁴ Scudder, *Noah Webster*, 6.

⁹⁵ *Connecticut Journal*, 5 July 1775. Also quoted in Barber, *Connecticut Historical Collections*, 176.

⁹⁶ Baker, *Itinerary*, 7-8. See also Ferling, *First of Men*, 122-3.

⁹⁷ LoD, 1:508-9.

taken for receiving General Washington with proper respect, and to provide a house for him accordingly.⁹⁸

This was a high-powered committee, including some of the body's most prestigious members. They reported the next day that the congress should send a committee of three to greet Washington. However, for some reason only two men agreed: Dr. Benjamin Church, Jr. (1734-1778), a physician from Boston already known to the generals from his visit to the Congress at Philadelphia in May, and Moses Gill (1734-1800) of Princeton. Their charge was:

to repair to Springfield, there to receive Generals Washington and Lee, with every mark of respect due to their exalted characters and stations; to provide proper escorts for them, from thence, to the army before Boston, and the house provided for their reception at Cambridge; and to make suitable provision for them, in manner following, viz.: by a number of gentlemen of this colony from Springfield to Brookfield; and by another company raised in that neighborhood, from there to Worcester; and by another company, there provided, from thence to Marlborough; and from thence, by the troop of horse in that place, to the army aforesaid: And [to make suitable provision for] their company at the several stages on the road, and to receive the bills of expenses at the several inns, where it may be convenient for them to stop for refreshment, to examine them, and make report of the several sums expended at each of them, for that purpose, that orders may be taken by the Congress for the payment of them: and all innkeepers are hereby directed to make provision agreeably to the requests made by the said committee: and that General Ward be notified of the appointment of General Washington, as commander in chief of the American forces, and of the expectation we have, of his speedy arrival with Major General Lee, that he, with the generals of the forces of the other colonies, may give such orders for their honorable reception, as may accord with the rules and circumstances of the army, and the respect due to their rank, without, however, any expense of powder, and without taking the troops off from the necessary attention to their duty, at this crisis of our affairs.⁹⁹

Church and Gill headed west to meet the generals at Springfield on 30 June and conduct them through the colony, militia units and crowds greeting them in every town.

At the same time, the Provincial Congress took its first steps toward providing the generals with somewhere to stay. The body resolved:

That the [Harvard College] president's house in Cambridge, excepting one room reserved by the president for his own use, be taken, cleared, prepared, and furnished, for the reception of General Washington and General Lee, and that a committee be chosen immediately to carry the same into execution.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 391.

⁹⁹ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 395, 398.

¹⁰⁰ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 398-9.

The congress also chose a five-man committee to oversee this work. Five days later, with the generals having arrived in Watertown, the congress ordered “That the committee for procuring and furnishing a house for Generals Washington and Lee, be directed to purchase what things are necessary, that they cannot hire [rent],” and “to procure some refreshment for the Generals.”¹⁰¹ At that point the congress still expected one house to suffice for both men.

On 1 July Moses Gill wrote to John Adams from Spencer, Massachusetts:

I am Now Acompanyg Genl. Washington and Lee from Springfield to the Camp. . . We Meet them at Spring, lodged last Night at Brookfield and are now under the Escort of the Troop of Horse which is to Continue till we arive at Worcester— where we are to be received by an Other Troop which is to Escort us to Morelborough—where we are to be received by an other Troop of Horse which is to Land the General at the Camp—but Now [no] Powder used.¹⁰²

The procession reached Watertown the next morning.¹⁰³ Though that was a Sunday, the Provincial Congress was meeting in the town meetinghouse even on Sabbaths. That day’s session started at eight in the morning, the legislators no doubt eager to see the generals arrive. When they did, the legislature delivered formal welcoming addresses to both Washington and Lee (see appendix C), and then let the commanders ride on. According to Ezekiel Price, then living in Milton, “It rained plentiful showers from eleven o’clock till sundown.”¹⁰⁴

The Provincial Congress later reported to Gov. Trumbull of Connecticut:

We have the pleasure to be able to acquaint your honor, that Generals Washington and Lee, with Mr. Mifflin, aid-de-camp to General Washington, arrived at Cambridge, last Sabbath, in good health, a little after 12 o’clock, at noon, and have great reason to expect, from their known characters, and their activity, and vigilance, already discovered, that their presence in the army will be attended with most happy consequences.¹⁰⁵

Pvt. Phineas Ingalls, stationed somewhere in Cambridge, showed no such happiness in his diary entry for that Sunday: “Rained. A new general from Philadelphia.”¹⁰⁶

Washington and Lee probably went to Gen. Artemas Ward’s headquarters in the Hastings house beside Harvard College. Ward gave Washington his orderly book, thus

¹⁰¹ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 441.

¹⁰² PJA, 3:53.

¹⁰³ Ezekiel Price in Milton expected that the generals would not arrive until Tuesday, possibly thinking that they would not travel on the Sabbath, as New England law required in peacetime; MHSP, 7:194.

¹⁰⁴ MHSP, 7:194.

¹⁰⁵ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 447.

¹⁰⁶ EIHC, 53:85.

passing on his authority as commander. Washington welcomed Ward as second-in-command of the new Continental Army. The officers probably ate together, getting acquainted and discussing the military situation. Some later authors described a celebration with “patriotic songs” or, conversely, “a rollicking bachelor’s song, calculated to make the immobile features of the chief relax.”¹⁰⁷ However, there is no evidence behind those traditions. The military gentlemen involved probably all sought to impress each other with their serious purpose and dignity, and it was still a Sunday. In the afternoon, Ens. Noah Chapin reported in his diary, “Genrel Washington & Genrel Lee with several other Gentlemen. . . Road out to the line of forts at Prospect Hill in Charlestown.”¹⁰⁸ The new generals then went to the Harvard president’s house for the night.

3.8 REACTIONS TO THE NEW GENERAL

Ezekiel Price wrote that 3 July 1775 was “exceeding pleasant,” and “towards noon, very warm.”¹⁰⁹ Over the nineteenth century, descriptions of Washington’s first full day in Cambridge gradually became more elaborate, with the commander-in-chief reviewing the full army—or a large portion of it—on Cambridge common. Evidence from 1775 suggests that there was no large review, but rather a series of inspections as Washington and Lee moved from one position to another, looking for points of vulnerability. The new commander himself might have quietly recalled that 3 July was the anniversary of one of his earliest military experiences—the disastrous battle at Fort Necessity in 1754.¹¹⁰

Some men in the New England army were excited about the new commander-in-chief. Lt. Joseph Hodgkins of Ipswich wrote to his wife from Cambridge:

. . .geeneral Washington & Lea got in to Cambridge yesterday and to Day they are to take a Vew of ye Armeey & that will he atended With a grate Deal of grandor there is at this time one & twenty Drumers & as many fiffers a Beting and Playing Round the Prayde.¹¹¹

As loud as forty-two drummers and fifers might be, those represented only about two regiments’ worth of musicians, so this parade was still limited. A Newburyport lieutenant was stationed on Prospect Hill, Paul Lunt, wrote in his diary:

¹⁰⁷ Amory, *Old Cambridge and New*, 23. Drake, *Historic Fields and Mansions of Middlesex*, 262.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Batchelder, *Bits of Cambridge History*, 262. IS THIS PGW? 3:480, n82: Noah Chapin diary, 2 July 1775, in LC, says Washington was at Prospect Hill on that date.

¹⁰⁹ MHSP, 7:194.

¹¹⁰ As Fred Anderson pointed out, in 1776 Washington wrote to a fellow veteran about “the Anniversary of the 3d,” showing that he remembered the date; “Hinge of the Revolution,” *Massachusetts Historical Review*, 1:48.

¹¹¹ *Ipswich Antiquarian Papers*, June 1881, quoted in Waters, *Ipswich in the Massachusetts Bay Colony*, 2:326.

Turned out early in the morning, got in readiness to be reviewed by the general. New orders given out by General Washington.¹¹²

The same words appear in the diary of Pvt. Moses Sleeper, also from Newburyport.¹¹³ However, several other soldiers and observers, probably at other parts of the siege lines, merely noted news of the generals' arrival or wrote that nothing remarkable happened.¹¹⁴

Some officers were eager to impress the new commanders. On 4 July, Gen. Nathanael Greene reported:

I sent a detachment today of two hundred men, commanded by a Colonel, Lieutenant Colonel and Major with a Letter of Address to welcome his excellency to Camp. The detachment met with a very gracious reception, and his Excellency returned me a very polite answer and Invitation to visit him at his Quarters.¹¹⁵

The young general's pleasure was not echoed in the comments of Ens. Noah Chapin of Somers, Connecticut:

this Day near 2000 Troops mustered toward Cambrid to waight on the new Generals But was Rejected By the General Who said they did not want to have time spent in waiting on them.¹¹⁶

On 5 July the commander reimbursed himself more than £18 for "the Exps. of myself & Party reconnoit'g the Sea Coast East of Boston Harbor," suggesting he may have stayed overnight at an inn in Chelsea. He dined in Cambridge with Ward, Lee, Putnam, their aides, and the Rev. Dr. Samuel Cooper (1725-1783), as the Patriot minister recorded in his diary.¹¹⁷ Later that day, Washington and Lee rode south to inspect positions at Roxbury, meeting Henry Knox on the road (see section 10.8).¹¹⁸ Three days later, Washington and his staff hosted James Warren, president of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, who would soon

¹¹² MHSP, 12:194.

¹¹³ Sleeper's diary is now in the archive of Longfellow House—Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site.

¹¹⁴ Martyn, *Artemas Ward*, 153.

¹¹⁵ PNG, 1:94.

¹¹⁶ Quoted by Anderson, *MHR*, 1:24.

¹¹⁷ Cooper, "Diary of Samuel Cooper," *American Historical Review*, 6 (1900-01), 313. Cooper waited on Washington and Lee again on 12 July, leaving letters for Reed to send to Philadelphia. He visited the new headquarters on 24 July in company with "Capt. Freeman," probably merchant Constant Freeman (1729-1806). *American Historical Review*, 6:314-5. He returned on 22 August on unspecified business with Thomas Dennie (1756-1842), son of a Loyalist merchant from Little Cambridge. *American Historical Review*, 6:317.

¹¹⁸ MHSP, 14:289.

be speaker of the Massachusetts House and paymaster general for the Continental Army (see section 5.6). From Watertown, Warren reported to Samuel Adams:

I dined Yesterday with Genl. Washington. he is an amiable man and fully answers the high Character you and my Friend [John] Adams have given of him. I admire the Activity, Spirit and Obligeing Behaviour of Mifflin. Coll. Read is a very sensible, agreable Gentleman.¹¹⁹

Washington went back to the Roxbury camp on 13 July.¹²⁰

Another person who encountered Washington and Lee during these busy days was Abigail Adams, who wrote to her husband on 16 July 1775:

The appointment of the Generals Washington and Lee, gives universal satisfaction. The people have the highest opinion of Lees abilities, but you know the continuation of the popular Breath, depends much upon favorable events.

I had the pleasure of seeing both the Generals and their Aid de camps soon after their arrival and of being personally made known to them. They very politely express their regard for you. Major Mifflin said he had orders from you to visit me at Braintree. I told him I should be very happy to see him there, and accordingly sent Mr. Thaxter to Cambridge with a card to him and Mr. Read to dine with me. Mrs. Warren and her Son were to be with me. They very politely received the Message and lamented that they were not able to upon account of Expresses which they were that day to get in readiness to send of[f].

I was struck with General Washington. You had prepared me to entertain a favorable opinion of him, but I thought the one half was not told me. Dignity with ease, and complacency, the Gentleman and Soldier look agreably blended in him. Modesty marks every line and fecture of his face. Those lines of Dryden instantly occurd to me

“Mark his Majestick fabrick! He’s a temple
Sacred by birth, and built by hands divine
His Souls the Deity that lodges there.
Nor is the pile unworthy of the God.”

General Lee looks like a careless hardy Veteran and from his appearance brought to my mind his namesake Charls the 12, king of Sweeden. The Elegance of his pen far exceeds that of his person.¹²¹

This appears to have been the only time that Abigail Adams met Washington during the siege of Boston, and it occurred while he was still stationed in the Harvard president’s house.

¹¹⁹ Warren to Adams, 9 July 1775, MHSC, 73:414.

¹²⁰ Heath, *Memoirs*, 18.

¹²¹ AFC, 1:246-7. Adams and Warren’s disappointment at not receiving the generals’ promised visit may eventually have come back to Washington (see section 17.2).

3.9 CHOOSING A HEADQUARTERS

On the morning of 6 July, only four nights after the new generals arrived in Cambridge, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress ordered its Committee of Safety “to desire General Washington to let them know if there is any house at Cambridge, that would be more agreeable to him and General Lee than that in which they now are.”¹²² By the next day, it was clear that the two generals would be living separately, and on 8 July the committee decided that “it is necessary the house of Mr. John Vassal, ordered by Congress for the residence of his excellency General Washington, should be immediately put in such condition as may make it convenient for that purpose.”¹²³

These records offer no clue as to why Washington thought the Vassall mansion would be “more agreeable” than the Harvard president’s house. There are several possible reasons. The first is that the Vassall house was larger, with no occupants to defer to. Washington expected his staff to grow, and he needed space not simply for meetings and paperwork but also for receiving guests and dining in a formal fashion.

In addition, the neighborhood of the president’s house was crowded. It stood in the center of Cambridge village, very close to where hundreds of soldiers were living in the college buildings. With his emphasis on hierarchy, the new commander probably wanted more distance between himself and the men. The Vassall house was more secluded, on the road between the main barracks and Watertown, where the Provincial Congress was governing most of Massachusetts.

Another consideration for Washington might have been security. The president’s house was half a mile closer to the siege lines, and to the bridge over the Charles River. By the morning of 4 July, Washington asked for that bridge to be converted into a drawbridge, showing his concern that the enemy might be able to use it. Though a provincial committee promised to take up the matter of the bridge, that task was never carried out.¹²⁴

One last factor, and perhaps the most important, is that Washington might simply have felt most comfortable on the John Vassall estate. With its manor house surrounded by outbuildings, fields, meadows, orchards, and other lands (worked, at least in part, by

¹²² Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 460.

¹²³ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 593.

¹²⁴ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 445, 451-2. In 1861, Eliza Susan Quincy set down an anecdote that she had heard three decades before from Dr. Amos Holbrook, who joined the Continental Army as a surgeon’s mate in August 1775. He told her that “a shell thrown by the British from Copp’s Hill struck the ground in the square near the President’s house. The fuze was yet burning; and a soldier went and stamped it out, at the risk of his life.” Quincy, *Memoir of the Life*, 223. Teele, *History of Milton*, 527. Quincy speculated that Washington moved his headquarters further from Boston for fear of more shells; MHSP, 12:263. However, the center of Cambridge was beyond the range of eighteenth-century mortars. Dr. Holbrook may have exaggerated or been misunderstood. Fifer John Greenwood recalled a similar incident on 21 July 1775, but that took place on the siege lines; Greenwood, *Revolutionary Services*, 21, 113.

enslaved people), all overlooking a river, the estate was more like his home at Mount Vernon than any other place in Cambridge could be.

3.10 MYTHS OF THE WASHINGTON ELM AND THE “OLD HUNDRED”

Over the middle of the nineteenth century, stories bloomed about Gen. Washington taking command of the Continental Army in a picturesque ceremony. Depictions of this event in art, poetry, and prose fed each other, informing most Americans that he had unsheathed his sword in front of the army assembled on Cambridge common on 3 July 1775. A less widespread tradition added that he also read a psalm to the troops. There is no contemporaneous support for such a ceremony, but it defined the public memory of Washington’s arrival during Henry W. Longfellow’s lifetime.

Even within Washington’s lifetime, American popular culture depicted his assuming command publicly and formally. In 1797 the engraver Elkanah Tisdale (1768-1835) created an image captioned “GENL. WASHINGTON takes Command of the American Army at Cambridge July 3d 1775” as an inset printed below a portrait of the general.¹²⁵ This scene showed Washington on horseback with three other mounted men, reviewing a long line of uniformed soldiers equipped with muskets, bayonets, and flags. Tents stand in the background. The troops appear far more regular than any description of the New England army of 1775 suggests.

In an oration in Cambridge’s meetinghouse on 4 July 1826 Edward Everett stated that Washington had taken command nearby: “Beneath the venerable elm which still shades the southwestern corner of the common, General Washington first unsheathed his sword at the head of an American army. . . .”¹²⁶ Twenty years later, Everett included that elm tree on the seal of the city of Cambridge. By that time an article in the *American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge* had dubbed the tree “The Washington Elm.”¹²⁷

As Thomas J. Campanella wrote in his study of New England elms, that tree on Cambridge common represented not only Revolutionary history but also the city’s rural past. In the 1820s, the decade when Everett first spoke about the elm, Cambridge’s population nearly doubled, and by 1845 it doubled again. The city became a bustling industrial center. The tree ended up stuck on a traffic island encircled by an iron fence for protection from

¹²⁵ Elkanah Tisdale, “Genl. Washington,” in *The American War, from 1775 to 1783, with plans* (New York: Charles Smith, 1797), record #9128-1, John Carter Brown Library Archive of Early American Images. Visible at <<http://jcb.lunaimaging.com/luna/servlet/detail/JCB~1~1~4711~7410007:Genl—Washington>>

¹²⁶ Everett, *An Oration Delivered at Cambridge*, 2. Thanks to Cambridge resident Robert Winters for pointing to this citation.

¹²⁷ *American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge*, 3:432.

wagon wheels.¹²⁸ People began to speak of the tree as a relic not simply of Revolutionary times but of the time before the town's founding.

The story of the Washington Elm, often called "venerable," spread over the next few decades. The Rev. Charles W. Upham of Salem mentioned it in his Independence Day oration in 1842, which, like Everett's, was anthologized in elocution textbooks.¹²⁹ Washington Irving retold the story in his 1855 biography of Washington.¹³⁰ Benson J. Lossing wrote about the tree in the November 1850 *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, calling it "older, probably, by a half century or more, than the welcome of Samoset to the white settlers."¹³¹ Lossing adapted that article in his *The Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution*, which provides the common text of the legend:

On the morning of the 3d of July, at about nine o'clock, the troops at Cambridge were drawn up in order upon the Common to receive the commander-in-chief. Accompanied by the general officers of the army who were present, Washington walked from his quarters to the great elm-tree that now stands at the north end of the Common, and, under the shadow of its broad covering, stepped a few paces in front, made some remarks, drew his sword, and formally took command of the Continental army.¹³²

Despite his certainty, Lossing had not spoken to an eyewitness to this ceremony, and his writings are not even clear about the location of the tree.

Poets also spread the legend of the Washington Elm. Verses about the landmark include:

- "The Washington Elm in Cambridge, Massachusetts," by Lydia Huntley Sigourney (1791-1865).¹³³
- "Under the Washington Elm, Cambridge, April 27, 1861," by Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809-1894).¹³⁴ This poem did not mention Washington except in its title. Instead, it contrasted the fabled gathering of Cambridge militiamen on the town common on 19 April 1775 with the mob attack on Union troops in Baltimore on the same date in 1861.
- "Under the Old Elm," an ode written for 3 July 1875, the hundredth anniversary of Washington's first full day in Cambridge, by James Russell Lowell (1819-1891).

In 1864 the city of Cambridge placed a granite monument beside the elm, proclaiming its place in the nation's history:

¹²⁸ Campanella, *Republic of Shade*, 62 and following.

¹²⁹ One example is William D. Swan, *The District School Reader* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1845), 420-3.

¹³⁰ Irving, *Life of George Washington*, 1:349.

¹³¹ *Harper's*, 1:726.

¹³² Lossing, *Pictorial Field-Book*, 1:564.

¹³³ Sigourney, *Scenes in My Native Land* (London: H. G. Clarke, 1845), 283-5.

¹³⁴ *Poems of Oliver Wendell Holmes* (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1862), 387.

Under This Tree
WASHINGTON
First Took Command
OF THE
AMERICAN ARMY,
July 3, 1775.

According to tradition reported as early as 1884 that line was composed by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.¹³⁵ Certainly the poet valued the tree as part of the city's historical and natural heritage. In April 1871 he transplanted seedlings from the elm, and in March 1875 the city forester brought him some items made from branches pruned off the tree.¹³⁶

The "Washington Elm" legend reached its height of picturesque absurdity with an unsourced claim from Samuel Adams Drake in 1874:

When the camp was here Washington caused a platform to be built among the branches of this tree, where he was accustomed to sit and survey with his glass the country round.¹³⁷

Few authors or artists accepted that detail, but by America's Centennial the image of the general taking command beneath the elm was firmly planted in American culture. In 1876 Currier & Ives published a lithograph of "Washington Taking Control of the American Army, at Cambridge, Mass. July 1775." It showed ranks of soldiers drawn up for review, equipped with uniforms, flags, and tents; Gen. Washington and other officers on horseback; and the Washington Elm towering over all.

The legend was so widely accepted that writers concocting diaries of Cambridge in 1775 felt they had to include it for authenticity. In *The Christian Life and Character of the Civil Institutions of the United States*, the Rev. B. F. Morris quoted "the journal of a chaplain in the American army" who had seen Washington take command under the elm (on 2 July). Morris never gave the name of this chaplain, the manuscript has never surfaced, and no other author appears to have accepted the authenticity of that journal entry.¹³⁸ Mary Williams Greely described the ceremony in her fictional "Diary of Dorothy Dudley," published in *The Cambridge of 1776*, which many later authors have taken as authentic.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ L. L. Dame, "Historic Trees," *Bay State Monthly*, 1 (1884), 86.

¹³⁶ Longfellow, *Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, 3:247.

¹³⁷ Drake, *Historic Fields and Mansions of Middlesex*, 268. Drake repeated this statement in further books and editions.

¹³⁸ Morris, *Christian Life and Character* (Philadelphia: George W. Childs, 1864), 285. This book suggested that Washington took formal command under the elm on 2 July, rather than the traditional date of 3 July.

¹³⁹ Gilman, *Cambridge of 1776*, 83.

The Washington Elm legend began to fall apart early in the twentieth century. (By that time the tree itself had been pruned of several limbs, wrapped with zinc bands, and held up with iron rods.) In his 1921 biography of Artemas Ward, Charles Martyn pointed out that no diaries, letters, or newspaper accounts from 1775 mention a large ceremony on Cambridge common. In fact, several soldiers' journals stated that nothing of importance happened on that 3 July.¹⁴⁰ Two years later, the elm collapsed during a pruning, and its pieces had to be carted away. Irving W. Bailey, a Harvard professor of plant anatomy, examined the trunk and concluded the tree had started growing in the early 1700s, well after Europeans arrived in Massachusetts.¹⁴¹ A. Gardner Bartlett published a letter in the *Cambridge Tribune* in November, later reprinted in *Old-Time New England*, pointing out the tree had stood in a regular line with five other elms of about the same age; he theorized that colonial farmers had planted them to provide shade on the common.¹⁴² Finally, local historian Samuel F. Batchelder rounded up the arguments against the Washington Elm tradition, repeating Martyn's evidence with a layer of withering sarcasm.¹⁴³

Nevertheless, the tradition endured, at least symbolically. Cuttings from the tree had been planted all over the country. Gavels and other items made from its wood were distributed to every state. A metal plaque was placed in the middle of the street where the elm had stood, and the granite monument was moved to the common, under a new elm, a "grandchild" of the original supplied by the Maryland D.A.R. In 1949 the city erected yet another monument with a bas-relief sculpture by Leonard Craske showing Washington taking command of rows of troops under a tree. After a great deal of effort, the Cambridge Historical Commission approved text that is historically unimpeachable, saying that the monument depicted a scene on 4 July 1775 at an unspecified nearby location, *after* Washington had taken command. In 1976 this city revised and rearranged the statuary, but the engraved granite stone remains, as do mentions of the Washington Elm in older books, so many visitors to Cambridge continue to receive and believe the legend.

A related story about Washington taking command in 1775 can be traced back as far as 1846. It surfaced in an Independence Day speech in Westfield (Massachusetts?) by the Rev. Daniel Waldo, an aged Revolutionary War veteran (though not one who was at Cambridge, or who ever met Washington). Boston's anti-slavery newspaper reported:

He remarked that there was a single incident that came within his personal knowledge which he believed was not generally known. It was that Washington,

¹⁴⁰ Martyn, *Artemas Ward*, 153.

¹⁴¹ *Arnold Arboretum Bulletin of Popular Information*, series 3, volume 5 (10 December 1931), 71, citing a Cambridge Park Department Report for the year ending March 1924.

¹⁴² Campanella, *Republic of Shade*, 64, 196.

¹⁴³ Batchelder, "The Washington Elm Tradition," *Cambridge Historical Society Publications*, 18 (1926), reprinted in Batchelder, *Bits of Cambridge History*.

on the day that he assumed the command of the American Army at Cambridge, read and caused to be sung the 101st Psalm. . .

Waldo then led the company in singing that psalm, traditionally known as “The Old Hundred.”¹⁴⁴ Over the following decades, the same story reappeared in other publications. Harriet Beecher Stowe put it in the mouth of a fictional veteran in *Oldtown Fireside Stories* (1872).

In 1878, for the first time, an author named an eyewitness to this event. The *Farmer’s Cabinet* magazine cited the memory of the late Amherst, New Hampshire, farmer Andrew Leavitt in saying that on 2 July 1775 Gen. Washington appeared “upon a magnificent black horse” and that “After the review the soldiers gathered around the tree under which the General sat, and listened to his address. At the conclusion he read to them from his Psalm book the 101st Psalm.”¹⁴⁵ Daniel F. Secomb described hearing the same story from Leavitt in his 1883 *History of the Town of Amherst, Hillsborough County, New Hampshire*.¹⁴⁶ Finally, George Allen Ramsdell’s 1901 *History of Milford, New Hampshire* states, “There is a tradition in the Wallace family, then represented by the soldier, Joseph Wallace, that when Washington had finished reading the psalm the company took up the matter and sang or chanted it to an appropriate tune.”¹⁴⁷ Documents from 1775 confirm that Leavitt and Wallace (or Wallis) were members of Capt. Josiah Crosby’s company in Col. James Reed’s New Hampshire regiment. However, in early July that regiment was stationed at Winter Hill in modern Somerville, not near the Cambridge common.¹⁴⁸

It would have been completely out of character for Gen. Washington to sit under a tree and read a psalm to soldiers gathered around him. He valued hierarchy and rank, and his religious behavior was not demonstrative. Had the new commander-in-chief behaved so much like a New England deacon, many local officers and politicians would have written about his action at the time. It seems more likely that Leavitt and Wallace (or their listeners in later decades) confused Washington with another high-ranking officer with more traditional New England religious habits, such as Gen. Ward. It is also possible that the story of the 101st Psalm was a legend created and spread by ministers in the mid-1800s which the Leavitt and

¹⁴⁴ *The Emancipator*, 29 July 1846. This report may have appeared even earlier in the *Boston Journal*, which is the newspaper that the *Southern Patriot* of Charleston, South Carolina, credited when it picked up the piece. The article was also reprinted over the next year in the *Connecticut Courant* and the *Friend of Salem*, Massachusetts.

¹⁴⁵ “Andrew Leavitt,” *The Farmer’s Cabinet*, 22 January 1878. The anonymous author of this article said Leavitt “narrated the events of that day to the writer who called on him one day after he had passed his ninetieth year,” which was in 1842.

¹⁴⁶ Secomb, *Town of Amherst*, 371. It is possible that Secomb (1820-1895) also wrote the *Farmer’s Cabinet* article in 1878, but the phrasing attributed to Leavitt differs.

¹⁴⁷ Ramsdell, *History of Milford*, 166-7.

¹⁴⁸ New Hampshire, *Documents and Records*, 7:596, 527-8, 565. Secomb, *Town of Amherst*, 369-70.

Wallace families adopted. Like the larger legend of the Washington Elm, there is no firm evidence for it.

CHAPTER FOUR

GENERALS OLD AND NEW

One of George Washington's first tasks on reaching Cambridge was to deliver formal commissions from the Continental Congress to the New England generals who had led the siege so far. Coming from four colonies, those officers were a mix of veterans and energetic newcomers. Most held commissions from their colonial governments, and in June the Congress had endorsed those choices and ranked the men as it took on the direction of the war.

Based on the discussions in Philadelphia, Washington might have expected some New England officers to resent seeing Gen. Charles Lee inserted near the top of the command chain. Instead, on arriving in Cambridge he found generals upset at how they now ranked against each other. One Connecticut commander stomped away because he was upset at his rank, and a Massachusetts general threatened to resign. Furthermore, there was an unexpected New Hampshire commander and extra Massachusetts brigadiers.

According to an arrival from New Hampshire in June, the officers at the siege were following this hierarchy: "Mr. [Artemas] Ward is Capt. General, Mr. [John] Thomas Lieut. General, and the other Generals are Major Generals."¹ Those major generals observed a seniority they had worked out among themselves; historian Fred Anderson described it as "an order based [on] an intricate and, to Washington, unfathomable calculus of age, experience, militia rank, social standing, political influence, and provincial allegiance."² The Congress's new rankings upset that system, and the result was the new commander's first political crisis.

4.1 THE MIX OF GENERAL OFFICERS

The Continental Congress made Washington its highest general. Officers and soldiers therefore occasionally referred to him as the "generalissimo," though some had trouble spelling the term. However, the Congress also told Washington to consult with a

¹ Nathaniel Folsom to New Hampshire Provincial Congress, 22 June 1775, *New Hampshire Provincial Papers*, 7:527. Although a major outranked a captain and lieutenant, a major general ranked *lower* than a captain general (a term the Continental Congress did not use) and a lieutenant general (a term it would use only later in the war). That is because the title of major general derived from the rank of sergeant-major.

² Anderson, "Hinge of the Revolution," *MHR*, 1:25.

council of war composed of all the other general officers available in the region before taking any important action.

Between 17 and 22 June the Congress appointed those generals in this order of seniority:

- as major generals, Artemas Ward, Charles Lee, Philip Schuyler of New York, and Israel Putnam.
- as brigadier generals, Seth Pomeroy, Richard Montgomery of New York, David Wooster of Connecticut, William Heath, Joseph Spencer, John Thomas, John Sullivan, Nathanael Greene, and Horatio Gates.³

Schuyler, Montgomery, and Wooster were assigned to the Northern Department, meaning the defense of northern New York—which quickly turned into the invasion of Canada (see chapter 16). As for the generals assigned to New England, the Congress distributed rankings across the four colonies, with the most populous (Massachusetts and Connecticut) coming first. Within each colony, relative seniority reflected how the provincial legislatures had assigned priority and what the Congress had heard about each man’s activity.

The Continental generals at Boston fell into three groups. There were two “regular generals”: Lee and Gates, born in Britain and bringing many years of experience as regular army officers. John Adams referred to “the earnest desire of General Washington to have the assistance of these officers” as one reason why he voted to commission them, despite the possibility of local opposition.⁴ Ironically, Lee and Gates were more radical in their politics than their American-born comrades; chafed by the British government’s patronage system, they had joined republican-leaning circles in England. They also praised the American militia system more than their colleagues.

The second group might be called the “old generals”: Ward, Putnam, Spencer, and Thomas, as well as the three men granted commissions by their home colonies but not the Congress. These New Englanders actually ranged in age from sixty-three to forty-seven, just a few years older than Washington himself. They had all, like him, served in high ranks in the British Empire’s wars against the French, commanding colonial regiments. That experience gained them great respect from their home colonies and from the men serving under them, at least at first.

The third group—Heath, Sullivan, and Greene—were “young generals,” in both age and experience. All in their thirties, they had never seen combat. Their knowledge of military matters came entirely from militia training and books. They were motivated by political principles and ambition.

³ JCC, 2:97-103.

⁴ PJA, 3:25-6.

Some intangible factors, difficult to document or to discern from a distance, also made some generals stand out. Washington, Lee, and Putnam had the power of celebrity; news papers had published stories about their exploits, and all had been publicly mentioned as possible commanders of an American army. Another factor was performance on the job: during the first two months of the siege, politicians and soldiers in Massachusetts had come to esteem Thomas. Over time, as Washington exerted control, personal rapport with the commander would influence the generals' relative standings. But at first he had to attend to unexpected grievances.

4.2 EXTRA GENERALS

Gen. Ward learned about the Congress's new appointments on 30 June in letters from John Hancock that also brought his commission.⁵ He showed the list to Joseph Frye (1712-1794) of Maine, whom the Massachusetts Provincial Congress had commissioned as a brigadier just nine days before. Not seeing his name, Frye said "he might then return to his family." Ward wished to keep Frye's services, so he "went up to Watertown" and brought back the Provincial Congress's assurance that "a letter would without delay be sent to the Continental Congress" about Frye and "sundry other General Officers appointed" in Massachusetts. Frye agreed to stay on.⁶

That same day, Ward wrote back to Hancock, saying, "I wish, Sir, the Appointments in this Colony may not have a Tendency to create Uneasiness among us; which we ought, at this critical Time, to be extremely careful to avoid."⁷ Ward did not detail the problems he saw, but over the next few days three appeared:

1. While waiting for the Continental Congress to take over the war, the New England colonies had commissioned additional generals—such as Brigadier Frye—who now thought they deserved the same rank in the Continental establishment.
2. The Continental Congress's senior brigadier, Pomeroy, had not been active in the army for weeks, and had never taken command responsibilities.
3. The way the Congress ranked generals in seniority did not match the hierarchy they had been observing among themselves.

Washington found substantial "Uneasiness" in Cambridge.

The easiest problem was the New Hampshire command structure. The colony had two regiments on the north wing of the siege lines. They were under the command of Col. John Stark and Col. James Reed, both initially reporting to Gen. Ward. On 29 May the New Hampshire Provincial Congress appointed Nathaniel Folsom (1726-1790) to head all its

⁵ LoD, 1:534.

⁶ Joseph Frye memorial, 30 May 1776, *American Archives*, series 5, 2:726.

⁷ Ward to Hancock, 30 June 1775, quoted in Martyn, *Artemas Ward*, opp. 151.

troops. He had fought in the Battle of Lake George in 1755 and represented the colony at the First Continental Congress.

Folsom arrived at the siege lines on 20 June and immediately found trouble. Stark announced that he did “not Intend to be under any subordination to any Person appointed by the Congress of New Hampshire to the general command of the New Hampr Troops.”⁸ While Folsom had been home meeting with the New Hampshire legislature, Stark had been fighting at Bunker Hill. It took a couple of days before Gen. Folsom could report that the colonel had agreed to respect his authority.⁹

Then came news of the Continental Congress’s list of generals, followed by Gen. Washington with the commissions. Folsom was left out. The new commander’s first general orders on 3 July 1775 acknowledged the presence of “General Falsam,” but John Sullivan, the only New Hampshire general commissioned by the Congress, arrived a week later.¹⁰ There are no documents about Sullivan’s discussions with Folsom, Stark, and Reed; evidently those officers worked out any potential conflict among themselves.¹¹ On 20 July Washington told the Congress that “General Folsom proposed. . .to retire.” He returned to New Hampshire, where in August the colony’s legislature voted to make Folsom the sole general of its militia.¹²

The Massachusetts Provincial Congress had produced a similar problem by commissioning more generals. In addition to Frye, who was working at Ward’s headquarters, the legislature had promoted Col. Richard Gridley of the artillery regiment to major general on 23 June (see section 10.1), and named John Whitcomb (1712-1785) of Bolton the “first major general of the Massachusetts army” on 13 June.¹³

Washington did not have to do anything about Whitcomb. This veteran had participated in Ward’s first council of war in April, but was reluctant to take on responsibilities; he declined the post of muster master in May and at first told the legislature that he would serve as major general only “until the army is regulated and properly encamped.”¹⁴ Whitcomb was in Cambridge during the Battle of Bunker Hill, ordering troops into battle. At a 14 July court martial, witnesses spoke of “General Whitcomb,” but notes for the Continental Army referred to “Colonel John Whitcomb, who is styled by the foregoing

⁸ *New Hampshire Provincial Papers*, 7:527-9. Stark and his men had enlisted under Ward, and therefore felt they had no legal obligation to their legislature.

⁹ *New Hampshire Provincial Papers*, 7:530.

¹⁰ PGW:RW, 1:50.

¹¹ Ben Z. Rose suggested that Folsom and Stark “accepted Sullivan’s selection as a compromise between their own candidacies”; *John Stark*, 69.

¹² *New Hampshire Provincial Papers*, 7:577.

¹³ The Massachusetts Provincial Congress had named Whitcomb as its fifth general in February. Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 105, 326, 333.

¹⁴ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 199, 206, 340-1.

deponents General,” offering no deference to his colonial rank.¹⁵ On 25 July the Massachusetts House chose Whitcomb to be a member of the colony’s Council, letting him save face by focusing on politics.¹⁶

Washington brought a commission for another Massachusetts general instead: Seth Pomeroy (1706-1777) of Northampton. He was in fact slated to be the Congress’s senior brigadier. A veteran of the attack on Louisburg in King George’s War, as well as of the French and Indian War, Pomeroy was the Massachusetts Provincial Congress’s third-ranking general as of October 1774. However, he had not taken a leadership role. Nearly seventy years old, he had traveled to Cambridge and joined other musket men in the Battle of Bunker Hill, but refused invitations to command. In Washington’s first report to the Congress, he wrote, “General Pomroy. . .retired before my Arrival occasioned (as is said) by some Disappointment from the Provincial Congress.”¹⁷ Pomeroy must have been sent news of the Congress’s commission, but did not come to Cambridge to accept it. On 20 July Washington reported, “I have heard nothing from General Pomroy, should he wholly retire, I apprehend it will be necessary to supply his Place as soon as possible.”¹⁸ That empty slot would prove useful.

4.3 RESENTMENT OVER RELATIVE RANK

More troublesome for Washington were generals on the Continental Congress’s list who objected to being ranked below others. John Thomas, though functioning as second-in-command behind Ward, fell toward the end of the Congress’s list of brigadiers. Among the Connecticut generals, their legislature had appointed Wooster and Spencer before Putnam, but the Congress had elevated Putnam to major general.

Washington discovered these problems shortly after arriving at Cambridge. On 10 July he wrote back to the Congress:

I am very sorry to observe that the Appointments of General Officers in the Provinces of Massachusetts & Connecticut have by no means corresponded with the Judgment & Wishes of either the civil or Military. The great Dissatisfaction expressed on this Subject & the apparent Danger of throwing the whole Army into the utmost Disorder, together with the strong Representations made by the Provincial Congress, have induced me to retain the Commissions in my Hands untill the pleasure of the Congress should be farther known (except General

¹⁵ *American Archives*, series 4, 2:1663.

¹⁶ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:284. After the siege, the Continental Congress offered Whitcomb the rank of brigadier general; he declined, in John Hancock’s words, “on Accot. of Age & a Diffidence of not being able to answer the Expectation of Congress.” *Letters of Delegates*, 4:336. Washington’s reaction appears in his letter to Artemas Ward, 1 July 1776; PGW:RW, 5:178.

¹⁷ PGW:RW, 1:89.

¹⁸ PGW:RW, 1:139.

Puttnams which was given the Day I came to the Camp & before I was apprized of these Uneasinesses). In such a Step I must beg the Congress will do me the Justice I beleive, that I have been actuated solely by a Regard to the publick Good. I have not, nor could have any private Attachments; every Gentleman in Appointment, was an entire Stranger to me but from Character. I must therefore rely upon the Candour of the Congress for their favourable Construction of my Conduct in this Particular. General Spencer was so much disgusted at the Preference given to General Puttnam, that he left the Army without visiting me, or making known his Intentions in any Respect. . . .

General Thomas is much esteemed & earnestly desired to continue in the Service: and as far as my Opportunities have enabled me to judge I must join in the general Opinion that he is an able good Officer & his Resignation would be a publick Loss. The postponing him to Pomroy & Heath whom he has commanded would make his Continuance very difficult, & probably operate on his Mind, as the like Circumstance has done on that of Spencer.¹⁹

Before leaving, Spencer had convinced a large number of Connecticut officers to sign a letter to their legislature on 5 July urging a protest to the Congress:

You are sensible it will be with great reluctance our Troops at Roxbury could see their General superseded by an officer in previous lower command. We have no objection to the appointment of Generals Washington and Lee, and shall endeavour to preserve the good order and submission to their government as hath before distinguished this part of the Connecticut Troops whilst under General Spencer's command; but the late arrangement so far removes General Spencer from his former command, that he cannot and will not continue in the service under this arrangement.²⁰

However, six days later the young Connecticut officer Samuel Blachley Webb told his stepfather, Congress delegate Silas Deane, that Spencer's support was not as solid as that letter suggested. He described Gen. Spencer's reaction to the Continental list:

He began to speak very freely; and finally, persuaded the officers, to remonstrate to the Assembly of Connecticut; and he set off immediately for home, without leave or license from Gen. Washington, which displeased him much. . . .

I have since been to Roxbury, and find the officers, many of them, heartily sick of what they have done, in particular, Maj. [Return Jonathan] Meiggs,—who says he was forced to sign what the others did—to keep peace; and says he had rather serve under Putnam than Spencer. You'll find Generals Washington and Lee, are vastly more fond, and think higher of Putnam, than any man in the army; and he truly is the Hero of the day. They have given him the command of Prospect Hill.

I find the intention of Spencer, was to get our Assembly to remonstrate to the Continental Congress, and beg a re-appointment; but little did he think that

¹⁹ PGW:RW, 1:89-90.

²⁰ *American Archives*, series 4, 2:1585.

this could not be done without cashiering Putnam, as he is in possession of his commission. Better is it for us to lose *four Spencers* than *half a Putnam*.

News of Putnam's new rank "gave universal satisfaction," Webb reported.²¹

Gen. Spencer ruined his cause by leaving camp. Connecticut delegates Deane and Eliphalet Dyer were so embarrassed that they would never propose a promotion for him in the Congress.²² At Hartford the Connecticut Committee of Safety mollified the old general, as shown in its notes of activity on 13 July:

The Governour laid before the Council, &c., sundry Letters and papers. Also a Letter he had prepared to General Washington, congratulating him on his appointment, &c.; and another to the same gentleman, hinting at General Spencer's uneasiness, &c., at being overlooked, &c., and that it was beside our expectations, &c., and proposing, &c., that said General Spencer may remain stationed at Roxbury with the body of Connecticut Troops now there, &c.; which are approved, though a small alteration was made in the Letter to gratify Gen. Spencer after he came in, &c.

Samuel Huntington and William Williams were desired to wait on General Spencer, at Gray's, the tavern where he was just arrived, and confer with him on the subject-matter of his dissatisfaction, &c., and endeavour to remove, &c., and reconcile him cheerfully to pursue the service; which they did accordingly.²³

Spencer returned to the camp on 19 July, presumably the day when he and Washington finally met. The commander-in-chief reported to Congress that the Connecticut brigadier "consented to serve under Putnam, rather than leave the Army intirely."²⁴

As for Gen. John Thomas, he never left camp, though he had more to resent than Spencer. He did suggest that he might resign from the army, which provoked a response from all quarters. The Massachusetts House promised support. On 23 July both Washington and Lee asked him to stay. Washington's letter appealed to Thomas's patriotism on behalf of all the colonies together:

...For the Sake of your bleeding Country, your devoted Province, your Charter rights, & by the Memory of those brave Men who have already fell in this great Cause, I conjure you to banish from your Mind every Suggestion of Anger and Disappointment: your Country will do ample Justice to your Merits—they already do it, by the Sorrow & Regret expressed on the Occasion and the Sacrifice you are called to make, will in the Judgment of every good Man, & lover of his Country, do you more real Honour than the most distinguished Victory.

²¹ Webb, *Reminiscences of Gen'l Samuel B. Webb*, 13-4.

²² Silas Deane to Elizabeth Deane, [15 July 1775?], LoD, 1:627-8. Eliphalet Dyer to Joseph Trumbull, 18 July 1775, LoD, 1:634-5.

²³ *American Archives*, series 4, 2:1658.

²⁴ Washington to Congress, 21 July 1775, PGW:RW, 1:138-9.

You possess the Confidence & Affection of the Troops of this Province particularly; many of them are not capable of judging the Propriety & Reasons of your Conduct: should they esteem themselves authorized by your Example to leave the Service, the Consequences may be fatal & irretrievable—there is Reason to fear it, from the personal Attachments of the Men to their Officers, & the Obligations that are supposed to arise from those Attachments. But, Sir, the other Colonies have also their Claims upon you, not only as a Native of America, but an Inhabitant of this Province. They have made common Cause with it, they have sacrificed their Trade, loaded themselves with Taxes & are ready to spill their Blood in Vindication of the Rights of Massachusetts Bay, while all the Security, & profit of a Neutrality has been offered them: But no Arts or Temptations could seduce them from your Side, & leave you a Prey to a cruel & perfidious Ministry. Sure these Reflections must have some Weight, with a Mind as generous & considerate as yours. . . .²⁵

Perhaps as characteristically, Lee's plea veered into a statement of his own worth:

You think yourself not justly dealt with in the appointments of the Continental Congress. I am quite of the same opinion, but is this a time Sir, when the liberties of your country, the fate of posterity, the rights of mankind are at stake, to indulge our resentments for any ill treatment we may have received as individuals? I have myself, Sir, full as great, perhaps greater reason to complain than yourself. I have passed through the highest ranks, in some of the most respectable services in Europe. According then to modern etiquette notions of a soldier's honor and delicacy, I ought to consider at least the preferment given to General Ward over me as the highest indignity, but I thought it my duty as a citizen and asserter of liberty, to waive every consideration. On this principle, although a Major General of five years standing [a largely honorary rank from the king of Poland], and not a native of America, I consented to serve under General Ward, because I was taught to think that the concession would be grateful to his countrymen, and flatter myself that the concession has done me credit in the eye of the world; and can you, Sir, born in this very country, which a banditti of ministerial assassins are now attempting utterly to destroy with sword, fire and famine, abandon the defence of her, because you have been personally ill used?

For God Almighty's sake, for the sake of everything that is dear, and ought to be dear to you, for the sake of your country, of mankind, and let me add of your own reputation, discard such sentiments.²⁶

Two groups of Thomas's officers chimed in as well.

Meanwhile, politicians were working out a new solution. Back on 4 July, James Warren and Joseph Hawley had written to Washington suggesting that "As Pomroy is now Absent and at the distance of an hundred miles from the Army," Thomas could be substituted as the most senior brigadier.²⁷ The general did not have the authority to make

²⁵ PGW:RW, 1:160-1.

²⁶ NYHSC, 4:197-8.

²⁷ PGW:RW, 1:61.

that change, but someone sent the idea to Philadelphia. The Continental Congress moved to fix the problem of Thomas's rank by resolving on 19 July:

That General Thomas be appointed first Brigadier General in the army of the United Colonies, in the room of Gen Pomeroy, who never acted under the Commission sent to him, and that Genl Thomas's commission bear the same date that General Pomroy's did.²⁸

Since Pomeroy had been the senior brigadier, moving Thomas into his slot meant Thomas would rank above all the other men he had previously commanded but one. On 4 August, Washington told Congress, "General Thomas has accepted his Commission and I have heard nothing of his retirement since, so that I hope he is satisfied."²⁹

With that, the Continental Army general officers at Boston were in place. They retained their ranks for the remainder of the siege. While the tussling over seniority undoubtedly affected Washington's image of the New England men, he was pleased to put that uneasiness behind him and work with his fellow generals.

4.4 ARTEMAS WARD: NEW ENGLAND GENTLEMAN

Historians have long made George Washington look better by heightening the contrasts between him and Artemas Ward (1727-1800), his predecessor as commander-in-chief. Authors portrayed Ward as aged, even though he was only five years older than Washington. They suggested Ward was incompetent, but he was in command during the siege's decisive battle and principal advocate of the plan that brought on its ultimate success. Historians paint Ward as parochial and tradition-bound—and that he certainly was.

By the values of New England society, Artemas Ward was an ideal country squire.³⁰ He received two degrees from Harvard, where not only did he have a clean disciplinary record but he volunteered to help the president end "swearing and cursing." He married a minister's daughter and fathered eight children. He was an active owner of the substantial farm he had inherited in Shrewsbury. Ward became a justice of the peace in 1751 the same year he began to hold town offices. His neighbors elected him town clerk and selectman twenty times, and first sent him to the Massachusetts General Court in 1757.

Physically, Ward was in his late forties, of medium height, somewhat stout, and occasionally suffering from kidney stones. According to the Rev. Timothy Dwight, Ward

was of few words, and those always pointing to the purpose in hand; was frank, undisguised, of inflexible integrity, an unwarping public spirit, and a fixed

²⁸ *American Archives*, series 4, 2:1886. JCC, 2:191.

²⁹ PGW:RW, 1:223.

³⁰ Biographical details come from Martyn, *Artemas Ward*, and Smith, "Rise of Artemas Ward."

adherence to what he thought right: a subject which he rarely mistook. His reverence for the Christian religion was entire; and his life adorned its precepts.³¹

In sum, Ward was the product and epitome of Massachusetts Congregationalist society.

As for military service, Ward's first commission was as a militia major in January 1755—the high rank reflecting his education and class. Three years later, as major in Col. William Williams's Massachusetts regiment, he started enlisting men for the British push on Fort Ticonderoga. According to his diary for 22 June at Fort Edward:

Ruggles & Williams's Regiment mustered by Brigdr. Genl. [Thomas] Gage who did Colo. Williams ye Honor to say was his Regt. in uniform it wo'd be one of the finest he ever saw.³²

The next month, Ward received a promotion to lieutenant colonel.

The British force that Lord George Howe had assembled (but did not survive to lead) was “the largest army of white men ever to that date gathered in a single command on American soil: a total of more than 15,000—9024 provincials and 6367 regulars.”³³ Among the British officers was Capt. Charles Lee of the 44th Regiment of Foot, and among the Americans were Maj. Israel Putnam and Capt. John Stark. The fight for Ticonderoga was “the largest battle in North American history.”³⁴ Ward's troops had helped to build fortifications, and he watched regular British units unsuccessfully attack French positions.³⁵ He thus gained significantly more experience of large-scale siege warfare than Washington.

Returning home, Ward reentered the Massachusetts legislature, and during the 1760s he became a quiet leader of its “country party,” Whigs opposed to Gov. Francis Bernard and Parliament's new taxes. In 1766 the governor rescinded Ward's commission as a militia colonel.³⁶ The Whigs showed support for Ward by seating him on a House committee “to inquire into the State of the Militia” in 1767 and electing him to the Council in 1768 and 1769. The governor vetoed that choice. Though Bernard's successor, Gov. Thomas Hutchinson, considered Ward “a very sulky fellow,” he approved Ward for the Council in 1770, and he was regularly reelected until Parliament's Massachusetts Government Act.³⁷

³¹ Quoted in Martyn, *Artemas Ward*, 271.

³² Martyn, *Artemas Ward*, 19.

³³ Martyn, *Artemas Ward*, 18. Lord Howe was an older brother of Gen. William Howe.

³⁴ Smith, “Rise of Artemas Ward,” 125.

³⁵ Smith, “Rise of Artemas Ward,” 108.

³⁶ Ward reportedly responded to the news of losing his militia position by saying, “I consider myself twice honored, but more in being superseded, than in being commissioned, and that I thank him for this, . . . since the motive, that dictated it, is evidence, that I am, what he is not, a friend to my country.” Smith, “Rise of Artemas Ward,” 153.

³⁷ Martyn, *Artemas Ward*, 40.

As events moved toward a crisis in Massachusetts in 1774, Ward worked on Shrewsbury's committee of correspondence and voted for the town "to purchase an iron field piece and ammunition."³⁸ He attended the Worcester County Convention in August and the Massachusetts Provincial Congress in October, serving on the committee that delivered its message to Gen. Gage. Late that year, the militia reorganized free of royal control. The 20 October 1774 *Massachusetts Spy* reported:

On the third instant, the regiment formerly belonging to the Hon. Artemas Ward, Esq., of Shrewsbury, in the county of Worcester, and who for his integrity was dismissed in a former administration, from being Colonel of said regiment, met, and taking in serious consideration the present oppressed and distressed condition of this province in general, and the poor garrisoned and blockaded town of Boston in particular, after proper solemnity, proceeded as follows, 1st— They cheerfully, yet with a degree of indignation, flung up their commissions, which they sustained under the late Governor Hutchinson; then they proceeded very regularly to the choice of their field and commission officers, and unanimously made choice of the following gentlemen, viz.: the Hon. Artemas Ward, Colonel. . .³⁹

The same day that item appeared, the Provincial Congress named Ward to a committee to consider "what is necessary to be now done for the defence and safety of the province." Their report advised establishing a Committee of Safety, Committee of Supplies, and general officers.⁴⁰ On 27 October the congress chose three generals: Jedediah Preble, Ward, and Pomeroy. All were veterans of the wars against the French, but Ward was the youngest by twenty years.⁴¹ Throughout the Provincial Congress's meetings, Ward sat on committees about military preparation.

When the war started on 19 April Ward was ill in bed with a kidney stone. Nevertheless, the next morning he rode to Cambridge and set up a military headquarters in the home of Jonathan Hastings, the Harvard College steward (see section 2.3). Heath and Whitcomb were there, along with six colonels, six lieutenant-colonels, Samuel Osgood as an aide de camp, and Joseph Ward (a distant cousin) as military secretary.⁴² The size of that gathering reflected New England's preference for consensus-building among the elite rather than a narrow hierarchy.

³⁸ Smith, "Rise of Artemas Ward," 211.

³⁹ Quoted in Martyn, *Artemas Ward*, 70-1.

⁴⁰ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 23, 31-4.

⁴¹ In December the Massachusetts legislature expanded its list of generals by adding Thomas and Heath, and in February 1775 it added Whitcomb. Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 35, 65, 90, 102.

⁴² Martyn, *Artemas Ward*, 90. On 20 July, Washington's general orders announced that Osgood and Joseph Ward were now both aides de camp to Gen. Ward. On 13 February 1776, Capt. Peleg Wadworth was appointed as Ward's aides "during the absence of Samuel Osgood Esqr."

Ward began to organize an army that could maintain the impromptu siege. The militia units that had responded to the Lexington alarm were starting to go home. Ward needed to replace them with soldiers signed up to serve for a longer term, not just in a crisis. He warned the Provincial Congress meeting in Watertown that “It is impossible to keep the men here” without a formal enlistment process.⁴³ The congress responded by issuing orders for an army of 13,600.⁴⁴

The first general orders Ward issued involved organization: setting up guards, appointing a steward to supply the army, instructing each regiment to establish a chain of command. He gave soldiers basic orders: not to abuse personal property, leave camp without permission, or nod off during guard duty.⁴⁵ A devout Congregationalist, he ordered men to “attend upon Prayers morning & Evening, also the Service on Lord’s Day.”⁴⁶ Ward did not, however, follow up these exhortations with a great show of discipline. In his ten weeks as commander, Gen. Ward issued orders for only one court-martial.⁴⁷

Some Massachusetts politicians saw Ward’s leadership as ineffective. Chief among them was James Warren of Plymouth. As early as 7 May he wrote to John Adams that the soldiers “seem to me to want a more experienced direction. I could for myself wish to see your Friends Washington and Lee at the Head of it, and yet dare not propose it.”⁴⁸ Others wrote to the Continental Congress delegates about the value of gaining support from outside New England or “regular generals” without denigrating the current command.

Ward apparently had difficulty exercising authority over the southern wing of the siege, under the command of Gen. Thomas. On 9 May, for example, Ward presided over a council of war that decided unanimously to take “Dorchester Hill.”⁴⁹ But nine days later Gen. Thomas wrote to Ward to say that he “much despaired of defending” that position without “Regular Intrenchments” and well-manned cannon.⁵⁰ On 15 June, having received a warning from New Hampshire that the British army planned to occupy the Dorchester peninsula, Ward sent members of the Committee of Safety, Gen. Putnam, and other officers to Roxbury with an order to seize it first. Thomas convened his own council of war, which decided that carrying out that order was impossible.⁵¹ The peninsula remained an

⁴³ Martyn, *Artemas Ward*, 94; see section 2.3 for more on this warning.

⁴⁴ Martyn, *Artemas Ward*, 95.

⁴⁵ Smith, “Rise of Artemas Ward,” 223-4.

⁴⁶ Smith, “Rise of Artemas Ward,” 228.

⁴⁷ Smith, “Rise of Artemas Ward,” 226. The provincial army may well have been carrying out courts-martial and other forms of discipline, but Ward did not make that process as visible as his successor did.

⁴⁸ Smith, “Rise of Artemas Ward,” 225. PJA, 3:4.

⁴⁹ Martyn, *Artemas Ward*, 102.

⁵⁰ Citing a letter in the John Thomas Papers, Martyn, *Artemas Ward*, 104-5. Elting, *Bunker’s Hill*, 17.

⁵¹ Martyn, *Artemas Ward*, 117-9.

unoccupied no-man's land. On 22 June, Ward and Putnam rode to Roxbury for a council with Thomas, Spencer, and Heath and proposed moving troops to Cambridge to guard against a British attack from their new position in Charlestown. The officers of the southern wing opposed sending any of their troops, and reinforcements had to be summoned from Marblehead.⁵²

Thomas's arguments may have been valid. There were limited resources, as Gen. Ward knew better than anybody, and Roxbury was as vulnerable as Cambridge. A 12 May joint meeting of the council of war and the Committee of Safety had recommended fortifying Prospect Hill, Winter Hill, and Bunker's Hill, but in the end the troops produced one breastwork on Prospect Hill. In fact, Ward and others argued against trying to occupy Bunker's Hill for the same reason that Thomas gave for not seizing the Dorchester peninsula: because the provincial army did not have enough cannon or gunpowder to defend it.⁵³

It is impossible to determine whether any other commander could have done more than Ward, given those limitations. It does seem clear that Ward commanded through finding consensus among his officers and exhorting his soldiers, rather than through orders, scolding, discipline, and inspiration. He had plenty of men; with the enthusiasm of the war's beginning (and perhaps some generous nose-counting), the New England army stood at 24,500 men at the end of May.⁵⁴ Those men carried out daring amphibious raids in Boston harbor, even destroying a British ship near Chelsea (see section 4.6). But the army was not well coordinated, and Ward did not try to enforce a strict order on it.

The Battle of Bunker Hill on 17 June struck Ward's critics as confirmation that the army needed new leadership. There was confusion over which high point in Charlestown the provincial troops should fortify and over lines of command. Reinforcements were slow to arrive at the battlefield, and many stayed away from the fight. The artillery regiment came in for particular criticism (see section 10.4). James Warren complained that Ward never left the Hastings house during the battle.⁵⁵ Ward's defenders replied that the commander-in-chief was right to remain at headquarters, especially when he had to worry about a British attack on Roxbury as well. Neither Ward nor his critics realized that this battle, however badly the provincial army had conducted it, would decide the outcome of the siege.

Ward apparently accepted the arrival of Gen. George Washington in July 1775 without objection. Even if he might have preferred to remain in command, as a politician he appreciated the Continental support that the Virginian represented. On 26 July, Ward moved to the army's right wing.⁵⁶ As of 5 August Ward was in "Tent Quarters," but the general

⁵² Smith, "Rise of Artemas Ward," 243.

⁵³ Martyn, *Artemas Ward*, 105.

⁵⁴ Smith, "Rise of Artemas Ward," 227.

⁵⁵ Warren to Samuel Adams, 21 June 1775, MHSC, 73:413.

⁵⁶ MHSP, 14:290.

eventually made his headquarters in the Roxbury mansion known as Datchet Place or Pierpoint Castle.⁵⁷ Gen. Washington later visited him there.

As early as 25 August Ward advised Washington that “Dorchester Hill would be a very important Post” for the British.⁵⁸ In the autumn councils of war, he voted against the commander’s plans for a direct attack on Boston (see chapter 11). At the council on 16 February 1776 Ward argued that:

the attack must be made with a view of bringing on an engagement, or of driving the enemy out of Boston, and either end will be answered much better by possessing Dorchester heights.⁵⁹

The rest of the council agreed. Over the next three weeks Ward was greatly involved in preparations for the move onto the Dorchester peninsula (see chapter 18).

Washington and Ward never developed a good rapport, and their relationship became strained at the end of the siege just as their collaboration achieved the desired result. Five days after Ward led soldiers into Boston on 17 March, he submitted his resignation, saying he was “in such an ill State of Health that I do not think myself capable of doing the duty. . . . to eat the Continental bread & not do the duty is what I am much averse to.”⁶⁰ Washington pressed Ward to stay on to supervise defenses in New England, and Ward rescinded his resignation.

However, private letters show that Washington did not hold much respect for his nominal second-in-command. On 1 April he told Joseph Reed that “Nothing of importance has occurred in these parts” except perhaps for Ward’s rescinded resignation:

. . . on account as he says, of its being disagreeable to some of the officers. Who those officers are, I have not heard. I have not inquired. When the application to Congress and notice of it to me came to hand, I was disarmed of *interposition*, because it was put upon the footing of duty, or conscience, the General being persuaded that his *health* would not allow him to take that share of duty that his office required. The officers to whom the resignation is disagreeable, have been able, no doubt, to convince him of his mistake, and that his *health* will admit him

⁵⁷ Preble, *First Three Generations of Prebles*, 61. This house survived, in greatly altered form, until 1902. Emily Pierpont Delesdernier left a florid description of it in her 1873 novel *Fannie St. John*.

⁵⁸ PGW:RW, 1:363.

⁵⁹ Gordon, *History of the Rise*, 2:189.

⁶⁰ Smith, “Rise of Artemas Ward,” 249. Martyn, *Artemas Ward*, 216. Ward sent a similar letter to Hancock; *American Archives*, series 4, 5:467. Ward did have serious health concerns; on 14 March an aide wrote to John Adams, “Genl Ward’s health being so precarious. . . .”; PJA, 4:53. Washington forwarded Ward’s resignation to the Congress on 24 March with little comment. PGW:RW, 3:523-4.

to be *alert* and *active*. I shall leave him till he can determine yea or nay, to command in this quarter.⁶¹

Washington was even more caustic in comments to Lee on 9 May:

General Ward, upon the evacuation of Boston, and finding that there was a probability of his removing from the smoke of his own chimney, applied to me, and wrote to Congress for leave to resign. A few days afterwards, some of the officers, as he says, getting *uneasy* at the prospect of his leaving them, he applied for his letter of resignation, which had been committed to my care; but, behold! it had been carefully forwarded to Congress, and, as I have since learnt, judged so reasonable, (*want of health* being the plea,) that it was instantly complied with.⁶²

However, the Congress accepted Ward's offer to stay on. He oversaw the "Eastern Department," or New England, until March 1777 when he said the region was so quiet that he did not deserve his salary.⁶³

Ward served in the Continental Congress in 1780-81 and for two terms in the U.S. Congress starting in 1791, voting with the Federalists. In 1792 Washington's letter to Lee quoted above was printed in *Memoirs of the Life of the Late Charles Lee, Esq.*⁶⁴ Ward evidently confronted his successor as commander-in-chief about those remarks. There are different versions of what followed, but all say that the two former generals had a frosty exchange behind closed doors.⁶⁵ Ward's health problems were genuine, as was his commitment to defending New England, though Washington may have been right to discern less enthusiasm about defending the rest of the colonies. The two men remained distant colleagues. Ward, despite being older and suffering from paralytic strokes, outlived Washington by ten months.

4.5 CHARLES LEE: PROFESSIONAL SOLDIER

Late in 1776 Charles Lee (1732-1782) lost respect for Washington, and with his typical moodiness he shifted to petulant and increasingly self-destructive behavior. His challenge to the commander-in-chief after the Battle of Monmouth and revelations that he had discussed reconciling with the British Empire when he was a prisoner of war in 1777 made Lee a reviled figure in nineteenth-century American historiography. Later studies have

⁶¹ Washington to Joseph Reed, 1 April 1776, PGW:RW, 4:9-10.

⁶² PGW:RW, 4:245.

⁶³ Smith, "Rise of Artemas Ward," 250.

⁶⁴ Langworthy, *Memoirs of the Late Charles Lee*, 254.

⁶⁵ Versions of the story come from Christopher Gore in MHSP, 12:125; Allen, *Reminiscences of the Reverend George Allen*, 42; and, least reliable, Drake, *Historic Fields and Mansions of Middlesex*, 260. Martyn was skeptical, but some sort of confrontation seems very likely; *Artemas Ward*, 217-8.

produced a more balanced picture of this complex man, but it is still difficult to recreate the respect and enthusiasm that Lee inspired in New England in 1775.⁶⁶

Lee had been born in Chester, England, to a military family. After schooling in England and Switzerland, he began his own army career in April 1746, at the age of fourteen, with a commission as an ensign, the lowest rank of army officer. Lee spent most of the next seventeen years fighting the British Empire's many wars. He might have met George Washington in 1755 when they both served under Gen. Edward Braddock, but Lee missed the march for Fort Duquesne.⁶⁷ Under the command of Brig. John Burgoyne, he gained some fame by leading a daring raid on a Spanish camp in 1762.⁶⁸ Lee's career stalled late the next year, and he retired as a major, later bureaucratically promoted to lieutenant-colonel. Lee spent the next decade traveling around Europe, observing armies, futilely proposing to young women, and turning toward republicanism. The property he inherited in Britain, his army pension, and his relatively simple tastes allowed this peripatetic lifestyle.

In October 1773 Lee landed in Philadelphia, carrying a letter of recommendation from Benjamin Franklin. Despite his recent arrival, he strode into the thick of American politics. In Virginia, he and Thomas Jefferson arranged a fast to protest Parliament's Coercive Acts. Back in Philadelphia, he wrote to the *Pennsylvania Journal* as "Anglus Americanus," urging voters to choose resolute representatives to the First Continental Congress. In New York the next month, he had the same essay printed as a handbill. As Lee passed through Newport, the Rev. Dr. Ezra Stiles wrote that he

talks high for American liberty, and seems to endeavor to enspirit the people to take arms. He says the king is a fool & his ministers rogues & villains. . . . General Gage was advanced over his head—he is chagrined and disappointed—he published a bold sensible well written address to the citizens of New York. Whether he is a pimp of the ministry or a sincere friend to public liberty, is to me uncertain.⁶⁹

The colonel carried political news from New York to Samuel Adams in Boston; the two conferred behind closed doors for hours. When Israel Putnam arrived that August, the *Boston Gazette* and *Boston Evening-Post* stated that the "town has had the satisfaction to be visited by two of the greatest military characters of the present age."⁷⁰

⁶⁶ The best modern biography of Lee, and source for most of this passage's biographical details, is Alden, *General Charles Lee*. Also valuable is John W. Shy, "Charles Lee: The Soldier as Radical," in Billias, *George Washington's Generals*.

⁶⁷ Alan C. Cate stated that "Lee was detached to a sister regiment to handle logistical affairs and missed the bloody debacle"; *Founding Fighters*, 34. Alden, *General Charles Lee*, 8.

⁶⁸ Alden, *General Charles Lee*, 22.

⁶⁹ Stiles, *Literary Diary*, 1:453-4.

⁷⁰ Alden, *General Charles Lee*, 59.

Lee returned to Philadelphia during the First Congress, and appears to have helped draft its address to the people of Canada.⁷¹ In response to a pamphlet urging conciliation with the Crown, he published one titled *Strictures upon A “Friendly Address to All Reasonable Americans. . .,”* which was soon reprinted in New York, Newport, New London, and twice in Boston. Among other points, Lee argued that the British army was not as formidable as friends of the royal government claimed; the 17 January 1775 *Essex Gazette* suggested that he had erased people’s fear of the redcoats.⁷² In short, despite having been in America less than two years, Charles Lee made himself a leading voice of the political resistance. On 10 May, the *Pennsylvania Journal* called him “a gentleman whose steady attachment to the rights of human nature, and to the principles of the British constitution in particular, hath endeared him to all the colonies.”⁷³

During his travels, Lee drew up a plan to organize an army in battalions which interested many Congress delegates, including Washington (see section 3.2). By February 1775 rumors said that Lee was about to become commander of an American army or at least a high-ranking general.⁷⁴ Lee himself wrote that aspiring to the top command would be “the last stage of presumption.”⁷⁵ In the winter of 1774-75 he visited Washington and probably Horatio Gates at their Virginia plantations. That spring, he was back in Philadelphia, helping to drill three regiments of militia.

It was clear that Lee was offering his services for a Continental Army, but some Congress delegates did not want them. Thomas Johnson of Maryland claimed to have spoken at length against Lee and won over the New York delegation (see appendix A). Among the Massachusetts delegates, John Hancock, Robert Treat Paine, and Thomas Cushing were reluctant to undercut Artemas Ward and their region’s own officers. On the other hand, John and Samuel Adams favored employing Lee, responding to requests from colleagues back in Massachusetts for a “regular” (i.e., professional) general. Thomas Mifflin of Pennsylvania (soon to be a top aide to Washington—see section 5.3) even argued that Lee deserved to be second in command. This appointment was apparently Congress’s most difficult issue in setting up the Continental Army.

Two factors weighed against Lee. The first was the fact that he had no property in America and had only recently arrived. Would his appointment suggest that the Americans were seeking help from a resentful and opportunistic mercenary because they could not fend for themselves? In response to that concern, Gates was helping Lee to buy property in western Virginia. Nevertheless, Lee still had £11,000 tied up in England, vulnerable to seizure

⁷¹ Alden, *General Charles Lee*, 60.

⁷² Alden, *General Charles Lee*, 64.

⁷³ Alden, *General Charles Lee*, 72.

⁷⁴ Alden, *General Charles Lee*, 73, 321.

⁷⁵ NYHSC, 4:148.

by the royal government. He asked a special committee if the Congress would indemnify him. The delegates agreed, and on 22 June Lee officially resigned from the British army.⁷⁶

The second factor that gave gentlemen doubts about Lee was his lifestyle. In an age that viewed the landed patriarch as the ideal gentleman, Lee lived as if he were on a perpetual campaign, never settling down geographically or maritally.⁷⁷ He moved restlessly, accompanied by a manservant he had hired in Italy, Guiseppi Minghini, and his dogs, the most famous of which was named Mr. Spada. While upper-class British and American society valued emotional control, Lee was snappish and passionate. His physical appearance was also far from the ideal: tall and remarkably thin, with unusually small hands and an unusually large nose. A caricature that Barsham Rushbrooke drew in the early 1770s was reportedly “allowed, by all who knew General Lee, to be the only successful delineation, either of his countenance or person.”⁷⁸

In the end, the Congress voted to commission Lee as a major general largely because Washington wanted to draw on his experience. The choice was not unanimous. To mollify supporters of Ward, the Congress made Lee only the third-ranking general. Samuel Adams wrote to James Warren about Lee’s integrity and devotion—and also asked that he keep the Congress’s indemnification a secret.⁷⁹ In July Warren and his Massachusetts Provincial Congress colleagues welcomed both generals with laudatory addresses (see appendix C). Newspapers and many diarists noted not just the arrival of Washington in Cambridge, but the arrival of Lee as well.

To young New England officers, Lee probably appeared larger than life. Many people thought he was the greatest expert on military affairs in the American colonies. He had been wounded three times, once in battle and twice in duels. He had traveled west far enough to lead the first British expedition on Lake Erie, and east far enough to have seen the Russians fight the Turks.⁸⁰ He had been made a full colonel in Portugal and a major general in Poland. He had served under Gen. Gage and Gen. Burgoyne, and seemed to know every other officer in the British army.

Among the Americans, only William Palfrey (see section 5.9) had had any sort of encounter with George III: in 1771 he had glimpsed the king at court in London. Lee had not

⁷⁶ Lee thus gave up his half-pay salary of £130 per year and his rank of lieutenant-colonel, worth up to £4,000. Alden, *General Charles Lee*, 75-9.

⁷⁷ Though Lee never married, he proposed to many young women and pursued others. John Shy questioned whether Lee’s flailing attempts at marriage might have masked homosexuality; Shy in Billias, *George Washington’s Generals*, 22-3, 48. The evidence Shy raised is weak, and Lee repeatedly got into trouble pursuing women rather than men. He also reportedly had an Iroquois wife and children while stationed on the New York frontier in the early 1760s; Alden, *General Charles Lee*, 9.

⁷⁸ Alden, *General Charles Lee*, 6. NYHSC, 7:342.

⁷⁹ LoD, 1:553.

⁸⁰ Alden, *General Charles Lee*, 12, 36.

only met the king multiple times, he had even told off the monarch for not granting him a regimental command: “Sir, I will never give your Majesty an opportunity of breaking your promise to me again.”⁸¹ Lee had also met King Stanislaus of Poland; Joseph II, the Holy Roman Emperor; and the era’s preeminent military expert, King Frederick the Great of Prussia. He was friends was Isaac Barré, Catherine Macaulay, the Earl of Shelburne, Edmund Burke, and other British Whigs.

On top of his military and political experiences, Lee was also a man of learning. He read Latin, Greek, and Italian, and called himself “the only General Officer on the Continent who can speak and think in French.”⁸² He even reportedly picked up a working knowledge of Mohawk.⁸³ On all his travels Lee carried a supply of books, and his letters quoted many authors, above all Shakespeare. He could cite not only English Whig staples like Locke and Macaulay but radical modern thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Gen. Nathanael Greene was known for being able to recite bits of Laurence Sterne’s novel *Tristram Shandy*;⁸⁴ Lee was actually a friend of Sterne, and the two men once published verse together.⁸⁵ Several American officers had been politically active, but none had written a pamphlet with the reach of Lee’s *Strictures upon A “Friendly Address...”*

On arriving in Cambridge, Lee apparently spent his first days riding around the siege lines with Washington, looking for weak spots. He directed the construction of new fortifications in Cambridge and west Charlestown, and planned the advance onto Plowed Hill (see section 11.2). He helped Washington write letters to Gage about the treatment of prisoners, and corrected the proof of an address printed in French for the Canadians.

Lee also made news. Back on 7 June, he had written a public letter to Gen. Burgoyne, summarizing the American political cause and urging his old commander and Gen. William Howe, as good Whigs, to withdraw from the war. In July, Burgoyne responded with an invitation to meet on the Boston Neck. Lee presented the letter to the Provincial Congress and asked a member to accompany him. The legislature appointed Elbridge Gerry, but suggested that Lee also consult a council of war. Eventually Lee declined Burgoyne’s invitation, and Continental soldiers soon destroyed the proposed meeting-place. But the generals’ correspondence was published widely in America and Britain.⁸⁶

Along with Gates, Lee was the most politically radical of all the generals in front of Boston. While Washington accepted the traditional general’s honorific of “Your Excellency,”

⁸¹ Horace Walpole agreed that “Lee was a galant adventurer whom George 3d. disgusted by an absolute breach of promise,” as quoted in Billias, *George Washington’s Generals*, 26.

⁸² Lee to Washington, 3 March 1776, PGW:RW, 3:404.

⁸³ Alden, *General Charles Lee*, 4.

⁸⁴ Greene, *Life of Nathanael Greene*, 1:27.

⁸⁵ Alden, *General Charles Lee*, 19.

⁸⁶ Alden, *General Charles Lee*, 85-6.

Lee told Dr. Benjamin Rush that it made him “spew.”⁸⁷ He privately favored an independent American republic in October, and by January, after reading the king’s speech, he started urging that policy on members of Congress.⁸⁸ Lee also advocated harsh measures against royal officials and sympathizers on the continent, suggesting that Patriots arrest the remaining governors and confiscate active Loyalists’ property.⁸⁹

Lee labeled his letters as coming from “Head-Quarters” when he was still sharing the Harvard president’s house with Washington. On 20 July he wrote from “Cambridge,” suggesting that he was not with the commander in the John Vassall house, and seven days later he started writing from “Winter Hill.” Lee used two houses while overseeing the northern wing of the American siege lines. One was the Medford mansion left behind by Isaac Royall, which Col. John Stark had already commandeered (see section 2.4). This was most likely the building he called “Hobgoblin Hall.”⁹⁰ But Gen. Washington thought that was too far from the front lines and later wrote: “I had made a point of bringing General Lee from thence on Acct. of the distance from his Line of Command, at least that he should not Sleep there.”⁹¹ Lee reportedly made his sleeping quarters in a farmhouse now called the Peter and Oliver Tufts House.⁹²

Once the siege lines around Boston were secure, Gen. Lee became the Continental Army’s troubleshooter. On 20 December 1775 he left for Rhode Island, where he inspected the colony’s defenses and demanded that Loyalists swear not to aid the royal military. Returning to Cambridge, Lee proposed a similar plan for strengthening New York. This was beyond Washington’s mandate from the Congress, so he asked John Adams for advice. With Adams’s approval, on 8 January 1776 Washington authorized Lee to carry out his plan, “keeping always in view the declared intentions of Congress.”⁹³ Lee set out for the south, reaching New Haven by 15 January.⁹⁴

Lee never returned to Massachusetts, but he had already done a great deal to strengthen the siege and the American army. Back in September, Col. William Thompson of Pennsylvania wrote after praising Washington: “I am every day more pleased with General Lee: our country owes much to him; and happy we are that a man of his great knowledge

⁸⁷ NYHSC, 4:207.

⁸⁸ Alden, *General Charles Lee*, 87, 91-4.

⁸⁹ Alden, *General Charles Lee*, 88-9.

⁹⁰ Abigail Adams to John Adams, 10 Dec 1775, AFC, 1:335. Greene to Lee, 21 January 1776, PNG, 1:184.

⁹¹ Washington to John Sullivan, 19 February 1776, PGW:RW, 3:344.

⁹² During the siege this house was reportedly the property of John Tufts (1754–after 1817) or his father Peter (1728-1791). It has been moved “a few rods” from its original location and now has the address of 78 Sycamore Street in Somerville. Freese, *Historic Houses and Spots*, 77. Comer, *Landmarks “in the Old Bay State”*, 332.

⁹³ PGW:RW, 3:53-4.

⁹⁴ Alden, *General Charles Lee*, 96.

assists in the command of our army.”⁹⁵ On 31 March, shortly before leaving Cambridge, Washington wrote to his brother about Lee’s next assignment, to command the defense of the southern colonies:

He is the first Officer in Military knowledge and experience we have in the whole Army—He is zealously attached to the cause—honest, and well meaning, but rather fickle & violent, I fear, in his temper however as he possesses an uncommon share of good Sense and Spirit, I congratulate my Countrymen upon his appointment to that Department.⁹⁶

Later in the war the two men would resent each other deeply, but in 1775-76 they were a friendly and successful team.

4.6 ISRAEL PUTNAM: ROUGH-HEWN HERO

Israel Putnam (1718-1790) was a popular and inspiring leader for the soldiers who served under him because of his immense physical bravery and lack of airs.⁹⁷ However, as a major general he was out of his depth. He was a poor writer, and thus as an administrator relied heavily on his aides de camp, appointed 22 July: his son Israel and Samuel Blachley Webb, both captains from Connecticut.⁹⁸ Gen. Putnam was also a poor military planner and slow to react to setbacks during battle. However, none of those limitations became serious liabilities during the Boston campaign.

Putnam was born in Salem, Massachusetts, to a prosperous farming family. Seeking land, he moved to Pomfret, Connecticut, with his wife Hannah in his early twenties. They had ten children before she died in 1765 and he married the widow Deborah Lathrop (Avery) Gardiner two years later. This was a common life pattern for a New England farmer. However, one episode from Putnam’s farming career, around 1743, impressed even his enemies:

It is said, that some Years ago he had a few Sheep upon his Farm, which a Wolf had destroyed; he was determined to avenge his loss by the Death of ye. Robber. He accordingly took a Companion, & repaired to his Den, then tied a Rope around his Waist, & with his Gun crawled on his Hands & Knees into the Den; when he soon perceived the Wolf with his Eyes glaring, at the further End of it; he fired his Gun & killed him; & seizing him by the Ears, gave the Signal to his Comrade, who pulled them both out. This rash Action was bruited about, & his

⁹⁵ Read, *George Read*, 128.

⁹⁶ PGW:RW, 3:570.

⁹⁷ Putnam was lionized by descendants and citizens of Connecticut, and the biographies they produced generally gloss over the general’s limitations. The details here come largely from *American National Biography*, 18:11-2.

⁹⁸ PGW:RW, 1:152-3.

Minister took to expostulate with him upon it; but he closed the Dispute by saying, “that if the Devil himself had stolen as many of his Sheep as the Wolf had, he would have gone into his Dominions & pulled *him* out by the Ears.”⁹⁹

That widely retold story helped make Putnam a legend.

In 1755 Putnam was a second lieutenant in the Connecticut militia during the British assault on Crown Point. He joined Robert Rogers’s rangers, which was a good match for his bravery and hardiness; by 1758 he held the rank of major. That summer, Caughnawaga Mohawks took Putnam captive, torturing and starving him before ransoming him in the fall. During the unsuccessful British attack on Fort Ticonderoga in 1759 Putnam became a lieutenant colonel, and he joined the assault on Havana in 1762. Two years later Connecticut, which had claims to lands in the west, commissioned Putnam as an officer to fight Pontiac’s Rebellion, but he saw little action. He returned to the Mississippi River valley in December 1772 leading an expedition to explore lands for a group of investors.

Putnam’s politics were fervent but unsophisticated. He protested the Stamp Act, served two terms in the lower house of the Connecticut legislature in 1766-68, and organized a Sons of Liberty group in his corner of Connecticut. At a convention of Whigs in Hartford in April 1766 he served as chair of the committee of correspondence. In August 1774 Putnam brought a herd of about 130 sheep to Boston to support the town’s poor after the London government had shut the port. While there, he and Lee visited old friends in the British army camp, including Maj. John Small. According to the Boston radical Dr. Thomas Young, the officers “bantered both him and General Lee about coming to fight: and neither of them gave the strongest assurances to the contrary”—Putnam and Lee did not back down and deny the possibility of war.¹⁰⁰

During the Powder Alarm of early September (see section 1.4), Putnam sent appeals to several militia officers in his part of Connecticut and set off for Boston, only to learn that he had reacted to false rumors. Nevertheless, on hearing of the Battle of Lexington and Concord, Putnam dashed off for Boston again. Some biographers reported that he was in Cambridge by 21 April while other sources say he arrived a couple of days later with the colony’s Footguards.¹⁰¹ Back in Connecticut, the legislature made Putnam the third of its three generals. An officer from that colony reported from Cambridge on 27 April that

⁹⁹ Oliver, *Origin and Progress*, 122-3.

¹⁰⁰ Dr. Thomas Young to Samuel Adams, 23 August 1774, in Samuel Adams Papers, New York Public Library. Other sources describe further conversations between Putnam and Gage or other high British officers; these led men on the royal side to believe that Putnam had offered his services to the Crown in exchange for an army commission. Oliver, *Origin and Progress*, 121; Humphreys, *Essay on...Israel Putnam*, 103-4. See also Capt. John Montresor’s comments on Putnam, NYHSC, 14:136. Once the war began, however, there is no sign the British commanders felt they could win Putnam over.

¹⁰¹ Barber, *Connecticut Historical Collections*, 168. The Footguards did not set out for Massachusetts until 22 April; Martin, *Arnold*, 62-3.

“General Putnam is Commander-in-Chief at this place,” Ward having briefly gone down to Roxbury.¹⁰²

On 27 May 1775 the opposing forces fought over Noddle’s Island in Boston harbor—a skirmish, but the biggest confrontation since the first day of the war.¹⁰³ Boston selectman Timothy Newell described the day, which began with provincials trying to round up livestock and destroy fodder on the island before the British could use them:

Our People set fire to hay and a barn on Noddle’s Island; a number of Marines went over.—Our People Retreated over to Hog Island, the troops following, by being decoyed by our People down to the water, who then fired and the action continued all night (though very dark) also a Man of War schooner firing their cannon continually upon them which towards morning catch’t aground upon Winesimet ferry ways. Our people boarded her and finally burnt her—This action seems without a parallel, that, notwithstanding several hundred of the Kings Troops and the schooners were engaged all night and it is said 100 were wounded and fell—not the least hurt happened, except to three wounded of our People, who were commanded by General Putnam. The Lord manifestly appears on our side, and blessed be his glorious name forever.¹⁰⁴

News of this fight reached Philadelphia in early June and enhanced Putnam’s standing. As Connecticut delegate Eliphalet Dyer wrote, “Gentn. Putnams fame ran so high as Induced the Congress to give him the Preference” as fourth major general.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, Putnam was the only general besides Washington that the Congress elected unanimously.¹⁰⁶

Soon after arriving at the siege lines, Putnam moved into the Cambridge house vacated by the Loyalist John Borland (now called Apthorp House—see section 1.2).¹⁰⁷ After Washington organized the army into brigades, Putnam moved forward to the Ralph Inman mansion where he had already stationed his son (see section 2.3). Much of that estate was converted into barracks.¹⁰⁸ Putnam’s wife Deborah joined him there at some point over the winter. On 22 May 1776 the general wrote to the Cambridge committee of safety from New York and “remonstrated against the treatment that Mrs. Putnam had received from an agent of this committee.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰² MHSC, series 5, 9:495.

¹⁰³ In the late 1800s, local historians began to call this skirmish the Battle of Chelsea Creek.

¹⁰⁴ MHSC, series 4, 1:262.

¹⁰⁵ LoD, 1:166.

¹⁰⁶ Higginbotham, *George Washington*, 55.

¹⁰⁷ William Heath to Washington, 21 November 1777, MHSC, series 7, 4:185.

¹⁰⁸ Cleary, *Elizabeth Inman*, 182-3.

¹⁰⁹ Putnam’s letter and the committee’s reply are quoted in Frothingham, *Siege of Boston*, 165, but those passages do not show the nature of the dispute. In 1871 local historian Thomas C. Amory wrote that Deborah Putnam had taken to riding in the Inmans’ fancy coach; “The [Cambridge] selectmen, provoked at this by them unwarranted appropriation of confiscated property, had the presumption,

By the time Washington arrived in Cambridge, Putnam had played a big role in the Battle of Bunker Hill. Later in the siege he personally led some Continental attacks, including a raid timed to coincide with Burgoyne's theatrical farce (see chapter 11.2). Washington respected Putnam's experience and rank, and continued to give him important assignments, such as planning for the Battle of Long Island in August 1776. However, the skirmish over Noddle's Island was the last time Putnam was present for an American victory of any significance. His reputation sagged, and he suffered a stroke in December 1779 forcing his retirement from the army.

4.7 JOHN THOMAS: FRONTLINE COMMANDER

Dr. John Thomas (1724-1776) was born in Marshfield, Massachusetts, and trained in medicine under Dr. Simon Tufts of Medford before going back to Plymouth County.¹¹⁰ As a young physician in 1746, he became a regimental surgeon during King George's War and saw action in Nova Scotia. The following year, he switched into the officers' ranks as a lieutenant. In the French and Indian War he was a colonel, serving in Nova Scotia and Montreal, while also doing emergency surgeries.¹¹¹ Much of the time he served under regular British officers.

After his military service Thomas settled in Kingston. He married his wife Hannah in 1761; it was a late marriage for him, but she was still young enough to bear three children in the next eight years.¹¹² The household also included at least one slave. Dr. Thomas became a justice of the peace in 1770. He won seats in the Massachusetts General Court in 1756 and 1758-60, but then sat out of elected office until the crisis of 1774 when he was elected to the Provincial Congress. Thomas was said to be six feet tall, an uncommonly commanding height in the eighteenth century.

During the Lexington alarm, Thomas and his regiment approached Boston from the south and took positions at the end of the Boston Neck in Roxbury. The men there threw up some barriers to prevent the British army from coming out, strengthening them over the following months. The first of Gen. Thomas's many letters home to his wife from Roxbury is dated 22 April 1775. He made his headquarters in what is now known as the Dillaway-Thomas House at John Eliot Square in Roxbury Heritage State Park. Thomas did not attend

when she was some distance from home, to compel her to alight. The general was not of a temper to submit very meekly to such an affront, and his indignation was expressed with sufficient force to have become historical." NEHGR, 25:232.

¹¹⁰ Only short studies of Thomas have been published: Charles Coffin, *The Life and Services of Major General John Thomas* (New York: Egbert, Hovey & King, 1844); Arthur Lord, "A Soldier of the Revolution, General John Thomas," *Bostonian Society Publications*, 12 (1915), 1-35; and Edward Pierce Hamilton, "General John Thomas," *MHSP*, 84, (1972), 44-52. Thomas's papers are at the Massachusetts Historical Society.

¹¹¹ *MHSP*, 84:46.

¹¹² Kingston VR, 289, 143-4.

Gen. Ward's first councils of war in Cambridge, effectively exercising an independent command (see section 4.4), but they exchanged letters.

On 27 June the Massachusetts Provincial Congress president James Warren wrote to John Adams at the Congress:

I cant but Hope you will make some suitable provision for our General Thomas. His Merits in the military way have surprised us all. I cant describe to you the Odds between the two Camps. While one has been Spiritless, sluggish, Confused, and dirty, I mean where Genl. Putnam and our Friend [Dr. Joseph] Warrens Influence have not had their Effects. The other has been Spirited, Active regular, and clean. He has Appeared with the dignity and Abilities of a General.¹¹³

However, this letter was too late to affect how the Congress ranked its brigadiers.

Following his threat to resign because of relative rank, Thomas became a valued member of the Continental command structure. There was little action in Roxbury because the narrow Neck did not provide much territory for either army to try to seize. Thomas's first major action, therefore, was to lead the push onto Dorchester Heights in March 1776 (see chapter 18). Later that year the Congress sent him to the Northern Department, where American troops were withdrawing from Canada under pressure from British forces and the smallpox virus. Despite being a doctor, Thomas had never been inoculated against smallpox. He caught the disease and died of it on 2 June.

4.8 WILLIAM HEATH: FIRST ON THE FIELD

William Heath (1738-1814) was the only American general active during the Battle of Lexington and Concord.¹¹⁴ His promptness probably caused the Massachusetts delegates at the Continental Congress to rank him ahead of John Thomas in seniority even as Heath was deferring to Thomas in the command of provincial positions in Roxbury.

Heath was on his home ground there, having lived in Jamaica Plain all his life. In 1759 he married Sarah Lockwood of Cambridge, and they had five children. Heath had joined the Roxbury militia as a young drummer and became a lieutenant in his twenties. When his company did not choose him for higher rank, he sought officer training in the private Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company and set out, as he later wrote, "to study, every military treatise in the English language, which was obtainable."¹¹⁵ As "A Military Countryman," he published newspaper essays on militia discipline during the 1770

¹¹³ PJA, 3:52.

¹¹⁴ The major sources on Heath's career are his own *Memoir*, first published in 1798; the *Heath Papers* published in two stretches in MHSC; and the manuscripts at the Massachusetts Historical Society. They provide detailed pictures of less important corners of the war. Heath's entry in *American National Biography*, 10:473-5, provides basic details.

¹¹⁵ Heath, *Memoirs*, 1.

controversy over army regiments and the Boston Massacre. Soon he was a captain known across Suffolk County for his military knowledge. According to his memoir, Heath was also a favorite of Gov. Francis Bernard, a Jamaica Plain neighbor, but that unpopular royal official never granted him favors before leaving Massachusetts in 1769.

Heath represented Roxbury in the Massachusetts legislature in 1761 and 1771-74, and in the Massachusetts Provincial Congress starting in October 1774. With seats on the Committee of Safety and committee of correspondence, he worked on military preparations. On 28 October the congress assigned him, Dr. Joseph Warren, and Dr. Benjamin Church to “lodge in some safe place in the country, the warlike stores now in the commissary general’s office, and that the matter be conducted with the greatest secrecy.”¹¹⁶ When the Massachusetts militia reorganized itself outside of royal control, he became a colonel, and on 9 December the congress chose him as its fifth “general officer,” immediately after Thomas.

It is uncertain where Heath lived during the siege, either in the first months when he was stationed on the southern wing in his home town or after July 1775 when he was in Cambridge. Connecticut troops camped on part of his lands in Roxbury.¹¹⁷

As a general, Heath was a solid administrator, dependable on logistics and provisions. He was not an inspiring leader or a bold warrior, and in a private letter on 1 April 1776 Washington suggested he deserved only “some little account.”¹¹⁸ Heath served through the entire Revolutionary War, almost always assigned to places that did not require a dynamic, aggressive commander.

4.9 JOSEPH SPENCER: OLD SOLDIER

Relatively little is known about Joseph Spencer (1714-1789).¹¹⁹ He was a genteel farmer, lawyer, and merchant from a family established in East Haddam, Connecticut. He married twice, fathering five children by his first wife and eight by his second. He was a probate judge starting in 1753 and had a seat in the lower and then upper house of the Connecticut legislature starting in 1750.

Spencer’s military experience began during King George’s War (1744-48) when he raised a company and served as lieutenant. He was a major of the Twelfth Regiment of Connecticut in 1757 and served in British expeditions against Louisburg, Ticonderoga, Crown Point, and Quebec. In 1766 he became a colonel in the colony’s militia. When war arrived in 1775 the legislature voted to make Spencer the second of its three generals, below David Wooster but above Israel Putnam. At sixty-six years old, Spencer formed the Second

¹¹⁶ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 41.

¹¹⁷ Richards, *Diary*, 17-8.

¹¹⁸ PGW:RW, 4:9-10.

¹¹⁹ There is no biography of Spencer, and this information is drawn largely from *American National Biography*, 20:451-2.

Connecticut Regiment and marched to Roxbury. It is uncertain where Spencer lived during the siege.

After he irked Washington and embarrassed Connecticut politicians with the way he protested being outranked in July 1775 Spencer served quietly through the siege. He participated in councils of war, but was not credited with any initiatives or ideas. In 1777 he was given command of an American push against the British forces occupying Newport, Rhode Island, but he called off a planned attack. After an inquiry by Congress exonerated him, on 13 January 1778 Spencer resigned his commission and returned home. He reentered state politics, and was even elected to the Continental Congress, but he attended only one mid-1779 session and was not active.

4.10 JOHN SULLIVAN: YOUNG AND DEMANDING

John Sullivan (1741-1795) was the last of the New England generals to arrive at the siege lines.¹²⁰ Until his appointment, he had been serving as one of New Hampshire's delegates to the Continental Congress. However, he had also been involved in the first American military action against a British outpost, back in December 1774.

Sullivan was born to a couple who had come to North America from Ireland, probably as redemptioners—indentured servants who promised to work a certain number of years to pay for their passage. His father was schoolmaster in Summersworth, New Hampshire, before the family moved across the river to Berwick in what is now Maine. One of Sullivan's older brothers joined the Royal Navy, dying at sea before the war. His younger brother James followed him into the law and settled in Massachusetts; he was a member of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress in 1775.

Having received a solid education from his father, John Sullivan read law with a local attorney starting in his late teens. He married Lydia Remick Worster of Kittery, two years older than he, in 1760. Their first child died in infancy shortly afterward, but they had five more children between 1763 and 1775. In 1763 the couple moved to Durham, New Hampshire, home to 1,200 people. As the town's first lawyer, Sullivan bought a large house from a doctor's widow and lived there for the rest of his life. He was full of energy and ambition with, biographer Charles P. Whittemore described, "black hair, and dark piercing eyes with a dark complexion offset by ruddy cheeks."

Sullivan was vigorous in collecting debts for wealthy clients and himself. At times in the 1760s his activity provoked complaints, petitions, and even violence from neighboring small farmers. He also owned household slaves, a rarity in New Hampshire. Starting in 1770

¹²⁰ Charles P. Whittemore provided a solid biography in *A General of the Revolution* (1961) and a digest version as "John Sullivan: Luckless Irishman," in Billias, *George Washington's Generals*. Thomas C. Amory's *Military Services and Public Life of Major-General John Sullivan* from 1868 is useful but less balanced. The New Hampshire Historical Society published three volumes of Sullivan's *Letters and Papers* in the 1930s.

Sullivan began to buy and build mills, which became his main source of income; John Adams wrote in June 1774 that Sullivan's six mills were "both his Delight and his Profit," worth £10,000.¹²¹

In November 1772 Gov. John Wentworth granted Sullivan a commission as major in the New Hampshire militia. The Durham lawyer did not speak against Crown policies until 1774, when he complained about the salary for a judge paid from the tea tax, and even then the judge in question was at odds with Gov. Wentworth. But Parliament's Coercive Acts in early 1774 provoked Sullivan. He was particularly vocal about how the Quebec Act made allowances for Catholicism to the north—though quite likely his parents had been Catholics before coming to America. Sullivan represented Durham in the New Hampshire Provincial Congress, which sent him and Nathaniel Folsom to the First Continental Congress.

In Philadelphia, Sullivan aligned himself with the Massachusetts delegates in favor of defying the new Crown measures. He argued against Patrick Henry that each colony should have one vote, rather than the more populous colonies (like Virginia) having more votes than the least populous (like New Hampshire). While in Philadelphia, Sullivan met George Washington, though there is no record of their interaction.

When he returned home in November 1774, Sullivan started organizing committees to enforce the Congress's Association, or boycott. On 14 December, he received word that militia units had stormed the lightly manned Fort William and Mary on an island in Portsmouth harbor and seized gunpowder stored there. The British army captain overseeing the fort had fired a cannon at the raiders, making that the conflict's first confrontation between royal and provincial military units using deadly force.¹²² Because no one was wounded or killed, however, the raid on Fort William and Mary it is not remembered as the start of the Revolutionary War.

The next day, Sullivan marched to Portsmouth at the head of two or three hundred men. Gov. Wentworth told them (falsely) that he had not sent to Boston for reinforcements, and promised to be lenient with any raiders he could arrest. Sullivan led the crowd in voting their approval of the raid. He then remained at the Bell Tavern until after dark, buying drinks for the house. Late on the night of 15 December Sullivan led dozens of men in boats out to the fort, where they removed "Sixteen Pieces of Cannon, about Sixty Musquets and other Military Stores," leaving fifty-three other cannon. The Massachusetts Loyalist Peter Oliver later wrote:

The Rebel General *Sullivan* carried off some Cannon from the Fort at *New Hamshire* together with some Shot wch. he designed to use with them; but he was so little acquainted with military Affairs, that he picked out Shot that were big enough for Cannon of double Bore to what he took away; he was so well versed

¹²¹ AFC, 1:113.

¹²² NDAR, 1:18.

in Iricism, that he could at any Time fire an eighteen Pound Cannon out of nine Pound Shot.¹²³

Folsom “came to Town that Morning with a great Number of Armed Men, who remained in Town to guard the Cannon till the Flow of the Tide in the Evening, When the Cannon were sent in Gondolas up the River into the Country.” Sullivan helped to move the captured supplies into the countryside.¹²⁴

Both of New Hampshire’s Congress delegates thus helped to turn political resistance into military preparation. While Sullivan’s “Address to the People” in late December 1774 said, “I am far from wishing Hostilities to Commence on the part of America,” he thought it was vital for America to be ready to defend itself in case anyone else commenced.¹²⁵ Gov. Wentworth dismissed Sullivan and other raiders from all their provincial offices, which left him with very few legislators.

Leaving time to meet with a committee from the Massachusetts Provincial Congress on the way, Sullivan set out for the Second Continental Congress on 6 April 1775. When war broke out while he was gone, his law clerk Alexander Scammell reported that people lamented, “I wish to God Major Sullivan was here!”¹²⁶ At the Congress in Philadelphia, Sullivan attacked John Dickinson’s proposal for the Olive Branch Petition. John Adams said he exhibited a “strain of wit, reasoning, and fluency which. . .exceeded every thing I had ever heard from him before.”¹²⁷ Abigail Adams later met Sullivan during the siege and described him as a man of “Sense and Spirit,” with “a warm constitution, not to be very sudenly moved, but when once roused, not very easily Lull’d.”¹²⁸

The next month, the Congress named its generals. New Hampshire had troops at the siege of Boston—two regiments under colonels—so it deserved to have a brigadier general in the Continental Army. The delegates did not know that the New Hampshire Provincial Congress had already named Nathaniel Folsom to that command (see section 4.1). Sullivan, ever ambitious, made it known in Philadelphia that he would accept a general’s position. The Congress named him as the brigadier from New Hampshire.

Sullivan set out for Massachusetts on 27 June 1775 with Gen. Gates, arriving on 9 July. There is no record of how Folsom or the colonels reacted to his arrival. At some point Folsom returned to New Hampshire, where the legislature made him sole general of its militia. After a short trip home to Durham, Sullivan returned to take command of a brigade

¹²³ Oliver, *Rise and Progress*, 116.

¹²⁴ John Wentworth to Vice Admiral Samuel Graves, 20 December 1774, NDAR, 1:37. Capt. Andrew Barkley to Graves, 20 December 1774, NDAR, 1:38.

¹²⁵ Whittemore, *General of the Revolution*, 15.

¹²⁶ *Historical Magazine*, 8 (1870), 141.

¹²⁷ DAJA, 3:317-8.

¹²⁸ Abigail Adams to John Adams, 10 December 1775, AFC, 1:336.

on Winter Hill. On the night of 26 August, following Lee's orders, Sullivan led his men in securing a more advanced position on Plowed Hill (see section 11.2). After the British bombardment of Falmouth, Washington sent him north to strengthen Portsmouth's defenses on 24 October. Back on the siege lines, and without Gen. Lee's oversight, he led an unsuccessful attack on the outskirts of Bunker Hill on 29 December. During the final push in March 1776 Sullivan prepared to assault Boston from the west.

It is not known where Sullivan lived during most of the siege, but after Lee's departure for New York he moved into the Isaac Royall House in Medford. On 19 February 1776 Washington wrote to him:

I am a little surprizd, and concern'd to hear of your Moving to Colo. Royals House—I thought you knew, that I had made a point of bringing Genel Lee from thence on Acct. of the distance from his Line of Command—at least that he should not Sleep there—The same reasons holding good with respect to yourself, I should be glad if you could get some place nearer, as I think it too hazardous to trust the left Wing of our Army without a General Officer upon the spot in cases of immergency. I do not wish you to return to your old House—any other tolerably convenient will satisfy me, and I am sure be pleasing to yourself, as I know you would not easily forgive yourself if any thing wrong shd happen for want of your presence on any sudden call.¹²⁹

Sullivan was very sensitive to slights. In September 1775 he complained about having had to furnish more men for a fatigue party than Gen. Greene, and Greene mollified him with a formal reply.¹³⁰ In January 1776 Sullivan promised some New Hampshire men who reenlisted they would be officers, and the colony's legislature grumbled that commissions were its prerogative. On learning of that criticism, Sullivan snapped back on 14 March:

I hope gentlemen the cruel and ungenerous Reflections upon my conduct thrown out by some persons among you did not proceed from that envious disposition which too often proves the destruction of an Infant state struggling for freedom. . . . I am now ordered to march for New York in a few days; those persons will then have no more fear of the destruction of their Liberties from a person who has spent more money, undergone more Fatigue and oftener Risqued his life than any other person in your Province, & all this to secure that freedom which these Gentlemen would perswade the world I am endeavouring to destroy. Gentlemen, I wish your Colony all possible happiness & would do every thing in the power of man to secure its Freedom & even feel a Disposition to serve those few Inveterate foes of mine that yet remain among you & convince them that no person would do more in the cause of Freedom than your most obedt. servt.¹³¹

¹²⁹ PGW:RW, 3:344-5.

¹³⁰ PNG, 1:123.

¹³¹ New Hampshire, *Documents and Records*, 8:92-3. Whittemore, *General of the Revolution*, 25.

In June 1776 when Sullivan wanted to be given command of the Northern Department, Washington sent a mixed assessment to the Congress:

I think it my duty to observe...that he is active, spirited, and Zealously attach'd to the Cause; that he does not want Abilities, many Members of Congress, as well as myself, can testify. But he has his wants, and he has his foibles. The latter are manifested in a little tincture of vanity, and in an over desire of being popular, which now and then leads him into some embarrassments. His wants are common to us all; the want of experience to move upon a large Scale; for the limited, and contracted knowledge which any of us have in Military Matters stands in very little Stead; and is greatly over balanced by sound judgment, and some knowledge of Men and Books; especially when accompanied by an enterprizing genius, which I must do Genl. Sullivan the justice to say, I think he possesses.¹³²

At the time, Sullivan was still cocky in his planning. After setbacks, including being captured during the Battle of Brooklyn, he became more cautious, but he never lost his ego.

In March 1777 after Sullivan complained to the commander-in-chief about being passed over for the command at Ticonderoga, Washington chided him:

Do not, my dear General Sullivan, torment yourself any longer with imaginary Sights, and involve others in the perplexities you feel on that Score. No other officer of rank, in the whole army, has so often conceived himself neglected, Slighted, and ill treated, as you have done, and none I am sure has had less cause than yourself to entertain such Ideas. Mere accidents, things which have occurred in the common course of Service, have been considered by you as designed affronts.¹³³

Sullivan did lead some major Continental initiatives later in the war, in particular a destructive campaign against the Iroquois towns of upstate New York.

Sullivan's interaction with fellow generals might have been affected by alcoholism. By 1777 he developed stomach problems, probably due to a peptic ulcer; his doctor told him to stop drinking spirits, but he did not. As he entered his fifties, Sullivan was drinking so much that he "approached a state of idiocy, . . . [and] could neither feed, dress, or undress himself."¹³⁴ He died soon afterwards.

4.11 NATHANAEL GREENE: YOUNG AND EAGER

Of all the generals at the siege, Nathanael Greene (1742-1786) was the youngest and least distinguished. He later did fine work as quartermaster general, and as commander in the South became one of the most respected field-generals in American history. As a result,

¹³² PGW:RW, 5:21.

¹³³ PGW:RW, 8:580-1.

¹³⁴ *New-Hampshire Provincial Papers*, 21:825-6.

biographers tend to search his early career for hints of promise.¹³⁵ Greene did not have much opportunity to shine during the siege of Boston, but he made a good impression on the commander-in-chief.

Among the amateur generals in Cambridge, Greene had an unusual background. He was not a planter or farmer, like Washington and Putnam, nor a professional, like Thomas, Sullivan, and Spencer. Rather, Greene was the manager of a large anchor factory that his family owned in Coventry, Rhode Island. He was a manufacturer, but before the Industrial Revolution society viewed that status as closer to a craftsman than to a gentleman. The forge gave Greene experience in managing a workforce of over one hundred men, heavy equipment, and a complex supply chain. His knowledge proved useful when he became a military commander.¹³⁶

Greene lamented his lack of education, though he put this in writing only after his father died in 1770.¹³⁷ He read avidly, even while working the forge. He amassed over two hundred books on various topics and paid for tutoring. His father had been a leader of the local Quaker church, but in 1773 Greene and a cousin were suspended for going to “a place in Conecticut of Publick Resort where they had No Proper Business.”¹³⁸ Saying he had been educated “amongst the most Supersticious sort,” Greene never rejoined the Society of Friends.¹³⁹

Among their other businesses, the Greene brothers owned a sloop *Fortune*, which the Royal Navy ship *Gaspee* seized in early 1772. The Greens sued, eventually winning a judgment of £300 from a local court. On 9 June the *Gaspee* ran aground. Locals, long angry over strict enforcement of Customs laws, grabbed the chance to storm the ship and set it on fire. Greene himself was not on the scene, but that conflict politicized him.

On 20 July 1774 Nathanael Greene married Catherine Littlefield. He was thirty-two, and she was nineteen, from an upper-class family that had connections to Benjamin Franklin.¹⁴⁰ The following spring, she would be pregnant with their first child.

In October 1774 Greene and other wealthy men asked the Rhode Island Assembly to charter their new militia unit, the Kentish Guards. They wore regular uniforms, and sought

¹³⁵ Greene’s many biographers include his grandson, George Washington Greene, who recorded, and perhaps embellished, a lot of family lore in *Life of Nathanael Greene* and started to organize the general’s papers for publication. That task was completed by the Rhode Island Historical Society in 2006 with the last volume of *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*. This profile draws on those papers and on Golway, *Washington’s General*, and Carbone, *Nathanael Greene*.

¹³⁶ Carbone, *Nathanael Greene*, 6.

¹³⁷ Golway, *Washington’s General*, 28.

¹³⁸ Carbone, *Nathanael Greene*, 10. Some biographers have guessed that Greene attended a dance, others a militia gathering.

¹³⁹ PNG, 1:47.

¹⁴⁰ Golway, *Washington’s General*, 43.

to look good on parade. Encouraged by a cousin, Greene hoped the company would elect him as an officer, but he was left out because, his friends said, he walked with a slight limp that marred their appearance. Greene wrote to Capt James Varnum that it was a “stroke of mortification” to hear that he was “a blemish” to the group; “I confess it is my misfortune to limp a little but I did not conceive it to be so great.”¹⁴¹

Six months later a rider brought news of the shooting at Lexington, and the Kentish Guards mustered. Before they reached Massachusetts, Gov. Joseph Wanton sent word that he had ordered the Rhode Island regiments not to respond. Greene and other kept on, returning only when they heard that the British army was back in Boston. The Rhode Island legislature pushed Wanton out of office and authorized raising an Army of Observation numbering up to 1,500, or three smallish regiments.

On 8 May 1775 the colony offered Nathanael Greene command of that force. The great mystery of his career is how he rose in one step from a private in the Kentish Guards to general of the colony’s army. He did have some connections. Greene’s older brother Jacob was on the Rhode Island Committee of Safety, and they were allied with the politically influential Ward family. Nathanael had shown his commitment to the Patriot cause. The aesthetic problem that concerned the Guards did not seem so important in an actual war. Yet another factor might have been that top Rhode Islanders were more interested in naval commands, given their maritime tradition and the money to be made from prizes.

Greene accepted the Rhode Island army command and led his first troops toward Boston, going ahead to report to Ward’s headquarters on 23 May. The commander assigned the new regiments to Thomas’s Roxbury wing. Greene had his men camp on the Jamaica Plain estate of departed governor Francis Bernard. According to the Rev. William Emerson, the Rhode Islanders brought “proper Tents and Markees that look as ye regular Camp of ye Enemy...everything in ye most exact english Taste.”¹⁴² In late July, Gen. Washington moved the Rhode Island men to the northern wing of the army. Greene is said to have used the house of Samuel Tufts (1737-1828) as his headquarters; that building does not survive.¹⁴³

In 4 June orders Greene told officers to “Supress as much as [possible] all Debauchery and Vulgar Language Inconsistent with the Character of Soldiers.” Eleven days later, however, a Connecticut man reported:

As to the moral state of the Camp it is bad; I see no kind of seriousness; but on the contrary my ears are filled with the most shocking oaths, & imprecations; & the tremendous name of the great God is taken on the most trifling occasions. The principle part of the Troops that are here belong to this [Massachusetts] & Rhode

¹⁴¹ PNG, 1:75-6. Golway, *Washington’s General*, 44-5. Carbone, *Nathanael Greene*, 16-7.

¹⁴² William Emerson to Phebe Emerson, 7 July 1775, Emerson, *Diaries and Letters*, 81.

¹⁴³ Drake, *History of Middlesex*, 2:312. Comer, *Landmarks “in the Old Bay State,”* 320-2. Freese, *Historic Houses and Spots*, 72.

Island Government; ours are not so bad as theirs but we are far from having anything to boast of.¹⁴⁴

The standards of some New Englanders were much higher than others’.

Greene traveled between Roxbury and Providence, trying to secure supplies and recruit more troops to fill his quota (he never raised more than a thousand).¹⁴⁵ He was away from the siege during the Battle of Bunker Hill. Though some Americans saw that loss as a debacle, Greene told his brother Jacob, “I wish [we] could Sell them another Hill at the same Price we did Bunkers Hill.”¹⁴⁶

For Greene, already at the bottom of the pecking order, Washington’s arrival with commissions presented only opportunities. He sent a message to the new commander with two hundred men (see section 3.8), and wrote home to a friend:

I hope we shall be taught to copy his example and prefer the Love of Liberty in this time of publick danger to all the soft pleasures of domestic Life and support ourselves with manly fortitude amidst all the dangers and hardships that attend a state of war. And I doubt not under the Generals wise direction we shall establish such excellent order and stricktness of Dicipline as to invite Victory to attend him where ever he goes.¹⁴⁷

As Washington presented his plans to attack Boston (see section 11.5), Greene offered limited support—but more than any other general. During the council of war on 18 October 1775 he said Washington’s plan could succeed *if* the army were able to land a formidable 10,000 troops in the town.¹⁴⁸ In February 1776 he wrote to a brother that, assuming there were only 8,000 British soldiers, “an attack with 20,000 men might succeed”—though that was more troops than in the whole American army at the time.¹⁴⁹

Within the reluctant councils, Greene might have stood out. Washington also appreciated his military regularity, and Greene may have grown more impressive over the siege. In 1822 Alexander Garden wrote that Henry Knox had said of Greene:

His knowledge. . . is intuitive. He came to us, the rawest, and most untutored being I ever met with; but, in less than twelve months, he was equal, in military

¹⁴⁴ James Cogswell to Levi Hart, 15 June 1775, in “Historical Letters,” *Monthly Bulletin of Books Added to the Public Library of the City of Boston*, 5:389.

¹⁴⁵ Carbone, *Nathanael Greene*, 22

¹⁴⁶ PNG, 1:92.

¹⁴⁷ PNG, 1:99.

¹⁴⁸ Golway, *Washington’s General*, 66.

¹⁴⁹ PNG, 1:194. Golway, *Washington’s General*, 67.

knowledge, to any General Officer in the army, and very superior to most of them.¹⁵⁰

During the fight for Manhattan Island, Greene made a serious error in advising Washington that he could hold Fort Mifflin. Once he learned not to assume what the enemy would do, however, Greene became one of the Continental Army's most effective generals, and Washington's favored successor.

4.12 HORATIO GATES: AMBITIOUS ADMINISTRATOR

Paradoxically, the reputation of Horatio Gates (1728-1806) suffered because he was in command during the Americans' most significant battlefield victory, at Saratoga.¹⁵¹ That win in the fall of 1777 and Washington's loss at Brandywine prompted members of the Continental Congress to discuss Gates as a possible commander-in-chief. Admiration for Washington in the nineteenth century was so intense that authors tore down any rivals. They therefore emphasized Gates's faults and defeats and stripped him of his strengths and victories.¹⁵² Whatever conflicts Gates and Washington later had, in 1775-76 they were on friendly terms and worked closely together.

Gates was the child of the Duke of Leeds's housekeeper and her second husband, a waterman who sold produce to mansions along the Thames.¹⁵³ He was named in honor of his godfather, young Horace Walpole. When Gates was a baby, his mother entered the service of the Duke of Bolton, who had set up housekeeping in Greenwich with his mistress. The duke evidently pulled strings to get Gates's father, once convicted of smuggling, a job with the Customs service. Young Horatio probably attended the local grammar school, but his most important lessons came from observing the duke's genteel circle and how his parents served that wealthy man. In 1741 Gates's father became Surveyor of Customs at Greenwich, giving the family a solid middle-class life.

When Charles Stuart marched on London in 1745, the duke volunteered to raise an infantry regiment. This created an opening for Horatio Gates, then in his late teens, to

¹⁵⁰ Knox reportedly made this statement to a South Carolina judge; Garden, *Anecdotes*, 76. It casts doubt on the unsupported tradition that Greene had patronized Knox's Boston bookstore before the war.

¹⁵¹ Late in life, Gates gave different years for his birth, and biographers further confused the picture; Mintz, *Generals of Saratoga*, 16. Recently, genealogists have found the record of his christening on 30 April 1728 in the Parish of St. Nicholas, Deptford, in Greenwich.

¹⁵² For a summary of this process, see Cate, *Founding Fighters*, 50. This profile draws from the more balanced treatment of Nelson, *General Horatio Gates*, and the valuable analysis in Mintz, *Generals of Saratoga*, as well as George A. Billias, "Horatio Gates: Professional Soldier," in Billias, *George Washington's Generals*, 79-108.

¹⁵³ After Gates's death, some Americans whispered that he had been the illegitimate son of a British nobleman, but British gossips never said that; rather, they talked about Gates's father as a lowly "victualler."

become a lieutenant in the army.¹⁵⁴ Stationed in Germany, he succeeded to the post of regimental adjutant. Gates then became an aide de camp to Col. Edward Cornwallis in Halifax, where he courted Elizabeth Phillips (d. 1783), daughter of the commissary at Annapolis Royale and a distant relation to the Earl of Thanet.¹⁵⁵ They married in October 1754 after Gates bought the captaincy of the Fourth Independent Company of Foot.

Capt. Gates and his company joined Gen. Edward Braddock's army in Maryland in April 1755. He reported to Lt. Col. Thomas Gage and might also have met Capt. Charles Lee. During the march west to Fort Duquesne, he almost certainly made the acquaintance of volunteer aide de camp George Washington. Gates was in the advance party attacked by Native and French soldiers on 8 July 1755 and "was shot through the left breast," his left arm disabled, "the ball having cut some string."¹⁵⁶ Although Gates had been in the army for nearly ten years, this was his first experience of battle.¹⁵⁷

After recuperating, Gates oversaw different frontier forts. Betsy Gates lived mostly in New York, where she was reportedly the first woman to wear a mannish riding habit. She gave birth to their only child, Robert, in late 1758.¹⁵⁸ The next year, Gates returned to military administration. He was brigade major to Gen. John Stanwix at Fort Pitt and to Gen. Robert Monckton at Philadelphia. He assisted Monckton as governor of New York and during an attack on the French island of Martinique. Monckton assigned Gates to carry news of that victory to London, an honor that usually meant a promotion. He arrived in March 1762 and was quickly made major in the 45th Regiment, with prospects to become a lieutenant colonel when a position opened up.

Gates wanted that promotion, or higher pay, but with the war ending the number of army command and staff positions shrank. Throughout his career he had relied on powerful patrons; now they had reached the limits of their influence, or thought that he had received the position he deserved. This was the start of Gates's frustration with the British army, and eventually with British society. He crossed and re-crossed the Atlantic, lobbied all his contacts, and maneuvered to trade or sell his commission. After seven years, Gates formally retired from the army on half-pay. Already he was moving in Whig political circles, and a friend joked that he had become a "red hot Republican." He even thought of running for Parliament, opposing the government policy he called "the present pernicious system of American Polliticks," and by 1770 wondered about moving to America himself.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ Mintz, *Generals of Saratoga*, 18.

¹⁵⁵ Mintz, *Generals of Saratoga*, 33.

¹⁵⁶ Mintz, *Generals of Saratoga*, 40.

¹⁵⁷ Nelson, *General Horatio Gates*, 17.

¹⁵⁸ Mintz, *Generals of Saratoga*, 41.

¹⁵⁹ Nelson, *General Horatio Gates*, 33.

In May 1772 Gates sent a letter about land for sale in Virginia to a gentleman he knew there: George Washington. Despite a polite but unencouraging reply, the Gates family set sail in August and by March 1773 the retired major owned 659 acres in Berkeley County. Gates named his plantation Traveller's Rest; he did not anticipate leaving. He bought "Six working Black Slaves," planted a diverse set of crops, built a limestone house, and sent his son to school in Annapolis. After years of expensive living in England, he found financial security. Gates's neighbors made him a justice of the peace and a lieutenant colonel in the militia. In April 1773 he wrote to a British acquaintance, "I was such a Fool to stay so long in England, Vainly hoping for what I never Obtained."¹⁶⁰

Having supported the American colonies' political cause, Gates was now a colonist himself, and fully committed. On 1 July 1774 he wrote to his old friend Charles Lee: "I am ready to risque my life to preserve the liberty of the western world."¹⁶¹ He joined a county committee to monitor the purchase of tea. On 29 April 1775 Gates heard about the Battle of Lexington and Concord, and set out for Mount Vernon. The veteran staff officer conferred with Washington and perhaps also Richard Henry Lee the day before the latter two left for the Second Continental Congress. They surely carried the news that Gates was ready to join an American army.

On 21 June Gates received word that the Congress had made him adjutant general with the rank of brigadier general. The next day, his neighbor Samuel Washington wrote:

As my Brother has been prevailed on to take the command of the Continental Army I am happy in your being with him in the capacity you and he mentions, as your greater Experience will assist him in the arduous business.¹⁶²

Gates rode north with Sullivan, meeting with Congress delegates in Philadelphia and with Gen. Schuyler, Montgomery, and Wooster in New York. He reached Cambridge on 9 July and soon moved into the John Vassall house with the commander-in-chief.

Gates's work as adjutant is discussed in section 5.2. As a member of Washington's council of war, he advised against risky attacks. Rather, he said, the siege was already damaging the Crown financially; "Boston Dirt will be a Dollar a Bushell to the English Treasury," he wrote on 27 July.¹⁶³ In early 1776 he advised, "Our Business is to Defend the main Chance; to Attack only by Detail; and when a precious advantage Offers."¹⁶⁴ Gates also expressed higher opinions of the militia than his commander did, saying he "never desired to

¹⁶⁰ Mintz, *Generals of Saratoga*, 75.

¹⁶¹ Mintz, *Generals of Saratoga*, 77.

¹⁶² Nelson, *General Horatio Gates*, 40.

¹⁶³ Nelson, *General Horatio Gates*, 44-5.

¹⁶⁴ Billias, *George Washington's Generals*, 85.

see better soldiers than the New-England men made.”¹⁶⁵ Politically, Gates was one of the first generals to advocate independence. In October, Charles Lee joked that his friend was so “mad an enthusiast” that he frightened moderates “out of their Wits.”¹⁶⁶ On 7 December, Gates told Franklin that the Congress ought to establish American independence before resuming its debate on “forms of government.”¹⁶⁷ He forged a lasting friendship with John Adams, who had similar views.

Physically, Gates appeared older than his late forties: stout and slightly stooped, with a long nose, ruddy cheeks, and thinning gray hair. In 1777 a German officer wrote that he “almost always wears spectacles.”¹⁶⁸ Burgoyne grumbled that he looked more like an “old midwife” than a general; Gates’s men fondly called him “Granny Gates.”¹⁶⁹ In conversation the veteran officer tended to share anecdotes and homely proverbs, mixed with off-color allusions and enough profanity to make “a New Englandman’s hair almost stand on end.”¹⁷⁰ Yet his manner was mild, and—perhaps because of his own background—Gates was always concerned about the welfare of the common American soldier.

4.13 FORMING BRIGADES AND DIVISIONS

On 22 July Washington announced the reorganization of the army into six brigades, and the brigades into “three Grand Divisions” under the three major generals at the siege. The divisions were:

1. Ward commanding Thomas and Spencer’s brigades “at Roxbury, and its Southern dependencies.”
2. Lee commanding Sullivan and his brigade on Winter Hill and Greene and his brigade on Prospect Hill, covering the left or north side of the siege lines.
3. Putnam in Cambridge commanding a brigade under Heath and a brigade “under the Command of the Senior Officer therein, and until the pleasure of the Continental Congress be known.” This division functioned as “also a Corps-de-Reserve, for the defence of the several posts, north of Roxbury, not already named.”

In his general orders, Washington prefaced the announcement of this reorganization by declaring:

¹⁶⁵ MHSP, 4:83.

¹⁶⁶ Lee to Benjamin Rush, 20 October 1775, NYHSC, 4:214.

¹⁶⁷ Gates to Franklin, 7 December 1775, quoted in Nelson, *General Horatio Gates*, 48.

¹⁶⁸ Nelson, *General Horatio Gates*, 5. Billias, *George Washington’s Generals*, 80.

¹⁶⁹ Billias, *George Washington’s Generals*, 80. Nelson, *General Horatio Gates*, 6.

¹⁷⁰ Nelson, *General Horatio Gates*, 6.

Regularity and due Subordination, being so essentially necessary, to the good Order and Government of an Army, and without it, the whole must soon become a Scene of disorder and confusion.¹⁷¹

While that statement perfectly reflected Washington's values, the reorganization accomplished some other tasks as well:

- Previously each general commanded only men from his own state, though they all reported to Ward. Washington assigned some of the many Massachusetts regiments to brigadiers from neighboring states. Soon he would mix in the new regiments of riflemen from the south. Washington always encouraged officers and enlisted men to think on a Continental scale (see section 8.6).
- The shuffle also separated the generals who had been upset about their seniority from those they felt unfairly outranked them. Spencer did not have to report directly to Putnam, and Thomas and Heath did not deal with each other daily.
- Finally, Washington placed his youngest brigadiers, Sullivan and Greene, under his most experienced major general, Lee. The Rhode Island troops had to make the biggest shift, from the southern to the northern wing of the army, but Washington could trust Greene to carry that out happily.

Pvt. Samuel Bixby noted that on 25 July "Genl. Washington, Genl. Lee, & Genl. Ward came from Cambridge to take a view of things in Roxbury," and the next day Ward arrived with "his Regt."¹⁷²

That regiment was not to be Ward's for long. As part of the reorganization, Washington ended a practice that two colonies had borrowed from the British army of each general also being in charge of a regiment. (Similarly, each colonel might also be in nominal command of one company in his regiment.) The general explained to the Congress on 4 August:

The General Officers of the Massachusetts, have regiments, those of Connecticut, have both Regiments, & Companies, & the other Field Officers have Companies each. In Rhode Island, the General Officer has no Regims, but the Field Officers have Companies: But I do not find they have, or expect Pay under more than one Commission. Should the Commissions now to be delivered pursue these different Establishments, there will be a distinction between the General Officers & Field Officers of the same Rank.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ PGW:RW, 1:153.

¹⁷² MHSP, 14:290.

¹⁷³ PGW:RW, 1:223-4. Higginbotham, *George Washington*, 57, says that Heath "claimed the right of designating his successor" as colonel, but Washington did not agree to that.

By establishing the same rules for officers from all colonies, Washington advanced the notion of a Continental Army. The result was “a structure and organization that would remain, with certain later modifications and reforms, throughout the war.”¹⁷⁴

Washington reported the arrangement of divisions and brigades to the Congress on 4 August, noting:

By this you will observe there is a Dificiency of one Brigadier General occasioned by Mr. Pomroy’s refusal to accept his commission, which I beg leave to request may be filled up as soon as possible.¹⁷⁵

In the same letter, however, he implied it would be a poor idea to promote Col. Richard Gridley of the artillery regiment as a general, even though there was an opening. The brigade was apparently doing fine without a brigadier. Five days later, Greene told the governor of Rhode Island:

His Excellency General Washington complains bitterly about the supernumerary officers that draws pay. There is most certainly a large number in this province, that has Commissions and very few men. I Perceive that this practice in this Government has given rise to some disagreeable sentiments with regard to the virtue and Justice of their proceedings. His Excellency thinks that where a Government has created more officers than are necessary for the Government of the Troops they send, that the supernumerary Officers must be paid by the Colony’s that appoint them.¹⁷⁶

Washington was evidently not seeking more Massachusetts officers at this time.

Meanwhile, Joseph Frye had accompanied Gen. Ward to his new headquarters in Roxbury, hoping that the Congress would confirm him for the open brigadier’s slot. Some Massachusetts delegates visited Ward in August. They had not, they told Frye, submitted his name for a commission because “in the letter sent to them in regard to him and others, his Christian name was not mentioned, and. . .they could not satisfy themselves it was he.” They asked for a précis of Frye’s service in earlier wars to share with their colleagues in Philadelphia. Frye provided this information and stayed on in Roxbury, “not doubting but he would be commissioned to command a Brigade that was then vacant” in Cambridge.¹⁷⁷ Washington’s general orders occasionally refer to “Col. Fryes Brigade,” or similar terms, but he held that command only because of his seniority.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ Higginbotham, *George Washington*, 51.

¹⁷⁵ PGW:RW, 1:228.

¹⁷⁶ PNG, 1:106.

¹⁷⁷ *American Archives*, series 5, 2:727.

¹⁷⁸ See orders of 9 August and 11, 15, and 24 September 1775.

On 31 August Washington sent another letter to the Congress, which had adjourned, about the vacancy in the army establishment:

As the filling up the place of vacant Brigadier General, will probably be of the first Business of the Honourable Congress: I flatter myself it will not be deemed assuming to mention the Names of two Gentlemen whose former Services, Rank, & Age may be thought worthy of Attention on this Occasion. Of the one I can speak from my own Knowledge, of the other only from Character. The former is Col. John Armstrong of Pennsylvania. He served during the last War in most of the Campaigns to the Southward, was honoured with the Command of the Pennsylvania Forces, and his general military Conduct, & Spirit much approved by all who served with him; besides which, his Character was distinguished by an Enterprize against the Indians, which he plann'd with great Judgment, & executed with equal Courage, & Success. It was not till lately that I had reason to believe he would enter again on publick Service, & it is now wholly unsolicited & unknown on his Part.

The other Gentleman is Col. Frye of Massachusetts Bay. He entered into the Service as early as 1745, & rose thro' the different military Ranks in the succeeding Wars, to that of Colonel, untill last June, when he was appointed a Major General by the Congress of this Province. From these Circumstances together with the favourable report made to me of him I presume he sustained the Character of a good Officer—Tho' I do not find it distinguished by any peculiar Service.

Either of these Gentlemen, or any other whom the Honourable Congress shall favour with the Appointment, will be received by me with the utmost Deference & Respect.¹⁷⁹

It is clear that of the two candidates Washington preferred Armstrong and mentioned Frye simply out of obligation. On 21 September the Congress named Armstrong as a brigadier general. He served in the south, and never came to Boston.

On 12 October Frye learned that Washington did not expect the Congress to appoint another brigadier in the near future. He then left for his home in Maine, on the way accepting a commission from Massachusetts to take command of his county militia, guarding the coast. That might have freed Washington to write to the Congress again on 2 November:

I must beg leave to recall the attention of the Congress to the Appointment of a Brigadier General—an Officer as necessary to a Brigade as a Colonel is to a Regiment, and will be exceedingly wanted in the new Arrangement.¹⁸⁰

Delegates scheduled a discussion of the matter for 23 November, but took no action. On 1 December, Gen. Putnam recommended Henry Babcock of Rhode Island for the vacant post, stating, "He has this day been very serviceable in assisting in quelling a mutiny and bringing

¹⁷⁹ PGW:RW, 1:390-1.

¹⁸⁰ PGW:RW, 2:288.

back a number of deserters.” (See section 8.12.) Washington passed that recommendation on to the Congress, undercutting it by adding, “I know nothing of this Gentleman.”¹⁸¹

In January 1776, the Congress finally chose another brigadier general for the army in Massachusetts: Joseph Frye. The headquarters staff wrote to him in Maine, and he made his way back to the siege lines. According to Frye:

he arrived the evening of the 15th of said month [February], and the next morning waited upon General Washington, who presented him a Brigadier-General’s commission, dated the 10th day of the preceding month.¹⁸²

On 24 February Frye sent Washington a short letter about chaplains in his brigade—the only surviving business between the two men during the siege.¹⁸³ The general orders of 2 March list Frye last among four brigadier generals with a certain assignment.¹⁸⁴ Five days later, however, Washington told Reed that Frye “keeps his room, and talks learnedly of emetics, cathartics, &c. For my own part, I see nothing but a declining life that matters him.”¹⁸⁵

One day after the British evacuation, on 18 March Frye wrote to Washington to say that he wished to resign as of 11 April.¹⁸⁶ The commander forwarded that news to Congress on 24 March, along with a similar letter from Gen. Ward:

Major General Ward and Brigadier General Frye are desirous of leaving the Service and for that purpose have requested me to lay the matter before Congress that they be allowed to resign their Commissions. the papers containing their applications you will herewith receive, they will give you full and a more particular Information upon the Subject and therefore shall take the Liberty of referring you to them.¹⁸⁷

Privately, Washington and his aides wondered about why Frye had chosen 11 April. He told Lee: “the choice of the day became a matter of great speculation, and remained profoundly mysterious till he exhibited his account, when there appeared neither more nor less in it, than the completion of three calender months.”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸¹ WGW, 4:143. The following year Babcock was appointed to a command in Rhode Island, and then quickly removed when he showed signs of mental illness.

¹⁸² *American Archives*, series 4, 2:727.

¹⁸³ PGW:RW, 3:359.

¹⁸⁴ PGW:RW, 3:400.

¹⁸⁵ WGW, 4:382. Reed, *Life and Correspondence*, 1:170.

¹⁸⁶ PGW:RW, 3:486-7.

¹⁸⁷ PGW:RW, 3:523-4.

¹⁸⁸ NYHSC, 5:14. PGW:RW, 4:245-6.

Frye's pettiness irked Washington, as did the reluctance that he shared with several other aging Massachusetts officers about staying with the army as the fighting moved south. His private view of Frye is clear in a 1 April letter to Joseph Reed:

General Fry, that wonderful man, has made a most wonderful hand of it. . . . He has drawn three hundred and seventy-five dollars, never done one day's duty, scarce been three times out of his house, discovered that he was too old and too infirm for a moving camp, *but* remembers that he has been young, active, and very capable of doing what is now out of his power to accomplish; and therefore has left Congress to find out another man capable of making, if possible, a more brilliant figure than he has done¹⁸⁹

4.14 DISTINGUISHING RANKS

Soon after arriving in Cambridge, Gen. Washington decided that the army, which had no uniform, needed a way to recognize him and his authority. It is possible that a sentry had halted him while he was out examining the siege lines. On 10 July Washington bought "a ribband to distinguish myself"—a cloth sash to be worn across the chest.¹⁹⁰ Four days later, the general orders declared:

The General observing great remissness, and neglect in the several Guards in and about the Camp, orders the Officers commanding any Guard to turn out his Guard immediately upon the near Approach of The Commander in Chief or any of the General Officers, and upon passing the Guard; The Commander in Chief is to be received with *rested Arms*; the Officer to salute, and the Drums to beat a march: The Majors General with *rested Arms*, the Officer to salute and the Drums to beat two Ruffles; The Brigadiers General with *rested Arms*, the Officer to salute and the Drums to beat one Ruffle. There being something awkward, as well as improper, in the General Officers being stopp'd at the out-posts; ask'd for passes by the Sentries, and obliged often to send for the Officer of the Guard (who it sometimes happens is as much unacquainted with the Persons of the Generals, as the private Men) before they can pass in or out: It is recommended to both Officers and Men. to make themselves acquainted with the persons of all the Officers in General Command, and in the mean time to prevent mistakes: The General Officers and their Aids-de-Camp, will be distinguished in the following manner.

The Commander in Chief by a light blue Ribband, wore across his breast, between his Coat and Waistcoat.

The Majors and Brigadiers General, by a Pink Ribband wore in the like manner.

The Aids-de-Camp by a green ribband.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ PGW:RW, 4:9-10.

¹⁹⁰ Revolutionary War Expense Account, 1775-1783, George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress.

¹⁹¹ PGW:RW, 1:114-5.

Portraits of Washington painted during the war show him wearing his light blue sash as an emblem of office.

Evidently one of the major generals—probably Ward or Putnam, since Lee cared little for such things—objected to wearing the pink sash. Not because of the color itself, but because it was the same that the brigadiers wore. On 24 July the commander’s general orders included:

It being thought proper to distinguish the Majors, from the Brigadiers General, by some particular Mark; for the future the Majors General will wear a broad purple ribband.¹⁹²

The next day, dispatch rider Giles Alexander billed the headquarters for over two yards of “Royall Ribb.”¹⁹³

Along with the cockades for officers’ hats (see section 8.5), these sashes were part of the commander’s effort to emphasize hierarchy in the army, starting from the top.

¹⁹² PGW:RW, 1:163.

¹⁹³ Alexander’s invoice, part of the financial papers in the George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, can be viewed at <<http://memory.loc.gov/mss/mgw/mgw5/116/1900/1934.jpg>>.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE COMMANDER'S STAFF

George Washington had far more experience administering a military force than in leading it on campaign. He had watched his brother's work as Virginia adjutant, and then taken a similar job. He had served as a volunteer aide for Gen. Edward Braddock and observed Gen. John Forbes, two British commanders known for their organizational skills.¹ Washington therefore knew the value of a smoothly running military headquarters. Nevertheless, he struggled during his first year to assemble the right staff to handle his combination of military and political responsibilities.

5.1 MILITARY ADMINISTRATION IN THE CONTINENTAL ARMY

On 16 June, immediately after setting salaries for major and brigadier generals, the Continental Congress established the administrative positions of adjutant general (at a salary of \$125 per month), commissary general of stores and provisions (\$80/month), quartermaster general (\$80/month), and paymaster general (\$100/month), plus deputies.² Later votes would refine this arrangement by adding more posts, changing salaries and duties, and so on. In fact, the Congress never stopped tinkering with the administrative side of the army, always seeking to keep costs low.

Though the Congress held the authority to appoint those men, it chose in late July to defer to Washington's recommendations on some open positions, "the Congress not being sufficiently acquainted with persons properly qualified for these offices."³ Some members, such as John Adams, objected to that decision, feeling that administrators should be a check on the general's power. Washington was probably pleased with the freedom to make his own choices. On the other hand, since he and his staff had been juggling those jobs for weeks, he might have been content if the Congress had filled the jobs earlier. In August Washington put men into those offices and sent their names to Philadelphia for approval. Once appointed, all those administrators answered to Congress, independent of the general, and most worked out of their own houses in Cambridge or elsewhere rather than as part of the headquarters staff. Nevertheless, they were part of Washington's team.

¹ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 3.

² JCC, 2:94.

³ Hancock to Washington, 24 July 1775, PGW:RW, 1:165.

A second level of military administration consisted of the commander's "family"—the secretary and aides de camp who lived and worked at headquarters. Gen. Washington could appoint and assign these men as he saw fit. They were his closest associates, and in many ways had to function as extensions of himself. Discovering what talents and personalities he needed in his headquarters office was one of Washington's most important lessons in the first months of the war.

5.2 ADJUTANT GENERAL: GEN. HORATIO GATES

Gen. Horatio Gates (profiled in section 4.2) had more experience in military administration than anyone else in the Continental Army. For much of his career he had worked closely with high-ranking officers: as an aide de camp under Col. Cornwallis, governor of Nova Scotia in 1749; as brigade major for Gen. John Stanwix ten years later; and as brigade major and aide to Gen. Robert Monckton through 1762.⁴ Washington recognized the value of that knowledge. He pushed the Continental Congress to appoint Gates as adjutant general, the army's main administrative post, and to give him the rank of brigadier general instead of colonel. Gates, in turn, advised Washington that he should not leave Philadelphia until the Congress had provided him "not only with all the Powers, but all the Means, their Power can bestow."⁵

John Adams wanted to know more about how the army functioned, quizzing various Massachusetts contacts in the fall of 1775. In response to Adams's queries, Gen. John Thomas wrote to James Warren detailing the responsibilities of different administrators. About Gates's job he wrote:

The Adjutant General Attends the Commanding Officer every day at orderly times, for the General Orders, and the Adjutants of each Regiment must attend him at his Office, at a certain hour that he may prefix, where he must deliver the Order to each of them, and they to their Several Regiments.⁶

Regimental adjutants copied the general's instructions into their orderly books and transmitted them to the officers. Washington's general orders were sometimes supplemented by further orders given out at the brigade or regimental level, also written into the orderly books. The resulting documents are valuable sources about the administration of the army, though it must be remembered that they preserve the top-down perspective.

While organizing and delivering daily orders was a big part of his work, Gates had much more to do. The adjutant general was also responsible for camp security and assigning

⁴ Nelson, *General Horatio Gates*, 9, 21-3.

⁵ Washington left for Cambridge before receiving this letter. PGW:RW, 1:23.

⁶ PJA, 3:121.

soldiers to details. He managed the army's recruiting and issued commissions for officers.⁷ Gates's arrival in Cambridge was announced on 9 July 1775 and the very next day he issued "Instructions for the officers. . . upon the Recruiting Service."⁸

One of the major challenges Gates tackled was to determine just how many men were in the army. As military manuals of the period specified, the adjutant general's responsibilities included keeping "an exact State of each Brigade, and each Regiment in particular."⁹ The challenge of confirming actual troop strength had stymied Washington. On 3 July, his first full day in Cambridge, his general orders began:

The Colonels or commanding Officer of each Regt. are ordered forthwith, to make two Returns of the Number of men in their respective Regiments; distinguishing such as are sick, wounded or absent on furlough.¹⁰

Washington repeated that order on 5 July, but still had not received adequate information five days later when he wrote his first report to the Congress:

My earnest Wishes to comply with the Instructions of the Congress in making an early and complete return of the State of the Army, has led into an involuntary Delay of addressing you, which has given me much Concern. Having given Orders for this purpose immediately upon my Arrival, & unapprized of the imperfect Obedience which had been paid to those of like Nature from General Ward, I was led from Day to Day to expect they would come in, & therefore detained the Messenger. They are not so complete as I could wish but much Allowance is to be made for inexperience in Forms, & Libertys which had been taken (not given) on this Subject.¹¹

Gates eased the task of counting soldiers by having standard forms printed and distributed as announced in the general orders for 12 July:

The Adjutant General will deliver at orderly time, a certain number of printed returns, to the Adjutant of each regiment; so that no excuse can for the future be admitted, for not making regular and exact returns when demanded; as it is only fitting up the Blanks, with the Numbers proper to be placed in them. The Commander in Chief will not for the future, admit of any palliative for making a false return, and is resolved, to bring any Officer of what Rank soever, to a Court Martial who is found delinquent.¹²

⁷ Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 84.

⁸ Nelson, *General Horatio Gates*, 40.

⁹ *Essay on the Art of War*, 38.

¹⁰ PGW:RW, 1:49, 63.

¹¹ PGW:RW, 1:87.

¹² PGW:RW, 1:107.

These forms did not end the slow reports—the general orders chided tardy officers again on 17 and 20 July—but on the next day Washington was able to tell the Congress:

I have inclosed the last weekly Return which is more accurate than the former & hope in a little Time we shall be perfectly regular in this, as well as several other necessary Branches of Duty.¹³

Soon the officer corps became used to Gates's system of weekly returns.

Gates also wrote a manual of military routine and drafted plans for systems of sanitation and supply in the camps. He did this work with a genuine concern for the soldiers' welfare and what they needed to fight. Gates also fostered ties with New England officers. The Continental Congress's appointments had supplanted Col. William Henshaw (1735-1820), whom the Massachusetts Provincial Congress appointed as adjutant general under Ward on 27 June. Gates ensured there were no hurt feelings by asking Henshaw to become his main assistant.¹⁴

In a profile of Gates, historian George Athan Billias wrote:

He had a real flair for administration and quickly became Washington's right-hand man in organizing the new American army at Cambridge in July, 1775. By writing the first army regulations and maintaining military records, he brought some semblance of order to the chaotic situation facing the new commander-in-chief. His professional experience enabled him to set up procedures for recruiting new soldiers and for training older ones. Efficient, hard-working, and loyal, he was able to relieve his chief from many time-consuming clerical chores. Washington was quick to recognize his merits as an administrator, and long after Gates had left the post of adjutant general, the commander-in-chief kept trying to persuade him to return.¹⁵

Only later, as they exercised separate commands, did a gap grow between the two men.

On 13 August 1775 Maj. Robert Magaw of Pennsylvania wrote home that "General Gates gave me share of his Bed at Gen Washington's till I could be provided," showing that Gates lived in the John Vassall house during the siege.¹⁶ This enabled him to work closely with the commander-in-chief; all his correspondence came from "headquarters." Gates probably slept in one of the upstairs bedrooms while younger, lower-ranking aides slept downstairs, as John Trumbull recalled (see section 6.6). In December Elizabeth Gates joined her husband, arriving from Virginia with Martha Washington (see section 7.7). The two women appear to have been friendly in 1775-76, but their relationship cooled as their

¹³ PGW:RW, 1:123, 134, 139.

¹⁴ Nelson, *General Horatio Gates*, 43.

¹⁵ Billias in Billias, *George Washington's Generals*, 84.

¹⁶ *Magazine of Western History*, 4:675.

husbands became rivals in 1777. Betsy Gates, with her aristocratic British manners, never developed friendships with the wives of younger generals.¹⁷

Gen. Washington's expense notebook records a payment on 7 September 1775 for paper to "Mr. Pierce—Assistt. to Genl. Gates."¹⁸ On 7 June 1776 Isaac Peirce (1753-1781) of Boston was officially appointed as one of Gates's aides de camp.¹⁹ It appears that he had started working at headquarters during the siege, but the Congress had not provided for an aide for the adjutant general, so the commanders came up with a different title. Peirce probably shared quarters with other young men on the headquarters staff.

5.3 QUARTERMASTER GENERAL: THOMAS MIFFLIN

The Philadelphia merchant Thomas Mifflin (1744-1800) accompanied Gen. Washington to Cambridge as an aide de camp (see section 5.9), but on 14 August he agreed to take the post of quartermaster general. That job came with a salary of \$80 per month plus a small percentage of the value of goods he brought into camp—a standard eighteenth-century incentive to maintain steady supplies. On 22 December the Congress added the rank of colonel as another perquisite of the quartermaster general's job.²⁰

Mifflin was a Quaker by birth, from a prosperous family of merchants. He graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1760 and spent the next four years in a trading office. After visiting England and France, in 1765 Mifflin returned to Philadelphia, went into business with his brother, and married his cousin Sarah. Of average height, Mifflin was handsome, agreeable, and lively. He served as secretary of the American Philosophical Society and joined other fashionable Pennsylvania associations. His talent for public speaking—John Adams later called him "a sprightly and spirited speaker"²¹—made him a success at politics, and Mifflin entered the Pennsylvania legislature in 1772. He also visited New York, Newport, and Boston, and by May 1774 was corresponding with Massachusetts leaders. Later that year the Pennsylvania assembly chose him as one of the colony's delegates to the First Continental Congress, where he met Washington.²²

When the war arrived, Mifflin became a major in a volunteer militia company and urged fellow Pennsylvanians to support New England. During the Second Continental Congress John Adams wrote that he "ought to have been a general for he has been the

¹⁷ Mintz, *Generals of Saratoga*, 85.

¹⁸ Revolutionary War Expense Account, 1775-1783, George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress.

¹⁹ WGW, 5:105. Peirce is described in Drake, *Memorials of the Society of the Cincinnati*, 413; and Ellery and Bowditch, *Pickering Generalogy*, 1:196.

²⁰ JCC, 2:94, 3:445.

²¹ DAJA, 2:150.

²² This summary of Mifflin's life is based on Rossman, *Thomas Mifflin and the Politics of the American Revolution*, a thorough modern biography.

animating soul of the whole,” and Samuel Adams said he would give “great spirit to our army.”²³ Mifflin argued that Charles Lee should be second-in-command, not Gen. Ward, but accepted the final consensus and resigned his political seat in order to serve in the army. After he left the city with Gen. Washington, on 28 July the Quaker Philadelphia Monthly Meeting stated the obvious:

Thomas Mifflin of this city, merchant, having for a considerable time past been active in the promotion of military measures, he hath separated himself from religious fellowship with us.²⁴

Mifflin never returned to the Society of Friends.

Mifflin helped Washington set up headquarters in the Wadsworth and then the Vassall house in Cambridge. Records show that he often handled the office’s financial transactions. On 20 July Mifflin wrote to a cousin from headquarters:

My Head & Times are so much engaged here in very important matters. . . . Every Day preparing & expecting an Engagement. I am oblig’d to ride from Morning to Night—I never had better Health or Spirits. . . . It is a righteous Cause. My whole Soul is ardently engaged in it. . . .²⁵

Mifflin thrived in the fast-paced, high-pressure environment of the early siege.

Washington’s “experience of his activity” was one reason he asked Mifflin to step into the quartermaster general’s role in August. Gen. Thomas explained that job this way:

The duty of a Quartermaster General, is to Inspect the Provisions and See that they are good and wholesom, and to see that Tents for the Army, Intrenching Tools and any other Articles Necessary for the Camp are Provided, to draw them out of the Store when wanted, and return them in when done with, to pitch on proper Ground for the Incampments, to laying out the Ground in Lines, that the Tents of each Regiment be properly Pitch’d according to their Rank, and form’d in the best manner for defence, and giving directions to the Quartermasters of each Regiment, and Camp Culler Men, that the Barracks be kept Clean, and the Streets Swept and all Filth be remove’d, that proper Vaults [i.e., latrines] be Open’d for the Use of the Troops &c.²⁶

²³ Rossman, *Thomas Mifflin*, 40, 43. John Adams to Abigail Adams, 29 May 1775, AFC, 1:207. Samuel Adams to Elbridge Gerry, 22 June 1775, in Adams, *Writings of Samuel Adams*, 3:219; this letter does not appear in LoD.

²⁴ Rossman, *Thomas Mifflin*, 41.

²⁵ Letter in Miscellaneous Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, quoted in Rossman, *Thomas Mifflin*, 45.

²⁶ PJA, 3:119.

The quartermaster general also had important duties when the army was on the march, but those of course did not apply during the siege.²⁷

Washington's other reasons for choosing Mifflin were "a thorough perswasion of his Integrity," and

because he stands unconnected with either of these [New England] Governments; or with this that, or t'other man; for between you and I there is more in this than you can easily immagine.²⁸

In sum, Washington was worried about the potential corruption of a quartermaster ordering all his supplies from local friends. Samuel Adams stated that Mifflin's "Character stood so high that no Gentleman could hesitate to put him into" the position.²⁹

In fact, Mifflin sent a lot of business through his cousin Jonathan Mifflin and his partner, William Barrett. After all, Mifflin's mercantile experience and connections were part of his qualifications for the job. He was careful to tell those colleagues that he expected "no part or Share of your Commissions or profits" from the orders since he would receive the quartermaster's commission.³⁰ At the same time, Mifflin told his "lads" in Philadelphia about opportunities up in Massachusetts; "In my opinion," he wrote, "you never had a better Chance to do Business." Specifically, he reported demand for Irish linen and "some fine blue Cloths and buff with Linings, etc."—the colors of the uniform that Washington wore, which became the standard for Continental officers. He could "put them into proper Hands for Sale," he said, but his name must not appear on any invoice.³¹ Mifflin told another relative "*under the Rose*" about what merchandise would sell well in Massachusetts, adding, "keep this Letter entirely to yourself as the least Hint of what I have written may ruin your Scheme of Trade."³²

When Jonathan Mifflin wanted to enlist in the Continental Army as it reorganized, its quartermaster general beseeched him to remain a civilian:

It will totally derange our Affairs and justly incur the Censure of those with whom we have contracted.—In short it will oblige me to leave this Camp & the

²⁷ Stephenson, *Patriot Battles*, 103.

²⁸ PGW:RW, 1:372.

²⁹ Rossman, *Thomas Mifflin*, 47.

³⁰ Letters of 2 November 1775, Emmet Collection, New York Public Library, and 13 November 1775, Washington-Biddle Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, quoted in Rossman, *Thomas Mifflin*, 47-8.

³¹ 6 September 1775 in Washington-Biddle Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, quoted in Rossman, *Thomas Mifflin*, 48.

³² Letter dated 2 November 1775, Miscellaneous Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. This relative visited the Cambridge camp at least once, perhaps bringing goods for sale. Rossman, *Thomas Mifflin*, 49.

Army forever. . . Besides you are now in a Way to lay up something—and although a Mind like yours may justly despise all property when it interferes with or should be sacrificed to the public, yet it should not be thrown away without Cause or without some reputable Object.³³

Eventually the noise of Mifflin's deals became too loud for Gen. Washington to ignore. Joseph Reed wrote from Philadelphia on 7 March 1776: "Persons are constantly employed in purchasing up Goods here which do not all go to the publick Stores as the Parties concerned have boasted of their great Profits. . ." ³⁴ On 25 March 1776 the general replied to Reed:

I have taken occ[asio]n to hint to a certain Gentn in this Camp, without Introducg names, my app[rehensio]ns of his being concerned in Trade. He protests most solemnly that he is not, directly nor indirectly; & derives no other profit than the Congress allows him for defraying the expenses, to wit 5 p Ct on the Goods purchased.³⁵

The eighteenth-century military procurement system pushed nearly any administrator into some sort of opportunistic side business. Washington's most trusted and reliable quartermaster general during the war, Gen. Nathanael Greene, also quietly steered a lot of trade to his family firm.³⁶ Washington remained impressed with Mifflin's "Excellent Talents."³⁷

Mifflin lived and worked in the house that belonged to William Brattle, the militia general who had triggered the Powder Alarm (see sections 1.2 and 1.4), between the general's headquarters and the college. According to the son of a doctor at the nearby hospital:

In his [Mifflin's] family, or within the camp precincts, were two young ladies whose personal qualities rendered them the centre of attraction among the officers of the army. One was Miss Wendall, afterwards Mrs. Mellen. The other was. . .the daughter of John Collins, [later] Governor of Rhode Island.³⁸

Martha-Fitch Wendell (1762-1835) was a Brattle granddaughter; during the war, her widowed mother kept the family property from being confiscated by the state by seeking

³³ 20 December 1775 letter in Provincial Delegates Papers, HSP, quoted in Rossman, *Thomas Mifflin*, 48-9. Jonathan Mifflin remained on the job until the following summer, when Mifflin—by then promoted to a brigadier general—made him his brigade major; Rossman, *Thomas Mifflin*, 49.

³⁴ PGW:RW, 3:428.

³⁵ PGW:RW, 3:538.

³⁶ Golway, *Washington's General*, 165-7, 203.

³⁷ 29 March 1776 letter to Putnam, PGW:RW, 3:560.

³⁸ Warren, *Life of John Warren*, 159.

“the favor of men in power civil and military,” according to her grateful relations.³⁹ Abigail Collins (1757-1832) was the daughter of a Rhode Island Patriot; her mother was an Avery from Boston.⁴⁰ In August, Abigail Adams wrote to her husband in Philadelphia about Sarah Mifflin: “tell her I do not know whether her Husband is safe here. Belona and Cupid have a contest about You hear nothing from the Ladies, but about Major Mifflins easy address, politeness, complasance &c. &c.”⁴¹ Mrs. Mifflin set out for Cambridge in the next month.⁴² (Later in the war Mifflin became notorious for extramarital affairs.)⁴³

The Mifflins hosted dinner parties in the Brattle mansion, entertaining everyone from Abigail Adams to Native chiefs (see section 16.9), from the Rev. Jeremy Belknap of New Hampshire to Mary Morgan, newly arrived from Philadelphia. Even Washington and Gates came from headquarters. In fact, given the number of descriptions of dinners in each house after August 1775 it appears that Mifflin took on the responsibility for entertaining civilian visitors to Cambridge while Washington’s dinner guests came mostly from the army ranks. Later Mifflin’s entertaining caught up with him; in the 1790s even members of his own political party criticized his drinking.⁴⁴

Mifflin managed twenty-eight people in the quartermaster general’s department, nineteen of them at his headquarters in Cambridge:

- five accounting clerks.
- two clerks operating a store to distribute utensils and other equipment to the troops. (These stores were also used to deliver clothing and blankets sent by the colonies; the Continental Congress had not set up a clothing supply line.)⁴⁵
- a clerk and an assistant assigned to deliver firewood.
- a clerk and an assistant managing a lumber yard.
- a stable manager.
- a granary manager.
- a barrack master and his clerk.
- a superintendent of blacksmiths.

³⁹ Martha-Fitch Wendell married a Harvard tutor in 1784; Harris, *Descendants of Capt. Thomas Brattle*, 40-51.

⁴⁰ *American Archives*, series 4, 2:400. Abigail Collins married Dr. John Warren of the hospital staff in 1777.

⁴¹ AFC, 1:271.

⁴² Rossman, *Thomas Mifflin*, 44.

⁴³ Rossman, *Thomas Mifflin*, 193.

⁴⁴ Rossman, *Thomas Mifflin*, 298-302.

⁴⁵ General orders, 24 August 1775, PGW:RW, 1:357.

- a superintendent of carpenters.
- two wagon masters.

An army captain oversaw the company of carpenters maintaining the wagon train that moved material to camp. There was an office to supply Ward's division in Roxbury and another serving Lee's division on Prospect and Winter Hills, each staffed by an assistant quartermaster with the rank of captain, a clerk, a firewood clerk, and a wagon master.⁴⁶

Because of Mifflin's energy, he became involved in other parts of the siege. Only a few days after his arrival, he was "observing on the Marshes with his [spy] Glass"; British gunners fired toward him, "but he is small mark and came off clear," wrote Samuel Blachley Webb.⁴⁷ In November Mifflin christened the *Congress* mortar with Gen. Putnam.⁴⁸ That same month, a British raiding party tried to seize cattle being grazed on Lechmere's Point. Col. William Thompson's regiment of riflemen mobilized, and Mifflin went along with his fellow Pennsylvanians (see section 8.9). Gen. Lee called him "a Hero," and Abigail Adams said he "flew about as tho he would have raised the whole Army."⁴⁹ Another eyewitness said he "never saw a greater display of personal bravery, than was exhibited on this occasion in the *cool* and *intrepid* conduct of Colonel Mifflin."⁵⁰ Mifflin himself described the event in a 13 November 1775 letter without mentioning his role.⁵¹

According to the Rev. William Gordon, Mifflin made another significant contribution at the end of the siege. He was called into a council of war on 26 February to discuss the best time to occupy Dorchester Heights, possibly because the generals needed to know when he could deliver necessary supplies.

The quarter master general, colonel Mifflin, was summoned to the council for the first time. He went prepossessed in favor of the night of March the fourth, a friend having reminded him, that probably the action would be the next day; and that it would have a wonderful effect upon the spirits of the New-Englanders, to tell them when about engaging—"remember the fifth of March, and avenge yourselves for the massacre at Boston." When required to give his opinion, he spake in favor of the aforementioned night, and supported it in opposition to the

⁴⁶ Erna Risch, *Supplying Washington's Army*, 33-4.

⁴⁷ Webb, *Correspondence and Journals*, 1:79.

⁴⁸ Rossman, *Thomas Mifflin*, 52.

⁴⁹ Lee to Benjamin Rush, 13 November 1775, NYHSC, 4:217. Abigail Adams to John Adams, 12 November 1775, AFC, 1:325.

⁵⁰ Attributed to Thomas Craig in *Memoirs of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania*, 2:111.

⁵¹ Washington-Biddle Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, described in Rossman, *Thomas Mifflin*, 52.

contrary sentiment of general Gates, who for some reasons deemed it an improper time. After a debate it was carried for that night by a majority of one.⁵²

That timing became part of the Continental Army's final push (see section 18.4).

5.4 COMMISSARY GENERAL: JOSEPH TRUMBULL

Oldest son of Gov. Jonathan Trumbull of Connecticut, Joseph Trumbull (1737-1778) was a Harvard graduate with experience in both business and politics. He arrived in Cambridge in the spring of 1775 as commissary for the Connecticut troops, supplying their food. As Gen. John Thomas described that job:

The Commassary of Provision, is to receive the Provision from the Contractors and to deliver them to the under Commassaries with directions for the delivery of them to the Troops according to the Order he may receive from the Commanding Officer, and is to be Accountable to the Publick in what way the Provisions are expended, by takeing receipts of the Commander in Chief for his Voucher.⁵³

In May 1775 the Massachusetts Provincial Congress assigned Trumbull the house of John Borland (see section 1.2).⁵⁴

The Connecticut delegates to the Continental Congress—Eliphalet Dyer (Trumbull's father-in-law), Silas Deane, and Roger Sherman—all tried to get Washington to appoint Trumbull as his secretary.⁵⁵ Trumbull realized that position was not available as soon as the generals arrived in Cambridge, and on 6 July he wrote to Deane proposing that the Congress make him commissary general of the entire army.⁵⁶ Samuel Blachley Webb, an officer from that colony, told Deane (his stepfather) on 11 July that Trumbull was "much beloved by all Ranks of people. . . his extensive connexions enables him to procure every necessary with the greatest imaginable dispatch."⁵⁷ Gen. Washington was impressed by how well the Connecticut troops were supplied, and probably also noted Trumbull's close connection to one of the region's remaining governors (see section 17.1).

In his first letter back to Congress on 10 July Washington wrote about the value of combining the supply chain under one manager, Trumbull:

⁵² Gordon, *History of the Rise. . .*, 2:190.

⁵³ PJA, 3:119.

⁵⁴ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 240. *American Archives*, series 4, 2:811.

⁵⁵ *Letters of Delegates*, 1:500. Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 318.

⁵⁶ Webb, *Correspondence and Journals*, 3:243.

⁵⁷ Webb, *Correspondence and Journals*, 1:78.

I esteem it therefore my Duty to represent the Inconvenience which must unavoidably ensue from a Dependence on a Number of Persons for Supplies, & submit it to the Consideration of the Congress, whether the publick Service will not be best promoted by appointing a Commissary General for these Purposes— We have a striking Instance of the Preference of such a Mode in the Establishment of Connecticut, as their Troops are extremely well provided under the direction of Mr [blank] Trumbull, and he has at different Times assisted others with various Articles—should my Sentiments happily coincide with those of your Honours on this Subject, I beg leave to recommend Mr Trumbull as a very proper Person for this Department.⁵⁸

The Congress made Trumbull's appointment official on 19 July.⁵⁹

Over the following months, Trumbull built a large food-distribution network. He had purchasing agents in Newburyport, Providence, New York, and other places working for a percentage of the value of the food they bought for the army. About twenty miles from the Cambridge and Roxbury camps were storehouses or magazines where livestock was slaughtered and flour stored. Within the camps there were four stores that issued food to the regiments, at Cambridge (the largest), Roxbury, Medford, and Prospect Hill. Three of Trumbull's four storekeepers had been commissaries or deputy commissaries for their home colonies at the start of the war. They oversaw clerks, coopers, cooks, and other workers.⁶⁰

In October, as Gen. Washington prepared for his conference with the committee from the Continental Congress (see section 17.7), he asked Trumbull to draw up a budget for supplying the army until spring. Trumbull's reply shows the scope of his supplies:

An Estimate of the cost of such articles, for the support of an AMERICAN Army, consisting of twenty-two thousand men, from the 10th of OCTOBER, 1775, to the 10th of MAY, 1776, being seven months, as fall within the department of the Commissary-General:

Twenty-five thousand barrels Flour, at 44s.,	£55,000
Twelve thousand barrels Pork, at 65s.,	39,000
One thousand barrels salted Beef, at 50s.,	2,500
Twenty-two thousand pounds fresh Beef, three days in a week, 25s. per cwt.,	29,100
Two hundred barrels Beer or Cider per day, s.,	10,500
Twenty-two thousand pints Milk per day, 1d.,	19,150
Twenty-eight thousand bushels Peas or Beans, 6s.,	8,400
Six ounces Butter per man per week, 3d. per pound,	10,080
Two gallons Vinegar per man per week,	10,000
One hundred hogsheads New-England Rum,	1,250
Hospital stores uncertain; say thirty pipes Teneriffe Wine,	900
One hundred casks Raisins, 50s.,	250
One hundred barrels Oat Meal,	200

⁵⁸ PGW:RW, 1:88.

⁵⁹ JCC, 2:190.

⁶⁰ Risch, *Supplying Washington's Army*, 161-2. After the siege, the area of Little Cambridge became a major meatpacking center, fed in large part by the demand of the Continental Army to the south.

[subtotal]	£186,330
Add contingencies,	13,670
[total]	£200,000

I compute the Pork as drove to camp; if bought in the country, the transportation will cost twenty Shillings per barrel more; in the whole, twelve thousand Pounds. Beer and Cider, Vinegar, Wine, Raisins, Oat Meal, and fifty hogsheads Rum, already purchased.⁶¹

Concerned about expenses, and knowing that Washington's army had never been that large, the Congress authorized a little over 20,372 troops in November.⁶² At the same time, it determined what a daily ration would be. Trumbull actually provided more food (except for milk) than the Congress called for.⁶³

Nevertheless, there were still complaints about the food, and about profiteering. On 14 November officers from Sullivan's brigade made "Very pointed complaints" about Trumbull, who was then away from camp. Washington ordered a court of generals to look into three accusations:

First. For not delivering out the back allowance of peas, or the value thereof in money, to the officers and men.

Second. For taking in onions at two shillings and eight pence, and delivering them out at four shillings; and,

Third. For taking in potatoes at one shilling and four pence, and delivering them out at two shillings.

The court threw out the first charge, but Trumbull admitted that the second and third were accurate. The generals then ruled that though "there was not the least design of fraud in Mr. Trumbull, they are unanimously of opinion that the measure was pernicious and injudicious."⁶⁴ The army thus put the commissary general on notice that it would protest too high a markup, but left him in the job.

Trumbull had bouts of debilitating sickness. On 30 October 1775 he fell ill while home in Lebanon, Connecticut, and wrote to Washington to say that he had deputized Jeremiah Wadsworth (1743-1804) of Hartford "To wait on Your Excellency in my name & stead" and to pick up money to pay the army's suppliers. The general reported meeting with Wadsworth on 2 November. Trumbull did not return to Cambridge until December.⁶⁵ Nonetheless, the supply network he built never faltered during the siege. The New England colonies were eager to supply their own troops, and the army did not face the challenges that

⁶¹ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1045.

⁶² JCC, 3:321-2.

⁶³ Risch, *Supplying Washington's Army*, 189-90.

⁶⁴ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1613, 4:489.

⁶⁵ PGW:RW, 2:265. Trumbull died at age forty-one in 1778, and Wadsworth succeeded him as Commissary General for the army; PGW:RW, 2:290.

hampered supply later in the war—troops on the move, disruptions by the British, runaway inflation.

5.5 MUSTERMASTER GENERAL: STEPHEN MOYLAN

Stephen Moylan (1737-1811) was another Philadelphia Patriot who brought business experience to Washington's military staff. He had an unusual background among American activists as an Irish Catholic immigrant. Moylan was born into a mercantile family in Cork. The Marquis of Chastellux reported, "one of his brothers is Catholic Bishop of *Cork*; he has four others, two of whom are merchants, one at Cadiz, the other at L'Orient; the third is in Ireland with his family; and the fourth is intended for the priesthood."⁶⁶ Stephen Moylan himself started an international career when he snuck out of Ireland to Paris to receive a Catholic education. He represented his family's mercantile house in Lisbon for three years and came to Philadelphia in 1768 trading goods and investing in ships. Moylan made at least one visit to Mount Vernon before the war.⁶⁷

On 25 July 1775 the Pennsylvania merchant and leading Continental Congress delegate John Dickinson wrote to Washington:

Mr. Moylan, a friend of mine, informs me that he intends to enter into the American Army. As he resided some years in this City and was much esteemed here, I sincerely hope he will be so happy as to recommend himself to your favour, which I am convinced he will endeavour to deserve.⁶⁸

Moylan had already arrived in Massachusetts around that time, apparently hoping to become an aide de camp to Gen. Charles Lee. On 27 July Lee told Robert Morris:

Moiland has come up to us, but unfortunately has dangled his time after some intrigue (for he calls every woman who has a body to her shift an intrigue) until my two Aid de Campships were filled up. I wish you would recommend him to the members of the Continental Congress with whom you are acquainted for some provision.⁶⁹

Fortunately, there was plenty of work for an experienced administrator.

The 11 August general orders announced Moylan's appointment as "Muster Master General to the Army of the United Colonies."⁷⁰ Gen. Thomas explained that position this way:

⁶⁶ Chastellux, *Travels in North-America*, 1:141-2.

⁶⁷ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 29.

⁶⁸ PGW:RW, 1:169, text from letter as published in *Potter's American Monthly*, 6:14.

⁶⁹ NYHSC, 4:200. It is hard to tell when Lee was just joshing, but Moylan was a bachelor at the time.

⁷⁰ PGW:RW, 1:287.

Commissary of Muster, is to Muster all the Regiments in the Army; Usually once in two Months, that the Commanding Officer of each Regiment, may Account for his Regiment, whether Sick, on Furlough, or on Command, and the Several Cantonements must See that the Muster Rools must Contain the Names of each Man in the Regiment to be attested by said Commasary, One to be Transmitted to the War Office, one to be kept by the Muster Master, The third to be deliver'd to the pay Master, by which the said pay Master is to pay of[f] the Troops, according to their Several Ranks.⁷¹

Before mechanical copying, this job entailed writing and sorting out a lot of paperwork involving thousands of individual names.

Three days after Moylan's appointment, the commander announced that he had taken over Gates's task to supervise the counting of the troops:

As the Troops are all to be mustered as soon as possible, the Muster-Master General, Stephen Moylan, Esq., will deliver the commanding officer of each Regiment thirty blank muster rolls, upon Friday next, and directions for each Captain how he is to fill up the blanks.

Further instructions on 17 August stated that Moylan was "to fix the days for mustering each Brigade, with the Adjutant General, who will give directions accordingly."⁷² Because the system of printed muster rolls and regular returns was already in place, Washington realized he could deploy his mustermaster general to other duties.

On 4 October Gen. Washington ordered Moylan to join Joseph Reed in the effort to outfit schooners for combat. Moylan was soon in Marblehead, working alongside Col. John Glover (see chapter 12).⁷³ When two of his military family departed for home later that month, the general recalled Moylan to Cambridge and made him temporary military secretary. By 23 January 1776 after Robert Hanson Harrison had settled into headquarters, Washington decided that Moylan's "time must now be solely Employed in his department of Commissary."⁷⁴

Moylan continued to bounce between administrative assignments for the rest of the year. On 6 March Gen. Washington officially made him an aide de camp.⁷⁵ The Congress removed Thomas Mifflin as quartermaster general and put Moylan in that post on 5 June. The return of the British in force at New York overwhelmed him, and on 1 October the Congress reappointed Mifflin while Moylan remained with Washington's staff as a

⁷¹ PJA, 3:119.

⁷² PGW:RW, 1:317.

⁷³ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 30.

⁷⁴ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 32. PGW:RW, 3:172.

⁷⁵ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 41. PGW:RW, 3:413.

volunteer.⁷⁶ Early in 1777 he took command of a company of dragoons, and served as a high-ranking cavalry officer through the end of the war.

5.6 PAYMASTER GENERAL: JAMES WARREN

Though conveying money to pay the troops and suppliers was a vital administrative task, it did not require as much daily attention as the quartermaster and commissary corps. The Continental Army paymaster general's never needed more than two deputies as his permanent staff. John Thomas described the position simply:

The Pay Master General receives the Cash, and pays of[f] the Muster Rools. . . , and any other Drafts that the Commanding Officer may make on him for the Use of the Army.⁷⁷

The Continental government paid mostly in printed bills, though it maintained a supply of precious specie (gold and silver) for special missions.⁷⁸

On 21 July Washington wrote to the Congress:

I must also renew my Request as to Money, & the Appointment of a Paymaster . . . The Inconvenience of borrowing such Sums as are constantly requisite must be too plain for me to enlarge upon, & is a Situation, from which I should be very happy to be relieved.⁷⁹

Already the Congress was discussing who should have that post, with some politicking among the colonies.

Massachusetts won out, and on 30 July John Adams wrote to James Warren (1726-1808) of Plymouth:

For the Honour of the Massachusetts I have laboured in Conjunction with my Brethren to get you chosen Paymaster General, and Succeeded So well that the Choice was unanimous: But whether We did you a Kindness or a Disservice I know not. And whether you can attend it, or will incline to attend it I know not.

Warren was one of Adams's closest friends (and his wife Mercy one of Abigail Adams's closest friends). Warren was also speaker of the Massachusetts House, having been president of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress. The legislature was then based in Watertown, allowing Warren to easily deliver the monthly pay to the colonel of each regiment.

⁷⁶ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 50.

⁷⁷ PJA, 3:121.

⁷⁸ In contrast, the British army paid in specie, and had troops stationed in many parts of the world; its pay department was therefore a large operation, and the basis of fortunes for men who worked within that system.

⁷⁹ PGW:RW, 1:139.

On 1 August the Congress resolved to send \$500,000 to Warren “to be applied to the use of the Army in Massachusetts-Bay, in such manner as General Washington, or the Commander-in-Chief for the time being, by his warrants shall limit and appoint.” The Pennsylvania delegates had the responsibility of counting these bills, and the Massachusetts delegates of transporting them to Cambridge after the Congress adjourned.⁸⁰ However, Warren received only \$172,520 from John Hancock on 17 August. He was evidently supposed to take over the disbursement of cash to the troops in September.⁸¹

However, it appears that the paymaster general for Massachusetts never distributed the August pay.⁸² This naturally caused grumbling. On 11 August Washington told the Massachusetts Council:

...I must endeavour to use those Powers committed to me by the Honble. Congress, to remove this cause of Complaint: I propose to direct the New Paymaster to commence his Payments from the 1st August and hereafter continue them Monthly⁸³

On 21 August Washington gave Warren \$1,000, or £300, from his own supply of cash.⁸⁴ Three days later, his general orders stated:

The late Pay Master of the Massachusetts Forces, is once more called upon, in a peremptory manner, to settle his Accounts with the different Regiments, that it may be known, what money is due to the men up to the first of this month (August) The General is sorry, that any difficulty or delay, should have happened, in a matter so plain and simple in its nature. He now assures the Regiments of Massachusetts, as they seem to be the only Complainants and Sufferers, that if they do not get paid by their own Colony pay Master, before the first day of September, that he will order James Warren Esq. Continental pay Master General, to pay each of the Massachusetts Regiments, for the month of August, and that he will moreover, use his endeavours to have their pay up to the 1st of August settled for and adjusted, as soon as possible.⁸⁵

Despite this “peremptory” public reproof, Washington’s general orders never identified this Massachusetts official.

⁸⁰ *American Archives*, series 4, 2:1902.

⁸¹ Receipt visible among the financial documents in the George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress. All the Congress delegates from Massachusetts were in Watertown on 17 August; *American Historical Review*, 6:317.

⁸² At PGW:RW, 1:358, the editors guessed that Henry Gardner, the Massachusetts legislature’s treasurer, had served as its army paymaster, but the legislature never appointed someone with that title.

⁸³ PGW:RW, 1:296.

⁸⁴ Revolutionary War Expense Account, 1775-1783, George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress.

⁸⁵ PGW:RW, 1:357.

Fortunately, Warren's work as paymaster went more smoothly for the rest of the siege. He supplied specie and Continental currency to Benedict Arnold before his expedition to Canada.⁸⁶ On 29 September Gen. Heath recorded, "500,000 dollars in Continental bills, were brought to Head-Quarters, from Philadelphia."⁸⁷ On 13 November Richard Henry Lee promised that another \$500,000 was on its way.⁸⁸ While the Congress remained slow about supplying cash, at this point in the war that cash still retained its value.

Warren and Washington also worked together on such issues as the Massachusetts generals' commissions (see section 4.3) and the secret correspondence of Dr. Benjamin Church (see chapter 14). In the end, however, this paymaster general felt stronger ties to Massachusetts than to the national government. On 4 April the day he was leaving Cambridge, Washington wrote to the Congress:

Colonel Warren pay master General finding the Army likely to be removed from hence, informed me the other day, that the situation of his Affairs and engagements in the business of the Colony, are such, as to prevent him from personally attending the Army, and offered to resign in case it should be requested. This was rather embarrassing; to me It appears indispensibly necessary that the pay master General with his Books should be at or near Head Quarters; Indeed it is usual for the principal of every department in the Army, however dispersed that Army may be, to be with the Commanding General, keeping deputies in the smaller departments. On the other hand Col: Warren's merit and attachment to the Cause are such, that I could do nothing less than desire, as some Money must be left for the pay and contingent charges of the Army which will remain here, he would wait here, until Congress shall be pleased to give their Sentiments upon the matter, sending in the mean time some person in whom he could confide, with the money, (But little of which there will be to carry, tho' great the demands, as nine of the Regiments which have marched to New York, have only received £500 each, towards their pay for the Months of Feby: and March and Six others not one farthing). I hope therefore this matter will be considered by Congress and the result transmitted me as soon as done.⁸⁹

Warren resigned on 19 April 1776 and was replaced by William Palfrey (see section 5.9). He remained a leader in Massachusetts politics for the rest of the war, gaining the rank of general in the state militia.

5.7 JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL: WILLIAM TUDOR

Soon after Gen. Washington arrived in Cambridge, he met one of John Adams's former law clerks, William Tudor (1750-1819). On 6 July Tudor wrote to his mentor:

⁸⁶ Washington to Warren, 10 September 1775, PGW:RW, 1:446.

⁸⁷ Heath, *Memoirs*, 22.

⁸⁸ LoD, 2:336.

⁸⁹ WGW, 4:472.

I...this Morning had the Honour of being introduc'd to Genl. Washington by Majr. Mifflin, and through Your Reccommendation was very genteely notic'd. I had an Invitation from the General to dine with him tomorrow, when I shall attempt making a proper Use of your Hints. I have been intirely idle ever since the Communication with the Town of Boston was interrupted. At a Time when every Nerve of every Citizen should be stretch'd in the Service of our bleeding Country it was with Pain I found I could not be useful. . . .

The General has not yet settled his Family. Having only one aid de camp, and Secretary. Mr. Reed was appointed Secretary before the General reach'd Cambridge. I have some Expectation of being in that Office with him. Which will make me one of the General's Family.⁹⁰

Instead, a week later, Washington asked Tudor to put his legal training to work by serving as judge advocate during the court martial of Col. James Scammon.

With his emphasis on discipline, the new commander expected many more courts-martial to follow, and he wanted a solid system for administering them. On 21 July Washington wrote to the Congress:

...I would humbly propose that some Provision should be made for a Judge Advocate, & Provost Marshal the Necessity of the first Appointment was so great, that I was obliged to nominate a Mr Tudor, who was well recommended to me, & now executes the Office, under an Expectation of receiving Captains Pay; an Allowance, in my Opinion, scarcely adequate to the Service in new raised Troops, where there are Court Martials every Day. However as that is the Proportion in the regular Army, and he is contented, there will be no Necessity of an Addition.⁹¹

The Congress responded on 29 July by appointing Tudor as Judge Advocate and confirming his salary at the captain's rate. Washington announced the appointment in his general orders the very next day, anticipating the news from Philadelphia and not wanting to wait.

Tudor would not be contented with his position for long. In a letter to Washington dated 23 August he described his workload:

I have your Excellency's Orders (through the medium of the Adjut-Genl) to attend every General Court-Martial, both those of the line and each Brigade, throughout the Army, and to see that there is a fair copy of the entire proceedings in each case made out, to be reported to the Commander-in-Chief. The number of offences made cognizable by a General Court-Martial only, the large Army here, and the extent of the camp, (ten miles at least,) in each quarter of which my duty demands my attendance, unitedly render my station arduous and difficult. The number of trials which have been reported to your Excellency within six weeks past will, I believe, justify this assertion.

⁹⁰ PJA, 3:64-5. Robert Treat Paine had already recommended Tudor to Washington; Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 318.

⁹¹ PGW:RW, 1:139.

It is not only expected that I give the proper orders for procuring the evidence, and putting all matters in such a train that the Court may have nothing else to do than to hear the witnesses and form a judgment, but that I also analyze the evidence and state the questions that are involved in it for the opinion of the Court. But I mean not to detain your Excellency by a tedious detail. It is sufficient to acquaint you that I am obliged to act as Advocate, Register and Clerk. . .

Almost every day since my appointment, a General Court-Martial has set in one or other part of the camp. A Court at Roxbury adjourned for six days successively, because my duty would not permit me to leave Cambridge.⁹²

At some point that same month, Tudor made a similar complaint to John Adams:

Since my Appointment (14 July) I have attended twenty seven Trials, among which were two chief Colonels and Nine commissioned Officers. Every one of which has been minutely reported in Writing to the Commander in chief. . . . I am oblig'd to set, without a Minute's Absence from 8 to three—doing the whole Labour of the Trial—and as soon as the Court is adjourn'd, to employ the afternoon in copying the Proceedings of the Morning, that the General may have early Knowledge of the issue. And that the Order of Court may be timely put into the general Orders.

For his work, Tudor noted, he initially received “a stipend of twenty dollars a month, without the least assistance or a single perquisite of office.” In contrast, he wrote, the British Judge Advocate was paid “ten shillings sterling per day, besides drawing pay as an officer.” Tudor therefore asked both Washington and Adams to recommend that the Congress raise his salary, or he would resign.⁹³

On 26 September Hancock wrote back to say that Congress had increased Tudor's salary to “Fifty Dollars per Month, for himself & Clerk, from the Time of his Appointment.”⁹⁴ He continued to administer the army's many courts-martial. Tudor also attended the Massachusetts General Court's trial of Dr. Benjamin Church (see section 14.5). In January 1776 Hancock and Tudor countersigned every copy of the new articles of war distributed to all the brigade majors.⁹⁵

There is no sign that Tudor provided legal counsel to Gen. Washington at headquarters, however. For example, he does not appear in the record of the council of war that discussed Dr. Benjamin Church's correspondence with the enemy, even though the outcome of that discussion hinged on understanding Congress's articles of war (see section 14.3). Indeed, Tudor's name almost never appears in Washington's correspondence and orders during the siege. With lawyers Joseph Reed and then Robert Hanson Harrison as his

⁹² PGW:RW, 1:354-5.

⁹³ PJA, 3:128.

⁹⁴ LoD, 2:65.

⁹⁵ *American Archives*, series 4, 4:631.

military secretary (see section 5.8), the commander may have felt that he already had legal advice he could trust.

In fact, Tudor's personal loyalties lay elsewhere. Back on 23 July John Adams had written to him:

We live in Times, when it is necessary to look about Us, and to know the Character of every Man, who is concerned in any material Branch of public affairs, especially in the Army.

There will be a large Number of Voluntiers in the Army perhaps. Certainly there will be many young Gentlemen from the southern Colonies, at the Camp. They will perhaps be introduced, into Places, as Aid du Camps—Brigade Majors, Secretaries, and Deputies in one Department, or another.

I earnestly intreat you to make the most minute Enquiry, after every one of these, and let me know his Character, for I am determined, I will know that Army, and the Character of all its officers.

I Swear, I will be a faithful Spy upon it for its good.⁹⁶

Tudor's subsequent letters to Adams serve as useful reports of events during the siege, but show no closeness to the commander-in-chief.

5.8 FINDING A FAITHFUL SECRETARY

At Washington's urging, on 21 June 1775 the Congress established that the commander-in-chief could employ a military secretary and three aides de camp. It assigned major generals two aides de camp and no secretaries unless they were (like Gen. Schuyler) heading a separate department of the war.⁹⁷ The secretary was to be paid \$66 per month.

Congress delegates almost immediately gave Washington recommendations for young men who could be his secretary or aides. The Connecticut representatives talked up their governor's son (see section 5.4). John Adams suggested two of his former law clerks, and John Hancock suggested a business associate. Ever politic, Washington thanked his colleagues for all these recommendations and then chose men he knew.⁹⁸ The general needed to trust his secretary to draft letters, orders, and plans, especially for government officials; to set up a well-organized office; and to handle confidential information. Those were the skills of a lawyer.

Joseph Reed (1741-1785) was the oldest son of a businessman and local official from Trenton. In 1750 the family moved into Philadelphia for three years; Reed would bounce between New Jersey and Pennsylvania for most of his early career.⁹⁹ He attended the

⁹⁶ PJA, 3:85.

⁹⁷ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 5, 314. JCC, 2:94.

⁹⁸ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 18, 318.

⁹⁹ Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 4-5. Most biographical details about Reed come from Roche, *Joseph Reed*, a modern scholarly biography. Reed, *Life and Correspondence*, was a valuable early source of

Philadelphia Academy and then the six-year-old College of New Jersey, which moved from Newark to Princeton during his studies. Reed read law under Richard Stockton, one of the colony's most respected jurists, and in 1763 went to London for further training. There he met the merchant Dennys DeBerdt, who championed the interests of the American colonies in the imperial capital, and fell in love with seventeen-year-old Esther DeBerdt. Her parents felt she was too young to marry; after some friction, they all agreed that Reed would have to establish himself in England before any marriage.¹⁰⁰

Meanwhile, Reed's brother and brother-in-law asked him to come back to New Jersey: his father had started to behave erratically. Reed arrived in May 1765 and discovered that the once-prosperous family firm was bankrupt. His depressed father retired to the countryside, leaving the financial mess and the responsibility for his children in his oldest son's hands. Reed threw himself into practicing law, using the prestige of his work at the Middle Temple in London. Soon he was one of the five busiest lawyers in the county, and in April 1767 he wrote to Esther DeBerdt that his practice was earning £1,000 a year and supporting himself and two younger brothers.¹⁰¹

Impressed, Dennys DeBerdt sought a position for Reed within the British imperial administration. He failed to make his prospective son-in-law secretary to the Earl of Dartmouth, who eventually became Britain's Secretary of State for the American colonies, but did line up the position of deputy secretary of the province of New Jersey. After Reed managed that job well for two years, the family suggested that he come to England to help DeBerdt as agent, or lobbyist, for the lower house of the Massachusetts legislature. Reed visited Boston for the first time, establishing ties with Samuel Adams and James Otis, and sailed to Europe in March 1770.¹⁰²

En route, Reed learned that DeBerdt had died on 11 April. When he got to London, he found the family firm and finances were in complete confusion—much as he had learned about his own family five years earlier. Once again, most of the responsibilities fell on Reed's shoulders. He married Esther DeBerdt at last on 31 May 1770 and brought her and her mother back to Philadelphia in the fall. He started to rebuild his law practice to support his new family—which by July 1774 included three small children.¹⁰³

Washington's letters to his former secretary in late 1775 and early 1776, but, Roche warned, its "transcription from the manuscripts does not display a high degree of accuracy" and is incomplete; Roche, *Joseph Reed*, viii. For example, Reed, *Life and Correspondence*, 1:120, states that in a 29 September letter Reed wrote, "I have no notion of being hanged for half treason." Roche did not find that line in that document, though similar words—"I have no notion of being hanged for half courage"—appear in Reed's 8 October 1775 letter to the same relative; Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 75.

¹⁰⁰ Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 18-20.

¹⁰¹ Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 21-4.

¹⁰² Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 25-8.

¹⁰³ Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 29-30.

When John Adams visited Philadelphia for the First Continental Congress in late 1774, he found Joseph Reed to be the top lawyer in the American colonies' largest city. Reed then owned four horses, three carriages, and two slaves.¹⁰⁴ During the same period Reed met the Virginia delegates hosting Washington for dinner on 3 October and was impressed with their fervor; even the Massachusetts men were "mere Milksons to them," he wrote.¹⁰⁵ In November Reed became the chairman of Philadelphia's Committee of Sixty-Six, which enforced the Congress's Association against buying British goods, and in April the lieutenant colonel of a militia battalion.¹⁰⁶ Still, he maintained a correspondence with Lord Dartmouth through February 1775.¹⁰⁷

On the evening that Washington, Richard Henry Lee, and Benjamin Harrison arrived from Virginia for the Second Continental Congress in May 1775 they ate supper at the Reeds' house (see section 3.3). Washington visited again three days after accepting the post of commander-in-chief, and on 23 June Reed left Philadelphia with the new commander-in-chief, planning to travel as far as New York—"part of his way to Boston," Esther Reed told her brother.¹⁰⁸ He saw his brother-in-law in Newark and his old friend Elias Boudinot in New York, leaving both men convinced that he would soon be on his way back home.¹⁰⁹ All of Reed's family and friends were therefore surprised to hear that he had decided to become the general's secretary, and was headed on to Cambridge.

Reed explained to Boudinot on 13 August 1775 that General Washington had expressed himself to me in such Terms that I thought myself bound by every Tye of Duty and Honour to comply with his Request to help him through the Sea of Difficulties.¹¹⁰

He told his brother-in-law:

I have taken too active a part in what may be called the civil part of opposition to renounce the public cause, when it seems to lead to danger, with Honour. I have a sovereign contempt for the character which can plan measures it has not spirit to assist in the execution of.¹¹¹

All Esther Reed could tell her brother in London was:

¹⁰⁴ Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 31.

¹⁰⁵ Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 49-50.

¹⁰⁶ Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 52, 60-1.

¹⁰⁷ Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 35, 56-7. Reed's letters to London were straightforward descriptions of the American political position; they reflect his hope at reconciliation, but show no double-dealing.

¹⁰⁸ Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 61-2, 234.

¹⁰⁹ Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 63-4.

¹¹⁰ Letter in Gratz Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, quoted in Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 66.

¹¹¹ Reed to Charles Pettit, 20 August 1775, quoted in Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 66.

An event has taken place which I little thought of and which I assure you my dear Mr. Reed as little suspected when he went from home; that is, his appointment as Secretary to the General. . . . I confess it is a trial I never thought I should have experienced, and therefore am the less prepared to bear it.¹¹²

Joseph did not send Esther a “full letter” until 26 July and said he was having “a plain kind of dog trot life that is very tedious at times without you.”¹¹³

The secretary’s salary was much less than Reed’s income as a lawyer, and a colleague in Philadelphia told him that “the public could have no Right to expect [such a sacrifice] from a Person situated as you were.”¹¹⁴ Reed saw his work for Washington as temporary. His family’s sudden financial reversals in 1765 and 1770 left him leery of staying away from his business for long.

Washington’s first general orders dated 3 July 1775 are in Reed’s handwriting.¹¹⁵ In his letter to Boudinot, Reed described his work that first week at Cambridge as being “Secretary, Adjutant General, and Quarter Master, besides doing a thousand other little Things which fell incidentally.” He felt lost in military affairs. According to biographer John F. Roche, “Reed confessed that he would have as soon thought of being an Indian interpreter as assume these tasks had not Washington’s patient instructions and a hasty perusal of military tracts given him a grasp of fundamental concepts.”¹¹⁶ At the same time, Reed discovered that all the activity and the change of climate had ended an intermittent fever he suffered back in Philadelphia; in August he said that he “never enjoyed better health in my Life,” and Pennsylvanians returning from Massachusetts told Esther that her husband was so fat she would not recognize him.¹¹⁷

Reed apparently drafted many of Gen. Washington’s most important letters in the first months of the siege, especially those meant for high officials or publication. Among these were the general’s exchange with British commanders about the treatment of prisoners, letters to the governors of the New England states, and an address to the Canadians.¹¹⁸ Many of the letters that Washington signed are in Reed’s handwriting, and others have his editorial markings as well as the commander’s. As Washington told Reed on 28 November he valued the lawyer’s “ready pen.”¹¹⁹ He also valued Reed’s competence and confidentiality, assigning

¹¹² Esther Reed to Dennis DeBerdt, 22 July 1775; Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 64.

¹¹³ Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 68.

¹¹⁴ Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 65.

¹¹⁵ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 318.

¹¹⁶ Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 67.

¹¹⁷ Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 69.

¹¹⁸ Roche reported that the New-York Historical Society holds twenty-four drafts in Reed’s writing.

¹¹⁹ Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 67-8.

him such sensitive tasks as intelligence gathering (see section 13.2) and launching the small navy (see chapter 12).

In July Reed told his wife that he planned to return for the Pennsylvania courts' fall term at the end of August.¹²⁰ But that period came and went, and his clerk wrote that he would attend in Reed's place "for fear your clients should go to some other attorney, thinking their business will be neglected if no one attends on your account."¹²¹ On 11 September Reed told his brother-in-law that he could not leave yet because the council of war might approve Washington's plan to attack Boston. The council voted against the plan, but the secretary stayed on, becoming immersed in the naval enterprise.¹²² Reed finally left the Cambridge headquarters on 30 October 1775 reaching home on 7 November.¹²³

Washington felt Reed's departure keenly. He had even asked Richard Henry Lee to pressure other Philadelphia attorneys to postpone action in cases involving Reed so he could come back.¹²⁴ The general insisted on keeping the secretary's post officially vacant. He asked Reed to return in letters sent 20 November, 28 November, and 15 December, sighing that none of his new aides was up to the job. On 23 January the general told Reed, "My business Increases very fast, and my distresses for want of you along with it," though a week later he apologized for pushing so strongly.¹²⁵ Washington also lobbied the Congress to raise Reed's salary because of "the extraordinary services at present attending the office, by reason of the General's direction of the naval department" (in fact, that part of the job was winding down), and he promised to add two clerk-copyists to the staff.¹²⁶

Gen. Washington's letters to Reed in these months are remarkable for their candor and emotional openness. Historians have judged that Washington wrote more freely to Reed, after their four months together in Cambridge, than to any other correspondent but his wife and his brother.¹²⁷ He was more frank to Reed about problems with the army than in his official correspondence to Congress.¹²⁸ He wrote about more personal subjects, and joked. On 14 January Washington was even reported to have asked Reed to send him word of any

¹²⁰ Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 73.

¹²¹ Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 236.

¹²² Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 73.

¹²³ Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 74.

¹²⁴ Washington to R. H. Lee, 29 October 1775.

¹²⁵ PGW:RW, 3:172-3, 225.

¹²⁶ Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 79. JCC, 4:180.

¹²⁷ Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 70, citing Douglas Southall Freeman and Allen French.

¹²⁸ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 32-3, cites Washington's 28 November 1775 on the Connecticut troops as an example. Of course, with Reed in Philadelphia, Washington might have expected him to judiciously pass on that information to sympathetic delegates.

criticism of his leadership in Philadelphia as a “proof of your friendship.”¹²⁹ For someone who disliked criticism as much as Washington, that was a remarkable invitation.

Unfortunately, few of Reed’s letters to Washington from this period survive. At the time Reed was telling family members that he did not plan to return to the army “unless some new events. . .make it more my duty.”¹³⁰ Becoming the commander’s closest aide and confidant had come at a cost:

The Service I really did to the Publick did not save me from the Malevolence of some who, upon the same principle than a Minister is accountable for a King’s Faults, attributed to me every Measure of the General’s which they did not like. And if he censured their conduct, instead of amending it they ascribed his Censure to ill offices done them by those about him.¹³¹

Philadelphians elected Reed to the provincial assembly in late January.¹³² He argued in favor of declaring independence, and in expectation of that vote he told Washington on 3 March that he would rejoin the army in the summer. But in April the legislature adjourned without voting on the issue, and Reed decided he had to stay in Philadelphia through June.¹³³ Only then did Washington acknowledge that he already had Reed’s replacement as secretary. In fact, that man had been working at headquarters since the fall.

Robert Hanson Harrison (1745-1790) was born and raised in Maryland, the son of a rich landowner. By 1769 he had established himself as a lawyer just over the Potomac River in Alexandria, Virginia. Among Harrison’s clients was the wealthy planter George Washington. He handled Washington’s complex business transactions and stayed over at Mount Vernon for fox-hunting. In early 1775 he was an officer in the Fairfax County independent militia company, one of those under Washington’s command.¹³⁴ Harrison’s wife had died, leaving him with two daughters, Sarah and Dorothy. When Washington was looking for aides de camp in August 1775 he wrote to his cousin and plantation manager Lund Washington to ask if his attorney might take one of those positions. Harrison did not express interest—in addition to having responsibility for his daughters, he was not in the best of health. But when Washington wrote in the fall that he was being left short-handed, Harrison immediately agreed to step in. He settled his affairs, moved his girls to a sister-in-law, and set out for Massachusetts.¹³⁵

¹²⁹ PGW:RW, 3:87.

¹³⁰ Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 76.

¹³¹ Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 71.

¹³² Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 76-7.

¹³³ Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 79-80.

¹³⁴ PGW:RW, 1:17.

¹³⁵ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 34-5.

On 6 November Washington's general orders announced Harrison as a new aide de camp. Harrison had probably arrived in Cambridge about a week before, judging by when his handwriting appears in the office files.¹³⁶ The intervening time looks like a tryout period, but it is not clear whether that was for his benefit or the general's. Two weeks after the announcement, Washington was still dubious that Harrison could step in as secretary. He wrote to Reed:

Mr. Harrison, though sensible, clever, and perfectly confidential, has never yet moved upon so large a scale, as to comprehend at one view the diversity of matter, which comes before me, so as to afford that ready assistance, which every man in my situation must stand more or less in need of.

Consequently, he told Reed, "I wish for your return."¹³⁷

Within two months, however, Washington had come to feel equally dependent on Harrison. He told Reed on 23 January:

... an Occurrence in Virginia. . . will I fear compell Mr Harrison to leave me, or suffer considerably by his stay. He has wrote however by the last post to see if his return cannot be dispensed with—If he should go, I shall really be distressed beyond Measure as I know no Persons able to supply your places (in this part of the World) with whom I would chuse to live in unbounded confidence. In short, for want of an acquaintance with the People hitherwards, I know of none wch appear to me qualified for the Office of Secretary.¹³⁸

By the next month the commander finally accepted that Reed was not coming back as secretary, and on 16 May he officially moved Harrison into that post.¹³⁹

Harrison eventually served six years at Gen. Washington's side, longer than any other aide but one. He was especially skilled at administration, keeping the headquarters running when Washington was away, and at communicating the general's ideas.¹⁴⁰ He was also confidential and discreet, so much so that we have very little information about him or his personal relationship with the commander. Harrison left Washington in March 1781 after he was appointed chief judge of Maryland.¹⁴¹

For all the trust Washington felt in Reed, he suffered an emotional blow at the end of 1776. In June Reed had rejoined the army as adjutant general, receiving the rank of colonel.¹⁴² He saw the British sweep the Continental Army out of New York, and began to

¹³⁶ The general was still awaiting him on 28 October. Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 36.

¹³⁷ Washington to Reed, 20 November 1775, WGW, 4:104.

¹³⁸ Washington to Reed, 23 January 1776, PGW:RW, 3:172.

¹³⁹ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 59. WGW, 5:50.

¹⁴⁰ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 110.

¹⁴¹ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 230.

¹⁴² Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 59.

feel that Washington was too indecisive at critical moments. On 21 November Reed shared that opinion in a letter to Gen. Charles Lee, who replied with further remarks and stated that he was disregarding the commander's orders on another matter. Lee's letter fell into Washington's hands, and he realized that two of his subordinates—one whom he had trusted deeply—were criticizing him behind his back. Though Washington kept Reed in his circle of advisers and colleagues, their letters were never again as intimate as they had been immediately after Reed's work in Cambridge.¹⁴³

5.9 CHOOSING AIDES DE CAMP

Gen. John Thomas stated this traditional understanding of a military aide de camp, which Washington probably shared in the summer of 1775:

Aid-de-Camps are constantly to attend the General, are to give him information of what comes to their knowledge, and to be ready to Attend his order, to go on any Message—and what Orders they may deliver Verbally from the General carries as much authority as if written, Especially in time of Action, and many other Services too many to be enumerated.¹⁴⁴

Over the course of the siege, however, Washington came to realize that he needed his aides to do more than to deliver orders.

In June 1775 Congress established that an aide de camp would earn \$33 per month, regardless of whether he worked for the commander-in-chief or a major general.¹⁴⁵ The legislature did not consider what army rank those aides should have until January 1776. Hancock wrote to Washington for his thoughts on the question, and the general replied that aides were considered on par with captains, but his own aides should rank above those of other generals.¹⁴⁶ Having received that advice, the Congress did nothing for another six months. Thus, none of the aides in Cambridge held an official Continental Army rank; they were addressed by their former militia titles, if any.¹⁴⁷

Throughout his first month in Cambridge, Gen. Washington was approached by young men bearing recommendations from members of Congress and other politicians, who were often family members or friends. They all sought useful positions in the army—though not, of course, at the enlisted rank. Because of the way that New England regiments grew out of local communities and coalesced around officers the soldiers knew (see section 8.1), these

¹⁴³ For this episode, see Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 98-102.

¹⁴⁴ PJA, 3:121.

¹⁴⁵ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 18. JCC, 2:94.

¹⁴⁶ Washington to Hancock, 30 January 1776, PGW:RW, 3:215.

¹⁴⁷ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 36-7.

outsiders had little chance of finding a berth except as military administrators. In sum, they all hoped to be on the general's staff.

As examples, three young men came from New Jersey: Matthias Ogden (1754-1791), Aaron Burr (1756-1836), and Anthony Walton White (1750-1803). On 19 July John Hancock wrote to Washington that "Mr. Ogden and Mr. Burr of the Jerseys [will] Visit the Camp not as Spectators, but with a View of Joining the Army & being Active during the Campaign."¹⁴⁸ Burr also brought a letter from Elias Boudinot to Joseph Reed. White showed up unannounced on 25 July with a letter from George Clinton of New York, and his father wrote to Washington twice.¹⁴⁹ The governor of New Jersey, Lewis Morris, sent letters on behalf of all three young men (White was his grandson).¹⁵⁰

Gen. Washington had to give such gentlemen all due consideration, and to assure their influential patrons that he appreciated their interest.¹⁵¹ Ogden and Burr volunteered to join Arnold's expedition to Canada, and gained Continental Army commissions the following year when the fighting moved south. As for White, the commander wrote to his father about his "modest deportment," but privately decided he had modest talents. No position in the army opened for him. On 3 October the general paid White £48 "for a Riding Mare," and he returned home to seek a commission in a New Jersey regiment instead.¹⁵² But the young man's memory continued to haunt the general; in January he told Joseph Reed that it "pains me when I think of Mr. White's expectation of coming into my family if an opening happens."¹⁵³

Gen. Washington found his first aide de camp before leaving Philadelphia. Thomas Mifflin was a fellow Congress delegate; he and Washington had worked together on the committee on military stores. Mifflin came from the genteel class, as all of Washington's aides would. A college graduate who had traveled in Europe, he was more cosmopolitan than his commander, but neither as old nor as tall, and therefore a fine representative.¹⁵⁴ Mifflin helped Washington set up his Cambridge headquarters and work through some of the Continental Army's first self-inflicted wounds, such as the generals' dispute over seniority (see chapter 4.3) and the gunpowder shortage (see chapter 11.4). The two men decided that

¹⁴⁸ PGW:RW, 1:132. See also Eliphalet Dyer to Joseph Trumbull, 18 July 1775, LoD, 1:634-5.

¹⁴⁹ PGW:RW, 1:58-9, 204, 212, 361, 365.

¹⁵⁰ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 13-4, 316-7, 327. Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 235.

¹⁵¹ Washington to Morris, 4 August 1775, WGW, 3:399-400.

¹⁵² Washington and Kitman, *Expense Account*, 46. Lefkowitz, 13-4, 316-7. Washington told federal officials in September 1798 that White never accomplished anything but "frivolity—dress—empty shew & something worse—in short for being a notorious L—r." Authors have interpreted the last word as "liar," but it could also have been "lecher."

¹⁵³ Washington to Reed, 23 January 1776, PGW:RW, 3:172.

¹⁵⁴ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 18-9.

Mifflin had the talent for the greater responsibilities of the quartermaster general, and on 14 August he left headquarters.

Washington ended up choosing a politician's son as his second aide de camp. John Trumbull (1756-1843) was the youngest son of the governor of Connecticut. As related in section 13.7, in July 1775 his brother encouraged him to map the British fortifications "as a means of introducing myself to the favorable notice of the general."¹⁵⁵ Washington liked what he saw. It is also possible that he viewed Trumbull's assignment as an aide, announced in the 27 July general orders, as a good cover to let him ride all around the siege lines, surveying the enemy positions. However, the arrival of a British deserter with plans of those fortifications meant that Trumbull spent more time at headquarters, copying those maps and handling correspondence.

Trumbull lasted only nineteen days in the job. Writing his autobiography decades later, he stated that he simply did not feel at home in the Virginia general's household:

The scene at head-quarters was altogether new and strange to me, for the ruined state of my father's fortune, and the retirement in which he lived at Lebanon, had prevented my having seen much of elegant society. I now suddenly found myself in the family of one of the most distinguished and dignified men of the age; surrounded at his table, by the principal officers of the army, and in constant intercourse with them—it was further my duty to receive company and do the honors of the house to many of the first people of the country of both sexes. I soon felt myself unequal to the elegant duties of my situation, and was gratified when Mr. Edmund Randolph (afterwards secretary of state) and Mr. Baylor arrived from Virginia, and were named aids-du-camp, to succeed Mr. Mifflin and myself. Mifflin was made quarter-master general of the army, and I a major of brigade at Roxbury.¹⁵⁶

The young captain was assigned to Connecticut's Gen. Spencer. Despite his short tenure, Trumbull was so proud of his service that he asked to be buried under the label "Patriot and Artist, Friend and Aid of Washington."¹⁵⁷

In his autobiography, John Trumbull described another event that might have had a bearing on his departure:

While I was in General Washington's family, in 1775, Mr. Hancock made a passing visit to the general, and observing me, he enquired of Mr. Mifflin who I was, and when told that I was his fellow aid-du-camp, and son of Gov. Trumbull, he made the unworthy observations that "*this family was well provided for.*"

¹⁵⁵ Trumbull, *Autobiography, Reminiscences, and Letters*, 22-3.

¹⁵⁶ Trumbull, *Autobiography, Reminiscences, and Letters*, 23. PGW:RW cites only one letter that Trumbull wrote on the general's behalf and none in his handwriting.

¹⁵⁷ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 44.

At the time, Trumbull's brother Joseph was commissary general (see section 5.4) and his brother Jonathan deputy paymaster for the Northern Department. In his memoir Trumbull included an *esprit d'espalier*, saying he told Mifflin that Hancock "is right; my father and his three sons are doubtless well provided for; we are secure of four halteres, if we do not succeed."¹⁵⁸ There might be some discrepancies in this story: Hancock came to deliver Continental currency to James Warren on 17 August (see section 5.6), but Washington had announced Trumbull's new assignment in Roxbury two days earlier. Nevertheless, hearing of comments about his family might have made Trumbull feel that he should take a less prominent position.

As Trumbull recalled, the commander's new aides were upper-class Virginians, young men he had seen grow up. Edmund Randolph (1753-1813) came from the colony's leading political family: his father, John Randolph, was the royal attorney general, and his uncle Peyton Randolph speaker of the House of Burgesses and past president of the Continental Congress. The family did not all share the same politics, however. John Randolph sided with the Crown while Peyton and Edmund were strong supporters of the Congress. John Randolph had cut off his son's support; in August he would write, "For God's Sake, return to your Family & indeed to yourself," and in September he would leave for England with his wife and daughters.¹⁵⁹ Edmund wanted to prove his Patriotism, and he needed a job, so he went to Philadelphia to ask the Virginia delegates for help.

Benjamin Harrison wrote to Washington about the young man on 21 July:

Edmund Randolph is here, & has the greatest Desire to be with you, he has beg'd of me to Say something in his favour, & that if you can you will keep one of the places now in your Gift for him. He is not able to Support himself, or he would not Ask this of you. You know him as well as I do. He is one of the cleaverest young men in America, & if Mr. Reed should leave you, his place of Secretary cannot be better Supplied. He will set off for New York in a few days, and I Beg it as a favour of you to write a line to be left at the Post office till Call'd for. This deserving young Man was in high Repute in Virginia, & fears his Fathers Conduct may lessen him in the Opinion of his Countrymen. He has taken this Method without the Advice of his Friends to Raise him into favour, as he is Determin'd on the thing. I am sure our good old Speaker will be much oblig'd by any favour you shew him. Applications of this sort, I fear, will be too frequent. I shall avoid them as much as possible, but I could not Refuse it on this Occasion, well knowing that a most valuable young Man, & one that I love, without some Step of this sort, may from the misconduct of his Parent be lost to his Country which now stands much in need of men of his Abilities.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Trumbull, *Autobiography, Reminiscences, and Letters*, 48.

¹⁵⁹ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 27.

¹⁶⁰ LoD, 1:656-7.

Richard Henry Lee, Patrick Henry, and Thomas Jefferson sent similar letters.¹⁶¹

The story of George Baylor (1752-1784) was less dramatic. He was a young planter, son of Col. John Baylor, Washington's friend and companion during the French and Indian War. He, too, came with recommendations from Continental Congress delegates, starting with Edmund Pendleton on 12 July 1775.¹⁶² Those letters mentioned his "Ardor." That was apparently enough for the commander-in-chief. On 15 August his general orders announced: "Edmund Randolph and George Baylor Esqrs are appointed Aids-de-Camp, to the Commander in Chief."¹⁶³

Randolph and Baylor had very different abilities, and Washington soon learned whose talents he needed more. Randolph had trained in his father's law office for a few years after a short stint at the College of William & Mary, and had started to practice on his own. He was "ready at his Pen," as the general said in a 10 February 1776 letter to Charles Lee.¹⁶⁴ And during the siege Washington had realized that he needed good writers and copyists at headquarters.

Overseeing an army spread out across many miles, dependent on far-flung supply chains and the approval of distant governments, Washington learned that his written communication was vital. Over the eight years of the war, the headquarters office sent out about 12,000 letters and orders in the commander's own name, plus more from his secretary and aides themselves.¹⁶⁵ As a later aide, Dr. James McHenry, described Washington's method of writing an important letter, he would start by writing notes on what he wanted to say. The assigned aide "Having made out a letter from such notes," said McHenry, "it was submitted to the General for his approbation and correction—afterwards copied fair. . . and signed by him."¹⁶⁶ For shorter notes, the general probably dictated his thoughts, and aides who were especially close or confident, such as Alexander Hamilton, conveyed his wishes in their own words with minimal consultation.¹⁶⁷

The general therefore needed "Aids that are ready Pen-men," who could compose letters in genteel prose that read like Washington's own words.¹⁶⁸ Even for letters that the general edited carefully, the aides needed good handwriting, already a hallmark of an eighteenth-century gentleman.¹⁶⁹ Nearly every letter sent from the headquarters also had to

¹⁶¹ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 27.

¹⁶² LoD, 1:623-4.

¹⁶³ WGW, 3:425.

¹⁶⁴ PGW:RW, 3:282-4.

¹⁶⁵ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 4.

¹⁶⁶ Steiner, *Life and Correspondence of James McHenry*, 27.

¹⁶⁷ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 12.

¹⁶⁸ PGW:RW, 3:282-4.

¹⁶⁹ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 8, 11.

be copied into blank notebooks called letter or copybooks, classified as either official or private.¹⁷⁰ On 25 March 1776 Washington expressed doubts about the suitability of Samuel Blachley Webb for a post at headquarters because:

what kind of a hand he writes I know not—I believe but a cramped one; latterly none at all, as he has either the Gout or Rheumatism in both—He is a Man fond of Company—of gaiety—and of a tender Constitution; whether therefore, such a person would answer yr purpose so well as a plodding, methodical Person, whose sole business shd be to arrange his Papers &ca in such order as to produce any one, at any Instant it is called for, & capable at the same time of composing a Letter, is what you have to consider.¹⁷¹

Randolph had all the necessary writing skills and temperament.

In contrast, and “contrary to my expectation,” Washington wrote, Baylor was “not in the slightest degree a penman, though spirited and willing.”¹⁷² The general wrote privately to Charles in January:

Mr. Baylor is as good, and as obliging a young Man, as any in the World, and as far as he can be Serviceable in Riding, & delivering verbal Orders as useful; but the duties of an Aid de Camp at Head Quarters cannot be properly discharged by any but Pen-men.¹⁷³

In his more colorful way, Gen. Charles Lee concurred, saying about Baylor and two of his own aides:

They can ride, understand, and deliver verbal orders; but you might as well set them to the task of translating an Arabick or Irish Manuscript, as expect that they shou'd, in half a day, copy a half sheet of orders.¹⁷⁴

In November 1775 Washington sent Baylor to Connecticut to meet Martha Washington and escort her to Cambridge (see chapter 7.7). At a time when his other aide and his secretary had both suddenly departed, the general felt he could afford to do without Baylor for several days. The young Virginian was clearly better at riding than at writing.

Baylor nonetheless remained one of Gen. Washington's aides de camp through 1776. The commander-in-chief finally found a better berth for him after the Battle of Trenton by assigning him to carry the battle report and a captured flag to the Congress in Philadelphia. By tradition, the aide accorded such an honor received a promotion, and the Congress made Baylor head of a new dragoon regiment. All of Washington's subsequent aides de camp were

¹⁷⁰ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 217.

¹⁷¹ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 54. Washington to Reed, 25 March 1776, WGW, 4:432.

¹⁷² Washington to Reed, 20 November 1775, WGW, 4:104.

¹⁷³ PGW:RW, 3:282-4.

¹⁷⁴ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 28; Lee to Washington, 19 February 1776, NYHSC, 4:308.

professionals with years of experience in business, the law, or medicine or educated young men, practiced with their pens.¹⁷⁵

Edmund Randolph served Washington for two and a half months before his uncle Peyton died suddenly on 22 October 1775. This was a shock to Virginia and Continental politics—and to the Cambridge headquarters, because the widow asked Randolph to come settle the estate. The young lawyer took a leave as aide and never returned. In his 10 February 1776 letter, Washington wrote regretfully that Randolph “leaves me little room to expect him.”¹⁷⁶ In March the Congress made Randolph deputy mustermaster general for the Southern Department, and he went on to a long career in Virginia politics.¹⁷⁷

Through the winter of 1775-76 Washington put off appointing permanent replacements for Reed and Randolph, hoping that they might return. As he looked ahead to another campaign season, however, the general knew that he needed a full staff. On 10 February he asked Gen. Lee to send his own aide William Palfrey (1741-1780) back from New York to work at headquarters.¹⁷⁸ Gen. Gates seconded this request: “The General writes to you about poor Palfrey, you will unless you are certain of providing better for him, send him of course to Head Quarters.”¹⁷⁹ Lee replied on 19 February:

I am extremely happy that there is any open(ing) [sic] for a more comfortable establishment for poor Palfrey than at present—He is a valuable and capable Man, and the pittance of a simple Aide de Campship is wretched for a Man who has a family to support—on this principle and in obedience to your commands I shall send him to Head Quarters without delay—I must at the same time confess that the loss will be irreparable to me, particularly if I am detach'd to Canada.¹⁸⁰

Unlike Washington's previous aides, Palfrey had a wife and children.

Palfrey was a Boston businessman whose first mentor had gone spectacularly bankrupt in 1765 dragging him down as well. John Hancock had hired Palfrey to manage his store and then his importing business, helping him rebuild his stature in the town (and freeing Hancock for the political activity that increasingly interested him). Palfrey began to correspond with radical politicians in England on behalf of the Boston Sons of Liberty, and in 1771 visited London, even spotting the king at St. James's Palace.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁵ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 99-100. Mintz, *Generals of Saratoga*, 43.

¹⁷⁶ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 36. PGW:RW, 3:282-4.

¹⁷⁷ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 27-8. The standard modern biography is John J. Reardon, *Edmund Randolph* (New York: Macmillan, 1974).

¹⁷⁸ PGW:RW, 3:282-4.

¹⁷⁹ NYHSC, 4:282.

¹⁸⁰ NYHSC, 4:308.

¹⁸¹ This profile is based on Palfrey, “Life of William Palfrey,” in Sparks, *Library of American Biography*, vol. 17.

Palfrey met Washington and Lee in Worcester at the start of July 1775 riding out from the siege lines with other gentlemen to greet the new generals. Lee made him an aide de camp.¹⁸² In December, as Lee traveled south, Washington assigned Palfrey to oversee the offloading of two prize ships stocked with ordnance and other goods in Beverly (see section 12.7). Palfrey sent a report dated 3 December 1775 that closed, “I hope General Lee will not be uneasy at my long stay.”¹⁸³ At the start of the new year, he presided over a religious service in Cambridge at the request of Martha Washington (see section 7.10). Palfrey officially joined Washington’s staff on 6 March, just after the move onto Dorchester Heights. He remained an aide only until 27 April when Congress chose him to be the new paymaster general—a position that paid better.¹⁸⁴

Among the men Washington appointed as aides later in the war, three more were part of his army outside Boston:

1. Samuel Blachley Webb (1753-1807), stepson of Connecticut politician Silas Deane and aide to Gen. Israel Putnam.¹⁸⁵
2. Richard Cary (1746-1806), brigade major in Putnam’s division. He was son of a Charlestown, Massachusetts, merchant, but moved south and did some business with Washington just before the war began.¹⁸⁶
3. Dr. James McHenry (1753-1816), an Irish immigrant who studied medicine under Dr. Benjamin Rush of Philadelphia. He joined the Continental Army medical staff, possibly at Washington’s recommendation.¹⁸⁷

5.10 CREATING THE LIFE GUARD

At the end of the siege, Gen. Washington looked ahead to the next likely campaign of the war: the British counterattack expected through New York. He knew that his headquarters was unlikely to remain in one comfortable house for several months, and thus prepared for a field campaign. When Reed left Cambridge, Washington asked him to obtain “a Sett of Camp Equipage—Tents—and a Baggage Waggon” in Philadelphia. Reed reported that a set of three tents would be completed by the end of March.¹⁸⁸

On 11 March 1776 Washington announced the formation of the Commander-in-Chief’s Guard, also called the Life Guard. General orders stated:

¹⁸² PGW:RW, 1:122-3.

¹⁸³ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 38.

¹⁸⁴ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 38-9.

¹⁸⁵ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 53-4. As quoted above, Washington expressed misgivings about Webb only three months before making him an aide de camp.

¹⁸⁶ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 55-6.

¹⁸⁷ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 140-1.

¹⁸⁸ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 49. *American Archives*, series 4, 5:1043.

The General being desirous of selecting a particular number of men, as a Guard for himself, and baggage, The Colonel, or commanding Officer, of each of the established Regiments, (the Artillery and Riflemen excepted) will furnish him with four, that the number wanted may be chosen out of them. His Excellency depends upon the Colonels for good Men, such as they can recommend for their sobriety, honesty, and good behaviour; he wishes them to be from five feet, eight Inches high, to five feet, ten Inches; handsomely and well made, and as there is nothing in his eyes more desireable, than Cleanliness in a Soldier, he desires that particular attention may be made, in the choice of such men, as are neat, and spruce. They are all to be at Head Quarters to morrow precisely at twelve, at noon, when the Number wanted will be fixed upon. The General neither wants men with uniforms, or arms, nor does he desire any man to be sent to him, that is not perfectly willing, and desirous, of being of this guard. They should be drill'd men.¹⁸⁹

While this unit has sometimes been portrayed as the commander's personal bodyguard, its mission was actually to guard the headquarters and its files, equipment, and cash, plus the baggage of Washington and his military family. It consisted of 180 men, including soldiers and such specialized staff as cooks.¹⁹⁰

To head this unit the general chose Capt. Caleb Gibbs (1748-1818), who had been adjutant of Col. John Glover's Marblehead regiment (see section 2.6). Gibbs quickly came to function as another of the general's aides; his handwriting started to appear in the headquarters letterbooks in March 1776.¹⁹¹ Gibbs also served as Washington's household steward, taking over the duties that Timothy Austin performed in Cambridge (see section 6.3). His second-in-command was Lt. George Lewis, the general's nephew who had arrived at headquarters with Martha Washington in December (see section 7.6). With the Life Guard in place and the files packed up, on 4 April 1776 the commander's staff was ready to go mobile.

¹⁸⁹ WGW, 4:387-8.

¹⁹⁰ Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 46-7.

¹⁹¹ The 16 May 1776 general orders told the army: "Any orders delivered by Caleb Gibbs, and George Lewis Esquires (Officers of the General's guard) are to be attended to, in the same manner, as if sent by an Aid-de-Camp." WGW, 5:50.

CHAPTER SIX

DAILY LIFE AT WASHINGTON'S HEADQUARTERS

During the siege of Boston, the John Vassall house became the administrative center for the American military, but it also returned to being a gentleman's mansion. Eighteenth-century society expected military commanders to live in a genteel, often luxurious style, even during wartime. When the Continental Congress agreed to pay Gen. George Washington's expenses during the war, and the Massachusetts Provincial Congress promised to provide a headquarters building with furniture and staff, everyone expected the general to use goods and services of the best sort available.

The headquarters mansion thus had a substantial household staff to cook, clean, and otherwise look after the daily needs of Washington and his top officers. It received deliveries of choice food and wines. At the same time, Washington and his staff were much more occupied with business than the wealthy John Vassall had to be, and the house was more crowded (at least with adults).

6.1 SETTING UP A GENTEEL HOUSEHOLD

Even before Gen. Washington and his staff found a long-term headquarters, they began to assemble the fixtures of a genteel household. On 5 July 1775, three days after the party arrived in Cambridge, the Salem merchant Nathaniel Sparhawk (1744-1814) wrote out an invoice of goods for the general: "4 doz Yellow Plates," eleven assorted dishes, "1 Tea Pott," "1 Damask Table Cloth," and "12 Loves Sugar."¹ To this he added "9 Yds White Damascus @5/4."² Sparhawk did business with Philadelphia merchants, so it is possible that Thomas Mifflin or Joseph Reed was already in contact with him.³ Salem was the richest port

¹ N. Sparhawk invoice, 5 July 1775, among the financial documents in the George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress. For details on Nathaniel Sparhawk, see *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, 16:235-7. He had a cousin of the same name in Salem, but that man owned a rope factory instead of being a merchant. Sparhawk signed his bills and receipts as "N. Sparhawk," which is also the name entered in Washington's account book. (The back of one receipt is filed for "W Sparhawk.") Following some early twentieth-century sources, Fitzpatrick misidentified him as "Nicholas" Sparhawk. Coincidentally, Sparhawk was an uncle of the Pepperell children portrayed in the Mather Brown portrait now on display at Longfellow House—Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site.

² N. Sparhawk to Joseph Reed, 5 July 1775, George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress.

³ See Sparhawk's advertisement in 29 November 1774 *Essex Gazette*. On 16 August 1775 Sparhawk asked Reed to pay his bill through Dr. John Warren, indicating another avenue of contact.

in Massachusetts outside Boston and thus most likely to have the goods suitable for the commander's household.

Two days later another Salem merchant, William Vans (1730-1797), sent Reed a letter accompanying a shipment of goods.

By the Bearer Mr. [Joseph] Daland I have sent as p inclosed Invoice all the things I could procure of yr. memo & as near it as the times will admit, wch: occasions many things to be very high [i.e., expensive], have also purchased the General a quarter Cask of choice Madeira Wine that is now fining, & will be bottled in about three Weeks, & then forwarded to you—could procure only part of the Spoons now, the remainder will be made & sent next Week—Nanken, Porks, Cheese & Cyder none at market, the latter may be purchased by some of the Officers from the Country, Coll Frye of Andover will be likely to get it—I have sent you for yr. own use three pair silk Hose as p Bill inclosed, I also sent you a pattern of Broad Cloth the only peice of that Color in Town price four Dollars p Yd. if it sutes please signify how much shall send—You'l observe I have charged Comms. on those things that I purchased of other people wch. hope will be pleasing—I shall be happy if these things prove agreeable to his Excellcy. to whome please present my Duty, & Complts. to Major Mifflin—I remain with tenders of my best services, Dr. Sir

Yr Obliged Friend & servant

Wm: Vans

P.S. no good paper
to be had in Town
The Spoons are put in
the Case⁴

Vans also sold goods from Philadelphia and appears to have already been acquainted with Reed and Mifflin.⁵

Vans continued to send supplies to the Cambridge headquarters, particularly further shipments of Madeira wine. These were among the largest expenditures Washington recorded: more than £87 in August, £35 in September, and £37 in December. Over a hundred bottles arrived at a time.⁶ Furthermore, Vans was not the only merchant to supply headquarters with wine. On 6 October William Ritchie billed Washington £28 for a hogshead of Madeira, on 18 December the French merchants Penet and De Pliarne sent bottles as gifts (see section 16.12), and on 20 January 1776 Washington paid £75 for a pipe from Paschal N.

⁴ Vans to Reed, 7 July 1775, George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress. Vans's dates based on <http://homepages.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~vfarch/genealogy-data/wc_src.html#C2796>. Fitzpatrick concluded that Vans and Sparhawk were partners in a single mercantile firm, but the two men's bills, receipts, and advertisements do not mention each other.

⁵ See Vans's advertisements in the 6 December 1774 and 21 March 1775 *Essex Gazette*.

⁶ Washington and Kitman, *George Washington's Expense Account*, 164.

Smith of New York.⁷ Even as he could see the end of the siege coming, Washington bought a cask of porter, two cases of claret, and 32 gallons of spirits from William Bartlett, the Continental agent in Beverly (see section 12.7).⁸ Wine was one of the general's largest ongoing expenses, and the only foodstuff that he did not entrust to the household steward.

Choosing to order from Sparhawk and Vans might have ensured top-quality goods, but could also have raised political questions. In the spring of 1774 both men had signed complimentary addresses to the outgoing and incoming royal governors, which put them on the list of Tories.⁹ In September Vans had made a public apology for signing the address to Hutchinson, and in the same paper advertised that he was willing to buy homespun cloth "For the Encouragement of American Manufactures."¹⁰ Sparhawk did not post a public apology until the war had begun and maintained close ties with Loyalist relatives in Britain, even living in that country later in life.¹¹

The money that Washington and his staff laid out on dishes, tablecloths, and wine reveal how they expected to serve elegant dinners. In entertaining his top officers, visiting officials, and others, Gen. Washington sought to maintain gentlemanly standards. His choice of the John Vassall house, and of the staff who worked there, reflected the same goal.

6.2 THE CHALLENGES OF IDENTIFYING THE HOUSEHOLD STAFF

The major sources on the administration of Washington's Cambridge household are the accounts kept by the general, his aides, and the household steward. The first historian to study those records in depth was John C. Fitzpatrick of the Library of Congress and, later, the George Washington Bicentennial Commission.¹² Later historians, reluctant to wade into

⁷ Fitzpatrick identified Smith as "a Cambridge merchant." In fact, he was based in New York, and was the son-in-law and business partner of Isaac Sears (1730-1786), a leading Patriot activist. In the fall of 1775 Sears supplied 7,000 barrels of flour to the Cambridge camp, so much that the quartermaster did not have enough money to pay him; JCC, 3:299-300.

⁸ These liquors most likely came off a captured ship. Washington and Kitman, *George Washington's Expense Account*, 175.

⁹ *Essex Gazette*, 14 June 1774; *Essex Journal*, 15 June 1774.

¹⁰ *Essex Gazette*, 13 September 1774; apology also in the *Boston Evening-Post*, 19 September 1774. Vans succeeded in convincing his neighbors that he was a reliable Patriot, and in the 1780s served as Salem's town representative to the General Court.

¹¹ *Essex Gazette*, 1 June 1775, cited in *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, 16:235.

¹² Fitzpatrick's comments appear in *George Washington's Account of Expenses*, and are extracted online in the George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress. For that book Fitzpatrick consulted all the headquarters financial documents, but printed only a copy of Washington's expense notebooks. The full collection consists of untranscribed images of three notebooks and hundreds of loose documents in Series 5 of the George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress: <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/gwhtml/gwseries5.html>>. The documents are designated as "George Washington, Revolutionary War Expense Account"; "Revolutionary War Accounts, Vouchers, and Receipted Accounts 2, 1775 - 1783"; "Revolutionary War Household Expense Accounts, 1775"

the same thicket of documents, have repeated Fitzpatrick's conclusions without reexamining the evidence beneath them.

Fitzpatrick named Ebenezer Austin as the steward in charge of Washington's household, and wrote this about the staff under him:

A complete list of the names of the servants at Headquarters in 1775 is difficult to give. Those we know were Edward Hunt, a cook; Mrs. Morrison, kitchen-woman; Mary Kettel, washerwoman; Eliza Chapman, Timothy Austin, James Munro, Dinah, a negro woman, and Peter, a negro man. . .

Elsewhere in his annotations for Washington's expense account Fitzpatrick named Adam Foutz as the Cambridge mansion's "French cook" and Giles Alexander as "a tailor employed at Headquarters from July, 1775, apparently to the end of the war."

After further research, this study concludes that Fitzpatrick was mistaken in some significant way about every white man he named. The steward was Timothy Austin, not Ebenezer. Of the two cooks Fitzpatrick listed, one was never in Cambridge and the other worked for only a few weeks. Almost all of the domestic workers at the John Vassall house in Washington's period were actually female. Fitzpatrick identified some local tradesmen as household servants and erred in identifying men who supplied goods to headquarters. This study attempts to assemble a more detailed and reliable picture of that staff, but it is very difficult to document the lives of eighteenth-century servants.

6.3 MR. AUSTIN, THE STEWARD

On the morning of 7 July 1775 the Provincial Congress designated Col. Lemuel Robinson (1736-1776) of Dorchester, Maj. Eleazer Brooks (1727-1806) of Lincoln, and Deacon Nathaniel Bailey (1731-1812) of Weymouth as "a committee to procure a steward for his excellency General Washington." That afternoon the congress added: "That the committee appointed to procure a steward for General Washington, be directed to procure him likewise two or three women, for cooks."¹³

Meanwhile, the separate committee on "how General Washington's table should be furnished"—i.e., who was going to supply food to headquarters and pay for it—was told to consult with the general and propose a resolution for the congress to act on. By 7 July it had become clear that Washington and Lee planned to keep separate headquarters, so the congress created a separate committee of Maj. Joseph Hawley (1723-1788) of Northampton, Col. Jonathan Grout (1737-1807) of Petersham, and Robinson "to wait upon General Lee, to

(credited to Ebenezer Austin); and "Revolutionary War Household Expense Accounts, 1775 - 1776" (credited to Ebenezer Austin).

¹³ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 466-7.

know of him what provision he expects should be made by this Congress for the furnishing his table.”¹⁴

On the morning of 8 July 1775 the Provincial Congress adopted the recommendation of its committee for “complying with the requisitions of General Washington” by issuing this order:

That Col. Robinson, Major Brooks, and Deacon Bailey, be a committee to make inquiry forthwith, for some ingenious, active, and faithful man, to be recommended to General Washington, as a steward; likewise, to procure and recommend to him some capable woman, suitable to act in the place of a house-keeper, and one or more good female servants.¹⁵

This was the seed of the headquarters household staff. The position of “steward” was not menial. The best-known man in Massachusetts with that title was Jonathan Hastings, steward of Harvard College; he was a college graduate, justice of the peace, and owner of a large house (see section 2.3). As steward, he managed servants, supplies, and funds, keeping day-to-day matters from distracting his employer.

The congress’s records say no more about the three-man committee looking for a steward, but that same day the Committee of Safety issued this resolve:

Whereas, it is necessary the house of Mr. John Vassal, ordered by Congress for the residence of his excellency General Washington, should be immediately put in such condition as may make it convenient for that purpose, therefore, *Resolved*, that Mr. Timothy Austin be, and hereby is empowered and authorized, to put said house in proper order for the purposes above mentioned, and that he procure such assistance and furniture as may be necessary to put said house in proper condition for the reception of his excellency and his attendants.¹⁶

Austin may have come to this committee’s attention through David Cheever (1722-1815) of the Committee on Supplies, who also became involved in furnishing the general’s headquarters.¹⁷ Cheever and Austin had worked together for years as deacons of Charlestown’s First Meeting—the sort of managerial job that Austin would take on for the new general.¹⁸

¹⁴ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 468.

¹⁵ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 471.

¹⁶ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 593.

¹⁷ On 8 July, the Committee of Safety asked Cheever to draft a resolve “empowering the committee of supplies to furnish General Washington with such articles of household furniture, as he has wrote to said committee for”; Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 477.

¹⁸ Budington, *First Church, Charlestown*, 194. When Cheever and Austin stepped down, one of their successors as deacon was John Larkin, best known in history for supplying Paul Revere with his horse on 19 April 1775. According to Austin’s records, Larkin supplied Washington’s headquarters with “two Cruits & 2 Mustard pots” on 5 August 1775.

Timothy Austin (1718-1787) was a leather-dresser who had served as Charlestown's treasurer in 1763. His second wife, Lydia, was a daughter of the late Cornelius Waldo, a merchant and promoter of the Waldoboro settlement in Maine. Her wealth and his town offices had raised this branch of the Austin family above the middling class.¹⁹ Timothy Austin was a solid gentleman whom the committee could trust to make sure the Vassall house was cleaned, furnished, and managed well for its important new occupant. Furthermore, as refugees from burnt-out Charlestown, the Austin family probably needed someplace to live and some means of support.

In the back of the first notebook Austin kept to track the household expenses, he wrote:

Agreed wth. <the> General July [illegible] 1775
@ £7.10/ p month for my Self [illegible] Daughter.²⁰

Fitzpatrick, examining the original page, reported that that agreement was made on 12 July and it included the services of Austin's wife as well as his daughter. (This has not been confirmed.)

Fitzpatrick reported that the steward's name was Ebenezer Austin, as other authors had done before him.²¹ This is understandable since Washington wrote in his own account book on 19 July:

To Cash to Mr. Ebenr. Austin the Steward for Household Expences . . . £10

A later page in Washington's notebook records all the cash given to "Mr. Ebenezer Austin, Steward" between 19 July 1775 and 4 April 1776. Its first item is entered:

To Cash to ~~Mr. Ebenezer Austin (who was employed as a Steward)~~ for Household Expences.

The entries that follow match what the steward recorded in his own notebook as receiving from the general's secretary on the corresponding dates.²²

¹⁹ Lincoln, *Genealogy of the Waldo Family*, 1:163-4.

²⁰ Austin, Revolutionary War Household Expense Accounts, 1775, image 69 of 71; George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, Series 5 Financial Papers.

²¹ In particular, Deane, "Washington's Head-quarters in Cambridge," MHSP, 12:259.

²² The crossed-out words probably reflect Washington's attempt to distinguish the total sum he gave Austin, which included reimbursements, from the part intended as the steward's personal salary. Pages from Washington's expense accounts can be seen in Washington and Kitman, *George Washington's Expense Account*, though that book relied on Fitzpatrick's identifications and its commentary is best ignored. The pages naming Ebenezer Austin are 42 and 127. Austin began his accounting in Old Tenor and later switched to Lawful money, at which point his figures match the general's.

Thus, Washington clearly believed at one point that his steward's first name was Ebenezer. However, in daily interaction Washington probably referred to the steward, who was over a decade older, as "Mr. Austin," never using a first name. Most of the general's payment lines refer simply to "Mr. Austin, Hd. Exps."

Fitzpatrick saw the name Timothy Austin throughout the steward's expense notebooks—e.g., "Paid Timothy Austin. . ."—and guessed that this man was Ebenezer's son. But at several times Timothy received the exact £7.10 that the general had agreed as the steward's monthly salary.²³ An entry for 23 August states Timothy Austin was paid "in full for one Month," confirming that he was an ongoing employee. In early November 1775 the steward totaled the cash "Ballance Due to T. Austin & carried to new Accot." Clearly Timothy Austin, not Ebenezer, was managing the household's finances for a regular salary.

As noted above, the Committee of Safety named Timothy Austin as the man they recommended for the post of steward. Similarly, on 28 March 1776 Cambridge's representative to the General Court, Samuel Thatcher, wrote to "Mr. Timothy Austin, Steward To his Exelency Genl: Washington at Head-Quarters," replying to an inquiry about the household furniture.²⁴ Thus, even if Washington believed that his steward's first name was Ebenezer, at the start and the end of the general's stay the Massachusetts legislature referred to the man as Timothy.

How might Gen. Washington have become confused? On 19 July, the day that he recorded his first payment to "Ebenezer Austin," the steward wrote in his own notebook: "Paid Ebenr. Austin for Sundry articles for the Kitchen as pr Note." Later, on 29 July, the steward added that he had "Paid Ebenr. Austin as p Note" £1.9.5 ³/₄. It is not clear what relationship this man was to Timothy Austin; there was more than one Ebenezer Austin in Charlestown at the time.²⁵ But it seems likely that Washington heard the name "Ebenezer Austin" and assumed that it referred to the same "Mr. Austin" who was serving as his steward.

Timothy Austin brought his daughter, and perhaps his wife, to the Vassall house to be part of the staff. They were:

- Mary Austin, born to Timothy's first wife Mary (Trumbull) on 2 January 1745. It is possible that Austin's agreement with the general referred to one of the young daughters of his second marriage, but Mary is a much more likely candidate. She was mature and single, and thus both available for work and in need of support.

²³ See entries on 17 October 1775, 15 February 1776, and 15 March 1776. Other payments are higher or lower, presumably because Austin was reimbursing himself or his family for expenditures, but they all hover around the agreed-upon salary.

²⁴ Samuel Thatcher to Timothy Austin, 28 March 1776, image 833 of 1132; George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, Series 4 General Correspondence.

²⁵ The Austins were one of Charlestown's oldest families, and Ebenezer was a very common name in eighteenth-century New England. In fact, Timothy Austin's late father had been named Ebenezer.

- Lydia Austin (1727-1800), daughter of Cornelius and Faith Waldo. Lydia and Timothy married in 1747 and had eleven children, six of them dying young and one at age twenty. In 1775 their surviving minor children were Samuel (1760-1848), Lydia (1762-1828), and Elizabeth (1767-1826).²⁶

After the spring of 1776 Timothy Austin returned to Charlestown and resumed his work as deacon. He left that post in the spring of 1787, and his death in Boston was noted in the 27 June 1787 *Massachusetts Centinel*.²⁷

6.4 CLEANING THE VASSALL HOUSE

In the headquarters paperwork is a document labeled “Accot. & Recet. for Cleaning of House before his Excellcy. Enterd it,” dated “July 1775.” (See figure 2 at the end of this chapter.) It appears to be in Timothy Austin’s handwriting, and is calculated first in devalued “Old Tenor” currency, as Austin’s notebook also begins. This invoice details the work put in to make the John Vassall house ready for its important new occupant:

	Old Tenor	
5 upper Chambers	a[t] 18/	£4.10—
Stair & Entry		1.2.6
Front Stairs & Entry		1.2.6
4 Chambers	a 22/6	4.10—
1 small do.		.18—
4 Lower Rooms	22/6	4/10—
2 kitchens Chamber, Entry &c		1.16—
£ Necessary house		1.2.6
Old Tenor	£19.11.6	
8 ½ days work for four a 12/		4.16—
O Tr	£24.7.6	
Sterling	£2.8.9	
Sand [?]	2.	
Suming [?]	£2.10.9	
Recd the Contents [?] of Major Tho Mifflin		
		£2.10.9

On 15 July Washington recorded in his notebook that he had expended the same £2.10.9 as “Cash paid for cleaning the House which was provided for my Quarters & wch. had been occupied by the Marblehead Regm.”²⁸

²⁶ Mary Austin remained unmarried when her stepmother wrote her will in 1797; it is unclear when she died. Lincoln, *Genealogy of the Waldo Family*, 1:163-4.

²⁷ Timothy Austin’s death was also noted in the 26 June *Salem Mercury*, the 29 June *Connecticut Gazette*, and that week’s *Worcester Magazine*.

²⁸ Revolutionary War Expense Account, 1775-1783, George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress. Washington and Kitman, *George Washington’s Expense Account*, 42.

The general presumably made this payment after the work was done according to the invoice. That suggests that Austin's staff had begun their cleaning at least eight and a half days earlier, on 7 July, the day after the Provincial Congress learned that Washington wanted to use the John Vassall house. It also suggests that Washington and his staff moved into that mansion on 15 July 1775 or the next day.

The final item on this invoice appears to be "Sand," which was indeed a crucial part of keeping a colonial house clean. J. Randall Cotton explained in *Old House Journal*:

Sand was sprinkled over the bare floors to collect dirt and grease. . . . When the sand was swept up, the week's dirt went along with it. An occasional good scrubbing with sand and water kept floors looking relatively new. . . .

A less common, but not rare, practice was to create a "sand carpet." Decorative patterns were created in sand spread across the floor. According to one account, the best parlors were "swept and garnished every morning with sand sifted through a 'sand sieve' and sometimes smoothed with a hair broom into quaint circles and fancy wreaths." Herringbone patterns were also documented.²⁹

Later in 1775 Austin bought "12 Bushl. Sand" from a man named Farrington. This strongly suggests that there were no carpets in most of the Vassall house, and the household accounts do not mention any being cleaned.

6.5 FURNISHING HEADQUARTERS

In early July 1775, in addition to arranging for the Vassall house to be cleaned, Timothy Austin and his contacts in the Provincial Congress were busy collecting furniture for it. At the end of Washington's stay in Massachusetts, Austin wrote to the House of Representatives, which replaced the Provincial Congress in July 1775, about whether the general was supposed to pay for that furniture and take it with him. Samuel Thatcher replied from Watertown on 28 March 1776:

In answer to yours of this day wherein you give Notice of General Washington's desire to know whether the Articles of Houshold Furniture which were procured for him when he came to Cambridge were charg'd to the Public—or a Loan—or whether there is to <be> a Consideration for the Use of them—I am authoriz'd to say that no Charge is to be exhibited against his Excellency or the Continent for any such Articles as were supply'd by Order this Colony.

²⁹ Cotton, "The Bare Facts About Early Floors," *Old House Journal*, March/April 1988, 38. The quotation appears in "Reminiscences of Philadelphia," published in Samuel Hazard's *Register of Pennsylvania*, 2 (1828-29), 326. See also Little, *Floor Coverings in New England Before 1850*; and Sheumaker and Wajda, *Material Culture in America*, 191-2. John Trumbull recalled that his earliest attempts at artwork involved "nicely sanded floors, (for carpets were then unknown in Lebanon [Connecticut],) . . . constantly scrawled with my rude attempts at drawing"; Trumbull, *Autobiography, Reminiscences, and Letters*, 5.

When his Excellency has no farther use for them—if he was leave them in the Care of some Person to be deliver'd to the Order of Court nothing farther is desired.³⁰

At least some of that furniture was apparently borrowed from genteel families in the region, possibly refugees from Boston.

Not everything was in place when the general moved in. On 22 July 1775, the House “Resolved, That the Committee of Safety be desired to complete the furnishing General Washington's house, and in particular to provide him four or five more beds.” Five days later, the steward recorded buying a “coverlid,” or coverlet.

As a Virginian, Washington was not used to New England weather. On 16 October Austin bought a “Blanket for the General.” In December, as Martha Washington and her family arrived and the nights grew colder, the steward bought four more blankets (two colored “Rose”).

The only example of the headquarters furnishings identifiable today are a set of chairs and a settee loaned by William Greenleaf, a Boston merchant who became the first sheriff of Suffolk County after the end of royal government. In the H. W. L. Dana Papers at the Longfellow House archives is a photograph of “a settee and two Chippendale chairs loaned to George Washington 1775-1776 by William Greenleaf.”³¹ One chair from the set is in the Henry Ford Museum, a plaque attached to its front. Others are still in the hands of private collectors. Sloans and Kenyon sold one at auction in 2006.³² Sotheby's sold another in 2007 with the following description and provenance:

Retains a warm rich color. Appears to retain original needlework outer covering of seat. An upholstered reproduction seat frame with matching needlework comes with this lot.

A paper label with ink inscription attached to the inside of the rear seat rail reads, *This chair is one of a set of six loaned by William Greenleaf, High Sheriff of Suffolk County, to help furnish General Washington's Headquarters when he occupied the building now known as the Longfellow House in Cambridge, Massachusetts. From July 1775 until March 1776.*

Washington's Headquarters were in Wadsworth House from July 1 to July 15, 1775.

Wm. Greenleaf

Elizabeth Greenleaf - m. Samuel Eliot

Wm. G. Eliot

³⁰ George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 4. General Correspondence. 1697-1799. Samuel Thatcher to Timothy Austin, March 28, 1776. Image 833 of 1132.

³¹ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Dana Papers, Photo Box 9, Folder 51, Longfellow House–Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site archives.

³² <http://www.sloansandkenyon.com/washingtons_chair.htm>.

*Thomas D. Eliot.
Margaret E. Gifford 1933*³³

Greenleaf's documented closeness to the Massachusetts authorities and the family's record-keeping suggest that Gen. Washington did indeed use those chairs.

Washington was also looking ahead to what furniture he would need when he went on campaign. On 2 October 1775, apparently recognizing that the siege would probably not bring a quick end to the war, the general recorded paying £22 "To a Field Bedstead & Curtains, Mattrass, Blankets &c. &c. had of different Persons." However, he apparently never had to use this material while he was in Massachusetts.

6.6 USE OF ROOMS OF THE HOUSE

In 1838 Henry W. Longfellow told his friend G. W. Greene that in Elizabeth Craigie's boardinghouse he occupied "Gen. Washington's chambers" on the southeast corner of the second floor.³⁴ A parallel tradition held that the general's office was directly below, in the front room to the right of the front door. Presumably Craigie had given her boarders that information. These beliefs might have been rooted in statements from people who had actually been in the house in 1775-76 and remained in greater Boston into the next generation, such as Tony and Cuba Vassall or their children (see sections 2.1-2) or Elizabeth Chapman (see section 6.10), but there is no solid evidence preserved for them.

In 1843 historian Jared Sparks sought more reliable information by writing to the artist John Trumbull, Gen. Washington's last surviving aide de camp (see section 5.9). Writing on behalf of the "inquisitive ladies of this town," Sparks sent a sketch of Elizabeth Craigie's ground floor and asked which numbered room "was the parlour, which the office, which the chamber occupied by the General, & the like?"³⁵ His wording suggests that he already had a mental picture of Washington using a "parlor" and "office." Sparks's query also shows that he and his Cambridge neighbors were seeking more than tradition.

Trumbull replied from New York on 12 June 1843:

I have recd your letter of the 9th & being Ever anxious to oblige the Ladies I hasten to inform them thru you, that the Dining room at Headquarters in the Year 1775 was No. 2 of your plan [southeast corner],—the reception Room No. 1 [southwest]—and the General's writing room No. 3 [northeast]—His Bedroom &c I never knew.

³³ <http://www.sothebys.com/app/live/lot/LotDetail.jsp?lot_id=159318503>.

³⁴ Quoted in Calhoun, *Longfellow: A Rediscovered Life*, 126. Henry W. Longfellow's poem "To a Child" and his brother Samuel's biography maintained the traditional understanding of "Washington's private room" being on the second floor in the southeast corner despite the lack of confirmation from Trumbull; Longfellow, *Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, 1:260.

³⁵ Jared Sparks to John Trumbull, 9 June 1843, Longfellow House—Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site.

I occupied a Chamber at the back of the house.
I am hardly able to write intelligibly—having been long dangerously ill—I
hope I am now recovering and am dear Sir
Your respectful Servant
Jn. Trumbull³⁶

Trumbull had a limited view, being an aide de camp for only nineteen days. If Washington changed how he used the house after Trumbull returned to the Connecticut troops or after Martha Washington's arrival, the young captain would not have known. Nevertheless, this is the best information to survive. (See figure 3 at the end of this chapter.)

Trumbull's phrase "the General's writing room" makes clear that the room at the northeast corner was used not just by the staff but by the commander himself. In that room Washington probably composed most of his official letters and read over those composed by his secretaries and aides. He and Gen. Horatio Gates reviewed paperwork for the army there. In the back of the house, the officers and their files would have been somewhat insulated from callers, who were presumably seated in the "reception Room" until someone was available to see them.

Trumbull's recollection of the southeast room being a dining room matches the only other surviving first-hand description of how the general used the John Vassall house. In the *Memorial History of Boston*, Edward Everett Hale reported:

Miss E. S. Quincy writes to me: "The late Daniel Greenleaf [1762-1853], of Quincy, told me that his father was employed (I believe) to furnish the Vassall House; and calling on Washington, his son accompanying him, the two were invited to dine,—the meal was taken in the room to the right of the front door, and consisted of four dishes of meat, etc., which the aids carved."³⁷

The general, his aides, and invited guests thus ate their midday dinners, and probably other meals, in the "Dining room" at the southeast corner.

The dining room almost certainly had other uses when meals were not being served. Gen. Washington probably convened his councils of war and other important meetings around the dining table. Eighteenth-century gentlemen often conducted business, political meetings, and even court sessions in taverns, so meeting in a dining room would not have seemed unusual. During busy periods Washington and his staff probably wrote or drew documents on the dining-room table. (At Valley Forge and Morristown, the same space in

³⁶ John Trumbull to Jared Sparks, 12 June 1843, Sparks Manuscripts, Houghton Library, Harvard.

³⁷ Winsor, *Memorial History of Boston*, 3:112-3. This is the same Greenleaf family that provided chairs for the general (see section 6.5).

the headquarters mansion was used as both the dining room and the aides' workspace, and the army added log cabins as extensions to each house for additional space.)³⁸

In the rudimentary floor plan that Sparks sent to Trumbull in 1843, there were *two* ground-floor rooms in the northwest corner of the house, one extending out the rear from the other. It is possible that Sparks reproduced the approximate layout that he had known as a tenant of Elizabeth Craigie, after the house had been remodeled with a kitchen extension. It is also conceivable that he had learned from Craigie about an earlier extension in that corner. The invoice for cleaning the house (quoted above) includes the line:

2 kitchens Chamber, Entry &c 1.16—

This might indicate that there were *two* rooms used to prepare meals in the Vassall house.³⁹ Alternatively, since this line comes right before the "Necessary house," it might refer to a nearby outbuilding where food was also stored and prepared.

Neither Trumbull nor Greenleaf left a comment on where the kitchen was, or what the room in the northwest corner of the ground floor was used for. Most observers have concluded that was the kitchen. Commenting on Trumbull's letter in *Country Life in America*, Oliver Bronson Capen said, "It is hard to understand why the kitchen and dining-room were separated in so inconvenient a way."⁴⁰ Presumably the general chose to use the corner opposite as his dining room either because it had already been set up that way, or because he saw some practical value in separating the "reception Room" and its visitors from his staff workspace. Invoices and receipts indicate that some deliverymen and tradesmen received payment from steward Timothy Austin, presumably meeting him at the back of the house, and some from the general's staff or even other general's aides.

The cleaning invoice refers to the rooms on the second and third floors as "Chambers," in contrast to the ground floor's "Lower Rooms." Trumbull used the same language when he wrote, "I occupied a Chamber at the back of the house." Presumably other aides were assigned similar rooms, or shared that one, and the household servants slept in smaller, more crowded chambers at the top of the house. Trumbull's lack of knowledge about the general's "Bedroom &c" might indicate that he went up the back stairs at night while the general went up the front stairs to his chamber.

³⁸ For the log cabin at Valley Forge, see Martha Washington to Mercy Warren, 7 March 1778, Mercy Otis Warren Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society. Recent archeological work has sought to locate the cabin's footprint: <<http://www.nps.gov/archeology/sites/npsites/valleyForge.htm>>. For the building at Morristown, see Washington to Greene, 22 January 1780, cited in Stevens, *Cultural Landscape Report for Washington's Headquarters: Morristown National Historical Park*, 22, 211.

³⁹ Confusing matters, this entry is separate from that for "4 Lower Rooms," one of which would have been the kitchen.

⁴⁰ Capen, "Country Homes of Famous Americans," *Country Life in America*, 6 (1904), 348.

Gen. Horatio Gates, who arrived in Cambridge on 9 July, almost certainly also had a bedroom of his own, probably at the front of the house. When Martha Washington and Elizabeth Gates arrived in December 1775 (see section 7.7), they would have moved in with their husbands. Secretary Joseph Reed, aide de camp Thomas Mifflin, and their successors probably shared second-floor rooms while they served on the generals' staff. The house filled up quickly. On 7 August, the old Massachusetts General Jedediah Preble (1707-1784) visited headquarters and recorded that Washington "said he was sorry he could not accommodate me with lodging."⁴¹

There is, regrettably, no information on where Jack and Eleanor Custis stayed when they arrived in December. The general's nephew George Lewis presumably bunked with the other young men. Tradition suggests Martha Washington took over the "reception Room" as her parlor, but again there is no contemporaneous evidence to support this.

Finally, the cleaning invoice refers to a "Necessary house." On 25 August, Washington noted a payment of £1.10 to "James Campbell—Necessaries for the House." Four days later there was an equal payment to "Jehoiakim Youkin," apparently for the same.⁴² "Necessary" was an eighteenth-century euphemism for an outhouse. This structure is long gone, but before indoor plumbing it was indeed a necessary part of any genteel home. Supplementing that facility, on 20 September Timothy Austin bought "3 Chamber Potts & 1 Pitcher." On 26 January and then on 14 February Austin added six more chamber pots for the household, perhaps because the winter nights had become too cold for people to use the necessaries.

6.7 MYTH OF THE VASSALL HOUSE TUNNEL

By the mid-1800s a rumor circulated in Cambridge that a secret tunnel connected the two Vassall houses along Brattle Street. Isabella James, who grew up in the mansion that Penelope Vassall had owned, wrote about this story in *The Cambridge of 1776*, published in 1875:

A strong belief prevails in Cambridge that a subterranean passage connects this house with Mr. H. W. Longfellow's, and that it was constructed to enable the two Vassall families to visit each other without exposure to the outside world. Many years ago the writer with her brothers and a brother of the Poet made a progress through the cellars in a vain search after this mysterious and mythical passage-way, one of the party only retaining a conviction that if a walled-up arch of solid masonry could be opened the entrance might be found.⁴³

⁴¹ Preble, *First Three Generations of Prebles*, 62.

⁴² The name of Jehoiakim Youkin or Yokum appears in records from the Stockbridge Indians; Wright, *Indian Deeds of Hampden County*, 149-50, 160-4, 168-9, 173-81. His signed receipt for 30s. from Joseph Reed is in the financial documents of the George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress.

⁴³ Isabella James, "The Batchelder House, and Its Owners," in Gilman, *Cambridge of 1776*, 100.

Isabella James's nephew Samuel Francis Batchelder tried to put the story to rest in a 1914 article for the Cambridge Historical Society:

A tradition of delicious mystery connects the two houses by a secret underground passage. A bricked-up arch in Colonel Henry [Vassall]'s cellar wall appears to be the foundation of both the tradition and that part of the building. We may assume, from what we know of the owner, that the feature was much more probably the entrance to a wine vault.⁴⁴

Given that visits between two related households would be easy to explain while tunneling was difficult and expensive, there is no credible reason for a subterranean passage between the Vassall houses.

Nevertheless, the story has persisted. A more recent version says Washington used a tunnel to bring supplies or people up from the Charles River. Again, this would have been unnecessary and prohibitively expensive, and there is no evidence for it.

6.8 DINING WITH THE GENERAL

Gen. Washington recognized the power that came from invitations to dine at headquarters, and his responsibility to spread that honor around. At the same time, the press of business made it impossible for him to extend formal invitations. On 6 September his general orders stated:

As the remoteness of some of the Regiments from Head Quarters renders it difficult to send invitations to the Officers; The Commander in Chief requests, that for the future, The Field Officer of the day, the Officer of his own guard, and the Adjutant of the day; consider themselves invited to dine at Head Quarters, and this general invitation, they are desired to accept accordingly.⁴⁵

Such dinners helped Washington learn about the officers serving under him, and how the siege looked from different locations.

Officers and locals appear to have appreciated such attention. As noted above, Benjamin Greenleaf recalled how he and his father dined with the general for decades afterward. Henry Knox happily told his wife Lucy on 9 August 1775 "I was yesterday at Cambridge. Generals Washington and Lee inquired after you. I dined at General W's." Knox told his brother on 26 September, "Last Friday Lucy dined at General Washington's."⁴⁶ The Rev. Dr. Samuel Cooper and his wife met Washington and Lee while they were all visiting the camps at Winter and Prospect Hills on 6 October; the commander-in-chief "obligingly invited us to dine at head Quarters," the minister wrote, though his wife chose to go to a

⁴⁴ Batchelder, "Notes on Col. Henry Vassall," *Cambridge Historical Society Publications*, 9 (1914), 14.

⁴⁵ WGW, 3:475.

⁴⁶ Drake, *Henry Knox*, 19.

relative's house instead.⁴⁷ On 26 December engineer Jeduthan Baldwin recorded: "Dind with Genl. Washington & Lady."⁴⁸ Most of the general's dinner guests appear to have been army officers or politicians, and the conversation probably focused on issues of the war.

Washington worried that he might slight someone important. In December 1775 he received word from Joseph Reed, back in Philadelphia, that the Congress was breaking down into regional factions. Around the same time he heard how the plan for a ball honoring his wife had been scuttled, with New England delegates among the most vocal critics. Had local leaders turned against him? The general wrote back to Reed on the 15th:

I cannot charge myself with incivility, or, what in my opinion is tantamount, ceremonious civility, to the gentlemen of this colony; but if such my conduct appears, I will endeavor at a reformation, as I can assure you, my dear Reed, that I wish to walk in such a line as will give most general satisfaction. You know, that it was my wish at first to invite a certain number of gentlemen of this colony every day to dinner, but unintentionally I believe by anybody we some how or other missed it. If this has given rise to the jealousy, I can only say that I am sorry for it; at the same time I add, that it was rather owing to inattention, or, more properly, too much attention to other matters, which caused me to neglect it.⁴⁹

It may not be coincidence that in the following month Washington invited Massachusetts delegate John Adams and speaker of the house James Warren to confer with him in a council—and to stay for dinner.

On some days the general and his lady sent out formal invitations to dine, sometimes on short notice, such as this one to Henry and Lucy Knox:

The General & Mrs. Washington, present their Compliments, to Colo. Knox & Lady, begs the favor of their Company at dinner, on Friday half after 2 oClock.
Thursday Evening Feby 1 1776⁵⁰

On other days Washington was less formal, as when he invited Continental Congress delegate John Adams on 7 January:

If it could be made convenient and agreeable to you to take pot-luck with me to-day, I shall be very glad of your company, and we can talk the matter over at large.⁵¹

⁴⁷ *American Historical Review*, 6:321.

⁴⁸ Baldwin, *Revolutionary Journal*, 19. Of course, officers who were *not* impressed by a meal at headquarters might well have omitted that event from their journals. But there are no examples of people complaining about the burden or tedium of eating with Gen. Washington.

⁴⁹ WGW, 4:165.

⁵⁰ PGW:RW, 3:237.

⁵¹ PJA, 3:397.

And there were days that the Washingtons accepted invitations to dine elsewhere, as Adams recorded in his diary on 24 January:

Began my journey to Philadelphia, dined at C[olonel]. Mifflins at Cambridge with G. Washington, & Gates and their Ladies, and half a Dozen Sachems and Warriours of the french Cocknowaga Tribe, with their Wives and Children.⁵²

As with most of Washington's other dinners while commander-in-chief, this meal was part sustenance and part business.

6.9 THE COOKS AND KITCHEN STAFF

Washington's expense account shows that he "paid a French Cook" £2.5 on 24 July 1775.⁵³ Fitzpatrick identified that man as "Adam Foutz, later a member of the Commander-in-chief's Guard." However, Foutz's name does not appear in any documents from Cambridge. Records of the 2nd Pennsylvania Regiment say that he enlisted in that unit as a private on 1 December 1776, was assigned to the guard as a cook, and served for the duration of the war.⁵⁴ Foutz was therefore not the "French cook" who worked briefly at the Cambridge headquarters.

Within a week of Washington moving into the Vassall mansion in July 1775, Austin hired a cook named Edward Hunt. The first record of his employment is a confusing line in Austin's expense account on 19 July: "Paid Edw. Hunt for going to Medford to engage them . . . 7.6 . . . [£]4.2.6." The steward evidently combined the initial amount he paid to Hunt and his wife with his own expenses in traveling to Medford to hire them. In the following weeks Austin gave Hunt payments of between one and three shillings every few days: eight payments in August and one in early September. But by 19 September, Hunt's work at headquarters was over. Austin "paid him in full for his Service in the Kitchen to the 14th. Instant," and also "paid his Wife."⁵⁵

In the spring Austin wrote down two more payments to Mrs. (Elizabeth) Hunt for "washing the food Linnen" and "washing the Servts. Cloaths," the first one on 5 March 1776 separate from a payment to "the Wash Woman" on the same day. This might be Edward Hunt's wife, back at headquarters to earn some money. This couple does not appear in the town records of Cambridge or Medford.

⁵² DAJA, 2:226-7. See section 16.8 for more on this dinner.

⁵³ Washington and Kitman, *George Washington's Expense Account*, 42.

⁵⁴ "Muster rolls, etc., 1743-1787," *Pennsylvania Archives*, series 5, 2:871. Foutz's name appears in many other documents reprinted in the *Pennsylvania Archives*.

⁵⁵ The Hunts' tenure at headquarters overlaps the period when Washington paid the "French cook." It is possible, therefore, that Edward Hunt was that cook, though his name does not sound particularly French. It is also possible that Washington hired another cook for a special event or dined away from headquarters on 24 July when he made that payment.

After Hunt's departure in September, neither Washington's nor Austin's account books indicate that there was another male cook at headquarters. Rather, for the remaining seven months of Washington's stay in Cambridge, his kitchen staff appears to have been as the Provincial Congress had imagined it back in July: "two or three women, for cooks." Austin left few clues about those female servants and what work they did. Unlike Hunt, the women did not receive cash payments every few days, but settled up monthly or at the end of the general's stay. The records' lack of detail makes it difficult to tell which of them lived in the house, and what their full compensation was. But in eighteenth-century American society, especially during wartime, many people were willing to work for low or deferred wages as long as they received comfortable and secure room and board.

These are the women who can be identified as working at Washington's headquarters, in addition to Austin's own family:

- "Dinah" was paid eight months' wages as Washington left Cambridge, meaning that she had started work around the beginning of August. Austin did not write down Dinah's last name, strongly suggesting that she was of African descent. He also did not pay any owner for her services, suggesting that she was free, at least in practice.
- "Mrs. Morrison the Kitchen Womn." received small sums starting on 28 October 1775, and finally a larger amount on 16 December 1775, when Austin wrote that he paid her "in full." (She was first noted as "Mrs. Morris.")
- Elizabeth Chapman collected six months' wages when Washington left the house, meaning she began work in October (see section 6.10).
- Mary Kettell was paid for "washing Table Linnen & Towels" on 28 August 1775. Kettell was a common surname in Charlestown, and Mary a very common first name for women, so it is impossible to identify this laundress further, but she was probably in the same straits as other Charlestown refugees. It is unclear whether she was the "Wash Woman" or "Washer Woman" that Austin paid at other times. Unlike the preceding women, the laundress(es) received payments at semi-regular intervals rather than in a lump sum.
- An unnamed woman (or women) whom Austin paid "for Scowring the House" on 5 Aug and 3 Oct 1775. At other times he also wrote of paying "for Cleansing the House" and "for Scowring the Pewter & Scowring the House & Washing." Again, this might have been one of the women named elsewhere in the accounts. Austin might not have wished to name his daughter or wife as doing this work because her labor was supposed to be included under his own payments. Or he may have chosen not to refer to free African-American women workers by name.
- Margaret Thomas (see section 9.11) was paid for sewing three shirts for Will Lee in February 1776. She remained with Gen. Washington's household for the remainder of

the war. Her name does not appear elsewhere in the records of the Cambridge headquarters, but it is possible she was already a fixture in the general's retinue.

6.10 ELIZABETH CHAPMAN: YOUNG HOUSEKEEPER

On 4 April 1776, at the end of Washington's period in the Vassall house, Austin wrote this line in his account book:

Eliza. Chapman 6 months wages Due this Day } [£]2/3/4⁵⁶

Elizabeth Chapman was the teenaged daughter of Jonathan and Jemima Chapman of Charlestown, born on 10 March 1758.⁵⁷ Her older brother Jonathan left an autobiography that described how their father “follow'd the Seas and died in Surinam 1765 leaving three Sons and five daughters.” Jonathan himself went to sea four days before his nineteenth birthday, sailing in May 1775 from Gloucester. One month later, the Battle of Bunker Hill left Charlestown “in Ashes,” and Elizabeth, her mother, and her other siblings “fled (with some little furniture to the Country)”—specifically to the house of Jonas Green in Malden. Jonathan found them there in the summer of 1775.⁵⁸

As refugees with no adult male in the family, the Chapmans needed income. Elizabeth probably welcomed the chance to work in a large household where room and board were part of her compensation. She appears to have started work in October 1775, about a month after Mary Kettell. Elizabeth's paternal grandmother was born Ann Kettell, so it is possible that she and Mary Kettell were related.

In 1784, Elizabeth Chapman married a sea captain named Ozias Goodwin, who relocated from Hartford to Boston. The couple had children from 1787 to 1799. Ozias became a merchant in Boston and served as an Overseer of the Poor, a respected public office. Their son, also named Ozias, became even wealthier and better known as a merchant. The captain died in 1819, and Elizabeth on 18 December 1831.⁵⁹ The Ozias Goodwin House at 7 Jackson Avenue in Boston, built in 1795, was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1988; it is uncertain which Ozias Goodwin lived there and when.

Elizabeth Goodwin's children preserved the memory of her service at the general's headquarters, and Samuel Adams Drake mentioned her in his *Historic Fields and Mansions of Middlesex*, first published in 1874: “Mrs. Goodwin of Charlestown, the mother of Ozias Goodwin, a well-known merchant of Boston, was his [Washington's] housekeeper; she had

⁵⁶ Austin, Revolutionary War Household Expense Accounts, 1775-76, image 83; George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, Series 5 Financial Papers.

⁵⁷ Goodwin, *Goodwins of Hartford*, 682.

⁵⁸ Chapman, “Autobiography of Captain Jonathan Chapman,” CSMP, 11 (1906-07), 208-9.

⁵⁹ Goodwin, *Goodwins of Hartford*, 682-4.

been rendered homeless by the destruction of Charlestown.”⁶⁰ Only seventeen when the general departed for New York, Elizabeth was too young to have been the main housekeeper, but she definitely served on Washington's household staff.

6.11 OUTSIDE THE HOUSE

Timothy Austin's accounts and the supplemental bills mention a man named “Peter,” most likely an African-American who worked in the Vassall house stables. Austin paid him for “Shears for the Horses” and “a Rope for the Horse,” and on 1 March 1776 paid someone (Margaret Thomas?) “for making 3 Shirts for Peter.” Some of these documents also mention a coachman, giving no name. The general paid other men for more advanced equine care, including £2.16 in October to William Ryan for “Nicking a pair of horses,” and £7.10 in January to “the Farrier—attending my Sick Horses.”⁶¹

Neither Austin's notebooks nor the general's contain any mention of Tony and Cuba Vassall and their children (see sections 2.1-2). The only evidence for the family's presence in 1775-76 is Darby Vassall's story of meeting Washington and the fact that they lived on the estate later in the 1770s. Technically Tony was still the property of Penelope Vassall, and Cuba and her children the property of John Vassall, all under the management of the Massachusetts government. It is possible that the family maintained themselves by working in parts of the Vassall estates beyond Washington's headquarters building—the outbuildings, fields, and hospital across the road. It is also possible that the Vassall family served the general but were never paid because all the men in charge perceived them as amenities that came with the house.

6.12 MEN WHO WERE NOT THERE

In addition to Ebenezer Austin and Adam Foutz, Fitzpatrick mistakenly named two more men as part of the headquarters household staff. Their names appear only briefly in Austin's records and can be identified through other sources:

1. Giles Alexander, identified as a tailor, appears four times in the headquarters papers.⁶² The general's correspondence shows that the headquarters employed a dispatch rider named Alexander, and a man named Giles Alexander had advertised his services carrying

⁶⁰ Drake, *Historic Fields and Mansions*, 305.

⁶¹ Washington and Kitman, *George Washington's Expense Account*, 46, 48, 151. Kitman interpreted Ryan's bill to refer to gelding, but nicking—cutting tendons so that a horse's tail stands up—is a more accurate reading.

⁶² Alexander billed Washington on 25 July 1775 for a pair of breeches, two yards of ribband, trimming, buttons, and “Linnen for pocketts.” On 18 August, he signed a receipt for payment from Isaac Peirce (see section 5.2). Washington's expense notebook records that August payment and another on 1 November.

letters around New England since the early 1760s.⁶³ It seems likely, therefore, that Giles Alexander came to headquarters not as a tailor but as a dispatch rider who also had dry goods to resell.

2. James Munro received 7s.7d. from Austin on 1 November 1775. Munro (1735-1804) was a blacksmith in Cambridge. In 1783 he became a deacon of the town's First Parish, and held that post until his death.⁶⁴

6.13 SUPPLYING THE TABLE AND HOUSE

Timothy Austin's account books provide a running tally of what food the Washington household consumed. It is beyond the scope of this report to attempt a quantitative or economic analysis of those expenses, but here are some general observations.

A large number of local merchants, bakers, farmers, and tradesmen supplied the house. Some names that appear repeatedly are the shopkeeper Francis Moore, farmers Joseph and Parsons Smith (see section 2.7), and a neighbor named Daniel Jones. Sometimes the food came from farther afield. On 26 September the *Industry*, sailing from New Providence in the Bahamas to Boston, entered Marblehead harbor to ride out a storm. Some local men took out a small schooner and seized that ship.⁶⁵ The captured cargo included 150 turtles, and judge advocate general William Tudor wrote to John Adams: "The Lovers of Turtle in the Camp are like to be indulg'd with a feast of it."⁶⁶ Gen. Washington's table was probably among those served by this capture, though the headquarters staff may not have known how to prepare it on their own: Austin paid an additional 18s.6d. for cooking two turtles on 18 October.⁶⁷

For meat, Austin often bought a "side" or a "quarter" of an animal at a time. The consumption of meat at the headquarters table matches the pattern that Daphne L. Derven perceived in the food-purchasing records of Deerfield, Massachusetts:

From a seasonal perspective, the lamb, mutton, and veal categories peaked in the spring and summer months. These meats did not keep well, but the carcasses were small enough to permit timely consumption in the warmer months. Beef had two major peaks in the fall and late winter with minimal representation in the

⁶³ For example, *Boston News-Letter*, 13 January 1763; *New Hampshire Gazette*, 28 January 1763. Alexander was enterprising enough to invest in the "New Hampshire grants" that would become Newfane, Vermont, but went bankrupt in 1768; *Boston Gazette*, 25 April 1768 and 12 February 1770.

⁶⁴ Cambridge, Christ Church, *Church of Christ*, 287; Paige, *History of Cambridge*, 305, 613-4.

⁶⁵ Nelson, *Washington's Secret Navy*, 101.

⁶⁶ Tudor to Adams, 30 September 1775, PJA, 3:174.

⁶⁷ On another date Austin recorded paying Col. John Glover in Marblehead £4.11.6 for a turtle.

summer. . . . The year-round availability of pork in contrast to beef was probably related to pork's ease of preservation and smaller carcass size.⁶⁸

In the winter Austin began to purchase not just beef, but parts of cattle that must have been recently slaughtered: calves' heads and feet, tongues, bellies for making into tripe. He brought in more salted pork.

As spring came, the menu changed once more. On 21 February Austin bought pears, a fruit he had not supplied since the previous July. Another sign of the season in March 1776 was robins—Austin added them to the household menu, and they appear to have been pleasing. He purchased six robins on 13 March, a dozen on each of 16 and 22 March, and two dozen on 1 April as the general and his staff were preparing to move. In the summer and autumn the steward had bought pigeons in quantity, and it is possible that other songbirds were among the unidentified "Fowl" that he bought throughout the year.

Both Austin and Washington recorded purchasing various household tools and necessities. Occasionally Austin paid for household repairs: "mending a Bolt for the Pump" on 24 July 1775 and "Paid a Tinker for mending a Kettle & Skimmer." He also paid for some repairs to the horse tackle, including the bill of a man named Barret "mending Chariot, Harness &c." The general himself tended to handle the purchase of new equipage, such as "Sadlery" and "halters," and on 3 October "a Riding Mare" from a young New Jersey gentleman seeking an officer's commission (see section 5.9).

Washington and Austin both bought clothing for the household's slaves, particularly Washington's personal servant William Lee and the stable hand named Peter. Giles Alexander and Richard Peacock billed the general directly for clothing while Austin paid for other garments and repairs. Austin bought "1 pr. Slippers for the Genl." on 6 November, and later paid for "Lady Washington's Slippers & Mending her Shoes," but he was not involved in buying any other clothing for the Washingtons themselves.

Between Martha Washington's arrival and the end of January 1776 Austin bought a dozen knives and forks, two dozen cups and saucers, and six wine glasses. As the correspondence with Sparhawk and Vans shows, the household already had eating and drinking utensils. Either there were not enough of those items for the expanded family, which might also have been hosting larger dinner parties, or their quality was no longer good enough. One clue that the staff had to adjust to a new way of doing things that winter is that on 17 January Austin spent £2 on "a Bell for the Kitchen."

One household necessity shows up on Austin's account books far less than might be expected: firewood. It was necessary not only for heating the house, but also for cooking and laundry. Austin recorded buying "2 Load Wood" on 25 August 1775 and another on 25 September. The army must have undertaken to supply firewood to the headquarters as well

⁶⁸ Derven, "Wholesome, Toothsome, and Diverse: Eighteenth-Century Foodways in Deerfield, Massachusetts," in Benes and Benes, *Foodways in the Northeast*, 57.

as the camps because neither Washington nor Austin recorded buying more during the winter months (see section 15.3).

In late March Gen. Washington's headquarters staff prepared to move south. This activity is also reflected in the household expenses. Austin purchased a "Padlock" on 21 March, then "2 Brass Padlocks" and "a Trunk" on 1 April—most likely for securing and moving papers and other valuable items. He closed out the accounts on 4 April 1776, paying off the regular household suppliers and staff, and a last £6.10.6 to himself. Then, life being as it is, Austin had to add the costs of two bushels of oysters and some beef.

6.14 THE STEWARD'S PURCHASES

This appendix lists every type of item that Austin bought for the general's headquarters. Further research might find significance in compiling the frequency, quantity, and/or prices of those transactions.

Poultry

"Birds" and "Fowls"
"Chickens"
"Ducks," "Wild Ducks," and "Wood
Ducks"
"Geese" and "Wild Goose"
"Partridges"
"Pidgeons" and "Fatted Pidgeons"
"Robbins"
"Turkies"

Seafood

"Fish," "Fresh Fish," "Small Fish,"
and "Corn Fish"
"Bass"
"Cod Fish," "Tom Cod," "Fresh
Cod," and "Corn Cod"
"Eels"
"Haddicks"
"Halibut"
"Lobsters"
"Mackerell"
"oysters" and "Billingsgate Oyster"
"Perch"
"Pickerell"
"Salmon"
"Smelts"
"Trouts"
"Turtle"

Meat

"Pig," "Roasting Pigg," "Pork," "Leg
Bacon," "Salt Pork," and "Spare
Rib"
"Beef," "Calves Feet," "Calves Head
& Pluck," "Belly of an Ox for
Tripe," "Tongues," "Neats
Tongues," and "Loin Veal"
"Lamb," "Mutton," and "Breast &
Neck Mutton"
"Venison"
"Sausages"

Fruits

“Apples” and “Bak’d Apples”
“Cherries”
“Cranberries”
“Damsons”
“Huckleberries”
“Hurtleberries”
“Lemmons”
“Limes”
“Mush Melons”
“Peaches”
“Pearmains”
“Pears”
“Plumbs”
“Quinces”
“Raisons”
“Water Melons”

Vegetables and Grains

“Corn,” “Green Corn,” and “Indian Meal”
“Beets”
“Cabbages” and “Green Cabbage”
“Carrots”
“Cucumbers” and “200 Cucumbers to Pickle”
“Onions”
“Potatoes”
“Rice”
“Squashes,” “Winter Squashes,” and “Patty Pans”
“String Beans”
“Turnips”

Bread, Baking Supplies, etc.

“Bread,” “Bisket,” and “Ginger Bread”
“Butter”
“Eggs”
“Milk”
“Nuts” and “Chesnuts”
“Sugar”

Spices and Flavorings

“Capers”
“Cinnamon”
“Cloves”
“mace”
“Mustard” and “Flour Mustard”
“Nutmegs”
“Pepper”
“Rose Water” and “Tansy Water” (the latter perhaps as a medicinal)
“Sage”
salt as “Fine Salt” and “Table Salt”
“Spices”
“Summer Savory”
“Sweet Herbs”
“Thyme”?

Alcohol

“Syder”
“Brandy”
“Cherry Rum”
(Washington bought wine directly.)

Kitchen and Dining Items

“Taps & fassettes [?]”
“Basket for Bread”
“Bell for the Kitchen”
“Bowls,” “Dishes & Plates,” “Earthen Platter,” and “Large Dish”
“Brass Cocks”
“Corks” [?]
“Cruits”
“Cups & Saucers”
“Dripping pan”
“Glass Tumblers,” “glass Beakers,” and “Wine Glasses”
“knives” and “Forks”
“Mugs”
“Mustard pots”
“pair Salts”
“Pepper Box & Dipper”
“pudding pan”
“Sieves”
“Sugar Pot”
“Tin Dipper”

Household Items

“Blanket for the General” and “Rose Blankets”
“Brooms” and “Floor Brushes”
“Cakes Crown Soap”
“Chamber Potts”
“Coverlid”
“Hart Barrels” (i.e., made from heartwood pine)
“hogsheads”
“Mop & Scrubbing Brush”
“Padlock...& Staples,” “Padlock for the Cellar,” and “Brass Padlocks”
“Pitcher”
“Snuffers”
“Tin Candlesticks”
“Trunk”
“Wash Bason”

Stable Items

“Birch Brooms”
“Brushes”
“Curry Combs”
“Neats foot oyl” in a “Keg”
“Rope”
“Sadle Girth”
“Shears”
“Straw”

Smoking Materials

“Pipes,” “4 Long Pipes,” and “Six Pipes for the Indian”
“Tobacco”

Old Tenor

5 upper Chambers _____ a 18/- £ 4. 10

Stair & Entry _____ 1. 2. 6

Front Stair & Entry _____ 1. 2. 6

4 Chambers _____ a 22/6 £ 4. 10

1 Small C^o _____ 10

4 Lower Rooms _____ 21/6 £ 4. 10

2 kitchen Chamber, Entry & 1 No _____

↳ Necessary house _____ 1. 2. 6

Old Tenor

8th days work ~~for~~ a 12/- £ 19. 11. 6

0th do £ 24. 7. 6

sterling £ 2. 0. 9

bank _____ 2

sums £ 2. 10. 9

Recd the Contents of Majors Tho Miffin
 £ 2. 10. 9

2. 10. 9
 16. 11
 3. 7. 8

Figure 3 (above). Invoice for cleaning the John Vassall house, paid by Thomas Mifflin on 15 July 1775. Image from the George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress.

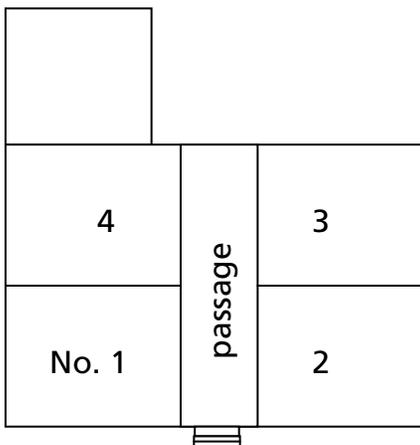


Figure 4 (left). Schematic first-floor plan of Washington's headquarters, based on the pencil sketch that Jared Sparks sent to John Trumbull on 9 June 1843. Trumbull identified room 1 as the "reception Room," 2 as the "Dining room," and 3 as "the General's writing room." Original letter at Longfellow House—Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

6.15 SUMMARY: THE HEADQUARTERS HOUSEHOLD STAFF

<i>Staff members</i>	<i>Fitzpatrick's identification</i>	<i>This study's identification</i>
Timothy Austin (1718-1787)	possibly steward's son	steward (refugee from Charlestown, where he was a leather-dresser and church deacon)
Lydia Austin (1727-1800)	unnamed	steward's wife, possible housekeeper and cook
Mary Austin (1745-after 1797)	unnamed	steward's daughter, housekeeper and cook
Edward Hunt	cook	cook, possibly "French cook," 19 July–14 September 1775
Elizabeth Hunt	not mentioned	laundress in March 1776, possibly wife of Edward Hunt
Mrs. Morrison	kitchen-woman	kitchen staff, 28 October–16 December 1775
Mary Kettel	washerwoman	laundress, 28 August 1775 and perhaps throughout
Elizabeth Chapman (1758-1831)	(as "Eliza") household staff	housemaid and possibly kitchen staff, October 1775–April 1776 (refugee from Charlestown)
Dinah	"a negro woman"	probably a cook, August 1775–April 1776
Peter	"a negro man"	stable worker
William Lee (c. 1753-c. 1824)	Washington's body servant	Washington's body servant, enslaved (see section 9.9)
Margaret Thomas	not mentioned	seamstress, possibly other duties, remained with Washington's household through the war (see section 9.11)
<i>Not staff members</i>	<i>Fitzpatrick's identification</i>	<i>This study's identification</i>
Ebenezer Austin	steward	supplier of household goods, July 1775
Adam Foutz	"French cook"	enlisted in the Pennsylvania Line in December 1776; cook for commander-in-chief's guard and headquarters from 1777 through the end of the war
Giles Alexander	tailor	dispatch rider who also supplied dry goods
James Munro (1735-1804)	household staff	Cambridge blacksmith

CHAPTER SEVEN

MARTHA WASHINGTON AND HER FAMILY

In the fall of 1775 Gen. Washington sent word for his wife to join him in Cambridge for the winter. Leaving Virginia with some young relatives and personal servants in mid-November, Martha Washington (1731-1802) arrived at headquarters on 11 December. She remained until early April, then returned south to Philadelphia separately from her husband. Letters, diaries, newspaper reports, and official paperwork provide glimpses of Martha Washington on her journey and in Cambridge.

More personal information about the Washingtons' time together is limited, however. There are few surviving letters from Martha, neither she nor George evidently kept a diary in these months, and other people were circumspect in their observations of the couple. As admiration for the Washingtons and the cult of domesticity grew in the nineteenth century, authors filled that vacuum in the historical record with secondhand lore, supposition, and fancy. There are therefore many descriptions of Martha Washington's experience and activities during the siege of Boston which have little or no support.

7.1 Washington's Farewell Letters

Only three letters from George Washington to his wife Martha survive, and he wrote two of those in the fortnight after accepting the post of commander-in-chief. Those two documents were found in Martha Washington's desk after her death by her granddaughter Martha Parke Custis Peter.¹ Evidently Martha had set those letters aside at some point and burned the rest (excepting only a short note that George had appended to a letter for someone else).² Obviously, those pages held special importance for Martha.

George wrote the first of those letters on 18 June 1775 two days after accepting the rank of general.

My dearest

I am now set down to write to you on a subject which fills me with inexpressible concern—and this concern is greatly aggravated and Increased, when I reflect on the uneasiness I know it will give you—It has been determined in Congress, that the whole Army raised for the defence of the American Cause

¹ Fields, "*Worthy Partner*", xxxi.

² Fields, "*Worthy Partner*," 188-9. Similarly, there is only one surviving signed letter from Martha Washington to George, dated 30 March 1767 and largely concerned with the weather; Fields, "*Worthy Partner*," 149.

shall be put under my care, and that it is necessary for me to proceed immediately to Boston to take upon me the command of it. You may believe me my dear Patcy, when I assure you, in the most solemn manner, that, so far from seeking this appointment I have used every endeavour in my power to avoid it, not only from my unwillingness to part with you and the Family, but from a consciousness of its being a trust too far great for my Capacity and that I should enjoy more real happiness and felicity in one month with you, at home, than I have the most distant prospect of reaping abroad, if my stay was to be Seven times Seven years. But, as it has been a kind of destiny that has thrown me upon this Service, I shall hope that my undertaking of it, designed to answer some good purpose—You might, and I suppose did perceive, from the Tenor of my letters, that I was apprehensive I could not avoid this appointment, as I did not even pretend [t]o intimate when I should return—that was the case—it was utterly out of my power to refuse this appointment without exposing my Character to such censures as would have reflected dishonour upon myself, and given pain to my friends—this, I am sure could not, and ought not to be pleasing to you, & must have lessend me considerably in my own esteem. I shall rely therefore, confidently, on that Providence which has heretofore preservd, & been bountiful to me, not doubting but that I shall return safe to you in the fall—I shall feel no pain from the Toil, or the danger of the Campaign—My unhappiness will flow, from the uneasiness I know you will feel at being left alone—I beg of you to summon your whole fortitude Resolution, and pass your time as agreeably as possible—nothing will give me so much sincere satisfaction as to hear this, and to hear it from your own pen.

If it should be your desire to remove into Alexandria (as you once mentioned upon an occasion of this sort) I am quite pleased that you should put it in practice, & Lund Washington may be directed, by you, to build a Kitchen and other Houses there proper for your reception—if on the other hand you should rather Incline to spend good part of your time among your Friends below, I wish you to do so.—In short, my earnest, & ardent desire is, that you would pursue any Plan that is most likely to produce content, and a tolerable degree of Tranquility as it must add greatly to my uneasy feelings to hear that you are dissatisfied, and complaining at what I really could not avoid.

As Life is always uncertain, and common prudence dictates to every Man the necessity of settling his temporal Concerns whilst it is in his power—and while the Mind is calm and undisturbed, I have, since I came to this place (for I had not time to do it before I left home) got Colo Pendleton to Draft a Will for me by the directions which I gave him which will I now Inclose—The Provision made for you, in cas[e] of my death will, I hope, be agreeable; I Included the Money for which I sold my own land (to Doctr Mercer) in the Sum Given you, as also all other Debts. What I owe myself is very trifling—Cary's Debt excepted, and that would not have been much if the Bank stock had been applied without such difficulties as he made in the Transference.

I shall add nothing more at present as I have several Letters to write, but to desire you will remember me to Milly & all Friends, and to assure you that I am with most unfeigned regard,

My dear
Patcy Yr Affecte
Go: Washington

P.S. Since writing the above I have received your Letter of the 15th and have got two suits of what I was told wa[s] the prettiest Muslin. I wish it may please you—it cost 50/ a suit that is 20/ a yard.³

The letter confirms that George had considered the likelihood of being offered a military post before leaving Mount Vernon. Though he had not discussed the prospect with Martha, he felt he had given her reason to suspect he would be gone for a significant period.

Even so, in this letter George insisted “that I shall return safe to you in the fall,” indicating that he expected a short and successful campaign. In a letter to Martha’s brother-in-law Burwell Bassett on 19 June George pushed his return back a little further: “I have no expectations of returning till Winter & feel great uneasiness at her lonesome Situation.” He asked the Bassetts to visit Mount Vernon and keep Martha company.⁴

The general wrote a shorter note to his wife on 23 June:

My dearest

As I am within a few minutes of leaving this City, I could not think of departing from it without dropping you a line, especially as I do not know whether it may be in my power to write you again till I get to the Camp at Boston—I go fully trusting in that Providence, which has been more bountiful to me than I deserve, & in full confidence of a happy Meeting with you sometime in the Fall—I have no time to add more, as I am surrounded with Company to take leave of me—I retain an inalterable affection for you, which neither time or distance can change. My best love to Jack & Nelly and regard for the rest of the Family concludes me with the utmost truth & sincerity

Yr entire

Go: Washington⁵

We know from other people’s letters that George wrote to Martha from Cambridge several times at least, but none of those papers survive.

7.2 THE DECISION TO TRAVEL

Without the Washingtons’ correspondence, understanding how Martha determined to come to Boston is a matter of speculation. But there are strong clues in the letters of Lund Washington (1737-1796), the cousin who was managing Mount Vernon, and others.

When in June 1775 George told Martha, “I shall return safe to you in the fall,” he saw no need for her to leave Virginia. However, with autumn rapidly passing, no sign of a British departure, and the need to recruit another army in Massachusetts, the general realized he would spend the winter away from home. George no doubt missed Martha, and probably

³ Fields, “*Worthy Partner*,” 159-60. Older transcriptions vary slightly. Original at Tudor Place, Georgetown, Washington, D.C.

⁴ PGW:RW, 1:13.

⁵ Fields, “*Worthy Partner*,” 162.

understood from her letters that she missed him. While bringing his wife to a war zone entailed risk, the general's headquarters was secure behind the lines, the enemy had shown little initiative, and eighteenth-century armies traditionally sat out the winter season.

Meanwhile, Virginia itself had turned into a potential war zone, perhaps more dangerous than Massachusetts. The royal governor, Lord Dunmore, had taken refuge on a ship on the James River, protected by soldiers and friends of the Crown. His opponents worried that he would try to incite a slave revolt and to attack settlements within reach of the water—eventually he did both. In particular, people expressed concern that Dunmore might try to raid Mount Vernon, capture the commander-in-chief's wife, and demand an end to the American rebellion. Neighbors and relatives urged Martha to move away from her home beside the Potomac to someplace less vulnerable.

On 5 October 1775 Lund Washington wrote to reassure the general:

'Tis true that many people have made a stir about Mrs. Washington's continuing at Mount Vernon, but I cannot think her in any sort of danger. The thought I believe originated in Alexandria. From thence it got to Loudoun [County]. I am told the people of Loudoun talked of setting a guard to conduct her into Berkeley, with some of their principal men to persuade her to leave this and accept their offer. Mr. John Augustine Washington [the general's brother] wrote to her pressing her to leave Mount Vernon. She does not believe herself in danger, nor do I. Without they attempt to take her in the dead of night, they would fail, for ten minutes notice would be sufficient for her to get out of the way. . . . I have never advised her to stay, nor indeed to go. Col. Bassett thinks her in no danger. She sets off next week with her son and daughter[-in-law] down to the country.⁶

Only one person could make Martha Washington decide to leave home, even for her own safety: her husband. According to Lund on 15 October the general's worried letters had changed her mind:

Mrs. Washington, I believe, was in no apprehension of Lord Dunmore's doing her an injury, until your mentioning it in several of your last letters. She intended to set off tomorrow down the country. I proposed to her to put whatever she thought most valuable into trunks, and should there be a necessity to move them,

⁶ PGW:RW, 2:116. Lossing, *Mary and Martha*, 137, quotes Mount Vernon neighbor George Mason as writing to the general at Cambridge: "Dunmore has come and gone, and left us untouched except by some alarm. I sent my family many miles back in the country, and advised Mrs. Washington to do likewise, as a prudential movement. At first she said 'No; I will not desert my post;' but she finally did so with reluctance, rode only a few miles, and plucky little woman as she is, stayed away only one night." The editors of both Washington's papers and Mason's papers suggest that this letter is spurious; *Papers of George Mason*, 1:315. However, some biographers of Martha Washington continue to make statements based on it.

it will be sooner done. She will stay tomorrow and do it. Your papers are among the things which will be put up...⁷

By the time Martha and Lund Washington made those arrangements, the general had asked her not simply to leave Mount Vernon, but to come to Cambridge. We do not have that message, but the general described it in a 13 October letter to John Augustine Washington:

I am obliged to you for your advise to My Wife, and for your Intention of visiting of her, seeing no great prospect of returning to my Family & Friends this Winter I have sent an Invitation to Mrs Washington to come to me, altho' I fear the Season is too far advanced (especially if she should, when my Letters get home, be in New Kent [County] as I believe the case will be) to admit this with any tolerable degree of convenience—I have laid a state of the difficulties however which must attend the journey before her and left it to her own choice.⁸

Martha Washington was indeed visiting her sister Anna Maria Bassett in neighboring New Kent County when that letter reached her.

On 29 October 1775 Lund told George that the previous Sunday he had received three letters from Cambridge, dated from the 2nd through the 9th, and had forwarded others written about the same time to Mrs. Washington at the Bassetts' plantation. Lund's comments show that he understood George had invited Martha to join him in Cambridge, and he assured his employer that "she had often declared she would go to the Camp if you woud permit her."⁹

Despite her decision and the approach of winter, however, Martha did not set off right away. She remained with the Bassetts through at least 5 November, when Lund wrote in some frustration to the general:

Mrs Washington Intends to come to you—she informs me she will leave Colo. Bassetts tomorrow & lose no time in getg home where she will Stay but a few days, before she sets out for the Camp—I think her stay in New Kent so long after she had your invitation to come to you, was rather ill judge'd, & will I fear occasion her have a very disagreeable journey—I suppose one way or other she will make it near the 20th before she will set off—I will do all I can to get her off sooner if Possible.¹⁰

In fact, Martha Washington left Virginia a couple of days before Lund's estimate. There is no documentation for why she spent the extra weeks with her sister. It is possible that she

⁷ PGW:RW, 2:175.

⁸ PGW:RW, 2:161-2.

⁹ PGW:RW, 2:256.

¹⁰ Fields, "Worthy Partner," 163.

tarried out of concern for Nelly Custis's health (see section 7.4). She may also have simply been nervous about the journey. Martha had never been north of Alexandria, so this trip to Massachusetts would be the biggest adventure she had ever undertaken.

7.3 SCANDALS TO DISPEL?

Authors have suggested that both Washingtons had personal reasons in late 1775 to display their affection to each other and the world. In the general's case, the impetus was supposedly a passage from a letter that Continental Congress delegate Benjamin Harrison had written to him in July, which the Royal Navy intercepted (see section 13.8). As published in the 17 August 1775 *Boston News-Letter*, it included this salacious aside:

As I was in the pleasing Task of writing to you, a little Noise occasioned me to turn my Head round, and who should appear but pretty little Kate, the Washer-woman's Daughter over the Way, clean, trim and rosey as the Morning; I snatch'd the golden glorious Opportunity, and but for the cursed Antidote to love, Sukey [Harrison's wife], I had fitted her for my General against his Return. We were obliged to part, but not till we had contrived to meet again; if she keeps the Appointment I shall relish a Week's longer stay.¹¹

Under this hypothesis, the general wanted to dispel any impression that letter may have left of his infidelity by bringing his wife to Cambridge. However, he waited several weeks after it appeared in print before suggesting that Martha join him.

On Martha's side, some authors have written that she was motivated to travel north after her brother-in-law Burwell Bassett showed her this item in a newspaper:

Mr. Washington, we hear, is married to a very amiable lady, but it is said that Mrs. Washington, being a warm loyalist, has separated from her husband since the commencement of the present troubles, and lives, very much respected, in the city of New York.¹²

That clipping has not been located in American newspapers from 1775. Frank Moore printed it in his *Diary of the American Revolution*, crediting the Upcott Collection of Newspaper Extracts at the New-York Historical Society.¹³ His citation does not confirm that it was

¹¹ PGW:RW, 1:148-9. Some of Harrison's colleagues in the Congress believed the paragraph was consistent with his personality. George Washington knew Harrison well in Virginia, and Martha might have known him also, so even if they considered the passage as possibly authentic they could have dismissed it as one of Harrison's poor jokes.

¹² Examples of this interpretation appear in Bryan, *Martha Washington*, 188; Roberts, *Founding Mothers*, 87; and Chadwick, *General and Mrs. Washington*, 189. The suggestion might have appeared first in Desmond, *Martha Washington*, 142. There is a hint of it, not tied to this particular news item, in Wharton, *Martha Washington*, 91.

¹³ Moore, *Diary of the American Revolution*, 1:201. Moore linked this item to a false story about Gen. Charles Lee published in the *Pennsylvania Evening Post* on 30 January 1776, but that newspaper did not

printed in 1775, or even in America. In mid-1775 New York was not yet a haven for “warm Loyalists,” so this item most likely dates from after the British military secured that city in late 1776.

7.4 JOHN PARKE AND ELEANOR CUSTIS

When the young widow Martha (Dandridge) Custis married for a second time in 1759, she had two children: four-year-old John Parke “Jacky” Custis (1754-1781) and two-year-old Martha “Patsy” Custis.¹⁴ George Washington became their stepfather and guardian, managing their property and doing his best to raise them as a Virginia patriarch was expected to do.

Jacky Custis was not a studious boy, despite his parents’ hopes. In 1770 his tutor, the Rev. Jonathan Boucher, told his stepfather: “I must confess to you that I never in my Life know a Youth so exceedingly Indolent or so surprizingly voluptuous; one wd suppose Nature had intended him for some Asiatic Prince.”¹⁵ Hoping Jack would learn new habits, the Washingtons sent him to King’s College (later Columbia) in New York at the age of eighteen, when many eighteenth-century boys actually graduated from college. On this trip Jack met Eleanor “Nelly” Calvert, from a prominent Maryland family, and became engaged. George Washington objected that the couple was too young to contemplate marriage: Jack was only nineteen, and Nelly sixteen.

In 1773 Patsy Custis died suddenly of an epileptic fit. Martha was deeply saddened, and George worried about her own health. Jack returned from New York after one semester, never to attempt college again. On the trip home, he stopped at the Calverts’ Mount Airy plantation and married Nelly. The young couple then settled into life on Jack’s own land at Abingdon, up the Potomac River from Mount Vernon, where they could easily visit his mother.¹⁶

On 19 June 1775 as Washington wrote to other male relatives back in Virginia with the news of his military appointment, he sent a particular message to Jack:

my great concern upon this occasion, is the thoughts of leaving your Mother under the uneasiness which I know this affair will throw her into; I therefore hope, expect, & indeed have no doubt, of your using every means in your power to keep up her Spirits, by doing every thing in your power, to promote her quiet—I have I must confess very uneasy feelings on her acct, but as it has been a

include the report about the Washingtons. Miller, *Scandals in the Highest Office*, 29, attributes the “Mrs. Washington” report to *Rivington’s Royal Gazette*, founded in 1777, but that was a New York newspaper and the item obviously originated somewhere else.

¹⁴ John Parke Custis was born on 27 November 1754. Martha Custis’s exact birthdate is unknown, but is thought to be in 1755 or 1756.

¹⁵ Fields, “*Worthy Partner*,” xxii.

¹⁶ Fields, “*Worthy Partner*,” xxii.

kind of unavoidable necessity which has led me into this appointment, I shall more readily hope, that success will attend it, & crown our Meetings with happiness.

At any time, I hope it is unnecessary for me to say, that I am always pleased with your & Nelly's abidance at Mount Vernon, much less upon this occasion, which I think it absolutely necessary for the peace & satisfaction of your Mother; a consideration which I have no doubt will have due weight with you both, & require no arguments to enforce. . . .

You must now take upon yourself the entire management of your own Estate, it will no longer be in my power to assist you, nor is there any occasion for it as you have never discover'd a disposition to put it to a bad use.¹⁷

At that time, Nelly Custis was pregnant with the couple's first child, so her mother-in-law actually visited her. On 6 September Peyton Randolph wrote to Washington: "We heard upon the road that Mrs Washington was very well, she was in Maryland to Visit Mrs Custis, who had got a girl."¹⁸ However, that child died in infancy, and it appears that Nelly's family worried about her emotional and physical health. When Martha Washington brought Jack and Nelly to her sister's home, and then to Cambridge, she may well have been hoping to offer the couple a change of scene.

In April 1776 Mercy Warren penned this impression of Jack and Nelly Custis, whom she had just met in Cambridge:

Mr. Custice is. . . a Sensible, Modest, agreeable Young Man. His Lady, a daughter of Coll. Calverts of Mariland, appears to be as [of] an Engaging Disposition, but of so Extrem Delicate a Constitution that it Deprives her as well as her friends of part of the pleasure which I am persuaded would result from her Conversation did she Enjoy a greater Share of Health. She is pritty genteel, Easey and agreeable, but a kind of Langour about her prevents her being sociable as some Ladies. Yet it is evident it is not owing to that want of Vivacity which Renders Youth agreeable, but to a want of health which a Little Clouds her Spirits.¹⁹

As quoted in section 7.8, by the end of January 1776 Martha Washington correctly guessed that Nelly Custis was pregnant again, so her "Langour" might have been morning sickness.

On 21 August Nelly gave birth to a daughter, Elizabeth Parke Custis (1776-1831). Joseph E. Fields calculated that the Custises must have conceived this child while on the road to Cambridge.²⁰ Jack and Nelly had three more children: Eleanor Parke Custis (1779-1854), Martha Parke Custis (1777-1852), and George Washington Parke Custis (1781-1857). (In

¹⁷ PGW:RW, 1:15.

¹⁸ PGW:RW, 1:423.

¹⁹ MHSC, 72:228-9.

²⁰ Fields, "Worthy Partner," 170.

addition, around 1780 Jack fathered a child eventually named William Custis Costin with Ann Dandridge, an enslaved woman who was also his mother's half-sister.)²¹

In late 1781 Jack Custis went to observe the siege of Yorktown. His son later understood that he worked as a "gentleman volunteer," but his military role is unspecified.²² John Parke Custis contracted "camp fever" and died at the plantation of his uncle on 5 November 1781, with his stepfather Gen. Washington at his side.

As a young widow Nelly Custis lived at Mount Vernon, but in the autumn of 1783 married Dr. David Stuart, a physician from nearby Alexandria. The Stuarts raised Nelly's two older daughters and had seven children of their own born between 1784 and 1796. Nelly's two younger children, Eleanor and "Wash," remained at Mount Vernon to be raised by their paternal grandparents. Nelly died on 28 September 1811 at age fifty-three, at the home of her daughter Martha in the capital city named after her first father-in-law.

7.5 THE MYTH OF JOHN PARKE CUSTIS AS AN AIDE-DE-CAMP

In the mid-1800s, journalist Benson J. Lossing published stories about how John Parke Custis had served his stepfather as an aide de camp during the siege of Boston. Lossing based his statements on a long interview with Custis's son in 1853. G. W. P. Custis was only an infant when his father died in 1781, so his knowledge of his father's work or events during the Revolution was entirely secondhand. Edward Lengel called his statements about his grandfather "an odd mixture of truth, exaggerations, and outright lies."²³

Lossing recorded a single story about Custis's activity as an aide during the siege of Boston:

One of the young [British] officers, an aide to General [Henry] Clinton, who had dreamed of becoming the owner of an American plantation, had. . . cut a vigorous shoot from [Alexander] Pope's willow, for the purpose of planting it on his estate here. It was carefully wrapped, for the preservation of its vitality, in oiled silk. . . .

Washington was in command of the Americans that hemmed in the prisoners upon the little peninsula. Among his aides was his step-son, John Parke Custis, a well-educated young man and polished gentleman in manners. There was frequent intercourse between the chief officers of the two armies under flags of truce, and young Custis was usually employed by Washington as the bearer of his communications. He became well acquainted with, and even attached to the young officer with the willow twig; and, a short time before the British evacuated Boston, in the early Spring of 1776, the disenchanted aide-de-camp presented

²¹ Wienczek, *An Imperfect God*, 84-5, 284-90.

²² Washington biographer Douglas Southall Freeman wrote that "nothing more than family tradition supported the statement of his son [that Jack Custis served as an aide to his father at Yorktown]...but his presence at camp in an unofficial capacity is beyond dispute." Freeman, *George Washington*, 5:401. See also Lefkowitz, *Indispensable Men*, 252-3, 374.

²³ Lengel, *Inventing George Washington*, 35.

that twig to young Custis as a token of friendly regard. Custis, then lately married, owned an estate in Abingdon, Virginia, which he visited soon after the American army withdrew from before Boston, and planted the twig near his house. It, too, grew into a tree as lordly in stature as its parent at Twickenham, and became, it is believed, the progenitor of all the weeping willows in America.²⁴

Referring to Custis as “a well-educated young man” shows how Lossing’s information had been colored by G. W. P. Custis’s admiration for the father he could not remember.

There is no hint in military records that John Parke Custis had a role on his stepfather’s staff in Cambridge or elsewhere. He never received an official appointment, and no documents are in his handwriting. None of the commander’s aides and generals left accounts of working with Custis. Washington was anxious to assure the Continental Congress and other civil authorities that he would never use his military power to become a dictator, so he had good reason to avoid giving authority to his stepson. Washington was also in a battle of wills with Gen. William Howe, trying to get the British commander to address him with a military title instead of “Mr. Washington”; doing business through a young relative with no military commission would surely have undercut his position.

The only “evidence” of Custis’s work as an aide was therefore the tree on his plantation, supposedly “progenitor of all the weeping willows in America.” Experts of various sorts dismissed Lossing’s story about that tree. Horticulturalists doubted that a cutting could survive a transatlantic journey and a New England winter. Historians noted reports that Dr. Samuel Johnson of King’s College had planted a weeping willow in Connecticut decades before the war.

Most telling, on 19 August 1776 George Washington wrote a long letter to Lund Washington about plans for Mount Vernon; among the trees he wanted to plant were “Willow (especially yellow & Weeping Willow, twigs of which may be got from Philadelphia).”²⁵ Weeping willow cuttings were thus already on sale in America.

7.6 GEORGE LEWIS: THE GENERAL’S NEPHEW

George Lewis (1757-1821) was a son of George Washington’s sister Betty, raised in Virginia. On 14 November 1775 his father, Fielding Lewis, wrote to the general:

You will receive this Letter by my Son George who accompanys your Lady, the Winter is so far advanced that I am fearfull she will have a very disagreeable Journey but I expect she will meet with every assistance. . . . George is very desirous of remaining with you as long as you stay with the Army, this I have no objection against provided he can have some little part that will bear his

²⁴ Lossing, “The Weeping Willow,” *Scribner’s Monthly*, 2 (1871), 386.

²⁵ George Washington to Lund Washington, 19 August 1776, *GW*, 5:461. Also printed in *Magazine of History*, 2 (1905), 149.

expences, I am in hopes you will find him diligent in whatever duty is required of him. . .

That letter closed with the news that George's brother Charles, younger by three years, had died eight days before "of an Inflamitary Fever after a short illness."²⁶

Only eighteen, Lewis was apparently skilled as a horseman, which might have been useful along the road, but he could not have been experienced in business or travel. He made little impression in Philadelphia. After the party left the city, the *Pennsylvania Gazette* identified him as "Warner Lewis, Esqr," the name of a better-known Virginia planter and his son. (Other newspapers reprinted that name, and in the next century it was mistakenly transcribed to refer to "the Lady of Warner Lewis." As a result, many biographies of Martha Washington erroneously state that she traveled to Cambridge with "Mrs. Warner Lewis.")²⁷

George Lewis almost certainly lived in the general's headquarters after he arrived in December 1775 and probably for the next three months as well. He may have helped with the administrative tasks. The latest editors of Gen. Washington's papers suggest that Lewis probably wrote a 19 February 1776 letter to Christopher French, a captured British officer who sent a ceaseless stream of complaints to headquarters (see section 13.9); apparently the unsigned copy in the headquarters files is in a handwriting that does not belong to any of the general's known aides.²⁸

In March 1776 Lewis was commissioned as a lieutenant in the commander-in-chief's Life Guard (see section 5.10).²⁹ He served in that unit until December and then became a captain in the 2nd Continental Dragoons. Capt. Lewis was often away from his unit during 1778 and after a chiding letter from his uncle he resigned his commission in February 1779 and went home to Virginia to stay.³⁰

7.7 THE JOURNEY TO CAMBRIDGE

Martha Washington and her relations set out from Mount Vernon on 16 or 17 November. The family rode in George Washington's coach, decorated with his family crest and almost certainly driven by an enslaved and liveried coachman. Martha and the Custises probably brought along personal servants and perhaps postillions—men in livery who rode on the back of the coach. There is, however, no record of which servants from Mount Vernon accompanied the family, or even how many.

²⁶ PGW:RW, 2:371.

²⁷ See newspaper quotations below for the initial error. The nonexistent Mrs. Warner Lewis appears most recently in Bryan, *Martha Washington*.

²⁸ PGW:RW, 3:95.

²⁹ Donald N. Moran, "The Men of the Commander-in-Chief's Guard: Captain George Lewis," *The Liberty Tree*, January 2006.

³⁰ PGW:RW, 2:373.

Lack of documentation has not stopped writers from filling in details. In 1900 Alice M. Longfellow wrote for the *Cambridge Tribune* that Martha Washington traveled “with a coach and four black horses.”³¹ More recently, Emilee Hines’s *More Than Petticoats: Remarkable Virginia Women* said there were “four white horses.”³² In reality, no source states what color the horses were, or how many of them. Similarly, there is no definite evidence that for this journey Martha Washington wore a homespun dress or stopped powdering her hair, as other authors have stated.³³

Gen. Washington worried about how his wife and family would fare on the roads. The coachman could have known the highway to Philadelphia from driving Washington to that city in recent years, and Jack Custis had traveled to New York for college, but New England was new territory for the whole party. Furthermore, the threat of political tumult in New York made the general anxious for his family to bypass that city. On 20 November Washington wrote to his former secretary Joseph Reed, who had just returned to Pennsylvania, about his wife:

I expect she will be in Philadelphia about the time this letter may reach you, on her way hither. As she and her conductor, (who I expect will be Mr. Custis, her son,) are perfect strangers to the road, the stages, and the proper place to cross Hudson’s River, (by all means avoiding New York,) I shall be much obliged in your particular instructions and advice to her. I do imagine, as the roads are bad and the weather cold, her stages must be short, especially as I expect her horses will be pretty much fatigued; as they will, by the time she gets to Philadelphia, have performed a journey of at least four hundred and fifty miles. . .³⁴

Martha Washington indeed reached Philadelphia before that letter. Reed, who was colonel of a militia battalion, had welcomed her to the city with a military escort. The 22 November 1775 *Philadelphia Gazette* described Martha’s arrival this way:

Yesterday the Lady of his Excellency General Washington arrived here, upon her way to New England. She was met at the Lower Ferry by the officers of the different battalions, the troop of light horse, and the light infantry of the 2d battalion, who escorted her into the city.³⁵

On 30 December Martha looked back on her journey in a letter to Elizabeth Ramsay, a family friend from Arlington:

³¹ *Cambridge Tribune*, 21 April 1900, quoted in *American Antiquarian Society Proceedings*, 13:317.

³² Hines, *More Than Petticoats*, 19.

³³ Chadwick, *General and Mrs. Washington*, 190.

³⁴ WGW, 4:106-7. Reed had already mentioned Martha Washington in previous letters to the general which are now lost.

³⁵ This item was reprinted in several newspapers, including Purdie’s *Virginia Gazette*, 8 December 1775.

I did not reach Philad till the tuesday after I left home, we were so attended and the gentlemen so kind, that I am lade under obligations to them that I shall not for get soon. I dont doubt but you have see the Figuer our arrival made in the Philadelphia paper—and I left it in as great pomp as if I had been a very great somebody³⁶

In *Mary and Martha*, Benson J. Lossing stated that Joseph Reed and his family hosted Martha Washington while she was in Philadelphia.³⁷ It is plausible that Reed offered to host the general's family, and that G. W. P. Custis passed on accurate information from his mother and grandmother to Lossing. On the other hand, *Mary and Martha* contains a great deal of unreliable material, and without Reed's letters or other evidence there is no confirmation of the party's accommodations.

Wherever Martha stayed, Continental Congress delegates and local Whigs came to offer their respects. Among her female peers, she must have met Dorothy Hancock, new wife of the President of the Continental Congress, and the wives of prominent Philadelphians. Anne Hollingworth Wharton posited that among Martha's callers were Mary Morgan, wife of the newly appointed Chief Physician of the American army (see section 15.9); her mother, Mary Hopkinson, wife of a Pennsylvania judge; and her sister Elizabeth Duché, wife of the Congress's chaplain.³⁸ Morgan would later revisit Martha in Cambridge.

Some in Philadelphia planned a ball to honor the commander-in-chief's wife. However, the Continental Congress had called for austerity during the war, so others objected to that plan. Underlying the dispute was the Whig fear that the army could give rise to a new aristocracy, and a gala honoring "Lady Washington" exacerbated that worry. The controversy is best traced in the diary of local politician and merchant Christopher Marshall:

21 [November 1775]. In company with Sampson Levy, Thomas Combs, and my son Benjamin, we viewed the inside of the new prison; thence into Chestnut Street, to view the arrival of Lady Washington, who was on her journey to Cambridge, to her husband. She was escorted into the City from Schuylkill Ferry, by the Colonel and other officers, and light infantry of the Second Battalion, and the company of Light Horse, &c.

24. After dinner, as I had heard some threats thrown out, that if the ball assembled this night, as it was proposed, they presumed that the New Tavern would cut but a poor figure to morrow morning, these fears of some commotion's being made that would be very disagreeable at this melancholy time, in disturbing the peace of the City, I concluded, if possible, to prevent, in order to which, I went to Col. [John] Hancock's lodgings, and finding he was not come from Congress, and the time grew short, being three o'clock, I walked up to the State House, in expectation of meeting him. That failing, I requested the door-keeper to call Samuel Adams, which he accordingly did, and he came. I then

³⁶ Fields, "Worthy Partner," 164-5.

³⁷ Lossing, *Mary and Martha*, 137-8.

³⁸ Wharton, *Martha Washington*, 92.

informed him of the account received of a ball, that was to be held this evening, and where, and that Mrs. Washington and Col. Hancock's wife were to be present, and as such meetings appeared to be contrary to the Eighth Resolve of Congress, I therefore requested he would give my respects to Col. Hancock, desire him to wait on Lady Washington to request her not to attend or go this evening. This he promised. Thence I went and met the Committee at the Philosophical Hall, which was large and respectable, being called together for this purpose only to consider the propriety of this meeting or ball's being held this evening in this city, at the New Tavern, where, after due and mature consideration, it was then concluded, there being but one dissenting voice (Sharp Delany), that there should be no such meeting held, not only this evening, but in future, while these troublesome times continued, and a Committee was appointed, immediately to go to inform the directors of this meeting, not to proceed any further in this affair, and also to wait upon Lady Washington, expressing this Committee's great regard and affection to her, requesting her to accept of their grateful acknowledgment and respect, due to her on account of her near connection with our worthy and brave General, now exposed in the field of battle in defence of our rights and liberties, and request and desire her not to grace that company, to which, we are informed, she has an invitation this evening, &c., &c. Came home near six. After I drank coffee, I went down to Samuel Adams's lodgings, where was Col. [Eliphaet] Dyer. Spent some time pleasantly, until Col. [Benjamin] Harrison came to rebuke Samuel Adams for using his influence for the stopping of this entertainment, which he declared was legal, just and laudable. Many arguments were used by all present to convince him of the impropriety at this time, but all to no effect; so, as he came out of humor, he so returned, to appearance.

25. At half past eleven, went to the Committee Room at the Coffee House; came away near two. At this time, Major [John] Bayard, one of the four gentlemen appointed to wait on Lady Washington, reported that they had acted agreeably to directions, that the lady received them with great politeness, thanked the Committee for their kind care and regard in giving such timely notice, requesting her best compliments to be returned to them for their care and regard, and to assure them that their sentiments on this occasion, were perfectly agreeable unto her own.

27. About ten, Lady Washington, attended by the troop of horse, two companies of light infantry, &c., &c., left this City, on her journey to the camp, at Cambridge.³⁹

Harrison was a Virginian while the most active opponents of the ball in the Congress—Samuel Adams and Eliphaet Dyer—were New Englanders. This brief argument reflected the regional disputes that were starting to divide the legislature.

This was probably the first time Martha Washington had faced a political controversy. She handled it as her husband would, making a show of setting aside any personal vanity while not going so far as to criticize those who wished to honor her. Public admiration for her and her husband probably grew. After Martha had arrived at Cambridge, George wrote back to Reed on 15 December with gratitude, adding, “the attention shown

³⁹ Marshall, *Extracts from the Diary*, 51-3.

Mrs. Washington at Philadelphia. . . cannot but be pleasing, although it did, in some measure, impede the progress of her journey.”⁴⁰

On 27 November Martha Washington left Philadelphia with a slightly larger party than when she had arrived, and an equally large military escort:

On Monday last, the Lady of His Excellency General Washington, the Lady of General Gates, J. Curtis [sic], Esq; and Lady, and Warner [sic] Lewis, Esq; set out for Cambridge. They were escorted by the Officers of the First and Second Battalions, the Light Infantry of the First and Third Battalions, and by the Troop of Horse.⁴¹

Elizabeth Gates was the daughter of a British army officer; she and Horatio Gates had been married for more than twenty years (see section 4.12).⁴² The two generals’ wives would quarrel in 1778, but during this journey Elizabeth’s years of living in an army officer’s household probably allowed her to reassure Martha about the conditions she would find in Cambridge.

Joseph Reed had written ahead to Samuel B. Webb, then an aide to Gen. Putnam:

In a few Days after this reaches you the Face of your Camp will be changed—Mrs. Washington, her daughter, and Mrs. Gates set out to-morrow from hence. No bad supply I think in a cold Country where Wood is scarce. They are very agreeable Ladies, & I heartily wish they had better Roads & a pleasanter season for this Journey than I imagine they will have. As the General will now stand in Need of a very gallant Aid-de-Camp, I believe I must make an Interest for you with the Ladies here; if they scruple my judgment, I can refer them to Mrs. Temple & her fair Daughter for further particulars.⁴³

Undoubtedly Reed also wrote to Gen. Washington and others, but those letters do not survive.

In New Jersey the party made a stop at Princeton, letting Martha report to Elizabeth Ramsay: “I see your Brother at Princeton he was very well but did not talk of coming home soon.”⁴⁴ The *New York Gazette* reported that the party reached Newark on the evening of 29 November, once again gaining a ceremonial escort:

Wednesday Evening last [Nov. 29th] arrived at Newark, in their Way to the Provincial Camp at Cambridge, the Lady of his Excellency General Washington, the Lady of Adjutant-General Gates, John Curtis [sic], Esq; and his Lady, and

⁴⁰ WGW, 4:165.

⁴¹ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 29 November 1775.

⁴² Nelson, *General Horatio Gates*, 12.

⁴³ Webb, *Correspondence and Journals*, 1:121.

⁴⁴ Fields, “*Worthy Partner*,” 164-5.

Warner [sic] Lewis, Esq; They were escorted from Elizabeth-Town by the Company of Light Horse, and most of the principal Gentlemen of that Borough; and on their Arrival at Newark, the Bells were set ringing, and Col. Allan's company of Minute-men immediately mounted guard. About 10 o'Clock on Thursday Morning Lady Washington and Lady Gates, &c. escorted by a party of Elizabeth-Town Light Horse, and a great Number of Gentlemen and Ladies from Newark, set out for Dobb's Ferry, in order to pass the North-River at that place, in their Way to the Provincial Camp.⁴⁵

Mary and Martha states that the party went even further north "to the King's Ferry on the Hudson, nearly forty miles above New York City," near Stony Point.⁴⁶ The general's worry about New York being politically unsettled was well founded; in the late fall of 1775 Gov. Tryon had taken refuge on a warship in the harbor, and on 23 November a Patriot mob destroyed the shop and house of printer James Rivington.

Even before Martha left Philadelphia, the general sent Capt. George Baylor south to meet her and escort her to Cambridge. As an aide de camp, Baylor had proved better at riding than at writing (see section 5.9), and he was already acquainted with Mrs. Washington. On 28 November the general sent a note after Baylor with Capt. Joseph Blewer: "I forgot to desire you to hire Horses if more than those you carried should be wanted."⁴⁷ On 29 January 1776 the general reimbursed Baylor £21.5.8 for "Exps. to & from Norwalk on Busi[nes]s."⁴⁸ This item has at times been treated as evidence of a second trip, but Baylor was simply late to file his paperwork for travel in the previous November and December.

Baylor's expense account makes it possible to trace Martha Washington's route through Connecticut and Massachusetts. The captain left Cambridge on 26 November and reached Norwalk on 4 December. There he must have made contact with the party from Virginia and turned back. Thereafter Baylor recorded payments at:

4 December	Norwalk	6.6.
5 December	Fairfield	1.-
6 December	New Haven (including "the hire of three Horses thirty four miles")	5.12.4
	Wallingford	16.6
7 December	Galpins (probably the name of a landlord in the vicinity of Berlin)	12.-
	Hartford	5.6
8 December	Suffield	15.5
	Springfield	6.10
9 December	Kingston	17.—

⁴⁵ *New York Gazette*, 4 December 1775.

⁴⁶ Lossing, *Mary and Martha*, 142.

⁴⁷ PGW:RW, 2:444.

⁴⁸ Revolutionary War Expense Account, 1775-1783, George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress.

Brookfield	6.10	
10 December	Spencer	16.8
Weston	5.11	
11 December	Marlborough	14.8

The larger payments presumably covered the previous night's accommodations, meals, and stable charges, and the smaller ones midday dinners.⁴⁹

The *Connecticut Journal* confirms that the party arrived in New Haven on the evening of 5 December.⁵⁰ Local tradition says that they stayed at the tavern of Isaac Beers, as Gen. Washington and Gen. Lee had done months before, but there is no contemporaneous confirmation of that.⁵¹ The *Massachusetts Spy*, published in Worcester, reported that on 10 December, Martha Washington and Elizabeth Gates “with their attendants passed through this town on their way to Cambridge.”⁵² No New England newspapers described the sort of ceremonial welcome that Mrs. Washington had received in Philadelphia and Newark. Many of the region's fighting men were away at the siege lines, and the populace may not have been so excited about the general. (The Connecticut line had just tried to come home and been stopped as attempted mutineers; see section 8.12.)

Martha Washington and her companions arrived in Cambridge on 11 December. There are conflicting traditions about her reception. According to *Mary and Martha*:

Mrs. Washington's advent was unheralded, for it was not known even to her husband on what day she would arrive, and no hint had been given to any one excepting Robert H. Harrison, the general's secretary, that she was expected. A letter to one of the officers from a friend in Philadelphia, giving him an account of her reception at and departure from that city, had been received on the day before her arrival.

Washington had sent a single member of his staff and an orderly out on the road he knew she would be travelling, a few miles from Cambridge, to guide her to head-quarters. This aide-de-camp had waited at a country inn several days. So unostentatious was her advent, attended only by this aide and the orderly riding some distance ahead of her equipage, that no one suspected the modest carriage with jaded horses bore the wife of the commander-in-chief, until she alighted with her companions at head-quarters, at near sunset on a cold, gray, December day.⁵³

⁴⁹ Washington also reimbursed Baylor on 5 February 1776 “for sundry articles purchased by him for the use of the Family”; this probably refers to Washington's personal family rather than his military “family.” Fitzpatrick connects this purchase to a 1 April 1776 invoice from William Lowder, but the amounts are different. Revolutionary War Expense Account, 1775-1783, George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress.

⁵⁰ *Connecticut Journal*, 6 December 1775.

⁵¹ Crofut, *Guide to the History and the Historic Sites of Connecticut*, 2:587-8.

⁵² *Massachusetts Spy*, 15 December 1775.

⁵³ Lossing, *Mary and Martha*, 143.

The late-day arrival is accurate, but many of the other details in that description are mistaken. Baylor never “waited at a country inn several days.” Stephen Moylan wrote the previous day that the general’s “lady will be here today or to-morrow.”⁵⁴ Gen. Gates must have been just as eager to see his wife as Gen. Washington. G. W. P. Custis might have remembered his mother or grandmother describing a contrast between their earlier elaborate receptions and their arrival in Cambridge.

Martha’s 1897 biographer Anne Hollingsworth Wharton started an opposing tradition: “Their arrival was the signal for great rejoicings in camp.”⁵⁵ That does not seem accurate, either. Soldiers did not make note of Martha Washington’s arrival in their diaries or letters home. The 14 December *New England Chronicle* simply reported:

Last Monday night came to town from Virginia, the Lady of his Excellency General WASHINGTON, and the Lady of the Hon. Adjutant General Gates; accompanied by John Custis, Esq; and Lady, and George Lewis, Esq.

7.8 ESTABLISHING TRADITIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS

In coming to Cambridge, Martha Washington established her custom of spending the winter with her husband wherever he was camped. Indeed, she spent much of the war as close to the commander as seemed safe, going home only for the midyear height of the campaigning season.⁵⁶ This underscored the closeness of the Washingtons’ relationship, and made her popular with the soldiers, not only because her arrivals showed her loyalty to the cause, but also because they meant the major marching and fighting was over for a while.

That popularity took time to establish, but there are a couple of small signs of admiration for Martha Washington during the siege of Boston. The 19 January 1776 *Essex Journal* reported:

On the 7th Instant the sixth daughter of Capt. [Ebenezer] Bancroft, of Dunstable, was baptized by the name of Mary Dandrige, the maiden name of his Excellency General Washington’s lady. The child was dressed in blue and buff, with a sprig of evergreen on its head, emblematic of his Excellency’s glory and the Provincial affection.

This baby had been born on 14 November 1775 in Tyngsboro, and may have been baptized late because her father was away serving in the army.⁵⁷ In another homage, by June 1776 there was a privateer off the Massachusetts coast called the *Lady Washington*.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ *American Archives*, series 4, 4:231.

⁵⁵ Wharton, *Martha Washington*, 96.

⁵⁶ A Mount Vernon research historian estimated that Martha Washington spent “52-54 of the roughly 114 months of the war either with her husband in camp, or nearby”; Henriques, *Realistic Visionary*, 91.

⁵⁷ Mary-Dandrige Bancroft lived until 1859. Holton and Holton, *Farwell Ancestral Memorial*, 43.

Martha Washington described her early experiences in Cambridge to Elizabeth Ramsay on 30 December:

I have waited some days to collect something to tell, but alas there is nothing but what you will find in the papers—every person seems to be cheerfull and happy hear,—some days we have a number of cannon and shells from Boston and Bunkers Hill, but it does not seem to surprise any one but me; I confess I shudder every time I hear the sound of a gun—I have been to dinner with two of the Generals, Lee and Putnam and I just took a look at pore Boston & Charlestown—from prospect Hill Charlestown has only a few chimneys standing in it, there seems to be a number of very fine Buildings in Boston but god knows how long they will stand; they are pulling up all the warfs for firewood—to me that never see any thing of war, the preparations, are very terable indeed, but I endeavor to keep my fears to myself as well as I can.

Your Friends Mr [Robert Hanson] Harrison & [David] Henly are boath very well and I think they are fatter than they were when they came to the Camp—and Capt [George] Baylor is as lusty man to what he was when you see him—the girls may rest satisfied on Mr Harrisons account for he seems two fond of his country to give his heart to any but one of his virginia Friends, there are but two young Ladies in Cambridge, and a very great number of Gentlemen so you may gess how much is made of them—but neither of them is pretty I think,

This is a beautyfull country, and we had a very plasant journey through New england, and had the plasure to find the General very well we came within the month from home to the Camp⁵⁹

Harrison the general's secretary and Baylor his aide were both from the Potomac area. David Henley (1749-1823) was a native of Charlestown who had moved to Virginia to establish himself in business before the war; he returned to Massachusetts and became brigade-major to Gen. Heath.⁶⁰

About a month later, Martha wrote to Anna Maria Bassett:

My Dear Sister

I have wrote to you several times in hopes that would put you in mind of me but I find it has not had its intended affect and I am really very uneasy at not hearing from you and have made all the excuses for you that I can think of but it will not doe much longer if I doe not get a letter by this nights post I shall think myself quite forgot by all my Freinds The distance is long yet the post comes in very regularly every week—

The General myself and Jack are very well Nelly Custis is I hope getting well again, and I beleive is with child, I hope noe accident will happen to her in going back I have not thought much about it yet god knows whare we shall be I suppose

⁵⁸ Maclay, *History of American Privateers*, 72.

⁵⁹ Fields, "Worthy Partner," 164-5. This letter is in the collection of the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York. The "two young ladies" might have been Martha-Fitch Wendell and Abigail Collins (see section 5.3).

⁶⁰ MHSC, series 7, 4:201.

there will be a change soon but how I cannot pretend to say—A few days ago Gen. Clinton, with several companies sailed out of Boston Harbor to what place distant for, we cannot find out. some think it is Virginia he is gone, others to New York—they have been kept in Boston so long that I suppose they will be glad for a place where they may have more room as they cannot get out anyway here but by water—our navy has been very successful in taking their vessels two were taken last week loaded with coles and potatoes wines & several other articles for the use of the troops—If General Clinton is gone to New York,—General Lee is there before him and I hope will give him a very warm reception,—he was sent there some time ago to have matters put in proper order in case any disturbance should happen, as there are many Tories in that part of the world or at least many are suspected there to be unfriendly to our cause at this time—winter has been so remarkable mild the Rivers has never been frozen hard enough to walk upon the Ice since I came here, Mr Dear sister be so good as to remember me to all enquiring friends—give my Duty to my Mam(ma) and love to my brothers and sisters Mr Bassett your Dear Children and self—in which the General Jack and Nelly joins me.⁶¹

Aside from mentioning the ruins of Charlestown, Martha wrote little about her activities, and nothing about people she was meeting for the first time. She mentioned only those military aides who would be familiar to her correspondents in Virginia.

On 19 December the Rev. Dr. Samuel Cooper wrote in his diary:

Went with Mrs. C. ([in] my Horse and chaise) to Cambridge. we waited on General Washington, his Lady Mrs Gates &c. At Head Quarters. Treated with Oranges and a Glass of Wine. invited to dine with them, but excus'd ourselves.

The Coopers departed at about half past one. On 13 February “Mrs. Washington, Gates, Mifflin” called on the Coopers in Waltham in return, but, the minister said, “finding us not at home left their names.” Cooper returned to headquarters on 11 March, “waited on Genl. Washington and Lady, Gates &c. convers'd with the Genl. and Gates about the Manner of our taking Possession of Boston s'd the Enemy leave it.” As a minister, Cooper expected to speak to both the gentleman and lady of the house.⁶²

There are other documentary hints that Martha Washington socialized with the wives of other American military officials, including Elizabeth Gates, Sarah Mifflin, Mary Morgan, and Lucy Knox. In early 1776 Catherine Greene came up from Rhode Island, having just given birth to a boy named after the commander-in-chief.⁶³ At the end of the siege, Mary Morgan remained behind with her husband after most of the army officers and their wives left (see section 15.9). On 9 April she described her boredom to her mother, and

⁶¹ Fields, “*Worthy Partner*,” 167, but that misstates the location of the original document. See the discussion in North, Wedge, and Freeman, *In the Words of Women*, 345.

⁶² Cooper, “Diary of Samuel Cooper,” *American Historical Review*, 6 (1900-01), 328, 333, 336.

⁶³ Carbone, *Nathanael Greene*, 28-9.

asked her to entertain Martha Washington and Nelly Custis when they arrived in Philadelphia because “they were to me as mother and sister, Mrs. Gates the same.”⁶⁴ Otherwise, the interactions of the women in Cambridge left little trace on paper.

Instead, Martha’s best documented social activity is a relationship that appears to have had trouble getting started: with Mercy Warren, wife of James Warren, the Massachusetts Speaker of the House and Continental Army paymaster. Since July, Warren had been hoping to host Gen. Washington for dinner (see section 3.8). Around the start of 1776 Mercy invited Martha to take refuge at the Warrens’ house in Plymouth in case there was a military emergency. On 8 January, Martha wrote a formal reply:

Mrs. Washington presents her respectfull compliments to Mrs Warren, and thanks her most cordially for her polite enquire, and exceeding kind offer—If the Exigency of affairs in this camp should make it necessary for her to remove, she cannot but esteem it a happiness to have so friendly an Invitation as Mrs Warren has given. In the meanwhile, Mrs Washington cannot help wishing for an oppertunity of shewing every civility in her power to Mrs Warren, at Head Quarters in Cambridge—⁶⁵

That letter is far more formal than those Martha Washington wrote to her relatives. In editing her papers, Joseph E. Fields concluded that:

a number of Martha Washington’s letters were drafted by her husband and then copied by her before being dispatched. . . . Different styles of spelling and diction easily distinguish the letters drafted by George Washington from those drafted by Martha. Several examples were found in which the draft copy in the hand of her husband co-exists with the recipient’s copy in the hand of Mrs. Washington.⁶⁶

Fields mentions letters to Mercy Warren as examples of this pattern, and biographer Helen Bryan judged that Martha’s January note, “though written in her own hand, sounds like it was dictated by George or one of his aides.”⁶⁷

It is possible that Mercy Warren, known already as a writer of political satire, intimidated Martha Washington, who had little education and was not confident about her intellect. Mercy Warren apparently remained determined to meet the commander-in-chief’s lady and traveled to Cambridge to do so. On 17 April 1776 Warren wrote to Abigail Adams describing that meeting:

⁶⁴ Quoted in Cambridge, *An Historic Guide to Cambridge*, 88. Morgan’s unpublished letters are at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁶⁵ Fields, “*Worthy Partner*,” 166.

⁶⁶ Fields, “*Worthy Partner*,” xxxi.

⁶⁷ Bryan, *Martha Washington*, 203.

Next Morning I took a ride to Cambridge and waited on Mrs. W[ashingto]n, at a 11 o'clock, where I was Received with that politeness and Respect shown in a first interview among the well bred, and with the Ease and Cordiality of friendship of a Much Earlier date. If you wish to hear more of this Lady's Character, I will tell you the Complacency of her Manners Speaks at once the Benevolence of her heart, and her affability, Cander, and Gentleness Qualify her to soften the hours of private Life, or to Sweeten the Cares of the Hero, and Smooth the Rugged pains of War. I did not dine with her, tho Much Urged. She desired me to Name an Early hour in the Morning when She would send her Chariot and accompany me to see the deserted Lines of the Enemy and the Ruins of Charleston, a Melancholy Sight, the last which Evinces the Barbarity of the Foe and leaves a deep impression of the Sufferings of that unhappy Town. . . . This family which Consists of about 8 or 9 was prevented dining with us the Tuesday following by an Alarm from Newport, but calld and took leave of us the Next day, when I own I felt that kind of pain which arises from Affections when the Object of Esteem is Seperated perhaps forever.⁶⁸

Martha's second surviving note to Warren is dated Tuesday, 2 April as the Washingtons prepared to leave Massachusetts. She regretfully declined a dinner invitation, much as Warren described:

You may be assured that nothing would give the General, or me the greater pleasure than to wait upon you at dinner this day,—but his time is so totally engrossed by applications from one department and another and [missing]—part in which last I am also concerned and busy—as indeed all the Family are—that it is not in any of our powers to accept your polite and friendly Invitation, nor will it be in my power I am perswaded to thank you personally for the polite attention, you have shewn me since I came into this province, I must therefore beg your acceptance of them in this way and at this time and that you will be assur'd that I shall hold them in greatfull remembrance. . . .⁶⁹

Again, the formality of this letter suggests that Martha had help composing it.

7.9 WASHINGTON'S RELIGIOUS ATTENDANCE IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Because Martha Washington was the impetus behind a New Year's church service in Cambridge, it is necessary to discuss her husband's approach to religious worship during the siege of Boston.

On 4 July 1775 as part of the first extensive general orders Washington issued to the army, he wrote:

⁶⁸ MHSC, 72:228-9. This letter also confirms that Abigail Adams had not yet met Martha Washington. Adams encountered Gen. Washington before he moved into the Vassall house, and therefore probably never visited headquarters.

⁶⁹ Fields, "Worthy Partner," 168.

The General most earnestly requires, and expects, a due observance of those articles of war, established for the Government of the army, which forbid profane cursing, swearing and drunkenness; And in like manner requires and expects, of all Officers, and Soldiers, not engaged on actual duty, a punctual attendance on divine Service, to implore the blessings of heaven upon the means used for our safety and defence.⁷⁰

Examining New England soldiers' diaries from that spring suggests that Washington's call for "attendance on divine Service" was unnecessary in many cases. Those diarists not only attended Sunday sermons, but many also wrote down who preached and what Biblical verse the man discussed. Occasionally they wrote about attending other services during the week.⁷¹

The men who kept those diaries might have been more pious than average, but anecdotes support the picture of New England soldiers as fervently religious. There were already chaplains in the camps, though the Continental Congress would not establish their salaries until the following year. After a British cannonball killed one American soldier early in the Battle of Bunker Hill, some of his comrades insisted on gathering to say prayers as he was buried, even though the barrage continued and Col. William Prescott ordered them to get on with building the redoubt.⁷² Such soldiers surely did not need exhortations from their new commander to attend services.

Washington arrived in Cambridge on the afternoon of Sunday, 2 July. He therefore may not have seen how the New England troops behaved on their Sabbath. But he and several of his traveling companions had visited the region before, and they knew that New Englanders had a strong reputation for piety. Indeed, during the First Continental Congress Samuel and John Adams had to fight off suggestions that Bay Colony Congregationalists were intolerant and perhaps even pushing the whole continent to war because of old religious enmities.⁷³

As commander-in-chief, Washington faced different and possibly conflicting pressures when it came to religious observances. As always, he wanted to be perceived as doing what people expected of a gentleman in his position. He wanted to impress his soldiers, some of whom might be suspicious of Anglicans because so many ministers and prominent members of that faith supported the Crown. And he wanted to instill discipline; the general seems to have consistently seen pious and polite habits as contributing to order among the lower officers and enlisted men. On the other hand, Washington also wished the

⁷⁰ WGW, 3:309.

⁷¹ One notable example is the journal of Pvt. James Stevens. To judge by his phonetic spelling, Stevens was not a learned man, but he carefully recorded the details of the many religious services he attended. Stevens, "Revolutionary Journal," *EIHC*, 48:41-71.

⁷² *Newburyport Herald*, 7 June 1825. Humphreys and Swett, *Essay on the Life of . . . Putnam*, 214.

⁷³ DAJA, 2:152, 3:311-2.

New Englanders to unite with Americans of different faiths, and even to make common cause with the Catholics of Canada (see sections 16.6 and 16.10). He was thus a voice for religious tolerance, and his remarks on the value of attending church services stopped well short of endorsing any particular doctrine or form of worship.

In the nineteenth century, Cambridge's churches vied to claim that Gen. Washington had worshipped in their pews. Delivering an address in Cambridge's First Meeting-house (Congregationalist, then Unitarian) on 4 July 1826 Edward Everett stated:

General Washington. . .to *that* seat was wont every Sunday to repair, to join in the supplications which were made for the welfare of his country.

A footnote in the published address identified "*that* seat" as "The first wall pew, on the right hand of the pulpit."⁷⁴

However, in 1858 the Rev. Nicholas Hoppin wrote of his own Christ Church:

There has always been a tradition in Cambridge that General Washington was in the habit of worshipping there; and when the church was repaired in 1825, a pew which he occupied was pointed out by a person who had been present. No written evidence however, . . .has been found.⁷⁵

Washington could not have both gone to the First Meeting-House "every Sunday" and been "in the habit of worshipping" at Christ Church. In fact, there is no other evidence that the general attended any church *regularly* during his period in Cambridge.

When Washington was home at Mount Vernon, he was a vestryman in the local Anglican church, as society and politics required. But he rarely attended services. His personal diaries show instead that he spent most Sundays in fox-hunting, letter-writing, and other business. Paul Leicester Ford found that "in the year 1760 he went [to church] just sixteen times, and in 1768 he went fourteen, these years being fairly typical of the period 1760-1773."⁷⁶

Washington was somewhat more likely to go to church services when he traveled, perhaps to learn more about the communities he was visiting and perhaps to make a proper appearance in front of people who had not met him before. While in Philadelphia for the First Continental Congress in 1774 Washington attended church three Sundays out of seven. He also took that opportunity to sample unfamiliar forms of worship: on one of those Sundays he attended a Quaker meeting, and on another a Catholic mass.⁷⁷ Since Washington did not keep a diary during the war, it is hard to determine his habits as commander-in-chief.

⁷⁴ Everett, *Oration Delivered at Cambridge*, 2.

⁷⁵ Hoppin, *Sermon on the Re-opening of Christ Church*, 51.

⁷⁶ Ford, *True George Washington*, 78.

⁷⁷ Ferling, *Ascent of George Washington*, 78.

Ordinarily Massachusetts men did no business on Sundays, and people were not supposed to travel from one town to another except for religious errands or emergencies. There were town wardens to enforce these laws. However, people recognized that the war required such rules to be relaxed. The Provincial Congress met on Sundays. The general required troops to work on all seven days, telling his brother John Augustine Washington on 27 July 1775 “by incessant labor (Sundays not excepted), we are in a much better posture of defence now, than when I first came.”⁷⁸ That environment made it acceptable for Washington also to do military business on Sundays.

People recorded seeing Washington at few religious services, even after his general orders recommending that officers and men attend. For example, on Sunday, 9 July, Lt. Benjamin Craft wrote in his journal about hearing two ministers, adding the verses they chose and his evaluation of their preaching; he did not mention seeing the general.⁷⁹ The Continental Congress designated 20 July 1775 as a day of public humiliation, fasting, and prayer, and in New England such a holiday meant attending special church services for hours. Dr. James Thacher described the observance in his published journal:

This day is devoted to a Public Fast throughout the United Colonies, by the recommendation of Congress, to implore the Divine benediction on our country; that any further shedding of blood may be averted; and that the calamities with which we are afflicted may be removed. This is the first general or Continental Fast ever observed since the settlement of the colonies. I have been much gratified this day with a view of General Washington. His excellency was on horseback, in company with several military gentlemen.⁸⁰

Thacher had clearly not seen Washington at worship.

There are four dates during and after the siege of Boston when contemporaneous documents describe Gen. Washington attending public religious services. Three of those events had clear political significance, and the fourth came at the request of Martha Washington.

Gen. Washington was present at a sermon in Cambridge’s meetinghouse by a Connecticut chaplain on 3 December 1775. Newspapers reported:

Last Lord’s Day was delivered, at the Rev. Dr. Appleton’s church in this town [Cambridge], in the audience of his Excellency General WASHINGTON, commander in chief of the forces of the United Colonies, &c. &c. &c. and several other General officers, by the Rev. Abiel Leonard, a very animating, spirited and learned discourse to the soldiery, upon the necessity and importance of their

⁷⁸ PGW:RW, 1:184.

⁷⁹ EIHC, 3:53. Craft was stationed at Winter Hill. He “went to hear Mr. [Abiel] Leonard” of Connecticut, and “In the afternoon heard Mr. [John] Allen,” a Boston Baptist.

⁸⁰ Thacher, *Military Journal*, 32-3.

engaging and continuing in the service of America, and of displaying true valour and courage in the defence of her rights and liberties, from the principles of love to GOD and their country, from the inspired address of Joab to the hosts of Israel, in 2 Sam. 2. 12.—“Be of good courage; and let us play the man for our people, and for the cities of our God; and let the Lord do that which seemeth him good.”⁸¹

That sermon was clearly part of Washington’s efforts to get men—particularly Connecticut men—to remain with the army for the rest of the month and to reenlist in the new year. Abiel Leonard (1740-1777) was a minister from Woodstock, Connecticut, who had signed on as chaplain for Gen. Putnam’s regiment.⁸²

On the auspicious Sunday of 17 March 1776 the general attended another of Leonard’s sermons, possibly again in the Cambridge meetinghouse. On 21 March 1776 the *New England Chronicle* published this item toward the end of a series of reports on the British evacuation:

Last Sabbath, a few hours after the enemy retreated from Boston, the Rev. Mr. Leonard preached an excellent Sermon, in the audience of his Excellency the General, and others of distinction, well adapted to the interesting event of the day, from these words in Exodus XIV. 25. *And took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily; so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the Lord fighteth for them against the Egyptians.*

This was another public event with a political message.

On 28 March Boston resumed its tradition of the “Thursday Lecture,” a mid-week religious ceremony delivered by different Congregationalist ministers in rotation. The *Boston Gazette* of 1 April 1776 reported:

Thursday last the Lecture, which was established and has been observed from the first settlement of Boston, without interruption, untill within these few months past was open’d by the Rev’d. Doctor [Andrew] Elliot. His Excellency General Washington, the other General Officers and their suites, having been previously invited, met in the Council Chamber, from whence, preceded by the Sheriff with his Wand, attended by the Members of the Council who had had the Small Pox, the Committee of the House of Representatives, the Selectmen, the Clergy, and many other Gentlemen, they repair’d to the Old Brick Meeting House, where an excellent and well adapted Discourse was delivered from those words in the 33 chap. Isaiah 20 verse.

After Divine Service was ended, his Excellency attended and accompanied as before, return’d to the Council Chamber, from whence they proceeded to the

⁸¹ *Massachusetts Spy*, 8 December 1775.

⁸² On 24 March 1776, Washington and Putnam wrote to Leonard’s congregation, asking it to let him take a leave to serve the army and return at the end of the war; Bay, *Reminiscences of the Bench and Bar of Missouri*, 356, 597-8.

Bunch of Grapes Tavern, where an elegant Dinner was provided at the Publick Expence; after which many very proper and pertinent Toasts were drank.

Joy and Gratitude sat on every Countenance, and smiled in every Eye.
The whole was conducted and concluded to the satisfaction of all.

Again, in attending this ceremony Washington made a public statement about the restoration of normal life in the liberated town, and the press noted his presence for the same reason.

It is of course possible that Washington attended other services during his months in Massachusetts, events which local newspapers did not note because they had no political meaning. However, no private letters or reminiscences from the general, his military staff, or local clergymen indicate that he went to church at other times, with the exception of a New Year's service that his wife desired.

7.10 NEW YEAR'S SERVICE

As Anglicans, the Washingtons observed the holiday of Christmas. Most New England Congregationalists did not, however: on 25 December their shops remained open and their meetinghouses closed. The Washingtons may have observed the Christmas holiday quietly in their home, inviting some top officers to join them. The engineer Col. Jeduthan Baldwin wrote in his diary for that day:

Dind with Genl. Putnam. went upon Leachmor Point at Sunset, & then went to Genl Washing. in the Evning. found & Skind ye 4 drowned oxen.⁸³

Four of Baldwin's draft oxen had drowned off Lechmere's point the previous day, and even an invitation from the general did not stop this New England farmer from getting the most value out of their carcasses.

Martha Washington chose to have a more public religious service to observe the coming of the new year—and as an Anglican, she preferred to worship in Cambridge's Anglican church. By the end of 1775 Christ Church had not hosted such a service for months. Most of the wealthy parishioners, including John Vassall and his family, had left in September 1774. It is not clear when the Rev. Winwood Serjeant himself departed, but on 2 June 1775 the Rev. Dr. Henry Caner of King's Chapel in Boston wrote of his colleague:

Mr. Serjeant of Cambridge has been obliged with his family to fly for the safety of their lives, nor can I learn where he is concealed. His fine church is turned into barracks by the rebels, and a beautiful organ that was in it broke to pieces.⁸⁴

⁸³ Baldwin, *Revolutionary Journal*, 19.

⁸⁴ Hawkins, *Historical Notices of the Missions of the Church of England*, 245. On 3 August Serjeant himself reported that he had fled to Kingston, New Hampshire, and then to Newbury, Massachusetts; Hoppin, *Sermon on the Re-opening of Christ Church*, 42.

Capt. John Chester's account of the Bunker Hill alarm (see section 2.4) confirms that Christ Church was used as a barracks in that month. The organ was probably dismantled to melt its pipes for musket balls.

A later minister and chronicler of Christ Church, the Rev. Nicholas Hoppin, speculated that American soldiers used the building for services in 1775 with a Congregationalist chaplain preaching to one of the regiments stationed inside or nearby. He conceded that there was no positive evidence for this idea.

At the turn of the New Year Christ Church was the site of a special ceremony recorded only in a letter that Gen. Lee's aide-de-camp Capt. William Palfrey wrote to his wife, dated 2 January 1776:

What think you of my turning parson? I yesterday, at the request of Mrs. Washington, performed divine service at the church at Cambridge. There was present the General and lady, Mrs. Gates, Mrs. Custis, and a number of others, and they were pleased to compliment me on my performance. I made a form of prayer, instead of the prayer for the King, which was much approved. I gave it to Mrs. Washington, at her desire, and did not keep a copy, but will get one and send it you.⁸⁵

After examining the manuscript of this letter, Hoppin concluded, "it bears some marks of having been written or sketched on Monday [1 January], and copied on Tuesday... so that the service was probably on Sunday, the last day of the year 1775."⁸⁶

Palfrey's new "form of prayer" offered a transition from the standard British prayer for the king's welfare to one that asked God to "Open his eyes and enlighten his understanding, that he may pursue the true interest of the people over whom thou, in thy providence, hast placed him." Palfrey also added a plea "to bless the Continental Congress," and to

Be with thy servant, the Commander-in-chief of the American forces. Afford him thy presence in all his undertakings; strengthen him, that he may vanquish and overcome all his enemies; and grant that we may, in thy due time, be restored to the enjoyment of those inestimable blessings we have been deprived of by the devices of cruel and bloodthirsty men, for the sake of thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord.⁸⁷

Palfrey's prayer reflected how American feelings of allegiance to the British king were waning, though it did not mark a total break from royal authority (see section 17.11).

⁸⁵ Palfrey, "Life of William Palfrey," *Library of American Biography*, 17:405.

⁸⁶ Hoppin, *Sermon on the Re-opening of Christ Church*, 50.

⁸⁷ Palfrey, "Life of William Palfrey," *Library of American Biography*, 17:405-6.

There are no other eyewitness accounts or newspaper reports of this service. On 30 December 1875 the *Boston Daily Advertiser* published what the newspaper's editors had been told was the text of a letter from Lydia Biddle to Sarah Mifflin, dated 1 January 1776. It described the service at Cambridge's Christ Church in detail. Immediately people wrote to the newspaper expressing doubts about the letter's authenticity. There was no proof either way for many years. In 1905 the Cambridge historian Samuel F. Batchelder learned that the letter had been composed by his aunt Isabella James.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, some authors continued to quote its description.

7.11 TWELFTH NIGHT

The Washingtons' seventeenth wedding anniversary was on 6 January 1776 which was also Twelfth Night. This was another holiday that New England Congregationalists did not observe, but some Anglicans did.

In 1855 Washington Irving wrote in his biography of George Washington:

Not long after her arrival in camp, Mrs. Washington claimed to keep twelfth-night in due style, as the anniversary of her wedding. "The general," says the same informant, "was somewhat thoughtful, and said he was afraid he must refuse it." His objections were overcome, and twelfth-night and the wedding anniversary were duly celebrated.⁸⁹

Irving identified his source only as "the descendant of one who was an occasional inmate there," making the tale's reliability impossible to gauge. The quotation has not turned up in any other published document. It is not clear what Irving meant by "due style" and "duly celebrated." No letter, diary entry, or newspaper item from 1776 describes such an event.

The Longfellow family accepted the Twelfth Night party tradition, and celebrated the date themselves.⁹⁰ Later generations recreated the Washingtons' party, dressing up as historical figures.⁹¹ Samuel Longfellow wrote: "If tradition is trustworthy," the drawing-room "remembers the gayety of a Twelfthnight party given by" Mrs. Washington.⁹² In 1900 Alice M. Longfellow said in the *Cambridge Tribune* that Washington rarely "allowed any merriment at headquarters, or took any part in revelry himself"; but after Martha arrived, "she and her husband celebrated their wedding anniversary, though the general had to be much persuaded by his aides."⁹³

⁸⁸ Batchelder to Morris H. Morgan, 10 May 1905, Christ Church Archives, Box E-05 (1A). Day, *Biography of a Church*, is a more recent book that still cites the "Biddle" letter as a source.

⁸⁹ Irving, *Life of George Washington*, 1:434.

⁹⁰ Longfellow, *Life of Longfellow*, 3:415-6.

⁹¹ Hollister, *Famous Colonial Houses*, 124.

⁹² Longfellow, *Life of Longfellow*, 1:260.

⁹³ *Cambridge Tribune*, 21 April 1900, quoted in *American Antiquarian Society Proceedings*, 13:317.

Those Longfellow family celebrations undoubtedly helped to color the description of the Washingtons' Twelfth Night party published in the "Diary of Dorothy Dudley" in *The Cambridge of 1776*.⁹⁴ Some later authors did not realize that diary was historical fiction and quoted its description of the party.⁹⁵ Another, shorter description appeared in Anne Hollingsworth Wharton's 1897 biography of Martha: "the sixth of January was duly celebrated with cake, candles, and rejoicing."⁹⁶ As a result, the Twelfth Night tradition became firmly established in accounts of the Washingtons' stay at Cambridge.

It is not even clear, however, that the couple celebrated their wedding anniversaries. Scholars have looked for such festivities. On 6 January 1773 there was a higher than average number of guests at Mount Vernon, and the editors of George's diaries speculated that they "may have been celebrating Twelfth Night and Twelfth Day." But his entry makes no mention of that holiday or the couple's anniversary.⁹⁷ Washington's papers do not mention Twelfth Night. In his general orders for 6 January 1776 he actually clamped down on what might have been holiday leniency:

The General is informed, that a Custom hath prevailed, at the Main Guard, in Cambridge, of permitting prisoners to be absent, upon their parole; he therefore orders a total Stop be put to this practice for the future; Any Officer offending herein, will be immediately put in Arrest, and tried for disobedience of orders.⁹⁸

There is also no record of the Washingtons celebrating their anniversary in other military camps, such as Valley Forge and Morristown.

The tradition of the Washingtons' Twelfth Night in Cambridge therefore hangs entirely on the thread of Irving's unidentified and unspecific informant.

7.12 DEPARTURE

As described in section 7.8, Martha received and visited Mercy Warren during her busy last days in Cambridge, and proposed a trip to see the Charlestown ruins. Because she had not had smallpox, she faced personal danger in going into Boston. Nevertheless, merchant John Andrews wrote that the general's lady and the Custises were among his guests for dinner there on 2 April.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Gilman, *Cambridge of 1776*, 55-6.

⁹⁵ Works citing the "Dudley diary" on this point range from Atherton, "When Washington Lived in Cambridge," *Harvard Illustrated Magazine*, 1 (1900), 111-22, to Volo and Volo, *Daily Life during the American Revolution* (2003).

⁹⁶ Wharton, *Martha Washington*, 98.

⁹⁷ DGW, 3:154.

⁹⁸ WGW, 4:217.

⁹⁹ MHSP, 8:411.

On 4 April 1776 the general left for the south and steward Timothy Austin closed his accounts for headquarters, so Martha had departed by then.¹⁰⁰ The Washingtons traveled separately. The general moved through Rhode Island with part of the army, including the new commander-in-chief's guard with George Lewis as a lieutenant. Martha and the Custises went by coach through Hartford, stopping along the way when Jack felt sick.¹⁰¹ The family arrived in New York on 17 April three days after the general.¹⁰² Martha moved into her husband's new headquarters while the Custises returned home to Virginia.

George Washington revisited Cambridge as President-elect in 1789, but Martha Washington's time in the John Vassall house from December 1775 to April 1776 was her only visit to Massachusetts.

¹⁰⁰ Following Wharton, *Martha Washington*, 105, some authors say Martha departed on 20 April, but she was in New York by that date.

¹⁰¹ Brady, *Martha Washington*, 110.

¹⁰² Fields, "Worthy Partner," 168.

An Account of Expenses to, and from Norwich
 Novemb^r. 26 1775

		£	s	d
To Cash	at Hartford	8	0	0
	at Sudbury	9	4	
N ^o 29	at Norwich	12	6	
	at Shrewsbury	5	8	
#	Water	4	2	
28	Spencer	17	8	
To Smith		1	6	
#	Brookfield	2		
29	Lingston	18	2	
#	Springfield	5	6	
30	Suffield	14	4	
	Windsor	8	9	
#	Hartford	4	6	
31	Weatherfield	9	9	
	Mansfield	5		
2	New Haven	1	2	8
3	Stratford	1		
4	Fairfield		6	6
#	Norwalk	1		
5	Fairfield			
6	New Haven my expenses			
	to and fro, and the hire of three Horses	5	12	4
	thirty four miles	16	6	
#	Wallingford	12		
7	Galpin	5	6	
#	Hartford	15	5	
8	Suffield	6	10	
#	Springfield	17		
9	Lingston	6	10	
#	Brookfield	16	8	
10	Spencer	5	11	
#	Wester	14	8	
11	Malborough			
		£	21	5
			8	

Received of His Excellency General Washington the above
 sum, this thirtyth of January 1776
 George Bayler

Figure 5. Martha Washington's New England itinerary, as preserved in the expense

CHAPTER EIGHT

REMAKING THE TROOPS INTO A CONTINENTAL ARMY

On 4 July 1775 in his first extensive general orders, Gen. George Washington announced:

The Continental Congress having now taken all the Troops of the several Colonies, which have been raised, or which may be hereafter raised for the support and defence of the Liberties of America; into their Pay and Service: They are now the Troops of the United Provinces of North America; and it is hoped that all Distinctions of Colonies will be laid aside; so that one and the same Spirit may animate the whole, and the only Contest be, who shall render, on this great and trying occasion, the most essential service to the great and common cause in which we are all engaged.

It is required and expected that exact discipline be observed, and due Subordination prevail thro' the whole Army, as a Failure in these most essential points must necessarily produce extreme Hazard, Disorder and Confusion; and end in shameful disappointment and disgrace.¹

These orders emphasized discipline, hierarchy, and national unity. In his nine months in Massachusetts, Washington strove to inculcate those values into the American army. While he was frequently disappointed in the imperfect results, the general's work to establish the Continental Army was probably the most long-lasting effect of his time in Cambridge.

8.1 THE NEW ENGLAND ARMY

The first American troops surrounding Boston were militia regiments—part-time soldiers assembling for emergency duty during the alarm of 18-19 April 1775. They were a cross-section of New England society, drawn from nearly all men aged sixteen to sixty.² Militiamen did not sign up for long service, and almost immediately after the battle the American ranks began to thin as individuals and entire companies went home.

After a plea from Gen. Artemas Ward to act quickly (see section 2.3) on 23 April the Massachusetts legislature voted for an army of 13,600, soon to be organized in regiments of ten companies, each of 59 men, including officers.³ Those companies were smaller than their

¹ PGW:RW, 1:54.

² The militia companies also included black men. Although provincial laws excluded them from military duty, it is clear that in practice men of African ancestry, both free and enslaved, mustered with militia companies from the first day of the war. See chapter 9 for more discussion.

³ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 148, 152.

militia predecessors, allowing some men to stay home without forcing companies to disband or combine with others.⁴ Col. John Stark and his New Hampshire regiment enlisted directly under Ward; this would become a problem when his home colony commissioned its own general in June (see section 4.2). Connecticut recruited 6,000 men in six regiments. Rhode Island sent 1,500.⁵ By late May 1775 the combined New England army in the field officially amounted to about 16,000 men.⁶

That army differed from the militia in that the officers and men signed on for the rest of the year—or until early December in the case of the Connecticut troops. Such a long commitment changed the makeup of the force. While many militia officers sought army commissions, and some militia regiments signed up for army service nearly *en masse*, other men went home to support their families and maintain their farms. They were ready to muster for another emergency, but did not want to be away from their homes, fields, and workshops for the next several months. The men who enlisted in the army were therefore less representative of New England society, disproportionately young and possessed of little property. They saw better prospects in the army than at home, or wanted the adventure of military service, or could be spared by their families.

Traditionally, New Englanders built armies by “raising for rank” within their local communities. A leading citizen would sign up a certain number of men to serve under him; that number would determine his rank as an officer. Thus, an ensign was expected to enlist about a dozen men, a lieutenant twenty to thirty, a captain fifty.⁷ Though the Provincial Congress and other legislatures issued the official regimental commissions, they did so after an aspiring colonel provided documentation that he and his junior officers had enlisted a regiment’s worth of men. Most companies were therefore made up of men from the same community, who had all—officers and enlisted men—grown up and worked and worshiped together. Soldiers expected to serve under the officers they had signed up with, not just any officers. Officers depended, at least initially, on their men for their rank.

The besieging army did not have uniforms or tight administration. What regularity they had was the product of New Englanders’ shared assumptions and traditions rather than official protocols. Gen. John Thomas’s wing operated somewhat independently of Gen. Ward and the Committee of Safety in Cambridge, as shown in the June discussions of whether to seize the Dorchester peninsula (see section 4.4). Benjamin Thompson of Woburn,

⁴ Martyn, *Artemas Ward*, 95.

⁵ Golway, *Greene Nathanael Greene*, 46.

⁶ Martyn, *Artemas Ward*, 108.

⁷ Anderson, “The Hinge of the Revolution: George Washington Confronts a People’s Army, July 3, 1775,” is an excellent study of the different outlooks of Washington and his troops during the siege. Good longer studies of the mindset of American soldiers during the war include Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed*; Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War*; Martin and Lender, *A Respectable Army*; and Galvin, *The Minute Men*.

writing to the British command in invisible ink in early May, referred to “the Rebel Army (if that mass of confusion may be called an Army).”⁸ The Rev. William Emerson of Concord perceived the same irregularity in early July, but took a more positive view:

’Tis also very diverting to walk among ye Camps. They are as different in their form as the Owners are in their Dress, and every tent is a Portraiture of ye Temper and Taste of ye Person that incamps in it. Some are made of Boards, some of Sailcloth, and some partly of one and partly of the other. Others are made of Stone and Turf, and others again of Brick and others Brush. Some are thrown up in a hurry & look as if they could not help it—meer necessity—others are curiously wrought with doors & windows, done with Wreaths and Withes in manner of a Basket. Some are ye proper Tents and Markees that look as ye regular Camp of ye Enemy.

These are Roadislanders, who are furnished with Tent Equipage. . .and everything in ye most exact english Taste. However I think that the great Variety of ye American Camp is upon ye Whole rather a Beauty than a Blemish to ye Army.⁹

Despite that lack of regularity, the New England army had kept the British troops from moving down the Boston Neck and inflicted enough damage during the Battle of Bunker Hill to discourage further attempts to advance. Of course, Gen. George Washington could not be sure of the British commanders’ plans when he arrived, and he did not like what he found.

8.2 WASHINGTON’S INITIAL IMPRESSIONS

According to refugee diarist Ezekiel Price, by 5 July 1775 “General Washington had visited the camps, and the soldiers were much pleased with him.”¹⁰ The feeling was not mutual. To begin with, the army was smaller than the new commander had expected from the enthusiastic reports of New Englanders at the Continental Congress. It took a great effort to determine just how small (see chapter 5.2); on 10 July he told the Massachusetts legislature that it had raised only 9,000 troops, and “I cannot estimate the present Army at more than Fourteen thousands five hundred Men capable of Duty.”¹¹ On that same day, Washington’s first report back to the Congress described the weaknesses he perceived:

Upon finding the Number of Men to fall so far short of the Establishment, & below all Expectation I immediately called a Council of the general Officers, whose opinion as to the Mode of filling up the Regiments; & providing for the present Exigency, I have the Honour of inclosing, together with the best Judgment we are able to form of the ministerial Troops. From the Number of

⁸ Brown, *Rumford*, 36-7. For more on Thompson’s espionage, see section 13.3.

⁹ Emerson, *Diaries and Letters*, 80.

¹⁰ *MHSP*, 7:194.

¹¹ PGW:RW, 1:103-4.

Boys, Deserters, & Negroes which have been listed in Troops of this Province, I entertain some Doubts whether the Number required can be raised here; and all the General Officers agree that no Dependence can be put on the Militia for a Continuance in Camp, or Regularity and Discipline during the short time they may stay. This unhappy & devoted Province has been so long in a State of Anarchy, & the Yoke of ministerial Oppression has been so heavily laid on it, that great Allowances are to be made for Troops raised under such Circumstances. The Defficiencies of Numbers, Discipline & Stores can only lead to this Conclusion, that their Spirit has exceeded their Strength. . . . It requires no military Skill to judge of the Difficulty of introducing Discipline & Subordination into an Army while we have the Enemy in View, & are in daily Expectation of an Attack, but it is of so much Importance that every Effort will be made which Time & Circumstance will admit.¹²

Washington did not think those “Boys, Deserters and negroes” would be reliable soldiers, and hoped to dismiss most of them. He also wanted the Congress to understand the handicaps he labored under.

Gen. Washington soon decided that the problem with the New England army was that its officers were too close to the enlisted men, and not strict enough. On 27 July he told his brother John Augustine Washington: “I found a mixed multitude of People here, under very little discipline, order, or Government.”¹³ After a few more weeks, the new general was even more frank in a 20 August 1775 letter to his cousin and caretaker Lund Washington:

The People of this Government have obtained a Character which they by no means deserved—their Officers generally speaking are the most indifferent kind of People I ever saw. I have already broke one Colo. and five Captain’s for Cowardice, & for drawing more Pay & Provision’s than they had Men in their Companies. there is two more Colos. now under arrest, & to be tried for the same Offences—in short they are by no means such Troops, in any respect, as you are led to believe of them from the Accts which are published, but I need not make myself Enemies among them, by this declaration, although it is consistent with truth. I dare say the Men would fight very well (if properly Officered) although they are an exceeding dirty & nasty people. had they been properly conducted at Bunkers Hill (on the 17th of June) or those that were there properly supported, the Regulars would have met with a shameful defeat; & a much more considerable loss than they did. . . ; it was for their behaviour on that occasion that the above Officers were broke, for I never spared one that was accused of Cowardice but brot ’em to immediate Tryal.¹⁴

The commander-in-chief was not alone in perceiving that problematic officers were holding down the potential of the enlisted men. On 20 July Charles Lee wrote to Congress delegate Silas Deane:

¹² PGW:RW, 1:90-1.

¹³ PGW:RW, 1:183.

¹⁴ PGW:RW, 1:335-6.

We shall then have time to bring your Troops into some arrangement and introduce some method amongst 'em. Yours, Connecticut, are already tolerable, the Rhode Islanders still better; but amongst the Massachusetts hitherto has reign'd an absolute anarchy. As to the materials (I mean the private men), they are admirable—young, stout, healthy, zealous, good humor'd and sober. Had we but uniforms, compleat arms, more Gentlemen for officers, I really believe a very little time and pains wou'd render 'em the most invincible Army that have appear'd since the first period of the Roman Republic in the world.¹⁵

Lee's political belief in militia forces may have colored his impressions, but he shared his commander's conclusion that they needed to improve the local officer corps.

At the end of August Gen. Washington took aim at the New England officer system in a letter to Congress delegate and friend Richard Henry Lee:

...it is among the most difficult tasks I ever undertook in my life to induce these people to believe that there is, or can be, danger till the Bayonet is pushed at their Breasts; not that it proceeds from any uncommon prowess, but rather from an unaccountable kind of stupidity in the lower class of these people; which believe me prevails but too generally among the Officers of the Massachusetts part of the Army who are nearly of the same Kidney with the Privates; and adds not a little to my difficulties; as there is no such thing as getting Officers of this stamp to exert themselves in carrying orders into execution—to curry favour with the men (by whom they were chosen, & on whose Smiles possibly they may think they may again rely) seems to be one of the principal objects of their attention.

I submit it therefore to your consideration whether there is, or is not, a propriety in that Resolution of the Congress, which leaves the ultimate appointment of all Officers below the Rank of Generals to the Governments where the Regiments originated, now the Army is become Continental? To me it appears improper in two points of view; first, it is giving that power and weight to an Individual Colony, which ought, of right, to belong only to the whole, and next it damps the spirit & ardour of Volunteers from all but the four New England Governments as none but their people have the least chance of getting into Office. . . .

I have made a pretty good Slam among such kind of officers as the Massachusetts Government abound in since I came to this Camp having Broke one Colo. and two Captains for Cowardly behaviour in the action on Bunker's Hill—Two captains for drawing more provisions and pay than they had men in their Company—and one for being absent from his Post when the Enemy appeared there, and burnt a House just by it. Besides these, I have at this time one Colo., one Major, one Captn, & two Subalterns under arrest for tryal—In short I spare none & yet fear it will not all do, as these People seem to be too inattentive to every thing but their Interest.¹⁶

The general thus suggested that the Congress grant him the power to appoint officers, subject to its later approval, which would have greatly increased his authority over the ranks. Wary

¹⁵ Webb, *Correspondence and Journals*, 1:84.

¹⁶ PGW:RW, 372-3.

of granting the military too much independence and of alienating its New England members, the Congress held back from that step. As a result, Washington still had limited authority over his officers. The general had to make the best of the army he had.

8.3 IMPOSING DISCIPLINE

Gen. Washington put great value on discipline, both in his own behavior and in how he treated the men under his command. On 10 November 1775 he sent this counsel to a new officer back in Virginia:

The best general advice I can give, and which I am sure you stand in no need of, is to be strict in your discipline; that is, to require nothing unreasonable of your officers and men, but see that whatever is required be punctually complied with. Reward and punish every man according to his merit, without partiality or prejudice; hear his complaints; if well founded, redress them; if otherwise, discourage them, in order to prevent frivolous ones. Discourage vice in every shape, and impress upon the mind of every man, from the first to the lowest, the importance of the cause, and what it is they are contending for.¹⁷

The new commander-in-chief's belief in the value of discipline was apparent almost as soon as he took command.

In a letter begun on 7 July, only five days after Washington arrived in Cambridge, the Rev. William Emerson reported:

There is great overturning in ye Camp as to Order & Regularity. New Lords, new Laws.

The Generals Washington and Lee, are upon the Lines every Day, new Orders from his Excellency are read to ye respective Regiments every Morning after Prayers, ye strictest Government is taking Place: great Distinctions made between Officers and Soldiers, everyone is made to know his Place and keep in it, or be immediately triced up and received (not 1000) but 30 or 40 Lashes, according to ye Nature of his Crime.¹⁸

Emerson made a point of contrasting corporal punishment in the British military (up to a thousand lashes) with the more humane American approach.

On 10 July Gen. Washington signed off on one man's sentence "to ride the wooden horse fifteen minutes." However, that was the last time that corporal punishment appeared in his orders. The Continental Congress's articles of war arrived soon after, and it limited punishments to "degrading, cashiering, drumming out of the army, whipping not exceeding

¹⁷ Washington to William Woodford, 10 November 1775, PGW:RW, 2:346.

¹⁸ Emerson, *Diaries and Letters*, 79.

thirty-nine lashes, fine not exceeding two months pay of the offender, imprisonment not exceeding one month.”¹⁹

Judge Advocate General William Tudor noted another significant difference between the Continental Army’s system of discipline and the British: “In the British Army, General Courts Martial sit only in capital Cases, or when a commissioned officer is to be try’d. . . . the strict Discipline which prevails among regular Troops, render General Court Martial but rarely necessary.” In contrast, many American enlisted men received full trials, requiring the presence of several officers—and, Tudor added, himself.²⁰

Despite those limits and safeguards, there was no doubt that Washington emphasized military discipline more than his predecessor. Ward had established a general court-martial system on 13 June and told colonels to create regimental courts-martial eight days later. But his general orders mentioned only one defendant by name: Capt. John Callender, whose trial had been demanded by Gen. Israel Putnam (see chapter 10.4). In contrast, Washington’s general orders reported individual trials and outcomes, and the appropriate punishments, starting on his second full day in Cambridge. Adjutants delivered those orders to their regiments each morning, and officers passed them on to the soldiers. No one in the army could miss the new general’s desire for law and order.

Richard Henry Lee assured Washington that the Congress stood behind his attempts to instill greater military discipline in the army:

I believe there is not a Man of common sense and who is void of prejudice, in the world, but greatly approves the discipline you have introduced into the Camp; since reason and experience join in proving, that, without discipline Armies are fit only for the contempt and slaughter of their Enemies.²¹

Furthermore, Washington tried to temper military justice with mercy where he thought soldiers had learned their lessons. He often commuted or reduced punishments at the last moment, and reserved the harshest treatment for men he considered ringleaders. Generally he was less forgiving with officers than with enlisted men.

8.4 RULES OF CONDUCT

Though Charles Lee perceived “an absolute anarchy” among the Massachusetts regiments when he arrived, Gen. Ward had issued plenty of rules. He had ordered that “all tumults and disorders in camp be suppressed,” that “the field-officers of the day take special care to suppress all grog-shops,” that “all profane cursing and swearing, all indecent language and

¹⁹ JCC, 2:119.

²⁰ PJA, 3:128. See also Tudor to Washington, 23 August 1775, PGW:RW, 1:354-5.

²¹ Richard Henry Lee to Washington, 26 September 1775, PGW:RW, 2:52.

behavior, will not be tolerated,” that “no lewd women come into the camp.” Ward’s orders reflected the values of the New England Puritans:

All officers see that their men attend upon prayers morning and evening, and also the service on Lord’s day, with their arms and accoutrements, ready to march in case of an alarm. That no drum beat after the chaplain is on the stage, and the men immediately attend.²²

Few Virginia planters and British army officers valued prayer so much, especially when there was work to be done. Washington’s orders for 4 July also required “a punctual attendance on divine service,” but only of “Officers, and Soldiers, not engaged on actual duty.”²³ The new commander put greater value on “incessant labour (Sundays not excepted)” to strengthen the fortifications.²⁴

Facing the challenges of managing thousands of generally young men, many away from their homes for the first time, the new commander issued many orders on behavior. For example, the general orders for 22 August 1775 addressed how the soldiers swam in the Charles River:

The General does not mean to discourage the practice of bathing, whilst the weather is warm enough to continue it; but he expressly forbids, any persons doing it, at or near the Bridge in Cambridge, where it has been observed and complained of, that many Men, lost to all sense of decency and common modesty, are running about naked upon the Bridge, whilst Passengers, and even Ladies of the first fashion in the neighbourhood, are passing over it, as if they meant to glory in their shame: The Guard and Centries at the Bridge, are to put a stop to this practice, for the future.²⁵

Some incident must have led to this new rule though there is no other record of it.

On 3 October Washington’s general orders took aim at gambling as a source of tension within the American camp:

Any Officer, non Commission’d Officer, or Soldier, who shall hereafter be detected playing at toss-up, pitch & hustle, or any other Games of chance, in or near the Camp or Villages bordering on the encampments; shall without delay be confined and punished for disobedience of orders.

“Toss up,” “pitch,” and “hustle” were all games that involved flipping or tossing coins, with winners walking away with the pot. A postscript was added to these orders: “The General does not mean by the above Order, to discourage sports of exercise and recreation, he only

²² General orders, 14 and 30 June 1775, MHSP, 15:107, 112.

²³ PGW:RW, 1:55.

²⁴ Letter to John Augustine Washington, 27 July 1775, PGW:RW, 1:184.

²⁵ PGW:RW, 1:346.

means to discountenance and punish Gaming.”²⁶ Late that month there was a wrestling match between the troops on Winter Hill and those on Prospect Hill; picking the best wrestlers meant “Evening prayers omitted” in Capt.-Lt. Nathan Hale’s regiment, but there was “no wager laid.”²⁷

On 26 February 1776 the general orders went further:

All Officers, non-commissioned Officers and Soldiers are positively forbid playing at Cards, and other Games of Chance; At this time of public distress, men may find enough to do in the service of their God, and their Country, without abandoning themselves to vice and immorality.²⁸

Washington’s own ordinary recreations at home included playing at cards; as recently as July 1773 he had ordered six dozen of the “very best” packs from London for Mount Vernon.²⁹ But wartime demanded sacrifice, or at least proper public behavior.

8.5 EMPHASIZING HIERARCHY

Alongside discipline, Gen. Washington valued and promoted military hierarchy, particularly distinctions between officers and enlisted men and between high-ranking officers and their subordinates. In his 10 November letter of advice to a new colonel, Washington wrote

Be easy and condescending in your deportment to your officers, but not too familiar, lest you subject yourself to a want of that respect, which is necessary to support a proper command.³⁰

The new commander’s emphasis on rank and deference conflicted with the relative egalitarianism of New England society.

Other gentlemen from the middle and southern colonies disliked the behavior they found in the New England army. James Wilkinson, a young officer from Maryland who arrived at Cambridge in September, later wrote

On entering the camp near Boston, I was struck with the familiarity which prevailed among the soldiers and officers of all ranks; from the colonel to the private, I observed but little distinction; and I could not refrain from remarking to a young gentleman with whom I made acquaintance, that the military discipline

²⁶ PGW:RW, 2:81-2.

²⁷ Johnston, *Nathan Hale*, 171.

²⁸ PGW:RW, 3:362.

²⁹ Washington to Robert Cary, 10 July 1773, PGW: Colonial, 9:274. See also Ford, *The True George Washington*, 198-9.

³⁰ Washington to William Woodford, 10 November 1775, PGW:RW, 2:347.

of their troops was not so conspicuous as the civil subordination of the community in which I lived.³¹

Arrivals from the south were also surprised by the makeup of the New England regiments, as Washington himself had been. “Such Sermons, such Negroes, such Colonels, such Boys and such Great Great Grandfathers,” volunteer Jesse Lukens (1748-1775) marveled to a friend in Pennsylvania.³²

As late as October 1776 Joseph Reed would complain to his wife back in Pennsylvania about New Englanders’ typical outlook and habits:

To attempt to introduce discipline and subordination into a new army must always be a work of much difficulty, but where the principles of democracy so universally prevail, where so great an equality and so thorough a levelling spirit predominates, either no discipline can be established, or he who attempts it must become odious and detestable—a position which no one will choose. It is impossible for any one to have an idea of the complete equality which exists between the officers and men who compose the greater part of our troops. You may form some notion of it when I tell you that yesterday morning a Captain of Horse, who attends the General from Connecticut, was seen shaving one of his men on the parade near the house.³³

In historians’ retellings, Reed’s anecdote about an officer shaving an enlisted man shifted to take place during the siege of Boston rather than months later, with Washington shocked by the sight rather than Reed.³⁴

The “General from Connecticut” was undoubtedly Israel Putnam, and his lack of concern about distance between officers and enlisted men appears in a recollection of the siege recounted by Pvt. Jacob Francis:

I recollect General Putnam more particularly from a circumstance that occurred when the troops were engaged in throwing up a breastwork at Lechmere Point across the river, opposite Boston, between that and Cambridge. The men were at work digging, about five hundred men on the fatigue at once. I was at work among them. They were divided into small bands of eight or ten together and a noncommissioned officer to oversee them. General Putnam came riding along in uniform as an officer to look at the work. They had dug up a pretty large stone which lay on the side of the ditch. The general spoke to the corporal who was standing looking at the men at work and said to him, “My lad, throw that stone up on the middle of the breastwork.”

The corporal, touching his hat with his hand, said to the general, “Sir, I am a corporal.”

³¹ Wilkinson, *Memoirs of My Own Times*, 1:16.

³² Jesse Lukens to John Shaw, Jr., 16 September 1775, *American Historical Record*, 1 (1872), 549.

³³ *American Archives*, series 4, 2:994.

³⁴ The change might have started with Montross, *Rag, Tag, and Bobtail* (1952), 40.

“Oh,” said the general, “I ask your pardon, sir,” and immediately got off his horse and took up the stone and threw it up on the breastwork himself and then mounted his horse and rode on, giving directions, etc.³⁵

After 1861 authors told the same story about Washington himself, reflecting America’s increasingly democratic values. In 1775 however, he wished to *widen* the gap between officers and enlisted men, not narrow it.

Within the locally raised regiments of the New England army, everyone knew which men were officers. Most of those soldiers had, after all, lived in the same regions for years, and had chosen to serve under their officers out of respect for their social standing, political leadership, and military experience. Some observers disliked this approach. In a 4 November 1775 intelligence report for the British command, Benjamin Thompson went on for three paragraphs about the lack of discipline in the American camp, attributing it to “the doctrines of independence and levellism” and “the great degree of equality as to birth, fortune, and education,” particularly among neighbors in the same company.³⁶

Gentlemen were of course more worried about “levellism” than common soldiers. Two of John Adams’s former law clerks reported that the New England army immediately welcomed the new general’s approach. On 7 July Jonathan Williams Austin wrote:

The Massachusetts Soldiers in particular are very deficient in almost every thing but Courage. The Officers and privates are so far on a Levell, that the former do not receive the Respect and Obedience which is due to their Station. Some Regiments however are much preferable to others. And since the Arrival of General Washington, things wear a quite different Aspect. He has in a manner inspired Officers and Soldiers with a taste for Discipline and they go into it readily, as they all venerate and love the General.³⁷

William Tudor wrote at more length on 19 July:

Since the Arrival of the continental Generals the Regulations of the Camp have been greatly for the Better. Matters were in a very poor Way before. The General [Ward] was despiz’d. There was little Emulation among the Officers, and The Soldiers were lazy, disorderly and dirty. The Genls. Washington, Lee and Gates are respected and confided in, and their Orders strictly and cheerfully executed

³⁵ Dann, *The Revolution Remembered*, 392-3. The story was retold about Washington himself, and a log, in *Merry’s Museum*, *Parley’s Magazine*, *Woodworth’s Cabinet*, and *the Schoolfellow*, 42 (1861), 148, followed by many reprintings. For an example of a high-ranking New England officer undertaking manual labor in order to *encourage* other officers to do so, see the anecdote about Col. Rufus Putnam in Graydon, *Memoirs of His Own Time*, 147-8.

³⁶ Stopford-Sackville, *Report on the Manuscripts*, 2:15. Thompson, who had no prestigious birth, large fortune, or higher education, had made himself a gentleman by ambitiously courting a wealthy wife and a friendly governor. He would go on to gain the title of Count Rumford from the Elector of Bavaria.

³⁷ PJA, 3:66.

and obeyed. And I hope we shall soon be able to meet British Troops on any Ground. The Freedom which our Countrymen have always been accustomed to, gives them an Impatience of Controul, and renders it extreem difficult to establish that Discipline so essential in an Army, which to be invincible, ought to be a grand Machine moved only by the Commander of it. Discipline will not inspire Cowards with Courage, but it will make them fight.³⁸

By and large, it appears that such observations were accurate. The New England troops did not rebel against the new commander-in-chief's new measures except when they conflicted with their own contractual understanding of military service (see section 8.12).

As a stranger to the region, an advocate of a national army, and a believer in hierarchy, Washington wanted a more visible denotation of rank. His 23 July 1775 general orders stated:

As the Continental Army have unfortunately no Uniforms, and consequently many inconveniences must arise, from not being able always to distinguish the Commissioned Officers, from the non Commissioned, and the Non Commissioned from the private; it is desired that some Badges of Distinction may be immediately provided, for Instance, the Field Officers may have *red* or *pink* colour'd Cockades in their Hatts: the Captains *yellow* or *buff*: and the Subalterns *green*. They are to furnish themselves accordingly—The Serjeants may be distinguished by an Epaulette, or stripe of *red Cloth*, sewed upon the right shoulder; the Corporals by one of *green*.³⁹

Washington's general orders repeated this system on 20 August 1776 for the "officers who have lately come into Camp" around New York, showing it was still in place a year later.⁴⁰

Another of Washington's concerns was higher pay for officers, which he made two arguments for: it would encourage reenlistment, and it would allow those gentlemen to distinguish themselves from the troops. On 21 September Washington sent the Congress a petition from subalterns, or junior officers, for higher pay, adding this endorsement:

I am of Opinion the allowance is inadequate to their rank and Service and is one great source of that Familiarity between the Officers and Men, which is incompatible with Subordination and Discipline. Many valuable Officers of these ranks, finding themselves unable to support the character and appearance of Officers, I am informed will retire, as soon as the Term of Service is expired, if there is no Alteration.

Later that month Gen. Schuyler wrote from Ticonderoga with a similar concern: "I shall only observe that the pay of the officers is so amazingly low, that I fear few gentlemen

³⁸ PJA, 3:79-81.

³⁹ PGW:RW, 1:158.

⁴⁰ PGW:RW, 6:88.

will engage for the winter service.”⁴¹ On 10 October Gen. Lee added his thoughts in a letter to Dr. Benjamin Rush:

the Congress must give better pay to their Officers, for the present miserable pittance will not tempt men of liberal notions to engage in the Service—it is indeed a fortune to the low wretches who live like the Common Soldiers and with the Common Soldiers, but men who chuse to preserve the decent distance of officers, must have a decent subsistence, and without this distance no authority or respect can be expected.⁴²

Lee’s republicanism did not mean he wished to erase the distinction between genteel officers and common soldiers.

The Congress, meanwhile, worried about the expense of the army as the war in Massachusetts seemed to drag on. When the legislature sent three members to meet with Washington in Cambridge (see section 17.6), its instructions for them expressed a wish to see “the pay of the men lessened to five dollars per calendar month, if this may be done with safety.”⁴³ The conference at headquarters in October therefore took up both questions of pay:

What should be the pay of the Officers & Privates that of some of the former in the present Army being it is apprehended too low & that of the latter too high? That of the Privates unanimously agreed cannot be reduced & agreed by a Majority that raising the Pay of the Officers would be inconvenient & improper—It was also unanimously agreed that, under the present Circumstances the Proposition of lowering the Pay of the Troops would be attended with dangerous Consequences.⁴⁴

The best Washington could manage in follow-up conversations on 24 October was for the committee to recommend that the Congress provide tents for the officers as well as the men in the upcoming campaign, thus relieving the officers of one expense they would traditionally have had to shoulder themselves.⁴⁵

However, the need to recruit a new army for 1776 induced the Congress to change its mind on junior officers’ pay.⁴⁶ On 17 November Washington’s general orders announced new salaries for subalterns:

⁴¹ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:839.

⁴² NYHSC, 4:212.

⁴³ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:848.

⁴⁴ PGW:RW, 2:191.

⁴⁵ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1163.

⁴⁶ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1906.

Representations having been made to the Continental Congress, of the great inequality in the pay of the Officers and Soldiers of this Army; the first being lower than usual, and less than was ever given to Commission'd Officers, in any other service, whilst that of the Soldiers is higher—The Congress have been pleased to increase the pay of Captain to Twenty six and $\frac{2}{3}$ Dollars—of a First Lieutenant to Eighteen Dollars, of a Second Lieutenant and Ensign, to thirteen and $\frac{1}{3}$ Dollars pr Kalender Month each; to take place so soon as the New Regiments are compleated, to their full Compliment of men. The Congress have given this encouragement to the Captains, and Subalterns, (whose pay was lower in proportion) with a View to impress upon their minds, a due Sense of Gratitude; at the same time that it is intended to enable them to support the Character and Appearance of Gentlemen and Officers, which will add much to the reputation of the Regiments, and can-not but be pleasing to every man in it.

Immediately before this item was news of the dismissal of a lieutenant for “defrauding some of his men of their Blanket money, and of attempting to defraud others of their Coat Money.”⁴⁷ Thus, while the enlisted men did not receive a raise, they were assured that their pay was higher than “in any other service” and that the commanders were protecting their interests.

8.6 NATIONALIZING THE ARMY

A third value that Gen. Washington emphasized in his command was national unity, putting the interests of the thirteen colonies at the Congress ahead of both personal interests and regional pride. From the beginning he sought to create a truly Continental Army, with officers and men from many regions integrated into one fighting force.

Among the steps Washington took to further that end were placing brigadier generals and their troops under commanders from other regions (see section 4.13), and welcoming administrators, officers, and volunteers from colonies outside New England (see section 8.7). He also tried to promote uniformity in the soldiers' dress. In his first letter to the Congress on 10 July 1775 Washington wrote:

I find the Army in general, & the Troops raised in Massachusetts in particular, very deficient in necessary Cloathing. Upon Inquiry there appears no Probability of obtaining any Supplies in this Quarter. And on the best Consideration of this Matter I am able to form, I am of Opinion that a Number of hunting Shirts, not less than 10,000 would in a great Degree remove this Difficulty in the cheapest & quickest Manner. I know nothing in a speculative View more trivial, yet if put in Practice would have a happier Tendency to unite the Men & abolish those Provincial Distinctions which lead to Jealousy & Dissatisfaction.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ PGW:RW, 2:388-9.

⁴⁸ PGW:RW, 1:88-9.

A “hunting shirt” was a loose coat worn over one’s waistcoat. It had the advantages of not having to be as tightly tailored as standard men’s coats and of being associated with backwoods marksmen.

The Congress approved that plan and told Washington to pass his wishes on to the colonial governments, which were responsible for clothing their own troops. On 4 August, for example, the general wrote to Gov. Jonathan Trumbull of Connecticut:

My Last Letter from the Honble Continental Congress recommends my procuring from the Colonies of Rhode Island & Connecticut a quantity of Tow Cloth for the purpose of making Indian or Hunting Shirts for the Men, many of whom are destitute [of] Cloathing. A Pattern is herewith sent you and I must request you to give the necessary Directions throughout your Government that all the Cloath of the above kind may be bought up for this Use & suitable Persons set to work to make it up, As soon as any Number is made worth the Conveyance, you will please to direct them to be forwarded. It is designed as a Species of Uniform—both cheap & convenient.⁴⁹

Three days later Washington’s general orders made another recommendation:

It is in an especial manner recommended to the Commanding Officer of each regiment, to see that a store of shoes and shirts, are laid in for the Men, as those are at all times necessary. The General also recommends it to the Colonels, to provide Indian Boots, or Leggings, for their men, instead of stockings; as they are not only warmer, and wear longer, but (by getting them of a colour) contribute to uniformity in dress; especially, as the General has hopes of prevailing with the Continental Congress, to give each Man a hunting shirt.⁵⁰

Washington’s hopes for “uniformity in dress” foundered on the scarcity of supplies. By 21 September he was writing to Congress:

The great Scarcity of Tow Cloth in this Country, I fear, will totally disappoint us, in our Expectations of procuring Hunting Shirts. Govr Cooke informs me, few or none are to be had in Rhode Island, & Govr Trumbull gives me little Encouragement to expect many from Connecticut.⁵¹

With the arrival of autumn, and the council of war reluctant to approve an assault on Boston (see section 11.5), Washington had to arrange for new clothing not just for uniform appearance but for warmth. He made standard clothing a part of his plans for the new Continental Army of 1776, announcing on 28 October:

⁴⁹ PGW:RW, 1:244.

⁵⁰ PGW:RW, 1:260-1.

⁵¹ PGW:RW, 2:29.

It is recommended to the Non-Commissioned Officers and Soldiers, whose pay will be drawn in Consequence of last Thursday's orders (especially to those, whose Attachment to the glorious Cause in which they are engaged, and which will induce them to continue in the service another Year) to lay out their money in Shirts, Shoes, Stockings and a good pair of leather Breeches; and not in Coats, and Waistcoats, as it is intended that the new Army shall be cloathed in uniform. To effect which; The Congress will lay in Goods, upon the best terms they can be bought, anywhere for *ready Money*, and will sell them to the Soldiers without any profit, by which means, a Uniform Coat, and Waistcoat will come cheaper to them; than any other Cloathing of the like kind can be bought—A number of Taylors will be immediately sett to work, to make Regimentals for those brave Men, who are willing at all hazards, to defend their invaluable rights and privileges.⁵²

Again, there turned out to be not enough cloth to carry out this plan as Washington hoped.

In the British army, all the infantry regiments wore red coats, but those coats differed from one regiment to the next in their “facings” (lapels, cuffs, and waistcoats), buttons, buttonholes, and other decorative stitching. On 4 November the Congress took some step toward that regularity by voting:

That Cloathing be provided for the new army by the Continent, and paid for, by stoppages out of the soldiers wages, at 1 2/3 Dollars per month, that as much as possible of the cloth for this purpose be dyed brown, and the distinctions of the Regiments made in the facings.

That a man who brings a good new blanket into the camp, be allowed 2 dollars therefor, and take it away at the end of the campaign.⁵³

The “stoppages” meant that the men's pay would be docked to pay for the clothing—which would be an adequate exchange as long as the Continental government could actually provide that clothing. Otherwise, the soldiers received less take-home pay—when they got paid at all.

Seeking a “regular” army, Gen. Washington wanted the Continental regiments to have the same sort of distinctions as British ones, and hoped that at least the entire officers' corps would be in uniform. On 1 November he told the officers who were planning to reenlist “not to run themselves to any expense in procuring Coats and Waistcoats until they are arranged into proper Corps and the Uniforms of the Regiment they belong to ascertained; which will probably be in a few days.”⁵⁴ Twelve days later, the commander told the colonels “to settle, as soon as possible, with the Qr Mr General, the Uniform of their respective regiments; that the buttons maybe properly number'd, and the work finished

⁵² PGW:RW, 2:247.

⁵³ JCC, 3:323.

⁵⁴ PGW:RW, 2:277.

without delay.”⁵⁵ That still did not produce the answers he needed, so on 17 November he ordered the colonels to meet with the quartermaster in Cambridge the next morning.⁵⁶

On 11 December Gen. Washington’s orders braided together the values of reenlisting for the national cause, distinguishing officers from men, and producing a uniform appearance:

To reward and encourage military Merit, The Congress thought proper to increase the pay of the Captains and Subalterns of the Continental Army; and as uniformity and decency in dress, are essentially necessary in the Appearance and regularity of an army, his Excellency recommends it earnestly to the Officers to put themselves in a proper uniform—The Field Officers of each of the new Corps, will set the example, by cloathing themselves in a Regimental of their respective Corps; and it is not doubted but the Captains and Subalterns, will immediately follow the example: The General by no means recommends, or desires Officers to run into costly, or expensive Regimentals, no matter how plain, or coarse, so they are but uniforms in their Colour, Cut and Fashion: The Officers belonging to those Regiments whose uniforms are not yet fixed upon, had better delay making their Regimentals until they are.⁵⁷

The following 20 February the commander extended the regimental uniformity to the “colours,” or flags, that each regiment carried: “those Colours should, if it can be done, bear some kind of similitude to the Uniform of the regiment to which they belong.” (See section 12.14 for more on these flags.) Once again, he urged the colonels to send their specifications to the quartermaster as quickly as possible “as the season is fast approaching for taking the field.”⁵⁸

Some of the new Continental Army’s units made a reasonably uniform appearance; a Philadelphian praised Col. John Glover’s regiment in particular (see section 2.6). But Gen. Washington still saw a motley collection of clothing, with the colonies late in supplying more. He was back to the solution of the year before: “It is recommended to those Corps which are not already supplied with Uniforms, to provide hunting Shirts for their men.”⁵⁹

More troublesome for Gen. Washington than the lack of a national uniform was the lack of national spirit. The commander was dismayed by rivalries among the colonies, and disappointed by any sign of officers encouraging local loyalties over the Continental cause. On 21 September he complained to Congress:

⁵⁵ PGW:RW, 2:357.

⁵⁶ PGW:RW, 2:389-90.

⁵⁷ PGW:RW, 2:528-9.

⁵⁸ PGW:RW, 3:347.

⁵⁹ General orders, 6 May 1776, PGW:RW, 4:217.

The Mode, in which the present Army has been collected, has occasioned some Difficulty, in procuring the Subscription of both Officers & Soldiers to the Continental Articles of War. Their principal Objection has been, that it might subject them to longer Service, than that for which they engaged, under their several provincial Establishments. It is in vain to attempt to reason away the Prejudices of a whole Army, often instill'd, &, in this Instance, at least encouraged by the Officers from private & narrow Views.⁶⁰

On 8 November 1775 he lamented the situation more frankly to his just-departed secretary, Joseph Reed:

Connecticut wants no Massachusetts-man in their Corp—Massachusetts thinks their is no necessity for a Rhode Islander to be Introduced amongst them—& New Hampshire Says, it's very hard that her valuable & experienced Officers (who are willing to serve) should be discarded, because her own Regiments, under the New Establishment cannot provide for them.⁶¹

Such complaints were not due simply to colonial pride, but also to the New England military system, which relied on personal acquaintance and commitments.

Washington's own second-in-command, Gen. Artemas Ward, shared his worries about the challenge of reenlisting men for the new year, but he saw the root of the problem coming from the top, not the bottom. On 30 October he wrote to John Adams:

I am in great concern about the raising a new army, for the Genius of this people is different from those to the southward. Our people are Jealous, and are not Inclineable to act upon an Implisit faith, they Chuse to see and Judge for themselves. They remember what was said of them by some that came from the Southward last summer, which makes them backward in Inlisting or manifesting a willingness to Inlist.⁶²

The reenlistment offered Washington a chance to push the army more toward national values, but he was fighting against strong traditions that he did not fully understand.

8.7 RIFLEMEN FROM PENNSYLVANIA, VIRGINIA, AND MARYLAND

One of the Continental Congress's first moves toward creating an army, even before it appointed a commander-in-chief, was to commit to raising ten companies of riflemen—two from Virginia, two from Maryland, and the rest from Pennsylvania.⁶³ Before the end of the month, the Congress added two more companies of Pennsylvanians, reflecting the

⁶⁰ PGW:RW, 2:24-5.

⁶¹ PGW:RW, 2:335.

⁶² PJA, 3:235.

⁶³ JCC, 2:89.

enthusiasm that recruiters encountered.⁶⁴ All the riflemen from that colony were made into a battalion under the command of Col. William Thompson (1736-1781). The rest remained in independent companies under the command of captains: Michael Cresap (1742-1775) and Thomas Price (1732-1795) of Maryland, and Hugh Stephenson (d. 1776) and Daniel Morgan (1736-1802) of Virginia.⁶⁵ Along with Washington himself and his aides, these companies embodied the commitment of the Middle Colonies to what had previously been a New England cause.

Riflemen were distinguished from ordinary Continental infantry by their weapons: early hand-made rifles, rather than muskets. The barrels of these guns were made to impart a spin to a musket ball when the gunpowder went off, making it fly straighter and farther than the balls simply pushed out of musket barrels. The results astonished observers. An 1 August letter from Fredericktown, Maryland, about Capt. Cresap's company said:

Yesterday the company were supplied with a small quantity of powder from the magazine, which wanted airing, and was not in good order for rifles; in the evening, however, they were drawn out to show the gentlemen of the Town their dexterity at shooting. A clapboard, with a mark the size of a dollar, was put up; they began to fire off-hand, and the bystanders were surprised, few shots being made that were not close to or in the paper. When they had shot for a time in this way, some lay on their backs, some on their breast or side, others ran twenty or thirty steps, and firing, appeared to be equally certain of the mark. With this performance the company were more than satisfied, when a young man took up the board in his hand, not by the end, but by the side, and holding it up, his brother walked to the distance, and very coolly shot into the white; laying down his rifle, he took the board, and holding it as it was held before, the second brother shot as the former had done. By this exercise I was more astonished than pleased. But will you believe me, when I tell you, that one of the men took the board, and placing it between his legs, stood with his back to the tree while another drove the centre.⁶⁶

Rifles also had disadvantages, however: they took longer to reload than muskets, and were not fitted with bayonets. As a result, riflemen were most useful as what modern armies call snipers.

The riflemen brought their reputation of being backwoods hunters, and their dress added to that impression. Pvt. John Joseph Henry later described his rifle company for his children:

The principal distinction between us [and the New England men], was in our dialects, our arms, and our dress. Each man of the three [rifle] companies bore a

⁶⁴ JCC, 2:104.

⁶⁵ Morgan had been a teamster during Braddock's march, so he and Washington may have met then, but there was a wide social gap between them at the time.

⁶⁶ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:2.

rifle-barreled gun, a tomahawk, or small axe, and a long knife, usually called a “scalping knife,” which served for all purposes, in the woods. His under-dress, by no means in a military style, was covered by a deep ash-colored hunting shirt, leggings, and moccasins, if the latter could be procured. It was the silly fashion of those times for riflemen to ape the manners of savages.⁶⁷

On top of their dress, the rifle companies attracted attention during their northward marches by their behavior. Pvt. George Morison recorded his company tarring and feathering “a violent tory” in Easton, Pennsylvania, and another in Litchfield, Connecticut.⁶⁸ Pvt. Aaron Wright added that in Litchfield “the men took a girl out of jail.”⁶⁹

With their patriotic enthusiasm, and men inured to long hunting treks, the rifle companies made remarkable time in traveling to Massachusetts; Morgan’s company marched from Frederick County, Virginia, in only three weeks. The first riflemen arrived in Cambridge from the region of Reading, Pennsylvania, on 18 July.⁷⁰ As of 13 August Maj. Robert Magaw of Philadelphia reported that there were four Pennsylvania companies deployed under Gen. Lee, three more “in the meeting House waiting for Tents,” and the last on the way; “The Marylanders and Virginians are under Gen. Ward at Roxbury.”⁷¹

In his military journal, surgeon’s mate James Thacher recorded a New Englander’s impressions of these new arrivals:

They are remarkably stout and hardy men; many of them exceeding six feet in height. They are dressed in white frocks or rifle-shirts, and round hats. These men are remarkable for the accuracy of their aim, striking a mark with great certainty at two hundred yards distance. At a review, a company of them, while on a quick advance, fired their balls into objects of seven inches diameter, at the distance of two hundred and fifty yards. They are now stationed on our lines, and their shot have frequently proved fatal to British officers and soldiers who expose themselves to view, even at more than double the distance of a common musket-shot.⁷²

Many Americans felt that the riflemen could determine the campaign.

While Washington had been dismayed to find the New England army significantly smaller than had been reported, with many regiments at less than full strength, several rifle companies actually brought *more* men than the sixty-eight that Congress had budgeted for. On 21 September the commander reported:

⁶⁷ Roberts, *March to Quebec*, 301.

⁶⁸ Roberts, *March to Quebec*, 507-8.

⁶⁹ *Historical Magazine*, 6:209.

⁷⁰ *American Archives*, series 4, 2:1722.

⁷¹ Magaw to Carlisle Committee of Correspondence, 13 August 1775, *Magazine of Western History*, 4:674.

⁷² Thacher, *Military Journal*, 33-4.

By the returns of the Riffle Companies, & that Battalion, they appear to exceed their Establishment very considerably. I doubt my Authority to pay these extra Men, without the Direction of the Congress; But it would be deemed a great Hardship wholly to refuse them, as they have been encouraged to come.⁷³

The Congress eventually decided that Washington should dismiss the worst marksmen with enough pay for them to get home.

Almost immediately after arriving, the riflemen went into the fight, as recorded by the Massachusetts lieutenant Paul Lunt:

Sunday, [July] 30th.—Last night, twelve o'clock, a party of General Washington's Riflemen crept within the Regulars' sentries, but being discovered were fired upon, which occasioned a skirmish between them and the Regulars' main guard. Killed of the Regulars seven, took two prisoners: one corporal of the Riflemen was killed or taken. Between the hours of twelve and one o'clock we had an alarm, and we were all paraded, and there was an immediate cry for volunteers to follow such officers as would head them, when all our company marched out to follow the officers wherever they went, and some part of every company in the regiment. We marched up into the fort, and were ordered [to] ground our arms and wait for orders: the alarm was occasioned by the Regulars intrenching upon Charlestown Common. The intent of the volunteers was to go down and beat them off; but upon further consideration the generals thought it not prudent to proceed, they being under cover of their cannon upon Bunker's Hill and the floating batteries and the ships. The generals ordered us to return, and be ready at a moment's warning: [we] then returned according to orders.

Monday, 31st.—Last night at ten o'clock another alarm; paraded immediately, marched up to the fort, but were ordered back. This was occasioned by a brisk fire at the lower sentries. The Regulars came out of their fort to drive in our sentries; but all was soon quieted, and [we] were ordered back. Turned in and got to sleep; at one o'clock were alarmed by the cry of "Turn out,—for God's sake, turn out." We paraded again and manned our lines, and there remained until after sunrise: the greatest part of the night the air was filled with the roaring of cannon and the cracking of small arms upon all sides. The Riflemen had engaged them upon Charlestown Common from two o'clock till after sunrise, killed a number, recovered five guns, and lost not a man. . . . This day two of our men were killed by a cannon-ball from Bunker's Hill: they kept a continual fire all day from the hill and the floating batteries. At about four o'clock P.m. they sent out a flag of truce, desiring cessation of arms for three days; but it was not granted. One of the Riflemen shot at the flag-staff of the truce, and cut it off above his hand. Between sunset and dark our people killed fourteen of the Regulars which came out in search of their dead.

Tuesday, August 1, 1775.—Orders given from the general for scouting parties to fire at all times whenever they have opportunity. . . .

⁷³ PGW:RW, 2:25-6.

Wednesday, 2d.—Had a good night's rest last night; all still this morning; some firing upon both sides at sunset, but killed none upon our side; some Regulars were seen dragged away, supposed to be dead.⁷⁴

Pvt. Samuel Bixby, stationed in Roxbury, recorded a more dramatic version of 2 August:

One of Genl. Washington's riflemen was killed by the regulars to day & then hung! up by the neck! His comrades seeing this were much enraged, & immediately asked leave of the Genl. to go down and attack them. He gave them permission to go and do as they pleased. The Riflemen marched immediately & began operations. The regulars fired at them from all parts with cannon and swivels, but the Riflemen skulked about, and kept up their sharp shooting all day. Many of the regulars fell, but the riflemen lost only one man.

A flag of truce came from Boston for a cessation of hostilities six days, but our Genl. would not agree to it, & sent it immediately back.⁷⁵

Bixby was the only person on the siege lines to report a riflemen's body treated this way, and his account is contradicted by Lunt's statement that the British "killed none upon our side." Less than two weeks later Washington complained to Gen. Thomas Gage about the treatment of American prisoners but said nothing of such an atrocity. In September, Gage's secretary Stephen Kemble recorded with some bemusement that "a report has been spread that one of their Deserters, a Rifle Man, had been Hanged, which checked the spirit of their People coming over to us."⁷⁶ It therefore seems likely that Bixby heard an unfounded rumor. It may have arisen from the Pennsylvanians' concern about their comrade captured on 30 July; Cpl. Walter Cruise was being kept "close confined, and allowed nothing but bread and water," in the Boston jail.⁷⁷

On the British side, officers remonstrated about Americans sniping at sentries, body details, even the flag of truce. Those complaints naturally made the riflemen popular with their comrades. Maj. Magaw reported that a British deserter had said "the enemy are much terrified on Acct of the Rifle Men," and told colleagues back in Pennsylvania:

You will think me vain should I tell you how much the Rifle Men are esteemed. Their Dress, their Arms, their size, Strength and Activity, but above all their great eagerness to Attack the Enemy, entitle them to the first Ranks. The Hunting Shirt here is like a full suit at St. James. A Rifle Man in his dress may pass Sentinels & go

⁷⁴ MHSP, 12:196-7. See also Caleb Haskell diary for the same dates, Roberts, *March to Quebec*, 467-70.

⁷⁵ MHSP, 14:291.

⁷⁶ NYHSC, 16:58.

⁷⁷ Edes, *Peter Edes*, 13. Cruise was exchanged in January 1777 and then met the commander-in-chief; Washington to Col. John Patton, 24 January 1777, PGW:RW, 8:74.

almost where he pleases, while Officers of the Other Regiments are stopped. Since we came here the enemy dare not show their heads.⁷⁸

Washington had already suggested dressing the entire army in hunting shirts (see section 8.6). The new troops no doubt added to the appeal of that possible uniform: would the British fear that every soldier they spotted might be a marksman?

On 4 August Gen. Washington curtailed the riflemen's shooting—not because he disapproved of their results but because he had discovered that the Continental Army had a severe shortage of gunpowder. He ordered all Americans to stop firing unless absolutely necessary (see section 11.4). Some of the riflemen continued to be active. On 16 August Maj. Magaw took nearly three hundred Pennsylvanians up to Cape Ann after rumors of a naval attack there. Another fifty participated in the Continental advance to Plowed Hill (see section 11.2), with one—"Poor Billy Simpson"—being fatally wounded. Finally, at the end of the month nearly all the Pennsylvanian companies deployed against a possible British counterattack that never came.⁷⁹

In early September three rifle companies under captains Daniel Morgan, William Hendricks, and Matthew Smith—about three hundred men in all—joined Col. Benedict Arnold's march to Quebec (see section 16.10).⁸⁰ As the troops headed north through Maine, Morgan refused to travel with, and thus take orders from, Lt. Col. Christopher Greene. Morgan insisted that Washington had promised him that he could answer only to Arnold. The commander-in-chief would later say this was untrue, but Arnold avoided trouble by sending Morgan on ahead.⁸¹

In January headquarters received the news that Col. Arnold had been wounded and Capt. Morgan captured, along with many other soldiers. On 30 March 1776 three privates were back at headquarters: "Curts. Birmingham, Wm. Burns, & Timothy Feely, Riflemen from Quebec."⁸² William Burns and Timothy Feeley had enlisted in Cumberland and Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, respectively. Curtis Birmingham, listed elsewhere as "Bramingham," may have been Curtis Binnagle, a Londonderry-born man in the same company as Feeley.⁸³ All three men had been captured in the assault on Quebec, and all three

⁷⁸ *Magazine of Western History*, 4:674.

⁷⁹ Magaw to Carlisle Committee of Correspondence, 29 August 1775, *Magazine of Western History*, 4:676.

⁸⁰ Martin, *Benedict Arnold*, 115.

⁸¹ Martin, *Benedict Arnold*, 121.

⁸² Washington and Kitman, *George Washington's Expense Account*, 50, 177.

⁸³ *Pennsylvania Archives*, 10:25, 40.

had joined a British regiment to get out of prison—and then evidently deserted.⁸⁴ Gen. Washington advanced these riflemen £6 so they could return home.

8.8 THE RIFLEMEN'S MUTINY

Back on the siege lines, most of the riflemen were idle since they were exempt from the duties of musket-toting regular soldiers. As gentleman volunteer Jesse Lukens described: “Our camp is separate from all others about 100 yards—all our Courts martial and duty was separate—we were excused from all working parties, Camp Guards, and Camp duty”.⁸⁵ The Pennsylvanian troops also enjoyed unusual leniency from some of their officers, and that led to trouble, according to Lukens:

this indulgence together with the remissness of discipline and care in our young officers had rendered the men rather insolent for good soldiers—they had twice before broke open our Guard House and released their companions who were confined there for small crimes, and once when an offender was brought to the Post to be whipped, it was with the utmost difficulty they were kept from rescuing him in the presence of all their Officers—they openly Damn'd them and behaved with great insolence;—however the Col. was pleased to pardon the man and all remained quiet—but on Sunday last [10 September] the Adjutant having confined a Serjeant for neglect of duty and murmuring, the men began again and threatened to take him out.⁸⁶

The adjutant was Lt. David Ziegler (1748-1811), born in Heidelberg—one of several German immigrants or sons of immigrants in the Pennsylvania battalion's officer corps.⁸⁷ Some men thought he was too strict; Pvt. Wright referred to “the unreasonable confinement of a sergeant by the adjutant.”⁸⁸

Lukens wrote that Lt. Ziegler responded to the enlisted men's threats to release their sergeant by confining another man. That produced a bigger reaction, which eventually required Washington's personal attention:

The Adjutant being a man of spirit seized the principal mutineer and put him in also, and coming to report the matter to the Col., where we all sitting after dinner were alarmed with a huzzaing and upon going out found they had broke open the Guard House and taken the man out. The Col. and Lieut. Col. with several of the

⁸⁴ NEHGR, 6:134. Cartmell, *Shenandoah Valley Pioneers*, 102-3. As prisoners, Bramingham and Feeley were listed as part of Capt. Morgan's company instead of Capt. Smith's. British-born captives were reportedly told that if they did not enlist in the Crown forces they would be sent to England and put on trial. Feeley later reenlisted in the Continental Army as a junior officer.

⁸⁵ *American Historical Record*, 1:547.

⁸⁶ *American Historical Record*, 1:547-8.

⁸⁷ Ziegler would be one of the founders of Cincinnati; see Katzenberger, *Major David Ziegler*.

⁸⁸ *Historical Magazine*, 6:209.

Officers and friends seized the fellow from amongst them and ordered a guard to take him to Cambridge at the Main Guard which was done without any violent opposition, but in about 20 minutes 32 of Capt. [James] Ross's company with their loaded rifles swore by God they would go to the Main Guard and release the man or lose their lives and set off as hard as they could run—it was in vain to attempt stopping them—we stayed in camp and kept the others quiet—sent word to General Washington, who reinforced the Guard to 500 men with fixed bayonets and loaded pieces. Col. [Daniel] Hitchcock's Regt (being the one next us) was ordered under arms and some part of General Green's Brigade (as the Generals were determined to subdue by force the mutineers and did not know how far it might spread in our Battalion)[.] Generals Washington, Lee and Green came immediately, and our 32 mutineers who had gone about half a mile towards Cambridge and taken possession of a Hill and woods, beginning to be frightened at their proceedings, were not so hardened but upon the General's ordering them to ground their arms they did it immediately. The General then ordered another of our Company's (Capt. [George] Nagles) to surround them with their loaded guns which was immediately done, and did the company great honor:—however to convince our people (as I suppose, mind) that it did not altogether depend upon themselves, he ordered part of Col. Hitchcock's and Col. [Moses] Little's regiments to surround them with their bayonets fixed and ordered two of the ring leaders to be bound. I was glad to find our men all true and ready to do their duty except these 32 rascals—26 were conveyed to the Quarter Guard on Prospect Hill and 6 of the principals to the Main Guard. You cannot conceive what disgrace we are all in and how much the General is chagrined that only one Regiment should come from the South and that set so infamous an example⁸⁹

Pvt. Daniel McCurtin of Maryland described how the fallout from these disturbances even affected men in Roxbury by 9 September “This day on account of some of our riflemen's misbehaviour we were stopped by the Sentries, but had, a free pass until now.”⁹⁰

The next day, Greene wrote to Washington about possible further trouble: “The Rifflers seems very sulky and I am informd threatens to rescue their mates to night, but little is to be feard from them as the Regiment are all ready at a moments warning to turn out—and the Guards very Strong.”⁹¹ According to Pvt. Wright, “34 men were confined, and two of them put in irons at headquarters in Cambridge.”⁹²

Washington's general orders for 11 September ended the riflemen's special treatment and promised military justice for those who had defied their officers:

Col. Thompson's Battalion of Riffle-men posted upon Prospect-hill, to take their share of all duty of Guard and Fatigue, with the Brigade they encamp with.

⁸⁹ *American Historical Record*, 1:547-8.

⁹⁰ Balch, *Papers Chiefly Relating to the Maryland Line*, 16.

⁹¹ Greene to Washington, 10 September 1775, PGW:RW, 1:455.

⁹² *Historical Magazine*, 6:209.

A General Court Martial to sit as soon as possible to try the men of that Regiment, who are now prisoners in the main Guard, and at Prospect-hill, and accused of “*mutiny*.”

The Riflemen posted at Roxbury, and towards Letchmore’s point, are to do duty with the brigade they are posted with.

The General Court Martial to meet to morrow morning at seven ’OClock; to consist of *three* Field Officers and *ten* Captains.⁹³

Two days later, the general orders announced the verdict:

The thirty three Riflemen of Col. Thompsons Battalion, tried yesterday by a General Court Martial, whereof Col Nixon was president, for “disobedient and mutinous Behaviour”; are each of them sentenced to pay the sum of Twenty Shillings, except John Leamon, who, over and above his fine, is to suffer six days imprisonment—The Pay Master of the regiment to stop the Fine from each man, out of their next Month’s pay, which must be paid to Dr Church for the use of the General hospital.⁹⁴

John Leaman was a private in Capt. Nagle’s company, the one Washington had ordered to surround their comrades “with their loaded guns.” He may have been singled out for disobeying that direct order.⁹⁵

This was a relatively mild penalty, especially given how at the same time Washington was dealing with the refusal of men in Col. Glover’s regiment to sail on the *Hannah* (see chapter 12.5). Lukens called it “too small a punishment for so base a crime and mitigated no doubt on account of their having come so far to serve the cause and its being the first crime.” However, he also said that the men “seem exceedingly sorry for their misbehavior and promise amendment,” and laid most of the blame on their commanders:

This will, I hope, awaken the attention of our Officers to their duty (for to their remissness I charge our whole disgrace) and the men being employed will yet no doubt do honor to their provinces, for this much I can say for them that upon every alarm it was impossible for men to behave with more readiness or attend better to their duty: it is only in the Camp that we cut a poor figure.⁹⁶

⁹³ PGW:RW, 1:449.

⁹⁴ PGW:RW, 1:454-5.

⁹⁵ *Pennsylvania Archives*, series 2, 10:36. Leaman’s name has been transcribed as “John Seamon” in some editions of Washington’s papers, and thus in other sources. Many authors infer that Leaman was a ringleader, perhaps the “principal mutineer” Ziegler had earlier confined. Charles P. Neimeyer identifies “Seamon” as the sergeant whose confinement started the conflict, but no document gives him that rank; Niemeyer, *Revolutionary War*, 21.

⁹⁶ *American Historical Record*, 1:547-8.

8.9 CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF THE RIFLE COMPANIES

There were no further reports of mutiny among the riflemen. However, individual men from those companies caused trouble. On 12 September Pvt. Wright recorded, “one was whipped 17 lashes, for stealing, and drummed out of camp.” Two days later there was even worse trouble among the Pennsylvanians: “John Kelly, one of Capt. [Robert] Cluggage’s men, shot one of Capt. [James] Chambers’s men through the head, for stabbing through his [hunting] shirt with a bayonet.”⁹⁷ On 9 October Pvt. Samuel Haws noted another rifleman being punished in Roxbury:

About eight o clock their was a Rifle man whipt 39 stripes for Stealing and afterwards he was Drummed out of the camps if the infernal regions had ben opened and cain and Judas and Sam Haws had been present their could not have ben a biger uproar.⁹⁸

According to Pvt. McCurtin, that man, “belonging to Captain Stenson’s Company,” had been convicted of stealing “a twenty dollar bill”; “fifty and two drums and as many whifers” saw him out of the army.⁹⁹ Two days later, Haws wrote, “Their was a Rifle man Drummed out of the camps for threatning his officers.”¹⁰⁰

Furthermore, the riflemen were proving far less loyal than the New Englanders. Between 25 July and 8 September Gen. Gage’s secretary Stephen Kemble reported ten men deserting from the American side; at least eight were riflemen, most born in Britain or Ireland.¹⁰¹ Compared to the local troops, more riflemen were recent immigrants, and all were far from their homes, so they probably felt the tug of the British Empire more keenly. Sgt. James Finley of Maryland was heard “expressing himself disrespectfully of the Continental Association, and drinking Genl Gage’s health”—for which he was sentenced “to be deprived of his Arms and Accoutrements, put in a Horse Cart, with a Rope round his neck, and drum’d out of the Army and rendered for-ever incapable of serving in the Continental army.”¹⁰² Even officers produced difficulties. In early October Capt. Ross left for Pennsylvania, and Lt. Col. Edward Hand wrote: “Gen. Washington is irritated by Capt. Ross’ absence without his knowledge, and declared to Col. Thompson that any officer who went home from his regiment must resign his commission.”¹⁰³

⁹⁷ *Historical Magazine*, 6:209. To be fair, two days later Pvt. Wright wrote, “One of the musketmen killed another by accident.”

⁹⁸ Lyon and Haws, *Military Journals of Two Private Soldiers*, 76.

⁹⁹ Balch, *Papers Chiefly Relating to the Maryland Line*, 20-1.

¹⁰⁰ Lyon and Haws, *Military Journals of Two Private Soldiers*, 76.

¹⁰¹ NYHSC, 16:50-8. See also Heath, *Memoirs* (1901), 20. MHSP, 7:205-6, 216. MHSP, 14:292.

¹⁰² General orders, 16 September 1775. PGW:RW, 2:1.

¹⁰³ *Pennsylvania Archives*, series 2, 10:11.

By that month, several Continental commanders had come to view the riflemen as more trouble than they were worth. Gen. Charles Lee told Dr. Benjamin Rush on 10 October:

I once was of opinion, that some Battalions from the Southward wou'd be necessary—but I have alter'd my opinion. I am now perswaded you have not to the Southward so good materials for common soldiers. Your Riflemen have a good deal open'd our eyes upon this subject, tho' to do justice to their officers They are unexceptionable; their Privates are in general damn'd riff raff—dirty, mutinous, and disaffected.¹⁰⁴

On 30 October Gen. Ward wrote to John Adams:

They do not boast so much of the Riflemen as heretofore. Genl. Washington has said he wished they had never come. Genl. Lee has damned them and wished them all in Boston. Genl. Gates has said, if any capital movement was about to be made the Riflemen must be moved from this Camp.¹⁰⁵

Washington may not have been as disappointed as Ward liked to believe, but the riflemen had certainly not provided a decisive edge in the siege.¹⁰⁶

Col. Thompson's battalion regained some of their luster on the afternoon of 9 November when they helped to repel a raid from Boston on Lechmere's Point in east Cambridge. Lt. Col. Hand described the action for his wife:

I give you the particulars of the fun our regiment had yesterday. About one, P.M., a number of regulars, taking advantage of a high tide, landed from twenty boats on Lechmere Point, to carry off some cattle. Six men of our regiment were on the point to take care of our horses; they did their utmost, and partly effected it. One poor fellow was taken; he was of Capt. Ross' company. I think his name was Burke. When the alarm was given, Col. Thompson was at Cambridge. I had gone to Watertown to receive the regiment's pay, but thanks to good horses, we arrived in time to march our regiment, which was the first ready, though the most distant of our brigade. Col. Thompson, who arrived before we had crossed the water, with thirteen men only of Ross' company, but not being supported by the musqueteers, before I could get up with the remainder of our regiment off duty, returned, and met Major Magaw and myself on the causeway; the whole then passed with the utmost diligence, up to our middles in water. David Ziegler, who acts as adjutant, tumbled over the bridge into ten or twelve feet water; he got out safe, with the damage of his rifle only. As soon as the battalion had passed the defile, we divided them into two parties, part of Capt. Chambers'. Capt. Miller's, and Lowdon's, with Major Magaw and Col. Thompson, marched to the right of the hill, with part of Cluggage's, Nagel's, and Ross'. I took the left, as the enemy

¹⁰⁴ NYHSC, 4:212.

¹⁰⁵ PJA, 3:235.

¹⁰⁶ In addition, after defecting to the British in October, Benjamin Thompson of Woburn wrote a report that was very critical of the riflemen, saying that "there never was a more mutinous and undisciplined set of villains" and that their marksmanship was exaggerated; Stopford-Sackville, *Report on the Manuscripts*, 2:18.

had the superiority of numbers, and the advantage of rising ground, with a stone wall in front, and a large barn on their right and flank, aided by a heavy fire of large grape-shot from their shipping and batteries. We had reason to expect a warm reception; but to the disgrace of British arms, be it spoken, by the time we had gained the top of the hill, they had gained their boats, and rowed off. We had but one man wounded, I believe mortally, by a swivel ball, Alexander Creighton, of Ross' company. Wm. Hamilton need not grudge the money his son cost him. His coolness and resolution surpassed his years. Billy Burd had his eyes closed, by the dirt knocked off by a cannon ball.¹⁰⁷

On 10 November Gen. Washington praised Thompson's rifle regiment for their performance in the general orders:

The General thanks Col. Thompson, and the other gallant Officers and Soldiers (as well of other Regiments as the Rifflers) for their alacrity Yesterday, in pushing thro' the water, to get to the Enemy on Letchmore's point; he is inform'd that there were some (names as yet unknown) who discover'd a backwardness in crossing the Causway—these will be marked, if they can be discovered¹⁰⁸

The next day, he told the Congress about the event, using the news to press the need for more supplies:

...our Powder is wasteing fast, notwithstanding the Strictest Care Oeconomy & attention is paid to it, the Long Season of wet weather we have had, renders the greater part of what has been served out to the men of no use; yesterday I had a proof of it, as a party of the enemy about four or five hundred taking the advantage of high tide, Landed at Leechmores point, which at that time was in effect an Island, we were alarmed, & of Course orderd every man to examine his Cartouchebox, when the melencholly truth appeard, &we were obliged to furnish the greater part of them with fresh ammunition. The Damage done at the point, was the takeing of a man who watch'd a few horses & Cows, ten of the later they Carryed of, Colonel Thompson marchd down with his Regiment of Rifle Men, & was join'd by Colonel Woodbridge with a part of his, & a part of Pattersons Regiment, who gallantly waded thro the water & soon obliged the enemy to embark under Cover a man of war, a Floating Battery & the Fire of a Battery on Charles town neck; We have two of our men dangerously wounded by grape shot from the man of war—& by a flag out this day we are inform'd, the enemy Lost two of their men.¹⁰⁹

However, at the end of the month Washington told Joseph Reed that the riflemen were being over praised again:

¹⁰⁷ *Pennsylvania Archives*, series 2, 10:11.

¹⁰⁸ PGW:RW, 2:340.

¹⁰⁹ PGW:RW, 2:350-1. Abigail Adams sent news of this skirmish to her husband; AFC, 1:324-5.

The colouring of that affair at Litchmores Point has been rather too high—The alacrity of the riflemen & Officers upon that occasion did them honour, to which Colo. Patterson's Regiment & some others were equally entitled, except in a few Instances; but the Tide, at that time, was so exceedingly high as to compel a large Circuit before our Men could get to the Causey, by which means the Enemy, except a small Covering Party, (distant from the dry land on this side near 400 Yards,) had retreated, or were about to Imbark—all the Shot therefore that pass'd were at a great distance; however the Men went to, & over the Causey (except as before mentioned) spiritedly enough.¹¹⁰

By this time, the commander-in-chief wanted to treat the rifle companies like all the other infantry units in the Continental Army. Washington still saw them as especially useful in warding off naval raids and landings. On 13 December, after a warning that the Royal Navy was about to attack Marblehead, he sent “a company of riflemen” to that town along with Glover's regiment and a company of artillery.¹¹¹ On 13 March 1776 while the British prepared to leave Boston, Washington ordered Gen. Heath to take “the rifle regiment,” along with six regular infantry regiments and an artillery detachment, to New York to prepare for a possible attack there.¹¹² But when the army was reorganized in 1776 the rifle companies were designated as regular Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Maryland regiments, with no official distinction about the weapons they carried or the duties they carried out.

8.10 BRAWL IN HARVARD YARD

Israel Trask, born in Essex County in 1765, accompanied his father, Lt. Jonathan Trask, to the siege lines as a kitchen helper and messenger. Serving from mid-1775 through to the next summer, the Trasks lived at Winter Hill, Harvard Yard, and eventually Dorchester Heights. In 1845 Israel Trask applied for a federal pension, offering recollections of life with the Continental Army seventy years before. He provided a child's view of one dramatic incident during the siege:

Sometime before the winter months of 1776 ended, the regiment was ordered to remove to Cambridge, the officers of which were quartered in the second story of the college buildings. It was at this encampment I saw for the first time the commander-in-chief, General Washington. A description of the peculiar circumstances under which it took place may not be thought foreign to the object of the present narrative but tend to illustrate not only the intrepidity and physical as well as mental power of the commandant-in-chief, but measurably show the low state of discipline then in the army, and the great difficulty of raising it to a proper standard.

A day or two preceding the incident I am about to relate, a rifle corps had come into camp from Virginia, made up of recruits from the backwoods and

¹¹⁰ PGW:RW, 2:463-4.

¹¹¹ Heath, *Memoirs*, 25.

¹¹² Heath, *Memoirs*, 35.

mountains of that state, in a uniform dress totally different from that of the regiments raised on the seaboard and interior of New England. Their white linen frocks, ruffled and fringed, excited the curiosity of the whole army, particularly to the Marblehead regiment, who were always full of fun and mischief. [They] looked with scorn on such an rustic uniform when compared to their own round jackets and fishers' trousers, [and they] directly confronted from fifty to an hundred of the riflemen who were viewing the college buildings. Their first manifestations were ridicule and derision, which the riflemen bore with more patience than their wont, but resort being made to snow, which then covered the ground, these soft missives were interchanged but a few minutes before both parties closed, and a fierce struggle commenced with biting and gouging on the one part, and knockdown on the other part with as much apparent fury as the most deadly enmity could create. Reinforced by their friends, in less than five minutes more than a thousand combatants were on the field, struggling for the mastery.

At this juncture General Washington made his appearance, whether by accident or design I never knew. I only saw him and his colored servant, both mounted. With the spring of a deer, he leaped from his saddle, threw the reins of his bridle into the hands of his servant, and rushed into the thickest of the melee, with an iron grip seized two tall, brawny, athletic, savage-looking riflemen by the throat, keeping them at arm's length, alternately shaking and talking to them. In this position the eye of the belligerents caught sight of the general. Its effect on them was instantaneous flight at the top of their speed in all directions from the scene of the conflict. Less than fifteen minutes time had elapsed from the commencement of the row before the general and his two criminals were the only occupants of the field of action. Here bloodshed, imprisonment, trials by court-martial were happily prevented, and hostile feelings between the different corps of the army extinguished by the physical and mental energies timely exerted by one individual.¹¹³

Trask's account came to public notice when Washington Irving published an edited different version of it in the second volume of his biography of Gen. Washington in 1855.¹¹⁴

Three years later, Thomas C. Amory told a similar story in his biography of Gen. John Sullivan.¹¹⁵ That account appears to meld what Amory acknowledged was the already "well-known contest between the fishermen of Marblehead and the Virginia riflemen" with what Sullivan reportedly witnessed while visiting the Cambridge headquarters. However, Amory's rendering contains impossible details. It states that the Marbleheaders fought riflemen under Capt. Daniel Morgan, who left Massachusetts well before snowfall. It calls Washington's servant "Pompey" when the man would almost certainly have been William Lee (see section 9.9). Amory has Washington leaping his horse over a gate; Trask would surely have described such a leap if he had seen it. As for Sullivan's presence, Irving quoted Trask as saying, "I saw none of his aides with him." The tale was already growing into an unreliable legend.

¹¹³ Dann, *The Revolution Remembered*, 408-9.

¹¹⁴ Irving, *Life of Washington*, 2:124-5.

¹¹⁵ Amory, *John Sullivan*, 1:69-70.

8.11 THE REENLISTMENT CRISIS

When the New England colonies raised their armies in the spring of 1775, they asked men to enlist until December, the end of the year at most. This reflected the widespread fear of “standing,” or permanent, armies, which Whigs thought were tools of political oppression—and expensive besides. It also reflected how eighteenth-century armies tended not to fight or march in winter. Above all, the limit on the troops’ enlistments showed how few political leaders expected the siege of Boston to last into 1776.¹¹⁶

As the stalemate dragged on, however, and especially after the September council of war rejected his first proposal for an attack on Boston (see section 11.5), Gen. Washington realized that a new army would have to be recruited before the end of the year. This change offered him the opportunity to reorganize the Continental Army’s structure; to weed out officers he did not trust and reward those who had risen in his esteem; and to establish new policies on pay, hierarchy, and other matters. But convincing thousands of soldiers to reenlist, or thousands of other young men to enlist in their place, was also obviously a major challenge. Indeed, this was probably the biggest task Washington faced during his months at Cambridge.

On 21 September Gen. Washington warned the Congress about the upcoming challenge:

The Connecticut & Rhode Island Troops stand engaged to the first of December only, & none longer than to the 1st January. A Dissolution of the present Army therefore will take Place unless some early Provision is made agst such an Event. Most of the General Officers are of Opinion, the greater Part of them may be re-listed for the Winter, or another Campaign, with the Indulgence of a Furlough to visit their Friends which, may be regulated so as not to endanger the Service.¹¹⁷

Planning the reorganization of the Continental Army was one of the main tasks of the meeting at headquarters with delegates from the Congress and the New England colonies in mid-October (see section 17.8).

Gen. Washington began the recruitment push as that meeting got underway, in his general orders for 22 October:

The Deputies from the Honorable Continental Congress, having arrived in this camp; in order to confer with the General, the several Governors, of Rhode Island, & Connecticut, the Council of Massachusetts bay, and the president and Convention of New Hampshire; on the continuing an Army for the Defence and support of America, and its Liberties; all Officers, who decline the further Service of their country, and intend to retire from the Army, at the expiration of their

¹¹⁶ In contrast to the New England infantry, the riflemen enlisted through 1 July 1776; Freeman, *George Washington*, 3:553.

¹¹⁷ PGW:RW, 2:25.

present Term of service; are to signify their Intentions in writing to their Colonel, which he is to deliver with his own, to the Brigadier General, or commanding Officer of his brigade—Those brave Men, and true Patriots, who are resolved to continue to serve and defend their Brethren, Privileges and Property, are to consider themselves engaged to the last day of December 1776 unless sooner discharged by the Hon: the Continental Congress, and will in like manner signify their intentions—This return to be made at orderly time, Wednesday next.¹¹⁸

Four days later, the commander-in-chief demanded clearer responses from the officer corps:

As several of the Officers have not yet signified their intentions respecting the requisitions contain'd in the orders of the 22nd Instant, and as the Nature of the Case will admit of no delay—The General directs, that every Officer in the Army, do forthwith declare to his Colonel or Commanding Officer of the regt. to which he belongs, whether he will, or will not continue in the service, until the last day of December 1776 (if the Continental Congress shall think it expedient to retain him so long) This declaration, must be made in explicit terms, and not conditional; as the Congress are to be advised thereof immediately, in order that proper Steps may be taken to provide other Officers, and other Men if necessary.—The times, and the Importance of the great Cause we are engaged in, allow no room for hesitation and delay—When Life, Liberty, & Property are at stake, when our Country is in danger of being a melancholy Scene of bloodshed, and desolation, when our towns are laid in ashes, and innocent Women and Children driven from their peaceful habitations, exposed to the rigour of an inclement season, and to the hands of charity perhaps for a support. When Calamities like these are staring us in the face, and a brutal, savage enemy, (more so than was ever yet found in a civilized nation), are threatening us, and every thing we hold dear, with Destruction from foreign Troops, it little becomes the Character of a Soldier to shrink from danger, and condition for new terms. It is the General's intention to indulge both Officers, and Soldiers, who compose the New Army, with Furloughs, to be absent a reasonable time, but it must be done in such a manner, as not to injure the service, or weaken the Army too much at once. The General also thinks that he can take upon him to assure the Officers and Soldiers of the new army, that they will receive their pay once a Month regularly, after the term of their present Inlistments are expired. The Major of each Brigade is furnish'd with the Form of a Return, to be made to the Colonel, or commanding Officer of each regiment, of the determination of the Commissioned Officers therein; and it is expected, that a return thereof, will be made on Saturday morning without fail, as no longer time can be allowed.¹¹⁹

The Congress made its plans for a “new army, intended to lie before Boston” official with a vote on 4 November, seeking “20,372 Men Officers included.”¹²⁰ That was a smaller army than it had authorized the previous summer. It required, as Gen. Greene wrote, “the

¹¹⁸ PGW:RW, 2:216-7.

¹¹⁹ PGW:RW, 2:235-6.

¹²⁰ JCC, 3:321.

reduction of Eleven Regiments and the discharge of such a number of Officers.”¹²¹ Henceforth, a Continental Army’s regiment would be designated by its home state and a number (e.g., the 27th Connecticut) rather than by the name of its commanding officer, thus diminishing the importance of serving under particular individuals.

This overhaul offered Washington a chance to remove New England officers who had not impressed him and to find positions for outsiders who had, such as the British deserter Thomas Machin (see section 13.7) and his nephew George Lewis (see section 7.6). However, local gentlemen did not like being displaced. Furthermore, it was soon clear the officers who did sign on for another year were not enlisting soldiers as quickly as the general had hoped. During the fall of 1775 Washington and his generals, particularly Charles Lee, were convinced that officers who expected to lose their posts were actually encouraging soldiers not to reenlist under anyone else. In November, Lee complained to Pennsylvanian Robert Morris:

enclosed I send you the address of the Generals to the Soldiers. You must know that some Officers who are discarded from the service are suspecting of exerting themselves to dissuade the soldiers from reenlisting—to counteract their machinations was the design of this paper.¹²²

Congress delegate Silas Deane understood that even “a General” was encouraging the men to resist reenlistment, and said that “little better could be expected from Men, trained up with Notions of their right of saying how, & when, & under whom they will serve.”¹²³

Some New England politicians still supported the region’s traditional military system. Samuel Ward, delegate to the Congress from Rhode Island, expressed doubts about the plans in a letter dated 21 November:

I have often told the Congress, that, under the idea of new modelling, I was afraid we should destroy our army. Southern gentlemen wish to remove that attachment, which the officers and men have to their respective colonies, and make them look up to the continent at large for their support or promotion. I never thought that attachment injurious to the common cause, but the strongest inducement to people to risk every thing in defence of the whole, upon the preservation of which must depend the safety of each colony. I wish, therefore,

¹²¹ PNG, 1:172.

¹²² Lee to Morris, 22 November 1775, NYHSC, 4:219. See also Lee’s letter to Morris on 9 December: “We were some time apprehensive of losing every thing from the backwardness of the men in enlisting. It is supposed that the discarded officers labored to render the soldiers disaffected; but the men really have public spirits and recruiting goes on most swimmingly”; NYHSC, 4:220. Gen. Greene expressed the same belief about disgruntled officers in his 31 December 1775 letter to Samuel Ward; PNG, 1:172.

¹²³ LoD, 2:489.

not to eradicate, but to regulate it in such a manner, as may most conduce to the protection of the whole.¹²⁴

This tension between centralized and local loyalties would continue throughout the war, with Washington almost always leaning toward the national government.

Even as he appealed to men's patriotism, Washington had to acknowledge that the Continental Army had not done a stellar job in providing the troops with all their basic needs. On 19 November he told the Congress: "the Badness of the weather. . .has caused great delay in building our Barracks, which with a most mortifying scarcity of fire Wood discourages the men from Enlisting."¹²⁵ As for blankets, quartermaster general Thomas Mifflin had such trouble ordering them that on 23 December Washington wrote to the governing bodies of all the New England colonies:

Notwithstanding the great pains taken by the Quarter Master General, to procure Blankets for the Army, he finds it impossible to procure a number sufficient. he has tried the different places to the Southward without success, as what were there, are engaged to supply the wants of the Troops in each place.

Our Soldiers are in great distress and I know of no way to remedy the evil, than applying to you, cannot some be got from the different Towns; most houses could spare one, some of them many.¹²⁶

Yet another problem was the soldiers' pay, with Washington finding himself "not having it in my power to pay them for the Months of Novr & Decr."¹²⁷ On 14 January 1776 the Massachusetts political leader and Continental paymaster James Warren told Samuel Adams that the lack of currency deliveries from Philadelphia had hurt recruiting:

I think the service has suffered and the enlistments been embarrassed, by the low state in which you keep your treasury here. Had the general been able to have paid off the old army to the last of December, when their term expired, and to give assurances for the pay of the militia when their continuance in the army should end, it might have produced many good effects—among others added some thousands to the army. You will be surprised, perhaps, when I tell you there is but about 10,000 dollars here; and that left by the necessary parsimony of the general, not knowing what occasion there might be for a little.¹²⁸

Despite all those deficiencies, Washington nonetheless saw the New England soldiers as lacking in patriotism when they did not reenlist or agree to remain in their posts until new

¹²⁴ LoD, 2:370.

¹²⁵ PGW:RW, 2:399

¹²⁶ PGW:RW, 2:591-2.

¹²⁷ Washington to Joseph Reed, 14 January 1776, PGW:RW, 3:89.

¹²⁸ MHSP, 14:277.

troops arrived. On 27 November Capt.-Lt. Nathan Hale reported finding Gen. Lee “very cast down, at the discouraging prospect of supplying the army with troops.”¹²⁹

8.12 THE CONNECTICUT “MUTINY”

Washington worried that the British commanders would learn about the shrinking Continental Army and respond with an attack. On 30 November 1775 he wrote to Joseph Reed:

...we have certain advice of a Scoundrel from Marblehead, a Man of property, having carried in to General Howe, a true statement of the temper and disposition of the Troops towards the new Inlistment; and hath given him the strongest assurances of the practacability of making himself Master of these Lines in a very short time, from the disaffection of the Soldiery to continue in Service—I am endeavouring to Counteract him—how effectually time alone can shew.¹³⁰

The man from Marblehead was Benjamin Marston (see section 13.3). His news did not change Gen. Howe’s resolve to leave Boston as soon as that was practical, but Washington continued to worry about the threat of a British assault.

By September, as quoted in section 8.11, Gen. Washington understood that “The Connecticut and Rhode Island Troops stand engaged to the 1st. December only.” A legal technicality extended that obligation for some Connecticut soldiers to 10 December. But Washington asked them all to remain longer, as he told Gov. Trumbull:

Some time ago, apprehending that they, or part of them might incline to go home when their time of enlistment should be up, I applied to the Officers of the several Regiments, to know whether it would be agreeable to the men, to continue till the 1st. of January, or until a sufficient number of other forces could be raised to supply their Place; who Informed me that they believed the whole of them would readily stay, till that could be effected. Having discovered last week, that they were very uneasy to leave the Service, and determined upon it; I thought it expedient, to summon the General Officers at Head Quarters, and Invited a Delegation of the [Massachusetts] General Court, to be present, that Suitable measures might be adopted for the defence and Support of our lines; the result was, that three thousand of the Minute Men and Militia of this Province, and two thousand men from New Hampshire, should be called in by the 10th. Instant for that purpose. With this determination the Connecticut Troops were made acquainted, and requested and ordered to remain here, as the time of most of them would not be out before the 10th., when they would be relieved.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Johnston, *Nathan Hale*, 180.

¹³⁰ PGW:RW, 2:464.

¹³¹ Washington to Trumbull, 2 December 1775, PGW:RW, 2:471-2.

Gen. Washington did not offer extra pay. He felt that asking soldiers to stay until the end of the year was a reasonable request given the emergency conditions.

However, Washington's desire collided with how New England soldiers viewed their service to the king or country, as laid out by historian Fred Anderson:

Provincial soldiers interpreted their obligation to fight not directly in terms of obedience to the king whom they ultimately served, but rather as a matter of contractual relationship with their provinces. Recruiting officers executed enlistment contracts as the agents of their provinces. Because they almost always "raised for rank," the men whom they enlisted understood military service not as a general obligation but as a specific agreement to serve under the officer who had enrolled them. . . . They regarded as equally binding both formal elements, such as the duration of enlistment and the provision of pay and supplies, and informal promises made by their recruiting officers. . . . As in common law where a broken contract absolves the aggrieved party from the obligation to perform further duties, provincial soldiers saw their government's failure to fulfill its end of the enlistment bargain as justifying their immediate reversion to civilian life.

Furthermore, the same Whig political rhetoric about not becoming slaves to tyrants could inspire soldiers to resist calls for unfair duty: "The provincials believed that if they acquiesced in violations of their rights, they would expose themselves to further abuse and perhaps even to indefinite terms of service."¹³²

Reflecting this outlook, when 1 December 1775 arrived, many of the Connecticut regiments packed up and headed for home. Ebenezer Huntington wrote:

The Connecticut men have this day taken the liberty to leave the Camp without Leave (I mean some of them). Majr. Trumbull & Capt. Chester are sent after them to bring them back they have not yet returned tho' 8 o'Clock—A party went from Cambridge in the same manner among whom was a Sergeant whom the Genl has determined to send to Connecticut in Irons with a Label on his back telling his Crime—to be dealt with as the Authority of the Colony shall think proper—The men universally seem desirous of mutiny because the men had not a bounty—the Genl is about ordering in Minute men to supply the places of those persons who shall so Poltroon like desert the lines.¹³³

Gen. Putnam called this "a mutiny," and used senior officers and gentleman volunteers in "bringing back a number of deserters."¹³⁴

The next day, Washington wrote to Gov. Trumbull about "the late extraordinary and reprehensible conduct of some of the Connecticut Troops." Despite his pleas and assurances, the general complained:

¹³² Anderson, "Hinge of the Revolution," *Massachusetts Historical Review*, 1:37-8.

¹³³ Webb, *Correspondence and Journals*, 1:123.

¹³⁴ *American Archives*, series 4, 4:182.

yesterday morning, most of them resolved to leave the Camp; many went off, and the utmost Vigilance and Industry were used to apprehend them; several got away with their Arms and Amunition. I have inclosed you a list of the names of some of them in Genl. Putnam's Regiment only who escaped; and submit to your judgment, whether some example should not be made of these men, who have basely deserted the Cause of their Country at this critical Juncture, when the Enemy are receiving Reinforcement.¹³⁵

In his general orders for 3 December Washington announced that he had sent the Connecticut governor the names of those missing men, "that they may be dealt with, in a manner suited to the Ignominy of their behaviour." He also told the Connecticut troops who remained "to obtain a written discharge, from the Commanding Officer of the Regt. they belong to, when they are dismissed on the 10th Instant; that they may be distinguished from, and not treated, as Deserters."¹³⁶

In a letter to Dr. Benjamin Rush, Gen. Lee insisted that the departing Connecticut men had run into criticism on their way home:

Some of the Connecticutians who were home sick cou'd not be prevailed on to tarry, which means, in the New England dialect, to serve any longer. They accordingly marched off bag and baggage but in passing through the lines of other Regiments They were so horribly hiss'd groan'd at and pelted that I believe they wish'd their Aunts Grandmothers and even sweethearts to whom the day before they were so much attached at the Devils own Palace—it is said They have been scurvily treated on the road and worse by the very connexions from whom They could not bear to be separated.¹³⁷

Washington's report to the Congress on 4 December described the same situation with less personal drama:

Last Friday...the Major part of the Troops of that Colony were going away with their Arms and Ammunition, we have however by threats, persuasion and the Activity of the People of the Country who sent back many of them that had set out, prevailed upon the most part to stay. There are about 80 of them missing.

The Connecticut soldiers remained in camp, sulking and surrounded by a guard of other American troops, regular and militia.

¹³⁵ PGW:RW, 2:471-2.

¹³⁶ PGW:RW, 2:475.

¹³⁷ NYHSC, 4:226. Lee posted a notice on his tent asking innkeepers and shopkeepers on the route from Cambridge to Connecticut to "show a proper contempt and indignation towards those disaffected miscreants who are at this crisis deserting her cause" by refusing to serve them. According to Pvt. Simeon Lyman, "the paper was took down as soon as it was dark, and another put up that General Lee was a fool." Lyman, "Journal," *Connecticut Historical Society Collections*, 7:128-9, 134.

On 3 December Gen. Putnam's chaplain, the Rev. Abiel Leonard, preached at the Cambridge meetinghouse with Washington himself attending (see section 7.9). According to the commander-in-chief, Leonard delivered "a sensible and judicious discourse, holding forth the necessity of courage and bravery and at the same time of obedience and subordination to those in Command."¹³⁸ The Rev. William Gordon also "addressed two or three regiments," and said that a man had told him "that I prevailed upon three hundred to stay for another month, which was all that was requested of them."¹³⁹

8.13 MILITIA TROOPS AND MISSING MUSKETS

On 4 December Gen. Washington reported that 5,900 men had reenlisted in the Continental Army. That number grew to over seven thousand after another week or so, and to 8,500 by 18 December. At the end of the year, the army was at about half the strength that the Congress had planned for. Meanwhile, all the Connecticut regiments but one (redesignated the 27th) had departed by 12 December when even Washington acknowledged that he had no authority to keep them.¹⁴⁰ The general was desperate enough to change his policy and enlist black soldiers on the same terms as white men (see section 9.8).

To fill out the ranks, Washington had asked Massachusetts and New Hampshire to send militia troops, enlisted on a short-term basis and serving under officers they had chosen. In his 4 December report to the Congress, he referred to "the necessity of Calling in a body of the Militia, much Sooner than I apprehended there would be an occasion for Such a Step."¹⁴¹ The general feared that bringing in militia regiments would, as he complained to Reed, undercut discipline: the militiamen, "being under no kind of Government themselves, will destroy the little subordination I have been labouring to establish."¹⁴²

In conversation with Gen. Heath on 5 December Washington heard something even more disturbing: the Massachusetts General Court's militia law passed on 1 December maintained what an earlier resolve had called "the Invariable Usage of this Colony" by stating those troops would be paid on a lunar-month cycle.¹⁴³ That pay cycle meant that Massachusetts's militiamen would receive about 6% more money than Continental Army soldiers for the same number of days in service.

On 6 December Washington wrote a most forceful letter to the president of the Massachusetts Council, calling this decision

¹³⁸ Washington to Gov. Jonathan Trumbull, 15 December 1775, PGW:RW, 2:556.

¹³⁹ MHSP, 63:601.

¹⁴⁰ Ferling, *First of Men*, 137.

¹⁴¹ PGW:RW, 2:484.

¹⁴² PGW:RW, 2:449.

¹⁴³ Resolve of 7 November, MAR, 1775-76, chap. 347 (p. 138 in 1918 edition). The 1 December resolve is referred to in chap. 414, but does not appear in the volume, indicating it was rescinded or revised.

the most fatal stab to the peace of this Army, that ever was given; & that Lord North himself, could not have devised a more effectual blow to the recruiting Service.

Excuse me Sir for the Strength of these expressions—if my information is wrong (I had it from Genl Heath, who says he had it from a Member of your Court) they are altogether Improper & I crave your pardon for them—if right, my Zeal in the American cause must plead my Excuse.¹⁴⁴

The General Court quickly assembled an unusually large committee of seven leading members, many of whom had met with Washington before.¹⁴⁵ After their meeting, the committee made plans to send Gen. Washington the text of the 1 December resolve and continue the discussion.¹⁴⁶ Soon, however, the Massachusetts legislature quietly voted to pay its militiamen “by the Calendar month” as the Congress did.¹⁴⁷

On 14 January 1776 James Warren wrote to Samuel Adams about the ongoing recruitment crisis:

The time for which our militia came in, ends to-morrow. We have presumed so much on the public spirit of our countrymen as to make no other provision, though everything depends on their staying, and they wish to be at home. Our [legislative] house adjourned yesterday morning, and the members went down among them to use their influence. I flatter myself most of them will stay to the last of this month.¹⁴⁸

Meanwhile, some veteran soldiers, having asserted their freedom by returning home, were voluntarily coming back to the army for another year.

By that time, Gen. Washington was worrying about a new problem: a shortage of firearms. On 4 November the Congress had resolved “That the good arms of such soldiers as leave the service, be retained for the use of the new army, on a valuation made of them.” In other words, the government required men who had arrived with their own muskets to sell that property to the army, for the amount of Continental currency that the army deemed fair

¹⁴⁴ PGW:RW, 2:502-3.

¹⁴⁵ This delegation included Spooner, Winthrop, and Palmer from the Council, and James Sullivan of Biddeford (1744-1808, brother of Gen. Sullivan and a future governor of the state), Joseph Batchelder of Grafton (1713-1797), Azor Orne of Marblehead (1731-1796), and probably Nathan Cushing of Scituate (1742-1812) from the House. The three Council members were already preparing to meet with Washington (in company with “Mr. Pitts, Mr. Jewett, Mr. Hobart, and Mr. Story” from the House) about having the Continental Congress pay for four companies stationed at Braintree, Weymouth, and Hingham. *American Archives*, series 4, 4:1223, 1325.

¹⁴⁶ *American Archives*, series 4, 4:1224-5.

¹⁴⁷ See, for example, MAR, 1775-76, chap. 541.

¹⁴⁸ MHSP, 14:277.

(and did not have on hand).¹⁴⁹ Gen. Greene described the controversial process of valuing those guns on 31 December:

This is the last day of the old enlisted Soldiers service; nothing but confusion and disorder Reigns. We are obligd to retain their Guns whether private or publick property. They are prized [i.e., priced] and the Owners paid, but, as Guns last Spring run very high, the Committee that values them sets them much lower than the price they were purchast At. This is lookt upon to be both Tyrannical and unjust. I am very sorry that necessity forces his Excellency to adopt any measures disagreeable to the Populace. But the Army cannot be provided for in any other way and those we retain are very indifferent, generally without Bayonets and of different Sizd Bores.¹⁵⁰

Once word of the government's policy got out, new soldiers were less likely to arrive with guns, making it seem even more important for the army to stop any from being removed.

To Washington, this was a clear case of military necessity, backed by the Congress's legal authority. For individual New England soldiers, however, they had risen against one government that seemed too demanding and did not appreciate another seizing their personal property. The general wrote to Reed on 14 January 1776:

...before the dissolution of the old Army I issued an Order directing three judicious men of each brigade to attend—review—and appraise the good arms of every Regiment—& finding a very great unwillingness in the Men to part with their Arms, at the same time, not having it in my power to pay them for the months of Novr & Decr I threatened severely, that every Soldier who carried away his Firelock, without leave, should never receive pay for those Months; yet so many have been carried of, partly by stealth, but chiefly as condemn'd, that we have not, at this time 100 guns in the stores of all that have been taken in the Prize Ship [*Nancy*], and from the Soldiery notwithstanding our Regiments are not half compleat—at the same time I am told, and believe it, that to restrain the Inlistment to Men with Arms you will get but few of the former, & still fewer of the latter wch would be good for any thing.¹⁵¹

As a result, the new army was not only smaller than its predecessor, but also more lightly armed.¹⁵² On 9 February, Washington told the Congress, “there are near 2000 men now in Camp, without firelocks.”¹⁵³ The next day, he privately grumbled about the New Englanders:

¹⁴⁹ JCC, 3:323. Continental money was not yet in such huge supply that its real value had dropped; rather, there was too little of it to pay the army's bills.

¹⁵⁰ PNG, 1:173.

¹⁵¹ PGW:RW, 3:89.

¹⁵² Some historians have written that the problem was soldiers taking home guns they had received from the Continental supply, such as from the ordnance ship *Nancy*; e.g., Ferling, *First of Men*, 142-3. While some men might have done so, the Congress's November policy and Greene's letter show that the army wanted to buy the guns owned by the soldiers themselves.

¹⁵³ PGW:RW, 3:278.

“notwithstanding all the publick virtue which is ascribd to these people, there is no nation under the Sun (that I ever came across) pay greater adoration to money than they do.”¹⁵⁴

Washington’s letters to Reed during that winter show the general at a low point, expressing his first notes of despair. On 14 January he wrote:

...the reflection on my Situation, & that of this Army, produces many an uneasy hour when all around me are wrapped in Sleep. Few People know the Predicament we are In, on a thousand Accts—fewer still will beleive, if any disaster happens to these Lines, from what cause it flows—I have often thought, how much happier I should have been, if, instead of accepting of a command under such Circumstances I had taken my Musket upon my Shoulder & enterd the Ranks, or, if I could have justified the Measure to Posterity, & my own Conscience, had retir’d to the back Country, & lived in a Wig-wam—If I shall be able to rise superior to these, and many other difficulties, which might be innumrated, I shall most religiously believe that the finger of Providence is in it, to blind the Eyes of our Enemys; for surely if we get well throw this Month, it must be for want of their knowing the disadvantages we labour under.¹⁵⁵

8.14 PUSHING FOR A STANDING ARMY

The difficulties of reforming the Continental Army at the end of 1775 spurred Gen. Washington to advocate for an army with longer terms of enlistment—three years, or until the end of the war. American politicians resisted that idea because it threatened to create a standing army which could eat up public resources and threaten the political order. Washington laid out his arguments in a long letter to the Congress on 9 February 1776:

Since the first of December I have been devising every means in my power to secure these Incampments, and though I am sensible that we never have, since that Period, been able to act upon the Offensive, and at times not in a condition to defend, yet the cost of marching home one set of Men; bringing in another, the havock and waste occasioned by the first; the repairs necessary for the Second, with a thousand incidental charges and Inconveniencies which have arisen, and which it is scarce possible either to recollect or describe, amounts to near as much as the keeping up a respectable body of Troops the whole time, ready for any emergency, would have done.

To this may be added that you never can have a well Disciplined Army.

To bring Men well acquainted with the Duties of a Soldier, requires time; to bring them under proper discipline and Subordination, not only requires time, but is a Work of great difficulty; and in this Army, where there is so little distinction between the Officers and Soldiers, requires an uncommon degree of attention. To expect then the same Service from Raw, and undisciplined Recruits as from Veteran Soldiers, is to expect what never did, and perhaps never will happen. Men who are familiarized to danger, meet it without shrinking, whereas those who have never seen Service often apprehend danger where no danger is.

¹⁵⁴ PGW:RW, 3:287.

¹⁵⁵ PGW:RW, 3:89.

Three things prompt Men to a regular discharge of their Duty in time of Action: natural bravery, hope of reward, and fear of punishment. The two first are common to the untutor'd, and the Disciplin'd Soldiers; but the latter, most obviously distinguishes the one from the other. A Coward, when taught to believe, that if he breaks his Ranks, and abandons his Colours, will be punished with Death by his own party, will take his chance against the Enemy; but the Man who thinks little of the one, and is fearful of the other, Acts from present feelings regardless of consequences.

Again, Men of a days standing will not look forward, and from experience we find, that as the time approaches for their discharge they grow careless of their Arms, Ammunition, Camp utensils &ca. may even the Barracks themselves have felt uncommon marks of Wanton depredation, and lays us under fresh trouble, and additional expence, in providing for every fresh sett; when we find it next to impossible to procure such Articles, as are absolutely necessary in the first Instance. To this may be added the Seasoning which new Recruits must have to a Camp, and the loss, consequent therefrom. But this is not all, Men engaged for a short, limited time only, have the Officers too much in their power; for to obtain a degree of popularity, in order to induce a second Inlistment, a kind of familiarity takes place which brings on a relaxation of Discipline, unlicensed furloughs, and other Indulgences, incompatible with order and good Government, by which means, the latter part of the time for which the Soldier was engaged, is spent in undoing what you were aiming to inculcate in the first.

To go into an enumeration of all the Evils we have experienced in this late great change of the Army, and the expence incidental to it, to say nothing of the hazard we have run, and must run, between the discharging of one Army and Inlistment of another (unless an Inormous expence of Militia is incurred) would greatly exceed the bounds of a Letter; what I have already taken the liberty of saying, will serve to convey a general Idea of the matter, and, therefore I shall with all due deference, take the freedom to give it as my opinion, that if the Congress have any reason to believe, that there will be occasion for Troops another year, and consequently of another inlistment, they would save money, and have infinitely better Troops if they were, even at the bounty of twenty, thirty or more Dollars to engage the Men already Inlisted ('till January next) and such others as may be wanted to compleat to the Establishment, for and during the War.—I will not undertake to say that the Men may be had upon these terms, but I am satisfied that it will never do to let the matter alone as it was last year, till the time of service was near expiring. The hazard is too great in the first place. In the next the trouble and perplexity of disbanding one Army and raising another at the same Instant, and in such a critical situation as the last was, is scarcely in the power of Words to describe, and such as no man, who has experienced it once, will ever undergo again.¹⁵⁶

The Congress did not change its enlistment policies for many more months, and there was another crisis of manpower at the end of 1776 before the new system took hold.

¹⁵⁶ PGW:RW, 3:274-6.

8.15 THE ARMY HE HAD

On 16 January Gen. Washington convened a council of war with representatives from the Continental Congress and the Massachusetts General Court to once again discuss an attack on Boston (see section 11.6). He felt that it was imperative to make “a bold attempt to conquer the Ministerial troops in Boston, before they can be reinforced in the Spring.” The council recommended that Washington request “Thirteen Regiments of Militia” from Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Hampshire to fill out the regular Continental troops. They also recommended that new recruits “be assured, they might carry [their firearms] home at the expiration of their services.”¹⁵⁷

Washington was probably dubious about these steps, but saw no other choice. As it turned out, the New England army he distrusted had already fought the decisive battle of the siege in Charlestown on 17 June. Following that council of war, local militia regiments turned out in strong numbers, providing the manpower to support the Continental Army’s move onto Dorchester heights in March. Massachusetts would eventually supply more soldiers to the Continental Army than any other state. By the end of the war, Washington had come to a new understanding and respect for New England military traditions while New Englanders revered Washington’s high standards and dedication.

¹⁵⁷ PGW:RW, 3:103-4.

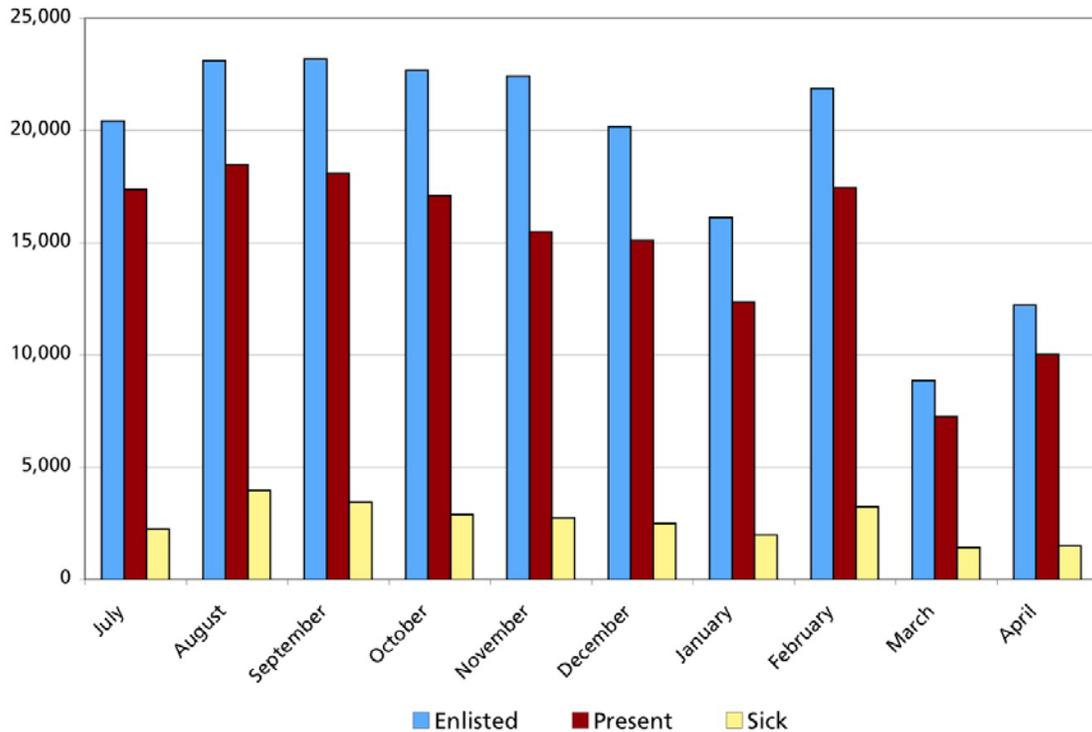


Figure 6. Troop strength of the Continental Army under Washington, based on the number of soldiers reported on muster rolls at the *end* of each month. The numbers of sick men are back-calculated from percentages. The January totals have been rounded up to make up for the lack of returns from the artillery regiment.

The December and January columns show the drop in strength as the original New England enlistments ended. The February columns include large numbers of militia troops called up for a short term: approximately 5,800 of the 17,400 men present were in militia regiments.

The March numbers are made up mostly of those New England militia companies, about to be discharged. Most of the Continental Army units were on their way to New York. The April figures reflect the soldiers Gen. Washington had with him in New York four weeks after leaving Cambridge.

The number of men reported sick rises in August during the dysentery epidemic, and again in February as the winter and camp germs took a toll on fresh troops.

Data source: Charles H. Lesser, *The Sinews of Independence: Monthly Strength Reports of the Continental Army* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), xxxi, 2-20.

CHAPTER NINE

ADDRESSING THE ASPIRATIONS OF SLAVES AND FREE BLACKS

When Gen. George Washington arrived in Massachusetts in July 1775 his views on slavery and the proper place for people of African descent in British-American society were standard for a Virginia planter. He was used to being waited on by people of African origin, and he distrusted the notion of black soldiers. Even as he guarded his own political liberties, he was content with a lifestyle that depended on the forced labor of many others.

The general tried to reshape the Continental Army according to those views, but at the end of 1775 did an about-face during the reenlistment crisis (see section 8.11). That shift to accepting a racially integrated enlisted corps was Washington's first step toward rethinking slavery as a whole. At the end of his life, he decided to posthumously free all his own slaves, an extraordinarily rare act for a Virginia planter.¹ Washington's journey to that decision started with his experiences in Cambridge.

This chapter discusses the context of the racially mixed army that Washington found when he inspected the Boston siege lines and then traces his response to it. The final sections describe African-American individuals the commander-in-chief encountered during the siege of Boston who probably influenced his thoughts on the abilities and aspirations of blacks in the new republic.

9.1 SLAVERY IN PRE-REVOLUTIONARY MASSACHUSETTS

Like the rest of the British colonies in North America, Massachusetts was a slaveholding society. In fact, it was the first of those colonies to write chattel slavery into its law. However, the institution did not dominate the economy of Massachusetts as it did in British colonies to the south and in the Caribbean.

The enslaved population of Massachusetts appears to have peaked in 1764 when blacks were 2.2% of the total population, slightly over 5,200 people out of a total of 223,841.² In contrast, in 1774 blacks comprised 6.3% of Rhode Islanders and 3.2% of Connecticut

¹ Washington's provisions for emancipation in his will were complex and designed to put off any great change until he and his wife Martha had both died. Nevertheless, he was taking a step that very few other Virginian planters ever took. For further discussion, see Hirschfeld, *George Washington and Slavery*, 209-23; Wiencek, *Imperfect God*, 352-8.

² Greene, *Negro in Colonial New England*, 347.

residents.³ Furthermore, in Massachusetts the black population was not growing. By 1776 the white population was half again as large as it was in 1764 while the black population had barely changed.⁴

In Cambridge, the 1765 census counted 47 black men and 43 black women out of a total of 1,582 people in 237 households—slightly less than 6% of the population. In the neighboring towns of Charlestown and Woburn, the percentages were 7% and 3%, respectively.⁵ This reflected a larger pattern: the black population of Massachusetts was concentrated in the port towns to the east. Slaves were rarer in rural areas, and rarer still in counties recently settled by poorer farmers. In 1765 more than a third of all Massachusetts slaves lived in Boston.⁶

There were no large slave-labor plantations in Massachusetts of the sort found in colonies to the south (including a few even in Rhode Island and Connecticut). Slaves in rural areas tended to live in ones or twos in the household of a town's richest inhabitant or minister, working and eating alongside their owners. In the ports, slaves were household servants or worked at crafts alongside journeymen and apprentices. Thus, though slavery penetrated many parts of the colony's economy, few Massachusetts gentlemen depended on slave labor for most of their income. A slave in the household was a status symbol as much as a business investment.

In greater Boston just before the Revolutionary War began, enslaved household labor might have begun to lose even that cachet. Patricia Bradley has found that between 1770 and 1774 the *Boston Gazette* and *Boston News-Letter* carried a total of twenty-five advertisements offering black babies for free, a sign that people were doubting the value of raising a lifelong slave. Other colonies' papers had few of these notices.⁷

9.2 ANTI-SLAVERY IN REVOLUTIONARY AMERICA

There were only two large-scale American anti-slavery movements before the Revolutionary War. The first occurred within the Society of Friends, or Quakers. The governing bodies of that faith began to require local meetings to expel members who continued to keep slaves. This naturally had the greatest effect in areas with large Quaker communities, such as Pennsylvania and New Jersey. In New England, Rhode Island had more Quakers, more slaves, and more slave traders per capita than any other colony,

³ Greene, *Negro in Colonial New England*, 74.

⁴ Greene, *Negro in Colonial New England*, 337. The disruption of the war, including the departure of many upper-class Loyalist households in March 1776, might have affected these figures.

⁵ Benton, *Early Census Making*. Cambridge's figures appear in this unpagged book early in the listings for Middlesex County.

⁶ Greene, *Negro in Colonial New England*, 85.

⁷ Bradley, *Slavery, Propaganda*, 32.

ensuring that the trend was hotly debated. However, the Friends' decisions had little effect on the behavior of non-Quakers. And since the most devout Quakers tended to keep out of the Revolutionary conflict, especially after the war broke out, they soon had even less influence with either side.

The other anti-slavery action was severely limited: attempts by a few American legislatures to end the transatlantic slave trade that brought new workers from Africa. Both Massachusetts and Virginia (with George Washington among its legislators) passed such laws in the decade before the Revolution.⁸ And in both cases, royal authorities vetoed the laws. This provided an additional grievance for the American Whigs to complain about—Thomas Jefferson even included it in the first draft of the Declaration of Independence—but there was of course no effect on the slaveholding societies.

Among the anti-slave-trade writers was Arthur Lee, whom Washington knew as younger brother of Richard Henry Lee and Francis Lightfoot Lee. Lee worked as an attorney in London from 1770 to 1776 helping to lobby for Massachusetts interests. His 1767 “Address on Slavery” was published in Virginia, though there is no evidence that Washington saw it or knew who wrote it.⁹

Among Massachusetts' anti-slave trade writers was Boston merchant Nathaniel Appleton (1731-1798).¹⁰ He had grown up in Cambridge, son of the Rev. Nathaniel Appleton (1693-1784), minister of the town's first parish since 1717. The Boston Edes and Gill published Appleton's 1767 antislavery pamphlet *Considerations on Slavery. In a Letter to a Friend*, which argued for abolishing the slave trade.¹¹

Another local voice against the slave trade was the Rev. Samuel Cooke (1709-1783) of Cambridge's second parish, Menotomy (now Arlington). On 30 May 1770 he delivered a sermon at the opening of the Massachusetts General Court, which Gov. Thomas Hutchinson had convened in Cambridge rather than its usual meeting-place in Boston. Cooke began with a strong Whig statement of the basis of government and then addressed the issue of slavery:

I trust, on this occasion, I may, without offence—plead the cause of our African slaves; and humbly propose the pursuit of some effectual measures, at least, to prevent the future importation of them. . . .

⁸ Any restriction on imports raises the value of the domestic product, so those laws would have brought economic benefits to the “domestic producers” of slave labor—people who already owned large numbers of male and female slaves. There is no evidence, however, that Washington and other planters were motivated to vote for the law for that purpose.

⁹ Rind's *Virginia Gazette*, 19 March 1767.

¹⁰ This Nathaniel Appleton (1731-1798) was a great-grandson of John Appleton (1622-1699). The Nathan Appleton who bought the house on Brattle Street for his daughter and Henry W. Longfellow was a great-great-grandson of Samuel Appleton (1625-1696), John's brother; Appleton, *Rough Sketch of the Appleton Genealogy*.

¹¹ Bradley, *Slavery, Propaganda*, 100.

Let the time past more than suffice, wherein we, the patrons of liberty, have dishonored the Christian name,—and degraded human nature, nearly to a level with the beasts that perish.

Ethiopia has long stretched out her hands to us—Let not sordid gain acquired by the merchandise of slaves, and the souls of men—harden our hearts against her piteous moans. When God ariseth, and when he visiteth, what shall we answer!

May it be the glory of this province—and of this respectable General Assembly—and we could wish, of this session, to lead in the cause of the oppressed.—This will avert the impending vengeance of heaven—procure you the blessing of multitudes of your fellowmen ready to perish—be highly approved by our common Father, who is no respecter of persons—and we trust, an example which would excite the highest attention of our sister colonies.¹²

Cooke did not extend his plea to ending slavery itself, and he took the political position of blaming the London government and its local appointees (such as the governor sitting before him) for preserving the slave trade.

Finally, in the early 1770s Massachusetts blacks themselves began to file petitions to the colonial legislature seeking relief from the oppression of slavery. These petitions asked for different things—an end to the slave trade, an end to slavery itself, financial support for going to Africa—as those men cast about for a way to gain the sympathy of white voters. The 1773 petition was even printed for circulation among the legislators.¹³ Those petitions used the same rhetoric of natural liberties which American Whigs had employed in their resistance to new Crown taxes and duties. Another inspiration for this effort was probably the Somerset case in London, in which Lord Chief Justice Mansfield ruled in 1772 that James Somerset had a legal right to freedom as soon as he arrived in England. Somerset had traveled from Boston with his owner, Customs official Charles Steuart.¹⁴

Thus, slavery remained settled in Massachusetts law, but cracks were beginning to form in the last decade before the Revolutionary War.

9.3 WASHINGTON THE SLAVEHOLDER

George Washington was served by enslaved African workers from the day he was born in 1732. He became a slave owner himself at the age of eleven when he inherited ten human beings, and he received more from his brother Lawrence in 1752. Washington's marriage to the widow Martha Dandridge Custis made him the manager of the slave-labor

¹² Samuel Cooke, *A Sermon Preached at Cambridge, . . . May 30th, 1770* (Boston: Edes & Gill, 1770), 41-2, quoted with modernized punctuation in Plumstead, *The Wall and the Garden*, 343-4. Discussed in Bradley, *Slavery, Propaganda*, 100.

¹³ *The Appendix or Some Observations on The Expediency of the Petition of the Africans Living in Boston* (Boston: Ezekiel Russell, 1773).

¹⁴ Moore, *Notes on the History of Slavery*, 116-7. Blumrosen and Blumrosen, *Slave Nation*, is a recent study of this case and its impact on American politics.

plantations she had inherited from her first husband and her father, among the largest in Virginia. In 1760 he paid taxes on 49 slaves, in 1770 on 87, and in 1774 on 135.¹⁵

Washington managed his human capital in much the same way as other American planters. He bought and sold slaves, looking particularly for men since they provided the most labor; in all he spent £2000 on buying people.¹⁶ Washington enforced discipline with physical punishments. In 1766 he ordered a man he considered a “Rogue & Runaway” to be shipped to “any of the Islands” in the British West Indies, which slaves feared because of the high death rates.¹⁷

Washington chose to buy no new slaves after 1772, but that was apparently an attempt to manage his spending rather than to move away from all commerce in labor. He continued to take in new slaves as payments for debt, and even decades later contemplated the price of buying skilled labor he felt he needed at Mount Vernon. Washington did not express concern about the ethics of selling slaves away from their home until 1778.¹⁸

In sum, in early 1775 there was no reason to expect George Washington to do anything radical about slavery or the racial divides in North America.

9.4 SLAVERY IN THE POLITICAL DISPUTE OF 1775

The British-Americans who protested new Crown revenue measures, starting with the writs of assistance case in 1761 and moving through the Stamp Act, Townshend duties, and Tea Act used rhetoric of “liberty” and “slavery” that they shared with generations of British Whigs. By “slavery” those authors did not mean the enslavement of people of African descent that they saw in their communities and, in many cases, their households. Rather, they used that term to mean a political subjugation to arbitrary rule, a form of serfdom under an unchecked monarch.

Washington expressed that philosophy in a 24 August 1774 letter to his longtime friend and neighbor Bryan Fairfax (c. 1730-1802). The Mount Vernon planter was then preparing to attend the First Continental Congress, and explained why he did not share Fairfax’s reluctance to defy royal authority:

For my own part, I shall not undertake to say where the Line between Great Britain and the Colonies should be drawn, but I am clearly of opinion that one ought to be drawn; & our Rights clearly ascertain'd. I could wish, I own, that the dispute had been left to Posterity to determine, but the Crisis is arriv'd when we must assert our Rights, or Submit to every Imposition that can be heap'd upon us;

¹⁵ Hirschfeld, *George Washington and Slavery*, 11-2.

¹⁶ Ferling, *First of Men*, 68.

¹⁷ Hirschfeld, *George Washington and Slavery*, 67, 69.

¹⁸ Hirschfeld, *George Washington and Slavery*, 14-6.

till custom and use, will make us as tame, & abject Slaves, as the Blacks we Rule over with such arbitrary Sway.¹⁹

This “slippery slope” argument—that at some undetermined point accepting any significant parliamentary taxes and restrictions would cause British-Americans to lose all rights—was at the core of Whig political thought. As for the overlap between political “slavery” and actual chattel slavery all around him, Washington actually came closer than many of his contemporaries to recognizing the similarities.

A few American political writers explicitly stated that their natural-rights arguments also covered black people. In 1764 James Otis, Jr., of Boston wrote in his *Rights of the Colonies Asserted*:

Does it follow that 'tis right to enslave a man because he is black? Will short curl'd hair like wool, instead of christian hair, as 'tis called by those whose hearts are as hard as the nether millstone, help the argument? Can any logical inference in favour of slavery be drawn from a flat nose, a long or a short face?²⁰

Despite those questions, Otis remained a slaveholder.²¹ Many American Whigs likewise lived comfortably with apparent contradictions between their words and actions.

Other Whigs were inching toward resolving the dilemma, at least for themselves, though few took action before the war. John Dickinson (1732-1808) of Pennsylvania was celebrated for writing the *Letters of a Pennsylvania Farmer* and “The Liberty Song,” whose lyrics declared, “not as slaves, but as freemen our money we'll give.” In 1769 he was the guest of honor at a Sons of Liberty banquet in Boston, and Washington knew him as a fellow delegate at the Continental Congress. Dickinson was also at one point the owner of more slaves than anyone else in Philadelphia. He began to emancipate those workers in 1772, freeing the last in 1777.²²

Occasionally supporters of the royal government noted the contradiction between the American Whigs' talk of slavery and the fact that so many of them lived off of slave labor. One example is the tombstone that the Concord lawyer Daniel Bliss had erected for a former slave named John Jack, which said in part, “Tho' he lived in a land of liberty, He lived a slave.”²³ However, few if any of those Loyalist writers actually advocated for an end to slavery, and many kept slaves themselves.

¹⁹ PGW:Colonial, 10:155-6. Fairfax was not politically active, and remained in Virginia through the war. See also Washington's invocation of “the Blessings of Liberty, and the Wretchedness of Slavery” in his letter to the people of Canada in September 1775; PGW:RW, 1:461.

²⁰ Quoted in Bradley, *Slavery, Propaganda*, xiii.

²¹ Waters, *Otis Family*, 133.

²² Bradley, *Slavery, Propaganda*, 4.

²³ *Boston Gazette*, 9 October 1774.

The royal authorities never moved against the institution of American slavery. On 13 August 1775 Gen. Thomas Gage sent a letter to Washington, drafted mainly by Gen. John Burgoyne, that criticized how Americans were treating some Loyalists behind their lines: “I understand there are of the King's faithful subjects, taken some time since by the rebels, laboring, like negro slaves, to gain their daily subsistence, or reduced to the wretched alternative, to perish by famine or take arms against their King and country.”²⁴ The British generals did not criticize the Americans for keeping actual “negro slaves.” Later in the war, British military commanders invited the slaves of their enemies to escape to their side, but that was a strategic move, not an ideological one.

The question of slavery entered into the political conflict between American Whigs and the Crown in one more way. In early 1769, during the dispute over the stationing of four British regiments in Boston, local politicians accused a British army captain of trying to incite local slaves to revolt.²⁵ This played off of ongoing fears of slave rebellions, which were even worse to the south, where there were many more slaves.

The return of British troops to Boston in 1774 apparently revived those fears. On 22 September 1774, Abigail Adams wrote to her husband John from Boston about a rumor that blacks would fight for the British in exchange for their freedom:

There has been in Town a conspiracy of the Negroes. At present it is kept pretty private and was discoverd [i.e., revealed] by one who endeavoured to diswaid them from it—he being threatned with his life, applied to justice [Edmund] Quincy for protection. They conducted in this way—got an Irishman to draw up a petition to the Govener telling him they would fight for him provided he would arm them and engage to liberate them if he conquerd, and it is said that he attended so much to it as to consult [Col.] Pircy upon it, and one Lieut. [?] Small has been very buisy and active. There is but little said, and what Steps they will take in consequence of it I know not. I wish most sincerely there was not a Slave in the province. It allways appeard a most iniquitious Scheme to me—fight ourselfs for what we are daily robbing and plundering from those who have as good a right to freedom as we have. You know my mind upon this Subject.²⁶

No other evidence for this conspiracy has emerged—no petition to Gov. Gage or other material in his files, no records of Quincy's interrogation, no other remarks on it. If events had actually happened as Adams believed, then officials indeed kept them “pretty quiet.” More likely, this was a false rumor that reflected a widespread fear among whites. Rumors of royal authorities encouraging slave rebellions also circulated in New York and Charleston in the following months.²⁷

²⁴ Gordon, *History of the Rise. . .*, 1:404.

²⁵ Zobel, *Boston Massacre*, 102.

²⁶ AFC, 1:161.

²⁷ *Norwich Packet*, 9 March 1775.

9.5 BLACK SOLDIERS IN THE NEW ENGLAND ARMY

Militia laws varied from one American colony to another, and changed over time. In general, however, they did not require blacks, either enslaved or free, to drill alongside whites—which meant that those blacks did not receive military training. In Massachusetts, free blacks were supposed to contribute their labor to society in another way, usually mending roads. Boston town records show that system breaking down over the eighteenth century, and it was rarely invoked after the mid-1760s. Furthermore, it is obvious from the rolls of militia on the first day of the Revolutionary War 19 April 1775 that black men were serving in their town's companies.

George Quintal's report *Patriots of Color: "A Peculiar Beauty and Merit"* found thirteen men described as "Negro," "black," or "African" in service during the Battle of Lexington and Concord, and fifty during the Battle of Bunker Hill.²⁸ Among the black Cambridge militiamen on the first day of the war were Cato Bordman, Cato Stedman, and Cuff Whittemore. The latter, from the Menotomy village, was apparently still legally enslaved at the time.²⁹ No one in New England could have missed the presence of black men among the provincial troops at the start of the war because "Prince Easterbrooks (a Negro man)" was on the casualty lists that the Massachusetts Provincial Congress circulated.³⁰

That congress had become the *de facto* government of Massachusetts outside Boston, and on 20 May 1775 its Committee of Safety set this policy for the army besieging that town:

That it is the opinion of this Committee, as the contest now between Great Britain and the Colonies respects the liberties and privileges of the latter, which the Colonies are determined to maintain, that the admission of any persons as Soldiers into the Army now raising, but only such as are Freemen, will be inconsistent with the policies that are to be supported, and reflect dishonour on this Colony; and that no slaves be admitted into this Army upon any consideration whatever.³¹

Putting their ideology of liberty into practice, these Massachusetts Whigs decreed that it would be inconsistent for them to rely on enslaved soldiers, or for wealthy men to send

²⁸ Quintal found additional men identified as Native American, as "mulatto" or "mixed," or in other ways indicating that they might have African or Native ancestry. In all, he reported over 100 documented soldiers of color in the early provincial army, and estimated there might be half again as many who could not be positively identified. *Patriots of Color*, 242, 260.

²⁹ Quintal, *Patriots of Color*, 65, 204, 218-9. Cato Bordman's name appears in Paige, *History of Cambridge*, 409.

³⁰ For examples, casualty lists in *Newport Mercury*, 8 May 1775, and "Bloody Butchery of the British Troops" (Salem: Ezekiel Russell, 1775). Easterbook was the only wounded man not referred to with a title or the honorific "Mr."

³¹ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 553.

slaves to do the fighting they should do themselves. The Committee of Safety drew a line between free men and slaves, not between whites and blacks.

9.6 WASHINGTON'S FIRST LOOK AT THE CONTINENTAL TROOPS

On 10 July 1775, soon after arriving in Cambridge, Washington sent the Continental Congress a long letter describing how much worse the situation was than he had been led to expect. He noted the lack of men, relative to what had been promised:

Upon finding the Number of Men to fall so far short of the Establishment arid below all Expectation, I immediately called a Council of the General Officers, whose opinion as to the mode of filling up the regiments and providing for the present Exigency, together with the best Judgment we are able to form of the Ministerial Troops, I have the Honor of inclosing. From the Number of Boys, Deserters and negroes which have inlisted in this Province, I entertain some doubts whether the Number required, can be raised here; and all the General Officers agree, that no Dependance can be put on the Militia for a continuance in Camp, or Regularity and Discipline during the short time they may stay.³²

The new commander-in-chief took the presence of “negroes,” among others, as a sign that the New England regiments were deficient.

Washington did not object to black men, even enslaved black men, being part of a military force—as long as they were laborers, not soldiers. He had brought his own slave Will Lee to Cambridge, after all (see section 9.9). On 27 December 1755 during the French and Indian War, he had advised Capt. Peter Hogg: “I think it will be advisable to detain both Mulatto’s and Negroes in your Company; and employ them as Pioneers or Hatchet-men.”³³ Washington’s reaction to seeing black privates in the same ranks as whites was probably similar to how he felt about seeing enlisted men and officers mingling as near equals: as a dangerous leveling of society (see section 8.5).

Ironically, the regiment at the John Vassall house in early July 1775—Col. John Glover’s men from Marblehead—contained at least a few black soldiers (see section 2.6). The Pennsylvania captain Alexander Graydon thought that regiment was exceptionally well trained when he saw them in mid-1776, but nonetheless was struck by their ethnic makeup:

The only exception I recollect to have seen, to these miserably constituted bands from New England, was the regiment of Glover from Marblehead. There was an appearance of discipline in this corps; the officers seemed to have mixed with the world, and to understand what belonged to their stations. Though deficient, perhaps, in polish, it possessed an apparent aptitude for the purpose of its institution, and gave a confidence that myriads of its meek and lowly brethren were incompetent to inspire. But even in this regiment there were a number of

³² PGW:RW, 1:90.

³³ Hirschfeld, *George Washington and Slavery*, 144.

negroes, which, to persons unaccustomed to such associations, had a disagreeable, degrading effect.³⁴

Washington may have felt a similar reaction when he first saw the New England troops, and he probably worried that other gentlemen from colonies to the south would feel the same way.

The Massachusetts Committee of Safety appears to have responded to the new commander's concerns about the quality of the province's troops. On 8 July, even before he wrote to Philadelphia, that body told recruiting officers:

You are not to enlist any deserter from the Ministerial Army, nor any stroller, negro, or vagabond, or person suspected of being an enemy to the liberty of America, nor any under eighteen years of age.

Washington's adjutant general, Horatio Gates, echoed those words two days later in recruitment orders.³⁵

9.7 ESTABLISHING A MORE RESTRICTIVE POLICY

In late 1775 Washington embarked on a reorganization of the provincial troops into a true Continental Army (see section 8.6). This process led to a discussion of whether that army should continue to include black soldiers.

That issue came up first at the Continental Congress in Philadelphia, at the instigation of South Carolina delegate Edward Rutledge. His colony had a much larger enslaved population than New England—indeed, at times in the eighteenth century most people in South Carolina were black. Rutledge became one of the Congress's principal voices for the interests of American slaveholders. New Jersey delegate Richard Smith's diary preserves the discussion:

Tuesday 26 Septr. Com[mitt]ee brought in a Letter to Gen Washington, in the Course of it E Rutledge moved that the Gen. shall discharge all the Negroes as well Slaves as Freemen in his Army. He (Rutledge) was strongly supported by many of the Southern Delegates but so powerfully opposed that he lost the Point.³⁶ The official record of the Congress on that date says nothing about the controversy: "The Committee appointed to prepare an answer to General

³⁴ Graydon, *Memoirs of a Life*, 146-7. It is possible that the number of blacks in Glover's regiment changed between July 1775 and when Graydon saw it in early 1776.

³⁵ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 592. *American Archives*, series 4, 2:1368, 2:1630. The American commanders actually welcomed British deserters who brought significant knowledge. The brigade-major for Gen. Greene's battalion, Maj. John Box, was a former army sergeant whom Greene had convinced to desert in December 1774 so he could drill the Kentish Guards; Greene, *Life of Nathanael Greene*, 1:51. British private Thomas Machin's commission as a lieutenant in the American artillery is discussed in section 13.7.

³⁶ LoD, 2:68.

Washington's letters, reported the same, which was read and agreed to.”³⁷ The letter to Washington that John Hancock signed that day on behalf of the Congress acknowledged the importance of “the Continuation of the Army, now under your Command, in the Service of the Continent after the terms of Enlistments shall have been Completed,” but offered no instructions on what sort of soldiers the army should recruit or reenlist.³⁸ Therefore, it is possible that Washington did not know that Congress had already considered the question of black troops.

A hint of the controversy in Philadelphia appears in John Adams's 5 October 1775 letters to William Heath and John Thomas, two of the Massachusetts generals:

It is represented in this city by some persons, and it makes an unfriendly impression upon some minds, that in the Massachusetts Regiments, there are great numbers of boys, old men, and negroes, such as are unsuitable for the service, and therefore that the Continent is paying for a much greater number of men than are fit for active or any service. I have endeavoured to the utmost of my power to rectify these mistakes, as I take them to be, and I hope with some success, but still the impression is not quite removed.

I would beg the favour of you therefore, Sir, to inform me whether there is any truth at all in this report, or not. It is natural to suppose there are some young men and some old ones and some negroes in the service, but I should be glad to know if there are more of these in proportion in the Massachusetts Regiments, than in those of Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire, or even among the Riflemen.³⁹

Those riflemen were from Pennsylvania and Virginia, so Adams was eager to have facts to throw back at all his colleagues.

On 23 October 1775 Heath wrote back, decrying jealousies among the colonies while also stating his intention to “Contribute to the Good of my Country, or Advantage of my Native Colony.” His answer to Adams's question was:

There are in the Massachusetts Regiments Some few Lads and Old men, and in Several Regiments, Some Negroes. Such is also the Case with the Regiments from the Other Colonies, Rhode Island has a Number of Negroes and Indians, Connecticut has fewer Negroes but a number of Indians. The New Hampshire Regiments have less of Both. The men from Connecticut I think in General are rather stouter than those of either of the other Colonies, But the Troops of our Colony are Robust, Agile, and as fine Fellows in General as I ever would wish to see in the Field.⁴⁰

³⁷ JCC, 3:263.

³⁸ LoD, 2:65-6.

³⁹ PJA, 3:183-4. MHSC, series 7, 4:3-4. Adams's letter to Thomas was reportedly so similar that it is not included in PJA.

⁴⁰ PJA, 3:230-1.

Privately, Heath disliked the sight of black troops, or preferred a racially segregated army. In 1777 he wrote that the blacks in the troops he had sent to counter a British thrust “were generally able bodied, but for my own part I must confess I am neaver pleased to see them mixed with white men.”⁴¹

Thomas’s 24 October answer to Adams was more favorable to his black soldiers:

I am Sorrey to hear that any Prejudice Should take Place in any of the Southern Colony’s with Respect to the Troops Raised in this; I am Certain the Insinuations you Mention are Injurious; if we Consider with what Precipitation we were Obliged to Collect an Army. The Regiments at Roxbury, the Privates are Equal to any that I Served with Last war, very few Old men, and in the Ranks very few boys, Our Fifers are many of them boys, we have Some Negros, but I Look on them in General Equally Servicable with other men, for Fatigue and in Action; many of them have Proved themselves brave...⁴²

By the time Thomas wrote that letter, he had already participated in a discussion that led to a new policy toward black troops.

On 5 October 1775 Washington convened his top commanders to discuss and answer the questions that the Congress had sent about the requirements of the new army (see section 8.6). At the meeting were major generals Artemas Ward, Charles Lee, and Israel Putnam, and brigadier generals Heath, Thomas, Joseph Spencer, John Sullivan, Nathanael Greene, and Horatio Gates. All were from New England states except Lee and Gates, both former officers in the British army who had become Virginia planters. Washington took it upon himself to add another question to the discussion:

Whether it will be adviseable to re-inlist any Negroes in the new Army—or whether there be a Distinction between such as are Slaves & those who are free?
Agreed unanimously to reject all Slaves, & by a great Majority to reject Negroes altogether.⁴³

Between one and three of the generals appear to have voted in favor of enlisting free blacks, but the record does not disclose which ones.⁴⁴

That vote might have affected Washington’s general orders for 9 October that say simply:

⁴¹ Heath to Samuel Adams, 27 August 1777, MHSC, series 7, 4:148.

⁴² PJA, 3:239-41.

⁴³ PGW:RW, 2:125. This text is from Joseph Reed’s notes of the meeting; Edmund Randolph’s notes say “inlist” instead of “re-inlist”; PGW:RW, 2:128.

⁴⁴ On the basis of later statements and actions, Patrick Charles surmised that Greene and Thomas probably supported keeping free black soldiers while Spencer’s views are impossible to determine and all other council members opposed the idea; Charles, *Washington’s Decision*, 81-100.

If any Negroe is found straggling after *Taptoo* beating about the Camp, or about any of the roads or Villages, near the encampments at Roxbury, or Cambridge, they are to be seized and confined until Sun-rise, in the Guard, nearest to the place where such Negroe is taken up.⁴⁵

While this order did not affect black soldiers in the ranks, it would certainly have discouraged other African-American men from going anywhere near the army camps.

A high-level council of war followed on 18-23 October with representatives from the Continental Congress and the New England governments (see section 17.8). On the last day this council considered the question of African-American soldiers, though the way the question was presented made the answer a foregone conclusion:

Ought not Negroes to be excluded from the new Inlistment especially such as are Slaves—all were thought improper by the Council of Officers?

It is no surprise that the group decided that blacks “be rejected altogether.”⁴⁶ Although the Congress had already rejected Rutledge’s proposal, the advice of the military commanders carried weight.

Washington quickly put that new policy into practice. In his general orders on 31 October 1775 he cajoled men into reenlisting by appealing to their patriotism and honor (and by promising “higher pay, than private Soldiers ever yet met with in any former war”). He directed the quartermaster general to reserve new clothing to soldiers “who are determined to stand forth in defence of their Country another year.” However, there was one major exception to that bounty: “Negroes. . . , which the Congress do not incline to inlist again.”⁴⁷ On 12 November, the printed enlistment forms were ready to be distributed. Washington summoned all colonels to pick them up at headquarters the next day at ten o’clock and reminded recruiters once again: “Neither Negroes, Boys unable to bare Arms, nor old men unfit to endure the fatigues of the campaign, are to be inlisted.”⁴⁸

9.8 A CHANGE OF POLICY

It is striking how little discussion can be found about the issue of excluding black soldiers from the Continental Army around Boston. As the Continental Congress records quoted above show, the official legislative minutes of the time tended to downplay discord and debate. But there were also no newspaper essays or private letters to Washington or the Continental Congress delegates on the matter. Some people in Massachusetts must have

⁴⁵ PGW:RW, 2:130.

⁴⁶ PGW:RW, 2:199.

⁴⁷ PGW:RW, 2:269.

⁴⁸ PGW:RW, 2:354.

supported letting blacks fight alongside whites if they wanted to, especially in a time of dire necessity.

The question seems to have been of the utmost delicacy, with pitfalls for people taking any position. Those who opposed enlisting black soldiers could be accused of weakening the army and undercutting the ideal of natural liberty. On the other hand, a policy of enlisting blacks could be attacked from two sides. Some, especially in the colonies with large enslaved populations, might see that change as a radical disruption of the social order, endangering the very society that the Patriots claimed to be protecting. Yet supporters of the royal government might argue that Patriots were exploiting black soldiers as a way to get out of fighting their own battles.

Advocates for black soldiers had the advantage of a *fait accompli*. There already *were* African-Americans in the provincial regiments. They made the most convincing case for themselves simply by doing their duty each day, and stating they were willing to sign up for another term. Their presence was ultimately more persuasive than a public debate.

In December 1775 two developments helped Washington to rethink the new policy against allowing black soldiers to reenlist which he had helped to install. First, he received word from Congress and his friend Richard Henry Lee that Lord Dunmore, Virginia's royal governor, had promised freedom to male slaves who joined the British Army. There had been rumors of the royal government making such an offer to slaves for a long time, starting even before the war, so this proclamation did not surprise Washington and his peers; it simply confirmed their assumptions and inflamed their fears.

In fact, Washington had been personally concerned about Dunmore for months. Since the summer there had been rumors that the governor would sail up the Potomac and attack Mount Vernon, seeking to capture Martha Washington. On 29 October 1775 the general's plantation manager and cousin Lund Washington wrote about how he might repel an attack: "I wish I had the musquets—I woud endeavour to find the men Black or White, that woud at least make them pay dear for the attempt."⁴⁹ In writing to the general about Dunmore's proclamation on 3 December Lund Washington expressed confidence that none of the slaves at Mount Vernon would run away to the governor.⁵⁰ Some did.⁵¹

The commander-in-chief's response to news of Dunmore's efforts has been distorted. Over the last four decades, many authors have stated that Washington wrote in late December 1775: "Success will depend on which side can arm the Negroes faster." However,

⁴⁹ PGW:RW, 2:258.

⁵⁰ PGW:RW, 2:479-80.

⁵¹ Wienczek, *Imperfect God*, 203-4.

this statement does not appear in the general's correspondence.⁵² Instead, on 26 December he told Lee:

If, my dear Sir, that man [Dunmore] is not crushed before spring, he will become the most formidable enemy America has; his strength will increase as a snow ball, by rolling; and faster, if some expedient cannot be hit upon to convince the slaves and servants of the impotency of his designs.⁵³

The general did not advocate arming blacks in Virginia, but rather of convincing them to remain on the plantations as docile workers.

More important than Dunmore's example was the expiration of militia enlistments at the end of 1775. Already Washington had felt it necessary to call out local militia to keep regiments from Connecticut from going home at the formal end of their enlistment (see section 8.12). Quite simply, the commander could no longer afford to turn away willing soldiers. Furthermore, it could not have escaped Washington that in the nearly six months he had been in command at Boston the black soldiers had behaved as respectably as the whites and caused no great fissures in the ranks. Even Thomas Lynch, delegate from South Carolina (see section 17.6), recognized that the end of enlistments required new thinking: "Your Riflemen, Negroes & deserters may in proper passes defend your artillery, Ammunition & Stores," he wrote on 8 December.⁵⁴

On 30 December 1775 Washington created a new policy in his general orders:

As the General is informed, that Numbers of Free Negroes are desirous of inlisting, he gives leave to the recruiting Officers to entertain them, and promises to lay the matter before the Congress, who he doubts not will approve of it.⁵⁵

It is unclear who "informed" the commander of those volunteers. Perhaps the word came from officers like those who had petitioned the Massachusetts legislature on behalf of Pvt. Salem Poor earlier in the month (see section 9.10). Perhaps recruiting officers were filing reports. Some authors have suggested that black soldiers themselves approached Washington, but there is no evidence of such a delegation, which would probably have attracted attention. They may instead have asked their officers to speak for them.

⁵² Charles, *Washington's Decision*, 73. The earliest appearance of that spurious quotation, said to be from a Washington letter to "Col. Henry Lee," may have been in Joel A. Rogers, *Africa's Gift to America: The Afro-American in the Making and Saving of the United States* (New York: n.p., 1959). Philip S. Foner quoted the sentence in *History of Black Americans*, 316, as well as in two books published the next year: *Blacks in the American Revolution* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976) and *Labor in the American Revolution* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976). Since then, the phrase has appeared in journal articles, textbooks, and popular histories.

⁵³ PGW:RW, 2:611. Lee, *Richard Henry Lee*, 2:9.

⁵⁴ LoD, 2:458.

⁵⁵ PGW:RW, 2:620.

The next day, Gen. Washington wrote to the Congress:

... it has been represented to me that the free negroes who have Served in this Army, are very much dissatisfied at being discarded—as it is to be apprehended, that they may Seek employ in the ministerial Army—I have presumed to depart from the Resolution respecting them, & have given Licence for their being enlisted, if this is disapproved by Congress, I will put a Stop to it.

Was there a real possibility of free black soldiers defecting to the British army because they were so “dissatisfied”? That seems unlikely for a variety of practical reasons. Getting to Boston or Charlestown across the siege lines and waterways was not easy, and people expected the British garrison to suffer badly from shortages of food and firewood as winter came on. Furthermore, while Dunmore was offering Virginia slaves their freedom, these men outside Boston were already free, and thus had less to gain. Finally, the number of New England blacks was not large enough for their defection to pose a major threat, unlike the situation in the south.

In choosing that argument, Washington made a case that he probably knew his fellow southerners would accept. As much as planters disdained and feared armed blacks, they preferred to have those men on their own side rather than on the enemy’s. Furthermore, Dunmore’s well-publicized announcement meant that the public would associate any stigma about recruiting black soldiers with the royal authorities, not the Continental Army—even though Washington had been in command of black soldiers first.

Once again, Congress followed the general’s recommendation, and on 16 January 1776 it resolved:

That the free Negroes who have served faithfully in the army at Cambridge, may be reenlisted therein, but no others.⁵⁶

In practice, the New England recruiting officers continued to bend the rules. Along with the reenlisting soldiers, the army was replenished with new black recruits and even some enslaved men.

Gen. Washington did not inquire too closely into whether his subordinates were following the Congress’s policy to the letter. In his next general orders to recruiting officers, issued 21 February 1776 he wrote:

The General being anxious to have the established Regiments, compleated, with all possible expedition, desires the Colonels, and commanding Officers, forthwith to send an Officer from each incompleat Company, into the Country, upon the recruiting service; who are expressly forbid enlisting any Boys—Old Men—or Slaves.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ JCC, 4:60.

⁵⁷ PGW:RW, 3:350.

He did not require those officers to determine if any free black recruits had been in the army before.

Once Washington changed his mind about reenlistment, he accepted African-American enlisted men on the same basis as white ones, though the Continental Army had no black officers. (See the exceptional case of Colonel Louis in section 16.7.) Later in the war, when Gen. Heath reported that some white recruits resisted being assigned to Rhode Island's "black regiment," initially filled by black and Native men, the commander-in-chief suggested: "The objection to joining [Col. Christopher] Greene's may be removed by dividing the blacks in such a manner between the two [regiments] as to abolish the name and appearance of a black corps."⁵⁸ This move toward racial integration showed how Washington had gotten over his worry that black troops were a sign of inferior strength and commitment.

9.9 WILLIAM LEE: WASHINGTON'S PERSONAL SERVANT

In October 1767, George Washington bought two "Mulatto" boys named Will and Frank and two "Negro" boys named Adam and Jack from Mary Lee, widow of Col. John Lee of Westmoreland County.⁵⁹ The price for Will and Frank was £61.15s, more than three times the £19 Washington paid for the other youths. All four slaves were probably teenaged males with many productive years before them, but the brothers' light skin made them particularly valuable as domestic servants.

John Lee (1724-1767) had married the young widow Mary (Smith) Ball in 1749.⁶⁰ They had no children together before he died. Given how the young mulatto men were Col. Lee's property and took his surname, he is the man most likely to have been their father. In any event, his widow sent them off with another master soon after the colonel's death. Mary went on to wed John Smith in August 1768, and Washington dined with that couple the day after their marriage.

Frank Lee became the butler at Mount Vernon, and Will Lee (c. 1753-c. 1824) became Washington's personal body-servant or "*Val de Chambre*." In his diary on 8 October 1770 the planter referred to "my boy Billy who was taken sick." In all other written sources, Washington referred to his body-servant as "William" or "Will." Other members of the household referred to the man as "Billy," as did later anecdotes about him, but Washington appears to have preferred a more formal name.

⁵⁸ Washington to William Heath, 29 June 1780, MHSC, series 7, 5:79.

⁵⁹ Wienczek, *Imperfect God*, 130-1. Washington recorded his payment to Mary Lee on 3 May 1768, when he was at Williamsburg. His diary for the month of the sale does not survive. Hirschfeld, *George Washington and Slavery*, 98.

⁶⁰ Smith, Ball, Lee, John, and Mary were all very common names in eighteenth-century Virginia, and genealogists have struggled to pin down this family. This identification follows that in *Diaries of George Washington*, 2:88.

At Mount Vernon, Will Lee became Washington's favored companion on foxhunts. In his recollections, begun in 1826, the general's grandson George W. P. Custis (1781-1857) recalled how "Washington always superbly mounted, in true sporting costume, . . . took the field at day dawn, with his huntsman, Will Lee, his friends and neighbours." Of Lee he wrote:

Will, the huntsman, better known in Revolutionary lore as Billy, rode a horse called *Chinkling*, a surprising leaper, and made very much like its rider, low, but sturdy, and of great bone and muscle. Will had but one order, which was to keep with the hounds; and, mounted on *Chinkling*, a French horn at his back, throwing himself almost at length on the animal, with his spur in flank, the fearless horseman would rush, at full speed, through brake or tangled wood, in a style at which modern huntsmen would stand aghast.⁶¹

Thomas Jefferson called Washington "the best horseman of his age, and the most graceful figure that could be seen on horseback."⁶² Historian Fritz Hirschfeld noted that Will Lee was able to keep up.⁶³

When Washington came to Cambridge in 1775, William Lee came with him. Lee's first name appears in the household accounts. Israel Trask probably remembered the servant in his memory of when the general broke up a fight between Glover's regiment and Virginia riflemen:

At this juncture General Washington made his appearance, whether by accident or design I never knew. I only saw him and his colored servant, both mounted. With the spring of a deer, he leaped from his saddle, threw the reins of his bridle into the hands of his servant, and rushed into the thickest of the melee. . .⁶⁴

Otherwise, Lee's work in Cambridge does not seem to have attracted public attention. His relationship with Margaret Thomas (see section 9.11) probably began at that time.

William Lee continued to attend to Washington throughout the war. Custis claimed that Lee acted as the head of "a corps of valets" who would ride out to observe their officers in battle, at one point attracting attention from British artillery as he surveyed them with "the large telescope that he always carried in a leathern case."⁶⁵ Lee became so well known that when the British government sought to embarrass the general in 1777, it issued a pamphlet of spurious embarrassing letters said to have been captured with "Billy, . . . the old servant of

⁶¹ Custis published his memories first in, of all places, his article "Washington a Sportsman," *The American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine*, 1 (1829), 6-7. Lee suffered knee injuries that curtailed his ability to ride before Custis turned eight, so his description might be secondhand and romanticized.

⁶² Jefferson to Dr. Walter Jones, 2 January 1814, in *Niles' Weekly Register*, 16 August 1828.

⁶³ Hirschfeld, *George Washington and Slavery*, 98.

⁶⁴ Trask's 1845 pension application is printed in Dann, *The Revolution Remembered*, 408-9. For the full account and discussion, see section 8.10.

⁶⁵ Custis, *Recollections and Private Memoirs*, 224. Editor Benson J. Lossing added a note that Lee's telescope was still on display at Mount Vernon in 1859.

General Washington.” However, as the general pointed out, Lee was never a British prisoner.⁶⁶

In 1783 Lee returned to Mount Vernon and resumed his domestic duties. A visitor to Mount Vernon in January 1785 later wrote: “His servant Billy, the faithful companion of his military career, was always at his side.”⁶⁷ When Washington made his first full inventory of enslaved workers in 1786, Lee as “Val de Chambre” was at the top of the list.⁶⁸

However, on 22 April 1785 Lee fell and broke his knee while helping Washington survey land. On 1 March 1788 he fell again and hurt his other knee while fetching mail from Alexandria. Though Lee insisted on accompanying Washington to the national capital in 1789, he could not resume his duties. In 1793 Washington wrote to his secretary about finding a replacement, and by May 1794 Lee was assigned to making shoes at Mount Vernon. The president freed “my Mulatto man William (calling himself William Lee)” in his will, and granted him an annuity of thirty dollars “as a testimony of my sense of his attachment to me, and for his faithful services during the Revolutionary War.”⁶⁹ Lee remained at Mount Vernon as a shoemaker, reportedly drinking heavily because of the pain in his knees, until his death about 1824.⁷⁰

Two portraits of Washington include black servants in the background, and some authors have taken them to be representations of William Lee. It is just as likely those figures represented generic servants, and not an individual man.

The first of these paintings is John Trumbull’s *George Washington*, completed in 1780 and now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. A black man wearing a turban holds the general’s horse in the background. Trumbull was an aide to the general for nineteen days in 1775 (see section 5.9), and thus had probably encountered Will Lee. Yet the artist did not paint this image from life and never identified the black figure, whose features are somewhat caricatured, as a particular man.

Edward Savage’s painting *The Washington Family*, completed in 1796 and now owned by the National Gallery, shows a light-skinned black male servant standing behind Martha Washington. Nineteenth-century engravings based on this painting identified that man as William Lee.⁷¹ Savage could indeed have modeled this figure on Lee when he painted the Washingtons in New York in 1789-90. In his public description of the painting, however, Savage never claimed to have based the black man on a particular servant; in fact, the artist

⁶⁶ This incident is discussed in Hirschfeld, *George Washington and Slavery*, 102-4.

⁶⁷ Watson, *Men and Times of the Revolution*, 279.

⁶⁸ Hirschfeld, *George Washington and Slavery*, 17.

⁶⁹ PGW:Retirement, 4:480-1.

⁷⁰ Hirschfeld, *George Washington and Slavery*, 109.

⁷¹ One such print is in the collection of the Boston Athenæum.

never mentioned that figure at all.⁷² Savage may have included the man as a symbol of the Washington family's wealth rather than as a portrait of an individual.

9.10 SALEM POOR: CONTINENTAL SOLDIER

On 5 December 1775 thirteen Continental Army officers and a brigade surgeon filed an extraordinary petition to the Massachusetts legislature seeking a reward for a private soldier named Salem Poor (c. 1742-after 1780). It said:

The Subscribers begg leave to Report to your Honble. House, (which wee do in Justice to the Character of So Brave a Man) that under Our Own observation, Wee declare that A Negro Man Called Salem Poor of Col. Fryes Regiment Capt. Ames. Company in the late Battle at Charlestown, behaved like an Experienced officer, as Well as an Excellent Soldier, to Set forth Particulars of his Conduct Would be Tedious, Wee Would Only begg leave to Say in the Person of this Sd. Negro Centers a Brave & gallant Soldier. The Reward due to so great and Distinguisht a Caracter, Wee Submit to the Congress—

The first three signers were Col. Jonathan Brewer, Lt.-Col. Thomas Nixon, and Col. William Prescott, commander in the provincial redoubt at Bunker Hill.⁷³ Poor's own colonel was dying of a musket wound suffered in that battle.

On 21 December, a member of the Massachusetts Council brought this petition into the House. The lower chamber's public record describes the petition as "a Paper signed by Colonel Brewer and other Officers of the Army, testifying the Bravery of Salem Poor, a Negro Man in Col. Fry's Regiment, at the late Battle at Charlestown." The House took no action until 2 January 1776 when "The Recommendation of Salem Poor was read, and he had Leave to withdraw it"—the period's euphemism for rejecting a petition.⁷⁴

For white officers of eighteenth-century America to describe a black man as having "behaved like an Experienced officer" was extraordinary praise. Officers were gentlemen, and most people thought blacks could never enter that class. Poor had moved from slavery to free status in 1769 by buying his freedom for £27, but he was never expected to be more than a poor laborer or farmer.⁷⁵

The timing of the petition on Poor's behalf is striking. The officers submitted it nearly six months after the actual battle, but only three weeks after Gen. Washington told those colonels that black soldiers could not reenlist. Was this appeal to the legislature an attempt to

⁷² Miles, *American Paintings*, 154. "The Washington Family," *Africans in America, part 2*, website at <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part2/2h10.html>>.

⁷³ This document is reproduced in Quintal, *Patriots of Color*, 175-8.

⁷⁴ Massachusetts, *Journal of the House*, vol. 51, part II (1775-76), 63, 103.

⁷⁵ Quintal, *Patriots of Color*, 170.

influence the discussion on black soldiers? Did Poor ask those officers to recommend some reward for him because he would soon be discharged from the army?

Unfortunately, the petition does not explain what Poor did during the Battle of Bunker Hill to earn the respect of all those officers. One possibility is that he killed Maj. John Pitcairn of the Marines or another officer as the British attacked the provincial redoubt. In 1787 the Rev. Dr. Jeremy Belknap, founder of the Massachusetts Historical Society, took notes on what he had heard about the Bunker Hill battle, including:

A negro man belonging to Groton, took aim at Major Pitcairne, as he was rallying the dispersed British Troops, & shot him thro' the head, he was brought over to Boston & died as he was landing on the ferry ways.⁷⁶

There was no soldier from Groton named "Salem," however, leaving the identity of this man unclear.

In 1818, in the first major retrospective study of the battle the Boston historian Samuel Swett wrote:

Young [Lt. William] Richardson of the royal Irish [or 18th Regiment], was the first to mount the works, and was instantly shot down; the front rank which succeeded shared the same fate. Among these mounted the gallant Major Pitcairn, and exultingly cried "the day is ours," when a black soldier named Salem, shot him through and he fell.⁷⁷

Eight years later, in his *History of Bunker Hill Battle*, Swett named his source for that anecdote as militia general John Winslow (1753-1819), and added that Winslow had also told him, "a contribution was made in the army for Salem and he was presented to Washington as having slain Pitcairn."⁷⁸ Winslow's recollection indicates that people saw this Salem's conduct as particularly laudable, and Salem Poor is the only black soldier for whom there is evidence of such praise from others in the army.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ MHSP, 14:93. An American tradition holds that Maj. John Pitcairn was killed as he mounted the wall of the provincial redoubt on Breed's Hill. However, Lt. John Waller of the Royal Marines wrote that Pitcairn was shot near him at some distance from the redoubt. It seems likely that provincials killed another officer on the wall and told each other that was Pitcairn, who had become notorious after the skirmish on Lexington common. Waller's accounts appear in a copy of his 21 June 1775 letter held by the Massachusetts Historical Society, visible at <http://www.masshist.org/revolution/doc-viewer.php?old=1&mode=nav&item_id=766>, and his 22 June 1775 letter to Jacob Waller printed in Nicolas, *Royal Marine Forces*, 1:87-9.

⁷⁷ Swett's appendix to Humphreys, *General Israel Putnam* (1818 ed.), 247.

⁷⁸ Swett, *History of Bunker Hill Battle*, 25.

⁷⁹ In 1826, Emory Washburn stated in a history of his home town that the "black soldier named Salem" whom Swett had described was a local man named Peter Salem; *Town of Leicester*, 51. There is documentation for Salem's service in the Continental Army in a unit that fought at Bunker Hill, but Washburn never provided further evidence for identifying him as the man praised in 1775 beyond the name "Salem," which other soldiers shared. Yet another name now associated with shooting Maj.

Gen. Washington left no record of having met any black soldier named Salem, though such an encounter may have been no more than an officer briefly singling out the man for praise during the commander's review of his company. Nevertheless, African-American soldiers like Salem Poor, Peter Salem, and many others, and the officers who spoke up for them, were part of the groundswell that persuaded Washington to change his mind about allowing black men to re-enlist in the Continental Army.

Salem Poor went on to serve at Fort George, Saratoga, Valley Forge, White Plains, and Providence before he was discharged in 1780.⁸⁰

9.11 MARGARET THOMAS: FREE BLACK LAUNDRESS

On 22 February 1776 steward Timothy Austin recorded this expense in the accounts for Gen. Washington's headquarters:

Paid Margaret Thomas for making three shirts for William⁸¹

The cost was 7 shillings and 2¼ pence. This innocuous entry confirms that Margaret Thomas, a free black woman, was part of the domestic staff at Washington's headquarters in Cambridge. She may have appeared on the books even earlier as "Washerwoman" since she was apparently taking care of household clothing (see section 6.9).

The account entry also hints at a special relationship between Thomas and "William"—the general's enslaved body-servant William Lee (see section 9.9). Austin paid her for sewing garments specifically for Lee.

Thomas appears to have stayed with the commander-in-chief's headquarters during the first years of the war, and perhaps throughout. Among Washington's papers is a 4 April 1778 receipt with her name signed at the bottom after she had been paid for:

Washington [an error for "washing"] done for His Excellency General Washington from the 20th. day of Octob: 1776 to the 20th day of Feby. 1778—including Servants &c. belonging to the General.

Again, the servants belonging to the general included William Lee.

On 28 July 1784 Washington wrote to Clement Biddle, his agent in Philadelphia:

The mulatto fellow William, who has been with me all the War is attached (married he says) to one of his own colour a free woman, who, during the War

Pitcairn is "Salem Prince"; that first appeared in a footnote in French, *First Year of the American Revolution*, 248. It was apparently an error for Salem Poor because there is no contemporaneous documentation for a soldier of that name.

⁸⁰ Quintal, *Patriots of Color*, 170-1.

⁸¹ "Revolutionary War Household Expense Accounts, 1775-1776," George Washington Papers, Library of Congress; page visible at <<http://memory.loc.gov/mss/mgw/mgw5/117/0300/0356.jpg>>.

was also of my family. She has been in an infirm state of health for sometime, and I had conceived that the connection between them had ceased, but I am mistaken; they are both applying to me to get her here, and tho' I never wished to see her more yet I cannot refuse his request (if it can be complied with on reasonable terms) as he has lived with me so long and followed my fortunes through the War with fidelity.

After promising thus much, I have to beg the favor of you to procure her a passage to Alexandria either by Sea, by the passage Boats (if any there be) from the head of Elk, or in the Stage as you shall think cheapest and best, and circumstances may require. She is called Margaret Thomas als. Lee (the name which he has assumed) and lives at Isaac and Hannah Sills, black people who frequently employ themselves in Cooking for families in the City of Phila.⁸²

This letter reveals several things. First, Washington recalled Margaret Thomas well, and recognized that there had been a “connection” between her and Will Lee during the war—perhaps starting as early as 1776. The general was surprised and somewhat skeptical to hear that that relationship had reached the formal level of marriage. Furthermore, Washington was obviously less fond of Thomas than Lee was.

Nevertheless, the general felt that he had to accede to the couple’s wishes and pay for her to come to Mount Vernon because Lee had served him so well through the war. As a slave-owner of great power, Washington had nonetheless agreed to do something which he did not want to do, which would cost him money, and which he thought would only lead to trouble, out of loyalty to one of his slaves. That was an extraordinary development.

There is no record that Biddle was able to find Margaret Thomas/Lee in Philadelphia, or that she made the trip to Mount Vernon. A woman named Margaret Lee was admitted to the public hospital in Philadelphia on 18 September 1798; however, she is not listed as black, as other hospital admittees were.⁸³ No other evidence about the fate of Margaret Thomas/Lee has been found.

9.12 PHILLIS WHEATLEY: AFRICAN-AMERICAN POET

Phillis Wheatley (c. 1753-1784) wrote to Gen. Washington from Providence on 26 October 1775:

Sir,

I have taken the freedom to address your Excellency in the enclosed poem, and entreat your acceptance, though I am not insensible of its inaccuracies. Your being appointed by the Grand Continental Congress to be Generalissimo of the armies of North America, together with the fame of your virtues, excite sensations not easy to suppress. Your generosity, therefore, I presume, will

⁸² PGW:Confederation, 2:14.

⁸³ *Gazette of the United States*, 19 September 1798.

pardon the attempt. Wishing your Excellency all possible success in the great
cause you are so generously engaged in. I am,
Your Excellency's most obedient and humble servant,
Phillis Wheatley⁸⁴

This letter did not say anything about Wheatley's race or previous enslavement, but Wheatley was a celebrity in New England, and Washington may even have recognized her name himself.

Wheatley had been brought to Boston on board the ship *Phillis* in 1761 and purchased by the merchant John Wheatley for his wife Susanna. The little girl showed unusual intelligence, all the more striking given her traumatic experiences. The Wheatley family educated and encouraged her, and helped her publish her poetry starting in 1765. Current events inspired most of Phillis's early verse, including the poem that made her famous in America, on the death of the Rev. George Whitefield in 1770. In 1773, still legally enslaved, she traveled to London to arrange for the publication of a book of her poems, receiving the attention of the Countess of Huntington, Lord Dartmouth, Granville Sharp, and others. The Somerset ruling (see section 9.2) meant Phillis was legally free in Britain; she apparently returned to America on the understanding that the Wheatleys would free her there, too.⁸⁵

Wheatley soon came to be associated with the anti-slavery cause. Several New England newspapers reprinted her 11 February 1774 letter to the Rev. Samson Occom about liberty which concluded "How well the Cry for Liberty, and the reverse Disposition for the exercise of oppressive Power over others agree—I humbly think it does not require the Penetration of a Philosopher to determine."⁸⁶ In these years she still evidently lived with the Wheatleys or their daughter and son-in-law, the Rev. John Lathrop.

The poem that Wheatley had sent Washington was yet another of the many she wrote extolling public figures:

Celestial choir! enthron'd in realms of light,
Columbia's scenes of glorious toils I write,
While freedom's cause her anxious breast alarms.
She flashes dreadful in refulgent arms.
See mother earth her offspring's fate bemoan.
And nations gaze at scenes before unknown;
See the bright beams of heaven's revolving light
Involved in sorrows and the veil of night!
The goddess comes, she moves divinely fair,
Olive and laurel binds her golden hair;
Wherever shines this native of the skies.

⁸⁴ PGW:RW, 2:242.

⁸⁵ The best study of Phillis Wheatley's life and literary career is now Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley*.

⁸⁶ *Essex Gazette*, 29 March 1774, reprinting the letter from the 11 March *New-London Gazette*.

Unnumber'd charms and recent graces rise.

Muse! bow propitious while my pen relates
How pour her armies through a thousand gates;
As when Eolus heaven's fair face deforms.
Enwrapped in tempest and a night of storms;
Astonished ocean feels the wild uproar,
The refluent surges beat the sounding shore;
Or thick as leaves in Autumn's golden reign,
Such, and so many, moves the warrior's train.
In bright array they seek the work of war,
Where high unfurled the ensign waves in air.
Shall I to Washington their praise recite?
Enough thou know'st them in the fields of fight.
Thee first in peace and honours,—we demand
The grace and glory of thy martial band.
Fam'd for thy valour, for thy virtues more,
Hear every tongue thy guardian aid implore!

One century scarce performed its destin'd round.

When Gallic powers Columbia's fury found;
And so may you, whoever dares disgrace
The land of freedom's heaven-defended race!
Fix'd are the eyes of nations on the scales,
For in their hopes Columbia's arm prevails,
Anon Britannia droops the pensive head,
While round increase the rising hills of dead.
Ah! cruel blindness to Columbia's state!
Lament thy thirst of boundless power too late.

Proceed, great chief, with virtue on thy side,
Thy ev'ry action let the goddess guide.
A crown, a mansion, and a throne that shine,
With gold unfading, WASHINGTON, be thine!⁸⁷

Washington apparently read the poem and laid it aside, unsure of how to respond.

In February 1776 Washington came across Wheatley's poem again. At that time he was preparing for what he hoped would be the final attack on Boston (see chapter 18). He had also reached his decision on accepting black soldiers into the army, whether or not that affected his thoughts about Wheatley. The general sent the poem to his former military secretary Joseph Reed on 10 February 1776:

I recollect nothing else worth giving you the trouble of, unless you are amused by reading a letter and poem addressed to me by Mrs. or Miss Phillis Wheatley. In searching over a parcel of papers the other day, in order to destroy such as were useless, I brought it to light again:—at first with a view of doing justice to her great poetical genius, I had a great mind to publish the poem, but not knowing

⁸⁷ Text as it appears in Mason, *Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, 166-7. The poem was printed in the *Pennsylvania Magazine, or American Monthly Museum*, for April 1776, edited by Thomas Paine. No manuscript copy survives.

whether it might not be considered rather as a mark of my own vanity, than as a compliment to her, I laid it aside, till I came across it again in the manner just mentioned.⁸⁸

This was a long letter, containing some statements about the deficiency of the army that Washington wished to keep confidential: “In short, my situation has been such that I have been obliged to use art to conceal it from my own officers.” Yet he knew that Reed was also passing on items from his letters to the Philadelphia press. The general’s comment that he had thought of publishing Wheatley’s poem might therefore have been a hint to Reed to do so while insulating himself from criticism.

Later in the month, Washington finally took up the task of replying to Wheatley. That belated thank-you note presented him with an etiquette dilemma: he had no practice in addressing a learned black woman. Even the salutation was a challenge. Normally Washington would refer to a black woman by her first name only: “Phillis.” But he knew to address an unmarried lady as “Miss Wheatley.” On 28 February Washington sought a middle ground:

Miss Phillis:

Your favour of the 26th of October did not reach my hands ’till the middle of December. Time enough, you will say, to have given an answer ere this. Granted. But a variety of important occurrences, continually interposing to distract the mind and withdraw the attention, I hope will apologize for the delay, and plead my excuse for the seeming, but not real neglect.

I thank you most sincerely for your polite notice of me, in the elegant Lines you enclosed; and however undeserving I may be of such encomium and panegyrick, the style and manner exhibit a striking proof of your great poetical Talents. In honour of which, and as a tribute justly due to you, I would have published the Poem, had I not been apprehensive, that, while I only meant to give the World this new instance of your genius, I might have incurred the imputation of Vanity. This and nothing else, determined me not to give it place in the public Prints.

If you should ever come to Cambridge, or near Head Quarters, I shall be happy to see a person so favoured by the Muses, and to whom Nature has been so liberal and beneficent in her dispensations. I am, with great Respect,

You obdt. humble servant.

G. Washington⁸⁹

The “humble servant” closing was a formula widely used in the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, it is striking to see Washington, master of hundreds of enslaved workers, use it in a letter to a woman who was recently enslaved herself.

Wheatley’s letter and poem appeared in *The Pennsylvania Magazine, or American Monthly Museum*, in April 1776. The magazine’s editor, Thomas Paine, told readers they were

⁸⁸ PGW:RW, 3:290.

⁸⁹ PGW:RW, 3:387.

“written by the famous *Phillis Wheatley*, the African Poetess, and presented to his Excellency Gen. *Washington*.”⁹⁰ Julian D. Mason, editor of one edition of *Wheatley’s* poems, theorizes that Reed supplied the text to Paine soon after receiving word that the British military had prepared to leave Boston. Washington had at last achieved a victory worthy of *Wheatley’s* high praise.

In 1850 Benson J. Lossing stated that *Wheatley* had taken up *Washington’s* invitation to visit him at his headquarters:

Washington invited her to visit him at Cambridge, which she did a few days before the British evacuated Boston; her master, among others, having left the city by permission, and retired, with his family, to Chelsea. She passed half an hour with the commander-in-chief, from whom and his officers she received marked attention.⁹¹

Lossing offered no evidence for this statement, however. There is no confirmation for such a visit in the records of *Washington*, his aides, or other people in Cambridge. If *Wheatley* did indeed receive “marked attention” from the general and his staff, it went entirely unremarked at the time. Furthermore, evidence suggests that *Wheatley* had moved to Providence during the siege, not Chelsea. Therefore, *Phillis Wheatley’s* visit to the Cambridge headquarters is therefore most likely a myth

⁹⁰ Hirschfeld, *George Washington and Slavery*, 91.

⁹¹ “A Pilgrimage to the Cradle of American Liberty,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, 1 (1850), 725. Lossing reprinted that article in *Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution*, 1:556.

CHAPTER TEN

ENGINEERING A NEW ARTILLERY REGIMENT

Artillery was crucial to Gen. Washington's task of driving the British military from Boston. With the British garrison receiving supplies by sea, the only way that the Continental Army could make life inside the fortified town untenable was to attack with cannon and mortars. The Americans also needed military engineers, who in the eighteenth century were part of the artillery corps, to create fortifications strong enough to stop the royal army from breaking through the siege lines.

The Continental Army suffered from a lack of ordnance, however. Some authors portray that army as having no artillery at all, but the New England governments deployed dozens of cannon and mortars, some as large as twenty-four pounders. But to do real damage at a distance, the American artillery needed *more* big guns. The army also lacked gunpowder and other supplies. And, although it took months for New Englanders to recognize the problem, the artillery regiment lacked strong leadership. Washington solved those problems in late 1775 with a radical reorganization of the regiment, installing an unranked volunteer as colonel and sending him hundreds of miles to the west to fetch heavy guns.

10.1 Col. Richard Gridley and His Artillery Officers

On 21 April 1775 two days after the Battle of Lexington and Concord, the Massachusetts Committee of Safety summoned Col. Richard Gridley (1711-1796), and asked him to lead the colony's artillery regiment.¹ Gridley was widely respected in the province because his gunnery had helped to conquer the French fort at Louisburg in 1745. For this feat he had received a British army commission and a half-pay pension from the Crown. Gridley had also led Massachusetts troops in the French and Indian War, serving at Crown Point and again at Louisburg, though those men had worked as carpenters rather than artillerists. Col. Gridley's experience and reputation prompted the Massachusetts Provincial Congress to grant him the title of Chief Engineer; a salary of £170 per year, in contrast to a

¹ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 520. 157. Most biographical research on Gridley came from Daniel T. V. Huntoon in articles for *The Magazine of History* and *The New England Freemason* and such books as his *History of the Town of Canton, Norfolk County, Massachusetts* (1893). However, Huntoon omitted uncomplimentary sources and details and gave undue credit to the colonel (whom he called a general). Col. Gridley deserves a more clear-eyed study. The most thorough examination of the artillery regiment in 1775 is Thomas J. Abernathy's unpublished *American Artillery Regiments in the Revolutionary War. Volume 1: Col. Richard Gridley's Regiment, 1775*, typescript available at the Massachusetts Historical Society.

regular colonel's pay of £144; and a pension of £123 per year to replace what he gave up by breaking with the Crown.²

The artillery regiment's second-in-command was Lt. Col. William Burbeck (1716-1785), who before the war had been in charge of ordnance at Castle William, the fort in Boston harbor, and thus worked closely with the British military. Burbeck was an expert in explosives who supervised the town's fireworks displays.³ He was linked to Boston's Whigs through the St. Andrew's Lodge of Freemasons. On 21 April 1775 Burbeck slipped away from Castle Island in Henry Howell Williams's canoe, landing at Noddle's Island on the northeast side of the inner harbor. Over the next few days Burbeck made his way to Cambridge, and then asked Williams to bring out "my military Books & plans as also all my instruments which ye Army stood in great Need of. And Could not Do without."⁴ As with Col. Gridley, the Provincial Congress was so pleased to have Burbeck on its side that it promised him an unusually large salary: £150 per year, plus £97.6.8 as an annual pension. He also had the title of Engineer.⁵

The third-in-command was Maj. David Mason (1726-1794), a decorative painter from Salem.⁶ His artillery experience went back to service at Fort William Henry in 1756. He had co-founded Boston's militia artillery company, or "train," before moving to Essex County in 1765. Settling in Salem in 1770, Mason remained active in the militia and gave lectures on electricity. In November 1774 members of the Massachusetts Committee on Supplies asked him to collect artillery supplies for the Provincial Congress.⁷ Gen. Thomas Gage had received word of some cannon Mason had mounted on field carriages and on 26 February 1775 sent a force to Salem to seize them; Mason had managed to delay Lt. Col. Alexander Leslie's column at the drawbridge over the North River long enough for his comrades to hide the cannon. A notebook Mason kept for his work showed that he also handled the brass guns of the Boston train, which had been spirited out of armories in

² Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 157, 168.

³ In 1769 John Hancock gave Burbeck a copy of Robert Jones's *Artificial Fireworks, Improved to the Modern Practice, From the Minutest to the Highest Branches*, 2nd edition (London: J. Millan, 1766); this copy, now at the Massachusetts Historical Society, identifies Burbeck as "Gunner of Castle William." On 13 January 1775 Gen. Thomas Gage wrote to Burbeck, addressing him as "Store keeper of his Majesty's Fortress of Castle William"; Thomas Gage Papers, Clements Library.

⁴ "Statement of William Burbeck certifying that he received help from Henry Howell Williams in April 1775, written on 17 April 1776," Noddles Island Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁵ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 153.

⁶ The two main sources on Mason's life come from his daughter, Susan Smith: "Biographical Sketch of Col. David Mason of Salem," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 48 (1912), 197-216; and "Memoir of Col. David Mason—by his daughter Susan Smith, relict of Professor Smith of Hanover, N.H.—Novr, 1842, in her 80th year," Shaw Family Papers, reel 4, frames 272-80, Library of Congress. A descendant owns a version of the first that differs in wording but not in detail.

⁷ See Mason's notebook in the Bryant-Mason-Smith Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

September 1774 and secretly moved to Concord in early 1775. Mason had thus been building the Massachusetts artillery force even before the war began.

The artillery regiment's fourth-ranking officer, Maj. Scarborough Gridley (1739-1787) had a much less impressive history. He was the colonel's youngest son, and it was obvious that he gained his rank only because his father had insisted that the Provincial Congress commission him. There is no evidence for Maj. Gridley's prior military or significant militia experience. Scarborough was not the only son of a regimental commander; two Burbecks were among the junior officers. Such family ties were not unusual in New England regiments, and could be interpreted as a sign of commitment to the cause, but they became a problem for the artillery.

In addition to the Massachusetts regiment, Rhode Island had sent an artillery company under Capt. John Crane and Lt. Ebenezer Stevens, young officers who had trained in Boston and moved away after participating in the Boston Tea Party.⁸

10.2 TECHNICAL CHALLENGES

Beyond the problem of manpower, the artillery regiment faced daunting logistical challenges. Its companies had to spread out along nearly the entire siege line, wherever the royal forces might try to break through or land. A young bombardier named Joseph White recalled how the regiment's administrator addressed this problem:

...the Adjutant came to me and said, I understand that you are a good speller, I told him I could spell most any word. Why cannot you come and be my Assistant said he. The regiment lays so scattered about, in different places, some in Roxbury, and some in Dorchester, &c. He told me he had seen the Col. and he had given him liberty to take any one he liked, only the pay must be the same as he then received. . . .

I then commenced acting the adjutant. I now sat off to take general orders, to the deputy adjutant general, which I followed every morning at 10 o'clock, with all the adjutants of the army. This deputy adjutant general was a sour, crabbed old fellow; he says to me, what do you want? I told him I wanted the general orders.—What are you? said he, I am an assistant adjutant of the regiment of artillery. An assistant adjutant, said he, I never heard of such an officer. Well, set down and take them.⁹

White found that his duties were so light that he started to teach school in the afternoons. "I was a feather-bed soldier all this time, and slept with the Commissary-General of military stores."¹⁰

⁸ Stevens, "Biographical Sketch of Ebenezer Stevens," *Magazine of American History*, 7:588-610

⁹ White, *An Narrative of Events*, 3-5.

¹⁰ White, *An Narrative of Events*, 5-6. White's statement suggests he slept in the Boland house assigned to commissary general Joseph Trumbull (see section 5.4); he may have bunked with a lower-ranking commissary, however.

White recorded one personal encounter with the commander-in-chief which, if accurate, must have taken place around the end of 1775:

One day the Col. sent for the adjutant, or assistant, I went to him, he told me to go to Gen. Washington's quarters, and tell him what I want; you must see him yourself. After a great deal of ceremony, I was admitted into the house. One of his aid-de-camps stood at the bottom of the stairs, (the Gen. being up chamber) he said tell me, and I will go up and tell him. I told him my orders was to see him myself. The Gen. hearing that, came to the head of the stairs, and said, "tell the young man to walk up.["] I did, and told my business "Pray sir, what officer are you"? I said I was Assistant Adjutant of the regiment of artillery. "Indeed, said he, you are very young to do that duty." I told him I was young, but was growing older every day. He turned his face to his wife, and both smiled. He gave me my orders, and I retired.¹¹

Many Revolutionary veterans and their families described unverifiable encounters with Washington, not all of them credible; this one is less flattering to its teller than many.

Another challenge for the artillery regiment was the quality of its ordnance. The cannon that the Massachusetts Provincial Congress had proudly gathered before the war looked inadequate as soon as the shooting started. Many of those guns came from shore batteries and ships. Dr. James Thacher later described the ordnance this way:

our army before Boston had, I believe, only four small brass cannon, and a few old honey-comb iron pieces, with their trunnions broken off; and these were ingeniously bedded in timbers in the same manner as that of stocking a musket. These machines were extremely unwieldy and inconvenient, requiring much skill and labor to elevate and depress them. Had the enemy been made acquainted with our situation, the consequences might have been exceedingly distressing.¹²

In fact, British spies had reported how badly the provincials had to mount their damaged cannon tubes back in March.¹³ Col. Gridley credited a doctor from western Massachusetts named Preserved Clapp for having invented this new carriage for "the cannon that had their trunnions broke off."¹⁴ Sturdy, maneuverable field carriages actually cost more than the guns themselves.

Almost all the New England colonies' cannon were iron, heavier and more prone to explosive bursting than brass guns. Some were as large as 24-pounders, meaning they could shoot cannonballs weighing twenty-four pounds.¹⁵ The Massachusetts regiment also had

¹¹ White, *An Narrative of Events*, 5-6.

¹² Thacher, *Military Journal*, 37-8.

¹³ Gage and De Berniere, *General Gage's Instructions*, 15-6.

¹⁴ Clapp, *Clapp Memorial*, 43. See also Massachusetts, *Journal of the House of Representatives*, 52:53, 102, 108.

¹⁵ MHSP, 14:289, 291.

four brass cannon, small ones meant for battlefield maneuvers rather than siege warfare; these had belonged to the Boston militia train before the war. Gen. Washington did not feel he could spare any of those guns. On 30 October he reported to the Massachusetts legislature that he had sent Maj. Mason to Cape Ann to evaluate its defenses against naval attack but concluded, "I find, that a Battery may be erected there, to the great Advantage, and Security of the Place. But the small Stock of Artillery, belonging to the Army, prevents me from Supplying the Materials for this Purpose."¹⁶

The army even needed cannon balls, reusing those shot over by the Royal Artillery. On 17 June Pvt. Samuel Bixby wrote: "we were anxious to get their balls as though they were gold balls."¹⁷ A 12 July 1775 letter described soldiers in Roxbury "contending for the balls as they roll along. . . . most of the cannon shot were taken up and brought to the General [probably John Thomas]."¹⁸ In his memoir John Trumbull described a different reason for rewarding soldiers who brought in cannonballs, and the results:

. . .the enemy occasionally fired upon our working parties, whenever they approached too nigh to their works; and in order to familiarize our raw soldiers to this exposure, a small reward was offered in general orders, for every ball fired by the enemy, which should be picked up and brought to head-quarters. This soon produced the intended effect—a fearless emulation among the men; but it produced also a very unfortunate result; for when the soldiers saw a ball, after having struck and rebounded from the ground several times, (*en ricochet*,) roll sluggishly along, they would run and place a foot before it, to stop it, not aware that a heavy ball long retains sufficient impetus to overcome such an obstacle. The consequence was, that several brave lads lost their feet, which were crushed by the weight of the rolling shot. The order was of course withdrawn, and they were cautioned against touching a ball, until it was entirely at rest. One thing had been ascertained by this means, the caliber of the enemy's guns—eighteen pounds.¹⁹

No formal orders of the sort Trumbull described have been found, however.

American soldiers also recycled shells and the gunpowder inside them—as long as those shells had not exploded. That 12 July letter stated:

During a severe cannonade at Roxbury, last week, a bomb, thirteen inches in diameter, fell within the American lines, and burnt furiously, when four of the artillerymen ran up, and one kicked out the fuse, saved the bomb, and probably some lives—a stroke of heroism worthy of record.

¹⁶ PGW:RW, 2:265.

¹⁷ MHSP, 14:287.

¹⁸ *American Archives*, series 4, 2:1650. *Remembrancer*, 1:164.

¹⁹ Trumbull, *Autobiography, Reminiscences, and Letters*, 18-9.

John Greenwood, a fifteen-year-old fifer, also described how Continental troops would make use of British shells:

These shells were mostly thirteen inches in diameter, and it was astonishing how high they could send such heavy things. I have often seen them strike the ground when it was frozen and bound up like a foot-ball, and again, falling on marshy land, they would bury themselves from ten to twelve feet in it, whereupon, the wet ground having extinguished the fuse, the Yankees would dig them up to get the powder out. On one occasion a 13-inch bomb dropped directly opposite the door of the picket guard-house where 200 men were on duty, and a lad about eighteen years old, named Shubael Rament [Raymond], belonging to our company, ran out, knocked the fusee from the shell, and took the powder out of it, of which I had some myself to kill snipe with.²⁰

In early August Gen. Washington discovered that the army was drastically short of gunpowder (see section 11.4). With each shot from a cannon or mortar consuming a large amount of powder, the artillery then had to remain quiet for long stretches.

Jury-rigged equipment, inexperienced soldiers, and overconfidence were a dangerous mixture. On 16 October the army launched two “floating batteries,” or barges mounted with cannon, on the Charles River (section 12.2). They came within firing range of Boston. Selectman Timothy Newell reported the boats “fired a number of cannon into the camp at the Common, the shot went thro houses by the Lamb Tavern &c.”²¹ British army captain John Barker wrote in his journal: “they fired several shot at the encampment on the Common without doing any harm, ’till at last one of their Guns burst and killed and wounded several of them.”²² According to Samuel Pierce of Dorchester, “one of them split their cannon by not raming their shot down; it kild one and wounded 6.”²³

The final challenge facing the artillery regiment was that its officers were also expected to be military engineers, designing and constructing fortifications that could keep the Crown forces from charging out of Boston. Militia companies had thrown up some barriers at the end of the Boston Neck in Roxbury in April. After the British had taken the Charlestown peninsula in the Battle of Bunker Hill, the provincials had to improvise more fortifications at the end of the Charlestown Neck. To the new Continental generals who inspected those works in early July, they looked grossly inadequate.

10.3 WASHINGTON’S “WANT OF ENGINEERS”

Col. Richard Gridley was in many ways like the older New England generals Washington found when he arrived in Massachusetts (see section 4.1). In fact, before the

²⁰ Greenwood, *Revolutionary Services*, 21. See also *Remembrancer*, 1:164.

²¹ MHSC, series 4, 1:269.

²² *Atlantic*, 39:552.

²³ Dorchester Antiquarian and Historical Society, *History of the Town of Dorchester*, 366.

new commander arrived, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress had voted on 23 June “That a commission be given to Col. Gridley as Chief Engineer and Colonel, with the rank of Major-General.” All the other officers in the artillery regiment were also supposed to be promoted one rank.²⁴

However, Washington’s arrival with Continental commissions for several generals—not including Gridley—superseded those promotions. The colonel was left a colonel, at least for the time being. The Gridley family already perceived a slight. On the eve of the Battle of Bunker Hill, the Committee of Safety had recommended that Scarborough Gridley be first major and David Mason second; five days later, the Provincial Congress issued commissions with the seniority of those two majors reversed.²⁵

On 3 July Col. Gridley wrote to the legislature from Cambridge:

Some time since you desired me to make a return of proper persons for field-officers for the Regiment of Artillery. Accordingly, after mature consideration, I made a return, which I thought if complied with would be the most likely means to serve the country in the best manner. But I find, gentlemen, my judgment in these matters is of little weight with you; it seems not necessary to consult me in it. Though I must have the trouble of teaching every one under me the knowledge necessary for the service, you have been pleased to revise the plan I gave you; that, no doubt, you have a right to do. But be assured, gentlemen, if I must have no judgment, and am not to be consulted in these matters, but must have persons transposed and imposed upon me without consulting me, I am determined I will withdraw myself from the Army, and will have nothing farther to do with it.²⁶

The Provincial Congress listened to the colonel’s letter and chose to let it “lie on the table.” The ranks were now Gen. Washington’s problem. The congress did nothing, and Gridley did not resign.

Washington waited until 4 August to bring up the question of Gridley’s rank to the Continental Congress:

Col: Gridley of this Province, who is at the Head of the Artillery has the rank of Major Genl from the Provincial Congress. Will it be proper to renew his Commission here in the same Manner? It is proper here to remark, that in this Case he will take Rank of all the Brigadiers General, & even the Majors General, whose commissions are subsequent in Date, & can answer no good Purpose, but may be productive of many bad Consequences.²⁷

²⁴ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 378.

²⁵ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 569, 373. Frothingham, *Battle of Bunker Hill*, 92, reports that the Gridleys turned in a roll on 16 June listing Scarborough as lieutenant colonel, above Burbeck. In 1784 Scarborough introduced himself to Samuel Adams, who had been out of the province at this time, with the title of colonel; Adams, *Writings of Samuel Adams*, 4:293.

²⁶ *American Archives*, series 4, 2:1477-8.

²⁷ PGW:RW, 1:224.

Clearly Washington did *not* want Gridley to become another general. Already in July the new commander appeared to have difficulty working with the artillery officer; he often issued orders to Gridley through his daily general orders rather than in private communications. On 26 September, after the Congress had let the issue rest for another period, John Hancock advised Washington to “Issue a Commission to Mr Gridley as Colonell only, and to Suspend the appointment of a Brigadier General for the present.”²⁸

Even aside from the problem of upsetting other generals already touchy over seniority, Washington had not been impressed with Gridley’s work in fortifying the American positions. In his first report to Congress on 10 July he wrote:

In a former Part of this Letter I mentioned the Want of Engineers; I can hardly express the Disappointment I have experienced on this Subject: the Skill of those we have, being very imperfect & confined to the mere manual Exercise of Cannon. Whereas—the War in which we are engaged requires a Knowledge comprehending the Duties of the Field and Fortification: If any Persons thus qualified are to be found in the Southern Colonies, it would be of great publick Service to forward them with all Expedition²⁹

Gen. Charles Lee had been even more caustic in his 4 July letter to Robert Morris:

We found every thing exactly the reverse of what had been represented. We were assured at Philadelphia that the army was stock’d with Engineers. We found not one. We were assur’d that we should find an expert train of Artillery. They have not a single Gunner, and so on so far from the men being prejudiced in favour of their own Officers They are extremely diffident in ’em and seem much pleased that we are arrived.³⁰

On 20 July, Lee told Dr. Benjamin Rush that as for “the abilities of their Engineers, . . . I really believe not a single man of ’em is [capable] of constructing an oven.”³¹ The problems were basic enough that the 15 July general orders required an artillery officer “to go round the Lines and Redoubts, to examine if the Guns are placed properly in the Embrasures; and if the Embrasures are properly made, and properly sloped towards the country.”³²

These complaints about a local hero appear to have astonished the Massachusetts delegates in Philadelphia. On 21 July the Virginia delegate Benjamin Harrison wrote to Washington:

²⁸ PGW:RW, 2:49.

²⁹ PGW:RW, 1:89.

³⁰ NYHSC, 4:188.

³¹ NYHSC, 4:196-7.

³² PGW:RW, 1:119.

The want of Engineers I fear is not to be supplied in America, some folks here seemed much displeas'd at your Report on that head, they affirm there are two very good ones with you, a Colo. Gridley I think is one, I took the liberty to say that they must be mistaken, they were certainly either not in Camp, or could not have the Skill they were pleas'd to say they had, this in my soft way put a stop to any thing more on the Subject³³

In fact, two days later John Adams was writing home to his protégé William Tudor on the subject, clearly concerned:

I beg you would let me know, what is become of Coll. Gridley and Mr. Burbanks [sic], and whether they have lost their Character as Engineers and Gunners—and let me know, what Engineers, there are in the Army, or whether there are none.

I want to know if there are any Engineers in the Province and who they are. I have heard the Generals were much disappointed, in not finding Engineers, and Artillery as they expected. P[lease] let me know the Truth of this, if you can learn it, and how they come to expect a better Artillery than they found. All this keep to your self.³⁴

Tudor was too busy with his duties as judge advocate general (see section 5.7) to answer Adams's questions about the artillery, but on 9 August James Warren, speaker of the Massachusetts house, wrote back:

As for Engineers I wish we were in a better way. G——y is grown old, is much governed by A Son of his, who vainly supposed he had a right to the second place in the Regiment that is before Burbank and Mason. The Congress thought Otherways. He was Sulkey. We had much Trouble with them, and I Understand the General has his Share yet.³⁵

Meanwhile, people were also raising questions about Scarborough Gridley's performance at the Battle of Bunker Hill.

10.4 THE REVERBERATIONS OF BUNKER HILL

The reputation of the American artillery regiment fell sharply after the Battle of Bunker Hill on 17 June 1775. Four companies, each with two small field-pieces, were ordered into that battle. Scarborough Gridley and his company never reached the Charlestown peninsula; instead, the young major chose to stop alongside the Charles River and fire ineffectually at a Royal Navy ship. Two more companies, under Capt. Samuel Gridley (a nephew of the colonel) and Capt. John Callender, reached the redoubt. The first captain reportedly complained that his small cannon were not strong enough to reach Boston, the

³³ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1697. PGW:RW, 1:145.

³⁴ PJA, 3:85. See also PJA, 3:105-6.

³⁵ PJA, 3:115.

second that his gunpowder cartridges too big to fit into his guns. Meanwhile, Capt. Samuel Trevett broke away from Maj. Gridley and led his Marblehead-based company to the front lines. Eventually Col. Gridley himself also went onto the peninsula.

Capt. Gridley and Capt. Callender pulled back before the major fighting, leaving their cannon behind. Trevett and his company were the only artillerymen who fought through the battle, helping to hold off the first two British charges. When they finally withdrew, those men brought off one American field-piece. The British captured the other five guns that had been brought onto the peninsula.³⁶

Gen. Israel Putnam had met Capt. Callender pulling back during the battle, and insisted that he be arrested on charges of cowardice. Unfortunately, the old general identified the backwards captain as Trevett instead of Callender. The Marblehead officer was placed under arrest before the mix-up was sorted out.³⁷ Despite pleas from fellow officers, Capt. Trevett resigned and went home, followed by his loyally disgruntled soldiers.

This mess awaited Gen. Washington when he arrived in Cambridge, and his general orders for 7 July 1775 made an example of Capt. Callender:

It is with inexpressible Concern that the General upon his first Arrival in the army, should find an Officer sentenced by a General Court-Martial to be cashier'd for Cowardice—A Crime of all others, the most infamous in a Soldier, the most injurious to an Army, and the last to be forgiven; inasmuch as it may, and often does happen, that the Cowardice of a single Officer may prove the Destruction of the whole Army: The General therefore (tho' with great Concern, and more especially, as the Transaction happened before he had the Command of the Troops) thinks himself obliged for the good of the service, to approve the Judgment of the Court-Martial with respect to Capt. John Callender, who is hereby sentenced to be cashiered. Capt. John Callender is accordingly cashiered and dismiss'd from all farther service in the Continental Army as an Officer.

The General having made all due inquiries, and maturely consider'd this matter is led to the above determination not only from the particular Guilt of Capt. Callender, but the fatal Consequences of such Conduct to the army and to the cause of america.

He now therefore most earnestly exhorts Officers of all Ranks to shew an example of Bravery and Courage to their men; assuring them that such as do their duty in the day of Battle, as brave and good Officers, shall be honor'd with every mark of distinction and regard; their names and merits made known to the General Congress and all America: while on the other hand, he positively declares that every Officer, be his rank what it may, who shall betray his Country, dishonour the Army and his General, by basely keeping back and shrinking from his duty in any engagment; shall be held up as an infamous Coward and punish'd

³⁶ This summary is based largely on Ketchum, *Decisive Day*. However, that book warns that the artillery companies' activity is "One of the most enigmatic aspects of the engagement"; Ketchum, 255.

³⁷ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 581-2.

as such, with the utmost martial severity; and no Connections, Interest or Intercessions in his behalf will avail to prevent the strict execution of justice.³⁸

Callender was not the only American officer to be cashiered because of the artillery regiment's failures on 17 June. Col. John Mansfield had kept his infantry regiment with Scarborough Gridley protecting his two small cannon from improbable attack rather than proceeding to the main battle. He was dismissed on 15 September for "remissness and backwardness in the execution of his duty, at the late engagement on Bunkers-hill."³⁹

But through the summer no officer named Gridley suffered any official consequences from the battle, undoubtedly because of the colonel's influence. Col. Gridley himself had performed bravely. He had laid out the redoubt on Breed's Hill, which proved barely adequate; returned during the thick of the fight; and suffered a leg wound during the retreat. On 27 June Gridley's wife and daughter told Ezekiel Price that "the colonel's wound keeps him confined, so that he cannot move out of his bed, but that he is in a good way to be cured of it."⁴⁰ As the colonel recuperated at home in Stoughton, he sent orders to his regiment through his son Scarborough. This of course left the colonel unable to supervise the building of new fortifications.

10.5 RECRUITING AMATEUR ENGINEERS

In his memoirs, Gen. William Heath looked back on American fortification-building in the summer of 1775 with patriotic nostalgia:

The works now going on, both on the Cambridge and Roxbury side, were considerable, and there was a great want of engineers. Col. Gridley was chief engineer, and was aided by his son. But the strength of body, activity and genius of the Americans capable of constructing with surprising dispatch any works in which they were guided, called for many instructors in this department.⁴¹

At the time, the situation looked more dire. The task of strengthening the works around Boston fell to the new Continental generals, infantry officers, and gentleman volunteers who claimed to understand military engineering. The Continental Congress had not aided this effort when on 16 June it voted to pay for only three engineers in the region. Furthermore, while the Congress granted a Chief Engineer a generous \$60 per month (£216 per year), it

³⁸ PGW:RW, 1:71-2. In discussing this episode, it is *de rigueur* for historians to add that Callender became a volunteer in a New York artillery unit during the Battle of Long Island and fought bravely. He was wounded, captured, and exchanged. Callender returned to the American artillery regiment as a captain and served until the end of the war.

³⁹ PGW:RW, 1:465.

⁴⁰ MHSP, 7:193.

⁴¹ Heath, *Memoirs*, 15.

offered each Assistant Engineer only \$20 per month (£72 per year), the same rate as an army captain.⁴²

Charles Lee's extensive military experience made him a leader in the effort to strengthen the American fortifications, as shown in his 27 July letter to Robert Morris:

...I work like ten post horses. Our miserable defect of Engineers imposes upon me eternal work in a department to which I am rather a stranger—the undoing what we found done gives us more trouble than doing what was left undone—however we have contrived to make ourselves pretty secure⁴³

Heath's memoir mentioned "Capt. Josiah Waters of Boston" as one impromptu engineer, and later accounts credit Josiah Waters (1721-1784) with working on the fortifications in Roxbury.⁴⁴ However, in a 21 October 1775 letter John Adams referred to "young Josiah Waters," evidently meaning Josiah Waters, Jr. (1747-1805).⁴⁵ Adding to the uncertainty, in 1776 the Connecticut legislature appointed Josiah Waters as engineer for Fort Trumbull in New London, Connecticut, and Josiah Waters, Jr., was his assistant.⁴⁶ On 24 October 1775 Gen. Thomas told John Adams that he felt Waters "has no great Understanding, in Either [fortifications or gunnery], any further than Executing or overseeing works, when Trased out, and by my Observations, we have Several Officers that are Equal or exceed him."⁴⁷

In the same letter, Thomas praised Capt. Peleg Wadsworth (1748-1829) of his own town of Kingston, Massachusetts, as his third choice for executing fortifications. On 5 December Stephen Moylan wrote to Wadsworth from the Cambridge headquarters:

I have it in command from his Excellency, Gen. Washington, to desire that you will examine the harbour of Cape-Cod, and see what fortifications may be necessary for the defence of its entrance, which, when you have with attention and accuracy executed, you will please to make a report thereof at Headquarters.⁴⁸

⁴² JCC, 2:94.

⁴³ NYHSC, 4:199.

⁴⁴ Heath, *Memoirs*, 16. Some authors give the first name of this officer as Joseph.

⁴⁵ PJA, 3:225. Accounts as early as 1853 state that the younger Waters conveyed intelligence about the imminent British march in April 1775 and watched to be sure that William Dawes, a relative, got out of town with the news; NEHGR, 7:139; Holland, *William Dawes*, 9, 19-20, 59. There are capsule biographies of both father and son in Roberts, *Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company*, 2:47, 161.

⁴⁶ Caulkins, *History of New London*, 520. *American Archives*, series 4, 4:971.

⁴⁷ PJA, 3:241.

⁴⁸ *American Archives*, series 4, 4:194. This order came in response to the Massachusetts legislature's resolve of 3 November, sending speaker James Warren, Ebenezer Sayer of Wells (1750-1778), and George Partridge of Duxbury (1740-1828) to headquarters to ask Washington "to appoint some suitable person as an Engineer to repair to Plymouth" and "make such works as are necessary for the defence of that town &c." *Massachusetts Acts and Resolves, 1775-76*, chap. 339 (1918 edition, p. 132).

Capt. Wadsworth replied to the commander-in-chief on 16 December:

I have examined the Harbour of Cape Cod. Give it as my oppinion—that Cape Cod makes a very extensive Harbour with any Winds from the West to North & N.E. & Shipping may conveniently Ride out of the Reach of Cannon altho' the whole Shore was lined with them. But the Cove, which may Strictly be called the Harbour might be pretty well commanded from an Eminence on the Shore. This might deprive an Enemy of the most commodious part of the Harbour prevent their Watering, Rendesvous &c. &c.⁴⁹

Washington forwarded that report on to the Congress on 25 December. The following month, the general passed along an expense accounting from Wadsworth to James Warren, speaker of the Massachusetts House.⁵⁰ That appears to have been the extent of Wadsworth's independent engineering work during the siege. In February 1776 he became an aide-de-camp and brigade-major for Gen. Ward.⁵¹

There are hints of other men offering their services as engineers. According to one biographer, Benjamin Thompson of Woburn “took up the study of fortification,” seeking an American commission.⁵² He never received one, and much later turned out to be a British spy (see section 13.3). According to the British officer Stephen Kemble, on 6 July a Frenchman came into Boston from the American lines with the news that another Frenchman, “one Dubue, is their Chief Engineer, as Gridley cannot Act from his Wound.” On 17 August “Monsieur Dubuque” himself sailed into Boston from Salem. No mention of this man has surfaced in American sources, and his identity and activity remain mysterious.⁵³

⁴⁹ PGW:RW, 2:561.

⁵⁰ Washington to Warren, 15 January 1776, Peleg Wadsworth Papers, Longfellow House–Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site. This letter has been interpreted two ways. The more likely reading is that the general reminded the speaker that Wadsworth's mission came “at the Instance of your Honourable body”—meaning the legislature. The other reads the last word of that phrase as “Lady,” implying that Warren's wife, Mercy Warren, had suggested the trip. The legislature authorized payment to Wadsworth for his expenses in “flinging up some Works & to examine Cape Code Harbor” in October 1776; *Massachusetts Acts and Resolves, 1775-76*, chap. 419 (1918 edition, p. 609).

⁵¹ *American Archives*, series 4, 4:1151. Bradford, *Biographical Notices of Distinguished Men in New England*, 413, said that Wadsworth “was appointed an engineer, by General Thomas, the same year [1775], in forming the army lines in Roxbury and Dorchester,” but there was never an official appointment. Wadsworth's grandson Henry W. Longfellow later owned the house that Washington was using as his headquarters in December 1775.

⁵² James Renwick, “Memoir of Sir Benjamin Thompson, Count Rumford,” in *Library of American Biography*, second series, 5:39. The entry on Thompson in *Appletons' Cyclopædia of American Biography* (1888), 5:345, states: “It is said that after the battle of Bunker Hill he was favorably introduced to George Washington, who had just assumed command of the American army, and who would have given him a commission in the artillery but for the opposition of the New Hampshire officers.” There is no evidence for such an offer or any meeting between Thompson and Washington.

⁵³ NYHSC, 16:47, 55. See also Samuel B. Webb to Silas Deane, 11 July 1775: “a Frenchman, who came here in the character of a gentleman, was detected in stealing. The next day he deserted to the enemy;

After several weeks of heated activity, the situation appears to have stabilized. Three men stand out in the records as having contributed significantly to the works around Boston and the artillery siege, officially recognized as engineers in the Continental Army.

10.6 RUFUS PUTNAM: “UNDERTAKE I MUST”

In his memoirs, Lt. Col. Rufus Putnam (1738-1824), a farmer and surveyor from Sutton, Massachusetts, wrote of how he was pulled from an infantry regiment into the nascent engineering corps:

My Regiment was Stationed at Roxbury, under the command of General Thomas, & imedately after the Battle of Charlestown the 17th of June, the general & Field ofiers [*sic*] of that Station met in Councill, to advise what was best to be don in our exposed Situation. it was the unanimous advice of the officers conveaned, that Some Lines of defence should be imedately commenced for the Securing the troops from surprize & protection of the town—the general informed us that he had applied for Colo. Gridley to come over from Cambridge, but could not obtain him as he was the only Engineer on that Side, & the only one he knew of.—Some of my acquaintance [including Gen. William Heath] mentioned me as having ben employed in that line in the Late war against Canada I informed the General that I had never read a word on the Subject of Fortification, that it was true that I had ben employed on Some under British Eengeneers [*sic*], but pretended to no knowledge of Laying works. but there was no excuse would do, undetake I must—— Oh what a Sittuation were we in. no Lines to cover us, better then a board fence in case the enemy advanced upon us, & this we had reason to expct—Necessity therefore was upon me, undertake I must

I imedately commenced tracing out Lines in front of Roxbury toward Boston, & various other places, on the Roxbury Side peticularly at Sewels point it was my good fortune to be at this place when Genl Washington & General Lee first came over to examin the Sittuation of the Troops & works on Roxbury Side of the River—and I was not a little gratified & incouraged from there perticuler approbation of the plan of the works I had Laid out. General Lee Spook much in favor of the works at Sewels point, compared with those which had ben constructed on Cambridge Side——

the works Laid out at Roxbury, Dorchester & Brookline were all of my constructing, & Late in the Fall I laid out the Fort on Cobble hill, near Charlestown Mill pond

In the course of this Campaign, by the Generals ordor, I Surveyed & delineated the courses, distences and relitave Sittuation of the enimies works in Boston & Charlestown with our own in Cambridge, Roxbury, &c &c &c ⁵⁴

but he's of no consequence, being simple, a foolish fellow.” Webb, *Reminiscences of Gen'l Samuel B. Webb*, 14.

⁵⁴ *Memoirs of Rufus Putnam*, 54-5. Putnam's listing of distances between various Boston landmarks dated 14 November 1775 is among Washington's papers; PGW:RW, 3:296-7. Rufus Putnam was a nephew of Gen. Israel Putnam.

For several months, however, Putnam did this work while officially remaining an infantry officer.

The 23 October conference at headquarters determined that Putnam should be made an Assistant Engineer, keeping the rank of lieutenant colonel and receiving more pay than Congress had originally provided. Lee had enough respect for Putnam's talent that the general brought him along to Newport in December on a mission to strengthen the defenses of that town. Putnam then returned to the Boston theater, and his planning was crucial to the American operation on Dorchester heights (see chapter 18).

10.7 JEDUTHAN BALDWIN: "NO PROVISION MADE FOR ME"

Jeduthan Baldwin (1732-1788) was a captain in the Massachusetts forces in 1755-59, helping to build fortifications for the British army on Lake George and Lake Champlain. In the early 1770s he was politically active in his central Massachusetts town of Brookfield. Soon after the war began, he headed to Cambridge, though without a military commission. On 7 July Baldwin wrote from the camp at Prospect Hill:

By an invitation from Col. Gridley, I went as an engineer (the 16th of June) upon Bunker Hill, in Charlestown, and threw up a breastwork, and was on that hill the whole of that memorable day. Ye 17th of June, at evening, we retreated out to Prospect Hill, and worked again all that night throwing up breastworks; and I have continued in that service as an engineer to this time. I propose to stay here about a fortnight; by that time I expect to finish the fortification on this hill, and then I expect to return home, as there is no provision made for me in the army, and the Congress are requested by Gen. Washington not to give out any more commissions.⁵⁵

Soon, however, Baldwin was back in Cambridge working on fortifications. Gen. Washington thought well enough of Baldwin to invite him to headquarters on Christmas Day and to dinner with Martha Washington the next day.⁵⁶

However, Baldwin's official role in the army was unclear. Unlike Rufus Putnam, he did not have an officer's rank or salary. In October he petitioned the Massachusetts General Court for pay as an engineer since 20 May. The legislature granted him £30. On 21 January 1776 Baldwin wrote to John Adams, who was then at Braintree:

I have Served as an Engineer in the present Army before Boston, was at the Laying out the works on Charlestown Hills, was in Charlestown the whole of that memorable Day 17th June, gave all the assistance I was able, went directly to Prospect Hill, had the direction of the work there, and then to Sewels Point in Brookline. I have had the principal direction and over Sight, Since the 17th of June in laying out and raising the works in Cambridge Cobble Hill, and at

⁵⁵ Baldwin, *Revolutionary Journal*. xxviii.

⁵⁶ Baldwin, *Revolutionary Journal*. 19.

Lechmer Point all which I have done without having an Establishment [i.e., rank] equal to the Service. This Province made me a grant of 30£ for my Service to the first of August, which was equal to a Colonel pay, and left the Establishment to the Honble. Congress. It has been proposed that I should have a Regiment, but this was objected too, for it was, said, that I could be of more Service in the Army as an Engineer. Now Sir, all I request is Rank and pay Equal to my Service⁵⁷

Gen. William Heath added his endorsement in a letter to Adams the next day:

I would beg to recommend to your Consideration the Services of Colonel Jeduthan Baldwin, who Joyned the Army the Beginning of the last Campaign, and has Continued ever Since in the army as an Engineer on the works. . . . He is Constantly in Business even in this Severe Season and the works at Cobble Hill and Lechmeres Point which you have Seen, (as well as many others) were laid out and Completed under his Direction. I wish you would mention the matter to His Excellency, if you should see him before you leave the Colony, and if He should have the Same Opinion of his Services, That you would Use your Influence in Congress, that he may have an adequate reward.⁵⁸

Evidently neither Baldwin nor Heath felt up to raising the issue directly with Gen. Washington.

Adams did not see those letters until he had reached Philadelphia. He wrote back to Heath on 18 February warning that Baldwin should not appear to be going over Washington's head:

Upon shewing your Letter and another from him to some of my Colleagues, they are of opinion that Coll. Baldwin will have a better Chance for obtaining an Adequate Establishment, by making a Representation of the Facts to his Excellency supported by a Line from you, and General Putnam who I perceive has written to my Friend Mr. [Samuel] Adams in his favour, and requesting General Washington to represent them to Congress, or to inclose your Representation, than by any Motion that we can make because a suspicion may arise that the Motion is made by us, without any Intimation from the General because of some Disgust that he may have taken at Coll. Baldwin, which though it would be a groundless would be a natural Jealousy.⁵⁹

Meanwhile, Baldwin continued to supervise the building of works in Cambridge, Roxbury, and Dorchester. In March 1776 he "Recd. a Warrant for 116 3/4 of Dollars for Service as Engineer in the Continentall army to the 14th of March Inclusive."⁶⁰

⁵⁷ PJA, 3:408-9.

⁵⁸ PJA, 3:409-10.

⁵⁹ PJA, 4:25-6.

⁶⁰ Baldwin, *Revolutionary Journal*. 30.

Two days later, Gen. Washington ordered Baldwin as an Assistant Engineer to proceed immediately to New York to start strengthening fortifications there. Baldwin left Massachusetts, but on 28 March he wrote to Adams again:

The great fateague I have had thro' the winter, and for about 3 weeks making preparation, and carrying on the Several works at Dotchester Point (by reason of Age and other inabilities of Col. Gridly who aforded but little assistance,) I was determined to leave the Service. But upon receiving your Letter, and the favourable Letter to Genl. Heath which were communicated to Genl. Washington, who Said, that he had wrote the Congress, that the pay allowed the Assistent Engineer was not equal to the service, and that he would write again, I was encouraged to come to this place, but however unequal to the Service my abilities may be, I am determined not to continue in it unless Some other provision is made for me.⁶¹

Finally on 22 April Gen. Washington himself weighed in from New York:

Mr. Baldwin is one of the Assistant Engineers ordered to Canada. He is indeed a very useful man in his Department, but declined the Service on Account of his pay which he says is inadequate to his support. In order to induce him to continue, I promised to represent his case to Congress and would recommend an increase of his pay, and that they would make provision for him accordingly.⁶²

Within a week the Congress voted to give Baldwin a commission at the rank of lieutenant colonel, later upgraded to colonel and Chief Engineer on the Canadian campaign.⁶³

10.8 HENRY KNOX: “DID NOT ESCAPE THEIR PRAISE”

The volunteer engineer who impressed Gen. Washington the most was Henry Knox (1750-1806). A large, charming young man, Knox grew up in a family of straitened circumstances and left school to be an apprentice to the booksellers Wharton and Bowles. Coming of age in July 1771, he opened the “New London Book Store” near the center of Boston. Knox’s first biographer stated that he served in the Boston artillery train as part of his militia duty; this is plausible, but there are no records to confirm it.⁶⁴ In the spring of 1772 he helped to co-found a different militia unit, the Boston Grenadier Corps, and became its second-in-command. He also studied the military books in his shop, determined to rise in society.

⁶¹ PJA, 4:93.

⁶² PGW:RW, 4:104.

⁶³ JCC, 4:312.

⁶⁴ Francis S. Drake, *Life and Correspondence of Henry Knox* (1873), 126-8. Knox has attracted several popular biographers, including Noah Brooks (1900), North Callahan (1958), and Mark Puls (2008), but there remains no scholarly study of his early career.

In July 1773 Knox injured himself in a hunting accident, losing two fingers from his left hand. The next time the grenadier company marched, Knox's hand was in a bandage. That wound, as well as Knox's size, uniform, and bearing, attracted the eye of Lucy Flucker, daughter of the royal Secretary of Massachusetts. Though her family did not support the match, Lucy and Henry married in June 1774.⁶⁵

It is possible that Knox's most important prewar services to the Patriot cause were secret. According to Paul Revere's recollection of how he organized a committee of mechanics to observe the royal military, around November 1774

... a Gentleman who had Conections with the Tory party, but was a Whig at heart, acquainted me, that our meetings were discovered, and mentioned the identical words that were spoken among us the Night before. . . . We removed to another place, which we thought was more secure: but here we found that all our transactions were communicated to Governor Gage. (This came to me through the then Secretary Flucker; He told it to the Gentleman mentioned above).

Was that gentleman connected to Flucker his son-in-law, Henry Knox? Historians have raised that possibility.⁶⁶ In January 1775 Josiah Quincy of Braintree wrote to his son about "intelligence from Boston" based on a conversation between a naval officer and an army officer overheard "at K—x's shop."⁶⁷

It is unclear when Henry and Lucy Knox left Boston after the outbreak of the war. His earliest biographer suggested the date was 16 June and that:

Knox quitted Boston in disguise (his departure having been interdicted by Gage), accompanied by his wife, who had quilted into the lining of her cloak the sword with which her husband was to carve out a successful military career.⁶⁸

However, the diary of the Rev. Samuel Cooper says that on 14 May he dined at the house of the Rev. William Emerson in Concord "with Mr. Knox and Wife of Boston."⁶⁹ Henry appears to have settled Lucy in Worcester, and then returned to the siege lines to help as he could.

⁶⁵ Gossip about how the Knoxes came to marry appears in the Willard (Knox) Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society. These recollections from people who had known the couple in Boston served as sources for Drake and subsequent biographers.

⁶⁶ The first suggestion appears to be French, *General Gage's Informers*, 164.

⁶⁷ Quincy to Josiah Quincy, Jr., 3 January 1775, in *Josiah Quincy, Jr.*, 214.

⁶⁸ Drake, *Henry Knox*, 17. William Heath claimed some credit in persuading Knox to leave Boston and join the American forces, but does not say when. He says only, "His removal out of Boston, and the state of his domestic concerns, required some previous arrangement; as soon as this was effected, he joined the army." Heath, *Memoir*, 16.

⁶⁹ *American Historical Review*, 6 (1901), 307.

Many authors say that Knox was involved in the Battle of Bunker Hill, but there are no contemporaneous reports or remarks from him to support that. Instead, he appears to have worked in Roxbury, where the provincial forces built fortifications to keep the British from charging down Boston Neck. According to Drake, Knox worked mainly on “the strong redoubt crowning the hill in Roxbury, known as Roxbury Fort, the site of which is now [in 1873] covered by the Cochituate Stand Pipe.”⁷⁰

On 26 September Samuel Adams wrote to Elbridge Gerry:

Until I visited head-quarters at Cambridge, I never heard of the valor of Prescott at Bunker Hill, nor the ingenuity of Knox and Waters, in planning the celebrated works at Roxbury. We were told here that there were none in our camp who understood the business of an engineer, or anything more than the manual exercise of the gun. This we had from great authority, and, for want of more certain intelligence, were obliged at least to be silent. There are many military geniuses at present unemployed and overlooked, who, I hope, when the army is new modelled, will be sought after and enlisted into the service of their country. They must be sought after, for modest merit declines pushing itself into public view.⁷¹

Adams was clearly pleased that Knox and Waters had disproved Washington’s criticism.

John Adams was also interested in hearing more about Knox, whom he had known in Boston. On 5 October he wrote to Gen. Thomas, asking for a confidential opinion about whether Knox and Waters “are qualified for engineers and whether they have studied the sublime art of war, I mean fortifications and gunnery whether they are sufficient masters of those services to hold any considerable employments in that branch of the service.”⁷² In response, Gen. Thomas described Knox this way on 24 October 1775:

I take [him] to be judicious, and [he] has by Reading, Obtained a Theoretical Knowledge, in fortifications. I have been Pleased with Some of his Projections, but he has had no Opportunity of Practicing any great, as he doth not belong to the Army; but I have thought, had he Practised he would make as good a Figure as any that I am Acquainted with; here, As to Gunnery I believe has not made that so much his Study

Thomas ranked no other engineer higher, even Lt.-Col. Putnam, “who has Planed almost all our works, at Roxbury.”⁷³

Back in Cambridge, Gen. Washington was already well aware of Knox’s work. The two men had met on 5 July on the road to Roxbury. Knox wrote to his wife Lucy about his encounter with both Washington and Lee:

⁷⁰ Drake, *Henry Knox*, 18.

⁷¹ LoD, 2:63.

⁷² Puls, *Henry Knox*, 32. This letter was not available for the PJA.

⁷³ PJA, 3:241.

Yesterday, as I was going to Cambridge, I met the generals, who begged me to return to Roxbury again, which I did. When they had viewed the works, they expressed the greatest pleasure and surprise at their situation and apparent utility, to say nothing of the plan, which did not escape their praise.⁷⁴

Three days later Knox wrote from Watertown:

General Washington fills his place with vast ease and dignity, and dispenses happiness around him. General Lee will become very popular soon. I am obliged to go to Cambridge to wait on General Washington, and promised to be there by seven o'clock. I am now half past that time.⁷⁵

Obviously, the young bookseller had impressed Washington more than the army's official engineers. Knox admired Washington and Lee in return, and showed an affinity for the new commander's preference for discipline and order: "The new generals are of infinite service in the army. They have to reduce order almost from a perfect chaos. I think they are in a fair way of doing it."⁷⁶

On 8 August Knox dined at Washington's headquarters. He told Lucy that "Generals Washington and Lee inquired after you." On the Friday before 25 September Lucy Knox dined at headquarters herself, presumably along with her husband.⁷⁷ Already the couple was building a close relationship with the commander-in-chief.

On 2 November Washington wrote to Gov. Trumbull of Connecticut, still lamenting the lack of engineers in the official corps:

I sincerely wish this Camp could furnish a good Engineer—The Commissary Genl [the governor's son Joseph] can inform you, how exceedingly deficient the Army is of Gentlemen skilled in that branch of business; and that most of the works which have been thrown up for the defence of our several Encampments have been planned by a few of the principal Officers of this Army, assisted by Mr Knox a Gentleman of Worcester⁷⁸

With the respect of Washington, Thomas, and the Adamses, Knox was well positioned to enter the Continental Army.

⁷⁴ Drake, *Henry Knox*, 18.

⁷⁵ Drake, *Henry Knox*, 18.

⁷⁶ Drake, *Henry Knox*, 19.

⁷⁷ Drake, *Henry Knox*, 19.

⁷⁸ PGW:RW, 2:289.

10.9 REORGANIZING THE REGIMENT

By autumn Gen. Washington was convinced that the artillery regiment needed to be overhauled. He still had to work around Col. Gridley, but in the coming months he made dramatic changes.

In late September a court-martial under Gen. Greene tried Scarborough Gridley for “being deficient in his duty upon the 17th of June last, the day of the action upon Bunker’s Hill.” The court decided the major was

guilty of a breach of orders. They do therefore dismiss him from the Massachusetts service; but on account of his inexperience and youth, and the great confusion which attended that day’s transaction in general, they do not consider him incapable of a Continental Commission, should the General Officers recommend him to his Excellency.⁷⁹

No such recommendation was forthcoming. Washington dismissed Scarborough Gridley from the American army on 24 September.⁸⁰

Col. Gridley might have sensed change coming. On 20 October he sent Washington an inventory of artillery supplies and added:

It is impossible to give an Exact List of what may be wanted on all occasions: I have endeavour’d as much as the time would permit, to Collect the Essential Matters for the Army; which are humbly Submitted by Your Excellency’s Most Obedt, Humble Servt. . .⁸¹

This was quite a change from how he had addressed the Provincial Congress in July.

During the conference at headquarters on 23 October (see section 17.8) Gen. Washington brought up two points relating to the artillery personnel:

14. Very unhappy Disputes prevailed in the Regiment of Artillery—Colo Gridly is become very obnoxious to that Corps and the General is informed that he will prove the Destruction of the Regiment if continued therein. What is to be done in this Case?

Agreed that as all Officers must be approved by the General if it shall appear in forming the new Army that the difference is irreconcilable Col: Gridly be dismiss’d in some honourable Way, & that the half Pay which he renounced by entering into the American Army ought to be compensated to him. . . .

16. Engineers are also much wanted where can they be got?

⁷⁹ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:855.

⁸⁰ PGW:RW, 2:37. In October two more courts-martial acquitted Capt. Samuel Gridley for “backwardness in the execution of his duty, and for negligence in the care and discipline of his camp,” and convicted his accuser in the artillery regiment of stirring up trouble with “malicious, vexatious and groundless” complaints. *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1049. Nonetheless, Samuel Gridley was not offered a position in the reorganized regiment, and sat out the rest of the war.

⁸¹ PGW:RW, 2:209.

Agreed to recommend to the Congress Henry Knox Esqr. & Lieut Col. Putnam who have Skill in this Branch as Assistt Engineers with suitable Pay & Rank as Lieut Colonels, the present pay of Assistant Engineers being deemed too small.⁸²

The next day, Gen. Thomas sent his private thoughts to John Adams: “Colo. Gridley so famed I think falls much Short of my Expectations, [and] Appears to me to be Superanuated.”⁸³ It is notable that the council did not discuss the possibility of promoting Lt.-Col. Burbeck to head the artillery regiment.

Rather, it appears that some generals and many junior artillery officers wanted to see Knox as colonel with Putnam as second in command. But two members of the Continental Congress at the conference, Benjamin Harrison and Thomas Lynch, balked at making Knox a colonel—possibly because of his youth and lack of formal experience, possibly because of issues of hierarchy or salary. On 26 October Knox shared his view of the situation with John Adams:

Encourag’d by your kindly mentioning my name in your Letters to several Gentlemen this way I now take the liberty of writing to you.

A number of the Generals desir’d me to act as engineer and said that when the delegates from the Continental Congress came here the matter should be settl’d—myself as cheif engineer with the rank and pay of Colonel and a Lt. Col. Putnam as second also with the rank of Col.—but the Gentlemen (two of them, Dctr. Franklin was of another opinion) delegates did not see proper to engage for any other rank than that of Lt. Col. and I believe have recommended us in that order to your Congress.

I have the most sacred regard for the liberties of my country and am fully determined to act as far as in my power in opposition to the present tyranny attempted to be imposed upon it, but as all honor is comparative I humbly hope that I have as good pretensions to the rank of Col. as many now in the service, the declining to confer which by the delegates not a little surpriz’d me. If your respectable body should not incline to give the rank and pay of Col. I must beg to decline it, not but I will do every service in power as a Volunteer. It is said and universally beleived that the officers and soldiers of the train of artillery will refuse to serve under their present Commander, the reasons of which you no doubt have heard. If it should be so and a new Col. Appointed I should be glad to succeed to that post where I flatter myself I should be of some little service to the Cause. The other field officers of the regiment wish it and I have great reasons to beleive the Generals too. This would be much more agreable to me than the first and would not hinder me from being useful in that department.⁸⁴

⁸² PGW:RW, 2:200-1.

⁸³ PJA, 3:241.

⁸⁴ PJA, 3:253-4.

Adams's reply on 11 November expressed pleasure at Knox's willingness to serve in the army and promised "you will very soon be provided for according to your Wishes, at least you may depend upon this that nothing in my Power shall be wanting to effect it."⁸⁵

Meanwhile, a letter from Gen. Washington dated 8 November was on its way to Philadelphia. He threw the weight of the military establishment behind the idea of appointing Knox as the new artillery commander:

The Council of Officers are unanimously of opinion that the command of the Artillery should no longer continue in Colo. Gridley, & knowing of no person better qualified to supply his place, or whose appointment will give more general satisfaction, have taken the liberty of recommending Henry Knox Esqr. to the consideration of the Congress, thinking it indispensably necessary, at the sametime, that this Regiment should consist of two Lieut Colo. two Majors, and twelve Companies, agreeable to the Plan & estimate handed in—which, differing from the last establishment, I should be glad to be Instructed on.⁸⁶

Nine days later the Congress acted on this recommendation, and also relieved Massachusetts of the burden of the colonel's pension:

Whereas it is become necessary to appoint another Colonel of the Regiment of Artillery, in the room of Colonel Gridley, on account of his advanced age,

Resolved, That this Congress will indemnify Colonel Gridley for any loss of half-pay which he may sustain in consequence of his having been in the service of the United Colonies.

The Congress then proceeded to the choice of a Colonel of the Regiment of Artillery, and Henry Knox, Esq., was unanimously elected.⁸⁷

The day before, Washington had given Knox orders for his first mission as artillery commander (see section 10.10).

John Adams had spoken up for Knox, and for two other Massachusetts officers as well: Thomas Crafts and George Trott, both officers in Boston's prewar "train." In response, the Congress recommended that Washington look into their characters and offer them commissions. On 11 December the general's secretary Robert Hanson Harrison sent Crafts a note on behalf of his commander: "the Majority of the Regiment [i.e., the rank of major] of Artillery is now vacant, and that he would wish you to fill it in Preference to any other Person."⁸⁸ Crafts explained his response in an impassioned letter to Adams dated 16 December:

⁸⁵ PJA, 3:287.

⁸⁶ PGW:RW, 2:331-2.

⁸⁷ JCC, 3:358-9.

⁸⁸ *American Archives*, series 4, 4:236.

On the 13th Instant was sent for by General Washington and offered the Majority in the Train—Under the following Officers, Col. Knox, Lt. Col. Burbeck, Lt. Col. Mason, First Major John Crane, which shocked me very much. Lt. Col. Mason was formerly Captain of the Train in Boston but was so low and mean a person, there was not an Officer or private that would train under him In consequence of which he was oblig'd to retire. Major Crane is a good Officer and a worthy Man But Last June he was only a Sarjant in the Company whereof I was Captain Lieutenant. You certainly will not blame me for not excepting under such humiliating Circumstances.⁸⁹

Washington told Congress that Trott “did not chuse to serve,” and Crafts’s “Ambition was not fully gratified by the Offer Made to him of a Majority.”⁹⁰ Even Adams did not support Crafts’s suggestion to divide the artillery into two regiments and make him colonel of one.

In a letter to the Congress at the end of the year, Gen. Washington discussed Gridley’s new role in the reorganized force:

I believe Colonel Gridley expects to be Continued as Chief Engineer in this Army—It is very Certain, that we have no one here better qualified, he has don very little hitherto in that department—but if the Congress chuse to appoint him—I will take Care that he pays a proper attention to it.⁹¹

That task turned out to be harder than the commander-in-chief wanted. On 28 April he wrote to Gridley from New York:

It gives me much concern to hear from every one who comes from Boston that those works that were laid out for its defence are in little more forwardness than they were when I left that town. Who am I to blame for this shameful neglect but you, sir, who were to have them executed? It is not an agreeable task to be under the necessity of putting any gentleman in mind of his duty; but it is what I owe to the publick. I expect and desire, sir, that you will exert yourself in completing the works with all possible despatch; and do not lay me under the disagreeable necessity of writing to you again upon this subject.⁹²

To one of his Massachusetts informants, Washington sarcastically wrote of “Colonel Gridley, whom I have been taught to view as one of the Greatest Engineers of the age.”⁹³

Washington was much more impressed by his new artillery colonel, whose appointment he had been able to announce to the army on 12 December:

⁸⁹ PJA, 3:366.

⁹⁰ PGW:RW, 2:547.

⁹¹ PGW:RW, 2:623.

⁹² PGW:RW, 4:159.

⁹³ Washington to Josiah Quincy, 25 April 1776, PGW:RW, 4:137.

The Honorable the Continental Congress having been pleased to appoint Henry Knox Esqr. Colonel of the Regiment of Artillery, upon the new establishment; he is to be obeyed as such.⁹⁴

At that time, the new colonel was hundreds of miles away from Cambridge.

10.10 HEAVY GUNS FROM LAKE CHAMPLAIN

On 16 November Washington gave Henry Knox, at that point still officially a volunteer, these orders:

You are immediately to examine into the state of the Artillery of this army & take an account of the Cannon, Mortars, Shells, Lead & ammunition that are wanting; When you have done that, you are to proceed in the most expeditious manner to New York; There apply to the president of the Provincial Congress, and learn of him, whether Col. [Joseph] Reed did any thing, or left any orders—respecting these things, & Get him to procure such of them as can possibly be had there. The president if he can, will have them immediately sent hither; If he cannot, you must put them in a proper Channel for being Transported to this Camp with dispatch before you leave New York. After you have procured as many of these Necessaries as you can there, you must go to Major General [Philip] Schuyler & get the remainder from Ticonderoga, Crown point, or St Johns—If it should be necessary, from Quebec, if in our hands—the want of them is so great, that no trouble or expence must be spared to obtain them—I have wrote to General Schuyler, he will give every necessary assistance, that they may be had & forwarded to this place with the utmost dispatch—I have given you a Warrant to the pay-master general of the Continental army, for a Thousand Dollars, to defray the expence attending your Journey, & procuring these Articles, an Account of which you are to keep & render upon your return.

At the bottom of the paper, the general himself added: “Endeavour to procure what Flints you can.”⁹⁵

This was a daunting mission, requiring the political skill of dealing with the New York legislature and Gen. Schuyler without yet having an official commission; the knowledge of artillery to pick out useful weapons; and the logistical talent to transport those heavy guns across the sparsely settled and sometimes mountainous landscape. Nevertheless, authors seeking a heroic narrative for the end of the siege have painted Knox’s accomplishments as even greater than they were. Following his first biographer in 1873, many historians have given Knox credit for the idea of bringing guns to Boston from the Lake Champlain forts.

⁹⁴ PGW:RW, 2:539.

⁹⁵ PGW:RW, 2:384-5.

More recent authors have added that he had to argue for his plan against powerful objections.⁹⁶ However, there is evidence contradicting both of these statements.

The Massachusetts Committee of Safety's 3 May orders to Benedict Arnold (written by Dr. Benjamin Church) said that he was to take "possession of the cannon, mortars, stores, &c., upon the Lake. . . [and] bring back with you such of the cannon, mortars, stores, &c., as you shall judge may be serviceable to the Army here, leaving behind what may be necessary to secure that post." On 19 May Arnold sent back an inventory of those guns, noting those he planned to send to Cambridge "as directed by Colonel Gridley."⁹⁷ As early as 14 August Washington had written about moving lead from Fort Ticonderoga to the siege lines.⁹⁸ The conference at headquarters on 23 October had reached this consensus:

15. Artillery of different Kinds will be wanted how is it to be got & where?
Agreed. That what can be spared from New York & Crown Point be procured.⁹⁹

Thus, Knox might have advocated fetching heavy artillery from Lake Champlain, but he was not the first or only person to propose the idea.

Many authors emphasize the winter weather as one of the major obstacles Knox faced in his trek. In fact, the new colonel treated the cold and snow more as help than as hindrance. Winter was when New England loggers moved their heaviest tree trunks to the shore, when farmers drove sledges piled high with goods to market towns. Dirt roads were easier to travel when frozen hard and covered with packed snow. Knox definitely faced meteorological obstacles, but he complained more often about not having enough cold and snow than about having too much.

On the same day that Gen. Washington gave Knox his orders, the commander also wrote to the New York Provincial Congress about the plan, and told Gen. Schuyler:

Mr Henry Knox, an experienced Engineer will set out for your Place & inform you of those articles that are most immediately necessary, but as this Gentleman goes first to New York you will please to get in Readiness for Transportation such Guns, Mortars, and Ammunition as you can and Mr. Knox will on his Arrival send them forward.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ One recent juvenile biography stated that people called the plan "Knox's folly," a phrase not found in any source; Anita Silvey, *Henry Knox: Bookseller, Soldier, Patriot* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010).

⁹⁷ *American Archives*, series 4, 2:646. A copy of Arnold's letter to the Massachusetts Committee of Safety is in the George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress.

⁹⁸ PGW:RW, 1:306.

⁹⁹ PGW:RW, 2:201.

¹⁰⁰ PGW:RW, 2:387.

Three days later, Washington sent a report to the Continental Congress, but he did not mention Knox's mission.¹⁰¹ Not until 28 November did the commander tell Congress about the plan to bring cannon to Cambridge. In that letter Washington repeated his hope that the Congress would appoint Knox colonel of the artillery regiment, and warned, "the formation of that Corps, will be at a Stand untill I am honoured with your instructions thereon."¹⁰²

On 4 December Washington received a report from Knox in New York, sent 27 November. Joseph Reed had not had time to meet with the provincial committee that managed artillery, so nothing had been done yet.¹⁰³ The next day, the new colonel and his nineteen-year-old brother, William, moved on to Albany. They met with Gen. Schuyler on 1 December. Schuyler's strength was logistics, and the two men made plans for the teams of oxen and horses Knox would need for his return to Cambridge. Knox sent a report from Fort George on the lower end of Lake George. He told Washington that Schuyler had provided a helpful inventory, that it would probably take ten days to move the heaviest guns from Fort Ticonderoga onto boats, and that

the conveyance from hence will depend entirely on the sledging—if that is good they shall immedia[tel]y move forward—without sledging the roads are so much gullied that it will be impossible to move a Step.¹⁰⁴

In other words, Knox needed snow.

At Fort Ticonderoga and Crown Point, Knox inspected the ordnance and chose fifty-nine pieces he thought would be useful, starting with twelve iron 18-pounders. In all, Knox collected iron and brass cannon, mortars, howitzers, and cohorns weighing almost sixty tons together. The colonel also took twenty-three boxes of lead, each one hundred pounds, and a barrel of musket flints. It took three days to load that material onto the gondolas, bateaux, and piraguas he had collected. The boats shoved off on the afternoon of 9 December.¹⁰⁵

Knox went ahead to Fort George, arriving two days later, and started to arrange for sleds and oxen. He asked the committee of correspondence at Stillwater, New York, for "40 good strong sleds that will each be able to carry a long cannon clear from dragging on the ground and which will weigh 5400 pounds each."¹⁰⁶ He also wrote to the committees in other towns along the roads to Cambridge, asking them to prepare food and shelter for his

¹⁰¹ PGW:RW, 2:398-400.

¹⁰² PGW:RW, 2:445.

¹⁰³ PGW:RW, 2:434-5.

¹⁰⁴ PGW:RW, 2:495-6.

¹⁰⁵ The following summary is based largely on Fiore and Schruth, "*The Noble Train of Artillery*."

¹⁰⁶ Knox to George Palmer (1719-1809) of Stillwater, New York, 12 December 1775, Henry Knox Papers.

teamsters. William Knox arrived with the guns at the fort on 16 December, and the next day the colonel sent Washington another status report:

I have made forty two exceeding strong sleds & have provided eighty yoke of Oxen to drag them as far as Springfield where I shall get fresh Cattle to carry them to Camp. The rout will be from here to Kinderhook, from thence into Great Barrington, Massachusetts Bay & down to Springfield—There will Scarcely be any possibility of conveying them from here to Albany or Kinderhook but on Sleds the roads being very much gullied—At present the sledding is tolerable to Saratoga about 26 miles; beyond that there is none—I have sent for the Sleds & teams to come up & expect to begin to move them to Saratoga on Wednesday or Thursday next trusting that between this & that period we shall have a fine fall of Snow which will enable us to proceed further & make the Carriage easy—if that should be the case I hope in 16 or 17 days to be able to present to your Excellency a Noble train of Artillery, the Inventory of which I've inclos'd I have been particular with respect to their dimensions that no mistake may be in making their carriages as there are none here or Implements of any kind¹⁰⁷

Gen. Washington must have been pleased to receive that letter at headquarters. However, though Knox had been able to keep to his schedule so far, his estimate of how long the rest of the journey would take was too optimistic.

A heavy snow arrived at Christmas but proved too much for the horses and sleighs. Then in early January a “cruel thaw” kept the Hudson River from freezing over at Albany. Two guns fell through the ice at the junction of the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers; Knox doubled back to lead the effort of retrieving the larger one, an eighteen-pounder. Another gun had to be pulled out of the Hudson, and a sled needed repair in Kinderhook. Knox entered Massachusetts on 10 January, then started across what he called “mountains from which we might almost have seen all the Kingdoms of the Earth.”¹⁰⁸ The procession stopped at Blandford because there was not enough snow to smooth the ground; Knox hired more ox teams, and the guns proceeded on to Westfield. He found more mud at Springfield, and sent the New York teamsters home. From that point, Massachusetts drivers handled the load.

On 24 January 1776 Knox's train finally reached Framingham. The next afternoon, John Adams and Elbridge Gerry viewed the guns.¹⁰⁹ Knox himself had gone on to the Cambridge headquarters. During that meeting Gen. Washington probably presented the young bookseller with his official commission as colonel of the artillery regiment.

¹⁰⁷ PGW:RW, 2:563-4.

¹⁰⁸ NEHGR, 30:325. Knox's diary of his journey can be viewed at <http://www.masshist.org/revolution/doc-viewer.php?item_id=463>.

¹⁰⁹ DAJA, 2:227.

10.11 A REVIVED REGIMENT

Along with the ordnance captured on the *Nancy* (see section 12.7), the heavy guns from Lake Champlain gave the Continental artillery regiment considerably more firepower. However, most of its weapons were still old, and its men inexperienced. During the barrages of early March (see section 18.5), Lt.-Col. Mason was in charge the large brass mortar called the “Congress.” On the second shot it burst, “killing a number of his men” and wounding him badly.¹¹⁰ Two other large mortars burst around the same time, and Gen. William Heath wrote, “They were not properly bedded, as the ground was hard frozen.”¹¹¹ Nevertheless, the American artillery was powerful enough to compel the British forces to leave Boston.

Soon after taking possession of the town, Washington sent Knox and most of his artillerists to New York to prepare defenses there. The engineers left behind to strengthen Massachusetts’s defenses included Col. Gridley and Capt. Thomas Machin (see section 13.7). On 29 March Boston had a town meeting and voted that:

Thomas Crafts Esq. Col. Thomas Marshall Major Paul Reviere be a Comittee to wait on General Washington, & to acquaint him that it is the Desire of the Town, that the Four Pieces of Cannon which are in the Continental Train of Artillery, & belonging to the Town of Boston, may not be carried out of this Colony, if his Excellency should apprehend the general Interest of the Colony will permit their remaining here.¹¹²

Washington knew of Crafts for having turned down the rank of major (see section 10.9). Marshall (1719-1800) was one of the Boston selectmen and a respected militia officer. The general may have met Revere (1735-1818) when he delivered the Suffolk Resolves to the Continental Congress in the fall of 1774, but never dealt with him closely.¹¹³ The “Four Pieces of Cannon” those men sought were the small brass field-pieces used by the Boston militia regiment before the war. Gen. Washington did not return those guns, which were probably already on their way south. There is no record of his response, and it is possible that he was too busy to meet with this committee. Undoubtedly he felt that Col. Knox’s regiment needed all the cannon it could get.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Drake, *Historic Fields and Mansions*, 183.

¹¹¹ Heath, *Memoirs*, 32.

¹¹² Boston Town Records, 18:228.

¹¹³ When Revere wrote to Washington in 1791 seeking a job in the federal government, he acknowledged that he could not “claim the honor of such a personal acquaintance with your Excellency, as, will furnish you with sufficient information of my character”; Triber, *A True Republican*, 161.

¹¹⁴ The Continental Army kept Boston’s four brass guns. Two were lost during the war, and Knox as Secretary of War returned the other two to Massachusetts in 1788. One of those cannon is now on display in the Bunker Hill Monument and the other in the Concord visitor center of Minute Man National Historical Park.

On 21 April Knox wrote to the general from Norwich, Connecticut, that Lt.-Col. Burbeck had refused to leave Massachusetts for fear of losing his state pension, and that Lt.-Col. Mason was “in ill health” from his wound.¹¹⁵ Those two older officers left the regiment, though Mason remained in the army for the rest of the war, supervising the Laboratory at Springfield (precursor to the Springfield Armory). Many artillerymen also departed. In February 1776 the muster roll for Knox’s regiment listed 563 men on duty out of 604 enlisted. In June, after the move to New York, there were only 364 out of 488—one-third of the regiment was no longer available.¹¹⁶ However, younger New England officers, including Crane and Stevens of Rhode Island, remained the backbone of the Continental artillery.¹¹⁷ But it was a very different unit from what Washington had found in July 1775.

¹¹⁵ Drake, *Knox*, 27.

¹¹⁶ Lesser, *Sinews of Independence*, 17, 24.

¹¹⁷ This group also included some of Lt.-Col. Burbeck’s sons and Lt.-Col. Mason’s son and son-in-law. Though the older officers might have resented Knox being promoted over them, they continued to support the cause.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

PLANS OF ATTACK

George Washington came to Massachusetts with the understanding that the Continental Congress wanted him to drive the British military out of Boston. Based on what he had heard from the New England delegates, he believed that the army had most of what it would need to achieve that goal. A decisive end to the siege might well convince the government in London that it had to negotiate with the American colonies. And the new commander-in-chief probably had private hopes for some sort of battlefield triumph that would bring glory to his name.

On reaching Cambridge, Washington found many more logistical and administrative challenges than he expected. It was weeks before he felt able to propose a large attack on the British positions, and then his generals voted overwhelmingly against the plan. The commander-in-chief continued to put forward ways to attack Boston over the following months, growing increasingly impatient with his military colleagues and anxious about the expectations of the Congress and the public.

11.1 OVERALL STRATEGY

Ideally, besieging a position meant cutting off its supplies and over time squeezing the enemy force inside until they had no choice but to surrender. Because the Royal Navy and the British commissary department were able to provision Boston, however, the Continental forces needed a different strategy. Furthermore, leaving the British military secure in Boston could free part of their force for operations elsewhere. As Joseph Reed told his wife on 26 July:

I think it most probable they will get Boston so strongly fortified that it may be defended by a small force, and then send detachments by water, who will land in different parts of the country, and lay it waste as far as they dare.¹

Gen. Washington used those fears to push for aggressive action.

One possible strategy was to storm the town. By the conventional wisdom of eighteenth-century siege warfare, attacking a fortified position required an army twice as large as the defending force. Washington therefore paid keen attention to his army's returns and intelligence about the British strength. However, he was never convinced that he had

¹ Reed, *Life and Correspondence*, 1:121. Since Reed had little military experience, as he was the first to admit, he probably reached this conclusion from discussions with Gen. Washington.

such overwhelming force. Furthermore, by winter he began to doubt that most of his soldiers would expose themselves to the dangers of such an assault. Boston's natural defenses meant that any attack, by land or water or both, would be complicated and risky. The obvious difficulties of his situation frustrated Washington, but may have saved him from disaster. His battle plans, especially this early in the war, often depended on coordinated attacks from different directions; he had not yet learned that those plans almost never worked as he had imagined.

An alternative strategy grew out of the Battle of Bunker Hill, which, after initial recriminations, New England officers had convinced themselves was a success. Ward, Greene, and other generals repeatedly spoke of replicating that battle—enticing the British army into attacking a fortified position so the well-protected American soldiers could inflict devastating casualties. Whether or not the royal army won that fight, the London government would then see how much it would cost to retain the colonies by military force and settle for peace. In the first years of the war, Washington subscribed to this idea of trying to bring on a “general engagement” on favorable terms. The British military rarely played along; when it did, the American strategy did not work.

11.2 RAIDS ON BRITISH POSITIONS

Continental troops conducted many limited raids on British positions in late 1775, starting within days of Washington's arrival in Cambridge. On 8 July Gen. William Heath recorded:

A little after two o'clock in the morning, a number of volunteers, under the command of Majors [Benjamin] Tupper and [John] Crane, attacked the British advance guard at Brown's house, on Boston Neck, and routed them, took a halbert, a musket, and two bayonets, and burnt the two houses.²

Other companies made similarly scaled attacks by whaleboat on Long Island and the Nantasket lighthouse (see section 12.1).

The Continental Army made a significant move in late August 1775 when intelligence suggested that the British would try to advance out of Charlestown. Gen. Charles Lee surmised that the enemy's first step would be to seize Plowed Hill, a rise between the British fortification on Bunker's Hill and the American camp on Winter Hill. He therefore drew up plans to fortify that position preemptively. Gen. Sullivan led the move on the night of 26 August. The British cannonaded the new Continental position the next day from Charlestown, their floating batteries, and a warship, but without dislodging Sullivan's men. His artillerists responded with a nine-pounder cannon, damaging one floating battery and

² Heath, *Memoirs*, 17.

sinking another.³ In December the Continental Army made a similar move onto Lechmere's Point in east Cambridge (see section 18.1).

There were other skirmishes and raids throughout the siege, but none were very consequential. On 26 September Maj. Tupper led an amphibious attack on Governor's Island to bring off some cattle there; Pvt. Henry Bedinger of Virginia left a detailed account of this maneuver.⁴ On 1 January 1776 the new lieutenant Samuel Shaw described a less successful action:

An attempt was made last week by two divisions of the army from Cobble and Winter hills, under General Sullivan, consisting entirely of volunteers, upon the ministerials at Bunker's Hill, for the purpose of destroying the remaining houses at Charlestown, which they occupied for barracks. They went off in high spirits, and got within two musket-shots of the enemy, who took no alarm, when they were obliged to return, by reason of the channel over which they were to pass not being sufficiently frozen to bear them.⁵

On 14 February Shaw wrote about yet another skirmish:

A fracas happened last night, between our guard at Cobble Hill and the regulars at Charlestown. Fourteen of the guard went over the mill-dam, and tore the plank off from the mill, and brought it away. Encouraged by this success, they went a second time, intending to burn what was left of it. The regulars, alarmed, had placed five sentries, who fired upon our men, but without doing them any damage. Our men returned the fire briskly, and would have taken the sentries, had not the British, from one of their batteries, opened upon them with grape-shot, which obliged them to desist.⁶

There appears to have been less activity on the southern wing of the army after July 1775, but only because most of the buildings on the Boston Neck had been burned by then.

The most storied Continental raid came on 8 January 1776 under the command of Gen. Putnam. Washington described it laconically in a 14 January letter to Joseph Reed:

We made a successful attempt a few Nights ago upon the Houses near Bunkers Hill—A Party under Majr [Thomas] Knolton crossed upon the Mill damn (the Night being Dark) and set fire to, and burnt down Eight, out of 14 which were standing, and which we found they were daily pulling down for Fuel—five

³ Billias, *George Washington's Generals*, 27, 49. Whittemore, *A General of the Revolution*, 20-1.

⁴ Dandridge, *Historic Shepherdstown*, 110-2, 145-6.

⁵ Shaw, *Journals*, 7.

⁶ Shaw, *Journals*, 8.

Soldiers, & the Wife of one of them, Inhabiting one of the Houses, were brought off Prisoners; another soldier was killed; none of ours hurt.⁷

John Greenwood recalled the same action from his perspective as a young fifer:

We were marched into a field a short distance from the camp and there joined by other parties to the number of 200 men, of whom some thirty or forty were provided with large bundles of chips dipped in brimstone and turpentine. Between nine and ten o'clock Putnam ordered us to march without the least noise or any music, leading us down to an old causeway belonging to Charlestown mills, which ran directly under Bunker Hill and was within pistol-shot of the fort. . . . Our men crossed the causeway (or mill-dam from Cobble Hill), surprised the different sentries, took a number of prisoners, and set fire to these houses under their very noses, the enemy at the fort being so astonished as not to fire for some time, at least not until the houses were in a light blaze. I never heard that we lost a single man.⁸

That 8 January raid was timed to coincide with the presentation in Faneuil Hall of *The Blockade of Boston*, a theatrical farce that Gen. John Burgoyne had written before he sailed home to London. The production lampooned the American army, not to mention offending Bostonians by turning their town-meeting space into a theater, still forbidden by Massachusetts law. British military wits had sharpened the insult by inviting Washington and others to attend their first production, *The Tragedy of Zara*, as the Rev. Dr. Samuel Cooper learned when he visited headquarters on 6 December.⁹

Selectman Timothy Newell wrote that word of the American attack arrived “Just as the farce began at the Playhouse of the Blockade of Boston—which with much fainting, fright, and confusion, prevented the scene.”¹⁰ Lt. William Feilding of the British army told a mentor in England:

as the Curtain drew up to begin the Entertainment, an Orderly Sergeant came on the Stage, and said the Alarm Guns were fired which Immediately put every body to the Rout, particularly the Officers, who made the best of their way to their Respective Corps and Alarm Posts, leaving the Ladies in the House in a most Terrible Dilema.

By 28 January, however, Feilding reported that the play “has been perform'd twice, and Receivd (tho Short) with great Applause.”¹¹

Lt. Shaw described the Americans' triumphant withdrawal:

⁷ PGW:RW, 3:90.

⁸ Greenwood, *Revolutionary Services*, 24.

⁹ *American Historical Review*, 6:327.

¹⁰ MHSC, series 4, 1:271.

¹¹ Quoted in Balderston and Syrett, *The Lost War*, 58-9, 64.

The expedition was carried on with great secrecy, hardly any person besides those employed knowing a syllable of the affair until they had the pleasure of seeing the blaze. Among the prisoners taken was a woman, who, being something fatigued, was, by General Putnam's order, carried between two men part of the way; but, this mode being found inconvenient, the General, with his usual affability, cried out,—“Here, hand her up to me”; which being done, she put her hand round his waist, and made this pious ejaculation as they rode off:—“Jesus bless you, sweet General! May you live for ever!”¹²

Other skirmishes led up to the Continental move onto Dorchester peninsula in March 1776 and are discussed in chapter 18.

11.3 THE FIRST COUNCIL OF WAR

In its instructions to Washington, the Continental Congress told him to consult with his council of war—a gathering of all the general officers—before any major move. Obviously, a full-scale attack on British positions required such a discussion. Historian Dave R. Palmer, also a retired lieutenant general, stated, “A military rule of thumb has it that councils of war do not fight,” and the American councils proved to be more cautious than the commander-in-chief.¹³

Washington convened his first council of war in Cambridge on 9 July.¹⁴ Gen. Gates had just arrived, Sullivan was still on his way from Philadelphia, and Spencer was back in Connecticut complaining about his rank (see section 4.3). The generals who attended came to these conclusions about their strategic situation:

- The British force amounted to 11,500 men. In fact, historian John Ferling wrote, the royal army “never exceeded 8,400 men.”¹⁵
- All the generals agreed that it was necessary to defend the army's current positions, which would require, they estimated, 22,000 men. In Philadelphia, the New England delegates had told Washington there were 20,000 men in the army, but the regimental returns totaled to only about 17,000, with 14,000 fit for duty.¹⁶ The council therefore decided to order an officer from each Massachusetts regiment to recruit more men until he reached the maximum established by the Congress, and to ask the

¹² Shaw, *Journals*, 7-8.

¹³ Palmer, *George Washington and Benedict Arnold*, 133-4.

¹⁴ This meeting was at “head-quarters,” which probably meant Harvard president Langdon's house but conceivably meant Harvard steward Hastings's.

¹⁵ Ferling, *Ascent of George Washington*, 96.

¹⁶ Anderson, “Hinge of the Revolution,” *Massachusetts Historical Review*, 1:26. Martyn. *Artemas Ward*, 165. At the end of July, the Continental muster rolls counted 17,371 available for duty; Lesser, *Sinews of Independence*, 2.

Massachusetts Provincial Congress for “a temporary reinforcement”—militia troops—to make up the immediate shortfall.

- If British troops overran the army, the men should rendezvous in a place that Washington’s secretary Joseph Reed wrote down as “the Welch Mountains near Cambridge & in the Rear of the Roxbury Lines.”¹⁷ Having just arrived in Massachusetts, Reed did not know the local geography or terminology, and later historians disagreed about what place the council meant. The most likely candidate is the Weld Hills in Roxbury, the tallest of which is now part of the Arnold Arboretum.¹⁸

Finally, the generals discussed this question: “whether it is expedient to take Possession of Dorchester Point or to oppose the Enemy if they should attempt to possess it”? They unanimously agreed not to try to take or defend that peninsula.¹⁹ The Continental Army’s first priority would be to strengthen its existing lines.

11.4 THE GUNPOWDER CRISIS

Gen. Washington called his next council of war on 3 August because of an administrative emergency. When he had arrived in Massachusetts, the Provincial Congress had provided him with an account of all the gunpowder it had collected. He and the rest of the army commanders had assumed that amount was on hand, but no one had subtracted the powder used in training, skirmishes, or the Battle of Bunker Hill. The minutes of Washington’s council describe the new realization: “Upon the Returns now made—the whole Stock of the Army at Roxbury & Cambridge & the adjacent posts, consists of 90 Bbbls [barrels] or thereabouts.”²⁰ A more dramatic account came from Gen. John Sullivan, writing to his government in New Hampshire:

We had a general council the day before yesterday, and, to our great surprise, discovered that we had not powder enough to furnish half a pound a man, exclusive of what the people have in their horns and cartridge-boxes. This situation we are reduced to by the Massachusetts Committee making a return to General Washington of four hundred and eighty-five quartercasks on his arrival, which he supposed were then on hand. To his surprise, he found that it was what was provided last winter, and that there is now on hand but thirty-eight barrels; which, with all the powder in the other magazines, will not furnish half a pound

¹⁷ PGW:RW, 1:80.

¹⁸ In 1807, Bancroft, *Essay on the Life...*, 47, stated that the “Welsh Mountains” were in Cambridge, probably the western part that became Arlington. However, there is no evidence that locals ever used that term. The editors of PGW:RW, guessed they were the hills of Newton.

¹⁹ PGW:RW, 1:80.

²⁰ PGW:RW, 1:216. A barrel contained 100-110 pounds of gunpowder; *American Archives*, series 4, 2:1035.

per man. The General was so struck, that he did not utter a word for half an hour. Every one else was also astounded.²¹

The council approved a desperate plan to raid the British garrison at Halifax (see section 12.4), and Washington sent urgent messages to the Congress and all the colonies that might have stocks of powder.

The next day's general orders told the soldiers not to waste gunpowder, but the new regulations were carefully presented to conceal the crisis:

It is with Indignation and Shame, the General observes, that notwithstanding the repeated Orders which have been given to prevent the firing of Guns, in and about Camps; that it is daily and hourly practised; that contrary to all Orders, straggling Soldiers do still pass the Guards, and fire at a Distance, where there is not the least probability of hurting the enemy, and where no other end is answer'd, but to waste Ammunition, expose themselves to the ridicule of the enemy, and keep their own Camps harrassed by frequent and continual alarms, to the hurt of every good Soldier, who is thereby disturbed of his natural rest, and will at length never be able to distinguish between a real, and a false alarm. . . .

The Colonels of regiments and commanding Officers of Corps, to order the Rolls of every Company to be called twice a day, and every Man's Ammunition examined at evening Roll calling, and such as are found to be deficient to be confined.

The Guards are to apprehend all persons firing Guns near their Posts, whether Townsmen or soldiers.²²

Similarly, on 9 August the Massachusetts legislature started to discuss "a Bill to prevent the waste of Powder by firing at fowl or game of any kind, and marks."²³

Within days, new supplies of gunpowder arrived in camp from colonies to the south, relieving the immediate emergency. On 21 August Joseph Reed wrote to a friend in Philadelphia:

²¹ Amory, *John Sullivan*, 16. Decades later Elkanah Watson (1758-1842) wrote that as an apprentice to merchant John Brown of Rhode Island he delivered a ton and a half of gunpowder to Gen. Washington personally in the summer of 1775. Directed to unload in the powder-house at Mystic, he found many barrels already there, but a young officer whispered that they were "filled with sand. . . To deceive the enemy"; *Men and Times of the Revolution*, 20. Brown did sell a ton of gunpowder to Washington, but not until the end of the year; Moylan to Brown, 27 November 1775, *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1688. A few decades even further on, authors suggested that such sand barrels had actually been the cause of the confusion in August; see, for example, Edward Everett Hale, *The Life of George Washington Studied Anew* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1888), 168-9. However, no more reliable source confirms that the Continental Army used sand to hide the shortage of powder.

²² PGW:RW, 1:218-9.

²³ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:319. Flexner, *George Washington*, 2:36, created a legend that Washington sent agents into Boston to spread the disinformation that the Continentals had "eighteen hundred barrels" of powder, but this was a misreading of sources. Ezekiel Price recorded a rumor of that amount of powder in other colonies on 2 July, before the shortage was known or Washington settled in; MHSP, 7:194. There is no evidence that British officials ever heard such information.

Captain Ross arrived here on Friday evening with the powder. It was a most seasonable supply. I can hardly look back without shuddering at our situation before this increase of our stock. *Stock*, did I say? It was next to nothing. Almost the whole powder of the army was in the cartridge-boxes, and there not twenty rounds a man.²⁴

With the new supply, Washington felt able to propose an attack on the British lines, but the gunpowder supply curtailed his plans throughout the siege.

11.5 PLANS OF ATTACK

On 8 September Gen. Washington presented his first plan for attacking the enemy in a letter to all the major and brigadier generals along the siege lines:

Gentn

As I mean to call upon you in a day or two for your opinions upon a point of a very Interesting nature to the well being of the Continent in general, & this Colony in particular; I think it proper, indeed an incumbant duty upon me previous to this meeting, to intimate to the end and design of it, that you may have time to consider the matter with that deliberation and attention which the Importance of it requires.

It is to know whether, in your judgments, we cannot make a successful attack upon the Troops in Boston, by means of Boats, cooperated by an attempt upon their Lines at Roxbury—The success of such an Enterprize depends, I well know, upon the allwise disposer of Events, & is not within the reach of human wisdom to foretell the Issue; but, if the prospect is fair, the undertaking is justifiable under the following, among other reasons which might be assigned.²⁵

Washington went on to cite the expense of a winter encampment and the prospect that the soldiers would not reenlist in the new year. He argued that the British commanders knew these weaknesses and were probably trying to wait out the American army. As for the possible costs of an attack, he wrote optimistically that “not much of [the gunpowder] would be consumed in such an enterprize.” Then he repeated his main point: “the expence of supporting this Army will so far exceed any Idea that was form’d in Congress of it, that I do not know what will be the consequences.”

All the generals (except Gates) gathered at Washington’s headquarters on 11 September to discuss his proposition. The minutes of that council of war repeated the commander’s reasons for an attack, using much the same words as in his letter. The generals concluded:

After duly weighing the above Proposition, considering the State of the Enemies Lines, and the Expectation of soon receiving some important Advices from

²⁴ Reed, *Life and Correspondence*, 1:118.

²⁵ PGW:RW, 1:432-3.

England it was unanimously agreed that it was not expedient to make the Attempt at present at least.²⁶

On 19 September Gen. Lee wrote to Dr. Benjamin Rush in Philadelphia explaining the reluctance to attack:

let me communicate to you my sentiments, but at the same time I must desire you to be secret—I think then We might have attack'd 'em long before this and with success, were our Troops differently constituted—but the fatal persuasion has taken deep root in the minds of the Americans from the highest to the lowest order that They are no match for the Regulars but when cover'd by a wall or breast work—this notion is still forth strengthen'd by the end less works We are throwing up in short unless We can remove the idea (and it must be done by degrees) no spirited action can be venturd on without the greatest risk²⁷

As long as the American soldiers would not charge British positions, their generals saw too much danger in launching any attack. On 14 September Joseph Reed wrote, “our troops [are] so young, . . . and should they happen to fail at the trial, the consequences would be very fatal.”²⁸

Ten days after that council of war, Washington wrote to the Congress, assuring the delegates that he shared any impatience they felt about the lack of results in New England:

The State of Inactivity, in which this Army has lain for some Time past, by no Means corresponds with my Wishes, by some decisive stroke to relieve my Country from the heavy Expences, its Subsistence must create. After frequently reconnoitring the Situation of the Enemy, in the Town of Boston, collecting all possible Intelligence, & digesting the whole, a Surprize [attack] did not appear to me wholly impracticable, though hazardous. I communicated it to the General Officers, some Days before. I called them to Council, that they might be prepared with their Opinions. . . . I cannot say that I have wholly laid it aside; but new Events may occasion New Measures. Of this, I hope, the Honbl. Congress can need no Assurance, that there is not a Man in America, who more earnestly wishes such a Termination of the Campaign, as to make the Army no longer necessary.²⁹

That month Gen. Washington sent Col. Benedict Arnold up to Canada (see section 16.5) and armed schooners out to sea (see section 12.4), so he could console himself that he was attacking the enemy in some way.

²⁶ PGW:RW, 1:451. Citing unpublished letters by Joseph Reed, John Ferling wrote that Lee supported Washington's proposal; *First of Men*, 132. However, the official record of the council and Reed's first biographer said the opposition was unanimous; Reed, *Life and Correspondence*, 1:121.

²⁷ NYHSC, 4:206.

²⁸ Quoted in Freeman, *George Washington*, 3:539, note 153.

²⁹ PGW:RW, 2:28-9.

In early October Washington convened councils of war to discuss how to organize the army for the upcoming winter.³⁰ He obviously expected that the British would not be gone by the end of the year. The council unanimously agreed that the army needed 20,372 men organized into twenty-six regiments plus riflemen and artillery, a number deemed “sufficient both for offensive and defensive measures.”³¹ In the same period, Washington learned that the Congress was sending a committee to confer with him—increasing the pressure from above for results (see section 17.6).

On 18 October, with the Congress delegates in Massachusetts, Washington convened all his generals (except Spencer, whose contributions were minimal anyway) for another discussion of whether to attack Boston. This time he did not have a plan to present. Instead, the purpose of this meeting seems to have been to show the delegates that the army had seriously considered the desire for such an attack. For the first time the council minutes recorded the response from each general, in reverse order of seniority:

The General acquainted the Members of the Council that he had called them together in Consequence of an Intimation from the Congress, that an Attack upon Boston if practicable was much desired. That he therefore desired their Opinion on this Subject.

General Gates—That under the present Circumstances it is improper to attempt it.

General Greene—That it is not practicable under all Circumstances—but if 10,000 Men could be landed at Boston, think it is.

General Sullivan—That at this time it is improper—the Winter gives a more favourable oppy.

General Heath—Impracticable at present.

General Thomas—Of the same opinion.

General Putnam—Disapproves of it at present.

General Lee—Is not sufficiently acquainted with the Men to judge—therefore thinks it too great a Risque.

General Ward—Against it.

General Washington—³²

The notes do not include Washington’s own opinion. The other generals’ unanimous agreement rendered his own preference moot. His silence also preserved his position as a proponent of aggressive action, held back by reluctant colleagues.

Six days later, Gen. Washington communicated the council’s discussion to the Congress delegates and handed them a difficult question in turn:

³⁰ Washington asked his generals to gather at ten o’clock on Monday, 9 October, but they convened the previous day. PGW:RW, 2:97-8, 123. The week before there had been an emergency council to discuss the discovery of Dr. Benjamin Church’s correspondence; see section 14.2.

³¹ PGW:RW, 2:123.

³² PGW:RW, 2:184.

The Council of War lately held, having in Consequence of an Intimation from the Congress deliberated on the expediency of an Attack upon Boston & determined that at present it was not practicable, The General wishes to know how far it may be deemed proper & advisable to avail himself of the Season to destroy the Troops who propose to Winter in Boston, by a Bombardment, when the Harbour is block'd up, or in other Words whether the loss of the Town, & the Property therein are to be so considered as that an Attack upon the Troops there should be avoided when it evidently appears that the Town must of Consequence be destroyed.

The Committee are of opinion this is a Matter of too much Consequence to be determined by them therefore refer it to the Hon. Congress.³³

It took until 22 December for the Congress to resolve: "That if General Washington and his council of war should be of opinion that a successful attack may be made on the troops in Boston, he do it in any manner he may think expedient, notwithstanding the town and the property in it may thereby be destroyed."³⁴

The next council of general officers at headquarters on 2 November (with Spencer attending) was concerned mainly with naming top field officers in the reorganized regiments.³⁵ However, there was an additional question in the minutes:

As the Situation of American Affairs with respect to Great Britain, may be such, as to render it indispensably necessary, to attempt to Destroy the Ministerial Troops in the Town of Boston, before they can be reinforced in the Spring; even if it should be by Bombarding, & Firing the Town, is it advisable to Erect any kind of Works upon Dorchester point, before Frost setts in, and what kind?³⁶

The surviving minutes of the meeting say nothing more about this point. Either pages were lost or the generals never formally took up that topic. Whether or not the question was discussed, the army took no action to fortify Dorchester before the winter.

11.6 ICE IN THE HARBOR

With the approach of cold weather, Washington began to think about what locals had told him about ice forming in the water around Boston. During cold winters ice built up in the shallow waters on either side of the Boston Neck, which at low tide became mudflats. This had the effect of widening the Neck on either flank of the British fortifications. Washington first worried that the enemy could take advantage of that ice to attack Continental positions, in a 17 November letter to Gen. Ward:

³³ PGW:RW, 2:202.

³⁴ JCC, 3:444-5.

³⁵ PGW:RW, 2:279-83.

³⁶ PGW:RW, 2:282.

As the Season is fast approaching when the Bay between us and Boston will, in all probability be close shut up, thereby rendering any movement upon the Ice as easy as if no Water was there—and, as it is more than possible that General Howe, when he gets the expected reinforcements will endeavour to relieve himself from the disgraceful confinement in which the Ministerial Troops have been, all this Summer; common prudence dictates the necessity of guarding our Camps wherever they are most assailable; for this purpose, I wish you, Genl Thomas, Genl Spencer & Colo. [Rufus] Putnam, to meet me at your Quarters tomorrow at Ten O'clock, that we may examine the Ground between your Work at the Mill & Sewel's point, & direct such Batteries as shall appear necessary for the Security of your Camp, on that side to be thrown up, without loss of time.

Washington then quickly moved to an idea for an attack: “I have long had it upon my Mind that a successfull attempt might be made, by way of surprize, upon Castle William.”³⁷ He believed that the fort was guarded by only 300 regulars while whaleboats could land up to a thousand Continental soldiers on Castle Island. However, the Castle was one of the most strongly fortified parts of the British defenses. Nothing came of this discussion in Roxbury, but it showed how Washington remained eager for some action.

By mid-January, Washington was feeling fed up with the opposition to his plans. He wrote to Reed on 14 January:

Could I have foreseen the difficulties which have come upon us—could I have known that such a backwardness would have been discovered among the old Soldiers to the Service, all the Generals upon Earth should not have convinced me of the propriety of delaying an Attack upon Boston till this time. When it can now be attempted I will not undertake to Say, but thus much I will answer for, that no oppertunity can present itself earlier than my wishes.³⁸

By then, the general knew that Henry Knox was on his way from Lake Champlain with more heavy cannon (see chapter 10.10). Of course, those big guns would need a lot of gunpowder, which was still in short supply.

In early January Washington wrote urgent letters to the Massachusetts legislature about the deficiency of men and muskets. He planned a council of general officers to address the issue on 15 January, but “adjourned” it on realizing that John Adams was in Cambridge. In the Congress, Adams consistently pushed for aggressive action. Learning that he planned to dine with legislative leaders James Warren and Joseph Hawley, the general hastily invited all three men to his headquarters to attend the council.³⁹ The record of the meeting on 16 January mentions Warren and Adams, but not Hawley. Lee had left to take command in New York, and Thomas was absent.

³⁷ PGW:RW, 2:391-2.

³⁸ PGW:RW, 3:90.

³⁹ Washington to Adams, 15 [January] 1776, PGW:RW, 3:93.

Gen. Washington once again raised the topic of an attack on Boston, this time in the context of needing more troops:

The Commander in Chief laid before the Council a State of the Regiments in the Continental Army, the consequent Weakness of the Lines, and in His Judgement, the indispensable necessity of making a Bold attempt to Conquer the Ministerial Troops in Boston, before they can be reinforced in the Spring, if the means can be provided, and a Favourable Opportunity Offer; & then desired the Opinion of The Council, thereupon.

The Council agreed unanimously that a Vigourous attempt ought to be made upon The Ministerial Army in Boston, as soon as practicable, all concurring circumstances Favouring the wish'd for Success; and Advised His Excellcy, to Request from this, & the Neighbouring Colonies, Thirteen Regiments of Militia to His Aid, to be at Cambridge by the First of February, & to Consist of the same Number of Men and Officers, as Those upon the Continental Establishment. . .⁴⁰

Letters went out that day to the governments of New Hampshire and Connecticut asking that they raise those thirteen militia regiments, and Warren took the same message back to Watertown.⁴¹

Two days later, Washington received dispatches from Gen. Schuyler, bringing news of the unsuccessful assault on Quebec and Gen. Montgomery's death (see section 16.10). The commander convened another council, again with John Adams, to discuss whether it made sense to send any troops to Canada. The generals felt that the siege lines were already "feeble."⁴² They concluded that three of the thirteen new militia regiments from New England should be assigned to Schuyler's Northern Department, an opinion Washington passed on to the Congress on 19 January.⁴³ Sending those troops north would of course leave fewer soldiers available for any attack on Boston.

Nevertheless, Gen. Washington remained eager to take some sort of action. On 8 February, Nathanael Greene wrote to his brother Jacob: "There is nothing new in camp, only preparations making for the attack. Whether it will take place or not, God only knows."⁴⁴ In reply to his brother's worries, the young general laid out his own doubts and hopes for ending the siege on 15 February:

Your apprehensions about attacking Boston are very well founded in many respects. The troops are raw and undisciplined, and consequently unfit for an attack sword in hand. But out of an army of 20,000 men, it will be hard if we cannot find 8,000 who will fight manfully. There must be some cowards among

⁴⁰ PGW:RW, 3:103.

⁴¹ PGW:RW, 3:117.

⁴² PGW:RW, 3:122-4. PJA, 3:404-5.

⁴³ PGW:RW, 3:147.

⁴⁴ PNG, 1:193.

them, as well as among us. But, however, an attack upon a town garrisoned with 8,000 regular troops, is a serious object, and ought to be well considered before attempted. I always thought an attack with 20,000 men might succeed. I still think so; and were the Bay to be frozen over, I should be glad to see the attempt made; not but that it would be horrible if it, succeeded, and still more horrible if it failed. But the advantage that America would derive from making ourselves masters of that garrison at this time, would be inconceivable. It would damp the spirits of Great Britain, and give ours a new spring. In a word, it would put a finishing stroke to the war; it would heal all the divisions among ourselves; silence the Tories, and work a general reformation throughout the continent. But I have little hopes now of such a happy event, as the weather is greatly moderated, and the scarcity of powder puts it out of our power to attempt any thing by cannonading or bombardment.⁴⁵

There would be another council of war the next day, but Greene—the only general who had expressed even qualified support for Washington’s October attack plan—was too sick to attend.⁴⁶

11.7 THE LAST COUNCIL AT HEADQUARTERS

Washington convened his last council in Cambridge on 16 February and laid out his arguments for preparing an attack as soon as possible:

- The new militia regiments “were come & coming in, and If compleat,” and augmented by Continental soldiers then “on Command,” would bring the total Continental force to nearly 17,500, plus officers.
- The British strength “did not much exceed 5,000 men fit for duty.” (This estimate was well below Greene’s understanding the day before, and below previous estimates by Washington.) Reinforcements were probably on the way, and when they arrived Gen. Howe would “undoubtedly endeavour to penetrate into the Country, If their strength should be sufficient, or remove to some other part of the Continent If not.”
- The Continental Army did not have enough gunpowder to produce an effective artillery barrage. The royal army might simply take refuge aboard ships in the harbor until the shelling had to stop, causing damage to Boston without liberating it.
- Finally, “part of Cambridge & Roxbury Bays were so frozen as to Admit an easier entry into the town of Boston.” (The day before Greene had reported that “the weather is greatly moderated,” suggesting the ice could soon melt.)

⁴⁵ Johnson, *Nathanael Greene*, 1:52-3. PNG, 1:194.

⁴⁶ In his 8 February letter Greene said, “I am as yellow as saffron, my appetite all gone, and my flesh too. I am so weak that I can scarcely walk across the room.” PNG, 1:193.

Gen. Washington therefore concluded “that a stroke, well aimed, at this critical juncture, might put a final end to the war, and restore peace and tranquillity, so much to be wished for.”⁴⁷

The other generals did not share Washington’s conclusion. Among their objections to his argument:

- “the King’s forces in the Town of Boston Comprehending New raised Corps & Armed Tories amount to a much larger Number than 5,000—furnished with Artillery, Assisted by a Fleet and possessed of every advantage the situation of the place affords”.
- “Our Army is at present very defective in the Numbers this Council declared to be sufficient for the purposes of Offensive War, and also deficient in Arms to the amount of 2,000 stand.”
- “The Militia Ordered & expected to be here by the first of the Month are not more than half arrived”; the real count of the American strength was therefore only 12,600 men, including officers.⁴⁸

The Rev. William Gordon reported that “Gen. Ward opposed the idea” of an attack as Washington proposed, and “Gen. Gates was also against it.”⁴⁹ As for the other brigadiers, “a m[aj]ority of the Generals commanding Brigades [said], that upon discoursing with the Field Officers of their respective Regiments upon the subject of an Assault, they in General declared a disapprobation of the measure, as exceedingly doubtful.”⁵⁰ In a private letter Gordon added, “The repulse at Quebec cooled some fiery spirits, and prudence prevented such a rash undertaking.”⁵¹

Ward proposed an alternative move:

the attack must be made with a view of bringing on an engagement, or of driving the enemy out of Boston, and either end will be answered much better by possessing Dorchester heights.⁵²

The generals agreed, however, that any move should be preceded by an artillery bombardment to soften up the British positions.

⁴⁷ PGW:RW, 3:320-1. PNG, 1:195-6.

⁴⁸ PGW:RW, 3:321-2.

⁴⁹ Gordon, *History of the Rise...*, 2:189. Paul David Nelson found Gates’s speech to this council among his papers at the New-York Historical Society, misfiled under December 1775; Nelson, *General Horatio Gates*, 45.

⁵⁰ PGW:RW, 3:322.

⁵¹ MHSP, 63:602.

⁵² Gordon, *History of the Rise...*, 2:189.

Perhaps a bit peeved, Washington asked whether they wanted “to begin a Cannonade & Bombardment with the present stock of powder”? The council resolved:

That a Cannonade & Bombardment will be expedient and advisable as soon as there shall be a proper Supply of powder, & not before, and that in the mean Time, preparations should be made to take possession of Dorchester Hill, with a view of drawing out the Enemy, and of Nodles Island also, if the Situation of the Water & other circumstances will admit of It.⁵³

Washington had scouted out the Dorchester peninsula in the previous week (see section 18.2), and preferred a more direct attack on the British positions. Still, he could not ignore his colleagues.

On 18 February Washington reported the result of his council’s discussion to the Congress:

The late freezing Weather having formed some pretty strong Ice from Dorchester point to Boston Neck and from Roxbury to the Common, thereby affording a more expanded and consequently a less dangerous Approach to the Town, I could not help thinking, notwithstanding the Militia were not all come In, and we had little or no Powder to begin our Operation by a regular Cannonade & Bombardment, that a bold & resolute Assault upon the Troops in Boston with such Men as we had (for it could not take Many Men to guard our own Lines at a time when the Enemy were attacked in all Quarters) might be crown’d with success; and therefore, seeing no certain prospect of a Supply of Powder on the one hand and a certain dissolution of the Ice on the other, I called the General Officers together for their opinion (agreeably to the Resolve of Congress of the 22d of December).

The Result will appear in the Inclosed Council of War, and being almost unanimous, I must suppose to be right; although, from a thorough conviction of the necessity of attempting something against the Ministerial Troops before a Reinforcement should arrive, and while we were favour’d with the Ice, I was not only ready, but willing and desirous of making the Assault; under a firm hope, if the Men would have stood by me, of a favourable Issue, notwithstanding the Enemy’s advantage of Ground—Artillery—&c.

Perhaps the Irksomeness of my situation, may have given different Ideas to me, than those which Influenced the Gentlemen I consulted, and might have inclin’d me to put more to the hazard than was consistent with prudence—If it had, I am not sensible of it, as I endeavoured to give it all the consideration that a matter of such Importance required—True it is, & I cannot help acknowledging, that I have many disagreeable Sensation’s on acct. of my Situation; for to have the Eyes of the whole Continent fixed, with anxious expectation of hearing of some great event, & to be restrain’d in every Military Operation for want of the necessary means of carrying it on, is not very pleasing; especially, as the means used to conceal my Weakness from the Enemy conceals it also from our friends, and adds to their Wonder.

⁵³ PGW:RW, 3:322.

The general went on to lament the “Inormous expence” of the new militia and the ongoing lack of gunpowder. This letter is unusual among Washington’s official correspondence in expressing so much personal emotion.⁵⁴

Washington was also frank about his frustrations in his letter to Reed on 26 February:

About ten days ago the severe freezing weather formed some pretty strong ice from Dorchester to Boston Neck, and from Roxbury to the Common—this I thought (knowing the Ice could not last) a favourable opportunity to make an Assault upon the Troops in Town—I proposed it in Council; but behold! though we had been waiting all the year for this favourable Event, the enterprize was thought too dangerous! perhaps it was—perhaps the irksomeness of my Situation led me to undertake more than could be warranted by prudence—I did not think so, and am sure, yet, that the Enterprize, if it had been undertaken with resolution must have succeeded; without it, any would fail; but it is now at an end, and I am preparing to take post on Dorchester to try if the Enemy will be so kind as to come out to us.⁵⁵

Washington, Ward, and the other generals hoped that fortifying the high spots on the Dorchester peninsula would result in “bringing on an engagement” like Bunker Hill. They still spoke of ending the siege with a costly battle.

⁵⁴ PGW:RW, 3:335-6.

⁵⁵ PGW:RW, 3:370.

CHAPTER TWELVE

LAUNCHING AN AMERICAN NAVY

The American siege lines blocked the royal authorities from supplying their garrison by land—but Boston was a port, and the Royal Navy had nearly free run of the sea. The town’s food supplies grew tight early in the war, but once the London government realized that Boston needed provisions, and friendly merchants in other parts of the empire realized the army had hard money to spend, they began to send supplies.

The sight of those ships moving easily in and out of the harbor irked Gen. Washington, and by the fall of 1775 he had launched a small fleet of armed schooners under his authority as army commander.¹ This effort carried financial and political risks, both internationally (fighting at sea was a significant escalation of the conflict) and domestically (Washington did not tell the Congress about his ships for weeks).

Washington’s six schooners sailed from Beverly and Plymouth. Neither he nor his secretary Joseph Reed, to whom he first delegated responsibility for this fleet, ever went to those harbors. In effect, they sought to manage a northwest Atlantic naval war from a headquarters on the Charles River.

12.1 WHALEBOATS IN THE HARBOR

Though the provincial troops did not have the firepower of the Royal Navy, they knew the ins and outs of Boston harbor. The Massachusetts Committee of Safety started to collect whaleboats as early as 25 April 1775.² Soldiers used these highly maneuverable craft in the fights over Noddle’s Island and other agricultural islands in the harbor.

On 11 July, a week after Washington and Lee arrived in Cambridge, the Continental Army launched another amphibious raid. Col. John Greaton and 136 men (British reports said 500) landed on Long Island in Boston harbor, where the British military was raising hay and grazing sheep and cattle. Early in the morning of 12 July the provincials herded that livestock onto their boats, took prisoner “fourteen of the Kings Mowers with the family belonging to the Island,” and set fire to “a large quantity of hay, which was put up into

¹ The history of Washington’s schooner fleet has been rediscovered on a regular cycle. This discussion is based largely on Nelson, *George Washington’s Secret Navy* (2008), which benefits from the author’s thoroughness and nautical knowledge. Other treatments include Maclay, *Washington’s Wolfpack* (originally written 1899); Knox, *The Naval Genius of George Washington* (1932); Clark, *George Washington’s Navy* (1960); and Hearn, *George Washington’s Schooners* (1995).

² Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 522.

bundles by the Regulars.” The Royal Navy responded with cannon fire, killing one man and wounding another. The Americans nonetheless returned on the afternoon of 12 July and burned the island’s only house.³

Washington did not mention ordering that action in his reports to the Congress, suggesting that provincial officers had planned it before he arrived. But the raid showed him a way to strike at the enemy; as a 12 July letter from Cambridge stated, “The Regulars do not seem willing to come out, but our people are perpetually provoking them.”⁴ On 15 July Washington’s general orders began: “The Commanding Officers of each Regiment to report the names of such Men in their respective Corps as are most expert in the management of whale boats.”⁵ Six days later, the general told the Congress: “I have ordered all the Whale Boats along the Coast to be collected, & some of them are employed every Night to watch the Motions of the Enemy by Water, in order to guard as much as possible against any Surprise.”⁶

Washington expected to use the whaleboats for more than surveillance. On the same day he wrote to the Congress, “three hundred Rhode-Islanders” under Maj. Joseph Vose raided Nantasket Point, seized barley and hay, and damaged the lighthouse there.⁷ The Royal Navy immediately started to repair that structure, so Maj. Benjamin Tupper led a second raid on 30-31 July. Abigail Adams described that action for her husband:

... a number of Men in Whale Boats went of from Squantom and Dorchester to the light house, where the General Gage had again fixd up a Lamp, and sent 12 carpenters to repair it. Our people went on amidst a hot fire from 30 Marines who were placed there as a guard to the tory carpenters, burnt the dwelling house, took the Torys and 28 Marines, kill’d the Leiunt. and one Man, brought of all the oil and stores which were sent, without the looss of a man till they were upon their return when they were so closely persued that they were obliged to run one whale boat ashore and leave her to them. The rest arrived safe except the unhappy youth whose funeral I yesterday attended, who received a Ball thro the temples as he was rowing the boat.⁸

Some politicians wanted to expand the war on the water. On 20 July James Warren told John Adams in Philadelphia:

The Barges full of Armed men were Afraid to Attack our Whaleboats at a proper distance, and the Armed Vessels, either agitated with Fear or destitute of

³ NDAR, 1:868-9. MHSC, series 4, 1:264.

⁴ *New York Gazette*, 31 July 1775.

⁵ PGW:RW, 1:118.

⁶ PGW:RW, 1:138.

⁷ NDAR, 1:941.

⁸ Abigail Adams to John Adams, 31 July 1775, postscript dated 2 August, AFC, 1:270.

Judgment did it without Execution. . . . It is said they are more afraid of our whale Boats than we are of their Men of War. A few Armed Vessels I am Abundantly Convinced would produce great Consequences.⁹

Washington was still wary of using “armed vessels” for naval warfare against the British. On 10 August, a committee of the Massachusetts General Court proposed building a fleet of warships, and the general advised against the idea: “you Gentlemen will anticipate me, in pointing out our Weakness, & the Enemy’s Strength” at Sea.¹⁰ He saw more potential in whaleboats and small schooners that could attack lightly defended merchant ships and duck away from the Royal Navy’s men-of-war.

Memorandums for the commander from the carpenter Joshua Davis show the scale of the American warfare by boat. On 22 July Davis produced a list of “such necessaries as will be wanting to Compleat One hundred Whale Boats for the service.” They included twenty small swivel guns, “10 Fathom Whale Wharf” for every twenty boards, and “100 Short Wool’d Sheep Skins for Muffling ye. Oars.” On 27 July he provided an inventory of the small vessels the colony already controlled: 117 in all, 96 of them whaleboats. There were thirty-five whaleboats “in Cambreg bay & River,” fifty-five “in Dogester Creke near the mettinghouse,” and “Two Long boats three Yalls Eight moses boats & one Bay boat” near the Cambridge bridge.¹¹ On 22 August the Massachusetts legislature promised Davis “the Pay of a Lieutenant-Colonel in the Army” as long as he worked for the colony.¹² Davis went on to become barrack master for the army (see section 15.1) and resumed working under Washington in late 1776.¹³

12.2 FLOATING BATTERIES

Another watercraft of the Continental Army was the floating battery: a rowboat with high, thick sides to protect the small cannon inside and the men who operated them. The British army deployed several of these early in the siege, using them to bombard provincial positions during the Battle of Bunker Hill. In his first letter back to the Continental Congress, Gen. Washington reported that “3 floating Batteries lay in Mystick River near their camp” in

⁹ PJA, 3:83. Adams leaked this letter to the press, and it was published as the opinions of a “gentleman in Watertown,” seat of the Massachusetts legislature. *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1696.

¹⁰ Nelson, *Washington’s Secret Navy*, 77-8. PGW:RW, 1:297.

¹¹ Davis’s report is in the George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress. For his work with the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, see NDAR, 1:601, 618, 858, and following.

¹² *American Archives*, series 4, 3:350-1.

¹³ *American Archives*, series 5, 3:507-8.

Charlestown.¹⁴ Another correspondent working with the general said those batteries carried six cannon: “two guns in their bows, two in their sterns, and one on each side.”¹⁵

Before the month was out, Americans started to design their own floating batteries.¹⁶ A *New Yorker* reported on 14 September “We have now got some floating batteries built, under the direction of Admiral Putnam, whose versatile genius is as ready for operation by water as land.”¹⁷ On 29 September Pvt. William Moody from Maine wrote in his diary: “Lieut. York, with 8 men out of our company to go in the floating battery.”¹⁸ The Americans sent these boats into action on 16 October. Two moved down the Charles River toward Boston, close enough to fire into the army’s camp on the Common and to strike some houses. Then one of the guns exploded. Boston selectman Timothy Newell recorded the result: “5 or 6 hats, a waistcoat and part of a boat came on shore at the bottom of the Common.”¹⁹

Two days later, Col. Jedediah Huntington of Connecticut reported back to Gov. Trumbull:

We had three fine floating batteries, two in Cambridge and one in Mistick River—two of them remain good yet; and about twenty flat-bottom boats that will carry near one hundred men each, besides a number of whale boats. What is to be done with them I know not.²⁰

Pvt. Moody was more dubious about the capacity of the flat-bottomed boats; on 3 October he wrote: “Yesterday 60 men drafted to try the boats, overloaded one boat, came near sinking her.”²¹

Despite their limited effect, floating batteries remained part of the Continental arsenal through the siege. The plan that Putnam and three brigadiers drew up for attacking Boston in February 1776 including three floating batteries, each mounting one twelve-pounder cannon.²² After the siege, Washington directed that the floating batteries now be deployed “for the purpose of defence”; however, it was unclear “if they have Guns on board,” reflecting the ongoing shortage of artillery.²³

¹⁴ PGW:RW, 1:86.

¹⁵ *American Archives*, series 4, 2:1637. See also Thomas Mifflin’s 20 July 1775 letter, quoted in Rossman, *Thomas Mifflin*, 46.

¹⁶ John Adams to Josiah Quincy, 29 July 1775, PJA, 3:105.

¹⁷ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:713. Gen. Israel Putnam was taking aggressive action, as usual.

¹⁸ Goold, *Phinney’s Thirty-first Regiment of Foot*, 26.

¹⁹ MHSC, series 4, 1:269.

²⁰ MHSC, series 5, 9:507.

²¹ Goold, *Phinney’s Thirty-first Regiment of Foot*, 26.

²² PNG, 1:196-7.

²³ General orders for 24 March 1776, PGW:RW, 3:521.

To conform to the rules of naval warfare, these American floating batteries displayed a flag (see section 12.12), but they were obviously extensions of the land war, not meant for deep waters.

12.3 POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF ARMED SHIPS

Taking the fight to the ocean would have major political implications for Washington. In mid-1775, he and most other Americans did not see themselves as fighting to become an independent nation. Rather, they fought to defend themselves from a corrupted ministry in London. Hunting down and attacking British supply ships clearly would not be defensive.

Furthermore, by the rules of naval warfare, attacking another ship required displaying a flag; otherwise, the act was piracy. For the Americans to fly a non-British flag, even one from their colonies' established governments, would be a symbolic step toward independence. As early as July 1775 John Adams was writing privately that the colonies should have "raised a naval Power," and his Massachusetts ally James Warren proposed that the colony create a navy, but their legislative colleagues saw that step as risky and provocative.²⁴

Rhode Island, with its mercantile economy and aggressive action toward royal government ships, had already moved ahead of the other colonies. In June its General Assembly voted to "charter two suitable vessels, for the use of the colony, and fit out the same in the best manner to protect the trade of this colony"—a euphemism for putting extra crewmen and cannon on board ships to make them ready for a fight. Meanwhile, a Royal Navy ship continued to cruise Narragansett Bay.²⁵

12.4 LAUNCH OF THE *HANNAH* FROM BEVERLY

The story of Gen. Washington's schooner fleet begins, most likely, in the council of war on 3 August 1775 that discussed the critical shortage of gunpowder. The minutes of that council go on to say:

It was proposed to make an Attempt on the Magazine at Halifax where there is Reason to suppose there is a great Quantity of Powder—And upon the Question being severally put it was agreed to by a great Majority. & that the Detachment for this Enterprize consist of 300 Men.²⁶

Those three hundred men would need transportation to Nova Scotia, and protection along the way, necessitating some sort of armed ship; later Washington would write vaguely of a

²⁴ John Adams to James Warren, 24 July 1775, PJA, 3:89. Nelson, *Washington's Secret Navy*, 63.

²⁵ NDAR, 1:670-1. Nelson, *Washington's Secret Navy*, 58-9.

²⁶ PGW:RW, 1:216.

link between his first schooner and “a scheme I had in view with the People of Hallifax.”²⁷ In this same period, Washington asked Rhode Island to send one of its two ships to Bermuda for gunpowder, showing how the crisis had opened his mind to naval action.²⁸ Four days after the council, Col. John Glover (1732-1797) of Marblehead leased a schooner called the *Hannah* on behalf of the army. The next day, he was back at the Cambridge headquarters as officer of the day, no doubt reporting on his work.²⁹

Washington knew Col. Glover because the Marblehead regiment was stationed near headquarters and often supplied the guard for the mansion. It is not clear who proposed arming schooners and sending them out from Cape Ann. Some historians have credited Glover, but his biographer George A. Billias noted that there is no documentation for this and Glover never took credit.³⁰ However the idea arose, the colonel, with his maritime experience and contacts in Marblehead, Massachusetts’s second largest port, was an obvious choice to manage the mission.

As more gunpowder arrived in the American camp over the following weeks, the generals no doubt realized that raiding Halifax, one of the British military’s main bases in North America, was a desperate idea. But now that Washington had begun to think about arming ships, he saw more opportunities. In mid-August, the general had his first talk with Col. Benedict Arnold, who proposed to attack Canada; that expedition would depend on ships, to carry the men north to Maine (see section 16.5). On 15 August a fleet of British transports arrived in Boston harbor “having taken from the Islands of Gardners &c. about two thousand sheep—one hundred and ten oxen, butter, eggs, &c. &c.”³¹ With the enemy seizing supplies from North American islands and coasts, there was no way that the Continental Army could starve them out of Boston. The sight of those ships arriving unimpeded also appears to have been personally frustrating to Washington.

Many authors have said that Glover leased the *Hannah* from himself. He did have a ship of that name, with which he had defied the Royal Navy back in early June.³² However, that ship is listed in Marblehead records as 45 tons, and the army’s schooner was 78 tons. There were many other vessels named *Hannah* in New England ports. Allen B. Hovey

²⁷ Washington to John Langdon, 21 September 1775, PGW:RW, 2:31. Winthrop Sargent (1753-1820) later wrote of himself, “when an expedition against Halifax had been intended, he was offered, and agreed to take command of one of the vessels destined for that important service”; Sargent, *Political Intolerance*, 7. Allen B. Hovey spotted the connection between this planning and the army schooners in his study “George Washington’s Armed Schooner: Secret Lives of the Hannah/Lynch,” prepared for Washington’s Naval Base, Inc., in 1993.

²⁸ PGW:RW, 1:221-2, 419-22.

²⁹ Hovey, “George Washington’s Armed Schooner,” 10. Billias, *General John Glover*, 214-5.

³⁰ Billias, *General John Glover*, 213-4.

³¹ MHSC, series 4, 1:265.

³² Billias, *General John Glover*, 67.

hypothesized that Glover leased a new ship for the army from the merchant John Lee, a previous colonel of the Marblehead regiment. Glover's son John had married Lee's daughter.³³ As for a place to equip the merchant vessel for fighting, Glover chose a wharf in Beverly that he had purchased in the summer of 1774 after the port of Boston was closed. Beverly was only half the size of Marblehead, and its cove was secluded, with a narrow, twisted channel that was a liability for commerce but a protection in wartime.³⁴

The American army tried to keep the work at Glover's wharf secret. On 16 August Capt. Ebenezer Francis wrote to his wife from Cambridge: "I hear there is some Schooners fitting out for a Cruze at Beverly for marblehead Regiment."³⁵ However, two days later the Marblehead diarist Ashley Bowen had apparently heard a denial: "No cruisers to fit out in Beverly as was talked of."³⁶ In fact, a blacksmith started work on the *Hannah* on 21 August.³⁷ Workmen installed more sails for increased speed and maneuverability, a whaleboat, and ten small cannon from the estate of John Lee's late brother, Jeremiah.³⁸

Glover was back in Cambridge on 23 August, according to his orderly book, and the next day Bowen noted: "Came from town a company of volunteers for privateering. They came from Camp at Cambridge and are to go on board Colonel Glover schooner."³⁹ As master of the *Hannah*, Glover chose Capt. Nicholson Broughton (1725-1798) of his regiment, a man with twenty years of experience as a ship's master. The second-in-command was John Glover, Jr., and the sailing master was John Gale, the colonel's brother-in-law.⁴⁰ Those officers signed up a crew of thirty-nine men from the regiment, one third of them from Broughton's company.⁴¹

During a commercial voyage, ship owners kept their costs down by hiring minimal crews; a schooner could be operated by only half a dozen men.⁴² But maneuvering the same size of ship while attacking an enemy with artillery and small arms required a much larger crew. Some of the *Hannah's* men would work as sailors, others "as gun crews and marines."

³³ Hovey, "George Washington's Armed Schooner," 10.

³⁴ Macy, *Hannah and Nautilus*, 7.

³⁵ Hovey, "George Washington's Armed Schooner," 12.

³⁶ Nelson, *Washington's Secret Navy*, 83.

³⁷ Hovey, "George Washington's Armed Schooner," 11, 15.

³⁸ Macy, *Hannah and Nautilus*, 7-8. Before the war, Jeremiah Lee had been on the Provincial Congress's Committee on Supplies and helped David Mason (see section 10.1) gather artillery.

³⁹ Billias, *General John Glover*, 214-5. Nelson, *Washington's Secret Navy*, 84.

⁴⁰ Nelson, *Washington's Secret Navy*, 93.

⁴¹ Macy, *Hannah and Nautilus*, 8. Nelson, *Washington's Secret Navy*, 88.

⁴² Billias, *General John Glover*, 74. Nelson, *Washington's Secret Navy*, 177.

The bigger crew meant that the schooner had to be fitted with additional living quarters and a larger stove.⁴³

Gen. Washington's orders for Broughton, written out by Joseph Reed, say:

1. You being appointed a Captain in the Army of the United Colonies of North America, are hereby directed to take the Command of a Detachment of sd Army & proceed on Board the *Schooner Hannah* at Beverly lately fitted out & equipp'd with Arms Ammunition & Provisss at the Continental Expence.

2. You are to proceed as Commander of sd *Schooner* immediately on a Cruize against such Vessels as may be found on the High Seas or elsewhere bound inward and outward to or from Boston in the Service of the ministerial Army & to take & seize all such Vessels laden with Soldiers, Arms, Ammunition or Provisions for or from sd Army or which you shall have good Reason to susspect are in such Service.

3. If you should be so successful as to take any of sd Vessels you are immediately to send them to the nearest & safest Port to this Camp under a careful Prize Master, directing him to notify me by Express immediately of such Capture with all Particulars & there to wait my farther Direction.

4. You are to be very particular & diligent in your Search after all Letters and other Papers tending to discover the Designs of the Enemy or of any other Kind& to forward all such to me as soon as possible.

5. Whatever Prisoners you may take you are to treat with Kindness & Humanity as far as is consistent with your own Safety—their private Stock of Money, & Apparell to be given them after being duly search'd, and when they arrive at any Port you are to apply to the Committee or to any Officer of the continental Army stationed at such Port for a Guard to bring them up to Head Quarters.

6. For your own Encouragement & that of the other Officers & Men to Activity & Courage in this Service, over & above your Pay in the continental Army you shall be entitled to one third Part of the Cargo of every Vessel by you taken & sent into Port (military & naval Stores only excepted, which with Vessels & apparell are reserved for the publick Service)—which 1st sd third Part is to be divided among the Officers & Men in the following Proportions.

Captain 6 Shares,
1st Lieutt. 5 Do,
2nd Lieutt. 4 Do
Ship's Master 3 Do
Steward 2 Do
Mate 1½
Gunner 1½
Boatswain 1½
Gunners Mate & Sergt. 1½
Privates 1 Share each

7. You are particularly charged to avoid any Engagement with any armed Vessel of the Enemy tho' you maybe equal in Strength, or may have some small Advantage; the Design of this Enterprize being to intercept the Supplies of the Enemy which will be defeated by your running into unnecessary Engagements.

⁴³ Macy, *Hannah and Nautilus*, 7-8.

8. As there may be other Vessels employed in the same Services with yourselves you are to fix upon proper signals & your Stations being settled so as to take the greatest Range avoid cruising on the same Ground—if you should happen to take Prizes in Sight of each other the Rules which take Place among private Ships of War are to be observed in the Distribution of the prize Money.

9. In Case of retaking the Vessel of any Friend to the American Cause I will recommend it to such Person to make a suitable Compensation to those who have done such a Service—but such Vessels are not to be deemed as coming within the Directions respecting other Vessels.

10. You are to be extremely careful & frugal of your Ammunition—by no Means to waste any of it in Salutes or for any Purpose but what is absolutely necessary.⁴⁴

Washington addressed Broughton as “a Captain in the Army of the United Colonies of North America,” and referred to his crew as “a Detachment of said Army,” reflecting his own commission as commander-in-chief of the army and the fact that the Continental Congress had not explicitly authorized warfare at sea. The general relied on how the Congress’s commission and instructions were open-ended (see Appendix B). His frustration at not being able to strike some sort of blow at the British made him ready to stretch his mandate. As Washington told his brother on 10 September, “The inactive state we lye in is exceedingly disagreeable, especially as we can see no end to it.”⁴⁵ Still, the general never informed the Congress what the *Hannah* was about to do.

12.5 THE *HANNAH*’S SUCCESS AND FAILURE

On 5 September 1775 Broughton and his crew sailed the *Hannah* out of Beverly harbor, taking the Continental Army onto the ocean. After hiding from British warships for two days, on 7 September the schooner made its first capture: the merchant ship *Unity*. It was under the control of a prize crew—i.e., a British warship had already captured it and left an officer and a small crew on board to convey it to Boston. Broughton sent a proud report to headquarters, concluding:

I . . . have deliver’d the ship and Prisoners into the hands & care of the Committee of Safety for this town of Gloucester, and have desired them to send the Prisoners under proper guard to your Excellency for further orders.

also have sent the Captain of the ship we took for your Excellencys examination⁴⁶

The prize crew, as well as the ship’s original American captain, arrived at headquarters on 9 September.

⁴⁴ PGW:RW, 1:398-400.

⁴⁵ PGW:RW, 1:447.

⁴⁶ PGW:RW, 1:428.

Gen. Washington soon realized that the *Unity* was the “Vessel of [a] Friend to the American Cause.” What was worse, he knew its owner: John Langdon, a New Hampshire delegate to the Second Continental Congress. The message went back to Broughton that this ship fell under the ninth paragraph of his instructions and not the sixth, meaning there would be no prize money for him and the crew. Broughton wrote back, arguing that the *Unity*’s captain had secretly been planning to sell fish to the British in Boston, which would have made the ship a legitimate prize. Washington, probably already apprehensive about the awkward way he would have to break the news of his schooner to a member of the Congress, insisted that the *Unity* and its original crew be set loose.

On 10 September Washington heard from Cape Ann that the *Hannah*’s crew had refused to sail again. That news came on the same day as the mutiny of the Virginia riflemen (see section 8.8), and the general was not in a kindly mood. He authorized Col. Glover to call up two hundred men from the Essex County militia, arrest the mutinous company on board the *Hannah*, and march them to Cambridge.⁴⁷ The 22 September general orders announced that thirty-six men had been found guilty of “Mutiny, Riot and Disobedience of orders.” Joseph Searle of Broughton’s company, apparently the leader of the protest, was sentenced to be whipped 39 times and drummed out of the army, and the others to suffer a combination of whippings and fines. In the end, not all the punishments were carried out, but those men were replaced on board the *Hannah*.⁴⁸ Broughton recruited a new crew and set sail again.

On 21 September Gen. Washington wrote to Langdon in Philadelphia:

E’er this you must have heard of the taking, and retaking of your Ship; and of my ordering it to be delivered up to your Agent. I have promised the Officers, to wit Captn Broughton, Lieutt Glover, & another Subaltern whose name I cannot recollect, that I would recommd them to your notice & compensation. I should have done the same thing in behalf of the Men (for you must know the Vessell which retook yours was fitted out at the Publick expence, & manned with Soldiers for a particular Expedition) but for their exceeding ill behaviour upon that occasion—I was obliged to send for, & bring them here Prisoners instead of prosecuting a scheme I had in view with the People of Hallifax, & I hope to bestow a reward of a different kind upon them for their Mutinous behaviour. With very great esteem I am Sir Yr Most Obedt Hble Servt⁴⁹

⁴⁷ There were about 170 militiamen and 36 mutineers. Hovey, “George Washington’s Armed Schooner,” 27, 250.

⁴⁸ PGW:RW, 2:36. Nelson, *Washington’s Secret Navy*, 98-9. Searle was baptized in Byfield on 1 December 1745; *Essex Antiquarian*, 6:49. He apparently rejoined the Continental Army at the end of the year; Roads, *History and Traditions of Marblehead*, 399; Massachusetts Society of the Sons of the American Revolution, *Register for 1904*, 234.

⁴⁹ PGW:RW, 2:31. Hovey, “George Washington’s Armed Schooner,” 27.

A month later, Joseph Reed passed \$130 on to Broughton and his officers “as a Compliment from Capt Langdon for retaking his Vessel.”⁵⁰

Despite the contentious results, the *Hannah*'s success at capturing a vessel in enemy hands showed Washington that an armed schooner could be effective. Furthermore, in late September and early October, men at Marblehead, Gloucester, and Portsmouth captured three British merchant ships that had sailed into their harbors; these prizes yielded flour, livestock, fruit, and turtles.⁵¹ Washington therefore asked his secretary, Joseph Reed, to take charge of arranging for more armed vessels. He also sent the army's mustermaster general, Philadelphia merchant Stephen Moylan (see section 5.5), to Marblehead to assist and oversee Col. Glover. On 9 October Glover and Moylan reported renting a second ship.⁵²

Capt. Broughton and his crew aboard the *Hannah* were eager for another capture. They became bolder, chasing a British transport into Boston harbor on 7 October.⁵³ Adm. Samuel Graves ordered Capt. John Collins on the *Nautilus* to hunt down the pesky American ship.⁵⁴ On the afternoon of 10 October the *Nautilus* spotted the *Hannah* and chased the schooner back toward Beverly. Broughton chose to run aground on a sandy spot. His crew unloaded their guns onto shore and started to fire at the *Nautilus*. Local militia units joined Broughton's men, and, with the help of a falling tide and shallow waters, the Americans fought the Royal Navy to a draw.⁵⁵ The 12 October 1775 *New-England Chronicle* reported that “one of our Privateers from Beverly” had fought with a British man of war and was “damaged very little if any.”⁵⁶

In fact, the *Hannah* was badly damaged, but Glover and Moylan did not realize that at first, or chose not to send the bad news to headquarters. None of their reports mention the fight between the *Hannah* and the *Nautilus*, or the damage that their schooner had sustained. Washington and Reed might therefore have never understood the extent of the problem. The *Hannah* was apparently refloated and returned to its owner by the end of the month, when Glover stopped paying to rent it. The ship never reappeared on records of the American fleet—at least under that name.

⁵⁰ Nelson, *Washington's Secret Navy*, 99-100.

⁵¹ In early October, at Reed's request, the Massachusetts legislature authorized Washington to rent two of these captured ships; the general ultimately declined the offer, apparently because he did not like the colony's terms. Nelson, *Washington's Secret Navy*, 104-5.

⁵² Hovey, “George Washington's Armed Schooner,” 59.

⁵³ Nelson, *Washington's Secret Navy*, 100-3.

⁵⁴ Macy, *Hannah and Nautilus*, 18.

⁵⁵ Macy, *Hannah and Nautilus*, 21-9.

⁵⁶ Hovey, “George Washington's Armed Schooner,” 56.

12.6 BUILDING A LARGER FLEET

On 5 October Gen. Washington finally informed the Congress about his efforts at naval warfare, though as an afterthought to requesting a prize court to determine how to deal with captured property:

I shall now beg Leave to request the Determination of Congress as to the Property & Disposal of such Vessels & Cargoes as are designed for the Supply of the Enemy & may fall into our Hands. There has been an Event of this Kind at Portsmouth as by the Inclosure No. 3. in which I have directed the Cargo to be brought hither for the use of the Army, reserving the Settlement of any Claims of Capture to the Decision of Congress. As there are many unfortunate Individuals whose property has been confiscated by the Enemy, I would humbly suggest to the Consideration of Congress the Humanity of applying in part, or in the whole such Captures to the Relief of those Sufferers after compensating any Expence of the Captors & for their Activity & Spirit. I am the more induced to request this Determination may be speedy, as I have directed 3 Vessels to be equipped in order to cut off the Supplies, & from the Number of Vessels hourly arriving it may become an Object of some Importance. In the Disposal of these Captures; for the Encouragement of the Officers & Men, I have allowed them one third of the Cargoes except military Stores, which with the Vessels are to be reserved for the publick Use. I hope my Plan as well as the Execution will be favoured with the Approbation of Congress⁵⁷

The general then went on to share intelligence about a substantial British fleet sailing out of Boston, showing just how many well-armed vessels the enemy had.

In fact, two days before Gen. Washington sent his report, the Rhode Island delegation to the Congress had proposed creating a Continental Navy.⁵⁸ Shortly afterward, the Congress received intelligence that two “north country built Brigs” were headed from England to Quebec “loaded with arms, powder and other stores,” but with no naval escort to guard them.⁵⁹ If American vessels could capture those ships, their cargoes would be very helpful to the army; if the brigs got through, the conquest of Canada would be harder. Delegates looked around for armed vessels under the control of an American government to hunt down those ships. The news that Gen. Washington had taken it upon himself to order “3 Vessels to be equipped in order to cut off the Supplies” to Boston therefore arrived at a very opportune time.

Even before receiving the Congress’s favorable reply, Washington and Reed expanded the army’s fleet. They appointed another ship’s captain from the officers of Glover’s regiment: John Selman (1744-1817). On 8 October the general commissioned Sion Martindale (c. 1732-1785), a Rhode Island merchant, as an army captain in command of an

⁵⁷ PGW:RW, 2:100.

⁵⁸ JCC, 3:274-5.

⁵⁹ JCC, 3:277. LoD, 2:114.

armed vessel to sail out of Plymouth. Two days later Washington told Gen. Greene to have his Rhode Island officers pick a crew for Martindale.

To rent and equip a ship for Martindale, Reed appointed an agent in Plymouth, Capt. Ephraim Bowen (1753-1841). As a Rhode Islander, Bowen was “somewhat of a Stranger” to his new port.⁶⁰ James Warren recommended Plymouth postmaster William Watson (1730-1815) to oversee provisioning and to account for prizes.⁶¹ Bowen was a careful manager, keeping a detailed journal of his work, but his initial reports were unrealistic, suggesting he could have a ship ready in only “four or five days.”⁶² Up in Marblehead, a larger port, Glover and Moylan were already having trouble finding enough carpenters to keep to their schedule.

On 12 October Washington acknowledged the Congress’s instructions to send ships after the two ordnance brigs headed for Quebec. A previous letter had brought word that a committee from the Congress, consisting of Thomas Lynch, Benjamin Franklin, and Benjamin Harrison, was on its way to meet with him and evaluate his progress in driving the British from Boston (see section 17.6). That news had two quick effects on the general’s plans for the army schooners. First, he promised the Congress that two ships “will be immediately dispatched” to hunt down the ordnance brigs; Reed had sent orders to that effect to Glover the day before, and told Broughton to enlist seventy crewmen.⁶³ Second, three of the ships that Glover and Bowen had rented were renamed the *Lynch*, the *Franklin*, and the *Harrison*.

Having promised that armed ships would soon be on their way north, Reed was eager to share the news of their sailing with the Congress delegates. On 15 October he wrote to Moylan: “Every Day, nay every Hour is precious. It is now 14 Days since they were set on Foot, Sure they cannot be much longer in preparing.”⁶⁴ That was the day the delegates arrived at Cambridge headquarters. Glover sent back the unwelcome news that the schooners still did not have crews or full provisions. Unwisely, he added that his son hoped to be a captain on one of the next ships.

Reed’s reply on 17 October was remarkable for its harsh frankness:

We learn with a good deal of Concern that there is no Probability of the Vessels being got away for several days—& that in all Appearance the Remainder of the Vessels besides Capt Broughton & Capt Selliman will not be ready these 2 weeks to which the long Delay already & frequent Disappointment makes us give some Credit—The General is much dissatisfied I cannot but think a Desire to secure particular Friends or particular Interests does mingle in the Management of these Vessels—The Number of Workmen we are told is inconsiderable—& in Short it

⁶⁰ NDAR, 2:437.

⁶¹ Watson, *Memoirs of the Marstons of Salem*, 41-2. NDAR, 2:475.

⁶² NDAR, 2:491. Nelson, *Washington’s Secret Navy*, 121-5.

⁶³ PGW:RW, 2:147, 179-80.

⁶⁴ Nelson, *Washington’s Secret Navy*, 148.

is said in plain Terms, that it will be made a job of—I thought it proper to mention to you what has been said

The secretary went on to say, “if they are not soon at Sea we shall heartily repent it was ever undertaken.”⁶⁵

The first reply from Beverly, dated 19 October, simply told Reed that the two schooners bound for the north would be ready the next day, as soon as a surgeon went aboard. Reed replied more cordially, discussing a flag (see section 12.12), though to Bowen he still warned that “we have been very unfortunate in sending Persons to do Business where their Connections lay.”⁶⁶ On 22 October the day the official council at headquarters ended but before the Congress delegates left Cambridge, Moylan finally dispatched Capt. Broughton and Capt. Selman to the St. Lawrence. Broughton’s ship, originally the *Speedwell* and then the *Lynch*, was renamed the *Hancock*, while Selman commanded the *Franklin*.⁶⁷

On 24 October Moylan addressed Reed’s critical comments:

Colo Glover showed me a Letter of yours which has mortified him much, I really & sincerely believe he has the cause much at heart, & that he has don his best (in the fitting out these four last vessels), for the publick Service you Cannot Conceive the difficulty the trouble & the delay there is in procureing the thousand things necessary for one of these vessels, I dare say one of them might be fitted in Philadelphia or New york in three days, because you would know where to apply for the different articles but here you must search all over Salem Marblehead Danvers & Beverly for every Little thing that is wanting I must add to these, the Jobbing of the Carpenters, who are to be sure the Idlest Scoundrels in nature, If I coud have procured others, I should have dismissd the whole Gang of them last Friday, & such religious rascalls are they, that we Coud not prevail on them to work on the Sabbath I have stuck very close to them since, and what by Scolding & Crying Shame for their torylike disposition in retarding the work, I think they mend something—

there is one reason, & I think a Substantial one, why a person born in the same town or neighbourhood should not be employed on publick affairs of this nature in that town or neighbourhood, it is that the Spirit of equality which reigns thro’ this Country, will make him affraid of exerting that authority necessary [for] the expediteing his business, he must shake eve[ry] Man by the hand, & desire, beg, & pray, do brother, do my freind, do such a thing, whereas a few hearty damns from a person who did not Care a damn for them would have a much better effect, this I know by experience, for your future government—indeed I could give other reasons, but I think this sufficient—⁶⁸

⁶⁵ NDAR, 2:490. Hovey, “George Washington’s Armed Schooner,” 70-1. Waite, *Extracts Relating to the Origin of the American Navy*, 11-2.

⁶⁶ NDAR, 2:537, 491.

⁶⁷ Nelson, *Washington’s Secret Navy*, 152, 157. See also Hovey, “George Washington’s Armed Schooner,” 79-82.

⁶⁸ NDAR, 2:589-90.

Within a week, Reed was on his way back to Philadelphia (see section 5.8), and Moylan took over his duties at the Cambridge headquarters. Glover was no doubt relieved to have a manager who understood his challenges.

In his last weeks, Reed had recruited more schooner captains. From a New London regiment came Capt. William Coit (1742-1802), a Yale-educated lawyer with experience as a merchant captain. According to home-town tradition:

Capt. William Coit was particularly original in his manner. He was blunt, jovial, eccentric; very large in frame; fierce and military in his bearing, and noted for always wearing a scarlet cloak. The populace of New London called him *the great red dragon*.⁶⁹

Coit was assigned to the *Harrison*, which was originally to be Martindale's ship, but the Rhode Island captain was insisting on something bigger and better armed. Reed asked Bowen to remind Martindale of the mission: "The Design is to intercept the Enemy's Supplies, not to look out for the Enemy's Armed Vessels."⁷⁰ In other words, they were not to get into risky fights with larger ships. Coit and his crew marched from Cambridge toward Plymouth on 24 October.⁷¹

From a New Hampshire regiment came Capt. Winborn Adams (d. 1777), assigned to the ship renamed *Warren*, out of Beverly. His crew was picked from Sullivan's brigade. Because the *Warren* was assigned to cruise around Cape Ann and Boston, and not up to Canada, it needed only fifty men.⁷² They headed north to Marblehead in the last week of October.

12.7 CAPT. JOHN MANLEY: THE FIRST NAVAL HERO

Of all the captains in Gen. Washington's fleet, Capt. John Manley (1732-1793) became the most successful. Unlike the others, he was not an officer in the army before being assigned to a schooner. Nor was he a native New Englander—he had been born in the village of St. Marychurch outside Torquay in England.⁷³ After some experience in the Royal Navy—John Paul Jones, a rival, sneered that he had been "a Stick officer Vulgarly Called Boatswains

⁶⁹ Caulkins, *History of New London*, 394. See also P. H. Woodward, "Captain William Coit," *Connecticut Historical Society Collections*, 7 (1879), 3-7; and Dexter, *Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Yale College*, 2:691-2.

⁷⁰ NDAR, 2:537.

⁷¹ Nelson, *Washington's Secret Navy*, 186.

⁷² Nelson, *Washington's Secret Navy*, 171-2.

⁷³ Manley's biography is confused by multiple claims, but Philip Chadwick Foster Smith reported on his baptismal records in *Fired by Manley Zeal* (1977). Smith's account therefore supersedes Isaac J. Greenwood, *Captain John Manley* (1915), and Robert E. Peabody, "The Naval Career of Captain John Manley of Marblehead," *EIHC*, 45:1-27.

Mate”⁷⁴—Manley made Boston his home port for many years. Reed credited Gen. Putnam with bringing him to the Cambridge headquarters in the fall of 1775.⁷⁵

Washington issued Manley a commission as schooner captain and sent him to Marblehead. There Moylan and Glover assigned him a ship that had been renamed the *Lee*, most likely after Gen. Lee, but perhaps also in homage to the Lee family of Marblehead or to Richard Henry Lee, Washington’s friend at the Continental Congress. The crew came from the Marblehead regiment. Col. Glover’s son, whom Washington deemed too young to be a captain, became Manley’s second-in-command. After the usual delays, the *Lee* sailed into open waters on 29 October. Over the next few weeks, Manley sent in a few prizes: a firewood sloop recaptured from the British, an Irish vessel chased into Beverly, a sloop carrying Spanish dollars and turnips.

On 29 November, a foggy day, Manley brought the *Lee* alongside a ship called the *Nancy*, stationing eight armed men “on the thwarts and sternsheets.” Captain Robert Hunter on the *Nancy* called out to ask for a pilot into Boston harbor. Manley promised him one, tying off. His crew then boarded the British ship and announced that its crew were prisoners. The *Nancy* turned out to have been chartered by the War Department to bring a large shipment of arms to the Boston garrison. At first Capt. Manley ordered it to sail to Portsmouth, but when he realized how valuable its cargo was he sent the *Nancy* to the nearest American harbor, Gloucester.⁷⁶

The news of this capture reached Washington while he and Gates, Lee, and Putnam were visiting the home of Dr. John Morgan, new director of the military hospital (see section 15.10). His wife Mary Morgan described the moment for her mother:

There arrived an express of a Brig being taken belonging to the enemy by one of our vessels, it is a valuable prize as it was loaded with arms and ammunition, what delighted me excessively was seeing the pleasure which shown in every countenance particularly Gen. Gates’s he was in an ecstasy, and as Genl. Washington was reading the invoice there was scarce an article that he did not comment upon and that with so much warmth as diverted everyone present.⁷⁷

Washington quickly sent a report on this prize to the Continental Congress; there was no longer any need for diffidence about the schooners.⁷⁸ He shared the good news with Reed and even with Benedict Arnold, then hacking his way through Maine.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Smith, *Fired by Manley Zeal*, 6. NDAR, 3:145.

⁷⁵ NDAR, 3:820.

⁷⁶ Nelson, *Washington’s Secret Navy*, 213. NDAR, 3:469. Archibald Robertson, *Archibald Robertson, Lieutenant-General Royal Engineers: His Diaries and Sketches in America, 1762-1780* (New York: New York Public Library, 1930), 67-9, explains why the *Nancy* was vulnerable to capture.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Anne Hollingsworth Wharton, *Colonial Days and Dames*, 144.

⁷⁸ PGW:RW, 2:461-2.

Fearing that the Royal Navy might try to raid Gloucester and recapture the artillery supplies, Washington sent four companies of soldiers to guard the town and authorized Glover to mobilize the local militia. He also commandeered Gen. Lee's aide William Palfrey, who had experience managing cargoes for John Hancock, and sent him to Gloucester to oversee the brig's unloading (see section 5.9). On 2 December some of the *Nancy's* cargo arrived in Cambridge. Three days later Moylan wrote to Reed:

I...would have given a good deal that you was here last Saturday when the stores arrived at camp; such universal joy ran through the whole as if each grasped victory in his hand: to crown the glorious scene there intervened one truly ludicrous, which was old PUT mounted on the large mortar which was fixed in its bed for the occasion, with a bottle of rum in his hand, standing parson to christen, while godfather Mifflin gave it the name of Congress. The huzzas on the occasion I dare say were heard through all the territories of our most gracious sovereign in this Province.⁸⁰

Capt. John Chester of Connecticut added the detail that "They have Scratched out the Last Letter of G. R. [on the big mortar] and put G. W. for G. Washington."⁸¹ Unloading the *Nancy* completely took two months, and the Congress's agent at Beverly, William Bartlett, eventually calculated the value of the ship and cargo at over £20,000.⁸²

The military supplies on the *Nancy* included, in addition to the "Congress" mortar, two thousand muskets with bayonets, two thousand cartridge boxes, fifty-three kegs of flints, seven thousand cannon balls, 150 carcass shells, and many specialized artillery tools.⁸³ William Tudor told John Adams of the response of top officers in the artillery regiment:

Col. [William] Barbeck assured me that it would have taken eighteen Months to have prepar'd a like Quantity of Ordnance Materials, could they have been furnish'd with every Thing requisite to make them. There are many Things which Money could not have procur'd Us. I heard Col. [David] Mason say that, had all the Engineers of the Army been consulted they could not have made out a compleater Invoice of military Stores, than we are now in Possession of.⁸⁴

Tudor also reminded Adams that Manley had been his client in one case.

The captain had continued to cruise. On 1 December he captured the *Concord* out of Greenock, Scotland, despite it outweighing the *Lee* at 250 tons.⁸⁵ On 9 December Manley

⁷⁹ PGW:RW, 2:463, 494.

⁸⁰ Reed, *Life and Correspondence*, 1:134. NDAR, 2:1284.

⁸¹ Chester to unknown, 3 December 1775, *Magazine of American History*, 8:127.

⁸² Nelson, *Washington's Secret Navy*, 219.

⁸³ American newspapers proudly printed the inventory. NDAR, 3:69-72.

⁸⁴ PJA, 3:340.

⁸⁵ Nelson, *Washington's Secret Navy*, 231-4.

captured an even bigger ship, the 300-ton transport *Jenny*, by coming close under the British flag.⁸⁶ Along with that ship, Manley secured a manual of the private British naval signals.⁸⁷ After the *Lee* captured the *Little Hannah* from Antigua, Moylan told Bartlett:

...there are Limes, Lemons & Oranges on board, which being perishable, you must sell Immediately. The General will want some of each, as well as of the sweetmeats & pickles, that are on board; as his Lady will be here to day or to morrow you will please to pick up such things on board as you think will be acceptable to her & send them as soon as possible—he does not mean to receive any thing without payment, which you will please to attend to—⁸⁸

Then came the *Betsey*, a sloop packed with food, prisoners, and sensitive letters that Gov. Dunmore had sent to Boston from Virginia (see section 14.7). Once again, Manley pretended that his ship was a British tender out of Boston and seized his quarry without a fight.⁸⁹ Quartermaster general Mifflin wanted the *Betsey*'s grain for the army, but Bartlett was legally obligated to find the best price, and Moylan had to mediate.⁹⁰ As the year came to a close, he rejoiced: "Captain Manlys good fortune seems to Stick to him."⁹¹

12.8 MIXED RESULTS FROM OTHER CAPTAINS

The reports that Moylan and Washington received about the other schooners were not so positive. Capt. Sion Martindale had his ship refitted as a brig, with ten carriage guns instead of four, and ostentatiously named it the *Washington*. On 6 November Moylan warned Watson:

The General is apprehensive, that Capt Martindale is going upon too large a Scale; & that he will make the out[f]it of his Vessel too expensive—the intention of fitting out these Vessels, is not to attack the Armed, but to take the unarmed Vessels, which Capt Martindale seems to have lost Sight of by putting Such a Number of Carriage Guns on board the *Washington*; but I sincerely hope his Success, will Amply repay the Expence.⁹²

Martindale's brig did not leave Plymouth harbor until 23 November. Six days later the crew "mutinied unanimously," according to the surgeon. Lt. Moses Turner (b. 1745) brought a letter from Watson to headquarters reporting:

⁸⁶ Nelson, *Washington's Secret Navy*, 236.

⁸⁷ Nagy, *Invisible Ink*, 239.

⁸⁸ NDAR, 3:35.

⁸⁹ Smith, *Fired by Manley Zeal*, 13.

⁹⁰ Nelson, *Washington's Secret Navy*, 238-9.

⁹¹ NDAR, 3:81.

⁹² NDAR, 2:902.

the people on board the Brigantine *Washington* are in general discontented, & have agreed to do no duty on board sd vessel, & say that they Inlisted to Serve in the Army & not as Marines

I believe Capt. Martindale has done all in his power to make things easy— His people really appear to me to be a sett of the most unprincipled, abandond fellows ever saw—your Excellency knows in what manner to conduct in this matter—I am very apprehensive that little is to be expected from Fellows drawn promiscuously from the army for this Business, but that if people were Inlisted for the purpose of privateering much might be expected from them⁹³

The general ordered those men back to their regiments and told Martindale to recruit a new crew. Further investigation, however, showed that the *Washington's* men were mainly protesting “their want of Cloathing,” which Bowen supplied. The brig finally left port on 3 December, and was immediately captured by two British warships. Despite all his extra guns, Capt. Martindale never fired a shot.⁹⁴

Capt. William Coit had better luck sailing out of the same harbor. The *Harrison* ran aground on its first two attempts to leave Plymouth, but soon it caught two ships carrying firewood and other goods to Boston. Coit sent Lt. Henry Champion, Jr. (1751-1818), with the news to headquarters, and Washington passed it on in an informal letter to Reed on 8 November:

P. S. I had just finishd my letter when a blundering Lieutt, of the blundering Captn Coit, who had just blunderd upon two Vessels from Nova Scotia, came in with the Acct of it; & before I could rescue my letter, without knowing what he did pickd up a Candle & sprinkled it with Grease—but these are kind of Blunders which one can readily excuse. The Vessels contain Hay, live Stock, Poultry, &ca and are now safely Moord in Plymouth Harbour.⁹⁵

On 25 November Coit slipped into Boston harbor and sent boats after one of the British transports anchored nearby. His men actually got on board that ship, loaded with forage for horses, but its captain had disabled the steering before escaping on his own boats. The Americans hurried back to the *Harrison* as the larger British warships bore down, and Coit sailed away at top speed. Each side reported this as a triumph for its brave officers.⁹⁶

Five days later, Lt. Champion was back at Cambridge headquarters complaining that the *Harrison* was “so Old & Crazy as to be unfit for the Service She is imply'd in.”⁹⁷ Nevertheless, Coit captured two more ships, one containing five pilots working for the

⁹³ NDAR, 2:1189-90. For more on Martindale and his lieutenants, see Chacko and Kulcsar, *Beggarmen, Spy: The Secret Life and Times of Israel Potter* (Cedarburg, Wisc.: Foremost Press, 2010).

⁹⁴ Nelson, *Washington's Secret Navy*, 223-5.

⁹⁵ PGW:RW, 2:335-6.

⁹⁶ Nelson, *Washington's Secret Navy*, 204-5.

⁹⁷ NDAR, 2:1218.

Crown and the other owned by Richard Derby, Jr., a staunch Salem Patriot who sat on the Massachusetts Council.⁹⁸ Coit's dramatic personal style seems to have worn out his welcome at headquarters. While Reed, home in Philadelphia, continued to expect good things of the Connecticut officer, Moylan wrote, "Coit I look upon to be a mere blubber."⁹⁹

Capt. Winborn Adams out of Beverly likewise had a mixed record. The *Warren's* first capture was deemed not legitimate, but his second, the *Rainbow* on 25 November, kept a load of potatoes and turnips out of Boston. At the end of the year Adams's crew recaptured a New Jersey vessel called the *Sally* with a prize crew and a cargo of wine.¹⁰⁰

As for Broughton and Selman, sent north to find the ordnance brigs headed for Quebec, they sent back many prizes—all of them trouble for Washington and his administrators. In October, the Marblehead captains took two Canadian schooners and a sloop, all carrying fish and oil. The general had said to treat Canadian vessels "with all Kindness and by no Means suffer them to be injured or molested," but Broughton justified his seizures by stating, "The smallest Intention of going to that Den of Mischievous Violators of the rights of Humanity [Boston], must carry in the bosom of it as we concieve the Idea of Friendliness to their infernal Intentions."¹⁰¹

In November Broughton and Selman seized a merchant ship named the *Warren* because its top officers did not speak "as true sons of Liberty strongly attachd to the Interist."¹⁰² They captured the *Speedwell*, out of Rhode Island, again deciding the captain and cargo owner were "toryistical"; that ship turned out to be partly owned by Gen. Nathanael Greene.¹⁰³ They took the brig *Kingston Packet*, another ship owned by Richard Derby.¹⁰⁴ Broughton also reported that he and Selman had tried "to get to Spanish River, in order to take the Brigantine loading with Coal," which had nothing to do with their assigned mission.¹⁰⁵

By late November Moylan and Washington were becoming concerned. Not only had the two captains not reported any good news about the ships the Congress had specifically sent them to find, but none of their captures were turning out to be legitimate. On 4 December the general reported to Congress:

⁹⁸ Nelson, *Washington's Secret Navy*, 227-8. NDAR, 2:1285.

⁹⁹ NDAR, 3:572.

¹⁰⁰ Nelson, *Washington's Secret Navy*, 211-2, 244-5.

¹⁰¹ NDAR, 2:850.

¹⁰² NDAR, 2:899.

¹⁰³ NDAR, 2:1259. Nelson, *Washington's Secret Navy*, 176, 184-5.

¹⁰⁴ NDAR, 3:6, 19.

¹⁰⁵ NDAR, 2:899.

by the Last Accounts from the Armed Schooners Sent to the River St Lawrence, I fear we have but little to expect from them, they were falling Short of provision, & mention that they woud be obliged to return, which at this time is particularly unfortunate, as if they chose a proper Station, all the vessells comeing down that river must fall into their hands—the plague trouble & vexation I have had with the Crews of all the armed vessells, is inexpressable, I do believe there is not on earth, a more disorderly Set, every time they Come into port, we hear of Nothing but mutinous Complaints¹⁰⁶

Manley's crew was quiet, he thought, only because of their victories and prizes.

Broughton and Selman had one more surprise for the general. On 17 November they had escalated their war by raiding Charlottetown on St. John's Island (later Prince Edward Island). They arrested the only royal appointees they could find: justice of the peace Thomas Wright, court clerk John Budd, and Phillip Callback, oldest member of the Council. The men of the *Hancock* and *Franklin* looted the town storehouses and Callbeck's home, reportedly calling out for his wife, daughter of a Boston Loyalist. After spiking the guns in the town battery because they were too heavy to remove, the crews sailed away, pleased to have struck such a blow against the Crown. On the way home, they seized one last merchant ship, loaded with butter.¹⁰⁷

The Marblehead captains landed their prisoners in Maine, to travel under guard to Cambridge. Once they arrived, Washington reported to Hancock:

my fears that Broughton & Sillman woud not effect any good purpose were too well founded, they are returned, & brought with them, three of the principal inhabitants from the Island of St. Johns. Mr. Collbuck is President of the Council, acted as Governor they brought the Governors Commission, the Province Seal & a & a. as the Captains Acted without any Warrant for Such Conduct, I have thought it but justice to discharge these Gentlemen, whose familys were Left in the utmost distress.¹⁰⁸

Wright later told the British secretary of state: "From the reception we met with at Head Quarters in Cambridge, and particularly from Generl Washington, I have reason to believe that these Transactions were not intended" by him.¹⁰⁹

In 1813 Selman provided a long, self-justifying account of his voyage on the *Franklin* to Elbridge Gerry, concluding with a picture of the captains' last meeting with the commander-in-chief:

¹⁰⁶ PGW:RW, 2:485. Once again, Gen. Washington's anger was fueled by other unrest among the troops on land (see section 8.12).

¹⁰⁷ Nelson, *Washington's Secret Navy*, 197.

¹⁰⁸ Washington to Hancock, 7 December 1775, PGW:RW, 2:508-9.

¹⁰⁹ NDAR, 3:290.

This year being nearly up Commodore Broughton and myself went to Head-Quarters at Cambridge to see the General,—he met us on the steps of the door—we let his Excellency understand we had called to see him touching the cruise, he appeared not pleased—he wanted not to hear anything about it and broke off abruptly to me, Sir, says he will you stand again in [i.e., return to] Col. Glover’s Regiment—my answer to him was, *I will not, sir*. He then accosted Commodore Broughton—You sir—have said that you would stand; Com. Broughton said, *I will not stand*, thus ended the matter relative to the cruise.¹¹⁰

Moylan’s version was: “from frequent rubs they got from me (under the Generals’s wings) they feel sore, and decline serving longer.”¹¹¹

12.9 A NEW YEAR WITH NEW CAPTAINS

The build-up of questionable prizes was all the more of a bother for Washington, Moylan, and their agents in Beverly and Plymouth because the Continental Congress and Massachusetts government had not set up prize courts to evaluate captures and adjudicate disputes. The general wrote to the Congress about the issue repeatedly, both officially through Hancock and unofficially through Richard Henry Lee. The Congress wanted the colonies to handle the issue. Massachusetts finally authorized privateering and a prize court on 1 November, and the Congress sent instructions on how Continental personnel should deal with that court the following month, but the governments were still working out the process in February.¹¹²

Thus, on top of all his other responsibilities, Gen. Washington was receiving letters and visitors asking him to dispose of ships he had never seen, based on secondhand reports and accusations. Eventually Moylan told the Salem Committee of Safety to deal with the *Kingston Packet*, saying, “His Excellency cannot be a Competent judge of such matters, if he was, he has not time to attend to them.” When the committee balked, he told Glover to “Manage the matter, so as Head Quarters may hear no more of her.”¹¹³

The root of Gen. Washington’s problem with the Marbleheaders might have been how his instructions combined military orders with financial incentives. On the one hand, Broughton, Selman, and their crews were soldiers enlisted in the Continental Army, bound to carry out the Congress’s orders to seek particular ships. On the other hand, their instructions promised them a share in any capture, as on a privateer, and the desire for profit led them to hunt easier and more valuable prizes. Even Washington had trouble with the distinction, referring to the schooners as “several Privateers rather armed Vessells, [fitted out] in behalf

¹¹⁰ Waite, *Extracts Relating to the Origin of the American Navy*, 26-8.

¹¹¹ Reed, *Life and Correspondence*, 1:137. NDAR, 3:572.

¹¹² PGW:RW, 3:349, 333. Nelson, *Washington’s Secret Navy*, 157, 184, 270.

¹¹³ NDAR, 3:6, 2:1284.

of the Continent.”¹¹⁴ Once the captains and crews saw they would receive no prize money for captures deemed illegitimate, they became more careful.

In the fall of 1775 the Continental Congress and some colonial governments also joined the war at sea. The Congress authorized fitting out two small men-of-war on 13 October, formally established a navy on 11 December and then planned thirteen frigates, each with dozens of guns.¹¹⁵ Once Massachusetts authorized privateers on 1 November the competition for ships and crews became fiercer; five ships were commissioned out of Salem, Gloucester, and Newburyport, apparently equipped much faster than the Continental schooners.¹¹⁶ In January a captain who had loaned cannon to the *Lee* asked for them back so he could arm his own privateer.¹¹⁷

The new year also brought turnover in the schooners' captains. Coit left the army, eventually to command a frigate for Connecticut. William Watson sent his lieutenant as a possible replacement to headquarters for an interview:

...I have thought it prudent to continue the Harrison in the service, and have, agreeable to your Excellency's Permission, nominated Capt. Charles Dyar to the Command. This Dyar was with Capt. Coit, his last cruise, & can give the character of the Scooner more perfectly.

Captain Dyar the bearer of this, wont at first interview appear to your Excellency, to advantage, he is no orator & seems rather softly, but his character is high as a good officer, & as an active, smart sailor. Capt. Coit has recommended him in high terms, & will give your Excellency his true Character.

We shall have no difficul[t]y in getting as fine a crew as any on the Continent, provided they can be enlisted for six months only, or for so long a time as Capt. Dyar shall continue to command—Our people are very fond of knowing their officers, & the best of them are unwilling to engage for a longer time, than their officers engage for. Captain Dyar will wait on your Excy & will receive every necessary direction.¹¹⁸

Charles Dyer (1738-1786) of Plymouth was impressive enough to receive a commission.¹¹⁹

Up in Beverly, Manley had his choice of ships, and he wanted to command the *Hancock*. The new captain on the *Lee* was Daniel Waters of Malden, and on the *Franklin* Samuel Tucker of Marblehead. Winborn Adams returned to the army, replaced by the *Warren's* master, William Burke. Washington's new temporary secretary, Robert Hanson Harrison (see section 5.8), sent the new captains their commissions and instructions from

¹¹⁴ Washington to Arnold, 5 December 1775, PGW:RW, 2:494.

¹¹⁵ Nelson, *Washington's Secret Navy*, 262-5. Smith, *Fired by Manley Zeal*, 16.

¹¹⁶ Nelson, *Washington's Secret Navy*, 236.

¹¹⁷ This captain was John Derby, Richard's younger brother. In the spring he had sped the Patriots' version of the Battle of Lexington and Concord to London. NDAR, 3:631, 713.

¹¹⁸ PGW:RW, 3:101. NDAR, 3:796, 871-3.

¹¹⁹ A précis of Dyer's military career appears at <<http://www.pilgrimhall.org/sailingoff.htm>>.

Cambridge. These now included the threat of being “dismissd the Service. . .in the Army or Navy” if the captains did not exert themselves for the public good. They also gave Manley the title of commodore, or senior captain, in charge of all four schooners sailing from Cape Ann.¹²⁰

In late January Manley resumed his captures with two ships from Whitehaven in England. By this point, the British commanders in Boston knew Manley’s name and had equipped a brig specifically to chase American privateers.¹²¹ On 30 January that ship, the *Hope*, chased the *Hancock* into Plymouth harbor. The *New England Chronicle* reported that “no man was even wounded,” though “One ball entered the stern, and passed about six inches from Capt. Manley, who was confined by sickness in his cabin.”¹²² After getting free of a sandbar and ice, the *Hancock* sailed out of Plymouth again, but this time a privateer called the *Yankee* accompanied him. Manley soon changed tactics, deciding that the schooners would patrol in packs for safety.¹²³

The Continental Army’s agent in Beverly, William Bartlett, launched a fifth schooner as a replacement for the captured *Washington*. It was called the *Lynch*, a name previously assigned to the *Hancock* for a short time, and its captain was John Ayres (d. 1778) of Braintree.¹²⁴ The cost of launching the 70-ton *Lynch* was close to double what the previous schooners had cost. More than half of that expenditure was accounted as repairs while new equipment cost much less than on the other ships. Though all the repairs were dated in 1776, other records show the army had started renting the *Lynch* in the fall of 1775.¹²⁵ After examining those financial records, Allen B. Hovey theorized that this *Lynch* was actually the 78-ton *Hannah*, returned to the fleet under a new name after its grounding and fight with the *Nautilus*. If so, Moylan knew about the change, because he had been to Beverly and Marblehead, but *Washington* might not have.

In March 1776 the Royal Navy summoned all its ships in New England back to Boston to evacuate the troops and Loyalists. That large fleet slowly made its way toward Halifax. On 2 April, Manley’s *Hancock*, sailing in a pack with the *Lee* and *Lynch*, caught a straggling brig called the *Elizabeth*, capturing a prominent Loyalist official and £24,000 worth of cargo.¹²⁶ Later that month, the Congress made Manley a captain in the new Continental

¹²⁰ Nelson, *Washington’s Secret Navy*, 268, 280-2. In this period the title of commodore was not a permanent rank but an *ad hoc* designation.

¹²¹ Nelson, *Washington’s Secret Navy*, 293.

¹²² Hovey, “George Washington’s Armed Schooner,” 105. Nelson, *Washington’s Secret Navy*, 282-6.

¹²³ Nelson, *Washington’s Secret Navy*, 292, 304-5.

¹²⁴ Nelson, *Washington’s Secret Navy*, 287. For John Adams’s impression of John Ayres in 1777, see PJA, 5:160.

¹²⁵ Hovey, “George Washington’s Armed Schooner,” 125, 230.

¹²⁶ Nelson, *Washington’s Secret Navy*, 310-1. NDAR, 4:694.

Navy. Eventually, Tucker, Waters, and Burke also received naval commissions. Though Washington stopped trying to exercise tight control over the schooners after leaving Cambridge, the last one remained on the Continental Army's account until the spring of 1777.¹²⁷

12.10 THE SCHOONERS' SIGNIFICANCE

The high point of Gen. Washington's war at sea, and in some ways the high point of all his martial activity in 1775, was Capt. Manley's capture of the ordnance ship *Nancy*. That was one of three brigs sent out from Britain around the same time; the other two reached Boston safely. Thus, for all the rejoicing in Cambridge over the *Nancy's* cargo, the British military received twice as much matériel, on top of what it already had. The royal garrison was never in danger of running out of weaponry, and its supplies of food and firewood remained adequate through the winter. Washington's schooners thus had only a limited effect on the supplies getting into Boston.

However, the fleet still produced valuable results. To begin with, the captured ordnance was undoubtedly useful to Washington's army. On 4 December, the general wrote to Alexander MacDougall in New York: "I have now the pleasure to acquaint you, that we are fully supplied with Shells & Shot from the Storeship, which has fortunately fallen into our Hands, and there is no necessity that these two Articles should be sent."¹²⁸ Even as the American fleet captured only a fraction of the weaponry shipped to the British, they added significantly to the Continentals' meager supply.

Second, while the schooners did not succeed in starving the garrison in Boston, they did raise the price of feeding it. In 1776 the system that the British commissary general's office used to send food to North America collapsed; American privateers had intercepted enough supply ships to raise insurance costs and drive away private contractors. Between October 1775 and March 1776 American vessels captured at least nine victuallers carrying provisions from Britain. According to R. Arthur Bowler, "one report by a British quartermaster in April 1776 gave the figure of forty-five vessels of all sorts bound for Boston and taken into Salem, Marblehead, and Cape Ann alone." The Treasury had to take over the task of shipping food and to arm most of the ships involved. This change reduced the losses; the Americans captured only three provisions ships in the rest of the year. But it raised the cost of the war for the Crown.¹²⁹

Finally, the schooners' captures, especially Manley's spectacular run in late 1775, provided a morale boost for the American army and people. As Washington stated to Benedict Arnold on 5 December, by that fall, "we were not likely to do much in the Land

¹²⁷ Nelson, *Washington's Secret Navy*, 323.

¹²⁸ PGW:RW, 4:488.

¹²⁹ Bowler, *Logistics and the Failure of the British Army*, 29, 95-6.

Way.”¹³⁰ The schooners let the general and his troops attack the British and come away with clear, if limited, victories.

12.11 NAVAL INVENTIONS AND INNOVATIONS

Other efforts to attack the Royal Navy taxed American ingenuity, or at least the American commander’s patience. On 14 December 1775, for example, the engineer Jeduthan Baldwin wrote in his journal: “went in the afternoon to Dotchester point to See the mashine to blow up Shiping, but as it was not finished, it was not put into the water.”¹³¹ He wrote no more about this machine. That winter David Bushnell was working in Connecticut on his submarine, one of the most closely guarded projects of the war.¹³² There is no evidence that Bushnell brought his invention to Washington’s attention during the siege, however, and the machine Baldwin was supposed to see remains a mystery.

Around the start of November 1775 a one-armed Scottish-born Philadelphia sea captain named John MacPherson (1726-1792) appeared at Washington’s headquarters.¹³³ He brought a letter from John Hancock reporting that a select committee of the Congress had heard MacPherson’s secret “method by which. . .he would take or destroy every Ministerial armed vessel in North-America” and thought it might work.¹³⁴ The Congress had therefore given MacPherson \$300 and sent him to Cambridge.¹³⁵ On 8 November Washington reported back:

I laid myself under a solemn tye of secesy to Captn McPherson, and proceeded to examine his Plan for the destruction of the Fleet in the Harbour of Boston with all that care and attention which the Importance of it deserved, & my judgment could lead to; but not being happy enough to coincide in opinion with that Gentleman, and finding that his Scheme would Involve greater expence than (under my doubts of its success) I thought myself justified in giving into, I prevailld upon him to communicate his Plan to three Gentn of the Artillery (in this Army) well acquainted in the knowledge, and practice of Gunnery; by them he

¹³⁰ PGW:RW, 2:494.

¹³¹ Baldwin, *Revolutionary Journal*, 18.

¹³² For more on the first submarine, see Arthur S. Lefkowitz, *Bushnell’s Submarine: The Best Kept Secret of the American Revolution* (New York: Scholastic, 2006).

¹³³ *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 23:51. Glenn, *Some Colonial Mansions*, 2:468-72.

¹³⁴ PGW:RW, 2:212. MacPherson had been talking to John Adams about burning ships for two months; DAJA, 2:176, 183.

¹³⁵ JCC, 3:300-1. NDAR, 2:256, 913. On the road Capt. MacPherson probably passed Joseph Reed, an old acquaintance; MacPherson had served as a go-between for Joseph Reed and Esther DeBerdt in London when her parents were trying to keep them apart (see section 5.8); Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 19, 227. MacPherson also had ties to the attack on Canada; his namesake son was an aide de camp to Gen. Richard Montgomery and died in the attack on Quebec (see section 16.10).

has been convinced, that, inasmuch as he set out upon wrong principles, the Scheme would prove abortive.¹³⁶

MacPherson then proposed another way of attacking the British fleet: “building a number of row-galleys.” Washington advised him to go back to the Congress, so he set off on 7 November for Philadelphia, carrying the commander’s letter and another that Gen. Gates concluded, “Capt Macphersons horse is at the door & hes impatient to be gone.”¹³⁷ In fact, MacPherson had already been arguing for months with members of the Congress about building galleys, and about whether he should be a commodore. He did not abandon the secret plan he had discussed with Washington; in March 1776, MacPherson grumbled to the Congress that only Col. Richard Gridley of the artillery regiment had disapproved of it.¹³⁸

12.12 THE SCHOONERS’ FLAGS

In the eighteenth century, a national flag was largely a naval concern. International law required a ship to fly the emblem of the government under which it sailed as it attacked another ship. (It could fly any national emblem up until that moment.) That was why the stars-and-stripes design came out of the Continental Congress’s naval committee in 1777 and why the first instructions on flags from Gen. Washington’s Cambridge headquarters involved the schooner fleet.

Before the political resistance turned into a war, American Whigs did fly flags of a particular design to make a point. That flag was the British Union flag, and their point was that they were standing up for traditional British political rights. Often the Whigs displayed a flag with a Union jack on a solid field of red or blue, sometimes with patriotic and political slogans inscribed in the field.¹³⁹ In 1770 fights between soldiers and locals over a particular flagpole in New York prompted activists to dub that the Liberty Pole. As the political conflict heated up in 1774, newspapers reported on communities erecting their own Liberty Poles, each taller than the last. Among the first things the British army did in Concord in April 1775 was to chop down and burn the town’s pole. News reports on those poles rarely specified the design of the flag because that detail was not newsworthy.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ PGW:RW, 2:330.

¹³⁷ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1402, 3:1532. See also Washington to Reed, 8 November 1775, PGW:RW, 2:335.

¹³⁸ *American Archives*, series 4, 5:191. MacPherson was full of inventions: Horgan, *Forged in War*, 130. He published a memoir aptly titled *A History of the Life, Very Strange Adventures, and Works of Captain John MacPherson* (Philadelphia: n.p., 1789) and claimed to have been a spy at Trenton.

¹³⁹ Examples of such Union flags with slogans appear in *Boston Evening-Post*, 24 October 1774; *American Archives*, series 4, 2:48.

¹⁴⁰ For further discussion see Young, *Liberty Tree*, 325-94; Fischer, *Liberty and Freedom*, 37-49. A rare example of a flag that was *not* a Union flag was raised by an individual in New York in March 1775; *American Archives*, series 4, 2:0176.

New England soldiers brought the Liberty Pole tradition with them when they massed outside Boston. The earliest example was on Winter Hill on 11 July, as noted in the diary of Pvt. John Kettell.¹⁴¹ On 1 August Lt. Paul Lunt of Newburyport wrote in his journal: “. . . raised the mast that came out of the schooner that was burnt at Chelsea, for to hoist our flag upon, in the fort upon Prospect Hill in Charlestown, seventy-six feet high.”¹⁴² Pvt. William Moody described that flag-raising, and another on 2 October: “We put up a liberty pole, hoisted a flag and fired a gun.” And again on 23 November: “This morning we hoisted a large new flag on Prospect Hill.”¹⁴³ It is possible each new pole or flag replaced one shot down by the British, but the American diarists do not mention such incidents. Nor did those diarists describe the flags they saw raised, which suggests that there was nothing novel about their design or meaning. They were probably the same British flags that American Whigs had been flying for years.

In contrast, a Massachusetts newspaper reported the details of a new sort of flag that Gen. Israel Putnam raised on 18 July 1775:

Last Tuesday Morning, according to Orders issued the Day before, by Major-General Putnam, all the Continental Troops under his immediate Command assembled on Prospect-Hill, when the Declaration of the Continental Congress was read, after which an animated and pathetic Address to the Army was made by the Rev. Mr. Leonard, Chaplain to General Putnam's Regiment, and succeeded by a pertinent Prayer; when General Putnam gave the Signal, and the whole Army shouted their loud Amen by three Cheers, immediately upon which a Cannon was fired from the Fort, and the Standard lately sent to General Putnam was exhibited flourishing in the Air, bearing on one Side this Motto, AN APPEAL TO HEAVEN—and on the other Side, QUI TRANSTULIT SUSTENIT. The whole was conducted with the utmost Decency, good Order, and Regularity, and to the universal Acceptance of all present.—And the Philistines on Bunker's-Hill heard the Shout of the Israelites, and being very fearful, paraded themselves in Battle Array.¹⁴⁴

The Latin motto and a brief description by David Humphreys, Putnam's aide later in the war, make clear that that side of the banner showed the Connecticut coat of arms. Humphreys also wrote that “An Appeal to Heaven” was in gold.¹⁴⁵

Thus, Putnam's standard was meant for “the Connecticut forces,” as Lt. Lunt wrote in his description of this 18 July event. However, the overall message produced a positive

¹⁴¹ Cited in Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston*, 225.

¹⁴² MHSP, 12:197. Lt. Benjamin Craft and Pvt. John Kettell described the same event: Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston*, 232; EHC, 3:55. Kettell called the location “Rand's Hill” after one owner of the land. The number seventy-six, not yet symbolically meaningful for Americans, was an odd coincidence.

¹⁴³ Goold, *History of Colonel Edmund Phinney's*, 26.

¹⁴⁴ *New-England Chronicle*, 12-31 July 1775.

¹⁴⁵ Humphreys, *Life of the Honorable Major-General Israel Putnam* (1788), 114.

response from all “those troops encamped upon and near said hill”—even “a war whoop by the Indians.”¹⁴⁶ The phrase “an appeal to heaven” conveyed a message that reached beyond governmental bounds. It was a political euphemism for armed revolt, popularized in John Locke’s *Second Treatise on Civil Government*.

Putnam spearheaded the construction of floating batteries in the early fall of 1775 (see section 12.2). Those boats flew banners using the same “Appeal to Heaven” motto when they attacked British positions on 17 October. Joseph Reed picked up that flag design in a letter to John Glover and Stephen Moylan three days later:

We have Accounts that the small Squadron which sailed sometime ago is bombarding Falmouth & Portsmouth—Our Vessels must be careful how they fall in with them—Please to fix upon some particular Colour for a Flag—& a Signal, by which our Vessels may know one another—What do you think of a flag with a White Ground, a Tree in the Middle—the Motto (*Appeal to Heaven*)—This is the Flag of our floating Batteries—We are fitting out two Vessels at Plymouth & when I next hear from you on this Subject, I will let them know the Flag & the Signal, that we may distinguish our Friends from our Foes.¹⁴⁷

Reed wanted the ships in the growing American fleet to recognize each other, and he was concerned about what might happen if those ships fell in, or met up with, the Royal Navy. While the Continental Army could fly the same flag as the royal army, or some variation on it, without violating international law, the schooner crews had to fly a distinct banner.

It is uncertain what flag the *Hannah* flew in its first voyages that fall, or what the *Hancock* and *Franklin* flew during their trip into Canadian waters. Moylan replied to Reed’s letter that those two schooners had already left port; “they had none but their old Colours, [so] we appointed them a signal, that they may Know each other by, & be known to their friends—the ensign up to the Main topping Lift.”¹⁴⁸ The other Continental Army schooners adopted the design that Reed suggested. After capturing the brig *Washington*, the Royal Navy shipped its flag to London, where it attracted notice in the *London Chronicle*:

In the Admiralty office is the flag of a provincial privateer. The field is white bunting; on the middle is a green pine-tree, and upon the opposite side is the motto, “Appeal to Heaven.”¹⁴⁹

No example of this flag is known to have survived.

¹⁴⁶ MHSP, 12:195.

¹⁴⁷ NDAR, 2:538.

¹⁴⁸ NDAR, 2:565. Washington communicated that signal to the governor of Rhode Island to share with his colony’s ships: PGW:RW, 2:250.

¹⁴⁹ Quoted in Lossing, *Pictorial Field-Book*, 1:570. See also Sir Hugh Palliser to the Earl of Sandwich, First Lord of the Admiralty, 6 January 1776. NDAR 3:482. *Remembrancer*, 2:341, reprints an item dated 6 January 1776 that erroneously called the image “a pale green palm-tree,” and rendered the motto as “We appeal to heaven.”

12.13 THE FLAG ON PROSPECT HILL

On 4 January 1776 Gen. Washington wrote to Reed about recent events in Cambridge:

We are at length favoured with a sight of his Majesty's most gracious speech, breathing sentiments of tenderness & compassion for his deluded American Subjects; the Eccho has not yet come to hand; but we know what it must be; and as Lord North said, & we ought to have believed (& acted accordingly) we now know the ultimatum of British Justice. the Speech I send you—a volume of them was sent out by the Boston Gentry—and, farcical enough, we gave great Joy to them (the red Coats I mean) without knowing or intending it, for on that day, the day which gave being to the New Army (but before the Proclamation came to hand) we had hoisted the Union Flag in compliment to the United Colonies, but behold! it was received in Boston as a token of the deep Impression the Speech had made upon Us, and as a signal of Submission—so we learn by a person out of Boston last Night—by this time I presume they begin to think it strange that we have not made a formal surrender of our Lines.¹⁵⁰

By the late 1800s this letter became the basis of a tradition about the raising of a new “Grand Union Flag” on Prospect Hill on the first day of 1776. However, the general's story about people in Boston taking the flag to be “a signal of submission” makes sense only if those British officials recognized it as their own.¹⁵¹

A 17 January letter from a British sea captain to his ship's owners in London confirmed that the flag hauled up at the start of the year was the Union flag:

I can see the Rebels' camp very plain, whose colours, a little while ago, were entirely red; but, on the receipt of the King's speech, (which they burnt,) they have hoisted the Union Flag, which is here supposed to intimate the union of the Provinces.¹⁵²

Lt. William Carter of the British army offered slightly different details in a letter dated 25 January 1776 and published just after the war:

The Provincials have entered on the new year with spirit.

The King's speech was sent by a [white] flag to them on the 1st instant. In a short time after they received it, they hoisted a union flag (above the continental

¹⁵⁰ PGW:RW, 3:23-4.

¹⁵¹ This analysis owes a great debt to Peter Ansoff, “The Flag on Prospect Hill,” *Raven*, 13 (2006), 77-100.

¹⁵² *American Archives*, series 4, 4:710-1. By 1777, authors in London had developed a different understanding of what had happened in Boston, probably influenced by the colonies' intervening declaration of independence. The *Annual Register* reported that in response to the king's speech the Americans “changed their colours, from a plain red ground, which they had hitherto used, to a flag with thirteen stripes, as a symbol of the number and union of the colonies”; *Annual Register... for the Year 1776*, 147.

with the thirteen stripes) at Mount Pisga [the British military's term for Prospect Hill]; their citadel fired thirteen guns, and gave the like number of cheers.¹⁵³

Carter recorded seeing two flags, one British and one Continental. It is notable that neither British man wrote about officials in Boston interpreting that flag as the sign of an American capitulation, as Washington was told.

On 15 January the *Pennsylvania Packet* printed a roundup of news from Boston, including an item that was most likely passed on by Joseph Reed, given the similarity between its language and the letter he received from Washington:

Our advices conclude with the following anecdote: That upon the King's speech arriving at *Boston*, a great number of them were printed, and sent out to our lines on the 2d of *January*, which being also the day of forming the new Army, the great Union flag was hoisted on *Prospect-Hill* in compliment to the *United Colonies*. This happening soon after the speeches were delivered at *Roxbury*, but before they were received at *Cambridge*, the *Boston* gentry supposed it to be a token of the deep impression the speech had made, and a signal of submission. That they were much disappointed at finding several days elapse without some formal measure leading to surrender, with which they had begun to flatter themselves.¹⁵⁴

Ansoff has pointed out that "the Great Union" was the official term for the British national banner combining the English and Scottish crosses.¹⁵⁵ Thus, readers of this newspaper would not have seen anything novel in the phrase "the great Union flag."

In 1872 the flag historian George Henry Preble misquoted the *Pennsylvania Packet's* report on the "great Union Flag" as the "grand union flag." Following the suggestion of other authors, he equated that term with the colors that the Continental Congress established for its new navy in December 1775, often called the "Continental Flag." Richard Henry Lee had drafted instructions for the Continental Navy which mention "the Union flag, and striped red and white in the field."¹⁵⁶ A British informant described seeing "English Colours but more Striped" on a Continental ship in Philadelphia on 4 January 1776.¹⁵⁷ However, there is no mention of this flag design in the Congress's correspondence with Washington. It is possible that Richard Henry Lee or Reed told the general about it in a letter that has been lost, but in either case Washington would surely have mentioned it in a reply. Instead, in his 4

¹⁵³ William Carter, *A Genuine Detail of the Several Engagements, &c, with an Account of the Blockade of Boston, &c, in a Series of Letters to a Friend* (London: n.p., 1784), quoted in Frothingham, *History of the Siege*, 283.

¹⁵⁴ *American Archives*, series 4, 4:570.

¹⁵⁵ Ansoff, "Flag on Prospect Hill," *Raven*, 13:90.

¹⁵⁶ LoD, 2:543.

¹⁵⁷ NDAR, 3:615.

January letter to Reed, the general referred to raising the “Union flag,” a phrase with a definite meaning at the time.

The question of what flags the American army flew during the siege of Boston therefore remains confused. However, some conclusions can be drawn:

- At least until the start of the war, American Whigs showed their adherence to what they considered bedrock British liberties by flying the British Union flag. British troops chopped down Liberty Poles holding that banner because they resented the Americans’ claim to be more patriotic while defying royal authorities.
- In July 1775, Gen. Putnam received a new banner with the Connecticut emblem on one side and the Lockean motto “An Appeal to Heaven” on the other. That flag migrated to the Continental Army’s floating batteries and then to its schooners—but the first three of those ships sailed with different, unidentified colors.
- At the start of 1776, the Continental fort on Prospect Hill flew the Union flag. That banner may have replaced a mostly red flag. It may have flown above another flag of thirteen stripes. But three witnesses agreed that it was a Union flag.
- At the same time, the Continental Congress had established a “Continental Flag” combining the Union canton with thirteen red and white stripes instead of a plain red or blue field. There is no evidence that Washington or anyone else in Cambridge knew about that flag in January 1776.
- The term “Grand Union Flag” is an anachronism created by Preble.

12.14 REGIMENTAL COLORS

Whatever flag represented the United Colonies, it differed from the banners that each regiment carried to distinguish itself and give its soldiers a visual rallying-point in battle. Among the New England colonies, Connecticut established colors for its regimental standards early.¹⁵⁸ Gen. Washington did not address the matter until his general orders on 20 February 1776:

As it is necessary that every Regiment should be furnished with Colours, and that those Colours should, if it can be done, bear some kind of similitude to the Uniform of the regiment to which they belong; the Colonels with their respective Brigadiers and the Qr Mr Genl, may fix upon such as are proper, and can be procured—There must be to each Regiment; the Standard (or Regimental Colours) and Colours for each Grand Division, the whole to be small and light—The Number of the Regiment is to be mark’d on the Colours, and such a Motto, as the Colonel may choose, in fixing upon which, the General advises a Consultation amongst them.

¹⁵⁸ *American Archives*, series 4, 2:1038, 1582.

The Colonels are to delay no time, in getting this matter fix'd, that the Qr Mr Genl may provide the Colours as soon as possible; they are also to consider what Camp-Equipage may be further necessary, that no time may be lost in providing it, as the season is fast approaching for taking the field.¹⁵⁹

Such standards had not seemed necessary during the siege, but with the possibility of an attack on Boston and the likelihood of a move to New York, the general felt it was time to put the army on a more regular footing.

¹⁵⁹ PGW:RW, 3:347.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

SECRET EFFORTS TO GATHER INTELLIGENCE

Gen. Washington understood that intelligence was crucial to his prospects for success in the siege of Boston. To prepare for the assault that he planned, he needed to know as much as possible about the British troop strength, deployments, fortifications, and supplies. For defensive purposes, he wanted to know if the enemy commanders were about to attack, either in the Boston theater or elsewhere in North America. In his first dispatch to Congress dated 10 July 1775 Washington attempted to estimate the British losses at Bunker Hill and warned of warships leaving the harbor. Even before he moved into the John Vassall house, Washington started to set up an intelligence-gathering operation inside Boston.

Many authors describe managing intelligence as one of Washington's strengths as a general, pointing particularly to the Culper Ring that operated inside British-occupied New York during the last years of the war.¹ In 1775 Washington still had to establish the procedures and find the personnel that made such an operation successful. In fact, his first efforts at getting useful intelligence out of Boston nearly ended in disaster, as discussed in chapter 14.

13.1 CROSSING THE SIEGE LINES

When Washington arrived in Cambridge, royal forces held the Boston and Charlestown peninsulas and a couple of the smaller harbor islands. The New England forces were spread out on the mainland. The two armies were separated by fortifications on the Boston and Charlestown necks, and by water everywhere else. Nevertheless, people and messages regularly crossed those barriers.

After May 1775 civilians could enter and leave Boston as long as they had the permission of the authorities on both sides and allowed their belongings to be searched. Both sides tried to prevent weapons, hard currency, and food from going to the enemy, as well as sensitive information, but they had no reason to force unfriendly people to remain on their side of the siege lines. Especially in the first eight months of the war, there appears to have

¹ Examinations of Revolutionary War intelligence that focus on Washington himself include David Ritchey, "George Washington's Development as an Espionage Chief," master's thesis, University of North Texas, 1993; Michael S. Prather, "George Washington, America's First Director of Military Intelligence," master's thesis, United States Marine Corps Command and Staff College, 2002; Allen, *George Washington, Spymaster* (2004); and Rose, *Washington's Spies* (2006). They focus on the later war and say little about the Boston campaign.

been a fairly steady trickle of traffic. For example, Boston businessman William Downes Cheever took his family out of Boston for safety and then returned with his grown son to look after the family property.² John Russell and Mary Greenwood came out to look for their young sons, who were with the American army; on 13 July 1775 Greenwood returned to Boston with a pass from Joseph Reed.³ Rachel Revere brought most of her family out to join her husband, Paul, leaving her eldest stepson to look after the North End shop.⁴ The family of William Dawes recalled him making “weekly visits” from Worcester to Boston, on each trip smuggling gold coins past the British checkpoints because his sister had sewn them onto his coat as cloth-covered buttons.⁵ Pvt. Samuel Bixby reported people trying to take whole wagons in and out in early June.⁶ People could arrange to meet at the siege lines or exchange letters through regular meetings under flags of truce, watched by men from both armies.⁷ The Boston selectmen tried to act as envoys between the two commands to minimize damage to people or property.

It was impossible for either military to patrol every spot of coastline in Boston harbor, so most clandestine information, goods, and people seem to have traveled by water. The watermen who already made their living ferrying people and goods around the harbor were in the best position to continue this trade. Enoch Hopkins, proprietor of the ferry between Charlestown and Boston’s North End, used his boats to ferry goods.⁸ A 15 June 1775 letter from William Stoddard, a Boston justice of the peace, shows that Hopkins and his son were carrying messages out of town and goods in.⁹ At some point during the siege, a Boston shopkeeper warned Gen. Thomas Gage that ferrymen named Hopkins and Goodwin were “as bad Rebels as any.” This informant explained:

I have seen them bring men over in Disguise—and they are up in Town every Opportunity they have gathering what Intelligence they can and when they return communicate it to the Rebels the other side, and they again to the Rebel Officers.¹⁰

² “William Cheever’s Diary, 1775-1776,” MHSP, 60:91-7.

³ Buckingham, *Specimens of Newspaper Literature*, 2:5. Greenwood, *Revolutionary Services*, 11, 17-9. Reed to Putnam, 13 July 1775, mentioned in Friedenwald, *Calendar of Washington Manuscripts*, 11.

⁴ Triber, *A True Republican*, 115.

⁵ Holland, *William Dawes and His Ride*, 38. This family lore, set down a century later, might be exaggerated.

⁶ MHSP, 14:285.

⁷ MHSP, 7:229-36.

⁸ Greenwood, *Revolutionary Services*, 7-8. A Bostonian named Enoch Hopkins died on 27 December 1778 at the age of fifty-five; Bridgman, *Epitaphs from Copp’s Hill*, 96.

⁹ *American Archives*, Series 4, 2:1003.

¹⁰ French, *General Gage’s Informers*, 117. This note from Gage’s files is undated.

In May the Royal Navy detained “Mr. Hopkins a carpenter,” for, Boston selectman Timothy Newell complained, “no other reason than taking his own Canoe from one wharf to another.”¹¹ It is unclear if these documents all refer to the same Hopkins, and how they might be connected; the navy might have arrested the wrong Hopkins.

Fishermen also carried people and information in and out of Boston. Stoddard’s letter explained how fishing boats could help men enter and leave the besieged town.

I waited on the Admiral this morning, and have got you a fishing pass for your boat and three men, to come in and out of this harbour, which I now send you. You will carefully observe the pass; you must observe to go a fishing from Salem, before you come up here, and then you may come in and go out.¹²

Gage’s unnamed informant said much the same:

And the men that go in the Fishing-boats are Equally as bad, for they will get a pass from the Admiral for a boat and Perhaps four men, they will take three Fisher-men and one Rebel, and as soon as they get below they will Land the Rebel and take another on board, so he comes up in the stead of him that they carried down, and Sees and hears what he can, and then returns the same way that he came.¹³

George Robert Twelves Hewes later described how the British Navy imposed tight regulations on fishermen, and how after fishing under these rules for “nine weeks” he used his borrowed boat to escape from Boston.¹⁴ The British commanders could not stop fishermen from coming and going because they needed the food those men supplied.

The royal authorities used their own boats to carry intelligence agents and reports. A Royal Navy ship and customs officials were still active in Newport, providing one channel for messages and people to reach Boston. After the war, wigmaker William Warden told the Loyalists Commission that “In 1775 he was sent by General Gage to Salem and Marble-head to receive some Intelligence. . . . The Custom-house Boat landed him at Marble-head, and [he] remained on Shore Six Hours, but was obliged to fly without executing his business.”¹⁵

¹¹ MHSC, series 4, 1:262.

¹² *American Archives*, series 4, 2:1003.

¹³ French, *General Gage’s Informers*, 117.

¹⁴ Hewes and Hawkes, *Retrospect of the Boston Tea-Party*, 60-1. Hewes and Thatcher, *Traits of the Tea Party*, 213-6. In the latter book, Hewes went on to describe being conducted to Cambridge to meet Gen. Washington and tell him about conditions in Boston; *Traits*, 216-9. Hewes’s modern biographer found this plausible, given the general’s hunger for intelligence; Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party*, 59, 64. However, Hewes did not mention such a momentous meeting to Hawkes, and he went on to describe Martha Washington serving at dinner with the general, though she did not arrive in Cambridge until December (see section 7.7). The story therefore seems unreliable, one of many nineteenth-century claims to have met Washington personally.

¹⁵ French, *General Gage’s Informers*, 159.

“Fowling,” or hunting birds, on the harbor islands was another excuse that men used to cross the water between the two armies. In December 1775 the committee from the Point Shirley community (now part of Winthrop) detained a man named Webber after he came out of Boston, calling him “a suspicious Person, having been imploy’d in piloting Vessels up & down the Harbour for the Enemy.”¹⁶ They sent Webber to the American colonel at Chelsea, who on 19 December reported to his commander-in-chief:

he brought a Man out of Boston with 20 Joes in Cash that could not git a Pass to come out & intended to return himselfe (as he says) to help more out, he goes under the Pretence of Fowling being a noted Gunner he has never had the Small Pox he Intended to run away himself as soon as he could git his Famaly out who all had passes.¹⁷

Washington’s aide Robert Hanson Harrison wrote back the next day: “Mr Weber. . .stands in a suspicious and unfriendly light—However as he would not wish to put any person under rigorous Confinement who does not deserve it,” the general would leave Webber’s treatment up to the local committee. By then the prisoner was feeling the “Head & Back Aek [ache] symptoms of the Small-Pox,” and was confined in hospitals at least through late February for reasons of public health.¹⁸

People did not even need boats to cross the water. On 18 July a twenty-nine-year-old Dublin-born barber named Richard Carpenter swam from Boston to Dorchester. According to diarist Ezekiel Price, Carpenter brought news “that it was very sickly in Boston; and that provisions were very scarce in Boston, and the people in great distress.”¹⁹ The barber then swam back into Boston—and was promptly caught by British guards.²⁰ In July 1775 Boston selectman Timothy Newell recorded how the British authorities threatened Carpenter with death:

Mr. Carpenter was taken by the night Patrole—upon examination he had swum over to Dorchester and back again, was tried here that day and sentence passed on him to be executed the next day,—his coffin bro’t into the Goal-yard [jail

¹⁶ Chamberlain, *Documentary History of Chelsea*, 2:531.

¹⁷ PGW:RW, 2:580.

¹⁸ Chamberlain, *Documentary History of Chelsea*, 2:531-2.

¹⁹ MHSP, 7:198, 200.

²⁰ MHSC, series 4, 1:264; MHSP, 60:93; NEHGR, 19:258; and other sources trace Carpenter’s imprisonment. The *New-England Chronicle*, 15 January and 27 February 1777, reported his release. See also JCC, 7:32; LoD, 6:109, 8:58. There is no evidence he was working for Gen. Washington as one wishful would-be descendant claimed: Carpenter, *Genealogical History of the Rehoboth Branch of the Carpenter Family*, 88-9. For more reliable genealogical data, see Rod D. Moody, “Family Record of Richard ‘the Spy’ Carpenter,” <<http://americanancestors.org/richard-spy-carpenter/>>.

yard], his halter brought and he dressed as criminals are before execution. Sentence was respited and a few days after was pardoned.²¹

This was as close as any suspected spy came to execution during the siege of Boston. Though both British and American officials imprisoned people for spying, they were not yet ready to hang enemy agents, as both sides would do later in the war.

Gen. Washington met with another man who escaped from Boston in July: Dr. Amos Windship (1745-1813).²² The 13 October 1775 *Boston News-Letter* confirmed that Windship “left the Town in a clandestine Manner without a Pass.” According to Ephraim Eliot, writing around 1820, Windship had escaped “In the disguise of a sailor, with his head shaved & covered with a milled cap.”²³ Presumably set ashore by a fishing boat, Windship came to the Cambridge headquarters. On 21 July the general added this postscript to a letter to the Congress:

I have also received a more authentic Account of the Loss of the Enemy in the late Battle [Bunker Hill], than any yet received. Doctr Winship who lodg'd in the same House with an Officer of the Marines assures me they had exactly 1043 killed & wounded, of whom 300 fell on the Field or died within a few Hours. Many of the wounded are since dead.²⁴

Eliot said that Windship went to work as a doctor in the Continental hospitals (see section 15.7), but this is uncertain. Records confirm he served as a naval surgeon later in the war.

13.2 “TO ESTABLISH A SECRET CORRESPONDENCE”

On 15 July 1775 Gen. Washington penned this entry in his expense notebook:

To 333 1/3 Dollars give to ———* to induce him to go into the Town of Boston; to establish a secret correspondence for the purpose of conveying intelligence of the Enemy's movements & designs

* The names of Persons who are employed within the Enemy's lines, or who may fall within their power cannot be inserted.

This £100 expenditure was one of the largest that the general made during the first year of the war. Only two outlays were bigger: the £239 he paid for five horses when he started out from Philadelphia, and the £232 he paid “for secret services” at the end of the siege. Thus, espionage was a very large part of the commander-in-chief's spending.

²¹ MHSC, Series 4, 1:264.

²² Windship had attended Harvard but had to leave after less than a year because Nathaniel Tracy accused him of theft; Eliot, “Dr. Amos Windship,” CSMP, 25:150-1.

²³ CSMP, 25:151-2.

²⁴ PGW:RW, 1:144.

Commenting on this page in the general's account notebook, historian John C. Fitzpatrick wrote:

The memoranda of accounts for secret service expenditures were carefully destroyed and it is now impossible fully to identify many of the American spies. Later in the war Major Benjamin Tallmadge was placed in charge of the Secret Service, and in the Washington Papers is a letter from him in which he incautiously mentioned the name of one of his spies. It has been so heavily scored over by the pen of the Commander-in-Chief as to defy deciphering and Washington's answer to Tallmadge's letter contains a sharp rebuke to the major for having needlessly exposed the spy to such a risk of discovery.²⁵

However, it appears that Washington learned the value of such secrecy *after* 1775, when he and his staff were *not* so careful. Documents they left behind make it possible to trace the first spy ring that the commander-in-chief set up.

On 28 July 1775 Joseph Reed wrote a confidential letter to Lt. Col. Loammi Baldwin, who was commanding American troops in Chelsea and along the north side of Boston harbor. Reed gave Baldwin an unusual assignment:

In full Confidence of your prudence & Secrecy as a Soldier, a Man of Honour & a Friend to your Country, the General has directed me to communicate to you a Scheme he is about to put in Execution to obtain constant & authentick Intelligence from Boston. The Plan is this. The inclosed Letter will be delivered by you to one Dewksbury who lives about 4 Miles from you towards Shirly Point—He will deliver it to a Waterman whom he can depend on who will convey it to one John Carnes a Grocer in the South Part of Boston. The Answers & such Intelligence as he can procure will be forwarded to you thro the same Channell: which you are to transmit to his Excellly by Express immedy—As the Success of the Project & the life of the Man in Boston may depend upon your Conduct let it not escape you to the nearest Friend on Earth & for fear of Accident destroy this Letter as soon as you are sufficiently Master of its Contents—When you see Dewksbury give him the above Caution in the strongest Terms: And so to pass from him to the other—Your good Conduct & Discretion in this Matter will not fail to be duly noticed.²⁶

The “inclosed Letter” came from Dr. Benjamin Church, Jr., the head of the Continental Army's medical department and a long-time leader of the Boston Whigs.

In writing this letter, Reed made many mistakes that a more seasoned spy manager would have avoided. There is no evidence that Reed or Washington had already met with Baldwin to assess his talents and discretion in managing intelligence agents. Reed chose to put his instructions in writing instead of delivering them orally. Most significantly, he

²⁵ Fitzpatrick, *George Washington's Accounts of Expenses*, as quoted on the website for the George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress.

²⁶ *American Archives*, series 4, 2:1748. The original letter is at the Massachusetts Historical Society, and filed in MHS Misc, 28 July 1775.

included much more sensitive information than was necessary. All Baldwin needed to perform his part in the operation was to pass the enclosed letter to “one Dewksbury,” and await a response from that man. Baldwin did not need to know how Dewksbury would send the letter across the water, nor the name of the provincial agent inside the town. Indeed, the real names of agents working within enemy lines should be an intelligence operation’s most closely guarded secret.

Reed’s indiscretion, and Baldwin’s choice to save this letter, make it possible to identify for the first time several of the people who made up this chain of communication, including the agent in Boston.

13.3 COL. LOAMMI BALDWIN

The first link in the chain was Lt. Col. Baldwin (1744-1807) himself. Born to a Woburn carpenter and farmer, Baldwin spent time working in Boston as a young man. He returned to Woburn and married Mary Fowle on 9 July 1772; their son Cyrus was born the following year, and their daughter Mary on 24 April 1775 just as the war began.²⁷ Baldwin’s intellect and interest in mechanical projects made him seek more knowledge and challenge than a rural farmer ordinarily needed. With his younger friend and neighbor Benjamin Thompson (1753-1814), Baldwin would walk to Cambridge to attend Prof. John Winthrop’s scientific lectures at Harvard College.²⁸

In 1768 Baldwin enlisted in the Middlesex County troop of horse guards under David Phipps of Cambridge; Phipps’s nephew John Vassall later commanded this unit (see section 1.2). When the Massachusetts militia reorganized free of royal control in the fall of 1774, the Woburn militia regiment voted to make Baldwin a major, a position that included administrative responsibilities as well as the command of a company. He led men during the Battle of Lexington and Concord, seeing action near Lexington common.²⁹ Baldwin then joined the Massachusetts army under Col. Samuel Gerrish. In early June he was corresponding with Gen. Artemas Ward about “taking some surveys of the ground between us and our enemies,” a form of intelligence-gathering but not one that involved managing secret agents.³⁰ A meeting of the regiment’s captains on 16 June chose him to be lieutenant colonel, and the following day he was the designated field officer of the American main guard.³¹

²⁷ Cutter and Adams, *Genealogical and Personal Memoirs Relating to the Families of the State of Massachusetts*, 1:575.

²⁸ Brown, *Benjamin Thompson*, 11.

²⁹ Hurd, *History of Middlesex County*, 1:447.

³⁰ *American Archives*, series 4, 2:902.

³¹ Hurd, *History of Middlesex County*, 1:447.

That duty kept Baldwin out of the Battle of Bunker Hill, but Col. Gerrish and the rest of the regiment were ordered to reinforce the American positions. Apparently Gerrish refused to lead his regiment down from the peak of Bunker's Hill to the major fighting. While stationed at Sewall's Point shortly afterward, he chose not to respond to British cannonballs.³² Although Gen. Ward declined to move against the colonel, complaints from others damaged his standing in the army. On 19 August a court-martial with Gen. Nathanael Greene presiding found that Gerrish had "*behaved unworthy an officer,*" and with Washington's approval ordered him "to be cashiered, and render'd incapable of any employment in the American Army."³³ By then, Baldwin was running the regiment, soon as a full colonel.

Baldwin's men, based in Chelsea, guarded the northern side of Boston harbor. From September 1775 to January 1776 the new colonel used "two Dwelling houses Belonging to Capt. Jonathan Green" on a hill overlooking the Mystic River.³⁴ Chelsea was the landing-place for the Winnisimett ferry that brought refugees and other people from British-occupied Boston to the American lines. From high points along the northern harbor, Baldwin and his men could also keep track of ships coming and going. He was therefore in a good position to gather intelligence for Gen. Washington.

Indeed, on the day after Baldwin received Reed's letter, he sent the commander-in-chief news that a boat had brought several refugees out of Boston:

I have taken the names of all the Passengers and stopd the Letters which I now Send for your Inspection & Beg your Excellency would Send them Back to me again as soon as possable as the Bairers are some of them in weighting and others are to Call again tomorrow for theirs Please to Keep the Inclosed Letters in their Respective Covers. I would Beg your Excellency would Send me some Assistance as the Boats are to Continue passing (*That is if we can believe General Gage*) and Somthing may Escape for want of Proper assistance that may turn to our disadvantag³⁵

On 31 July Baldwin debriefed a disembarking passenger about British army casualties and deployments, and on 2 August he passed on "two Letters in one cover Directed to Mr Nathl Noyes, Andover, which I thought Proper to Send for your Excellencies Perusal."³⁶ Baldwin or his sergeant Joseph Leach reported nearly every day on shipping activity in Boston harbor.

Baldwin was certainly diligent, but there is no indication that he had any particular interest in or knowledge of espionage before Reed wrote to him on 28 July. Neither of those

³² Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston*, 178-9.

³³ PGW:RW, 1:325.

³⁴ Chamberlain, *Documentary History of Chelsea*, 1:53.

³⁵ PGW:RW, 1:192-3.

³⁶ PGW:RW, 1:213.

men realized that Baldwin was uniquely vulnerable to being spied on because his friend Benjamin Thompson was secretly a British agent.

After moving from Woburn to Concord, New Hampshire, in 1772 Thompson had curried favor with that province's royal governor and become a major in the state militia. In December 1774 his town's committee of correspondence called him a "Rebel to the State," and in mid-May 1775 authorities in Massachusetts confined him "upon suspicion of being inimical to the liberties of this Country."³⁷ The Woburn committee of correspondence—which included Baldwin—met at least twice to hear the accusations from New Hampshire. Meanwhile, at his friend's request, Baldwin himself carried Thompson's petition for freedom to the Massachusetts Committee of Safety.³⁸ At the end of May the Woburn committee reported that it had "received full satisfaction from Thompson"; he had either explained his actions or promised not to support the royal authorities anymore. Free once more, in the summer of 1775 Thompson apparently traveled behind American lines, presenting himself as a gentleman volunteer, particularly interested in artillery and engineering.

Not until the twentieth century did historians see evidence that in 1774 Thompson had schemed with New Hampshire royal authorities to send deserters back to the British army, and that on 6 May 1775 he sent Gen. Thomas Gage a report written in invisible ink.³⁹ That report cited information from "a Field officer in the Rebel Army"—who was most likely Baldwin. Through the middle of 1775 Thompson collected information on the provincial troops, which he later disgorged for the British command.⁴⁰

According to Baldwin's diary, Thompson visited him in Chelsea on 4 June and then went home to Woburn on the 13th. The two men remained in touch that summer; after Washington's general orders for 23 July told sergeants and corporals to wear epaulettes (see section 8.5), Thompson sent Baldwin designs for them.⁴¹ There is no evidence that Baldwin told Thompson about the military intelligence duties he was assigned at the end of July, or that they even met after June. However, it is clear that Baldwin continued to trust his friend. In fact, Baldwin remained friendly even after Thompson defected to the royal side of the siege lines on 13 October and then built a career for himself as a British government official and army officer. Even as he handled top-secret correspondence from Washington's headquarters, Loammi Baldwin showed little instinct for counterintelligence.⁴²

³⁷ Ellis, *Memoir of Sir Benjamin Thompson*, 73.

³⁸ Ellis, *Memoir of Sir Benjamin Thompson*, 76-7.

³⁹ French, *General Gage's Informers*, 118-46. Brown, *Benjamin Thompson*, 36-8. The letter can be viewed at <<http://www2.si.umich.edu/spies/letter-1775may6-1.html>>.

⁴⁰ Thompson's 4 November 1775 report to the royal authorities in Boston appears in Stopford-Sackville, *Report on the Manuscripts*, 2:13-8.

⁴¹ Ellis, *Memoir of Sir Benjamin Thompson*, 83-4.

⁴² In his 1979 biography of Thompson, Sanborn C. Brown posits otherwise: "As a highly intelligent man and one who knew Thompson very well, Baldwin must have been aware that he was a British agent."

The colonel was diligent about gathering information in Chelsea for the commander-in-chief, however. On 4 August he wrote to Gen. Washington:

Capt. Morton who came out of Boston yesterday in the afternoon informs that a little before he came away the [British] Generals went over the ferry to Bunker Hill to consult (as it was said) upon the propriety of taking possession of a considerable eminence in this Town a little West of Winnisimmit Ferry commonly known by the name of Greens Hill; and I am informed by some persons who left Boston this morning that the Soldiers told them as they was coming away that they ware Fools to go to Chelsea for tomorrow they (the Regulars) ware a going to take possession of that Place & burn & destroy all before them, and this it was said was to be done in consequence of the determination of the Council of War held yesterday on Bunker Hill.⁴³

Aide-de-camp John Trumbull replied on the commander's behalf that same day: "he is very glad of every Information with regard to their Movements & thanks you for your Attention, but cannot think, that, if any Affair was on foot the Soldiers would be allow'd to know any thing of it—& therefore concludes we need not be under any Apprehensions On that Score."⁴⁴ Two days later, British troops crossed the Mystic River and burned a house near Green Hill. Baldwin reported that event and refrained from reminding the general of his earlier dispatch.⁴⁵

By then, Baldwin was dealing with a different sort of worry. Around five o'clock on 4 August three ladies, one of them the wife of the barrackmaster for the king's troops, "came over Winnisimmet Ferry. . . with a horse and chaise: no such instance having happened before." With heightened awareness of "my duty to be very cautious at this critical day," Baldwin hurried to the Cambridge headquarters, where Gen. Washington told him to take the ladies to the General Court in Watertown.⁴⁶ The commander then tried to turn over the whole issue to the legislature:

As there may be Inconveniences, from Persons being Suffer'd indiscriminately to go thro. the Country, many of whom, are undoubtedly disaffected to the Publick Interest: I have caused a Court of Inquiry to set upon several, but the Business

The same thing must have been true for Thompson, since Baldwin would have had little reason to hide the fact that his duties included military espionage." Brown admits, however, "There is no documentation showing that Baldwin ever made any written reports on Thompson's activities or cited him as the source of any information." Nor is there evidence that Thompson ever learned about Baldwin's assignment or passed the details to the British. Brown, *Benjamin Thompson*, 41-2. Thompson went on to a stellar governmental and scientific career in Europe, eventually receiving the title of Count Rumford.

⁴³ PGW:RW, 1:219-20.

⁴⁴ PGW:RW, 1:220.

⁴⁵ PGW:RW, 1:250-1.

⁴⁶ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:312.

multiplies so fast, and we are so much Strangers to the Characters, and Conduct of many, that I would wish to put it on a more proper Footing: especially as it takes Several Field Officers every day from their duty—You will please Sir, to lay this Matter before the General Court that they may either appoint some proper Persons more Competent to this Business, or take such other Steps as shall appear to them likely to remedy this Mischief.⁴⁷

In a postscript Reed added, “Col. Baldwin being impatient to return to his post. Gen. Gates will be the bearer of this.” Baldwin set up a guard to take the three ladies from Malden to Watertown, ordering his soldiers: “you are not to suffer sd ladies to have any private conference or communication with any person except the Guards, nor suffer any person to offer any insult to them.”⁴⁸

On 13 August Lt. Col. Baldwin sent Washington more new arrivals, of a different sort: “two men who deserted from The Lively Man of War this morning about 3 oClock and were taken up by our Guard at Chelsea Beach & conducted to me by a file of men.” Along with those deserters he sent a letter describing “a Small brush with the Enemy today,” and “the Observation as Usual” of ships.⁴⁹ On 2 October he reported: “I have just obtained two London Papers & the Last Boston Paper. . . . the Bearer, Mr Shaw who sets out immediately, and who can give your Excellency a particular account of the manner in which they were procured.”⁵⁰ Samuel Shaw (1754-1794) had turned twenty-one that day and left his father’s house, where British officers were lodging in hopes of joining the Continental Army.

On the night of 24 November a Marblehead Loyalist named Benjamin Marston (1730-1792), who had been trying to keep a low profile for months until a mob attacked his house, set out in an open boat for Boston.⁵¹ Two days later, Col. Baldwin wrote to Washington that “three Gentlemen. . . who are under very large Bonds to Return to Boston” had come out to Chelsea and described how Marston “gave to Genl How an account that our Army was almost Broak up on account of the Soldier not being paid and that in three weeks time the Soldiers were determined to leave their Posts and go to ther Respective homes. . . .”⁵²

⁴⁷ PGW:RW, 1:247-9.

⁴⁸ The House decided to let the barrack master’s wife go to the springs at Stafford, Connecticut, for her health, and then lodge with her brother in Rehoboth. The other two women, a legislative committee reported, “have given such an open, full account of matters, and appear to be friendly to the Country [that] they may without danger thereto, be freed from confinement.” Carter, “Joseph Goldthwait, the Barrack Master of Boston,” *Collections of the Maine Historical Society*, Series 2, 9 (1898), 363-5, citing documents in the Massachusetts Archives.

⁴⁹ PGW:RW, 1:300-1.

⁵⁰ PGW:RW, 2:79. On 1 December, Shaw wrote to his father: “With respect to getting a commission, the matter rests with the General. . . . I shall be extremely obliged to his Excellency if he do not make a *Hack mark* against my name.” Shaw became a lieutenant in the reorganized Continental artillery (see section 11.2 for his descriptions of a couple of skirmishes). Shaw, *Journals*, 5-6.

⁵¹ Shipton, *New England Life in the Eighteenth Century*, 596.

⁵² PGW:RW, 2:429.

Washington was already worried his army would dissolve at the end of the year (see section 8.11); this message confirmed that the enemy commander knew about that potential weakness. The three gentlemen from Boston also brought news of a missing British ordnance ship—see section 2.7.

Baldwin continued his intelligence duties through the decisive American move onto Dorchester heights (see chapter 18). He wrote to his wife on 6 March 1776 “I have had much to do, constantly keeping a party on Noddle’s Island for spies to discover all the movements of the enemy.” In this letter he used “spies” in the eighteenth-century manner, referring to what modern military tacticians call “scouts.”⁵³

Baldwin remained with the Continental Army until 1777 when he retired because of illness. He returned to Woburn, and three years later became sheriff of Middlesex County. He served in the Massachusetts legislature and ran for Congress. In 1793 Baldwin helped form a company to build the Middlesex Canal; he oversaw the actual construction, which took until 1803. That piece of engineering allowed the new town of Lowell to grow into a center of textile manufacturing. Baldwin died in 1807, and is often called the “father of civil engineering in America.”⁵⁴

13.4 THE TEWKSBURY BROTHERS AND THE WATERMEN

The next link in Reed’s communication chain was a man named “Dewksbury” who lived on “Shirley Point.” This was one of three brothers named Tewksbury who had been raised in the area called Point Shirley or Pulling Point, which is now part of Winthrop:

- John Tewksbury (c. 1735-1816).
- Andrew Tewksbury (1739-1814).
- James Tewksbury (1744-1800). He gave his youngest son, born in 1784, the first name Washington.⁵⁵

All three Tewksburys appear on “A Rool of the men that kept Guard att Pullin Point in Chelsea by order of Capt. Saml. Sprague from April 19, 1775 till Discharged by there officer” after a month. As of 19 August, according to a document signed by Capt. William Rogers of Baldwin’s regiment, Andrew, James, and John “Duksbury” were at Pulling Point.⁵⁶ It is not clear how Baldwin was supposed to know which Tewksbury brother to approach with his

⁵³ Hurd, *History of Middlesex County*, 1:447.

⁵⁴ Vose, *Sketch of the Life and Works of Loammi Baldwin* (1885), concerns Col. Baldwin’s namesake son but starts with a profile of him. Baldwin’s connection to Massachusetts’s industrialization appears in Eddy, *Historical Sketch of the Middlesex Canal* (1843); Roberts, *The Middlesex Canal* (1938); and Clarke, *The Old Middlesex Canal* (1974).

⁵⁵ Cutter, *Genealogical and Personal Memoirs*, 4:1677, 2076.

⁵⁶ Chamberlain, *Documentary History of Chelsea*, 2:444, 506. The Tewksbury family name is spelled various ways in town and county records.

secret letter, but perhaps they were all in on the scheme. In December Baldwin referred to a “committee” of inhabitants on Pulling Point operating somewhat independently of him and the army.⁵⁷

In Washington and Reed’s communications chain to their agent in Boston, the next link after “Dukesbury” was “a Waterman,” a term for someone who made his living carrying goods and people in a small boat. Reed did not name this man, possibly because he did not know him. As discussed in section 13.1, there was a lot of traffic over the water around Boston, and plenty of opportunities for a waterman to carry a letter to “one John Carnes a Grocer.”

13.5 JOHN CARNES: MINISTER, GROCER, AND SPY

John Carnes was born in Boston on 11 July 1723. His father was a pewterer who had improved his social position through business and militia service. John entered Harvard College, where his father paid the tuition by supplying pewter tableware. Young Carnes became interested in a ministerial career, especially after hearing the Rev. George Whitefield preach in Cambridge in 1740.⁵⁸

Carnes graduated from Harvard in 1742, earned a master’s degree, and in December 1746 was ordained as the new minister of Stoneham. In the following July, he married Mary Lewis of Lynn, three years his senior and from a comfortably wealthy family. However, his ministerial position did not work out: in July 1757 Carnes resigned from the Stoneham pulpit, complaining about how little and late the town had paid him.⁵⁹ After preaching in various meetings, in April 1759 Carnes accepted a post as minister in Rehoboth’s Seekonk parish. Almost immediately some congregants started to complain. In 1763 a council of men from eight other churches and then a committee of the Massachusetts General Court tried to arbitrate the dispute without success. The legislators concluded that Carnes had done nothing wrong, but found “an unhappy alienation of affection in his people to him, and incurable.”⁶⁰

In December 1764, at Carnes’s request, the Rehoboth congregation dismissed him from their pulpit. He was forty-one years old, had a wife and a still growing family to maintain, and had failed twice at the only profession he was trained for. He settled in Boston, and after delivering a few more sermons gave up the idea of preaching. Instead, Carnes

⁵⁷ Chamberlain, *Documentary History of Chelsea*, 2:531.

⁵⁸ The most thorough biography of Carnes is by Clifford K. Shipton for *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, 11:137-42. This profile focuses on Carnes’s well-documented ministerial career. It not only says nothing about his espionage activity but dismisses his descendants’ recollection of it as “an unsubstantiated family tradition.”

⁵⁹ *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, 11:139. Carnes published his side of the dispute in the 22 August 1757 *Boston Gazette*.

⁶⁰ *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, 11:140.

opened a shop on Orange Street in the South End. He applied for a license to sell liquor, which the selectmen finally granted in 1768.⁶¹ As a businessman Carnes remained low key, not advertising his goods. Two incidents forced him to put notices in the newspapers, offering the only clues to his business and political attitudes.

In January 1770 Boston's shopkeepers were under great public pressure not to sell goods imported from Britain, and to shun the handful of merchants who continued to import. Accused of sending an out-of-town customer to one of those merchants, a South End businessman named Christopher Prince published an open letter in the *Boston News-Letter* on 25 January complaining about that attack on his character. He wrote that he suspected one of his two accusers of being "a quondam [former] Parson, and twice seperated from this People, for Reasons best known to himself, and from a Preacher of the Gospel now follows the laudable Calling of retailing Rum to the Soldiers at the South Part of the Town."

In the 29 January *Boston Gazette*, Carnes responded with a long letter denying that he had made the earlier accusations but endorsing them. As to the sneers against himself, Carnes wrote:

In respect to my being in the *laudable Business of Retailing*, it is the Fruit of Necessity, and very usual with all persons who are in the grocery-way in the south part of the town where I live.—But how low? how false the suggestion of my selling Rum to the soldiers? Tis true when I first sold liquors, I sold them indiscriminately to all customers; but as soon as I was convinced of the impropriety of supplying the soldiers with that article, I refused to let them have any; and Mr. Prince being a neighbor, must I think have known, that for near eight months past, I have declined selling to them.

Carnes went on to accuse Prince of behaving "like a true Italian, hugging a man in his arms, while that moments he determines to stab him," and called him "a dirty Fellow, remarkable for his want of Education, and may I not add, remarkable for Profanity and Impudence." This episode is valuable as an indication of Carnes's support for the Whig campaign and of how he saw himself as "in the grocery-way." He was, as Reed's letter described, "John Carnes a Grocer in the South Part of Boston."

The other incident that brought Carnes into the newspaper was a break-in at his store on the night of 16 March 1769. Four days later he announced a ten-dollar reward for apprehending the thief and listed the stolen goods. That advertisement shows that Carnes's inventory included stockings, handkerchiefs, thread, linen and other fabrics, needles, shoes, combs, soap, and knives.⁶² In May 1769 six British soldiers were found to be in possession of

⁶¹ BTR, 20:222, 304. On 22 May 1771 the selectmen granted Carnes a new license to retail from "the House he has lately removed to the South part of Boston, lately improved by Mr. Joseph Ballard"; BTR, 23:87.

⁶² *Boston Gazette*, 20 March and 3 April 1769. The 23 March 1769 *Boston News-Letter* also mentioned the theft.

the stolen goods. Their indictment listed some other items as well, including mitts and watch seals.⁶³

Of the six soldiers, only one—Pvt. John Moies of the 14th Regiment—was convicted. He was sentenced to a whipping and ordered to pay Carnes triple damages of more than £78. That was well beyond what any working-man could pay, so the court bound Moies to Carnes as an indentured servant for three years. British military commanders sputtered at this injustice and tried to arrange a settlement with the shopkeeper. Then they discovered that Moies actually welcomed his sentence, seeing it as a way out of the army.⁶⁴ While his regiment headed south, Moies remained in the Boston area. He married a Dorchester woman in 1771 and eventually had seven children baptized at Trinity Church.⁶⁵ It is uncertain whether Moies maintained any ties with John Carnes after 1769, but as a former British soldier he might have been a valuable intelligence source. He was in Boston during the siege, later testifying about how he had tried to save a store from looting in March 1776.⁶⁶ By 1781 Moies had his own shop on Long Lane, licensed to sell liquor.⁶⁷

There is no evidence of how John Carnes responded to the outbreak of war in April 1775. *A reminiscence* published in 1858 stated:

Dr. David Townsend, June 17, 1775, in the morning, went to Brighton to see Mr. Carnes's family of Boston. About one in the afternoon, Mr. Carnes came and reported that there was hot work. The British at Boston, with their shipping, were firing very heavy on our men at Bunker Hill.⁶⁸

This may have been John Carnes, having moved his family out of the army-occupied town, or it may have been one of his relatives.⁶⁹ If he was indeed out of town in June, that left him in a position “to go into the Town of Boston” the following month, as Washington’s account notebook describes a secret agent doing.

There is no clue about what motivated Carnes to take the risk of spying for the Americans. He may well have needed the money. He had supported Whig politics but not in a highly visible way—which could have allowed him to present himself as a neutral or

⁶³ This court case is discussed in *The Legal Papers of John Adams*, 2:436-7.

⁶⁴ Zobel, *Boston Massacre*, 136-7.

⁶⁵ NEHGR, 61:43.

⁶⁶ Refcode 45940 in Thwing, *Inhabitants and Estates of the Town of Boston*, CD-ROM. Dunkle and Lainhart, *Records of the Churches of Boston*, CD-ROM.

⁶⁷ BTR, 25:155.

⁶⁸ NEHGR, 12:230.

⁶⁹ John Carnes’s younger brother Edward was a prominent ropewalk owner and militia officer. In late July 1775, the British army pulled down “Mr. Carnes’s Rope Walk” in the West End, which suggests he was no longer in town to guard his property; MHSP, 60:93. John Carnes’s son Thomas became quartermaster and steward for a hospital in Cambridge (see section 15.7); *Boston Gazette*, 4 March 1776.

Loyalist returning to Boston. Another of Carnes's possible advantages as a spy is that he might have come across as ineffectual. Congregants had rebelled against him in both Stoneham and Seekonk, and on his death the Rev. William Bentley of Salem wrote: "His talents were small & his manners displeasing but his simplicity had no vice in it. . . . We used often to laugh at Carnes, but there was many a worse man in our wicked world."⁷⁰ Carnes's seeming simplicity could have been valuable in secret intelligence work.

13.6 CARNES'S REPORTS

On 15 August 1775 Lt. Col. Baldwin sent Gen. Washington important news from Chelsea:

I hope to be able tomorrow to forward to your Excellency a letter from the Mr. J— C— the Grocer I heard from him yesterday Informing that he Expected to git further Information by tomorrow if it comes to hand Shall forward it with all Convenient Speed⁷¹

The next day, Baldwin wrote:

I have received a Letter which I suppose came from Mr. J. C. by the Hand of the Gentleman Expected who says he is going to Headquarters in the morning to see about the sheep that was brought off from Pulling Point which I have wrote to the adjutant General about⁷²

At the time Baldwin was dealing with the problem of sheep that he had ordered his men to drive out of reach of British raiding parties. They needed places to graze, and the people of Point Shirley wanted to keep that livestock. It appears that one of the Tewksbury brothers carried Carnes's letter to Cambridge and used his trip to lobby for being allowed to tend that livestock. Eventually the Point Shirley families were assigned those sheep and cows under strict warning to keep them away from the enemy.

Carnes's letters do not survive in Washington's file, but his news apparently did not remain secret for long. In fact, it spread with his name still attached—a major security breach. On 20 August Ezekiel Price wrote in his diary:

in the afternoon, Mr. Hill, of Providence, was here, who left Cambridge this forenoon, and says, that this morning a woman got out of Boston, who brought a letter from Parson Carnes, which mentioned that the Regulars in Boston intended to come out this night or tomorrow night,—in consequence of which,

⁷⁰ Bentley, *Diary*, 2:454.

⁷¹ PGW:RW, 1:311.

⁷² PGW:RW, 1:312-3.

preparations were making in the several American encampments to receive them⁷³

Frothingham's *History of the Siege of Boston* confirms, "On the 20th the British, it was thought, were about to sally out of Charlestown, when the camp was alarmed, and the men ordered to lie on their arms" to be ready.⁷⁴ The British did not attack, but that alarm might have spurred the American forces to preemptively take Plowed Hill on 26 August (see section 11.2).

Given how Hill and Price heard about that report sent by "Parson Carnes," other people behind the American lines probably received the same information. On 26 August the Newport merchant George Rome wrote to Gen. Gage:

A few days ago a Gentn. of your acquaintance, whom I shall not name, called upon me.—He said he had intelligence of much importance to you from the Rebel Camp [?]. He put it under cover to Majr. Sherriff, & I have committed it to a passenger, (a safe hand) who will wait upon your Excellency with it, & communicate verbally such other materials as were not committed to writing.⁷⁵

Maj. William Shirreff was the deputy quartermaster for the British forces in Boston. Rome was not necessarily passing on a warning about Carnes, but this letter shows how the British commander was able to receive information from the American camp.

An 1898 volume of *American Ancestry* reported a family tradition that Carnes "lived in Boston during the siege 1775, corresponded with Gen. Washington, was suspected by Gen. Gage, had his house and papers searched, and was ordered to leave, which he did."⁷⁶ If this tradition is accurate, Carnes must have left Boston before 11 October 1775 when Gage sailed for home. Alternatively, it is possible that Gen. William Howe ordered the parson out later and the family misremembered.⁷⁷

Carnes's name does not appear in Gen. Gage's surviving intelligence files. The fact that the British authorities did not lock the parson in jail, but merely searched his property and ordered him to leave Boston, suggests that they did not realize his link to the enemy commander. Gage could have been informed about the "letter from Parson Carnes," but not that Carnes had sent that letter to Gen. Washington rather than to a friend or relative.

⁷³ MHSP, 7:204-5.

⁷⁴ Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston*, 232-3.

⁷⁵ French, *General Gage's Informers*, 188.

⁷⁶ *American Ancestry*, 11:134. The same statement appears in Lewis, *Edmund Lewis*, 32-3.

⁷⁷ Ezekiel Price recorded hearing another rumor from "Mr. Carnes (a son of the parson's)" on 13 November, so it is possible that John Carnes was sending information from Boston around that date. That rumor was: "it is reported at Cambridge, &c., and believed, that twenty-five hundred Regulars have lately arrived at Boston; he also says that the Regulars, last Saturday, intended to land a number of them at Chelsea,—having their boats, &c., ready,—but the wind blowing fresh against them prevented their setting off"; MHSP, 7:214.

Carnes's clerical background and unimpressive manner may have worked in his favor. However his stint as a spy ended, John Carnes was definitely outside Boston before the end of the siege; on 1 March 1776 he took the job of chaplain to a regiment in the Continental Army.

On 1 April, as Gen. Washington prepared to leave Massachusetts, he entered a large sum in his expense book:

To amount of Sundry sums pr. Memmo. for secret services to the date ... [£]232

No memorandum survives with clues about who received this sum, whether one person or several. Some of the money may have gone to the Rev. John Carnes, or to someone else who had actually remained in Boston through the siege, or to the watermen and other intermediaries who ferried messages back and forth. By that spring, the general and his aides had become more cautious about what information they kept on paper.

After serving several months as an army chaplain, Carnes returned to Massachusetts and by the late 1770s settled in Lynn, his wife's home town. His fortunes had clearly improved since he had needed to open his South End shop. The Rev. William Bentley of Salem later attributed this change to "the prosperity of his children," but cash from Gen. Washington might have also been a factor. Carnes became a justice of the peace, and represented Lynn for eight years in the Massachusetts legislature and at the 1788 state convention that ratified the U.S. Constitution. He died in 1802, keeping his secrets.

13.7 PVT. MACHIN AND THE BRITISH FORTIFICATIONS

Another of Washington's intelligence priorities was to obtain accurate information about the British army fortifications, particularly those on the narrow neck of land leading into Boston, where he envisioned launching a major assault. Soon after arriving in Cambridge, the general spread the word that he wanted someone who could draw the plans of those works. Commissary general Joseph Trumbull (see section 5.4) told his younger brother John, who had long been interested in drawing, that he should undertake this task.

In his 1841 memoir, John Trumbull described what happened next:

...he advised me (as I could draw) to attempt to execute a view and plan, as a mean of introducing myself (probably) to the favorable notice of the general. I took his advice and began the attempt, by creeping (under the concealment of high grass) so nigh that I could ascertain that the work consisted of a curtain crossing the entrance of the town, flanked by two bastions, one on the western and the other on the eastern side, and I had ascertained the number of guns mounted on the eastern, (their caliber was already known,) when my farther progress was rendered unnecessary by the desertion of one of the British artillery-men, who brought out with him a rude plan of the entire work. My drawing was also shown to the general, and their correspondence proved that as far as I had gone I was correct. This (probably) led to my future promotion; for,

soon after, I was presented to the general, and appointed his second aid-du-camp...⁷⁸

(For more on Trumbull's work as aide de camp at headquarters, see section 5.9.)

On 27 July, the same day that Washington announced Trumbull's appointment, his general orders also addressed the importance of intelligence from deserters:

For the future when any Deserters come to any of the out Guards, they are with the least delay to be sent by a Corporals Guard, to the next Guard in the Lines, who is immediately to escort them in the same manner to the Major General commanding that division of the Army, who as soon as he has examined them will forthwith send them under a proper Escort from his guard to the head quarters: Some Deserters being made drunk, who came last night from the Enemy, before they reached Head Quarters; It will be considered as a Breach of orders in any person, who gives Rum to Deserters, before they are examined by the General.⁷⁹

Evidently the general's attempts to question recent deserters had not gone as smoothly as he had wished.

There were in fact three deserters from the British on 27 July according to the diary of the British Lt.-Col. Stephen Kemble:

Two Men of 52d. Regiment Deserted from the Advanced post on the Charles Town side, and one from the 23d., a sensible intelligent fellow, some knowledge of fortification and Gunnery. Supposed to be sent by design, tho' little credit to be given for it, and reasons sufficient from Authority that it is a feint.⁸⁰

The talk of a "design" was apparently talk among British officers that their commanders had sent the "sensible intelligent fellow" from the 23rd Regiment, also called the Royal Welch Fusiliers, to be a double agent within the American ranks. Kemble apparently suspected that that story was being spread to make the Americans distrust this deserter, or possibly to discourage other regulars from trying to leave the same way.

Kemble's report was matched by one from Col. William T. Miller of the Rhode Island troops, stationed at Prospect Hill and writing on 29 July:

We have three deserters from the regulars come into this camp since we came here, one of whom found his own brother here in the camp. Their meeting was very affecting. One hath deserted by way of Roxbury, who it is thought will prove a very serviceable man to our army, as he is able to give a plan of all the works and

⁷⁸ Trumbull, *Autobiography, Reminiscences, and Letters*, 22-3.

⁷⁹ PGW:RW, 1:178.

⁸⁰ Kemble, *Journals*, 50.

fortifications in Boston, and knows all their plans. He says he can direct the enemy to storm Boston, with the loss of very few men...⁸¹

The news that a deserter had brought critical information about the British fortifications traveled fast within the American lines, and made people anticipate an attack.

The Massachusetts veteran Jedediah Preble, visiting the American camp on 9 August, recorded meeting a man who had deserted from the British “this day fortnight”—on 27 July. The deserter was “as sensible intelligent a fellow as I ever met with.” He told Preble that on 19 April “he came out with Lord Percy” to Lexington, as the 23rd Regiment had indeed done. He gave numbers for the British casualties from Bunker Hill and their total strength, saying “He took the account from Gen’l Robinson,” apparently British brigadier general and quartermaster general James Robertson.⁸²

The man that people on both sides of the siege lines called a “sensible intelligent fellow” was a private named Thomas Machin. On 27 July Lt. Richard Williams of the Royal Welch Fusiliers wrote in his diary:

Last night Thos. Machin, soldier in our Regt. deserted when sentry on the fire boat in the river near the neck. he went off in the Canoe go to this float, he took the other man’s firelock with him, as it was that man’s turn to lay down, this fellow will give them good intelligence of our Works, for he was a pretty good Mechenik & knew a little of fortification. he invented a new carriage for guns on a pivot &c. his books & instruments were sent for to the General’s.⁸³

Machin had planned his escape with enough care to take his companion’s gun so that the man could not shoot him or quickly alert others. Furthermore, according to Trumbull, he had prepared and brought a plan of the British fortifications.

British military records show that Thomas Machin had enlisted in Maj. Harry Blunt’s company on 17 February 1773 and traveled with the 23rd Regiment to New York that spring.⁸⁴ As Gen. Gage built up the royal forces in Boston, the Welch Fusiliers arrived in August 1774. The company’s roll lists Machin as having deserted on 28 July 1775 the only member of the company to desert so far that year.⁸⁵

Lt.-Col. Kemble praised Machin as “intelligent.” Lt. Williams wrote about his “new carriage for guns on a pivot,” books, and mechanical instruments, valuable enough for Gen. Gage to impound. Yet Machin was merely a private, and within the British class system he

⁸¹ Quoted in Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston*, 229.

⁸² Preble’s diary entry is printed in facsimile and edited transcription in Preble, *Genealogical Sketch*, 62-3. The confusion of “Robinson” and “Robertson” appears in many manuscripts of this time.

⁸³ Williams, *Discord and Civil Wars*, 26.

⁸⁴ Muster roll of the 23rd Regiment dated 31 July 1773, New York, War Office Papers [hereafter “WO”] 12/3959, 239, National Archives, Great Britain.

⁸⁵ WO 12/3960, 29, National Archives, Great Britain.

was unlikely to become an officer, whatever his intelligence and ingenuity. Machin probably saw better prospects for himself on the other side of the siege lines.

On reaching Cambridge, Machin shared his plan of the British fortifications, and offered additional intelligence. Washington wrote down “An Acct. of the Killed & Wounded in the Ministerial Army” after Bunker Hill based on his conversation with the deserter he then called “John Machin.”⁸⁶ That same day, the general wrote to his brother John Augustine Washington:

By very authentick Intelligence lately receivd out of Boston (from a Person who saw the returns) the number of Regulars (including I presume the Marines) the Morning of the action on Bunkers Hill amounted to 7533 Men—their killed & wounded on that [occasi]on amounted to 1043, whereof 92 were Officers. our loss was 138 killed—38 Missing & 276 Wounded. The Enemy are sickly, and scarce of Fresh provisions—Beef, [which] is chiefly got by Slaughtering their Milch Cows [in] Boston, sells from one Shilling to 18d. Sterg per lb.⁸⁷

This was just the information a commander needed to assess the enemy’s strength.

Gen. Washington also apparently assigned Machin to work with Trumbull on mapping the enemy fortifications. The young Connecticut officer took the deserter to be “one of the British artillery-men” because of his knowledge of engineering. It is possible that Machin indeed had experience in that field, but there is no reliable evidence. Trumbull and Machin created more detailed maps of the British fortifications. The headquarters staff sent one to the Continental Congress, and another, with notations by Washington’s aide Thomas Mifflin, ended up in the papers of diplomat Arthur Lee.⁸⁸

Machin drops out of the sources for the rest of 1775. A small notice dated 8 January and printed in the *New-England Chronicle* on 11 January 1776 shows “Tho. Machin” working for quartermaster general Thomas Mifflin in collecting supplies for barracks. After the 8 January raid on British positions in Charlestown (see section 11.2), a letter from the camp to Philadelphia described one of the Americans’ guides as “your friend Minchin,” who behaved “with great coolness.” The recipient of that letter might have been Joseph Reed, and the guide Thomas Machin.⁸⁹

On 18 January 1776 Washington gave Machin a commission as a second lieutenant in the reorganized Continental artillery regiment. Other American officers may have been wary of the man as a deserter and an outsider, but the commander-in-chief valued him highly.

⁸⁶ See note in WGWS, 3:337. The deserter told Jedediah Preble that the British had 700 dead after Bunker Hill and 357 recovered from wounds, and “could not muster more than 6000 men”; Preble, *Genealogical Sketch*, 63.

⁸⁷ PGW:RW, 1:184.

⁸⁸ Copies sent to the Continental Congress appear in PGW:RW, 1:234-7. Winsor, *Narrative and Critical History of America*, 6:211-2.

⁸⁹ Letter dated 9 January 1776, MHSP, 14:276.

Washington never described Machin as a deserter, at least in writing. Instead, he recommended the Englishman to other commanders and civil authorities as “an ingenious Man. . . [who] has given great Satisfaction as an Engineer at Boston,” and took a personal interest in his promotions.⁹⁰

Machin was often assigned to military-engineering projects rather than battlefield artillery, which lowered his risk of being captured and executed. On 21 March 1776 Gen. Nathanael Greene’s orders stated: “Machin of the artillery to oversee the fatigue and mark out the ditch, &c.”⁹¹ Massachusetts officials asked for him to stay in the state to obstruct channels in Boston harbor against British warships and to dig a canal across Cape Cod, which would allow American ships to travel from Boston to Newport and points south without venturing into the open sea.⁹² Gen. Artemas Ward’s former aide de camp certified in 1778 that “General Ward Directed Liut. Thomas Machin of the Artillery To act as Engineer to Erect Fortifications for the Defence of the Town and Harbour of Boston From the first of April 1776 to the month of June Following, which Services he faithfully perform’d.”⁹³

Machin’s most memorable assignment during the Revolutionary War was designing, manufacturing, and installing a giant “chain” across the Hudson River below West Point. This series of floating obstacles, linked together, was intended to keep British warships from sailing easily up the river. Creating it was a major feat in pre-industrial America, described in detail in Lincoln Diamant’s *Chaining the Hudson*. In 1779 Machin was one of the artillery officers in Gen. John Sullivan’s expedition against British-allied Onondaga, and two years later he participated in the siege of Yorktown.⁹⁴

When Machin started to woo Susan Van Nostrand, youngest daughter of a wealthy Long Island weaver and deacon, his concealed past caught up with him. He wrote to the Boston merchant Oliver Wendell on 10 August 1782 about his trouble:

But to my great mortification, somebody was pleased to inform the young lady’s friends that I had a wife in Boston. And as I always did, and I hope ever will, detest deception, be it of what kind soever it will: and much more that which is of all the most villainous; I therefore, relying on our former friendship and your justice, make no doubt but you will give the bearer, Mr. [Timothy] Dunning, the young lady’s and my friend, whatever information he may require, relating to my conduct when in Boston.

⁹⁰ Washington to James Clinton, 21? July 1776, WGW, 5:319. See also Washington to New York Convention’s Secret Committee, 21 July 1776, WGW, 5:318. Diamant, *Chaining the Hudson*, 102.

⁹¹ *MHSP*, 16:338.

⁹² Such a canal would not be finished until 1916. Diamant, *Chaining the Hudson*, 102.

⁹³ Certification of Joseph Ward, 9 August 1778, White Plains, in Miscellaneous Manuscripts/Boston, folder 5, New-York Historical Society.

⁹⁴ Machin, “Journal of March from Fort Schuyler,” *Magazine of American History*, 3:688-9; reprinted in Cook, *Journals of the Military Expedition*, 192-7. Diamant, *Chaining the Hudson*, 171.

Machin contacted Wendell because of “An experimental knowledge of your philanthropy”; whether that refers to acquaintance before or after the siege is uncertain.⁹⁵ Dunning found satisfactory answers in Boston, and the couple married in August. Machin retired from the army in April 1783 at the rank of captain, his promotion backdated to August 1781.⁹⁶ He settled in upstate New York, and died on 3 April 1816.⁹⁷

By that time Machin had constructed a cover story that erased his past as a deserter and replaced it with a genteel English background and early participation in the American Revolution. His death notice said, “He was a British officer at the battle of Minden” in 1759, and “he had the honor of being wounded in the defence of Bunker-hill.”⁹⁸ An 1845 county history went further, describing Machin also as a son of esteemed British mathematician John Machin and clerk of James Brindley, canal-builder for the Duke of Bridgewater. This profile went on:

After making a voyage to the East Indies, Machin sailed for America, and arriving in 1772, took up his residence in the city of New York. The principal object of his voyage was to examine a copper mine in New Jersey. After a short stay in New York, he went to reside in Boston, and evidently intended a permanent residence; as he warmly espoused the cause of the Bostonians against his “father land.” He was one of the celebrated Boston tea party of 1773. He was engaged and wounded (in one arm) in the conflict on Bunker’s hill, while acting as lieutenant of artillery.⁹⁹

Machin did indeed make “a short stay in New York”—along with the rest of the 23rd Regiment. His name appears in the Royal Welch Fusiliers’ rolls from his enlistment in Britain in 1773 through his desertion in July 1775.¹⁰⁰ Apparently for reasons of social standing rather than security, Capt. Machin and his family promoted a fictive biography that obscured Pvt. Machin’s real service to Washington early in the siege of Boston.

⁹⁵ Simms, *History of Schoharie County*, 591. Dunning was married to one of Van Nostrand’s sisters; Stoutenburgh, *Documentary History of het (the) Nederdeutsche Gemeente Dutch Congregation*, 392-3. .

⁹⁶ Commission dated 28 April 1783, Thomas Machin Papers, folder 5, New-York Historical Society.

⁹⁷ Among Machin’s business ventures was a mill to mint coins, authorized or not. See “Machin’s Mills Imitation British Halfpence,” in *Coins and Currency Collections at the University of Notre Dame Department of Special Collections*, <<http://www.coins.nd.edu/ColCoin/ColCoinIntros/Machin.intro.html>>.

⁹⁸ *Berkshire Star*, 18 April 1816, citing the *Albany Gazette*.

⁹⁹ Simms, *History of Schoharie County*, 550-1, provided no documentation for any of its statements about Machin before 1776. They do not match what is known about the mathematician: ODNB, 35:466.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas J. Abernathy made a particular search for Machin’s name in the rolls of Gridley’s artillery regiment in 1775, without success. Abernathy, “American Artillery Regiments in the Revolutionary War,” 1:58-9.

13.8 BENJAMIN HICHBORN AND THE INTERCEPTED LETTERS

In late July 1775 a young Boston lawyer named Benjamin Hichborn (1746-1817) visited Philadelphia. Having clerked for a Loyalist lawyer, Hichborn was eager to show the world that he really sided with the Patriots. He therefore cajoled two delegates—John Adams of Massachusetts and Benjamin Harrison of Virginia—into trusting him to carry their letters to Massachusetts.

At that time, American governments controlled land routes along the coast while the Royal Navy was unchallenged on the ocean. While small, fast American ships had the chance to sneak past royal ships on patrol, it was much safer for Patriots to send their letters by land. Nevertheless, Hichborn chose to board a ship to cross Long Island Sound. The Royal Navy sloop *Swan* stopped the vessel, and another passenger informed the navy captain that Hichborn was carrying letters for members of the rebel congress—showing that the young lawyer had not kept that secret. Hichborn had planned elaborate ways to hide those documents or destroy them, but his last-minute choice to try something else allowed the naval officers to find the letters and then put him under arrest.

Hichborn was shipped to Boston harbor and confined aboard Admiral Samuel Graves's flagship, the *Preston*. While in custody, he later reported, "The admiral enquired where I lodged, and what Company I kept at Philadelphia, and insisted upon my giving him a particular account of the Conversation of the Adamases and other Members of the Congress." He said he had replied, "The only Matter of a political kind that engaged my attention, was the probability of a Reconciliation between great Britain and her Colonies."¹⁰¹

Meanwhile, some of Hichborn's friends on the mainland were trying to arrange his release. On 5 August James Warren, speaker of the Massachusetts House, sent a note to Washington about the possibility, and also led the Massachusetts legislature in a resolve to offer Gen. Gage a prisoner exchange. The province was holding two Loyalists in the Concord jail, captured on a voyage to Halifax.¹⁰² The legislature proposed that they would trade those two men for ten civilians whom the British military was holding, as well as free movement for "all the Selectmen of Boston." Among the ten civilians was Hichborn. The resolve ended with a plan to send two members—John Pitts (1738-1815) of Dunstable and Jonathan Brown (1724-1797) of Watertown—to "to wait on his Excellency General *Washington*, and desire him to send into *Boston* a Trumpeter with a copy of this Resolve to the Selectmen of said Town."¹⁰³

The next day Gen. Washington responded, agreeing that an exchange was the most likely way to secure Hichborn's release and promising cooperation. He added:

¹⁰¹ PJA, 3:326.

¹⁰² *American Archives*, series 4, 2:1399-400. See also PJA, 3:111-2.

¹⁰³ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:310-1.

It is very Surprising, if the Letters intercepted are of Consequence, that those Gentlemen [Hichborn and his companion] should act so imprudent a Part. If their suffering only affected themselves, I should not think it improper that they should feel a little for their Misconduct or Negligence.¹⁰⁴

The general's supply of sympathy probably faded further when the British authorities published the letters in the 17 August issue of the *Boston News-Letter*. As described in section 7.3, someone had inserted a sentence into Harrison's letter to Washington that implied both men made a habit of extramarital affairs.

As for John Adams's 24 July letters to his wife and to James Warren, royal officials did not alter those; evidently they felt that publishing Adams's usual unvarnished private opinions would cause enough damage. For Abigail he had characterized "the Behaviour of my Compatriots" in Congress as "The Fidgets, the Whims, the Caprice, the Vanity, the Superstition, the Irritability of some of us."¹⁰⁵ In the letter to Warren, Adams wrote about "A certain great Fortune and piddling Genius whose Fame has been trumpeted so loudly," whom everyone recognized as Pennsylvania delegate John Dickinson. He closed that missive with an obvious allusion to Gen. Charles Lee:

You observe in your Letter the Oddity of a great Man. He is a queer Creature. But you must love his Dogs if you love him, and forgive a Thousand Whims for the Sake of the Soldier and the Scholar.

Adams also asked about Warren's effort to set up a new government in Massachusetts, hinting of independence before it was politically acceptable and asking jocularly, "Will your Judicial hang and whip, and fine and imprison, without Scruples?"¹⁰⁶ Clearly Adams would not have expressed himself like that in public.

Washington left no direct comments about this episode. Dickinson's rivalry with Adams in Congress became hotter, and other delegates regained their distrust of the radical New Englanders. Characteristically, Lee sent Adams a letter stating that he felt no resentment at all, cheerfully owning his fondness for Spada and the other dogs. (In a postscript Lee added, "Spada sends his love." Later he made that dog shake hands with Abigail Adams, or *vice versa*.)¹⁰⁷ Meanwhile, Hichborn remained locked up on the *Preston*.

On 20 October the Rev. Jeremy Belknap was at Gen. Ward's headquarters in Roxbury when three men arrived "who had the preceding night made their escape from Boston." One of these was Benjamin Hichborn. He had managed to slip from his guarded cabin into a canoe that a young man used "to catch fish for the officers." The "dark and rainy" night

¹⁰⁴ PGW:RW, 1:259-60.

¹⁰⁵ LoD, 1:657. AFC, 1:255-6.

¹⁰⁶ LoD, 1:651-3. PJA, 3:89.

¹⁰⁷ PJA, 3:184-6; Abigail Adams to John Adams, 10 December 1775, AFC, 1:335.

concealed his escape from the ship, and after paddling “about two hours” Hichborn reached Dorchester Neck “and soon after found our guards.”¹⁰⁸ By the time Hichborn told the same story to John Adams in December, he was “upon the Water about two hours and an half.”¹⁰⁹

The next day, Hichborn visited James Warren and tried to prove his usefulness by sharing intelligence he gathered during his confinement. Warren wrote to John Adams:

Hitchburne was to see me last Evening. He seems distressed to Approve his Conduct to us relative to the Letters—very little of a publick kind can I learn from him more than we have from Others. He says they [the British in Boston] dread and Apprehend the Erecting Batteries on Dochester Hill, and Noddles Island. The first will drive them from their Lines on the Neck, and the other make it Impossible for Ships to Lay in the Harbour I mean above the Castle.¹¹⁰

In the following week Hichborn sat down with Gen. Washington in Cambridge, and came away desperate to redeem himself. On 28 October he wrote to Adams:

General Washington does not yet appear altogether Satisfied with my Conduct. The only Satisfaction I have at present arises from the generous Reception I met with from Coll. Warren, but my anxiety to know your Sentiments of the part I have taken prevents my attention to any thing else. . . . General Washington and the World, may think meanly of me, but suffer me to say without the appearance of adulation, possessed of your Confidence of favourable opinion, I can be happy under their united frowns. Nothing but a line of approbation from you can restore me to myself.¹¹¹

In a later letter Hichborn acknowledged that he thought the general was “much disgusted” at the “humorous anecdotes” in Harrison’s letter as published.¹¹² Harrison himself had just visited Cambridge (see section 17.6), and presumably expressed his own feelings about the incident to the commander.

Along with his first apology to Adams, Hichborn sent “a rude plan of a design” for an attack on the British—another effort to restore his standing. Hichborn said that he hoped to send this to Gen. Washington through James Bowdoin, head of the Massachusetts Council. That same night he wrote out an intelligence report, which he addressed to an unnamed intermediary:

¹⁰⁸ Belknap, “Journal of my Tour to the Camp, and the Observations I made there,” MHSP, 4:79-81. See also James Warren to John Adams, 20 October 1775, PJA, 3:219; and Abigail Adams to John Adams, 22 October 1775, AFC, 1:310.

¹⁰⁹ PJA, 3:323.

¹¹⁰ PJA, 3:222.

¹¹¹ PJA, 3:256-7.

¹¹² PJA, 3:322.

As his Excellency General Washington desired me to reduce to writing anything I know respecting the Navy in Boston Harbour, I beg you wou'd shew him the enclos'd memorandum wch. will afford a general view of their Situation—the Plan of attacking the *Preston* hereto annex'd I send you. . . . I did not chuse to present it to the General lest he might think me too officious.¹¹³

On 18 November that memorandum, along with a brief report on four Royal Navy ships in Boston harbor and “Tho'ts on the Practicability of Taking the Flagship *Preston*,” were sent to headquarters over the signature “*Britannicus*.” The cover letter begins: “The enclosed Papers I received a few days ago; I suppose they come from Mr. Hitchborn. He appears very certain. . . .” The writer considers the plan to attack the *Preston* but then says: “If Mr. H——’s Plan be a good one, might it not be applied with a better chance of Success to the taking of the *Boyne*?” The “*Britannicus*” letter is not in Bowdoin’s handwriting. In fact, the writing resembles Hichborn’s own.¹¹⁴

In his edition of the commander-in-chief’s expense account, John C. Fitzpatrick wrote, “Some information was sent in to Washington by a Mr. Hitchborne,” which led other authors to think that this man was one of the general’s paid agents.¹¹⁵ In fact, Benjamin Hichborn was an overeager young professional who had screwed up badly and was trying to climb back into favor. There is no evidence that Washington ever acted on the man’s information or proposals.¹¹⁶

13.9 TALK OF PRISONER EXCHANGES

Hichborn’s escape did not end the pressure on Gen. Washington to arrange prisoner exchanges for gentlemen held in Boston. (There was less lobbying to free working-class men.) On 11 August the American commander wrote to Gen. Thomas Gage about officers captured at the Battle of Bunker Hill:

I understand that the Officers engaged in the Cause of Liberty and their Country, who by the Fortune of War, have fallen into your Hands have been thrown indiscriminately into a common Gaol appropriated for Felons—That no Consideration has been had for those of the most respectable Rank, when

¹¹³ PGW:RW, 2:393-4.

¹¹⁴ *Britannicus* letter: <<http://memory.loc.gov/mss/mgw/mgw4/034/0800/0873.jpg>> Intelligence report: <<http://memory.loc.gov/mss/mgw/mgw4/034/0600/0620.jpg>> Report on ships: <<http://memory.loc.gov/mss/mgw/mgw4/034/0600/0622.jpg>> Proposal to attack the *Preston*: <<http://memory.loc.gov/mss/mgw/mgw4/034/0600/0623.jpg>>

¹¹⁵ For example, Bakeless, *Turncoats, Traitors and Heroes*, 90.

¹¹⁶ Hichborn finally secured forgiveness from John Adams in the summer of 1776 and went on to a prominent career in the Boston bar. His persistence could be convincing; in 1779 he accidentally shot a man, and the next year he married the man’s widow. See Sibley’s *Harvard Graduates*, 17:36-44, for a full profile.

languishing with Wounds and Sickness. That some have been even amputated, in this unworthy Situation.

Let your Opinion, Sir, of the Principle which actuates them be what it may, they suppose they act from the noblest of all Principles, a Love of Freedom, and their Country. But political Opinions I conceive are foreign to this Point, the Obligations arising from the Rights of Humanity & Claims of Rank are universally binding and extensive, except in case of Retaliation. These, I should have hoped, would have dictated a more tender Treatment of those Individuals, whom Chance or War had put in your Power—Nor can I forbear suggesting, its fatal Tendency, to widen that unhappy Breach, which you, and those Ministers under whom you act, have repeatedly declared you wish'd to see forever closed.

My Duty now makes it necessary to apprise you, that for the future I shall regulate my Conduct towards those Gentlemen who are or may be in our Possession, exactly by the Rule which you shall observe, towards those of ours, who may be in your Custody. If Severity, & Hardship mark the Line of your Conduct, (painful as it may be to me) your Prisoners will feel its Effects: But if Kindness & Humanity are shewn to ours, I shall with Pleasure consider those in our Hands, only as unfortunate, and they shall receive from me that Treatment to which the unfortunate are ever intitled.¹¹⁷

Reed evidently drafted this letter for Washington.

Gen. John Burgoyne wrote most of Gage's 13 August reply:

To the Glory of Civilized Nations, humanity and War have been compatible; and Compassion to the subdued, is become a general system.

Britons, ever preeminent in Mercy, have outgone common examples, and overlooked the Criminal in the Captive. Upon these principles your Prisoners, whose Lives by the Laws of the Land are destined to the Cord, have hitherto been treated with care and kindness, and more comfortably lodged than the King's troops in the Hospitals, indiscriminately it is true, for I Acknowledge no Rank that is not derived from the King.

My intelligence from your Army would justify severe recrimination. I understand there are of the King's faithfull subjects, taken sometime since by the Rebels, labouring like Negro Slaves, to gain their daily Subsistence, or reduced to the Wretched Alternative, to perish by famine, or take Arms against their King and Country. Those who have made the Treatment of the Prisoners in my hands, or of your other Friends in Boston, a pretence for such Measures, found Barbarity upon falsehood.

I would willingly hope Sir, that the Sentiments of liberality, which I have always believed you to possess, will be exerted to correct these misdoings. Be temperate in political disquisition, give free Operation to truth, and punish those who decieve and misrepresent, and not only the effects, but the Causes of this unhappy Conflict will be removed.

Should those under whose usurped Authority you Act, controul such a disposition, and dare to call severity retaliation, to God who knows all hearts be the appeal for the dreadful consequences. I trust that British Soldiers Asserting the rights of the State, the Laws of the Land, the being of the Constitution, will meet all Events with becoming fortitude. They will court Victory with the Spirit

¹¹⁷ PGW:RW, 1:289-90.

their cause inspires; and, from the same Motive will find the patience of Martyrs under misfortune.¹¹⁸

The next day, Washington authorized Reed to send orders to the Massachusetts government “to order the Officers now at Watertown, together with those at Cape-Ann, to be confined in Northampton jail” for equal treatment. However, this policy, which Reed called “very contrary to [Washington’s] disposition,” was soon rescinded.¹¹⁹ Instead, on 19 August the commander-in-chief sent Gen. Gage another letter, again drafted by Reed, which closed: “I shall now, Sir, close my Correspondence with you, perhaps forever. If your Officers, our Prisoners, receive a Treatment from me, different from what I wish to shew them, they and you will remember the Occasion of it.”¹²⁰

In fact, Gen. Gage did not have authorization from London to treat the men captured at Bunker Hill as prisoners of war, recognizing officers’ rank and making them all eligible for exchange or parole. He had agreed to a small trade of captives on 6 June, but the bloody battle had hardened his attitude.¹²¹ The British commanders also did not have a strong incentive to worry about prisoner treatment since relatively few British soldiers were still unwillingly in American hands.

A month after this exchange, Gen. Washington learned that twenty of the thirty-one provincials captured at Bunker Hill had died of their wounds or jailhouse diseases.¹²² His exchange of letters had been futile as diplomacy, but proved more useful as propaganda when the Continental Congress ordered the letters to be published in October.¹²³ By the end of the year each side held more of the other’s men, captured mostly in the invasion of Canada (see chapter 16) or at sea (see chapter 12), but the Crown was still reluctant to authorize exchanges that implicitly recognized the American army.

Washington’s further attempts at exchanges therefore involved individual men not captured in battle and not legally connected to the military. After Bunker Hill, the British army evidently found letters conveying sensitive information on Dr. Joseph Warren’s body and deduced that they had come from a Boston schoolteacher with the initials “J.L.” Authorities arrested both John Leach and James Lovell. After a few weeks, they determined that Lovell was their culprit.¹²⁴ Though his father and brothers were Loyalists working

¹¹⁸ PGW:RW, 1:301-2.

¹¹⁹ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:328.

¹²⁰ PGW:RW, 1:327.

¹²¹ *American Archives*, series 4, 2:920.

¹²² *Pennsylvania Packet*, 25 September 1775.

¹²³ *Providence Gazette*, 14 October 1775. *Boston News-Letter*, 19 October 1775. The British government also published the first two letters in London, but not the third.

¹²⁴ Leach’s account is “A Journal Kept by John Leach, During His Confinement by the British, in Boston Gaol,” NEHGR, 19:255-63.

closely with the Crown, Lovell was kept confined in the Boston jail in difficult conditions (for a gentleman—it is clear that working-class prisoners were treated worse).

During the siege Gen. Washington received pleas to exchange a prisoner for Lovell, but saw difficulties in doing so. The commander did not wish to concede that the man had been spying. (Indeed, if Lovell had been corresponding only with Warren, there was no way to know what information he had provided and under what arrangement.) Washington also insisted that it was appropriate to exchange Lovell only for a civilian held by the American forces. In a 23 October letter to the selectmen of Boston, Joseph Reed passed along the general's suggestion that Lovell be traded for Terrence McDermott, who was, the secretary noted, a "Friend of Colo. Robinson"—perhaps Col. James Robertson, the British barrackmaster-general.¹²⁵

McDermott had arrived in Philadelphia from Ireland in August as a gentleman volunteer or cadet traveling with Maj. Christopher French, Ens. John Rotton, and a shipment of redcoat uniforms. The Philadelphia Committee of Safety had arrested all three men and sent them north for the commander-in-chief to interrogate or use as bargaining chips.¹²⁶ Washington ordered these prisoners to be held at Hartford, far from the siege lines; apparently he considered them to be yet another potential headache.

For months Maj. French sent Washington formal letters demanding more respectful treatment, the privilege to wear his sword, and so on. After a couple of replies, Washington turned this correspondence over to aides.¹²⁷ On 10 February 1776 Stephen Moylan replied to French's request to return to Ireland:

I am also commanded to tell you that the General is surprised a gentleman of Major French's good sense and knowledge should make such a request. Let him compare his situation with that of such gentlemen of ours who by the fortune of war have fallen into the hands of their enemy. What has been their treatment? Thrown into a loathsome prison and afterward sent in irons to England. I repeat—let the Major compare his treatment with theirs and then say whether he has cause to repine at his fate.¹²⁸

By this time Washington and his staff were considering the dire, and somewhat exaggerated, reports of how the British army was treating Ethan Allen, captured in Canada in September, and the captains of privateer vessels.

¹²⁵ PGW:RW, 2:234-5.

¹²⁶ PGW:RW, 2:234-5, 1:311-2. Webb, *Correspondence and Journals*, 1:101. See also Washington's expense notation on 7 September 1775.

¹²⁷ For complete details, see Sheldon S. Cohen, "The Connecticut Captivity of Major Christopher French," *Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin*, 55 (1990), 124-232.

¹²⁸ Quoted in Griffin, *Stephen Moylan*, 30. Eventually the task of replying to French might even have been handed off to Washington's nephew, George Lewis; see section 7.6.

Back on 19 November and again on 6 December Lovell had written desperate letters to Washington describing how he had been charged with spying, a capital offense. Lovell said that Gen. Howe's aide Capt. Nisbet Balfour had suggested he be exchanged for Col. Philip Skene, the royal governor of Crown Point and Ticonderoga, and his son.¹²⁹ Washington passed the first of these two letters on to John Hancock on 18 December noting again "the impropriety of exchanging a Soldier for a Citizen."¹³⁰ In the end, there was no exchange for Lovell during the siege. The British army carried him to Halifax in chains, and traded him for Skene only in July 1776.¹³¹

¹²⁹ PGW:RW, 2:400-1, 501-2.

¹³⁰ PGW:RW, 2:574-5.

¹³¹ After being freed, Lovell became a Massachusetts delegate to the Continental Congress. He was a notable figure in the history of American intelligence as head of the foreign affairs committee and deviser of impractical diplomatic codes. See *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, 14:31-48.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MANAGING COUNTERINTELLIGENCE

Gen. Washington knew when he came to Cambridge that he needed intelligence about the British military's forces and plans, but he appears to have paid less attention to guarding his own military information from agents of the Crown. He and the local authorities were well aware that there were Loyalists in the Massachusetts countryside, though far fewer than before the war. But they apparently felt that the years of political arguments had identified those supporters of the Crown, so they could be watched and kept away from the siege lines and from sensitive information.

Neither Washington nor the men of the Continental Congress appear to have been mentally prepared for the possibility that their cause would be betrayed from within. When they realized late in September 1775 that that had happened, they discovered that they did not have the legal system in place to deal with the problem. In the final months of that year, the headquarters staff became notably more concerned about British spies and agents in Massachusetts and elsewhere in North America.

14.1 THE WOMAN WITH THE CODED LETTER

Washington's most troubling intelligence problem during the siege of Boston, as well as the best documented and most studied, began when Gen. Nathanael Greene brought two men from Rhode Island to the commander's headquarters. One was Adam Maxwell, a Scottish schoolteacher whom Greene had paid for tutoring in basic Latin and geometry fifteen years before.¹ The other was a Newport baker named Godfrey Wenwood.² The men came to Greene with a 26 September letter from Henry Ward, Secretary of the province of Rhode Island, urging "the strictest inquiry" into their story:

In July last, a woman, with whom Mr. Wainwood had an acquaintance in Boston, came to his house and wanted him to assist her in procuring an opportunity of seeing Mr. Dudley or Captain Wallace; and by all her behaviour showed that she had some secret of consequence. He artfully drew from her that she had been sent from Cambridge with a letter to be delivered to either of the persons named, to be forwarded to Boston. It immediately occurred to him that the letter was probably sent from some traitor in our army. Upon which, he started every

¹ PNG, 1:14, 50.

² Wenwood spelled his name "Wainwood" in early newspaper advertisements, and that spelling appeared in many legal documents, but from the 1770s on he usually presented himself as "Wenwood".

difficulty in the way of her seeing Dudley or Wallace, that he could think of, and finally prevailed upon her to intrust him with the delivery of the letter. He kept the affair to himself for some time, being at a loss what step he should take in it; and at length imparted the secret to Mr. Maxwell, who, upon opening the letter, found it written in characters which he did not understand.³

The letter was addressed on the outside to “Major Cane in Boston, on his magistry’s sarvice”—Maj. Edward Cane of the 43rd Regiment.⁴ “Mr. Dudley” was the Collector of Customs in Newport, and “Captain Wallace” the commander of the warship *Rose*, then patrolling Newport harbor. Obviously, conveying a coded letter from Cambridge, location of the American headquarters, to British officials was suspicious. Ward had advised Maxwell to leave Wenwood in Dedham while he visited Greene so that no Boston refugees would recognize the baker and suspect that something was up. Nevertheless, Wenwood was with Greene when they went to Washington’s headquarters.

Washington and all the other officials who wrote about this case took care not to mention the name of the woman “sent from Cambridge” with the suspicious letter. Contemporaneous remarks show that people understood she had been in a relationship with Wenwood before taking a new lover in the Boston area. It is possible to identify her, therefore, by following the trail of Godfrey Wenwood.

In a 1772 naturalization petition to the Rhode Island legislature, Wenwood identified himself as “a Native of the Kingdom of Prussia, but hath for several Years resided in this Colony, with his Family, and acquired some Estate therein.”⁵ He had arrived in Newport in 1764 advertising himself as “Godfrey Wainwood, Late from London,” in the 10 December 1764 *Newport Mercury*. When Wenwood died in 1816, newspapers reported he was “aged 77,” meaning he was born about 1739 and thus about twenty-five years old when he came to America.⁶

Soon after settling in Newport, Godfrey Wenwood married a woman named Mary Butler on 17 January 1765.⁷ By 1768 he was established enough to advertise for an escaped

³ PNG, 1:125. The letter is visible at <<http://memory.loc.gov/mss/mgw/mgw4/033/0700/0754.jpg>> and <<http://memory.loc.gov/mss/mgw/mgw4/033/0700/0755.jpg>>. On 23 October, the Rev. Dr. Ezra Stiles later wrote that the woman added the address to the outside of the letter when she handed it to Wenwood. However, Stiles had secondhand information that was incorrect in other details. Stiles, *Literary Diary*, 1:628.

⁴ Howe, *Orderly Book*, 41, 108. Some sources identify this officer as Lt. Col. Maurice Cane of the 6th Regiment. He had been promoted to lieutenant colonel over a decade earlier. *Scots Magazine*, 24:452.

⁵ *Records of the Rhode Island General Assembly, session begun August 1772*, 28. See also *Connecticut Gazette*, 2 October 1805.

⁶ *Providence Patriot*, 5 October 1816.

⁷ No record of the wedding of Godfrey Wenwood and Mary Butler has been found, but that date is stated in Rhode Island Supreme Court (“Superior Court of Judicature, Court of Assize, and General Goal Delivery”) Record Book, Vol. F (1772-1795), page 101; Rhode Island Supreme Court Judicial Record Center, Pawtucket, Rhode Island.

slave.⁸ In the summer of 1774 the Wenwoods' marriage broke up. The 22 August *Newport Mercury* included Godfrey's announcement that Mary "(for reasons to me unknown) has eloped from my bed and board; and stripped my house of sundry articles much to my prejudice." The ad went on to standard legal language disclaiming all debts Mary might contract. That September the county court granted Godfrey a divorce, stating it was "fully proved" that Mary had "absented herself from his Bed and board, committed Adultery and cohabited with other Men."⁹

Mary may have returned to Newport to retrieve winter clothing. In January 1775 Godfrey placed this advertisement in the *Boston Post-Boy*:

Whereas a certain pretended Lady, now known and called by the name of Mary Wenwood, formerly called Mary Butler, a Native of Marblehead, a very lusty Woman much pitted with the Small-Pox, who generally wears the best of Cloathing, did some Time past, take, steal and carry away from my Dwelling-House in Newport, a Woman's red Broad Cloth Cloak and Head, a Muff and Tippet, a Silk Shirt, and sundry other Articles.---I do hereby offer a Reward of the said Sum of Twelve Dollars to any Person or Persons who will apprehend the said Mary and confine her in his Majesty's Goal in Newport, exclusive of all reasonable Charges, that he or they may be reasonably at in performing the same.¹⁰

By running that advertisement in that newspaper rather than in his own colony's press, Godfrey showed that he believed Mary to be in or near Boston. It may be coincidence, but the 14 December 1775 *New-England Chronicle* reported that the Cambridge post office was holding mail for a woman named Mary Butler—Mary Wenwood's maiden name.

Mary Wenwood was therefore most likely the "woman, with whom Mr. Wainwood had an acquaintance in Boston," who visited him from Cambridge in July 1775. Contemporaries who wrote about the baker and the unnamed woman implied they had been lovers, not mentioning a dissolved marriage. James Warren called the woman "an infamous hussey," and Wenwood "a friend of hers."¹¹ The Rev. Ezra Stiles of Newport called her "a Girl of Pleasure," and said "her former Enamorato" Wenwood "had known her in Boston."¹² But if

⁸ *Newport Mercury*, 15 August 1768. In 1781 Wenwood bought another slave, named Robert or Bob, with a promise to free him after seven or nine years of labor. This man escaped to abolitionist Philadelphia in 1789. See Sweet, *Bodies Politic*, 255-6.

⁹ Rhode Island Supreme Court Record Book, F:101. The records do not preserve Mary's side of the divorce. Aside from the decree itself, the only surviving paperwork is an invitation for her to appear in court and respond to Godfrey's accusations, which on 26 September 1774 the Newport County sheriff reported that he could not deliver because she "was not to be found within my Precinct"; "Wainwood v. Wainwood, 1774" file, Rhode Island Supreme Court Judicial Record Center, Pawtucket, Rhode Island.

¹⁰ *Boston Post-Boy*, 30 January 1775.

¹¹ James Warren to John Adams, 1 October 1775, PJA, 3:178.

¹² Entries for 2 and 23 October 1775 in Stiles, *Literary Diary*, 1:618-9, 628.

Wenwood had received the letter from a former lover instead of a former wife, he would have had *two* partners who had both become other men's mistresses and moved to greater Boston while occasionally returning to Newport. It seems more likely that Warren, Stiles, and other observers were working with incomplete information or choosing to derogate Mary Wenwood.

Whatever emotions remained from their former relationship, in late July 1775 the woman from Cambridge left Godfrey Wenwood with a coded letter and instructions to pass it on to royal officials. The baker worried enough to ask schoolteacher Maxwell for his advice. On 2 October Ezra Stiles recalled, "I remember some Weeks ago Mr Maxwell ask me whether I could decypher Characters—& said he believed there would be some occasion for a decypherer to detect an illicit Correspondence in the Army."¹³ What finally prompted Wenwood and Maxwell to approach a Patriot official, nearly two months after the woman's visit to Newport, was her note asking after it:

I much wonder you never Sent wot you promest to send. If you Did Inever reseve it so pray Lett me know By the first orpurtnty wen you expet to be hear & at the Same time whether you ever sent me that & wether you ever Got a answer from my sister I am alitle unesey that you never rote . . . Direct your Lettr. to mr Ewerd Horton Living on Mr. Aapthorps farm in Littel Cambrig¹⁴

If the woman had tried to appear innocent by suggesting that the letter was meant for "my sister," that probably made Wenwood even more suspicious; earlier, she had said she was delivering the letter for someone else. Furthermore, the fact that the woman guessed he had never sent the letter meant that somehow she was receiving information from Boston.

Having heard the Rhode Islanders' story and examined their documents, Gen. Washington sent Wenwood to "Little Cambridge," the part of the town on the other side of the Charles River. There was indeed an "Edward Horton" (also listed as "Edmund Horton") living there in 1776.¹⁵ The woman might have been living with him, or he might simply have been a neighbor collecting her mail. As James Warren expressed it, Wenwood's mission was "to draw from the Girl, by Useing the Confidence She had in him, the whole Secret." He failed. "She is a suttle, shrewd Jade," said Warren.¹⁶

¹³ Stiles, *Literary Diary*, 1:618-9.

¹⁴ This letter is part of Washington's wartime papers, linked to the name Wainwood, and can be viewed at <<http://memory.loc.gov/mss/mgw/mgw4/034/0200/0254.jpg>>. It is quoted in full (with a slightly different transcription) in Bakeless, *Turncoats, Traitors and Heroes*, 14.

¹⁵ Paige, *History of Cambridge*, 429, 447.

¹⁶ PJA, 3:178. Washington's 5 October report to the Congress left out this step; instead, he wrote, "I immediately secured the woman."

Washington then ordered the woman to be brought to headquarters. In his biography of the general, Washington Irving said that Gen. Israel Putnam carried out this task in dramatic fashion:

Tradition gives us a graphic scene connected with her arrest. Washington was in his chamber at head-quarters, when he beheld from his window, General Putnam approaching on horseback, with a stout woman *en croupe* behind him. He had pounced upon the culprit. The group presented by the old general and his prize, overpowered even Washington's gravity. It was the only occasion throughout the whole campaign on which he was known to laugh heartily. He had recovered his gravity by the time the delinquent was brought to the foot of the broad staircase in head-quarters, and assured her in a severe tone from the head of it, that, unless she confessed everything before the next morning, a halter would be in readiness for her.

So far the tradition;. . .¹⁷

This anecdote is consistent with other stories about Putnam (see section 11.2), but there is no contemporaneous evidence for it, especially for the detail of Washington laughing in his own bedroom. Even Irving was dubious, twice labeling it "tradition."

A contemporaneous description of the woman's arrest comes from James Warren's letter to John Adams: "She was then Taken into Custody, and Brought to the Generals Quarters that Night. It was not till the next day that any thing could be got from her."¹⁸ According to the Rev. William Gordon, then at Roxbury, the woman's lover, "not being suspected, had an opportunity of speaking to her, so that she would not discover the writer, till terrified into it by the severest threats."¹⁹ A few days later an officer in the Roxbury camp passed on another rumor: the "Girl. . .after an Examination and 4 Hours under guard Confessd."²⁰ The commander himself told the Congress: "for a long time she was proof against every threat and perswasion to discover the Author, however at length she was brought to a confession."²¹ The man who had given her the coded letter, she said, was Dr. Benjamin Church, a leader of the Massachusetts Whigs, a representative from Boston to the Massachusetts legislature, and the Surgeon-General of the American army.

14.2 THE BETRAYAL OF BENJAMIN CHURCH

Gen. Washington had met Church in June when the doctor came to Philadelphia as a liaison between the Massachusetts Provincial Congress and the Continental Congress. During that

¹⁷ Irving, *Life of George Washington*, 1:400. George Washington Greene retold the story in *Life of Nathanael Greene*, 1:120.

¹⁸ PJA, 3:178.

¹⁹ Gordon, *History of the Rise. . .*, 2:135.

²⁰ "Letters of Ebenezer Huntington, 1774-1781," *American Historical Review*, 5 (1900), 705-6.

²¹ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:956-8.

visit Dr. Church had impressed delegates enough that they later unanimously chose him to be the army's first Surgeon-General (see section 15.8). Washington had met him again during his ride through Massachusetts in early July; the Provincial Congress had chosen the doctor and Moses Gill to welcome the new generals to the colony (see section 3.7).

Early in the war, Dr. Church had been working out of the Hastings house beside Harvard Yard as a member of the Massachusetts Committee of Safety. He remained a member of the Massachusetts legislature in July, meeting Washington at least once in that capacity.²² After taking the job of overseeing the army's medical wing, Church spent most of his time in the main hospital set up in Penelope Vassall's house. Between his proximity to the commander's headquarters and his place near the center of Massachusetts political organizing, Dr. Church was privy to many secrets of the American forces. Immediately after the new generals arrived in Cambridge, Dr. Church agreed to send a letter into Boston for Gen. Lee—which might have allowed him to slip in his own correspondence as well.²³ Washington and Reed might well have thought back to the document they had sent to their agent John Carnes in Boston on 28 July (see section 13.2): it was a letter from Church, meaning that the doctor already had one foot inside their espionage network.²⁴

Through the middle of September the army had been holding a series of inquiries about Dr. Church's dealings, intended to establish his standing over regimental surgeons (see section 15.8). On 19 September he had asked for leave to visit his family in Taunton, and the next day he had sent Washington his resignation. On 24 September adjutant general Horatio Gates replied:

I am directed by his Excellency the General to inform you that his unwillingness to part with a good officer alone prevents his complying with your request, in your letter of the 20th instant. He desires you would stay with your family some time longer, and if there is then no prospect of its being in such a situation as to permit you to return to your duty, you will receive a discharge pursuant to your letter.²⁵

The commander-in-chief had thus confirmed his trust in his Surgeon-General less than a week before. Now he faced evidence that Dr. Church was secretly corresponding with an enemy officer.

Washington's first step was to send a note to two of Church's colleagues in the Massachusetts House: James Warren, speaker, and Joseph Hawley, a respected older

²² *American Archives*, series 4, 3:31.

²³ Freeman, *George Washington*, 3:487-8.

²⁴ Dr. Church could have used his letter to expose Washington's secret agent inside Boston without even knowing the person's identity. Most likely, however, the doctor had simply asked to use this convenient channel to get a note into Boston for his own purposes.

²⁵ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:780.

legislator from Northampton. In doing so, the general made clear that he was working with the civil authorities and within the law, not arbitrarily using military force against an elected official. According to Warren, “We all thought the Suspicion quite sufficient to Justify an Arrest of him and his Papers, which was done.” Joseph Reed reported Church’s arrest in a letter dated 29 September.²⁶ William Tudor told John Adams that it happened the next day: “To our great Astonishment the Surgeon General was this forenoon put under an Arrest for Corresponding with the Army in Boston.”²⁷

At first, according to the Rev. William Gordon, Church made an “attempt to conceal the writer, instead of declaring at once who he was, what was his design, and what he had written,” which made him appear more guilty.²⁸ When challenged, the doctor admitted to Washington that he had written the coded letter and sent it through the woman. He had addressed it to Maj. Cane to ensure it got through British checkpoints, he said, but it was in fact meant for his sister Alice’s husband, printer John Fleeming. As Warren told the story:

He owns the writeing and sending the Letter. Says it was for Flemming in Answer to one he wrote to him, and is Calculated, by Magnifying the Numbers of the Army, their regularity, their provisions and Ammunition &c, to do great Service to us. He declares his Conduct tho’ Indiscreet was not wicked.²⁹

The doctor’s brother, Edward Church, asked to see the letter from their brother-in-law. Dr. Church “cou’d not tell what was become of it,” the younger Church told Josiah Quincy.³⁰ Washington asked for the key to the code. Church could not produce it, and it did not turn up in his confiscated papers. The doctor assured Washington that the letter, “when decyphered would be found to contain nothing criminal.”³¹ However, he had no explanation for why he had kept this message secret from everyone in the army. Washington ordered that Dr. Church be confined to his quarters in the army hospital.³²

²⁶ Reed, *Life and Correspondence*, 1:120. Reed told a relative: “I have perused the most intimate and confidential letters wrote to” Church. However, Reed did not discuss those letters’ content beyond how they did not show the Massachusetts Whigs pushing for independence or another radical change in governance.

²⁷ PJA, 3:174. Josiah Quincy of Braintree, citing a conversation with Dr. Church’s brother Edward, also wrote that the doctor had been taken into custody on the afternoon of 30 September; Quincy to James Bowdoin, 1 October 1775, MHSC, series 6, 9:388. Church dated his close confinement from 30 September when he addressed the Massachusetts House on 27 October. Months later, however, he wrote that he had been “put under arrest, in Cambridge, on the 27th of September”; *American Archives*, series 4, 4:531.

²⁸ Gordon, *History of the Rise . . .*, 2:135.

²⁹ PJA, 3:178.

³⁰ MHSC, series 6, 9:388.

³¹ PGW:RW, 2:99.

³² While living in Penelope Vassall’s house, the doctor carved “B. Church, Jr.” on the outside of a second-story closet door; Winsor, *Memorial History of Boston*, 3:111.

American officials scrambled to find someone capable of figuring out what the letter said. On 30 September Greene wrote back to Henry Ward with the news of Church's arrest and a request:

There is no person here that can decipher it. I have sent Mr Gouch express for Mr Silas Downer who I am informd is very expert at deciphering. Youl be so good as to provide him a horse and furnish him with money and send him to Camp as soon as possible. Must intreat you not disclose the subjects of Mr Downers business to any Person until you hear farther from me except to Governor Cook. If the Letter contains nothing criminal it will be a pity to ruin his publick Character, but let the contents be what it will, he deserves punishment for his imprudence, to carry on such a Correspondence without the commander in chiefs being made acquainted with it.³³

Three days later, Council member James Bowdoin wrote from Middleborough: "An excellent decypherer, if there be none nearer, may be found at Salem, I mean Mr Oliver."³⁴ The headquarters staff gave one copy of Church's letter to the Rev. Samuel West of Dartmouth (later New Bedford), an army chaplain known equally for his intellect and his absent-mindedness.³⁵ When West visited Washington's headquarters to deliver his results, his friend Robert Pierpont (1712-1786) informed the general that the minister had lost his horse, and Joseph Reed loaned him one to get home.³⁶

Meanwhile, on 1 October Elbridge Gerry urged Elisha Porter, a representative from Hadley whom he knew to be "expert in decyphering," to offer his services to Gen. Washington. That same Sunday, Gerry started a letter to Continental Congress delegate Robert Treat Paine with the news about Church. On Monday, Porter received a copy of the letter. Soon Gerry could add a postscript to his letter to Paine:

the Letter (I am informed by Colo. [Joseph] Palmer) is decyphered; the Contents respect the State of the Army, the Quantity of powder now in our possession,

³³ PNG, 1:127-8.

³⁴ MHSC, series 6, 9:389.

³⁵ "Anecdotes of Unitarian Divines," *Harper's Magazine*, 31:231-2.

³⁶ The Rev. Samuel Spring, chaplain on Col. Benedict Arnold's expedition (see section 16.5), had taken West's horse by mistake. James Warren told West that he should try to keep the horse that Reed assigned to him. This was the sort of minor matter that Washington and his staff disliked having to deal with. Though Reed did not have the authority to transfer that property to West, he allowed the minister to use the horse indefinitely. See West to Washington, 11 October 1775, and Reed to West, 17 October 1775, PGW:RW, 2:142-4.

what is expected & where, together with other Intelligence of a black & treacherous Nature.³⁷

As confirmation, West's and Porter's decipherings matched exactly.

Church had used a substitution cipher, with each letter of the alphabet replaced by a particular symbol. That meant that the most common symbols in his long message corresponded to the most common letters in English prose. He had left no spaces between the symbols to disguise the lengths of his words, but West and Porter could still determine which signs most likely represented E, T, A, O, and then the rest of the alphabet.³⁸

The beginning and end of the letter were very bad for Church:

I hope this will reach you—three Attempts have I made without Success in effecting the last the Man was discovered in attempting his Escape, but fortunately my Letter was sewed in the Waisband of his Breeches, he was confined a few Days, during which Time you may guess my feelings. but a little Art and a little Cash settled the Matter. . . .

I wish you could contrive to write me largely in cipher by the way of New Port, addressed to Thomas Richards Mercht inclose it in a Cover to me intimating that I am a perfect Stranger to you, but being recommended to you as a Gentleman of Honour you took the Liberty to inclose that Letter, intreating me to deliver it as directed, the Person as you are inform'd being at Cambridge. Sign some fictitious Name. this you may send to some Confidential Friend at New Port to be delivered to me at Watertown. make Use of every Precaution, or I Perish.

Clearly the doctor was going to great lengths to keep this correspondence secret, exploiting and corrupting people on the American side of the siege lines. He obviously knew that what he was doing could be punishable by death.

The middle of the letter read differently, however. Most would have fit well into a newspaper essay enthusiastically describing how the Continental Army could not help but triumph over its corrupt foe:

The People of Connecticut are raving in the Cause of Liberty. . . . the Jersies are not a Whit behind Connecticut in Zeal. the Philadelphians exceed them both. I saw 2200 Men in Review there by Generall Lee consisting of Quakers & other Inhabitants in Uniform, with 1000 Riffle men and 40 Horse who together made a most war-like Appearance. I mingled freely and frequently with the Members of

³⁷ Paine, *Papers*, 3:88. It is possible that Gerry's "Colo. Palmer" should be "Colo. Porter." Some authors say that Gerry deciphered the letter with Porter. Austin, *Life of Elbridge Gerry*, 1:32-3, went so far as to say that Gerry had deciphered the letter alone and before West, but that the resentment of "the military gentlemen in whose custody Dr. Church was confined," combined with "the events of a later time, in which the parties were brought into unhappy collision"—i.e., the party politics of the early republic—had robbed Gerry of credit. However, Gerry's own words suggest he helped only a little.

³⁸ Porter's translation with a key to the cipher can be seen at <<http://memory.loc.gov/mss/mgw/mgw4/034/0200/0277.jpg>>.

the Continental Congress they were united, determined in Opposition and appeared assured of Success, now to come Home. The Opposition is become formidable—18 Thousand Men brave & determined with Washington and Lee at their Head are no contemptible Enemy. Adjutant General Gates is indefatigable in arranging the Army—Provisions are very plenty. Cloaths are manufacturing in almost every Town for the Soldiers. 20 tons of powder lately arrived at Philadelphia Connecticut & Providence. upwards of 20 tons are now in Camp. Salt Petre is made in every Colony. . . .

for the Sake of the miserable convulsed Empire solicit peace, repeal the Acts, or Britain is undone. this Advice is the Result of warm Affection to my King & to the Realm. Remember I never deceived you—every Article here sent you is sacredly true. . . . A view to Independance gr[ows] more & more General—should Britain declare War against the Colonies they are lost forever.³⁹

In fact, saltpeter and gunpowder were in short supply, and the army around Massachusetts did not number 18,000. American political writers had been making similar boasts about solid unity and vast supplies for several months, trying to convince the British government to back down. Like Church, they had long expressed a desire to remain within the Empire as long as colonial autonomy was restored. If the doctor was sharing valuable information with the enemy, he was doing so in an exceptionally subtle manner.

14.3 AN EMERGENCY COUNCIL OF WAR

Having received at least one copy of the translation, the commander-in-chief summoned his generals for a council at headquarters. He also, he reported to Congress, “in the mean time had all his [Dr. Church’s] papers searched, but found nothing criminal among them. But it appeared on inquiry that a confidant had been among the papers before my messenger arrived.” This might have been Edward Church, searching for evidence to exonerate his brother, or a still unknown confederate. More likely, the doctor had already destroyed or removed incriminating documents in connection to his recent trip to Taunton, when he tried to resign.

Generals Ward, Lee, Putnam, Spencer, Heath, Sullivan, Greene, Thomas, and Gates gathered at Washington’s Cambridge headquarters on Tuesday, 3 October. According to Joseph Reed’s official minutes:

The General communicated to the Board a Discovery of a Correspondence carried on with the Enemy by Dr Church by Letter in Characters which was decyphered by the Revd Mr West & laid the sd Letters before the Members of this Council.

³⁹ PGW:RW, 2:103-5.

After considering & discussing the Matter it was determined to adjourn till tomorrow—& then that Dr Church be examined.⁴⁰

All the generals then reconvened and summoned Dr. Church.

Dr Church being sent for & shewn the Letter in Characters was asked—whether the sd Letter was written by him—To which he answered he believed it was.

He was then shewn the Explanation of sd Letter as decyphered—& asked whether it was a true one.

To which he answered in the Affirmative.

Dr Church then explained his Intentions in writing sd Letter as calculated to impress the Enemy with a strong Idea of our Strength & Situation in order to prevent an Attack at a Time when the Continental Army was in a great Want of Ammunition & in Hopes of effecting some speedy Accommodation of the present Dispute & made solemn Asseverations of his Innocence.

The General then asked the Opinion of the Council severally whether it did not appear that Dr Church had carried on a criminal Correspondence with the Enemy—to which they unanimously answered in the Affirmative.⁴¹

When Gen. Washington asked about a proper punishment for Dr. Church's behavior, however, the council discovered a quirk in the Articles of War that the Continental Congress had enacted on 30 June. Article 28 stated:

Whosoever, belonging to the Continental Army, shall be convicted of holding correspondence with, or of giving intelligence to the enemy, either directly or indirectly, shall suffer such punishment as by a General Court-Martial shall be ordered.

The previous article held that anyone who gave the enemy “Money, Victuals, or Ammunition” was also liable to court-martial. However, Article 51 limited what such a court-martial could do:

That no persons shall be sentenced by a Court-Martial to suffer death, except in the cases expressly mentioned in the foregoing Articles; nor shall any punishment be inflicted at the discretion of a Court-Martial, other than degrading, cashiering, drumming out of the Army, whipping not exceeding thirty-nine lashes, fine not exceeding two months pay of the offender, imprisonment not exceeding one month.

Only three of the “foregoing Articles” mentioned death as a punishment: for abandoning a post (Article 25), confusing the watchword system (26), and compelling a commander to

⁴⁰ PGW:RW, 2:83.

⁴¹ PGW:RW, 2:83.

surrender (31).⁴² The Congress had been more worried about cowardice and incompetence than espionage or treason.

Legally, therefore, a court-martial could remove Dr. Church from his position as Surgeon-General, perhaps adding the ceremony of “drumming out of the Army” and even a whipping—though those penalties were meant for enlisted men, not gentlemen like Church. But the army could not hang Dr. Church as a traitor and spy, even if the evidence were solid enough. In fact, it could not lock him up for more than a month.

Washington and his generals therefore decided not to reach a determination on Church at all, but to turn the question over to the civil government. Reed wrote:

it was determined, from the enormity of the crime, and the very inadequate punishment pointed out, that it should be referred to the General Congress, for their special direction; and that in the mean time he be closely confined, and no person visit him but by special direction.

On 9 October Gerry reported to Samuel Adams: “Doctor Church. . .is confined under a guard of fifty men, without being permitted to communicate with any one.”⁴³

14.4 RUMORS AND REACTIONS

Naturally, the American camp buzzed with rumors about the coded letter and Dr. Church’s arrest. One aspect of the case that intrigued many people was the relationship between Church and the woman who had carried his letter to Newport. In his 1 October letter to Paine, Elbridge Gerry referred to her as “a Girl at little Cambridge (*whom you have probably heard of*).”⁴⁴ James Warren told John Adams that the trouble started with “The Doctor haveing formed an Infamous Connection, with an Infamous Hussey to the disgrace of his own reputation, and probable ruin of his Family.”⁴⁵ Ezra Stiles noted that the woman had carried the letter to Newport “in her stocking on her Leg.”⁴⁶ An officer in the Roxbury camp wrote: “the Plot was discovered by his Miss who is now with Child by him and he owns himself the father (for he has Dismissed his Wife).”⁴⁷

Dr. Church had been notorious for extramarital affairs for years. The pro-Crown October 1769 *Boston Chronicle*, co-published by John Fleeming, hinted at revelations of his life “in the marital state.”⁴⁸ A privately circulated handwritten key to this publication said

⁴² JCC, 2:116, 119.

⁴³ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:0994.

⁴⁴ Paine, *Papers*, 3:86.

⁴⁵ PJA, 3:178.

⁴⁶ Stiles, *Literary Diary*, 1:618-9.

⁴⁷ “Letters of Ebenezer Huntington,” *American Historical Review*, 5:705-6. There is no confirmation that the woman was pregnant.

⁴⁸ *Boston Chronicle*, 23-26 October 1769.

that he had “more than once foxed his Wife.”⁴⁹ Church’s colleagues started to criticize his womanizing only after his mistress had helped to expose his double-dealing.⁵⁰

Many of Church’s colleagues were astonished at his betrayal, and looked for exculpatory explanations. Before knowing the content of the deciphered letter, James Bowdoin speculated:

I cannot but hope that on strict enquiry he will turn out an honest man, notwithstanding appearances to ye contrary. Rather than think otherwise, I have indulged a conjecture that to answer some political purposes with regard to ye enemy, the discovery of a traitorous correspondence is only pretended, in order that by subjecting him to apparent inconveniency on acco. of it, he might be ye better qualified to act ye part of a spy, if disposed to undertake in so hazardous a business.⁵¹

After seeing what Church had written, Gen. Charles Lee told John Adams:

I call it astonishing, for admitting his intentions not to be criminal so gross a piece of stupidity in so sensible a Man is quite a portent. And supposing him guilty, it is terrifying to the last degree—as such a revolt must naturally infect with jealousy all political affiance. It will spread an universal diffidence and suspicion than which nothing can be more pernicious to Men embark’d in a cause like ours, the corner stone of Which is laid not only on honour virtue and disinterestedness⁵²

In a letter to commissary general Joseph Trumbull, Washington’s secretary Joseph Reed still expressed sympathy: “Poor Doctor *Church* is certainly ruined.”⁵³ Whig political philosophy held that the temptations of power would inevitably corrupt some individuals, like the royal officials they were fighting. But they had not expected that the same forces would act so quickly on one of their own.

The wives of the Massachusetts Patriot leaders seem to have been less surprised at Church’s treachery. They focused more concern on his wife, Sarah. Though she was an Englishwoman, and none of the circle of Patriot women seem to have been close to her, many were saddened by her plight. On 14 October Abigail Greenleaf told her uncle Robert Treat Paine: “His poor wife too is an object of the Pitty and Compasion of everyone. She still Loves him, tho he has treated her in so base a manner. If she looses her senses I think twill not be strange.”⁵⁴ Her mother added: “I want to know how she bears it.”⁵⁵ Abigail Adams

⁴⁹ Sparks, *Sparks Manuscripts*, 10:3:45-7, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

⁵⁰ For more on this point, see David Kiracofe, “Dr. Benjamin Church and the Dilemma of Treason in Revolutionary Massachusetts,” *New England Quarterly*, 70 (1997): 443-462.

⁵¹ MHSC, series 6, 9:389.

⁵² Letter dated 5 October 1775, PJA, 3:185.

⁵³ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:965.

⁵⁴ Paine, *Papers*, 3:97.

reassured herself by asking her husband: “What are your thoughts with regard to Dr. Church? Had you much knowledg of him? I think you had no intimate acquaintance with him.”⁵⁶

As for Gen. Washington, he was troubled by how Elbridge Gerry had sent a copy of the decoded letter to Robert Treat Paine in Philadelphia. Reed wrote a letter to James Warren “affirming that General Washington was exceedingly affronted” at Gerry’s action. On 4 October Gerry responded to Reed, hotly justifying his decisions and calling the complaint “meer Invective, rendered the more unjustifiable by ye Manner in which it was conveyed.”⁵⁷ Given all the rumors circulating, Washington could not have worried that Gerry’s letter to Philadelphia would tip off the doctor’s confederates. Rather, the general did not want members of the Congress to hear the bad news before he himself had reported on it and declared that the situation under control.

Godfrey Wenwood and Adam Maxwell returned home to Rhode Island. On 19 May 1776 Wenwood married seventeen-year-old Mary Campbell at the Trinity Church in Newport.⁵⁸ After the British military occupied Newport from 1776 to 1779 Maxwell complained that royal officials or Loyalists had harassed him because of his role in unmasking Church, and he moved to East Greenwich.⁵⁹ The Rhode Island legislature granted Wenwood small sums from the confiscated estates of two Loyalists, including merchant George Rome.⁶⁰ In 1800 the baker asked the U.S. Congress to compensate him for property lost to the British or reward him for his special service in 1775; apparently he hoped for a pension or steady government contract.⁶¹ Following Wenwood’s death in 1816, two of his daughters took over his business on Bannester’s Wharf.⁶² They also took over the task of petitioning Congress; from 1824 to 1847 they submitted requests for the family to be

⁵⁵ Paine, *Papers*, 3:102. Eventually Sarah Church left Massachusetts for England and petitioned successfully for a pension on the basis of her husband’s work as a spy; French, *General Gage’s Informers*, 158-9.

⁵⁶ Abigail Adams to John Adams, 21 October 1775, AFC, 1:306. She also passed on a refugee’s statement that “the Tories are much distressd about the fate of Dr. Church, and very anxious to obtain him, and would exchange [James] Lovel for him,” but nothing came of this (see section 13.9).

⁵⁷ Henkels, *Letters and Papers of Elbridge Gerry*, 82-3.

⁵⁸ Arnold, *Vital Record of Rhode Island*, 10:440, 473. Campbell’s age is calculated from the report of her death “in her 44th year of her age” in the *Rhode-Island Republican*, 15 May 1802. This couple had several children and what appears to have been a stable marriage.

⁵⁹ PNG, 1:14.

⁶⁰ Rhode Island, *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island*, 9:660.

⁶¹ *Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States*, 3:634. Mason, *Reminiscences of Newport*, 384.

⁶² Mason, *Annals of Trinity Church, Newport*, 167.

rewarded for their father's contribution to American counterespionage. Congressional committees expressed sympathy but declined to act.⁶³

Church's mistress disappears from all accounts of the investigation after she disclosed who had given her the coded letter. Gen. Washington evidently decided to keep her name out of his official report and paperwork. None of the surviving comments on the episode mention her name or identifying information. A Mary Wainwood of Rhode Island—perhaps the baker's former wife using her married name—was admitted four times into the Boston almshouse after 1785, and died there on 23 May 1797.⁶⁴

14.5 DR. CHURCH REFUSES TO GO QUIETLY

On 5 October Gen. Washington finally wrote out his report for John Hancock, president of the Congress. After discussing some other matters, he wrote: "I have now a painful tho' a necessary duty to perform, respecting Dr. Church, Director-General of the Hospital." He explained the arrival of Wenwood, the arrest and interrogation of the woman, Church's acknowledgment of the letter and insistence that it was innocent. The general enclosed copies of all the relevant documents, including the minutes of the Council of War. In conclusion, Washington wrote:

The Army & Country are exceedingly irritated & upon a free Discussion of the Nature, Circumstances & Consequence of this Matter it has been unanimously agreed to lay it before the Honbl. Congress for their special Advice, & direction. At the same Time suggesting to their Consideration, whether an Alteration of the 28th Article of War may not be necessary.⁶⁵

The commander-in-chief thus tried to hand the entire matter over to Congress.

Dr. Church continued to insist that he was innocent of anything but being too secret in his correspondence with his brother-in-law. After hearing from two medical colleagues that his letter had been deciphered, Church wrote to Washington himself:

Being informed by my Friend Drs McKnight & McHenry, that the indiscrete Letter is decyphered, and that notwithstanding the evident Tendency of the whole was to influence the Enemy to propose immediate Terms of Accommodation, yet I am censured and some sinister suspicions still entertained on Acct of some Passages contained therein—further to elucidate the matter I must beg your Excellency's Indulgence to represent a few facts . . .

⁶³ U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Revolutionary Claims, 29th Congress, 1st Session, report 26, 31 December 1845, on "Heirs of Godfrey Wenwood."

⁶⁴ Nellis and Cecere, *Eighteenth-Century Records of the Boston Overseers of the Poor*, 345, 362, 466, 471, 485, 535, 493, 618.

⁶⁵ PGW:RW, 2:99-100.

Church insisted that “I can honestly appeal to Heaven for the purity of my Intentions,” and closed with a request for “the magnanimous the compassionate General Washington to shield me from undeserved Infamy.”⁶⁶

On 10 October he wrote to Joseph Reed in even more flowery language, asking for what appears to be a conjugal visit:

Above all, Sir; let me whisper one Wish to your Heart: Under the Umbrage of the Evening, may not a fair Sufferer unbosom her Sorrows, and snatch Relief from the consoling Tongue of her tenderest Friend? Without wounding her delicacy without having Witnesses to the Effervescence of her Heart.⁶⁷

The headquarters staff did not act on this suggestion.

Washington had already sensed that the army and the surrounding populace were “exceedingly irritated” at Church’s apparent betrayal, and at the army’s lack of a decisive response. Not only was there no punishment for the doctor, but there was not even a trial scheduled. Unlike his colleagues in political organizing, the bulk of the people seem to have had little doubt about Church’s guilt. The ongoing military stalemate around Boston probably added to a sense of public frustration.

There was no more clarity in Philadelphia. On 14 October the Continental Congress voted to dismiss Church from his post as Surgeon-General—but took no other official action. As John Adams reported:

The Congress declined entering into any Discussion of the Evidence, or any Determination concerning his Guilt or the Nature of his Offence.

But in general they had a full Conviction that it was so gross an Imprudence at least and was so Suspicious, that it became them to dismiss him from their Service, which they did instantly.

The big problem was figuring out what Church had intended by the deciphered message. John Adams called it “the oddest Thing imaginable.”⁶⁸ His cousin Samuel stated, “To me it appears to be a very unintelligible Letter,” noting how the colonists’ “firmness and Resolution are picturd in high Colours,” yet “Other parts of his Letter wear a different Complection.”⁶⁹

On the morning of 14 October the Massachusetts House took some action. Dr. Church was still a member of that legislature, and Whig thinking frowned on the military controlling the elected government. At the request of the chamber, James Sullivan (1744-1808) of

⁶⁶ PGW:RW, 2:85-7. This letter can be viewed at <http://memory.loc.gov/mss/mgw/mgw4/034/0600/0667.jpg>.

⁶⁷ *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, 3:393, citing a letter at the New-York Historical Society.

⁶⁸ PJA, 3:208-9.

⁶⁹ LoD, 2:179.

Biddeford, younger brother of Gen. Sullivan, wrote a resolve asking Gen. Washington about Church's imprisonment:

Whereas this House hath been informed that *Benjamin Church*, Esquire, a member thereof, is now detained and imprisoned by his Excellency *George Washington*, Esquire, General and Commander-in-Chief of the Forces of the *United Colonies*; and the House being jealous of their privileges, and desirous to know the cause of said imprisonment: therefore,

Resolved, That the Speaker, Mr. *Sullivan*, and Major *Bliss*, be a Committee to apply to his Excellency *George Washington*, Esquire, requesting him, as soon as may be, to certify to this House the cause of the detention and imprisonment of the said *Benjamin Church*, Esq., that they may advise thereon.⁷⁰

It is unlikely that speaker James Warren let this happen without consulting Washington. The resolution was probably a bureaucratic tactic to move the action away from the military, which was limited by the Articles of War.

Church's response was to resign from the House on 23 October, and then to argue that the legislature no longer had any authority over him. The House refused to act on his resignation before the hearing. At ten o'clock on Friday, 27 October several officials appeared at Church's door: Gen. Gates and other army officers, Middlesex County sheriff James Prescott, and a messenger from the Massachusetts House. They brought a summons. According to Church, "I requested to be indulged with an opportunity to change my linen, which was indulged me, while the guard was parading, and the officer of my escort waited upon the General for his directions." A friend had offered his chaise, and Church and the messenger rode to Watertown surrounded by "a guard of twenty men, with drum and fife."⁷¹ The public could hardly miss that the authorities were doing something about Dr. Church at last.

When the procession reached the Watertown meeting-house, approximately three miles away, the legislature posted guards at the doors and let Church enter. He reported, "The galleries being opened upon this occasion, were thronged with a numerous collection of people of all ranks." The clerk read the resolution asking Gen. Washington why Church had been detained, the deciphered letter, and Reed's minutes of the council of war. Dr. Church then produced the letter from his brother-in-law Fleeming, which he said had been brought out of Boston "after my return from Philadelphia" by a woman who had departed with her "two children."⁷² The House then broke for midday dinner.

In the afternoon, members of the Massachusetts Council came into the meeting-house to hear Church's response to questions. Church rolled out arguments of all kinds. He

⁷⁰ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1464. John Bliss (1727-1809) represented Wilbraham.

⁷¹ Church's account of the hearing was published in MHSC, series 1, 1:84-94.

⁷² French, *General Gage's Informers*, 184.

complained the summons was too sudden, and that he should not be under military guard. He invoked “the rights of Magna Charta, and bill of rights.” He explained that he had enciphered his letter and sent it to Maj. Cane only because his brother-in-law had specified that method. He asked why no additional evidence against him had surfaced in the past month. He argued that he could not be convicted of corresponding with the enemy when the only correspondence in evidence had never actually reached the enemy. Four days after the hearing, Dr. Church wrote out his arguments at much greater length and erudition than the official transcript.

The judge advocate general, William Tudor (see section 5.7), was in the spectator gallery, and wrote to John Adams the next day about Church:

He made an artful and masterly Defence. He endeavoured to evade the Censure of the House by insisting, that as it would be before another Court that this Matter must have a final Issue, should the House proceed to expell him it would have a fatal Effect whenever a final Judgement should be given on his Conduct. . .

But it is impossible to write all he said. Let it suffice to acquaint You, That if the Force of Rhetorick and the Powers of Language, if the most Pathetick Arts of Persuasion, enforc'd by All the Ingenuity, Sense of Spirit of the Doctor could have made him innocent, he would have appear'd spotless as an Angel of Light. . .

The Candid think, the Doctor was frightened at the Length to which Matters had arriv'd, was dubious and fearful how they might terminate, and was sollicitous to secure a Retreat in Case of Necessity. But that he meant to provide for his own Safety, without Betraying the Interests of America. And that he is rather to be despiz'd for Timidity, than damn'd for Villainy.⁷³

Church's political colleagues were still seeking a way to explain his behavior beyond outright treachery.

James Warren reported to Adams what happened after Church was taken back to his quarters in Cambridge:

there was a Motion for a Suspension of any Judgement upon him, least it might Influence his Court or Jury upon his Trial. Another Motion that we should Accept a Resignation he had made by Letter, and accompany it with a resolve that should save our honour, and not Injure him in his Trial. The End of the whole matter was Appointing a Committee to report how to proceed.⁷⁴

That committee included Warren, Joseph Hawley, and Elbridge Gerry, who were all involved in the case already; Azor Orne of the Committee of Safety; and Benjamin Mills of the western town of Chesterfield.⁷⁵ According to Tudor, Hawley favored accepting Church's resignation,

⁷³ PJA, 3:259-61.

⁷⁴ PJA, 3:262.

⁷⁵ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1479.

“leaving Censure and Punishment to another Tribunal.” In contrast, Warren had already turned against the accused: the day before, he had written to Samuel Adams with deep criticism of Church’s “General Inattention and Unfeeling manner he discovered when he was among us. I used to Impute that to the Indolence of his Temper, but am now Convinced that it proceeded from the Wickedness of his Heart.”⁷⁶

On 2 November the House voted to expel Dr. Church, judging that in July he had tried “to carry on a secret correspondence with the enemy in Boston,” and that “before that time he had secretly communicated intelligence to the said enemy.”⁷⁷ Warren told John Adams that it was “almost an Unanimous Vote”—meaning that some legislators were still not convinced this was the best course.⁷⁸ Nine days later, the legislature also voted:

That the honourable the Council of this Colony be, and they hereby are desired to take suitable measures for causing the said Benjamin Church, in case of his being liberated from his present confinement, to be apprehended and secured, that such further measures, with respect to him, may be pursued, as the security of this people loudly demands, and the laws of this Colony will justify.⁷⁹

Without taking responsibility for Church’s continued imprisonment, the legislature endorsed that action.

At the same time, the Continental Congress had worked out a solution. On 7 November it revised the rules and regulations of its army. Now the first rule was: “All persons convicted of holding a treacherous correspondence with, or giving intelligence to the enemy, shall suffer death, or such other punishment as a general court-martial shall think proper.” The Congress also resolved:

That Dr. Church be close confined in some secure gaol in the colony of Connecticut, without the use of pen, ink, and paper, and that no person be allowed to converse with him, except in the presence and hearing of a Magistrate of the town, or the sheriff of the county where he shall be confined, and in the English language, until farther orders from this or a future Congress.⁸⁰

This removed Church from the theater of war, and from where resentment against him was probably highest. No American authority ever put the doctor on trial, convicted him, or imposed a formal punishment, but he was never free again.

⁷⁶ Warren to Adams, 26 October 1775, MHSC, 73:424.

⁷⁷ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1497-8.

⁷⁸ PJA, 3:284.

⁷⁹ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1517-8.

⁸⁰ JCC, 3:331-4.

News of the Congress's decision arrived in Cambridge later in November, and Church was quickly moved to Connecticut under military guard. In a letter to Reed on 20 November Gen. Washington wrote: "so much for Indiscretion! the Doctor will say."⁸¹

14.6 THE FULL STORY OF CHURCH'S TREACHERY

Dr. Church's father, a Boston merchant and deacon, continued to protest his son's innocence and lobby for a milder confinement, but he was nearly alone. Most people in Massachusetts believed in the doctor's guilt and just wished for more solid evidence. When the Congress sent him back to Massachusetts in 1776 and then proposed a prisoner exchange in 1777, people rioted.

In the absence of information, Church's acquaintances shared theories. Many people assumed that royal officials had bribed the doctor into cooperating. Dr. Samuel Savage, who had studied medicine with Church in early 1775, told Paul Revere "that a short time before the battle of Lexington, . . . [Church] had no money by him, and was much drove for money; that all at once, he had several hundred new British guineas." Yet Revere also believed that the doctor had been secretly writing propaganda for the Crown years before that date.⁸²

Ezra Stiles dated Church's conversion to March 1775:

Col. Ezra R[ichmond] tells me Dr Chh. was at Newpt. between 5th March & Lexington, he spent Even'g with the Dr at Dighton & found him unaccountable & shrewd & sagacious. The Col. asked, wt would the End of these things be? His Answer vague, yet implying that after fightg. awhile the affairs would be compromised, yet so that America would be conquered & G. B. carry her point. Also said, he & Hancock &c had been invited to dine with Gen. Gage who treated them with great Politeness & Affability, & beg'd them to use their Influence to prevent the Oration 5 March—that a week after Gage sent for him:—& says Chh., what would you think of £30000. —The Colonel thinks he realized 25 Thousd.⁸³

In London, the *Remembrancer* quoted a report that Church "was taken into the Government's pay about the middle of *April*," just before the Battle of Lexington and Concord.⁸⁴

Not until Allen French examined Gen. Thomas Gage's intelligence files in the early 1900s did Americans learn the extent of Church's activity. He had started to send reports to

⁸¹ PGW:RW, 2:408.

⁸² Revere to the Rev. Jeremy Belknap, 1 January 1798, MHSP, 16:371-6. Gov. Thomas Hutchinson did tell his predecessor on 29 January 1772, "The Dr. Church who wrote the Times is now a writer on the side of government"; Wells, *Life and Public Services of Samuel Adams*, 2:52. However, Hutchinson's letter was far too optimistic on several points. No such writings have been identified, and in 1773 the doctor delivered a blistering oration to commemorate the Boston Massacre.

⁸³ Stiles, *Literary Diary*, 2:118.

⁸⁴ *Remembrancer*, 2:156.

Gage early in 1775. Immediately after Church began sitting with the Massachusetts Committee of Safety on 21 February, the royal governor received regular updates about where the Committee on Supplies was collecting weapons and what the Provincial Congress was doing.⁸⁵ These reports, from at least one other informant besides Church, led to the military expeditions to Salem in February and Concord in April.

Immediately after the Battle of Lexington and Concord, Church volunteered to go back into Boston. He carried in a note from Dr. John Homans asking another doctor for surgical knives—and providing a tally of the British wounded in provincial custody, which ended up in Gage’s file.⁸⁶ While Church was in Boston, Rachel Revere gave him a note for her husband, Paul, and £125 to smuggle out of the town. That note also went into Gage’s files, and there is no track of the money.⁸⁷ Church claimed he had been arrested during that trip; certainly he was at the Province House, speaking with the British commander, before being sent back out to the American lines.

In May, just after the Provincial Congress had appointed him to go to Philadelphia, Church wrote a long letter mentioning that mission. Though the document in Gage’s files is unsigned and not in Church’s usual handwriting, it could only have come from him. The same writer sent other notes. One described an angry man named Timothy whose accusations made the writer destroy his cipher in case people suspected him. Another suggested, “Send Rachel out with more practicable instructions”—perhaps the royal authorities used Rachel Revere to unwittingly deliver a message to the doctor. That latter note also closed with “The 25th of this month finishes a quarter,” a hint that it would soon be time for a payment.⁸⁸

In mid-July 1775 Dr. Church ran into obstacles in trying to communicate with his contacts in Boston. His coded letter complained, “I have been to Salem to reconnoitre, but I could not escape the geese of the capitol.” Perhaps this was when, as quoted in section 13.1, the customs house boat landed a Loyalist named William Warden in Marblehead to rendezvous with a secret agent—namely Church. On 23 July the doctor took the risk of giving his mistress the coded letter and sending her to Newport. Five days later a new avenue opened up: the Americans’ own communication chain through Point Shirley to John Carnes. If that had been available earlier, Church might not have used Mary Wenwood as a courier, and Godfrey Wenwood might never have become suspicious.

⁸⁵ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 509 and following. Compare to “Memorandums 21st. Feby.,” and following, vol. 126, Thomas Gage Papers, American Series, Clements Library.

⁸⁶ Bell, “Note from a Doctor,” *New England Ancestors*, 7:2 (Spring 2006), 19–24.

⁸⁷ French, *General Gage’s Informers*, 170-1.

⁸⁸ French, *General Gage’s Informers*, 151-7. For one attempt to pull the fragments of Church’s correspondence together, see Nagy, *Invisible Ink*, 44-5.

The documents in Gen. Gage's files show that Dr. Church was clearly turning over much more intelligence than he admitted to, from an earlier date, and in return for money. On the other hand, Church appears to have withheld the Patriots' most sensitive information, such as the Committee of Safety's decisions to send a fast ship to Britain with its version of what happened at Lexington and Concord and to approve Benedict Arnold's plan to attack Fort Ticonderoga.⁸⁹ Had Gage known about those efforts, he might have been able to respond more effectively. In contrast, he could do little about Church's reports on the American military build-up, which tended to describe widespread activity rather than particular weaknesses or chokepoints.

Dr. Church appears to have been playing both sides, trying to get money from the British while continuing to work for the Patriot cause. He expressed hopes that the colonies would remain part of the British Empire, but so did most American gentlemen in the summer of 1775. Many Patriots wrote publicly about the colonies' military build-up, trying to awe royal officials into backing down. Church may have told himself he was doing the same thing, except directly to the man who mattered most and for much better pay. His messages to Gage expressed contempt for American politicians but praised the military forces and the value of liberty. (In contrast, Benjamin Thompson derogated all three.) None of Dr. Church's contemporaries found fault with how he managed the military hospitals, nor produced definite evidence that he had sabotaged the Massachusetts army while on the Committee of Safety.⁹⁰ He was more guilty than his Patriot comrades knew, and perhaps more innocent than they suspected.

14.7 INTELLIGENCE ABOUT VIRGINIA

In early October, shortly after Gen. Washington discovered Dr. Church's treachery, he learned of another concealed threat—not in Massachusetts, but in his home colony and the western territories he had helped to win for the empire. From a hiding-place in Newport, a man named William Cowley wrote that Lord Dunmore, the royal governor of Virginia, had been scheming with John Connolly, the colonial major appointed to command Fort Pitt. Having worked for Connolly since 1773, Cowley had accompanied him from western

⁸⁹ These points are made in Maude B. Vosburgh, "The Disloyalty of Benjamin Church, Jr.: A Study of the First American Surgeon General," *Cambridge Historical Society Publications*, 30 (1944), 59-60. Church claimed that his intercepted letter showed he had kept the gunpowder shortage secret as well, but the extent of that problem was not known until after that 23 July letter.

⁹⁰ Decades later, authors made two such accusations against Church. Emory Washburn recorded a tradition that he had tried to stop a Leicester regiment from marching onto Bunker Hill during the battle; "Topographical and Historical Sketches of the Town of Leicester," *Worcester Magazine and Historical Journal*, 2 (1826), 112. It is not even clear that Church was in Massachusetts at the time. Charles Martyn questioned whether Church had tried to pull Gen. Thomas and his troops away from Roxbury in May 1775, but that appears instead to have been a simple error in writing orders; Martyn, *Artemas Ward*, 103-4.

Pennsylvania to Dunmore's ship off the Virginia coast and then to Boston. After Connolly met with Gen. Gage, he and his servant had sailed south on the Royal Navy ship *Viper* on 20 September, docking in Newport. There, Cowley said, "I made my Escape one Night by great Chance" with the help of a local sailor who had been impressed.⁹¹

Connolly later described Cowley as "my servant. . .an Englishman, [who] had lived with Lord Dunmore, and had acquaintance in General Washington's family"—which could have meant the commander's relatives, household staff, or military aides from Virginia. Connolly complained that some of those people in Boston had "corrupted" the Englishman into having "eloped" to the Americans, but Cowley appears to have acted on his own.⁹²

After reading Cowley's letter dated 4 October Washington arranged for him to come to Cambridge. On 12 October the Englishman gave a deposition repeating his description of Connolly's plans to Newton magistrate Abraham Fuller (1720-1794):

Conolly asked this Deponent if he was willing to go with him into the Indian Country, told him that he had been with Genl Gage to get a Commission and Orders to go into the Indian Country to raise the Indians & French—that there was some Part of the Royal Irish (at Fort Charter's this Deponent thinks he said) who had in Command from Genl Gage to join him, and who had nine twelve Pounders—that assoon as he had settled his Business with Lord Dunmore after his Return, he intended, as he dared not go Home thro the Heart of the Country to take his Lordship's Tender, go to St Augustine, there get guides to lead him through the Cherokee Nation, Shawanese, Mingo, & Delaware—that he was to get Commissions from Lord Dunmore for Capt. White Eyes, and Corn Stalk, and others of the Chiefs, and designed to make them Presents, in Order to encourage them to join him—that he intends to stay at Detroit this Winter to furnish himself with Boats & Canoes, to bring his Forces and Cannon up the Ohio River—that he then intends to attack Fort Pitt, after taking which he supposed all that Part of the World would join him, especially as he had Orders to give 300 Acres of Land to every Man that would enlist under him,—this Deponent further saith that the said Conolly informed him of another Scheme he had in View, namely to proclaim Freedom to all Convicts & indented Servants, then to march down to Alexandria in Virginia where he expects a Reinforcement from Lord Dunmore, and to meet with some Men of War, with which he intended to sweep the whole Country before him.⁹³

The commander-in-chief was naturally interested in the "scheme to distress the Southern Provinces" that Cowley described, and sent the deposition to the Congress that day.⁹⁴

⁹¹ NDAR, 2:293-4. PGW:RW, 67-8.

⁹² Connolly, "Narrative," PMHB, 12:410.

⁹³ NDAR, 2:413. Connolly called Cowley's story "a strange mixture of truth and falsehood"; PMHB, 12:410. It is unclear what became of William Cowley; the name appears on later lists of Continental soldiers, but that may not be the same man.

⁹⁴ PGW:RW, 2:148.

Around the same time, Connolly reached Virginia and met with Dunmore again. On 5 November the governor made him “Lieutenant-Colonel Commandant of the Queen’s *Royal Rangers*.”⁹⁵ With a newly appointed lieutenant and surgeon, Connolly set out for Detroit (by land, not through Florida as Cowley described). Meanwhile, Patriot authorities, alerted by Washington’s letter, had started to hunt for him. On 13 November Richard Henry Lee told the general: “We have taken the most effectual measures, by sending runners from all the Southern provinces into the Indian Nations thro which he proposes to pass, to arrest and secure Ld Dunmores wicked Agent, Conelly.”⁹⁶ The three Loyalists were in jail in Maryland ten days later.⁹⁷

Washington was pulled back into that intrigue on 18 December when he received a packet of documents that Capt. John Manley of the *Lee* had captured on the sloop *Betsey* (see section 12.7). Dunmore had sent that ship north with food for the Boston garrison. Also on board was Moses Kirkland (c. 1730-1787), a South Carolina Loyalist, who carried letters describing other royal efforts in the southern colonies.⁹⁸ Washington had Capt. James Chambers (1744-1805) of the Pennsylvania regiment carry this intelligence to Philadelphia right away as “these papers are of So great Consequence.”⁹⁹ The *Betsey* also carried two men from Princess Anne County, Virginia, whom Dunmore’s forces had captured in a skirmish: William Robinson (d. 1787), a member of the colony’s Provincial Congress, and militia captain Thomas Matthews.¹⁰⁰ On 31 December Washington loaned Matthews £100 so they could go home. Along with them to Philadelphia he sent the captive Kirkland, whom he called “a more illiterate and simple man, than his strong recommendations bespoke him.”¹⁰¹

Yet another passenger on that sloop was a fifteen-year-old named John Skey Eustace (1760-1805). He carried a letter of recommendation that Dunmore had written two weeks earlier to Gen. William Howe:

⁹⁵ *American Archives*, series 4, 4:617.

⁹⁶ PGW:RW, 2:364.

⁹⁷ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1660. PGW:RW, 2:479, offers a report of how they were captured.

⁹⁸ *American Archives*, series 4, 4:336-7. Kirkland reported being taken to Washington’s headquarters; Chesney, *Journal*, 106.

⁹⁹ PGW:RW, 2:573. *American Archives*, series 4, 4:313-4.

¹⁰⁰ Dunmore to Howe, 30 November 1775, *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1713. Dunmore also sent two men he unreliably identified as “natives of Boston” who had been caught trying to smuggle gunpowder into the colonies. These ship’s captains were named Oliver Porter and William Deane. They probably visited Washington’s headquarters after being rescued, but do not appear in his records. NDAR, 4:245.

¹⁰¹ PGW:RW, 2:624-5. When Kirkland escaped from Continental custody in May, an advertisement described him as “a stout corpulent man, between fifty and sixty years of age, about five feet ten inches high, of a swarthy complexion, fresh coloured, and wears his own grey hair tied behind.” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 15 May 1776. As a favor to Gen. Washington, Matthews carried a letter to Robert C. Nicholas in Virginia; PGW:RW, 3:242.

The bearer of this, whose name is John Eustace, is the Son of an unfortunate widow Gentlewoman in this Country, I have had the Care of Him for these three Years past, and have given him the best Education this Country could afford. He is a very good Latin scholar; of exceeding good spirit and quick parts; of excellent temper and good disposition; has conceived a great desire to go into the army. I have therefore to entreat you when an opportunity offers, to give him a commission, and I think he will do me no discredit, and you much service. If you are kind enough to employ him, I should be much obliged to you if you would recommend him to some prudent officer, who would take the trouble now and then to give him a little good advice; for the only fault I know in him (if fault it can be called in a boy) is that he is a little too volatile.

The letter went on to offer Gen. Washington useful intelligence: Dunmore asked Howe to ship some troops to Virginia, saying that “some of your Light-Horse. . . would reduce, without the smallest doubt, the whole of this Southern Continent to a perfect state of obedience.” Gen. Washington sent that letter to the Congress as proof of Dunmore’s aims.¹⁰²

Washington had almost certainly known of young John Eustace back in Virginia, whether or not they had met. The boy had arrived in Williamsburg with Lord Dunmore in 1771, and the new governor had paid for his education at the College of William and Mary. The reason for Dunmore’s generosity, gossips said, was that he had taken John’s older sister Kitty as his mistress, even as she married and then divorced a local doctor.¹⁰³

Eustace did not return to Virginia with Robinson and Matthews, nor did he go into Boston to join Howe’s army. Instead, he decided to remain with the Continentals. Gen. Charles Lee took a liking to “little Eustace.”¹⁰⁴ On 21 January 1776, when Lee was away setting up defenses in New York, Gen. Greene wrote to him that

Mr. Eustace lodges at Hobgoblin Hall, he says by your Order—should be glad to know your pleasure in the matter. He is young and fond of diversion and many ill Councillors about him—perhaps his conduct may not be so prudent as you could wish¹⁰⁵

In October 1776 Eustace became one of Lee’s aides de camp, and the general later referred to him as an adopted son. But the two volatile personalities fell out before the end of the war.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² PGW:RW, 2:581-2.

¹⁰³ On the Eustace family’s connections to Dunmore, see Morrow, *A Cock and Bull for Kitty: Lord Dunmore and the Affair that Ruined the British Cause in Virginia* (Williamsburg, Va.: Telford Publications, 2011).

¹⁰⁴ Lee to Washington, 19 February 1776, PGW:RW, 3:340.

¹⁰⁵ PNG, 1:184.

¹⁰⁶ General orders, 29 October 1776, PGW:RW, 7:45. Lee to Washington, 26 February 1777, PGW:RW, 8:447. Morrow, *A Cock and Bull for Kitty*, 54.

Shortly before departing for home, Matthews told Gen. Washington a secret about John Connolly that he had learned from a source who asked not to be named. On 25 December Gen. Washington sent that intelligence on to the Congress:

I have received undoubted Information—that the genuine instructions given to Conolly [by Dunmore], have not reached your hands—that they Are very artfully Concealed in the tree of his Saddle & covered with Canvas So nicely, that they are Scarcely discernable—that those which were found upon him are intended to deceive—if he was caught—you will Certainly have his Saddle taken to pieces in order to discover this deep Laid plot.¹⁰⁷

To his friend Richard Henry Lee, Washington divulged everything the next day:

The Information respecting Connelly's Instructions being conceald in the tree of his Saddle may be relied on—it came to me from Mr Atkinson the Midshipman who Commanded the Sloop coming to Boston & taken by us & who was Eye Witness to the device which he says was so well done that he should not have been able to have discover'd the place himself wherein the Instructions were secreted without pulling the whole to pieces. He wishes that no use may be made of his name. I believe the Intelligence was rather inadvertently communicated by Atkinson to Captn Matthews, who acquainted me of it yesterday.¹⁰⁸

Patriot authorities searched the major's effects but found nothing. On 30 January the commander-in-chief invoked another witness to assure the Congress his information was solid:

You may rely, that Connolly had Instructions concealed in his Saddle. Mr. Eustice who was one of Lord Dunmores family, and another Gentleman who wishes his name not to be mentioned, saw them cased in Tin, put in the Tree, and covered over;—he probably has exchanged his Saddle, or with drew the papers when it was mended as you conjecture; those that have been discovered are sufficiently bad, but I doubt not of the others being worse and containing more diabolical and extensive plans. . . .

Since writing the above I saw Mr. Eustice and mentioning that nothing had been found in the Tree of Connolly's Saddle, he told me that there had been a mistake in the matter: That the Instructions were artfully concealled in the two pieces of Wood which are on the mail pelion of his portmanteau Saddle; That by order of Lord Dunmore he saw them contrived for the purpose, the papers put in, and first covered with Tin and over that with a waxed canvass Cloth. He is so exceedingly pointed and clear in his Information, that I have no doubt of its being true. I could wish 'em to be discovered, as I think they contain some curious and extraordinary plans.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ PGW:RW, 2:601. A saddle's tree is its structural base. A pillion is a pillow mounted behind the saddle.

¹⁰⁸ PGW:RW, 2:612.

¹⁰⁹ PGW:RW, 3:44-5. Richard Henry Lee sought more information from Eustace about Dunmore's espionage methods in June 1776; Lee to Washington, 13 June 1776, PGW:RW, 4:514.

Connolly later wrote that his instructions had indeed been “concealed in the sticks of my servant’s mail pillion”; that man had realized those papers might be sensitive and burned them when Patriot authorities detained the gentlemen in the party.¹¹⁰

14.8 MORE SUSPICION IN THE AIR

The discovery of Dr. Benjamin Church’s secret correspondence appears to have cued the American command to increase security measures in the following months, but it took time for this new vigilance to trickle down. The Rev. Jeremy Belknap recorded talk over a dinner at Thomas Mifflin’s house on 21 October 1775 about an Anglican minister named Page: “This Page is suspected by some to be a spy, as he has a plan of the lines, and is bound to England.”¹¹¹ The same day, Gen. Heath reported to Washington that a chaplain had told him:

one Mr. Page, an Episcopalian minister, is taking plans of all our works; that he was yesterday viewing the works at Roxbury, in order to correct his plans; that he acquainted the Rev. Mr. Belknap, who is now in Cambridge, that he was going for England, and by those plans would strive to convince my Lord Dartmouth that we were too strong to be taken.¹¹²

Nevertheless, Gen. Lee had furnished Page with an unusual introductory letter to Gen. Putnam, and no one appears to have been following him.

Nor did anyone stop Loammi Baldwin’s friend Benjamin Thompson from moving around the countryside. On 1 October as word of Church’s arrest began to spread, he wrote to the Rev. Samuel Parker in Boston about personal effects he had left there. On 10 October he made lists of his creditors and debtors. Three days later, he traveled to Rhode Island, boarded a ship, and sailed for Boston. By 4 November Thompson was writing a long, critical report about what he had seen of the American army for Gen. William Howe.¹¹³ As with Church, historians did not realize the extent of Thompson’s secret work for the British for over a century.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ PMHB, 12:411, 415-6.

¹¹¹ MHSP, 4:83. This appears to be the same Page that Ezra Stiles wrote about at length in 1773; Stiles, *Literary Diary*, 1:355, 405-8.

¹¹² MHSP, 4:296-7.

¹¹³ Brown, *Benjamin Thompson*, 45.

¹¹⁴ Some authors have suggested that Church and Thompson worked closely together and that Thompson might even have removed incriminating documents from Church’s papers while Washington questioned the doctor on the other side of the Watertown road. French, *General Gage’s Informers*, 159-61. More likely the two men worked independently, and Church’s arrest spooked Thompson into leaving.

After October Gen. Washington took a more aggressive policy toward possible Loyalists. On 8 November Gen. Gates wrote to James Otis of the Massachusetts Council:

I send you, by order of his Excellency the Commander-in-Chief, Lemuel Cox, late of Boston, a supposed spy from the Ministerial Army. I send, also, much evidence as can be immediately produced against him; others there are, at some distance in the country—I think at Marlborough—but Captain Forster will inform you. What you think proper to do with the prisoner should be done as soon as convenient. There is no doubt of his having been in and out of Boston twice, if not thrice, since the battle on Bunker's Hill. His distant removal from the camp will at least be absolutely necessary.¹¹⁵

That afternoon, aide Robert Hanson Harrison wrote to James Warren of the Massachusetts House:

A Mr. Smithwick, now at Watertown, is a person who attempted to get letters and a boat into Boston. His trunk, at Mistick, has a guard over it. 'Tis the general[s] desire he should be sent to Head-Quarters, under the Sergeant and men who are now with Mr. Cox.¹¹⁶

Otis replied that the legislature had done as Washington requested.¹¹⁷

As much as Washington wanted such suspicious characters confined and questioned, he did not want to take on the responsibility of guarding and trying them. The next day, the commander wrote back to James Warren:

I must also recommend to your attention the necessity there is of constituting some court, before whom all persons inimical, or suspected to be inimical, to America, should be brought for examination. My time is so much taken up with military affairs, that it is impossible for me to pay a proper attention to these matters. There will be sent to you amongst others a James Smithwicke, who from an intercepted Letter, appears to have resolved to get into Boston, there is a small trunk belonging to him now in my possession which contains in Gold & silver about 500£ lawful money, which it is probable he Intended to carry in with him.¹¹⁸

In a postscript Washington added that he was also sending back the trunk for the legislature to look after.

Cox (1736-1806) was an inventive Boston wheelwright who had dined with the Sons of Liberty in 1769; the evidence against him is not known. The legislature sent him to a prison in

¹¹⁵ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1402.

¹¹⁶ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1510.

¹¹⁷ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1402

¹¹⁸ PGW:RW, 2:339-40.

Ipswich.¹¹⁹ Smithwick (d. 1778) was a ship's captain who had been born in Britain or Ireland and attended Boston's Anglican churches—therefore a plausible Loyalist. The House referred his case to the Council. Apparently they let the captain settle in Medford; the 8 February 1776 *New-England Chronicle* advertised a letter awaiting him there. Both men remained in Massachusetts after the siege. Smithwick resumed sailing his ship, the *Welcome*, out of Boston harbor.¹²⁰ Cox became a successful builder of bridges in both America and Europe. (During his return visit to the state in 1789 Washington viewed Cox's bridge at Salem.)¹²¹

14.9 THE CASE OF MAJOR ROGERS

In the middle of December Gen. Washington received a letter from Robert Rogers (1731-1795), the celebrated backwoods fighter from the French and Indian War. Writing from Porter's tavern in Medford on 14 December Rogers explained that he had returned to America on business after several years of retirement in England. Since arriving in June he had met with officials of the Continental Congress and local Patriot authorities who had given him permission to travel, and concluded:

I do sincerely entreat your Excellency for a continuance of that permission for me to go unmolested where my private Business may call me as it will take some Months from this time to settle with all my Creditors—I have leave to retire on my Half-pay, & never expect to be call'd into the service again. I love North America; it is my native country & that of my Family's, and I intend to spend the Evening of my days in it.—I should be glad to pay you my respects personally, but have tho't it prudent to first write you this Letter, & shall wait at this place for your Excellency's commands.¹²²

However, around the same time Washington received an urgent 2 December letter from the Rev. Eleazer Wheelock, president of what would become Dartmouth College in New Hampshire. He reported that Rogers had visited him on 13 November. The retired major said he “had been offered and urged to take a commission in favour of the Colonies, but, as he was now in half pay from the Crown, he thought proper not to accept it.” He dangled the prospect of “a large interest for this College” in new land grants, and the next morning moved on, not paying his tavern bill of three shillings. Then Wheelock went on:

¹¹⁹ Felt, *Annals of Salem*, 1:308-9.

¹²⁰ In January 1778, the Massachusetts legislature authorized Capt. Smithwick to carry Dr. Benjamin Church into exile in Martinique; MAR, 1777-78 session, chapter 585, 20:228. The *Welcome*, Smithwick, and Church were never seen again.

¹²¹ For more details on Cox, see Watkins, “A Medford Tax Payer,” *Medford Historical Register*, 10:33-48, 57-64.

¹²² PGW:RW, 2:549-50.

But yesterday two soldiers...on their return from Montreal, informed me that our officers were assured by a Frenchman, a Captain of the artillery, whom they had taken captive, that Major Rogers was second in command under General Carleton; and that he had lately been in Indian habit through our encampments

at St. John's, and had given a plan of them to the General; and suppose that he made his escape with the Indians, which were at St. John's.¹²³

That was, of course, highly suspicious.

Instead of inviting Rogers to headquarters, Washington asked Gen. Sullivan to meet with him. Sullivan reported that he had copied Rogers's paperwork, which looked genuine. He had quizzed the retired ranger about his travels and even asked about the reports from the north. Sullivan told Washington on 17 December:

he owns [i.e., admits] Every thing in Mr Wheelocks Letter except that of his having been in Canada which he warmly Denies & Says he can prove the Rout he Took and prove himself to have been in the Several Towns at or near the Days he has mentioned. I asked him why he came to the Camp as he had no Business with any particular person & had no Inclination to offer his Service in the American Cause to which he Replied that he had voluntarily waited upon the Committees of Several Colonies as he thought it a piece of Respect Due to them and would probably prevent his being Suspected and Treated as a person unfriendly to us—that he Likewise thought it his Duty to wait on your Excellency & acquaint you with the situation of his affairs and if he could to obtain your licence to Travel unmolested—These Sir are the Facts as handed to me by him what may be his Secret Designs I am unable to Say & what Steps are most proper to be taken Respecting him your Excellency can best judge—I am far from thinking that he has been in Canada but as he was once Governour of Michalamackinack it is possible he may have a Commission to Take that command & stir up the Indians against us & only waits for an opportunity to get there—for which Reasons I would advise Lest Some Blame might be Laid upon your Excellency in future not to give him any other permit but Let him Avail himself of those he has & should he prove a Traytor Let the Blame Centre upon those who Enlarged him¹²⁴

The commander-in-chief chose not to meet with Rogers. The next day he wrote to Gen. Schuyler to share Wheelock's warning.¹²⁵ Rogers arrived in Albany early in January, and Schuyler wrote back, "I believe there is no truth in the intelligence sent by Mr. Wheelock"; the dates did not add up for Rogers to have been with the British forces in Canada.¹²⁶ On 16 January Washington replied: "I am apt to believe the intelligence given Dr. Wheelock, respecting Major Rogers, was not true, but being much suspected of unfriendly views to this

¹²³ PGW:RW, 2:473-4.

¹²⁴ PGW:RW, 2:567-8.

¹²⁵ PGW:RW, 2:578-9.

¹²⁶ *American Archives*, series 4, 4:581.

country, his conduct should be attended to with some degree of vigilance and circumspection.”¹²⁷

In fact, while professing neutrality, Rogers had offered his services to Gen. Thomas Gage months before his arrival in Massachusetts. He was apparently working closely with Gov. Tryon of New York.¹²⁸ In the summer of 1776, as the Continental Army prepared for a massive attack by returning British forces at New York, Rogers was still moving around the region. Gen. Washington asked the American authorities to arrest the major and confine him to Philadelphia. The old ranger escaped and made his way to the British lines by 6 August.¹²⁹ Later he tricked Washington’s agent Capt. Nathan Hale into revealing himself, leading to that spy’s execution.¹³⁰ While Gen. Washington still had not built an effective espionage network, his instincts had improved.

The paperwork on intelligence matters from Washington’s Cambridge headquarters became more guarded after the unmasking of Dr. Church and the arrival of Robert Hanson Harrison as aide and then secretary (see section 5.8). Travel in and out of Boston probably slowed as the sides of the conflict solidified and winter set in. As a result, there are fewer sources on intelligence efforts from the last months of the siege.

During those months, Gen. Washington was not yet adept at managing American military secrets, but he was successful enough. It was impossible to keep the British command from learning about the widespread grumbling in the American camps toward the end of 1775. However, Washington was able to conceal the drastic lack of gunpowder in early August 1775 (see section 11.4) and the move onto Dorchester heights in March 1776 (see chapter 18). Obviously, the British generals’ lack of interest in attacking made them less aggressive about gathering intelligence and putting it to use than they would be later in the war. But by then, Washington and his staff had learned valuable lessons about security.

¹²⁷ *American Archives*, series 4, 4:696.

¹²⁸ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1674.

¹²⁹ Rogers, *Journals*, 261-75.

¹³⁰ For recent discoveries on Rogers and Hale, see James Hutson, “Nathan Hale Revisited: A Tory’s Account of the Arrest of the First American Spy,” at <<http://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/0307-8/hale.html>>.

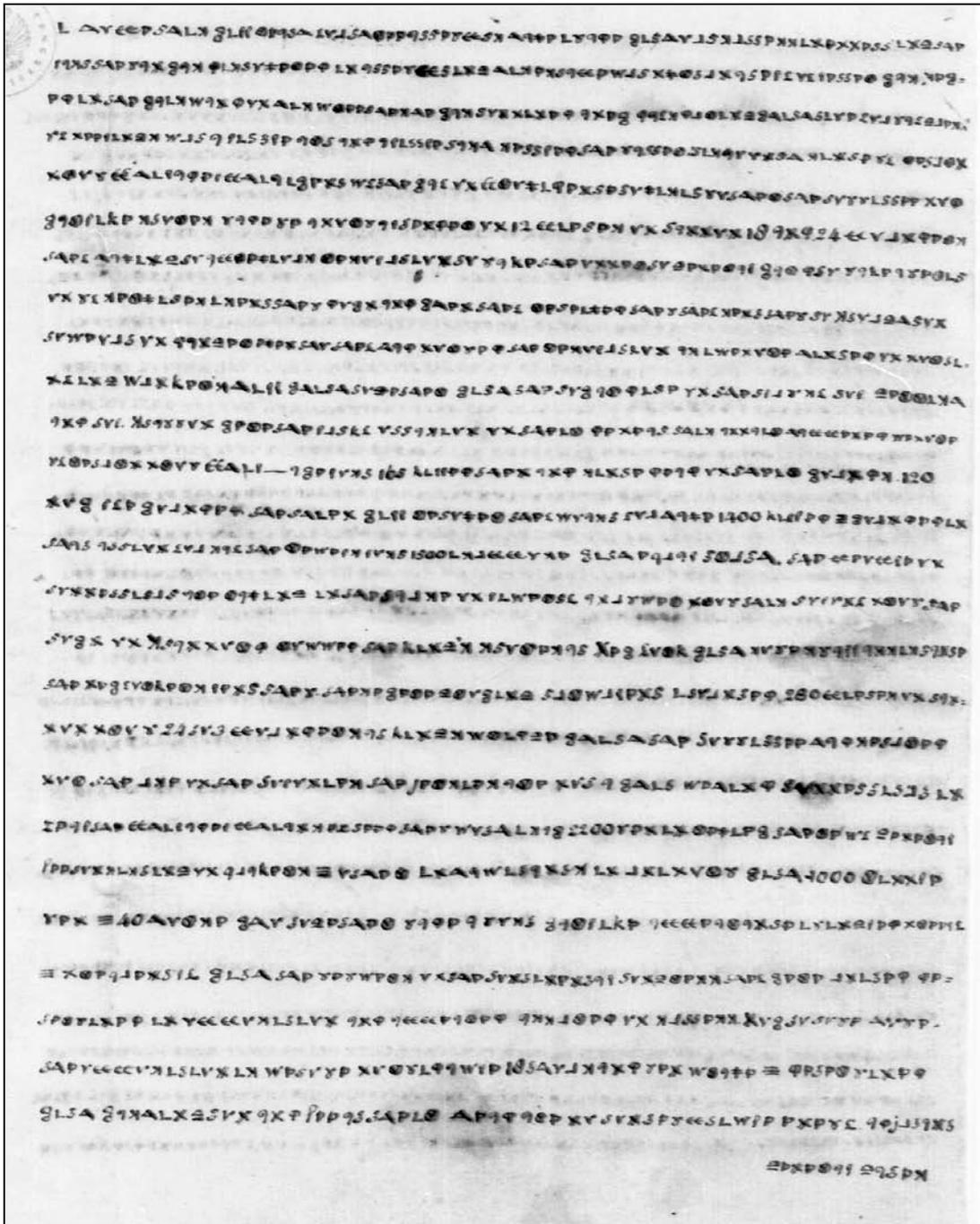


Figure 7. The ciphered letter that Godfrey Wenwood brought to Gen. Washington in late September 1775. It was addressed to "Major Cane in Boston, on his magisty's sarvice." Since a coded communication to an enemy officer was naturally suspicious, the general sought out the woman who had given Wenwood that letter and then arrested the man who had given it to her: Dr. Benjamin Church, Surgeon-General of the Continental Army. He also put out a request for men skilled in code-breaking to decipher the letter. The Rev. Samuel West of Dartmouth, an army chaplain, and Elisha Porter, a Massachusetts House representative, worked independently from copies of the letter, arriving at the same results. Image from the George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

MANAGING LOGISTICS, SUPPLIES, AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Though Gen. Washington wished to force a battle with the British army, the success of his forces in the siege of Boston (and, ultimately, in the War for Independence) actually came from keeping the Continental Army in the field long enough to outlast the resolve of the government in London.

Maintaining a force of several thousand men required organizing supplies of food and clothing (discussed in sections 5.4 and 8.6), as well as forage for all the horses and oxen the army was using. The troops needed warm and healthy shelters, especially as the winter of 1775-76 drew closer. Those several thousand men camped in towns that normally housed a few thousand people left a clear but short-lived imprint on the Massachusetts landscape.

In an era when more soldiers died of disease in camp than on the battlefield, commanding an army also meant providing medical care. Though even the best doctors of his day had limited understanding of the spread of disease, medications, and medical hygiene, Washington and his commanders tried to use the tools of cleanliness, careful treatment of sewage, and quarantine against epidemics. Quickly, however, the general learned to leave the medical department to the doctors.

15.1 REMAKING THE LANDSCAPE

On 7 July 1775 less than a week after Washington arrived in Cambridge, the Rev. William Emerson described how the besieging army had already altered the local landscape:

Who would have thought a twelve month past that all Cambridge and Charlestown would be covered over with American Camps, and cut up into Forts and Entrenchments, & all their Lands, Fields & Orchards laid common, ye Horses & other Cattle feeding in ye choicest mowing Land,—whole fields of Corn eat down to the Ground, Large parks of well regulated Locusts cutt down for firewood & other public Uses. This I must say looks a little melancholy—but it is Tory Land ye chief of it, and would have done no good to ye Public, had not these Times come on.¹

The young private Daniel Granger saw more damage in the winter of 1775-76:

I well recollect that on the Westerly part of this Point stood a very beautiful Seat, which belonged to a Mr. Daulton a Tory as I was informed with a beautiful Yard,

¹ Emerson, *Diaries and Letters*, 79.

Garden, Trees & Serpentine walks &c &c. But every thing had been cruelly mutilated by the Soldiers out of spite to Toryism.²

No prominent Loyalist in the area had a name like “Daulton,” so this estate cannot be identified.

For Washington as a planter and former surveyor, the sight of ruined fences, trampled mowed fields, hewn orchards, and other damage to well-managed farmland was troubling. On 16 July his general orders stated:

It was with much surprise and concern that the General in passing along the New Hampshire Lines Yesterday, observed a most wanton, mischeivous, and unprofitable Abuse of property, in the Destruction of many valuable Trees, which were standing along the side of the road, out of the way of our works or guns, he therefore orders, that an effective stop be put to such practices for the future, or severe punishment will fall upon the Transgressors of this order.³

On 11 August Washington responded to civilian concerns with unusually harsh language:

Complaints having been made by the Inhabitants to the East of Watertown, that their Gardens are robb'd, their Fields laid waste, and Fences destroyed; Any Person who shall for the future be detected in such flagitious, wicked practices, will be punished without mercy.⁴

Such scolding probably did not curb hungry soldiers for long, and fences and trees were in more danger as the days turned colder (see section 15.3).

Furthermore, the Continental Army's biggest effect on the landscape came from the structures Washington ordered to be built: the fortifications designed to bottle up the British army, and the barracks needed to house tens of thousands of men. Tents did not offer enough protection in the winter. Many of the empty buildings that the soldiers had used at first (see chapter 2) were too far from the siege lines, and, as the general told the Massachusetts Council on 6 October 1775 some local families were returning:

By an Estimate laid before me by the Quarter Master General I find it will be impracticable to provide sufficient Barracks for the Troops before the Season is too far advanced without appropriating many of the Houses in & about Cambridge to this Use. Many of the Inhabitants who had deserted them are now returning under the Protection of the Army: I feel a great Repugnance to exclude them from what is their own, but Necessity in this Case I fear will supersede all other Considerations—I must beg the General Court to act upon it.⁵

² Granger, “A Boy Soldier under Washington,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 16 (1930), 543.

³ PGW:RW, 1:122.

⁴ PGW:RW, 1:287.

⁵ PGW:RW, 2:119.

The House considered this letter the same day, but eventually confiscated only the estates of people who had moved into Boston or otherwise joined the enemy.⁶

That made building barracks an even higher priority, but construction went slowly. On 31 December Gen. Nathanael Greene wrote home to Rhode Island:

We have sufferd prodigiously for want of Wood. . . . The Barracks have been greatly delayd for want of Stuff. Many of the Troops are yet in their Tents and will be for some time especially the Officers. The fatigues of the Campaign, the suffering for want of Wood and Cloathing, has made abundance of the Soldiers heartily sick of service.⁷

Of course, at the same time that Greene, Washington, and the other generals were worried about housing the men they had, they also wanted many more men to enlist (see section 8.11).

On 4 April 1776 Joshua Davis (who first dealt with Gen. Washington on the matter of whaleboats—see section 12.1) supplied a “Return of all the Buildings Bult for the Use of The Continental Armeiy in Cambg. Brooklin Roxbury Dorchester &c. From Agt. 1775 to Apr. 1 1776.”⁸ In all Davis inventoried 223 new buildings, in addition to several converted barns. Of that total, he designated 132 as barracks; the largest of those buildings, on Winter Hill, was 120 feet long, 18 feet wide, and 14 feet tall, enough for two stories. Eight buildings, mostly smaller, were labeled for officers. Following the general orders for 31 October 1775 the quartermaster general assigned one officers’ barracks “to each compleat Corps under the new establishment” of the army.⁹ Those buildings were much smaller than the regular barracks, no more than 26 feet on a side. Officers probably also had the pick of nearby houses, according to the custom of eighteenth-century armies.

Daniel Granger recalled arriving at Winter Hill in December 1775 as a substitute for his older brother and finding barracks still under construction.

The Barracks were then building, but were not finished. The Weather was extremely cold. But the Mess, my brother belonged to had excavated a place into the side of a Hill covered it with Timber & boards built up a fireplace & Chimney and a Door, had Straw for the flooring & beading, where they were warm & comfortable, and were called a Mess of Cubs, who lived in a Den. As soon as the Barracks were finished, we were obliged to quit the Den & go into the Barraks. but were not so warm & comfortable: the Barraks were hastily built only boarded & battened & without Windows excepting a square opening with a sliding shutter.

⁶ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1456.

⁷ PNG, 1:173.

⁸ This document can be viewed at <<http://memory.loc.gov/mss/mgw/mgw4/035/0900/0950.jpg>>.

⁹ PGW:RW, 2:270.

Granger also described a “watch box” provided for sentries on cold, windy nights (“yet I was obliged to go out for I could not see any one approaching when in the Box”) and a “Guard-house” for men on duty on a given night but not standing sentry, with “a good fire” but a “cold wet floor.”¹⁰

Among the specialized buildings was a workshop for making artillery supplies on the Cambridge common, as British informant Benjamin Thompson reported in November 1775:

On the north-west side of Cambridge Common is the Laboratory, round which two or three companies are encamp'd, but I believe no considerable quantity of powder is ever kept in this place, nor at any other place in or near Cambridge. In Watertown, at the distance of about half a mile north from the meeting-house, is a school house, which I am told is one of their principal magazines of gunpowder. The company in Watertown furnish a guard for it, and two sentries are constantly planted here in the daytime, and four in the night.¹¹

Davis's list also included 61 guardhouses, armor shops and a smithy, stables, storehouses, a commissary store, a carpenters' shop, a wood office, and one “Dwellinghouse. . .with glass Windows” at Winter Hill. This inventory apparently does not include the small watch-boxes or any existing buildings the army also used. Pvt. James Stevens did a lot of carpentry work on those “Baruks,” and recorded his perspective in his journal, including the men's brief strike over a pay cut on 10 December.¹²

That military infrastructure was left behind as the Continental Army moved south to New York in March and April 1776. When Gen. John Burgoyne surrendered his British and German-speaking troops after the Battle of Saratoga, Gen. William Heath had many of those prisoners of war housed in the leftover Winter and Prospect Hill barracks.¹³ In the following years, those buildings decayed. Local farmers probably appropriated them, or their wood, for other uses. As greater Boston grew and industrialized, people built over that land.

¹⁰ *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 16:539-41.

¹¹ Stopford-Sackville, *Report on the Manuscripts*, 2:14. About 1781 Harvard student Joshua Green drew several buildings around the Cambridge common, including one that was either the Laboratory or a barracks. Now in the Harvard University Archives, this sketch, titled “A Plot of Cambridge Common with a view of the Roads & a principal part of the Buildings thereon,” can be viewed at: <<http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/18029347>>.

¹² Stevens, “Journal,” *EIHC*, 48:60-2.

¹³ *MHSC*, series 7, 4:169.

Return of all the Buildings built for the Use of the Continental Army in Cambri⁹ & Rocklin Counties of Donbutor &c. From Sept^r 1775 to Sept^r 1776

<i>Place</i>	<i>No^o of Buildings</i>	<i>Use they were built for</i>	<i>Length of Each</i>	<i>Width of Each</i>	<i>Height of Each</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
<i>Cambri⁹ Senior</i>	1	<i>Warrack</i>	100	16	7	<i>In this fort are 1100 feet in length of built & 100 feet in depth set in the ground mostly with floors Chimney Cabins &c. about 16 feet wide</i>
	2	<i>D^o</i>	85	11	7	
	3	<i>D^o</i>	115	19	7	
	1	<i>Smith Shop</i>	80	18	0	
	1	<i>Stabel</i>	50	30	12	
	1	<i>Storehouse</i>	80	16	7	
	1	<i>Warrack</i>	120	18	14	
	1	<i>D^o</i>	50	30	14	
	1	<i>Dwellinghouse</i>	42	20	10	
<i>Cambri⁹ Prospect Hill</i>	33	<i>gardens office</i>	10	16	7	
	4	<i>D^o</i>	30	16	7	
	30	<i>Warrack</i>	100	16	7	<i>Also a barn 30 feet long Chimneys & Cabins built two store high</i>
	2	<i>D^o</i>	96	16	7	
3	<i>D^o</i>	110	16	7		
1	<i>Stabel</i>	30	30	12		
<i>Cambri⁹ Cobbel Hill</i>	1	<i>Comedy Store</i>	30	16	14	
	4	<i>Office</i>	17	17	7	
	1	<i>Gardhouse</i>	80	20	7	
<i>Lithman Point</i>	3	<i>D^o</i>	30	16	7	
	3	<i>Warrack</i>	110	20	7	
<i>W. Co^o Simeys</i>	1	<i>Gardhouse</i>	80	20	7	
	1	<i>D^o</i>	30	18	7	
	1	<i>Warrack</i>	65	17	7	
	30	<i>Warracks</i>	24	17	7	
<i>McComb⁹ Down R^o Swoll^o</i>	1	<i>D^o</i>	126	17	7	
	1	<i>D^o</i>	65	17	7	
	1	<i>D^o</i>	96	17	7	
	19	<i>Warracks</i>	96	17	7	
	4	<i>Shops & Stor^o</i>	46	17	0	
	21	<i>D^o</i>	24	16	0	
	1	<i>Warrack</i>	84	17	7	
	3	<i>D^o</i>	100	17	7	<i>Carried over</i>

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Place Built in	No of Building	Use built for	Length	width	Height	
Cambridge	1	Barrack	72	17	7	Also three Barns made in to Barracks Two Store high about 35 by 30 feet long
	2	Gardhouse	16	16	7	
	2	D ^o	30	15	7	
	2	Barracks	16	23	7	
	1	Carp. Shop	65	20	9	
	1	Barrack	60	17	7	
	1	Arms Shop	66	14	8	
	1	M ^o Gardhouse	66	30	7	
	2	Office	10	14	7	
	Brook line fort.	2	Barrack	96	32	
3		D ^o	96	16	7	
Roxbury included place.	1	Gardhouse	30	10	7	one Store high 30 by 20 by with glass windows same Two Barracks frame Also frame of 40 Also frame of 40 in. Nail & left on hand in the Camp at Roxbury
	25	Barrack	96	16	7	
	4	Gardhouse	26	16	7	
	1	Gardhouse	35	16	7	
	1	Barrack	20	22	7	
	1	officers house	26	22	7	
	1	officers Barrack	22	12	7	
	1	Barrack	100	16	7	
	1	Arms Shop	64	20	8	
	4	Gardhouse	63	16	7	
for Dorchester	1	D ^o	64	30	7	Sum of all built in 223
	11	Barrack	96	16	7	
	3	Gardhouses	35	16	7	
	1	wood office	14	12	9	
	1	Gardhouse	30	16	7	

Recd Letters Cambridge April 14 1776
By order of his Excellency to J^ohⁿ Davis

Figure 8. List of buildings erected for the Continental Army, drawn up by Joshua Davis on 4 April 1776. This inventory shows how the siege of Boston changed the built landscape of Cambridge, Roxbury, and Dorchester. Image from the George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress.

15.2 WASHINGTON'S FORTIFICATIONS AND THEIR FATE

After Gen. Washington arrived in early July 1775, the Continental Army embarked on a feverish burst of fortification in fear of another British thrust out of Boston. Troops under Gen. Lee shored up the defenses at Prospect Hill and Winter Hill facing the Charlestown neck, and Rufus Putnam, Henry Knox, and others directed similar work in Roxbury (see chapter 10). By the autumn, those lines were secure. The army's engineers then focused on secondary positions.

In late November, the Americans moved onto Cobble Hill in east Cambridge (now Somerville) and began to fortify it. Gen. Washington himself was involved in planning this move, according to his 27 November letter to Richard Henry Lee:

I was engaged with a party of Men throwing up a Work upon A Hill, called Cobble Hill; which, in case we should ever be supplied with such things as we want [i.e., more heavy artillery and gunpowder], may proove useful to us, & could not be delayed, as the Earth here is getting as hard as a Rock.¹⁴

On the same day, Washington went into more detail for Joseph Reed, who had seen the area:

I recollect no occurance of moment since my last, except the taking possession of Cobble Hill on Wednesday night[,] this to my great surprize we did, & have worked on ever since, without receiving a single Shott from Bunkers Hill—the Ship—or Floating Batteries—what all this means we know not, unless some capitol stroke is meditating.—I have caused two half Moon Batteries to be thrown up, for occasional use, between Litchmores Point & the Mouth of Cambridge River; and another Work at the Causey going on to Litchmores point to command that pass, & rake the little rivulet which runs by it to Patterson's Fort. Besides these I have been, & mark'd out, three places between Sewells point, & our Lines on Roxbury Neck for Works to be thrown up, and occasionally Mann'd in case of a Sortee, when the Bay gets froze.¹⁵

The next day, the general acknowledged in a letter to the Congress that Cobble Hill was “of little use at present,” but could offer advantages in “future operations.” The following month, the Americans built Fort Putnam on a hill near Lechmere Point, even closer to Boston. Jeduthan Baldwin was the military engineer in charge of this project, and his *Revolutionary Journal* traces its gradual progress. The battery at this position proved useful during the March 1776 shelling of Boston (see section 18.5).

As happened with the barracks and other buildings, most of these earthworks and other fortifications were dismantled within a few decades. Historic preservation had little place in the mindset of the early American republic. Farmers plowed up the fortifications, and manufacturers and developers built over them. Within decades, the towns around

¹⁴ PGW:RW, 2:435.

¹⁵ PGW:RW, 2:446.

Boston were densely inhabited and spotted with factories. In 1877 Cambridge historian Lucius R. Paige wrote of two of the larger sites:

“Fort No. 2” was on the easterly side of Putnam Avenue, at its intersection with Franklin Street. It was in good condition a few years ago; but since Franklin Street was extended directly through it, a large proportion of the embankment has been removed, and the remainder is rapidly disappearing. This fort effectually commanded the river as far down as Riverside, where “Fort No. 1” probably stood, though no vestige of it remains.¹⁶

Three years later, the *Boston Herald* noted that the hill where Fort Putnam had been built was “since removed,” and a plaque on the side of the “Putnam School-house on Fourth Street” was the only sign it had been there.¹⁷

One small part of Gen. Washington’s fortifications remains. According to Paige:

At the next angle of the river, on the easterly side of Pine Grove, anciently called the Oyster Banks, there was another “3 gun battery,” which commanded the river down to Lechmere’s Point. This fortress was carefully preserved by the Dana family, for many years, until by an arrangement with the owners, and at the joint expense of the City and the Commonwealth, it was restored in 1858 as nearly as possible to its original state, and enclosed by a substantial iron fence.¹⁸

This land became a city park, newly dubbed “Fort Washington.” (In 1776 it was just a battery, too small to warrant a formal name.) The owners’ deed to the city and the state law providing restoration funds required that the spot “shall forever remain open for light, air, and ornament, for the convenience and accommodation of the owners of estates in said Pine Grove and of the Public generally,” and “shall always be accessible to the public.”¹⁹ It remains a city park today.

15.3 THE FIREWOOD SUPPLY

The Continental Army needed wood not just for building barracks, but also for firewood—for warmth during most of the year, and for cooking and washing all year round. Even at the height of the summer, Gen. Washington worried about a short supply from the army’s contractors. On 29 August he wrote to the Massachusetts Council to ask that the colonial government fix the price of firewood and other commodities:

¹⁶ Paige, *History of Cambridge*, 422.

¹⁷ Cambridge, *Exercises in Celebrating the . . . Settlement of Cambridge*, 135, 149.

¹⁸ Paige, *History of Cambridge*, 422. The United States government contributed three cannon made well after the Revolution for this park.

¹⁹ The owners of this land in 1857 were Edmund T. and Elizabeth Hastings, Mary E. Dana, Joseph A. and Penelope Willard, and John and Hannah S. Bartlett; Cambridge, *An Historic Guide to Cambridge*, 179-80.

The Quarter Master General of the Army has represented to me that notwithstanding he has offered 2/ pr Foot for Fire Wood, 2/1½ pr Bushel for Oats, 3/4 pr Ct for Hay he cannot procure those Articles for the Use of the Army. From the Information I have received, I have great Reason to believe that this is an artificial Scarcity partly created by some Persons who are monopolizing those Articles in order to advance the Price, & partly by the Possessors of them in the Neighbourhood of the Camp who keep them in Order to profit by our Distress. As such a Combination must be attended with fatal Consequences both to the Country & Army I cannot doubt the Interposition of your Honors to provide some Speedy & effectual Remedy. That which is usual & Customary in such Cases is to fix the Prices to the Several Articles bearing a Proportion to what is the ordinary Rate, & if Persons will not Comply with a reasonable Tariff but still refuse to furnish such Necessary Articles the great Law of Self Preservation must authorize us to compel them. This or any other Regulations which your knowledge of the People & Zeal for the Service shall induce you to make will I doubt not remove the Mischief at present, & prevent it in future. If you should at the same Time extend your Views to other Articles besides those I have enumerated I flatter myself it would have a very beneficial Effect.²⁰

At this time, Washington and Quartermaster General Thomas Mifflin clearly believed there was a ready supply of wood, oats, and hay in the vicinity, and they wanted the government to ensure they received those goods at the best prices.

As the weather grew colder, the general knew that his army would need more and more firewood. On 8 September Washington used that oncoming need as one of his arguments for attacking Boston as soon as possible:

The Season is now fast approaching when warm, and comfortable Barracks must be erected for the Security of the Troops, against the inclemency of the Winter—large & costly provision must be made in the article of wood, for the Supply of the Army—and after all that can be done in this way, it is but too probable that Fences, woods, orchards, and even Houses themselves, will fall Sacrifices to the want of Fuel, before the end of the winter.²¹

That argument did not win over Washington's generals, who preferred saving soldiers to saving fences.

On 6 October, with winter still closer, the commander once again raised the issue of firewood prices with the Massachusetts legislature: "Little or no Wood is brought in & it is apprehended the Owners keep it back to impose an unreasonable Price."²² Over the following weeks, the general was pleased whenever his schooners captured a ship carrying firewood to Boston (see chapter 12). Not only did that cargo increase the supply for his own army, but the besieged British would not be able to use it—and their shortage was more dire.

²⁰ PGW:RW, 1:376-7.

²¹ PGW:RW, 1:433.

²² PGW:RW, 2:118.

By winter most people coming out of town reported that soldiers were pulling down fences and buildings to fuel their fires.

On 15 October, still awaiting action from the Massachusetts legislature, Gen. Washington issued orders for the army to collect its own wood:

One Sub[altern], *one* serjt and *twenty-five* Rank & File from each of the four Brigades in the Lines, and in Cambridge, to parade to morrow morning at Sunrise upon Cambridge Common, to cut Fire-wood for the army. The Qr Mr General or his deputy, will attend upon the common in Cambridge to give directions to the Officer commanding the party.²³

The orders for 28 October added five more woodcutters from each brigade, and designated nine men in Whitcomb's regiment "to burn Charcoal for the use of the Army."²⁴

On 1 November the Massachusetts legislature sent a committee to headquarters to ask Washington to consult with Mifflin and provide an estimate of "what Quantity of Wood and Hay would be necessary to supply the Army thro' the Winter." This committee consisted of Joseph Batchelder of Grafton (1713-1797), Azor Orne of Marblehead (1731-1796), Eleazer Brooks of Lincoln (1727-1806), Daniel Hopkins of Salem (1734-1814), and (probably) Nathan Cushing of Scituate (1742-1812).²⁵ The army's response the next day was delayed because Washington asked Gen. Horatio Gates to send it on, and he forgot for a few hours. During that time, Washington told Speaker James Warren, he discovered the supply was worse than he knew:

When the Comittee were here yesterday I told them I did not believe that we had then More than four days Stock of wood before hand, I Little thought that we had scarce four hours, & that different Regiments were upon the point of Cutting each others throats for a few Standing Locusts near their incampments, to dress their victuals with.

this however is the fact, & unless Some expedient is adopted by your honorable Body to draw more teams into the service or the Qr Mr Genl impowerd to impress them, this Army (if their Comes a Spell of Rainy or Cold weather) must inevitably disperse, the Consequence of which need no animadversion of Mine.

it has been matter of great grief to me to see so many valuable plantations of Trees destroyed—I endeavoured (whilst there appeared a possibility of restraining it) to prevent the practice but it is out of my power to do it, from Fences to Forrest Trees, & from Forrest trees to Fruit trees is a Natural advance to houses, which must next follow, this is not all. the distress of the Soldiers in the article of wood will I fear have an unhappy influence upon their enlisting again.²⁶

²³ PGW:RW, 2:168.

²⁴ PGW:RW, 2:247.

²⁵ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1491. There were multiple men named Cushing in the Massachusetts House in 1775-76.

²⁶ PGW:RW, 2:291.

Apparently members of the legislature spoke to firewood suppliers, but the problems remained.

There was a curious incident on 6 November the day after Washington strictly forbade soldiers from making bonfires with effigies of the Pope (see section 16.6):

Although the men confined by Lieut. Col. Reed of the 26th Regt were released upon Application to Head Quarters—The General, so far from being displeased with Col. Reed, for his endeavours to prevent an infringement of the General Orders, that he thanks the Colonel; as he shall every Officer, who pays strict Obedience to orders, as without so doing, it is in vain to think of preserving order, and discipline, in an army—The disagreeableness of the weather, scarcity of wood, &c. inclined the General to overlook the Offence committed at that time, but he hopes, and expects, the Officers and Soldiers, will for the future, carefully avoid wantonly cutting the Trees, and committing waste upon the property of those, already but too much distressed by the depredations of the army.

Lt. Col. Joseph Read (1735-1801) of Uxbridge may have arrested men gathering wood for a bonfire, but was unable to prove that they were not simply collecting firewood. The worst Washington could scold them for was “wantonly cutting the Trees.”²⁷

On 19 November Gen. Washington told the Congress that the shortage of wood was preventing the soldiers from building both barracks and fires. He reported two new causes for the problem:

...the badness of the weather...has Caused great delay in building our barracks, which with a most mortifying Scarcity of fire wood, discourages the men from enlisting the last I am much affraid is an insuperable Obstacle I have applyed to the Honble house of representatives of this Province, who were pleasd to appoint a Committee to negotiate this business, & notwithstanding all the pains they have, & are taking, they find it impossible to supply our necessitys, the want of a Sufficient number of Teams I understand to be the chief impediment.²⁸

In that same day’s general orders, Washington had the army use its own resources to solve the problem of transportation:

The Brigadier Generals to make Returns of the Number of Teams necessary, to furnish their respective divisions with wood, and the teams appointed for each division, to be continually employed in the service of that division, and not to be shifted, from one division to another, as great Confusion arises thereby, some Regiments having a double Stock of wood, while others, are suffering for want. The Qr Mr General to provide the Teams returned necessary for the above

²⁷ PGW:RW, 2:308-9.

²⁸ PGW:RW, 2:399.

Service, and direct the Waggon Master General to continue them in that employ.²⁹

On 2 December the Massachusetts House addressed the firewood problem by requiring towns in Middlesex County to supply the different parts of the American camp:

Whereas, it appears that the camps at Cambridge, Charlestown, and Medford, consumes fifty-eight cords of Wood per day, viz: twenty-four at Cambridge, sixteen at Prospect-Hill, and eighteen at Winter-Hill; and the camp at Roxbury consumes seventeen cords per day. In order that there may be a daily supply,

Ordered, That the Members of this House, from the Towns of Needham, Newton, Weston, Waltham, Lincoln, Bedford, Woburn, Reading, Stoneham, Lexington, Wilmington, and Malden, be a Committee to apportion and make out what quantity it is proper each of said towns (and the Town of Natick) should supply, daily, of the fifty-eight cords, and to which place they shall send it; also, that the Members from the Towns of Roxbury, Dedham, Stoughton, Dorchester, Braintree, and Milton, with Messrs. Perry and Metcalf, be another Committee to determine what part of the seventeen cords each of said towns shall send to the camp at Roxbury, daily. As soon as said Committees have made return what quantity each town should supply, there go a recommendation from the honourable Court to said towns, to carry their respective quotas accordingly.³⁰

After protests from a couple of the smaller towns, the quotas were adjusted, but this remained the basic solution to the army's needs: requisitions by the colonial and town governments with transportation by squads of soldiers. The needs of the army evidently overwhelmed the capacity of private contractors and the market.

Firewood remained a problem at the end of the year when Gen. Greene wrote: "Many Regiments have been Obligd to Eat their Provision Raw for want of firing to Cook, and notwithstanding we have burnt up all the fences and cut down all the Trees for a mile round the Camp, our suffering has been inconceivable."³¹ Nevertheless, the Continental Army's difficulties with fuel never approached the problems inside Boston, where the troops dismantled churches and houses to heat the buildings that were left.

15.4 SANITATION IN THE CAMPS

Almost as soon as Gen. Washington arrived in Cambridge, he instructed his men to stay clean, to protect both their health and their respectable appearance as soldiers. His general orders for 4 July 1775 said:

All Officers are required and expected to pay diligent Attention, to keep their Men neat and clean—to visit them often at their quarters, and inculcate upon

²⁹ PGW:RW, 2:397.

³⁰ *American Archives*, series 4, 4:1316-7.

³¹ PNG, 1:173.

them the necessity of cleanliness, as essential to their health and service. They are particularly to see, that they have Straw to lay on, if to be had, and to make it known if they are destitute of this article. They are also to take care that Necessaries be provided in the Camps and frequently filled up to prevent their being offensive and unhealthy. Proper Notice will be taken of such Officers and Men, as distinguish themselves by their attention to these necessary duties.³²

This was apparently not specific enough, and ten days later the orders stated:

As the Health of any Army principally depends upon Cleanliness; it is recommended in the strongest manner, to the Commanding Officer of Corps, Posts and Detachments, to be strictly diligent, in ordering the Necessaries to be filled up once a Week, and new ones dug; the Streets of the encampments and Lines to be swept daily, and all Offal and Carrion, near the camp, to be immediately burned: The Officers commanding in Barracks, or Quarters, to be answerable that they are swept every morning, and all Filth and Dirt removed from about the houses: Next to Cleanliness, nothing is more conducive to a Soldiers health, than dressing his provisions in a decent and proper manner. The Officers commanding Companies, should therefore daily inspect the Camp Kitchen, and see the Men dress their Food in a wholesome way.³³

Washington's experience during the French and Indian War had alerted him to this aspect of commanding soldiers.

Still, there was only so much a general could do with thousands of young men, many of them away from their homes for the first time. On 24 July the general orders addressed a particular problem:

Report being this morning made to the General That the main Guard room is kept abominably filthy and dirty; for the future one Commanding Officer is not to relieve another, upon that Guard, until he is assured that the Officers and Mens apartments are clean and in decent order.³⁴

Finally, on 1 August Washington required each company to designate one man to keep its camp clean, reporting to the quartermaster's department instead of doing regular duty:

One Man a Company, to be appointed a Camp Colour man, from every Company in every Regiment in the Army, whose particular duty it must be to attend the Quarter Master and Quarter Master serjeant, to sweep the Streets of their respective encampments, to fill up the old necessary Houses and dig new ones, to bury all Offal, Filth, and Nastiness, that may poison or infect the health of the Troops; and the Quarter Masters are to be answerable, to their Commanding Officers for a strict observance of this order, and by persevering in the constant and unremitted Execution thereof, remove that odious reputation, which (with

³² PGW:RW, 1:55.

³³ PGW:RW, 1:114.

³⁴ PGW:RW, 1:164.

but too much reason) has stigmatized the Character of American Troops. The Colonels and Commanding Officers of Regiments, are to be answerable to the General, for all due obedience to this order.³⁵

When the army was on the move or setting up camp, camp color men had many other duties, but for a settled camp, sanitation came first.

Gen. Nathanael Greene echoed his commander's concerns in his orders to his brigade on 14 August, as hastily written by a company captain:

There appears to be a Grate neglect of the people Repairing to the Neserys agreeable to General orders but to Void there Exerments about the field perniciously[?] and Dont fill the Vaults that are Dug as Directed by his Excelently. As the healths of the Camps is greatly Dangred by these Neglects it is Recomendend to the ofisers of the Several Ridgments to pay due attention to futer transgresion and Let the Transgresor be ponished with the Utmost Severity.³⁶

This order suggests the problem was not the availability of necessities but the troops' readiness to forgo them.

Washington's remark about the troops' "odious reputation" may have been deserved. According to the royalist spy Benjamin Thompson, the bulk of the Continental soldiers

have no women in the camp to do washing for the men, and they in general not being used to doing things of this sort, and thinking it rather a disparagement to them, choose rather to let their linen, &c., rot upon their backs than to be at the trouble of cleaning it themselves.³⁷

That description suggests that Washington's private comment about New Englanders to his cousin Lund on 20 August—"they are an exceeding dirty and nasty people"—was meant literally.³⁸

With the arrival of many new recruits in 1776, Gen. Washington once again stressed the importance of hygiene on 5 January:

As nothing adds more to the Appearance of a man, than dress, and a proper degree of cleanliness in his person; the General hopes and expects, that each Regiment will contend for the most Soldierlike appearance. . .

The Regimental Quarter Masters, and their Serjeants, are to cause proper Necessarys to be erected at convenient distances from the Barracks, in which their men are lodged, and see that those necessarys are frequently filled up, any person who shall be discovered easing himself elsewhere, is to be instantly

³⁵ PGW:RW, 1:206-7. Bland, *Treatise of Military Discipline*, 247-8, explains the necessity of camp color men.

³⁶ PNG, 1:108. See also Cash, *Medical Men*, 34.

³⁷ Stopford-Sackville, *Report on the Manuscripts*, 2:15.

³⁸ PGW:RW, 1:336.

confined and brought before a Regimental Court Martial—They are to cause also the Filth, and Garbage, about the Barracks, to be removed and buried, In short, it is in a particular manner the duty of the Quarter Master, to see that the Barracks are kept clean and sweet; the Victuals properly prepared &c.—and although it is the particular business of the Qr Masters, and their Serjeants, to see this done, it is equally necessary, and the duty of the other Officers, to look into this business, as too much care cannot be used in a matter, where the health of the Men so much depends upon it.³⁹

By then, the army had already weathered a serious epidemic.

15.5 THE SMALLPOX SCARE

Smallpox was the most dreaded disease of the eighteenth century, and an epidemic had already started in Massachusetts in late 1774. Gen. Washington himself was immune, having survived a case at the age of nineteen, but he was concerned that it could kill and disable large numbers of his troops. Many of those soldiers were young, rural, and of modest means, thus less likely to have already gone through the illness.

The Massachusetts Provincial Congress recognized its first case of smallpox in early June. By the end of the month it had established two quarantine hospitals, one in the house of John Badger at Fresh Pond and another for the southern wing of the army.⁴⁰ On 20 June Gen. Artemas Ward's general orders stated:

That Sergeant Green and John Botch take the command of the guard at the small-pox hospital, near Fresh Pond, and keep a sentry at the gate, who is to permit no person to go in or out, except the doctor, and such as the doctor shall permit to pass; and that a very strict guard be constantly kept at said hospital.⁴¹

The infected soldiers were supposed to stay in the hospital until they died or the disease had run its course. Their clothing and other belongings were “smoked” before they could return to society. Those doctors and others who cared for smallpox patients were in danger of contracting the disease themselves if they had not already had it. During the early summer, Gen. Folsom of New Hampshire asked Dr. Hall Jackson to stay on duty because “not one of his [regimental] surgeons had had the disease.”⁴²

On 4 July 1775 the legislature told Gov. Trumbull of Connecticut:

³⁹ PGW:RW, 3:27-8.

⁴⁰ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 293, 570, 406. Philip Cash says that Badger lived in Brookline; Cash, *Medical Men*, 38. However, a man of that name inherited land along Fresh Pond in 1771; Binney, *History and Genealogy of the Prentice, or Prentiss Family*, 61. The Massachusetts House paid Badger on 8 November 1775; MAR, 1775-76, chap. 355.

⁴¹ MHSP, 15:109.

⁴² New Hampshire, *Documents and Records*, 7:652.

Our camps at Cambridge and Roxbury are daily putting on a more defensible appearance; the health in our army is as general as we could expect. Several privates in the Cambridge camp were last week taken down with the small pox, but we have great reason to hope, that the precautions taken on this occurrence, will, by the divine blessing, prevent the spreading of that distemper in the camp.⁴³

Doctors had various rules for smallpox patients about diet, medications, exposure to cold water, and such, but “precautions” beyond quarantine had little to no effect.

Gen. Washington’s first extensive general orders issued 4 July 1775 appear to have referred to the danger of getting too close to the hospital in Fresh Pond:

No Person is to be allowed to go to Fresh-water pond a fishing or on any other occasion as there may be danger of introducing the small pox into the army.⁴⁴

Fishing from the far side of the pond was an unlikely way to contract the disease, but in the eighteenth-century no one knew how smallpox spread. On 16 October Lt. Paul Lunt recorded in his diary:

One man broke out with the small-pox in Captain Parker’s company, and was moved away to the hospital: it is thought that he caught it by a pair of stockings that he took out of a stone wall.⁴⁵

Such speculation reflected people’s fears of the disease rather than scientific knowledge.

Pvt. Daniel McCurtin of Maryland left a memorable description of his visit to a hospital on 17 February 1776 where he apparently saw soldiers afflicted by smallpox:

This day being a fine moderate day and I being unwell, I was sent out to a place called Jamaica Plains, about three miles back in the country to St. Thomas’ Hospital. But O Good God, what was my surprise and astonishment when I entered this deplorable house of pangs and misery where nothing was heard but sobs and sighs, some crying to their Lord for relief, others with a tremendous and shivering tongue, blaspheming his August holy Name. Some would start up from their little couches, sometimes seizing the adjacent afflicted by the eyes, or attempt to jump out at a window, if not interrupted. Some with shrilling voice attempted to express some emotions of the mind but could not perform his designing task for the want of the use of them faculties necessary to human beings, but what was most striking in my eyes, was this, that the most part of the whole were blistered, some of whom got eleven patches on their bodies at once. This faint relation of the Hospital was all that I could gather material during this interval of time.⁴⁶

⁴³ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 293, 447-8.

⁴⁴ PGW:RW, 1:55.

⁴⁵ MHSP, 12:202.

⁴⁶ Balch, *Papers Relating Chiefly to the Maryland Line*, 32.

Some of these men might have been suffering from other conditions, including psychological ones, but McCurtin probably attributed all their troubles to smallpox.

The fear of that dreaded disease affected how the Massachusetts legislature and Gen. Washington treated refugees from Boston in the late fall of 1775. The disease was apparently more virulent inside the town, and on 22 November Gen. William Howe recommended inoculation for his soldiers.⁴⁷ Already, on 5 October the Massachusetts House had voted to halt the Chelsea ferry out of Boston because of fear that its passengers might carry smallpox. Washington echoed this worry in a letter to James Warren on 9 November.⁴⁸ On 28 November he told the Congress, “As the small Pox is now in Boston, I have used the precaution of prohibiting such as lately came out from coming near our Camp.” Instead, they were sent east to Point Shirley, where there was already a smallpox hospital.⁴⁹

Washington’s worries became more pointed in early December, as he described to the Congress:

By recent information from Boston, Genl Howe is going to Send out a number of the Inhabitants in order it is thought to make more room for his expected reinforcements, there is one part of the information that I Can hardly give Credit to, A Sailor Says that a Number of these comeing out have been innoculated with design of Spreading the Smallpox thro’ this Country & Camp. I have Communicated this to the General Court & recommended their attention thereto.⁵⁰

On 6 December the Massachusetts General Court voted to authorize a committee to requisition as many carriages as they might need to carry all people leaving Boston to Point Shirley, to have those inhabitants’ belongings “sufficiently smoked and cleansed,” and to give those who appeared healthy “certificates that they are of the poor of *Boston*, and quite free from infection.” As for the rest, they were to be kept in hospitals near that remote point.⁵¹ It appears that Thomas Crafts, who was also seeking a commission in the artillery regiment (see section 10.9), headed that committee.⁵²

By 11 December Gen. Washington had become convinced that the enemy was deliberately practicing biological warfare: “the Information I received that the enemy intended Spreading the Small pox amongst us, I could not Suppose them Capable of—I now must give Some Credit to it, as it has made its appearance on Severall of those who Last Came

⁴⁷ Howe, *General Sir William Howe’s Orderly Book*, 148.

⁴⁸ PGW:RW, 2:339.

⁴⁹ PGW:RW, 2:447.

⁵⁰ PGW:RW, 2:486.

⁵¹ *American Archives*, series 4, 4:1325.

⁵² Washington to James Otis, Sr., 10 December 1775, PGW:RW, 2:526.

out of Boston. . .”⁵³ Three days later, he called the royal authorities’ treatment of the poor “a weapon of Defence they Are using against us.”⁵⁴ Washington had dismissed Dr. Isaac Rand from his post at the smallpox hospital, believing that the army had “got the better of the small pox,” but he now endorsed the new hospital director’s recommendation that Rand be put onto the Continental payroll.⁵⁵ “If we escape the Small Pox in this Camp, & the country round about, it will be miraculous,” the general told Joseph Reed.⁵⁶

On 14 December, the same day that Gen. Washington wrote about smallpox used as a weapon, he received a delegation of Quakers from Rhode Island asking to provide help to people suffering on both sides of the siege lines. This committee was led by Moses Brown (1738-1836) and included Thomas Steere, Thomas Lapham, Benjamin Arnold (a Brown family employee), and David Buffum (d. 1829). Brown’s diary, prepared as a report back to his central meeting, described their encounter:

Breakfasted at [blank] and whent to Caimbridge and Waited on General Washington with the Address from Our Meeting for the Sufferings. He received us kindly But he haveing made a Rule to Let none into Boston except a man or his Wife that had been sepperrated, the Small Pox being there and a great many poor being lately sent out and Apprehending Our Intention might in good Measure be Accomplished by Sending into some of our friends to meet us on the Lines to Effect which he would do anything he could. We concluded to adopt that method and desireing leave to Write General How and Inclose him a Copy or Duplicate of the Address which we had and a Letter to [Boston Quakers] James Raymor and Ebenezer Pope which he concented to and proposed our shewing what we wrote to General Nathanael Greene as if he approved of it it was likely he should and so perhaps save us the Trouble of an Alteration which we approveing. Waited on Nathanael and there Wrote to James Ramor and Ebenezer Pope as follows viz—and allso to General How incloseing the Meetings Address to him and the Letter to Pope and Raymor, as follows Viz—Presenting these to General Washington in the evening and he approveing Directed his Aid De Camp to Inclose these in the morning to General Ward at Roxbury with an Order for a flagg.

At dinner with Greene and other Rhode Island officers, Brown and his colleagues discussed the Quakers’ role in the war and the threat of “Independency.”⁵⁷

The next day Brown’s committee met with quartermaster general Thomas Mifflin, who felt that approving the relief mission was politically unwise “as General Washington was a stranger and it might give offence to the people” of Massachusetts. Brown and Arnold traveled to Watertown to consult important members of the legislature while the other three

⁵³ PGW:RW, 2:533-4.

⁵⁴ PGW:RW, 2:548.

⁵⁵ PGW:RW, 2:547.

⁵⁶ PGW:RW, 2:553.

⁵⁷ Brown and Thompson, “Moses Brown’s ‘Account of Journey. . .,’” *Rhode Island History*, 15:112-4.

men sent their letters into Boston under a flag of truce. That night in Cambridge they “had to Lodge in a Room by the fire with only an old underbed of straw covered with a blanket.” On 16 December the Quakers met at the siege lines in Roxbury with sheriff Joshua Loring and Maj. John Small. Those royal officials proved reluctant to accept financial aid for Boston’s poor, implying that the town was not suffering greatly.⁵⁸ Brown and his colleagues therefore headed north and distributed the money they had collected in Marblehead, Salem, and other towns.⁵⁹

In the end, the American camps did not suffer a major smallpox epidemic, though Washington remained worried. In his general orders on 13 March when it was clear that the British forces would soon leave, he stated that no one should enter town without explicit authorization from his commander:

...as the enemy with a malicious assiduity, have spread the infection of the smallpox through all parts of the town, nothing but the utmost caution on our part, can prevent that fatal disease from spreading thro’ the army, and country, to the infinite detriment of both—His Excellency expressly commands every Officer, to pay the exactist obedience to this order.⁶⁰

The next day, the general orders repeated the belief that the British had used smallpox as a weapon:

The General was informed Yesterday evening, by a person just out of Boston, that our Enemies in that place, had laid several Schemes for communicating the infection of the small-pox, to the Continental Army, when they get into the town—This shews the propriety of Yesterdays Orders, and the absolute necessity of paying the strictest obedience thereto.⁶¹

In response, the Continental Army first entered Boston, Gen. Washington ordered Putnam to lead in “a thousand Men (who had had the Small Pox).”⁶² For the rest of the month, general orders continued to stress the danger of that disease.

Smallpox did not affect the Continental Army outside Boston as much as Washington and his generals feared. As Jedediah Huntington told Gov. Jonathan Trumbull on 19 February 1776: “Every now and then, some one breaks out with the smallpox, but this has not been mortal.”⁶³ However, it proved to be a fearsome factor in the army’s failure to

⁵⁸ *Rhode Island History*, 15:115-7.

⁵⁹ *Rhode Island History*, 15:117-20. On 9 January 1776, Gen. Washington donated £15 from the Continental funds “To the Relief of the distressed Wives & Children of the Soldiers from Marblehead” and £10 to those of “Cape Ann.” Washington and Kitman, *George Washington’s Expense Account*, 48.

⁶⁰ PGW:RW, 3:458.

⁶¹ PGW:RW, 3:466.

⁶² PGW:RW, 3:490.

⁶³ *American Archives*, series 4, 4:1205.

maintain its presence in Canada (see section 16.11). By the middle of 1776 the disease had killed Gen. John Thomas, blinded Col. James Reed of New Hampshire, and sickened many other officers and men who had been at the siege.

15.6 DYSENTERY, OR THE “BLOODY FLUX”

The real killer within and behind the American lines during the siege of Boston was the “bloody flux,” or dysentery. People of the time recognized that diarrheal illness as a common hazard when many people gathered together—hence another of its names, “camp fever.” But they did not understand how it spread through contact with feces, making sanitation and hygiene all the more important, particularly for people nursing others with the disease.

Instead, commanders blamed other factors. On 9 August Gen. Greene wrote to Gov. Cooke in Rhode Island:

Our troops are now very sickly with the Dysentery. There was about a Week of exceeding hot Weather, thought brought on this distemper, but they are now getting better, and from the change of air and the healthy situation we posted in, I hope we shall recover a perfect state of health very soon.⁶⁴

Only a month earlier, Washington had reported that he had found the “Troops both in Camp & Quarters very healthy,” and on 15 August he judged the riflemen who had arrived to be in the same condition.⁶⁵ Yet on 28 August the general was worried enough to warn:

As nothing is more pernicious to the health of Soldiers, nor more certainly productive of the bloody-flux; than drinking New Cyder: The General in the most positive manner commands, the entire disuse of the same, and orders the Quarter Master General this day, to publish Advertisements, to acquaint the Inhabitants of the surrounding districts, that such of them, as are detected bringing new Cyder into the Camp, after Thursday, the last day of this month, may depend on having their casks stove.⁶⁶

Those measures did not stem the epidemic.

On 22 August Dr. Benjamin Church reported that there were 400 men in the Continental hospitals, the “great part of them Dysenteries.”⁶⁷ At the end of that month, over 17% of all the men in the Continental Army were listed as sick, and that figure remained above 12% for the rest of the siege.⁶⁸ Dr. James Thacher wrote in his journal for November:

⁶⁴ PNG, 1:106.

⁶⁵ Washington to James Warren, 10 July 1775, PGW:RW, 1:104. Washington to Philip J. Schuyler, 14 August 1775, PGW:RW, 1:306.

⁶⁶ PGW:RW, 1:371.

⁶⁷ French, *General Gage's Informers*, 177.

⁶⁸ Lesser, *Sinews of Independence*, xxxi.

Our hospitals are considerably crowded with sick soldiers from camp; the prevailing diseases are autumnal fevers and dysenteric complaints, which have proved fatal in a considerable number of instances. It is highly gratifying to observe, that these brave men, while in the service of their country, receive in sickness all the kind attention from physicians and nurses, which their circumstances require; they have the prayers and consolations of pious clergymen, and are destitute of nothing but the presence of their dearest friends to alleviate their sufferings.⁶⁹

Unfortunately, visitors to the camps and sick soldiers returning home to recover unwittingly spread the infection. In his memoir, Lt. David Perry (1741-1826) wrote:

In the heat of Summer, the men were attacked with the Dysentery, and considerable numbers of them died. The people flocked in from the country, to see the camps and their friends, and took the disorder; and it spread all over the New-England states: it carried off a great many more in the country than in the camp, which seemed to dishearten the people very much.⁷⁰

The Rev. Samuel West of Needham mentioned this epidemic in his autobiography:

The Dysentery soon prevailed in the American Army & Extended itself more or less through the country. Although it prevailed most in the Town near camp My parish partook largely of this calamity. We buried about 50 persons in the course of the season. Some families were dreadfully. One in particular a Mr Joseph Daniels buried an amiable wife & 6 promising children in about 6 weeks—we often buried 3 or 4 in a day. My time was wholly devoted to visiting the sick, attendance on the dying and dead.⁷¹

Commissary General Joseph Trumbull was “very sick with the dysentery” when he went home in the fall, as his father reported to Washington on 30 October.⁷²

On 10 August Abigail Adams told her husband: “Your Brother Elihu lies very dangerously sick with a Dysentery. He has been very bad for more than a week, his life is despaired of.” Elihu Adams died 18 March 1776 his death attributed to the flux. By 8 September the disease had infected a farmhand in Abigail’s own household:

His Disorder increasd till a voilent Dysentery was the consequence of his complaints, there was no resting place in the House for his terrible Groans. He continued in this state near a week when his Disorder abated, and we have now hopes of his recovery.

⁶⁹ Thacher, *Military Journal*, 35.

⁷⁰ *Magazine of History*, 137:32.

⁷¹ *Dedham Historical Register*, 2:22. This is not the same Rev. Samuel West who deciphered Dr. Benjamin Church’s letter (see section 14.2). Thanks to Judith Cataldo for this reference.

⁷² PGW:RW, 2:264.

Two days later, Abigail “was seiz’d with the same disorder in a voilent manner.” A housemaid had to be carried home to recover. Three-year-old Thomas Boylston Adams became ill, and his mother wrote, “such is the distress of the neighbourhood that I can scarcely find a well person to assist me in looking after the sick.” Before the end of the epidemic, Abigail’s mother and another housemaid had died, and a servant in another household was left “Bereaved of his reason” by the disease.⁷³

As late as 19 February 1776 Jedediah Huntington wrote: “The sickness which, for three weeks past, has much prevailed in our camp, and been very mortal, is now abating.”⁷⁴

15.7 THE HOSPITAL SYSTEM

Following tradition, every regiment of the New England army had its own surgeon and surgeon’s mate, or assistant. On 7 May 1775 the Massachusetts Committee of Safety voted that colonels should appoint their regimental surgeons, choosing men they trusted:

Whereas, it appears to this committee, that great uneasiness may arise in the army, by the appointment of surgeons who may not be agreeable to the officers and soldiers in their respective regiments, therefore, *Voted*, that it be recommended to the Congress, to allow the colonel of each regiment to nominate the surgeon for his regiment; said surgeon to nominate his mate; and unless there is some material objection made against them, that they be accordingly appointed.⁷⁵

As a result, most regimental surgeons came from the same communities as the soldiers they treated, and were close to their colonels.

The threat of smallpox prompted the Massachusetts Provincial Congress to set up its first hospital (see section 15.5), and the Battle of Bunker Hill overwhelmed the regimental surgeons. On 19 June the Committee of Safety chose the house of the Rev. Samuel Cook of Menotomy (Arlington) as a hospital for the wounded under Dr. William Eustis—a medical trainee of Dr. Joseph Warren, who had just been killed in the battle. On the same day, it empowered Dr. Isaac Foster of Charlestown to take over other Menotomy houses, employing people and supplies as needed and taking necessary precautions about the smallpox hospital.⁷⁶ The Massachusetts Provincial Congress set up hospitals in the houses of Dr. Marshall Spring and John Hunt of Watertown and of the Loyalist absentee Joshua Loring

⁷³ Abigail Adams letters, 10 August, 8 September, 9 October, 22 October, 25 October, and 27 November 1775, AFC, 1:273-330.

⁷⁴ *American Archives*, series 4, 4:1205.

⁷⁵ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 538.

⁷⁶ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 571-2.

of Jamaica Plain.⁷⁷ (At the end of June the Massachusetts government also assigned one room in the John Vassall house for sick soldiers—see section 2.5.)

On 24 June the congress decided each military hospital would have a surgeon and two surgeon's mates, with a committee to oversee these men. The surgeons were to be paid £8 per month, the mates £4.10s.⁷⁸ Two days later, the Committee of Safety chose Dr. John Warren (1753-1815), younger brother and trainee of the late Dr. Joseph Warren, to head a hospital in Cambridge.⁷⁹ On the afternoon of 27 June the congress added two doctors from its ranks to its hospital committee, Isaac Rand and Isaac Foster.⁸⁰ Within two weeks, that committee made Foster a surgeon of the hospital at Cambridge and Rand a surgeon of the hospital at Roxbury.⁸¹ The congress also set up a procedure for sending soldiers to the hospitals, and established the warrant for a medical commissary to supply medicines and other goods.⁸²

Dr. Isaac Foster (1740-1782) was a politically active physician from Charlestown. He had graduated from Harvard in 1758 and trained in Boston under Dr. James Lloyd before doing additional study in England. He represented Charlestown in the Massachusetts Provincial Congress and gave up much of his private practice in the first months of the war to treat the army's wounded and sick.⁸³ On 6 June 1775 Foster's home in Charlestown was used as a rendezvous during an exchange of prisoners.⁸⁴ Eleven days later, that building and the rest of the central town burned down during the Battle of Bunker Hill. Appointing Foster director of the hospital not only recognized his commitment to the provincial cause, but also provided him and his family with an income. He was probably at work in the hospital set up in Penelope Vassall's Cambridge house when Gen. Washington came to town. As his surgeon's mate Foster chose Josiah Bartlett (1759-1820), a teenager he had already been training.

On 4 July the Massachusetts congress created a three-person committee to write to the new commander-in-chief, "informing him of the provision this Congress has made for

⁷⁷ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 355, 357, 360-1, 378, 387. The Loring house, now called the Loring-Greenough House, is a historic site in Jamaica Plain.

⁷⁸ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 384, 424-5, 449.

⁷⁹ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 578.

⁸⁰ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 406.

⁸¹ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 464.

⁸² Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 437.

⁸³ Foster, "A Bundle of Old Letters," *Atlantic Monthly*, 3:550-1.

⁸⁴ *American Archives*, series 4, 2:920.

the sick and wounded of the army.”⁸⁵ The general had made his own observations, and on 20 July told the Continental Congress that the system was not working:

I have made Inquiry into the Establishment of the Hospital, & find it in a very unsettled Condition. There is no principal Director, or any Subordination among the Surgeons, of Consequence, Disputes & Contention have arisen, & must continue, untill it is reduced to some System. I could wish that it was immediately taken into Consideration, as the Lives & Health of both Officers & Men, so much depend upon a due Regulation of this Department—I have been particularly attentive to the least Symptoms of the small Pox and hitherto we have been so fortunate, as to have every Person removed so soon, as not only to prevent any Communication, but any Alarm or Apprehension it might give in the Camp. We shall continue the utmost Vigilance against this most dangerous Enemy.⁸⁶

With his interest in hierarchy and order, Washington would have disliked the improvisational nature of the existing medical wing.

15.8 THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS TAKES OVER

The Continental Congress was already addressing the issue, and on 27 July voted to create a hospital department, agreeing to pay for one “Director-General and Chief Physician,” four surgeons, one apothecary, twenty surgeon’s mates, one clerk, two storekeepers, and “One Nurse to every ten sick,” in descending order of daily salary. The director-general’s duties were “to furnish medicines, Bedding and all other necessaries, to pay for the same, superintend the whole, and make his report to, and receive orders from the commander in chief.” That same day the Congress named Dr. Benjamin Church, Jr. (1734-1778), to that post, and gave him authority to appoint everyone else.⁸⁷

That was a large amount of authority and freedom for a congressional appointee, but Church was well regarded as both a doctor and a politician. He came from a prominent and wealthy New England family, born in Newport and raised in Boston. He had a top education, including Harvard College and training in London at the Medical College and in hospitals. For years he had been one of Boston’s leading Whig activists. For example, after the Boston Massacre of 1770, Church:

- performed an autopsy on Crispus Attucks’s body, concluding that two musket balls had entered the man’s chest on a downward path, which implicated employees of the Customs service in the shooting.

⁸⁵ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 445, 446, 448. James Thacher left a description of this committee from the perspective of an aspirant to the rank of surgeon’s mate: Thacher, *Military Journal*, 31.

⁸⁶ PGW:RW, 1:139-40.

⁸⁷ JCC, 2:210-1.

- wrote the accusatory verse that appeared underneath Paul Revere's engraving of that event, one of the doctor's many poems on political topics.
- delivered the public oration commemorating that event in 1773.

Starting in late 1774 whenever Samuel Adams, John Hancock, and other senior politicians were out of town or ill, Church and Dr. Joseph Warren became the leaders of the Boston resistance. Church served in the Massachusetts Provincial Congress and its Committee of Safety and Supplies, chairing at times in the weeks after Warren's death. In that capacity he signed Col. Benedict Arnold's 3 May 1775 orders to attack Fort Ticonderoga. The Massachusetts legislature chose Dr. Church to carry their request for military support to the Congress in Philadelphia in May, and weeks later he was one of the two members delegated to welcome the Congress's new generals to Massachusetts (see section 3.7).

News of the appointment of the new Surgeon-General (as the position was also called) reached Cambridge in August, and Church quickly went to work. Gen. Washington had already, with some evident reluctance, ordered more of the Cambridge mansions converted into hospitals. On 26 July his orders stated:

It being represented that the present Hospital, is not large enough to contain the sick, Lieut. Governor Oliver's house, is to be cleared for that purpose, and care to be taken that no injury is done to it.⁸⁸

By 21 August Thomas Fayerwether's nearby house had also been "lately converted into an Hospital."⁸⁹

The next day, Dr. Church wrote back to Samuel Adams about the challenges he had tackled:

An Acquaintance with the Oeconomy of Hospitals derived from a Residence of almost three years in the London Hospitals, made the Task before me very acceptable, but I confess the extreme Disorders in which I found matters upon a closer scrutiny, rendered the attempt to effect a Change a very formidable One; a total Revolution was necessary, to fix upon any Principles at all: there existed near 30 Hospitals, each distinct and independent, and some of them under the Guidance and uncontroled Jurisdiction of Surgeons who had never seen an Hospital; the Demands upon the Commissary General and Quarter-master were so extremely frequent and rapid that they informed me, the Expense of supplies for the Surgeons exceeded all the other Expenses of the Army: a matter so ruinous for the Cause demanded, an instant remedy. I immediately procured two good Houses in Cambridge, the one already improved as a Colony Hospital, the other a regimental sick-House, a perfect sink of Putrescence, filth and Disease; to these I have found it necessary to add a third vizt. the House of the fugitive Judge [Joseph] Lea. I then gave orders to sundry regimental Surgeons to send such of

⁸⁸ PGW:RW, 1:172.

⁸⁹ PGW:RW, 1:341.

their sick as were capable of being removed; I found but little difficulty wth. the Surgeons of this Colony, for having examined and appointed them, they considered me in the light of a Master or Director before, and readily conceded to my Orders; but I have had much difficulty with my Brethren of Connecticut &c, they viewed themselves as Lords of their little Dominions; each Surgeon had his Hospital, to which the Officers submitted as matters of Right, already established by uninterrupted usage, and hugged as a Benefice by each distinct Incumbent; they began to thrive mightily, some Surgeons divided the Regiments with their Coll., their Orders were undisputed at the publick Stores: The Officers indeed groaned that Diseases became so grassant, the Committee of Supplies and the Commissary groaned with good Reason that they shd. never be able to answer the Demands: a cabal has been formed against me, which now exists in a crumbling situation, I still persevere in demolishing these little Pagoda's, and altho' much Art and much Malice have been exercised to discredit the American Hospital, it is now arrived to such a degree of reputation that the Soldiers bless the happy Institution.⁹⁰

Church reported 200 patients in the three Cambridge houses, which he had named after Washington, Lee, and Putnam; he estimated they would have room for forty more. There were 170 men in the “three Houses at Brookline to accommodate Roxbury Camp,” but he planned to consolidate those into two mansions: “Loring’s and [former governor Sir Francis] Barnard’s which I shall call Ward’s Hospital and St. Thomas’s Hospital in honour of the two Generals on that Quarter.” (St. Thomas’s was also a famous hospital in London.)

Church told Adams, “The number of Surgeons I apprehend must be enlarged to three more,” or seven overall. He had placed Foster and Warren on the Continental payroll along with Samuel Adams’s son Samuel (1751-1788) and Princeton graduate Charles McKnight (1750-1791).⁹¹ Massachusetts was still paying William Aspinwall (1743-1823), Lemuel Hayward (1749-1821), and Richard Perkins (1730-1813, a member of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress from Bridgewater) to look after soldiers from the Roxbury camp. Church closed his long letter with a plea for more medicines, “Tow-Cloth for Beds,” and other supplies.

Just as Gen. Washington and Gates had required regimental commanders to send reports on how many men they had fit for duty, Dr. Church told regimental surgeons to send him reports on the men they were still caring for. In another effort at regulation, the medical department ordered printed forms, to be signed by a surgeon, to confirm that a given man was too sick for duty. An example made out by Dr. Isaac Foster and dated 12 November 1775 is among Washington’s papers.⁹²

⁹⁰ French, *General Gage’s Informers*, 173-7.

⁹¹ There was another Dr. Samuel Adams (b. 1745) in the Continental Army, but he served in a regiment stationed in Roxbury. His papers are at the New York Public Library. On McKnight, see Alexander, *Princeton College During the Eighteenth Century*, 142-3.

⁹² Visible online at <<http://memory.loc.gov/mss/mgw/mgw4/034/0800/0823.jpg>>.

Church's efforts produced protests from the regimental surgeons, who claimed he was forcing patients to move from their little hospitals and monopolizing the increasingly scarce medical supplies. On 7 September Gen. Washington ordered a series of hearings on Church's new system:

Repeated Complaints being made by the Regimental Surgeons, that they are not allowed proper Necessaries for the Use of the sick before they become fit Objects for the General Hospital: And the Director General of the hospital complains, that contrary to the Rule of every established army, these Regimental Hospitals are more expensive than can be conceived; which plainly indicates that there is either an unpardonable Abuse on one side, or an inexcusable neglect on the other—And Whereas the General is exceedingly desirous of having the utmost care taken of the sick (wherever placed and in every stage of their disorder) but at the same time is determin'd, not to suffer any impositions on the public; he requires and orders, that the Brigadiers General with the commanding Officers of each Regiment in his brigade; do set as a Court of enquiry into the Causes of these Complaints, and that they summon the Director General of the hospital, and their several Regimental Surgeons before them, and have the whole matter fully investigated and reported—This enquiry to begin on the left of the Line to morrow, at the hour of *ten* in Genl Sullivan's brigade.

When a Soldier is so Sick that it is no longer safe, or proper for him to remain in Camp, he should be sent to the General Hospital—There is no need of regimental Hospitals without the Camp, when there is a general Hospital so near and so well appointed.⁹³

The last sentence shows how strongly Washington supported Church's approach.

Among the complaints from Sullivan's brigade was that Church had blocked Dr. Hall Jackson from amputating the leg of a New Hampshire soldier named Simpson and insisted that the man be transferred to a Continental hospital, where he eventually died.⁹⁴ After that inquiry ended on 14 September Church sent Sullivan this letter:

Dr. Church presents his most respectful compliments to General Sullivan, and most heartily felicitates himself on receiving so honorary a testimonial of General Sullivan's approbation, as he met with the last evening at Head Quarters. The Doctor esteems himself peculiarly happy that the undeserved prejudice against him is so totally removed, which, from frequent intimations, he was apprehensive had possessed the General's mind. He flatters himself that his whole conduct, during the present unhappy contest, will bear the strictest scrutiny. A regard to place, popularity or the more detestable motive of avarice, never influenced his conduct in publick life. The sole object of his pursuit, the first wish of his heart, was ever the salvation of his Country.

The Doctor, nevertheless, in justice to himself, and with respect to the man who behind the curtain has influenced and took the lead in the opposition to him, must declare, that although he could never stoop to act the parasite, play the

⁹³ PGW:RW, 1:426-7.

⁹⁴ Sullivan, *Letters and Papers*, 1:87-8, 97-8.

buffoon, or become the herald of his own eminence in his profession, [he] would feel the indignation of conscious merit, should he be put in competition with the person who vainly endeavors to supplant him.⁹⁵

It is unclear whether Church's ornate language contained flattery or sarcasm, but that inquiry cleared him. Washington ordered another hearing in Greene's brigade. As the process rolled on, Church asked for leave to visit his family.

On 18 September Washington directed the inquiry in Heath's brigade to proceed.⁹⁶ It found that Dr. Church had behaved well and merited praise.⁹⁷ Nonetheless, Church sent his resignation to headquarters from Taunton on 20 September. The general had adjutant general Horatio Gates send back a flattering request that the doctor reconsider (see section 14.2). The inquiries moved on to Col. Frye's brigade on 24 September and Gen. Thomas's on the 29th. But the process never concluded. Washington's general orders for 30 September stated:

A Court of enquiry ordered to sit this day in Brigadier General Spencers brigade, in relation to the dispute between the Director General of the hospital, and the Regimental Surgeons, is on account of the Indisposition of Dr Church, to be postponed until further orders.⁹⁸

The "Indisposition of Dr Church" was that he had been detected sending a coded letter to a British army officer in Boston and was being detained at the main Cambridge hospital. (See chapter 14 for the remainder of Church's story.)

15.9 THE NEW DIRECTOR-GENERAL: DR. JOHN MORGAN

Dr. Church's arrest and detention for many days in the Cambridge hospital naturally disrupted the medical corps. On 3 October Gen. Washington announced that Dr. Isaac Foster would superintend "the General Hospital" on an interim basis.⁹⁹ Nine days later he wrote to the Congress about two possible replacements for Church:

Upon the Presumption of there being a Vacancy in the Direction of the Hospital, Lt. Col. [Edward] Hand formerly a Surgeon in the 18th Regimt or Royal Irish, & Dr. Foster late of Charles Town, & one of the Surgeons of the Hospital under Dr Church are Candidates for that Office. I do not pretend to be acquainted with their respective Merits, & therefore have given them no farther Expectation than that they should be mentioned as Candidates for the Department. I therefore

⁹⁵ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:712.

⁹⁶ PGW:RW, 2:6.

⁹⁷ *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, 13:389-90, citing Heath Papers, 19 September 1775.

⁹⁸ PGW:RW, 2:66.

⁹⁹ PGW:RW, 2:81.

need only to add on this Subject, that the Affairs of the Hospital require that the Appointment should be made as soon as possible.¹⁰⁰

Washington brought up the same question at the meeting with three delegates from the Congress later that month (see section 17.8), and they left it to the Congress.

Meanwhile, on 9 October Dr. John Warren wrote to John Hancock on behalf of “a number of gentlemen employed in the Hospital at Cambridge”:

The suspension of the late Director from his station, has put us into great confusion, by reason of our not being able to acquaint ourselves with the particulars of the institution. We cannot obtain any information from him. We have been for some time past expecting warrants from the Continental Congress, but have not yet received them. We should be extremely gratified by having them expedited to us, or some directions which might remedy the inconveniences we experience from the fluctuating state we are at present in. The gentleman above referred to informed us that he was about to write to the Congress, recommending an additional appointment of two to the present number of surgeons, four only being already appointed, by which means it happens that two gentlemen at present officiate as chief surgeons at Roxbury, under an uncertainty with regard to their continuance, and are very importunate either to be confirmed or receive a dismissal. There are four houses here, appropriated to the purpose of receiving the sick and wounded in Cambridge, by the names of the Washington, Putnam, Lee, and Convalescent Hospitals, all of which contain, at present, about three hundred and fifty patients, being all the sick of the army in Cambridge, excepting such as are so slightly ill as to be attended with convenience in camp. The number is rather upon the decrease, and but a small number have hitherto died.

Three houses are improved for the same purpose at Roxbury; the number of sick and wounded I cannot ascertain. Those surgeons who are already appointed are stationed in the several houses in Cambridge; the two who stand candidates attend to those at Roxbury. We cannot obtain information whether the appointments are to receive the sanction of the Congress, or whether the Director was invested with a discretionary power to make them, without a necessity of their being ratified by any other authority. The only person here from whom we could expect an answer to our queries is secluded from the whole world, and no person is admitted to an interview with him.

Another article, to which, if I am not too tedious, I would beg your attention, is our deficiency with regard to medicines. . . .

Warren closed with a plea that Hancock send “the regulations for the hospital to us at Cambridge *speedily*.”¹⁰¹

On 17 October the Continental Congress selected Dr. John Morgan (1735-1789) of Philadelphia as “director general and chief physician of the Hospital, in the room of Doctr.

¹⁰⁰ PGW:RW, 2:146-7.

¹⁰¹ Warren, *Life of John Warren*, 53-9.

Church.”¹⁰² Morgan was the founder of the medical school at the College of Philadelphia, now known as the University of Pennsylvania, and thus the first professor of medicine in North America. He had been one of that college’s first graduates, and, after his medical apprenticeship, found further experience as a doctor in the British army during the campaigns in western Pennsylvania in 1758-1760. He had sought additional hospital training in London, Edinburgh, Paris, and Rome, becoming a member of the Edinburgh College of Physicians, a licensiate of the London College of Physicians, and a Fellow of the Royal Society. Returning in Philadelphia, Morgan was one of the city’s leading doctors and citizens, joining the American Philosophical Society in 1766 and becoming one of its curators three years later. In sum, it was a coup for the Continental Congress to obtain a man of his learning as the director of its army medical service.¹⁰³

Samuel Adams told James Warren about the new appointee: “The Dr. though not yet arrivd to the Age of forty has long sustaind the Character of learned and is very eminent in the Profession of Physick and Surgery, and I dare say will fill the place to which he is appointed with Dignity. You will find him to be an agreeable Acquaintance.”¹⁰⁴ John Adams sent his wife a long description of Morgan’s training and career and concluded:

Dr. Morgans moral Character is very good, and his manners are civil, decent, and agreeable. He married a sister of the Lady of our Chaplain, Mr. [Jacob] Dushe, who is new Rector of the three united Churches in this City. A sister of the Doctors is married to Mr. [Samuel] Stillman the Antipaedobaptist lately in Boston, now in this Place.

Thus I hope We shall hear no Complaint that this Place is not now well filled.

Jealousy and Envy spare nobody. Some have whispered that the Dr. is a little Visionary in Theory and Practice. But all agree that he is attentive, vigilant and laborious for the good of his Patients in a great Degree, and he is said to be a pious Man.¹⁰⁵

Emphasizing Morgan’s character, piety, and connections to clergymen seems to have been Adams’s way of convincing New Englanders to accept a doctor from outside their region and of assuring them he would not be another Dr. Church.

It took nearly a month for Dr. Morgan to set out for Cambridge with his wife, Mary (d. 1785). The Morgans were cheerful on their journey, according to their letters, and Mary described their arrival in late November this way:

¹⁰² JCC, 3:297.

¹⁰³ The most recent biography is Whitfield J. Bell, Jr., *John Morgan: Continental Doctor* (1965).

¹⁰⁴ Adams to Warren, 14 November 1775, LoD, 2:345.

¹⁰⁵ AFC, 1:315.

six or eight of the gentlemen of the faculty [came] to wait upon Dr. Morgan and escort us to the Camp, some of them on horse back and some of them in carriages. I do assure you we had no small cavalcade. My good friend Mrs. Mifflin met us on the way in her chariot and conducted us to her house, where we are to stay till we are settled in one of our own.¹⁰⁶

Washington, Lee, Putnam, and Gates all came to the Mifflins' house to meet the new Chief Physician; while there, they received word of the capture of the ordnance brig *Nancy* (see section 12.7). Abigail Adams also visited the Morgans and on 10 December reported:

I have according to your desire been upon a visit to Mrs. Morgan, who keeps at Major Mifflins. I had received a Message from Mrs. Mifflin some time ago desiring I would visit her. My Pappa who you know is very obliging in this way accompanied me, and I had the pleasure of drinking coffe with the Dr. and his Lady, the Major and his Lady and a Mr. and Mrs. Smith from New York, A daughter of the famous Son of Liberty Capt. [Isaac] Sears, General Gates and Lee, a Dr. [James] McHenry and a Mr. Elvin, with many others who were strangers to me. . . .

The Dr. appeared modest and his Lady affable and agreeable. Major Mifflin you know I was always an admirer of, as well as of his delicate Lady. I believe Phyladelphia is an unfertile soil, or it would not produce so many unfruitfull women.¹⁰⁷

As Adams had learned, the Morgans had no children. Later she would call Mary Morgan “what is Commonly Called a Very Good kind of woman And Commands Esteem without the Graces of politness, the Briliancy of wit, or the Merits of peculier understanding above the Rest of her sex Yet to be Valued for an Honest unornamented plain Friendliness.”¹⁰⁸

On 12 December Dr. Morgan reported to Washington that the latest weekly return showed there were 676 soldiers in the hospitals, about a third of them in Roxbury. At the worst time, he understood, the number of sick men “amounted to near fifteen hundred.” The Congress had authorized pay for four surgeons, but Morgan felt (as Church had already told Samuel Adams) the hospital system needed three more. Aspinwall and Hayward were still on duty at Roxbury, and Isaac Rand was needed at the smallpox hospital. Morgan recommended giving all three (plus Rand's mate Lyon) Continental appointments, and stationing Rand at Point Shirley.¹⁰⁹

Soon Dr. Morgan ran into the same tensions between his central office and the regimental surgeons that had led to the inquiries under Church. He apparently had trouble

¹⁰⁶ Wharton, *Colonial Days and Dames*, 143. Mary Morgan's letters are in the Hopkinson Family Papers at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

¹⁰⁷ AFC, 1:335-6.

¹⁰⁸ Abigail Adams to John Adams, 17 April 1776, AFC, 1:386. John Adams had earlier described Mary Morgan in his diary as “a sprightly, pretty lady”; DAJA, 2:152.

¹⁰⁹ PGW:RW, 2:541-2.

resisting demands in conversation, though he complained about them afterward. On 18 June 1776 Morgan told the Congress of his experiences within a longer report:

I compute that there are not less than three or four score Regimental Surgeons and Mates who were in commission at *Cambridge*, and yet they were destitute (as such) of every article essentially necessary for the care of sick and wounded, (which I mention not as a fault, but a misfortune,) yet presumed they had a right to draw upon the General Hospital for every store they thought proper for the sick under their care. Though I had no instructions that would authorize my compliance, and though I knew it to be contrary to every known establishment of the like nature, yet I had it not in my power to demand from them any report of the number or state of the sick, so as to be a judge of the propriety of granting or refusing what they might demand. And such a door was once opened to them of extracting every kind of expensive store from the General Hospital, that had I not wholly shut that door against them, it is impossible to form any idea to what an amazing extent the expenses of the General Hospital would amount; but the Commissary-General [Joseph Trumbull] has often informed me, that had it not been stopped, the expenses of the sick would equal that of all the well soldiers of the whole Army.¹¹⁰

Morgan later grumbled that over six weeks one regimental surgeon had requisitioned from the hospital a hogshead of rum, wine, sugar, molasses, and a pint of oatmeal—“yet there was no return made of the sick” in that regiment.¹¹¹

In a memo addressed to Washington, Morgan recalled discussing the hospital budget with him during the siege:

In a conference I once had with your Excellency at Cambridge, on the subject of hospital expences, you told me, and I took it as a hint of caution and advice to observe the strictest oeconomy in my department (from which I have never deviated) that you were fearful the expences of the General hospital would exceed the estimate that had been made of them, by a person of experience in General hospital matters. If I rightly recollect, your Excellency thought the sum mentioned to be ten thousand pounds sterling per annum. I was surprized, and concluded the gentleman was mistaken; I resolved however, if possible, to employ such strict oeconomy in the department, as to keep within those bounds, yet was fearful it could not be accomplished, on account of the advanced price of every article of living and hospital stores. Desirous of knowing what were the principles on which he founded the calculation, I wrote to the person that was mentioned, on the subject, in answer to which he informed me, that the estimate, he had given in to General Gates was ten thousand pounds sterling, for every ten thousand men, for six months, and so in proportion, which is equal to 40,000 £. ster. per. annum, for 20,000 men, the number then kept on foot.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ *American Archives*, series 4, 6:1714.

¹¹¹ Morgan, *Vindication of His Public Character*, 42.

¹¹² Morgan, *Vindication of His Public Character*, 5.

In fact, on 31 December 1775 Gen. Washington sent the Congress an estimate that an army of 15,000 would need £6,000 for “Hospital, Medicines, Physician, Surgeons, Apothecary, with their necessary Attendants &ca.”¹¹³ This clearly did not agree with Morgan’s figures, making his job close to impossible.

Morgan’s writing style was prolix, even when it was presenting a message that readers would want to hear. As an example, on 1 January he sent this public letter of thanks to some communities that had collected supplies for the hospital:

Impressed with a lively sense of the spirit of patriotism which so eminently adorns the good people of this country, the subscriber, who is appointed to the chief direction of the sick and wounded, thinks it incumbent on him to make known the seasonable aid he has lately received from the towns of Concord, Bedford, first and second Parishes of Sudbury, Acton, Marlborough, Stow and Lincoln. The Hospital having, for some time past, been in great want of old linen for bandages, compresses, and lint, or fine tow for dressing; saddler’s or sole leather, and web, or gartering, for tourniquets; of tape, thread, needles, pins, and other articles of a like nature; application was made to the inhabitants of the above-named places for a supply, at such prices as they, themselves, should think reasonable. No sooner were our wants thus made known to them, than with an alacrity and zeal truly characteristick of the people, the business of collecting those things was immediately undertaken by some of their Selectmen, and other proper persons. The Clergy, in particular, engaged warmly in the work. To their pious and animated exhortations, from the sacred desk, may be ascribed much of that Christian charity, and those laudable effusions of philanthropy which were manifested on this occasion, and which cannot fail to secure to them the esteem of the publick, and to reflect a lasting honour on their attachment to the cause of liberty, and the rights of human nature. . . .¹¹⁴

A great deal of Morgan’s next year appears to have been filled with writing similarly verbose memos about the difficulties he faced. Those documents did not succeed in making his job any easier.

On 19 March, as the commander-in-chief was directing part of his army in taking control of Boston and the other part in moving south, Dr. Morgan offered him a horse. That simple offer took more than one hundred words:

Doctor Morgan’s Compliments to General Washington. Having received a present of an exceedingly handsome & good horse, he thinks it too elegant & accomplished an Animal not to wish General Washington Master of it; therefore begs the Generals Acceptance of it, in which case he shall think himself very happy to have had it in his power to furnish him so noble a Steed at a time when he may have more particular occasion for a good riding horse, either for his own Use or that of Mrs. Washington.

¹¹³ WGW, 4:199.

¹¹⁴ *American Archives*, series 4, 4:536.

Dr. Morgans servant now attends with the Horse to deliver it to whomsoever the Genl shall order to take charge of it.

Washington declined the gift.¹¹⁵

On 3 April the commander-in-chief gave Dr. Morgan instructions on packing up most of the army's medical supplies for New York. He was to equip medical chests for the five Continental regiments remaining in Massachusetts and leave behind enough personnel to care for the sick who "cannot be removed." The general's letter left a blank for the name of the physician who would oversee those patients.¹¹⁶ Dr. Isaac Foster, now officially Morgan's Deputy Director-General, went ahead to New York to set up a new military hospital. As of 23 April Morgan had sent twenty-six wagons of hospital equipment south, but was bogged down in dividing the supplies that the British forces had left behind in a way that satisfied both his orders and the demands of the Massachusetts government.¹¹⁷ He did not arrive in New York until late May.¹¹⁸

Over the next several months, Dr. Morgan lost support in both the army and the Congress. In the fall of 1776 another doctor received authority over the most important military hospitals, and on 9 January 1777 the Congress dismissed Morgan because of "the general complaints of persons of all ranks in the army," and "the critical state of affairs at that time."¹¹⁹ He returned to Boston and published a 208-page book titled *A Vindication of His Public Character in the Station of Director-General of the Military Hospitals*, mostly in the form of a memorandum to the commander-in-chief. Though a later inquiry cleared him of any wrongdoing, Morgan became morose and withdrew from his practice in Philadelphia.¹²⁰

On 21 October 1777 Dr. Benjamin Rush, then a Continental Congress delegate but at one point a professor in Morgan's medical school, told John Adams:

There is but *one* right System for a military hospital, and that is the one made use off by the British Army. It was once introduced by Dr. Church at Cambridge, and Dr. [Charles] McKnight informs me that he never has seen order—Oconomy—or happiness in a hospital since it was banished by Dr. Morgan and his Successor.¹²¹

In fact, Church had been in charge for less than two months, and was already facing complaints from the regimental surgeons. Conflict between those doctors and the

¹¹⁵ PGW:RW, 3:493.

¹¹⁶ WGW, 4:464-5.

¹¹⁷ *American Archives*, series 4, 5:1024-5, 1045-6.

¹¹⁸ Morgan, *Vindication of His Public Character*, 48; Washington to Congress, 15 May 1776, WGW, 5:46.

¹¹⁹ JCC, 8:626.

¹²⁰ Morgan, *Journal of Dr. John Morgan*, 55-7.

¹²¹ PJA, 5:318.

centralized medical administration, especially when supplies were so scarce, seems to have been unavoidable. Gen. Washington quickly learned not to get in the middle.

15.10 ANDREW CRAIGIE, MASSACHUSETTS COMMISSARY OF MEDICINES

Among the people Dr. John Morgan came into conflict with was Andrew Craigie, a young apothecary supplying medicines to the hospitals. On 30 April less than two weeks after the war began, the Massachusetts Committee of Safety voted “That Andrew Craigie be appointed to take care of the medical stores, and to deliver them out as ordered by this committee; and that the secretary make out his commission accordingly.”¹²² Dr. Joseph Warren was filling in as clerk for that meeting, among his many other tasks, and the paperwork for Craigie’s commission may never have been completed. Over the next few months, successive authorities kept appointing the young man to what was basically the same job. On 14 May, the safety committee empowered Craigie as “commissary of the medicinal stores, &c.” to requisition “beds, bedding, and other necessaries for the sick, as they may be wanting, giving the owners a receipt for such articles as he may take for the purpose aforesaid.”¹²³ He was evidently equipping an entire hospital.

Craigie (1754-1819) was just launching himself as an independent apothecary when the war began.¹²⁴ He was the son of a ship’s captain, also named Andrew Craigie, said to have sailed between London and Boston before settling down as a shopkeeper.¹²⁵ Family tradition holds that Capt. Craigie was born on the Orkney Islands in Scotland and met his wife Elizabeth Gardner after being shipwrecked on Nantucket. In any event, the couple was admitted to Boston in April 1741.¹²⁶ The captain joined the West Church in 1756, and was one of the founding members and officers of the Boston Marine Society.¹²⁷

Young Andrew entered the South Latin School in 1763, slightly older than other first-form boys.¹²⁸ Like a great majority of grammar school entrants in the period, he did not complete the seven-year course; he probably switched to a Writing School and in his teens became an apprentice to an established apothecary. Unfortunately, no information has surfaced about which importer of medicines Andrew Craigie worked for. He was evidently

¹²² Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 530, 597.

¹²³ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 545.

¹²⁴ Some sources give Craigie’s birth date as 1743, but that was an older brother who must have died young; BTR, 24:248, 283.

¹²⁵ *Cambridge Historical Society Proceedings*, 4:36.

¹²⁶ BTR, 15:288.

¹²⁷ CSMP, 7:403. William H. Teschek, “Descendants of Andrew Craigie of Boston,” <<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~teschek/andrew/index.htm#toc>>

¹²⁸ Jenks, *Catalogue of the Boston Public Latin School*, 84.

well connected because the Committee of Safety gave him an appointment at a young age and then continued to promote him.

On 4 July the Massachusetts Provincial Congress made Craigie “a commissary of medical stores,” with a salary of £5 per month.¹²⁹ A month later, the Massachusetts General Court confirmed his post as apothecary for the colony’s “Medical Store in Watertown,” with a higher salary, and assigned him an assistant: James Miller Church, Dr. Benjamin Church’s son.¹³⁰ As Massachusetts’s supplier of medicines and medical supplies, Craigie undoubtedly visited the Penelope Vassall house in Cambridge and the other hospitals. Washington’s papers show no correspondence with him, however, and in 1780 the general described Craigie as “a gentleman not personally known to me.”¹³¹

The general might have been tangentially drawn into a conflict between Craigie and Dr. John Morgan in late 1775. The Surgeon-General’s version of events appears in a letter he sent to John Adams in February 1776:

On my Arrival at Cambridge Mr. Craigie waited on me and solicited my appointing of him Apothecary to the General Hospital. He represented that he had been in that Station, from the beginning of the War, and had continued so ever since. He was informd the Appointment rested in me, and begged my continuing him in that Station.¹³²

Morgan acknowledged that he had hoped to give this job to “a Young Gentleman, a Pupil of my own, on whose Ability and Fidelity I could rely,” named Giles.¹³³ But Morgan apparently shied from confrontations in person, so he promised Craigie he could stay on. In fact, the doctor told Adams: “I spoke to General Washington in his behalf, that in case the Appointment of the Apothecary was reserved by the Congress to be at their Disposal, and the place not fill’d up, he would be pleas’d to recommend Mr. Craigie to the Place.” (The general never mentioned Craigie or the apothecary’s position in his letters to the Congress during the siege.)

Dr. Morgan asked Craigie “to make out a list of all the Drugs &c. in the Medicinal Store, which I found extremely ill Supply’d.” According to medical historian George B. Griffenhagen, Craigie’s inventory of 2 December “included 120 different items, but only

¹²⁹ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 448.

¹³⁰ *Massachusetts Acts & Resolves, 1775-76*, chap. 32, 44.

¹³¹ Quoted in Kremers and Sonnedecker, *Kremers and Urdang’s History of Pharmacy*, 165.

¹³² All quotations from Morgan to Adams, 19 February 1776, PJA, 4:30-35.

¹³³ Kremers and Sonnedecker, *Kremers and Urdang’s History of Pharmacy*, 520, lists “A. Giles” as an “Apothecary” at Cambridge and New York Hospitals, July, Aug., 1776.” Morgan’s protégé may have been Aquila Giles (1758-1822) of Maryland, an aide de camp to Gen. Arthur St. Clair in 1777 who had befriended some of the young Continental Army doctors; Warren, *Life of John Warren*, 155.

limited quantities of the essential drugs.”¹³⁴ Among the regiments, only that of Col. Hand (the former British army surgeon who had applied for Morgan’s job) reported a good supply of medications.¹³⁵

Around this time Craigie also gave Morgan a letter addressed to John Adams, asking him to send it on. That letter dated 4 December 1775 came from four young doctors working in the Cambridge hospitals: Adams, Warren, McKnight, and James McHenry.¹³⁶ They wrote of Craigie:

He has been employed in the Publick Service from the first Commencement of Hostilities, first by an Appointment of the Committee of Safety to procure Medicines for the Army, next by the appointment of the provincial Congress as Commissary of the medicinal Store, and from them he received a Warrant investing him with full power to act as such and lastly by the late Director of the Hospital Dr. Church he was appointed Apothecary for the Hospital as well as of the whole Army together, That he has discharged the Duties annexed to the Station which he has held, not only the Surgeons of the Hospital, but also those of the Regiments, as well as the whole Army who have in a great Measure been supplied with the most important medicinal Articles by his vigilance and Assiduity, can with Gratitude attest. . . . he put himself to great Expence and Infinite Pains when he found the Exigencies of an Army already beginning to Suffer through want of Medicine so loudly called for it. These Motives induced him to run the Hazard of an Attempt to procure his Medicines out of the Town of Boston, the place of his nativity, and from whence he made his escape soon after the first Battle, having left the most valuable part of his Possessions there, and in this he so well succeeded as to get a considerable Quantity of the most valuable Articles safe to the Army having escaped the greatest Danger of a Detection by the Enemy; You will reflect that after having thus supplied the Army with all his own Medicines, he put it out of his power to pursue the Business upon which he depended for a maintenance, and therefore reserved no resource to which he could at any Time apply in case any thing of the kind now apprehended should take place.

It is also known by great Numbers that Mr. Craigies’ Attention was not confined solely to procuring Medicines but extended even to Bedding and Quarters for the wounded Soldiers particularly at the Time of the Battle of Bunker Hill. The Fatigues with which Mr. Craigies Office had till lately been attended, augmented by the procrastination of the appointment of an Assistant, had rendered him almost indifferent with Regard to his continuance in it, but after an Assistant was appointed, being enabled to perform his Business without Injury to his Health, he was desirous of remaining in it, especially as he had, after

¹³⁴ Morgan published this inventory in the 24 June 1779 *Pennsylvania Packet*. It is analyzed in Griffenhagen, “Drug Supplies in the American Revolution,” *United States National Museum Bulletin*, 225:109-33.

¹³⁵ *American Archives*, series 4, 5:115.

¹³⁶ McHenry was working as a volunteer, not on the payroll. He would eventually serve as one of Gen. Washington’s aides (see section 5.9).

procuring a considerable Assortment of medicines, and born the Heat and Burthen of the Day, render'd the Task much more easy...

The doctors asked Adams to share their letter with the other Massachusetts delegates.¹³⁷

In addition, on 3 December Dr. Samuel Adams (the Massachusetts delegate's son) had called on James Warren in Watertown and convinced him to write to John Adams that "Mr. Craige who has been Apothecary to the Army is like to be superceeded, and Mr. Dyre [sic—Giles?] Appointed in his room. As he Appears to me a very clever fellow and such Changes do us no good I could wish it might be prevented."¹³⁸ Evidently Craigie had learned of Morgan's hope to appoint his own protégé as apothecary and started a campaign to keep the job. By giving the four doctors' letter to Morgan, Craigie might have been signaling that he had both their support and good contacts in the Congress.

Over the next few days, Morgan learned that he had the legal authority to dismiss or hire any apothecary he wanted.¹³⁹ Furthermore, he looked at Church's and Foster's account books and found that the only apothecary they mentioned was a Dr. Benjamin Allen or Alline.¹⁴⁰ The Continental Army had never assigned Craigie a salary. Morgan became convinced that the young man had lied to him about being the hospital apothecary. On top of that, Morgan decided that Craigie was giving a man named "James Jones" too much money for various drugs. The Director-General's letter to Adams went into a detailed comparison of prices (which might simply have reflected the differences between Philadelphia and wartime Massachusetts) and concluded:

I could produce other similar Instances, but let these Suffice, as Specimens, of Dr. Craigies fitness for the Station to which he aspires. A pretty piece of Work. At this rate no Sum of Money could be thought of, adequate to the enormous expence of supplying the whole Army. Is it to be wondered at, then, that I should lose all Confidence in Mr. Craigie.

In December 1775 Dr. Morgan called the young apothecary in for a meeting and presented the evidence of the high prices. As he recalled:

When I Charged him with it he was so sensible of his Misconduct, that he humbly intreated me to allow him to withdraw the Rhubarb. He pleaded his being deceived himself (but I suppose his meaning was that it should not Appear against

¹³⁷ PJA, 3:355-6.

¹³⁸ PJA, 3:348.

¹³⁹ JCC, 2:209-11. To be exact, the Congress had granted Church this authority, and Morgan felt he had succeeded to it.

¹⁴⁰ This man appears in *Massachusetts Acts and Resolves, 1780*, chap. 80, as Benjamin Alline, paid for "three chests of medicines delivered to Dr. Benjamin Church, on the 5th day of April, 1775." This might be the same man who provided deposition #77 in Bowdoin, *Short Narrative of the Horrid Massacre*.

him,) which I granted. By this time, Certainly knowing that the Appointment of an Apothecary rested with me, I determined to Acquaint Mr. Craigie he need not flatter himself with being appointed to that Office, and to Appoint Mr. Giles to it, in whose Integrity, as well as Ability to fill up the Place, I could repose Confidence. Mr. Craigie urged, in his own behalf, that it was a bad time of the Year to be Discharged; and that to be Idle would be an injury to him. Was it another season of the Year, it would be less Matter; Having no design to injure Mr. Craigie, I gave him to understand, if he Chose to remain in the Quality of an Assistant, till he could provide better for himself, he was wellcome: This he declined. He insisted on receiving pay as Apothecary, from the beginning of the Service to that Day, which I thought I was scarcely Justified to pay him, as Dr. Allen had received pay as such; and if I paid two, it was at my own risk; however, I concluded to pay him his full demand, as on Enquiry from Dr. Foster I Learned that Dr. Allen would acquiesce, and knew that if it should not be allowed, I could make Mr. Craigie refund.

Morgan never seems to have consulted Alline himself, or even met him. Alline's reported willingness to give up his salary for the preceding months is odd. It is also notable that, although Morgan could not find Craigie's name in the hospital's accounts, all the Cambridge doctors agreed that the young apothecary had been their main supplier. Craigie may have done that work while still drawing a salary from Massachusetts. Church may have made promises he never put in writing. Perhaps there was some other double-dealing which left everyone satisfied but the new Director-General.

Dr. Morgan told Adams, "On the Whole my Intention was to pay him all his Demands for Services, that he might have no Complaint; and to let him down gently." Still avoiding face-to-face conflict, he gave Craigie what he called "a formal, but Cold, Certificate of his having acted Well in which my Cooler Judgment tells me I was to blame, but Charity for him was the Motive." Morgan held onto the young doctors' letter. Then in the new year he heard that Craigie

has made a stir, among some worthy Gentlemen here, who think from his partial Account he has been hardly treated and have advised him to Apply to You to get his grievances represented to Congress, he giving as a reason for my behaviour to him, that I put Mr. Giles in, as being an Apprentice of mine, with a View of putting the pay into my own Pocket.

That news prompted the doctor to send his long, defensive letter to John Adams in February along with the doctors' recommendation. He planned to send similar letters to "Lynch and Rutledge," delegates from South Carolina.

The conflict between Morgan and Craigie was apparently still simmering at the end of the siege.¹⁴¹ The ultimate winner is clear. Morgan was pushed out of the Continental Army

¹⁴¹ The two men had another encounter in late 1776, which ended with Morgan giving Craigie a warrant as apothecary in a region where he had no authority. Craigie complained that "in giving me a warrant, he could only promise himself a temporary riddance of a *troublesome* person"—which may

establishment within a year. In contrast, from 1777 to 1780 Craigie served as the Apothecary General for the army's Northern Department. After a reorganization of the medical supply administration, he became the Continental Army's sole Apothecary General from 1780 to the end of the war.¹⁴²

15.11 BODY-SNATCHING

Training the young surgeons and surgeon's mates was an important function of the army's medical wing. Dr. John Warren later wrote:

The military hospitals of the United States furnished a large field for observation and experiment in the various branches of the healing art, as well as an opportunity for anatomical investigations.¹⁴³

Those "anatomical investigations" required cadavers to dissect. While sickness and battles provided a steady supply of corpses of young men, often far from family and sometimes entirely anonymous, society still frowned on how surgeons used bodies.

Gen. Washington's general orders reflected that sentiment on 1 September:

Complaint has been made to the General; that the body of a Soldier of Col [Benjamin Ruggles] Woodbridges Regiment has been taken from his grave by persons unknown; The General and the Friends of the deceased, are desirous of all the Information that can be given, of the perpetrators of this abominable Crime, that he, or they, may be made an example, to deter others from committing so wicked and shameful an offence¹⁴⁴

It was clear to the army surgeons, and probably to most of the soldiers, what had happened to the soldier's body. Dr. James Thacher later wrote in his published journal:

The body of a soldier has been taken from the grave, for the purpose, probably of dissection, and the empty coffin left exposed. This affair occasions considerable excitement among our people; both resentment and grief are manifested; as it seems to impress the idea that a soldier's body is held in no estimation after death. Such a practice, if countenanced, might be attended with serious consequences as it respects our soldiers. Much inquiry has been made, but without success, for the discovery of the persons concerned; and the practice in future is strictly prohibited by the commander-in-chief.¹⁴⁵

have been the point. Craigie appears to have talked his way into the position he wanted anyway. See Craigie to Dr. John Warren, 5 November 1776, in Warren, *Life of John Warren*, 121.

¹⁴² Kremers and Sonnedecker, *Kremers and Urdang's History of Pharmacy*, 164-5. JCC, 18:910. In 1791, Andrew Craigie bought the old John Vassall mansion in Cambridge. He expanded that building and was a crucial investor in the development of east Cambridge.

¹⁴³ Warren, *Life of John Warren*, 227.

¹⁴⁴ WGW:RW, 3:464.

¹⁴⁵ Thacher placed this entry in his journal under November 1775. Thacher, *A Military Journal*, 36.

Thacher probably knew more about that body than he let on. He was working at the hospital in Cambridge under Dr. Warren. According to one of that surgeon's sons:

My father began to dissect early in the Revolutionary War. He obtained the office of army surgeon when the Revolution broke out, and was able to procure a multitude of subjects from having access to the bodies of soldiers who had died without relations.¹⁴⁶

Another son wrote a biography of his father that referred to Gen. Washington's order against body-snatching, but went on to suggest that the only problem had been letting people see what had happened:

It was done with so little decency and caution, that the empty coffin was left exposed. . . . It must have been the act of a reckless agent or a novice. In cases of this kind, where the necessities of society are in conflict with the law, and with public opinion, the crime consists, like theft among the Spartan boys, not in the deed, but in permitting its discovery.¹⁴⁷

It is unclear whether Gen. Washington shared the Warrens' belief in the necessity of surgical training and issued his order just to satisfy the dead soldier's upset friends. His general orders did not mention the problem of body-snatching again, but "anatomical investigations" surely went on.

¹⁴⁶ Warren, *Life of John Collins Warren*, 1:404.

¹⁴⁷ Warren, *Life of John Warren*, 233.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

DIPLOMACY AND INVASION

The American War for Independence started as a civil war within the British nation, but it took place mainly on a continent that was home to other nations as well: the French Catholic Canadians and the various Native nations living to the north and west of the united colonies. Even before the first shots, American leaders were concerned about the potential alliances of those neighboring peoples. Both the Patriots and the Crown tried to win over those groups or at least to convince them to be neutral.

The Continental Congress's concerns about Canada evolved quickly from worry about a British military invasion from the north to authorizing an invasion of that territory. That plan in turn shaped the Congress's policy on relationships with the Native peoples who lived between New England and New York and the Anglo-French cities on the St. Lawrence. Through their agents, the Congress sought neutrality and limited military help, but remained wary of forging full alliances with any Indian nation for fear of the potential consequences and obligations.

Gen. George Washington did not have responsibility for the Canada invasion or for negotiations with Native leaders. However, he tried to aid those initiatives from afar with polite diplomacy. Late in the summer of 1775, as he became frustrated by the obstacles to forcing the British out of Boston, he also decided to devote some of his army's men and supplies to a bold attack on Quebec, with Indian help.

16.1 THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS AND CANADA

The First Continental Congress invited the voters of Quebec and Nova Scotia to send their own delegates to the next such gathering in May 1775. Neither Canadian province did. A week after the Second Continental Congress convened, it received word that a collection of New Englanders had seized Fort Ticonderoga and other fortified points along Lake Champlain. The delegates' response was somewhat contradictory, reflecting how they were split on how aggressively to challenge the London government. On the one hand, the Congress resolved that "there is indubitable evidence that a design is formed by the British Ministry of making a cruel invasion from the province of Quebec, upon these colonies." On the other hand, it ordered the heavy weapons in those forts to be moved south to Lake George, stymieing any preemptive attempt to invade Canada.¹

¹JCC, 2:55-6.

On 29 May the Congress approved an address “To the oppressed Inhabitants of Canada.” It concluded:

As our concern for your welfare entitles us to your friendship, we presume you will not, by doing us injury, reduce us to the disagreeable necessity of treating you as enemies.

We yet entertain hopes of your uniting with us in the defence of our common liberty, and there is yet reason to believe, that should we join in imploring the attention of our sovereign, to the unmerited and unparalleled oppressions of his American subjects, he will at length be undeceived, and forbid a licentious Ministry any longer to riot in the ruins of the rights of Mankind.²

Having made peaceful noises, the Congress then called on Connecticut and New York to work together to maintain the garrisons at Ticonderoga and Crown Point; this was the body’s first step toward directing its member colonies’ military activity.³ As a delegate from Virginia, George Washington participated in those discussions.

In June, after choosing Washington as commander-in-chief of its army, the Congress made New York delegate Philip Schuyler (1733-1804) a major general in charge of the “Northern Department,” or the defense of northern New York.⁴ On 27 June, after the new generals had set out for their assignments, the Congress went further and authorized Schuyler to investigate the situation in New York and Canada, and

That if General Schuyler finds it practicable, and that it will not be disagreeable to the Canadians, he do immediately take possession of St. Johns, Montreal, and any other parts of the country, and pursue any other measures in Canada, which may have a tendency to promote the peace and security of these Colonies.⁵

The united colonies thus endorsed the notion of invading Canada—but only if it would not be disagreeable to the Canadians.

The Canadians the Congress had in mind were the French Catholics who made up the bulk of the provinces’ white population. They numbered about sixty thousand, most of them tenant farmers. Most of these *habitants* wanted to remain neutral in the conflict between the British government and its English-speaking subjects. Canada’s francophone *seigneurs*, or wealthy landowners, and Catholic officials tended to support the Crown once the Quebec Act made clear that their power bases were safe. The people in Canada most eager to ally with the Whigs to the south were English-speaking merchants and their dependents,

² JCC, 2:68-70.

³ Martin, *Benedict Arnold*, 86. Arnold is endlessly fascinating to American historians, and Martin’s is among the best of the several recent biographies of him.

⁴ For a short, highly sympathetic profile, see John H. G. Pell, “Philip Schuyler: The General as Aristocrat,” in Billias, *George Washington’s Generals*.

⁵ JCC, 109-10.

clustered in the cities of Quebec and Montreal. Some of those men were already in touch with activists in Boston, New York, and elsewhere, urging an alliance and offering assurances that the *habitants* would be happy to throw off the tyrannical government.⁶

From Cambridge, Gen. Washington maintained a steady exchange of letters with Schuyler, whom he respected as a fellow aristocrat and veteran. He understood that Schuyler had the responsibilities of negotiating with the Native nations in that part of the continent and planning any invasion of Canada. In August, however, the commander-in-chief met a New England officer with an ambitious plan to march on Quebec through Maine.

16.2 BENEDICT ARNOLD: ENERGETIC PATRIOT

Sometime in the first half of August 1775 Washington had his first conversation with Benedict Arnold (1741-1801) of Connecticut. The recently resigned officer was in Massachusetts to settle his financial accounts with the legislature, which in 2 May had commissioned him as a colonel to attack Fort Ticonderoga. Washington had heard about that victory back in Philadelphia, though the news had come from one of Arnold's rivals and did not present him in the most flattering light. In person, Gen. Washington found Arnold quite impressive.

Arnold came from a genteel family in Norwich, Connecticut, but in the early 1750s his father developed a serious drinking problem, three of his siblings died young, and the family lost status. Benedict's mother arranged for him to become an apprentice to two of her cousins, who were apothecaries. He did well, representing the firm on trading voyages to the Caribbean and London, and the cousins helped him set up his own shop in New Haven in 1761. That port town was quadrupling in population between 1750 and 1775. Arnold prospered as a "Druggist, Bookseller, &c.," as his sign announced. He invested in ships, and sometimes traveled on them to trade in Canada and the West Indies. Between those voyages and his apothecary's knowledge, his neighbors referred to him as both "Capt. Arnold" and "Dr. Arnold." In 1767 he married Margaret Mansfield, daughter of the New Haven County sheriff, and they had three sons over the next six years. During a trip to Martinique, he wrote back to his wife Peggy that "I have bought you a Negro girl—very cheap." In 1770 Arnold began building a mansion with formal gardens and outbuildings on Water Street.⁷

Throughout his rise, Benedict Arnold was snappish about his reputation and respect. In 1766 he led his crew in publicly whipping a sailor who had threatened to inform on him for smuggling, and then published his side of the story in the *Connecticut Gazette*. Four years later he filed suit against a captain who had whispered that he had venereal disease, and he also dueled. Though no more than five feet, five inches tall, Arnold was oversized in his

⁶ Martin, *Benedict Arnold*, 109-11.

⁷ Martin, *Benedict Arnold*, 33, 35-7, 50, 54.

pugnacity.⁸ Active in business and the militia, he never sought elected office, and thus had little practice in forging compromises or consensus.

In 1770 Arnold began to express strident Whig political ideas. In response to the Boston Massacre, he wrote, “Good God, are the Americans all asleep and tamely giving up their liberties, . . .” After the Boston Tea Party, he encouraged crowd action against people who criticized that event. Late in 1774 Arnold and sixty-four other men formed an independent militia company, which the next year became established as the Governor’s Second Company of Guards, or the Footguards. These men elected Arnold as their captain.⁹

News of the Battle of Lexington and Concord arrived in New Haven on 21 April. The Footguards assembled and voted, with a few dissents, to march to Massachusetts. Arnold allowed some Yale students to come along. The next day, he defied the town selectmen and David Wooster, Connecticut’s highest-ranking militia officer, by demanding some of the public supply of gunpowder.¹⁰ Armed and enthusiastic, the company marched north, reportedly going through Pomfret to pick up Israel Putnam (see section 4.6) and settling into the abandoned house of Lt. Gov. Thomas Oliver at Cambridge.¹¹

On 30 April Arnold met with Dr. Joseph Warren and the Massachusetts Committee of Safety to propose a radical way to solve the besieging army’s shortage of artillery: a raid on Fort Ticonderoga and Crown Point, two British army outposts on the west side of Lake Champlain. Three days later, the colony approved Arnold’s plan. He rode west with £100, ten horses, and some of the provincials’ precious ammunition.¹² Unknown to Arnold, an officer he had spoken to on the road had brought the same idea back to Hartford, where the Connecticut government ordered a similar mission.¹³

As a result, when Arnold reached Castleton in what is now Vermont on 8 May, he found Ethan Allen’s “Green Mountain Boys” and other companies were already gathering to attack Ticonderoga. Arnold had his Massachusetts commission but no authority and no men. He ended up functioning as a volunteer officer, watching as Allen stormed Ticonderoga on 10 May and Seth Warner seized Crown Point two days later.¹⁴ Both outposts were lightly guarded; their commanders had not even heard that a war had broken out. Allen sent triumphant reports to the Albany Committee of Correspondence, the Massachusetts

⁸ Martin, *Benedict Arnold*, 44, 449, 52, 2.

⁹ Martin, *Benedict Arnold*, 58-9, 61-2.

¹⁰ Martin, *Benedict Arnold*, 62-3.

¹¹ Barber, *Connecticut Historical Collections*, 168. Martin, *Benedict Arnold*, 65, said they used the house of the previous lieutenant governor, Andrew Oliver, which was in Dorchester; Stark, *Loyalists of Massachusetts*, 183. The first seems more reliable, but no contemporaneous support has turned up.

¹² Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 529, 531, 185.

¹³ Martin, *Benedict Arnold*, 64-5.

¹⁴ Martin, *Benedict Arnold*, 67-9, 73.

Provincial Congress, and the Continental Congress.¹⁵ As the Green Mountain Boys celebrated their easy triumphs, Arnold inventoried the forts' artillery, finding 201 guns, but only half usable. Within a few days, the soldiers that his officers had been recruiting started to arrive while many of Allen's men were heading home. Soon Arnold was in practical command of the outposts, though he would still bump up against other colonels for weeks. He led a raid on St. John's, capturing two ships, and then started to consolidate the defenses at Crown Point.¹⁶

In mid-June Arnold sent the Congress a detailed plan for invading Canada from the Lake Champlain forts using two thousand troops. This led to the Congress's decision to authorize Gen. Schuyler to pursue such an invasion. By then, however, Arnold had resigned his Massachusetts commission, somewhat petulantly, after friction with fellow officers and the arrival of a Provincial Congress oversight committee. On 4 July Arnold traveled south, meeting with Schuyler in Albany. While there, he learned that his wife had died at age thirty. He returned home to see his sons and his sister, now his only close family, and to recuperate.¹⁷

Arnold still had to settle his financial accounts with the Massachusetts government. He arrived in Watertown on 1 August and met several times with a committee headed by Dr. Benjamin Church. These conversations did not go well, with the legislature eventually paying Arnold less than half of the compensation he sought.¹⁸ At some point in that period, Arnold went into Cambridge to brief Gen. Washington about the forts in northern New York. James Kirby Martin guessed that Silas Deane (1737-1789), an Arnold supporter in the Continental Congress who visited headquarters in that period, arranged the meeting.¹⁹ Dave R. Palmer suggested that the only reason Arnold did not protest loudly about Church's committee is that he was caught up in making plans for Canada when it announced its decision.²⁰

During those conversations with Gen. Washington, Arnold suggested attacking Canada at the same time as the thrust north that Schuyler was planning with Gen. Richard Montgomery.²¹ With a Continental Army commission, Arnold said, he would lead a contingent from the Maine coast up the Kennebec River and through the wilderness to Quebec City, distracting and dividing Britain's forces in Canada. Soon he drew up a detailed

¹⁵ Martin, *Benedict Arnold*, 81-5. *American Archives*, series 4, 2:556, 606.

¹⁶ Martin, *Benedict Arnold*, 73-7.

¹⁷ Martin, *Benedict Arnold*, 92-4, 99-104.

¹⁸ Martin, *Benedict Arnold*, 105-6.

¹⁹ Martin, *Benedict Arnold*, 462.

²⁰ Palmer, *George Washington and Benedict Arnold*, 116.

²¹ Arthur S. Lefkowitz wrote that Washington had the idea of an attack through Maine and presented it to Arnold, but did not cite support from Washington's writings; Lefkowitz, *Benedict Arnold's Army*, 28-9. Most historians credit the Connecticut man with the initiative.

written plan. The Americans had to act quickly, Arnold warned, before Gen. Guy Carleton, the governor of Canada, had the time to strengthen his cities' defenses. Other people had proposed a similar attack, including the Massachusetts colonel Jonathan Brewer before he was badly wounded at Bunker Hill. Washington saw potential in the idea and in Arnold; while New England did not lack for ambitious officers, the Connecticut merchant showed an attention to detail and a discipline that matched the general's own approach.²² The commander may also have been chafing at how his generals had just voted down his own plan for attacking Boston (see section 11.5). While considering Arnold's vision, the general put him in contact with a man who had recently come to headquarters with a contingent of Native Americans.

16.3 NATIVE AMERICANS IN THE NEW ENGLAND ARMY

When Gen. Washington arrived in Cambridge in July 1775 he found two types of Native soldiers in the provincial armies. The first group consisted of men assimilated into English-dominated colonial towns who had enlisted alongside their neighbors. For example, in the main guard on 3 July the commander's first full day in Cambridge, was Pvt. Alexander Quapish, a widower from Dedham, Massachusetts. In the fall of 1775 Quapish "was taken Sick in the Army Near Cambridge and was Dismissed." He arrived at a home in Needham on 15 November and died there the following 23 March. A town historian later called Quapish the "last of the Aborigines in Dedham."²³

Other soldiers identifiable as Indians among Washington's troops include John Ashbow of Norwich, Connecticut, whose brother died fighting alongside him at the Battle of Bunker Hill; John Chowen of Lancaster, Massachusetts, whom a 3 January 1776 deserter advertisement said "is a mulatto, but calls himself Indian"; Joseph Paugenit of Framingham, Massachusetts, stationed on Winter Hill in September; and John Sunsiman of Woodstock, Connecticut, who later fought at Germantown and Monmouth.²⁴ Gen. Washington would most likely have treated these men like other privates in his army.

The second group of Natives the commander found was a small company of warriors from Stockbridge in western Massachusetts. The youngest of New England's "praying towns," set aside for Indians who had adopted Congregationalist Christianity, Stockbridge was a community in flux when the war began. In 1774 one of its missionary founders and protectors had died. At the same time, its western part, settled mostly by English families, split off to become a separate town. Over the preceding decade, the Native families had sold

²² Martin, *Benedict Arnold*, 107.

²³ Quintal, *Patriots of Color*, 186.

²⁴ Quintal, *Patriots of Color*, 53-4, 81-2, 169, 206.

most of their land to pay off debts. Their population numbered two or three hundred while there might have been a thousand whites in the area.²⁵

Under economic pressure and seeking influential allies, the Stockbridge leaders offered to support the Massachusetts Provincial Congress in early 1775, even before the war began. Thirty-five men joined Capt. William Goodrich's minuteman company, receiving the congress's promise of a blanket, a red ribbon, and friendship.²⁶ Seventeen later enlisted in the Massachusetts army and came to the Cambridge camp by the end of April.²⁷ On 9 May the Rev. Thomas Allen of Pittsfield told Seth Pomeroy that they would "be of great Service should the King's Troops march out of Boston."²⁸ These warriors stood out because they lived separately with their families and wore war paint.²⁹ The Rev. William Emerson described the Stockbridge soldiers in early July:

Last Saturday visited ye Camp or rather Wigwaums of ye Indians who are under ye *Care & Government* of Col. [John] Patterson, who informed me to my great Satisfaction, that they are wholly under his Command. They are permitted to live by themselves, in a very thick woods, that belongs to *Inman Farm*. They have some of them got their Squaws & Papooses with them. I had ye Pleasure of sitting down with 'em at a fine Mess of Clams cooked and eat in ye true genuine Indian Taste. I wish you had been there to see how generously they put their Fingers into ye Dish, and picked out some of ye largest Clams to give me, & with what a Gust I eat them.³⁰

When Lt. Paul Lunt described the raising of a new flag on Prospect Hill on 18 July he said the ceremony ended with "a war whoop by the Indians."³¹

New Englanders were generally pleased with the Stockbridges' support, especially when there appeared to be little danger of equivalent attacks from Britain's Indian allies. But commanders inside Boston noted that the provincials had "open'd the Door" to the Native style of warfare, as Gen. Thomas Gage wrote in September: "they have brought down all the Savages they could against us here, who with their Rifle men are continually firing on our

²⁵ Following the lead of Colin G. Calloway, this study deals with Native Americans largely on a community basis rather a tribal or national one. The Stockbridge community was composed of families from the Mahican, Housatonic, and Wappinger peoples who had adopted Christianity and some aspects of English culture. The town had become the central "fireplace" of the Mahican nation, but cannot be equated with the Mahican nation. Calloway, *American Revolution in Indian Country*, xvi, 85-6, 90-1.

²⁶ Calloway, *American Revolution in Indian Country*, 92.

²⁷ Mackenzie, *British Fusilier*, 77.

²⁸ *Historical Magazine*, 1:108.

²⁹ Calloway, *American Revolution in Indian Country*, 92-3. Stiles, *Literary Diary*, 1:554.

³⁰ Emerson, *Diaries and Letters*, 79-80.

³¹ MHSP, 12:195.

advanced Sentries.” Some Stockbridge leaders went west as emissaries to the Iroquois nations, speaking up for the Americans’ cause to a generally skeptical audience.³²

Gen. Washington seems to have had little to do with the Stockbridge warriors. Since they were formally enlisted in the Massachusetts army, with a company captain and officers, they did not require his special attention. In the 23 October conference with the committee from the Continental Congress, he asked for approval on how he had dealt with all the Native visitors:

17. Several Indian Chiefs of the St Francis, Penobscot Stockbridge & St. John’s Tribes have been to offer their Services & told they would be called for if wanted & dismiss’d with Presents[.] Ought they to be called if a Necessity for them should appear & is the giving them Presents proper?

Agreed That these Indians or others may be called on in Case of real Necessity & that the giving them Presents is both suitable & proper.³³

The Stockbridge company remained in the Continental Army throughout the war, fighting in New York, New Jersey, and Canada. However, the community in western Massachusetts dwindled, and by 1790 almost all the Native families moved to Oneida country in New York.³⁴

In his history of the Revolution, the Rev. William Gordon of Roxbury included a description of an Indian “war dance” during the siege. It appears in his book alongside events from October or November of 1775, but may in fact belong to another period. Gordon did not include enough details to identify the Native culture:

A number of Indian chiefs have also been down, that they might see and judge for themselves, how far the reports propagated among them were true or false. They were treated at head quarters, and by different officers, with much respect. One evening they entertained the generals and others with a war dance, if that may be called an entertainment, wherein the motions and actions of the dancers were calculated to alarm and terrify those who were not acquainted with such sights. They were pleasant and agreeable company. Two of them had their squaws or wives with them: who were well looking women, allowing for their very dark complexion: one of them was much dejected, having lately lost her papoos or child. When the Indians danced in company with the American gentlemen and ladies, both men and women kept time with far greater exactness than the others. They went off upon their return, fully satisfied with the treatment they had received; and it is hoped will carry back those accounts which will keep their tribes peaceable.³⁵

³² Calloway, *American Revolution in Indian Country*, 93-4.

³³ PGW:RW, 2:201.

³⁴ Calloway, *American Revolution in Indian Country*, 96-103.

³⁵ Gordon, *History of the Rise. . .*, 2:141-2.

16.4 NATIVES FROM THE NORTH

On 15 August Washington wrote to Gen. Philip Schuyler about the arrival of a small group of Natives from Canada:

Several Indians of the Tribe of St. Francis came in here Yesterday and confirm the former Accounts of the good Dispositions of the Indian Nations, and Canadians to the Interests of America. A most happy Event, on which I sincerely congratulate you.

The “Tribe of St. Francis” referred to the community of Saint-François-du-Lac, now known as Odanak, at the conjunction of the St. François and St. Lawrence Rivers, between Montreal and Quebec. Most of its inhabitants were Abenakis. They had close ties to the French Canadians, but had also sent some young men to Dartmouth College in New Hampshire.³⁶

A letter published in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, most likely from one of the Philadelphians on Washington’s staff, added more detail about these arrivals:

Yesterday Sen-night arrived at the camp in Cambridge, Swashan, the Chief, with four other Indians of the St. François tribe, conducted thither by Mr. Reuben Colburn, who has been honorably recompensed for his trouble. The above Indians came hither to offer their service in the cause of American liberty, have been kindly received, and are now entered the service. Swashan says he will bring one half of his tribe and has engaged 4 or 5 other tribes if they should be wanted. He says the Indians of Canada in general, and also the French, are greatly in our favor, and determined not to act against us.³⁷

Reuben Colburn (1740–1818) was a shipbuilder in Gardinerston (then called Pittston), Maine, on the Kennebec River.

To reach Pittston, Swashan (also called Swausen) and his four colleagues had traveled through the forests of Maine, using approximately the same route by which Arnold proposed to attack Quebec. On the coast they had picked up “twenty or thirty” Norridgewocks and Pegwackets from their community on the Kennebec River, led by a man named Paul Higgins (fl. 1767-1775). Higgins had been captured in his youth during a raid on Berwick and grew up in the Norridgewock community, becoming their translator and liaison to the British colonists.³⁸

The Massachusetts House of Representatives appointed a committee to confer with Swashan, whom they took as “an Ambassador from that Tribe.” Neither civil nor military

³⁶ Calloway, *American Revolution in Indian Country*, 69.

³⁷ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 30 August 1775.

³⁸ Drake, *Book of the Indians*, 156. Drake quoted a statement that the Kennebec Indians “were rowed down in canoes to Merrymeeting Bay by their squaws” from William S. Bartlet. Writing about the same event in *Frontier Missionary*, 262-3, Bartlet credited that detail to “one of the oldest settlers in Kennebec.” Hanson, *History of Gardiner*, 27.

officials appear to have distinguished between the St. Francis community and the men from the Kennebec region. It is therefore unclear how many people Swashan spoke for, but he supported the Continental Army himself.³⁹

16.5 ASSEMBLING AN INVASION FORCE

Gen. Washington put Benedict Arnold in contact with Reuben Colburn and the Indians who had arrived with him. On 20 August he wrote a long letter to Schuyler about the Connecticut man's invasion plan.

In my last (a Copy of which is inclosed) I sent you an account of the Arrival of several St. Francis Indians in our Camp, and their friendly Dispositions. You have also a Copy of the Resolution of Congress, by which you will find it is their Intention only to seek a Neutrality of the Indian Nations, unless the ministerial Agents should engage them in Hostilities or enter into an offensive Alliance with them. I have been therefore embarrassed in giving them an answer when they have tendered their services and assistance. As your Situation enables you best to know the Motions of the Governour [of Canada] and the Agent, I proposed to him to go Home by Way of Ticonderoga, referring him to you for an answer, which you will give according to the Intelligence you have had, and the Judgment you have formed of the Transactions among the Indians; but as he does not seem in any Hurry to leave our Camp, your answer by the Return of this Express may possibly reach me before he returns and alter his Rout; Four of his Company still remain in our Camp, and propose to stay some Time with us. The Design of this Express is to communicate to you a Plan of an Expedition, which has engaged my Thoughts for several Days. It is to penetrate into Canada by Way of Kennebeck River, and so to Quebeck by a Rout ninety miles below Montreal. I can very well spare a Detachment for this Purpose of one Thousand or twelve Hundred Men, and the Land Carriage by the Rout proposed is too inconsiderable to make an objection. If you are resolved to proceed, which I gather from your last Letter is your Intention, it would make a Diversion that would distract Carlton, and facilitate your Views. He must either break up and follow this Party to Quebeck, by which he will leave you a free Passage, or he must suffer that important Place to fall into our Hands, an Event, which would have a decisive Effect and Influence on the publick Interests. There may be some Danger that such a sudden Incursion might alarm the Canadians and detach them from that Neutrality, which they have hitherto observed: but I should hope that with suitable Precautions and a strict Discipline preserved, any apprehensions and Jealousies might be removed. The few whom I have consulted upon it approve it much; but the final Determination is deferred until I hear from you. You will therefore by the Return of this Messenger inform me of your ultimate Resolution.—If you mean to proceed, acquaint me as particularly as you can with the Time and Force, what late Accounts you have had from Canada, and your Opinion as to the Sentiments of the Inhabitants, as well as those of the Indians upon a Penetration into their Country; what Number of Troops are at Quebeck, and whether any Men of War with all other Circumstances which may be material in the

³⁹ Swashan fought for the Americans in 1778 and 1779. Calloway, *American Revolution in Indian Country*, 69, 73, 76.

Consideration of a Step of such Importance. Not a Moments Time is to be lost in the Preparations for this Enterprize if the Advices received from you favour it. With the utmost Expedition the Season will be considerably advanced, so that you will dismiss the Express as soon as possible.⁴⁰

As courier for this message, Washington chose Eleazer Oswald (1756-1795), one of the captains in Arnold's regiment. Apparently expecting Schuyler's approval and knowing that time was tight, Washington and Arnold moved ahead with their plan.

On 21 August Arnold wrote to Colburn about bateaux, provisions, and other things necessary for the wilderness trek. Colburn hurried back home to gather supplies and start building the boats.⁴¹ The men from St. Francis wanted to go home, and Washington advised them to visit the American troops in Ticonderoga on their way. Higgins apparently promised that the Norridgewocks and Pegwackets would guide Arnold through the wilderness, and he and his companions set out for Maine on foot.⁴²

Oswald returned to the Cambridge headquarters the afternoon of 2 September. Gen. Schuyler had endorsed Arnold's plan, telling Washington:

your Excellency will easily conceive that I felt happy to learn your intentions, and only wished that the thought had struck you sooner. The force I shall carry is far short of what I would wish. I believe it will not exceed seventeen hundred men; and this will be a body insufficient to attempt *Quebeck* with, after leaving the necessary detachments at *St. John's*, *Chambly*, and *Montreal*, should we succeed and carry those places, which must be respectable, to keep an open and free communication with *Crown Point*, &c.⁴³

Preparations in Cambridge sped up. Washington gave Arnold a commission as colonel and sent a message to Colburn at Pittston ordering two hundred bateaux.

That same day, the general wrote a letter to the Newburyport merchant Nathaniel Tracy (1751-1796) making him responsible for acquiring enough boats to carry Arnold's troops up to the Kennebec River:

You are hereby authorized and empowered to take up for the service of the said Colonies so many vessels as shall be necessary for the transporting a body of Troops to be detached from this Army on a secret expedition. Freight of such vessels to be paid in such manner and at such a rate as is herein endorsed; and in case of loss or damage to such vessels, or any of them, such loss or damage to be compensated by the publick, according to an estimation to be made before the said vessels proceed in the above service.

⁴⁰ WGW, 3:437-8.

⁴¹ Martin, *Benedict Arnold*, 113.

⁴² Calloway, *American Revolution in Indian Country*, 70.

⁴³ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:442.

Obviously, Washington had already made some contact with Tracy and given him some details of the “secret expedition,” such as how many soldiers would need to be transported. It is likely that Tracy came to the headquarters for that discussion.⁴⁴

Five days later, Joseph Reed wrote to Tracy:

Colonel *Glover* has just informed the General that there are five vessels at *Beverly*, and two at *Newbury*, which were fitted out for another purpose, but will answer the present equally well, as they are completely equipped with platforms, wood, water, &c. It will be a saving, both in time and expense, to make use of these. You will, therefore, be pleased, in your transaction of this matter, to consider these seven vessels as a part of the transports, and only extend your care to the remainder. Whatever expense may have accrued in preparing any vessels which will not be necessary by this arrangement, must be carried to the general account; but you will be careful not to add any thing to it after this comes to hand.⁴⁵

At the time Reed and Glover were preparing to launch an armed schooner, an effort that apparently grew out of a plan to raid the British military depot at Halifax (see section 12.4). These seven ships in Beverly and Newbury were apparently being prepared as part of that plan, which Washington set aside in favor of Arnold’s expedition.

Tracy was still a young man and had not been very active in Massachusetts politics. But he was the administrator of the estate of his father-in-law, Jeremiah Lee, who had worked on the Provincial Congress’s important Committee on Supplies.⁴⁶ Glover had known Lee, a business mentor and his immediate predecessor as colonel of the Marblehead regiment. According to a probate inventory drawn up in June, the Jeremiah Lee estate owned several ships: the *Tryal*, equipped with six swivel guns, and the *Broad Bay*, *Horton*, *Hannah*, *Eagle*, *Abigail*, *Swallow*, and *Betsy*.⁴⁷ Author John Codman listed the transports to the Kennebec as: “the *Commodore*, the flagship, carrying Arnold; the sloops *Britannia*, *Conway*, *Abigail* and *Swallow*; the schooners *Houghton*, *Eagle*, *Hannah* and *Broad Bay*”; and two more, names unknown.⁴⁸ The overlap in names suggests that Tracy supplied most of the vessels for Arnold’s expedition from his father-in-law’s estate.⁴⁹

On 5 September Washington’s general orders announced a call for men to go on Arnold’s expedition:

⁴⁴ WGW, 3:430-1. Tracy would later buy the John Vassall house from the state of Massachusetts.

⁴⁵ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:67-8.

⁴⁶ Lee had caught a chill while hiding—probably needlessly—from army officers on 18 April 1775, and died the following month.

⁴⁷ Hovey, “George Washington’s Armed Schooner,” 7, 242-5.

⁴⁸ Codman, *Arnold’s Expedition to Quebec*, 38.

⁴⁹ R. H. Harrison to Joshua Wentworth, 10 September 1776, shows that Tracy also loaned the army ten cannons from the Lee estate to arm the schooners; *American Archives*, series 5, 2:274.

A detachment, consisting of two Lieutenant-Colonels, two Majors, ten Captains, thirty Subalterns, thirty Sergeants, thirty Corporals, four Drummers, two Fifers, and six hundred and seventy-six Privates, to parade to-morrow morning, at eleven o'clock, upon the Common in *Cambridge*, to go upon command with Colonel *Arnold*, of *Connecticut*; one Company of *Virginia* Riflemen, and two Companies from Colonel *Thompson's Pennsylvania* Regiment of Riflemen, to parade at the same time and place, to join the above detachment. Tents and necessaries proper and convenient for the whole will be supplied by the Quartermaster-General immediately upon the detachment being collected. As it is imagined the officers and men sent from the Regiments, both here and at *Roxbury*, will be such Volunteers as are active woodsmen, and well acquainted with batteaus, so it is recommended that none but such will offer themselves for this service. Colonel *Arnold* and the Adjutant-General will attend upon the Common in *Cambridge* to-morrow, in the forenoon, to receive and parade the detachment. The Quartermaster-General will be also there, to supply tents, &c.

It actually took a few days for Arnold and Gates to select the men for the expedition and for quartermaster Mifflin to equip them. Among the officers were Lt. Col. Christopher Greene, a cousin of the general; Maj. Timothy Bigelow; and Capt. Daniel Morgan of the Virginia riflemen. The unranked volunteers included Oswald as Arnold's secretary and Matthias Ogden and Aaron Burr of New Jersey (see section 5.9). The wives of Sgt. Joseph Grier, Pvt. Jemima Warner, and two other soldiers came as support workers.⁵⁰ The expedition had a surgeon, Dr. Isaac Senter, and a chaplain, the Rev. Samuel Spring. In all, over a thousand men and at least one dog left Washington's army for the north.⁵¹

In eighteenth-century military terminology, Arthur S. Lefkowitz pointed out, an expedition was a swift attack.⁵² But the preparations were typical military hurry-up-and-wait, no doubt frustrating for Arnold. Pvt. Ephraim Squier wrote in his diary on 7 September, "This instant set out for Cambridge. Went and signed to go under Lieut. James Sprague for Quebec, and returned to Dorchester same day." On the 8th he returned to Cambridge, and on the day after that he received clothing for the trip and then "returned again to Dorchester." (The clothing was "a new coat and a linen frock," according to British spy Benjamin Thompson.⁵³) On 10 September Squier wrote, "This morning early set out for Cambridge, in order to march for Quebec. Paraded on Cambridge Common. Being not ready to-day, tarried at Cambridge." The next day the contingent "refused to march until we had a month's pay, so we stayed in Cambridge to-day." On 12 September "Early this morning paraded again in order to march, but still not ready, we pitched our tents on Cambridge

⁵⁰ Lefkowitz, *Benedict Arnold's Army*, 51-2.

⁵¹ Darley, *Voices from a Wilderness Expedition*, includes a complete roster of men on the expedition, as best they can be identified. The contingent was racially integrated, at least a little: the army listed Pvt. Benjamin Butcher of Worcester as black. Lefkowitz, *Benedict Arnold's Army*, 350, 112.

⁵² Lefkowitz, *Benedict Arnold's Army*, 28.

⁵³ Martin, *Benedict Arnold*, 464.

Common.” Finally Squier’s group “set out for Quebec” on the afternoon of the 13th, getting “three miles from Cambridge.”⁵⁴ Pvt. Caleb Haskell recorded going ahead to Lynn as a guard, but all of the other diarists on the expedition describe leaving Cambridge on 13 September.⁵⁵

Over a week later, on 21 September Washington mentioned the expedition for the first time in his official letters to Philadelphia:

I am now to inform the Honbl. Congress, that encouraged by the repeated Declarations of the Canadians & Indians, & urged by their Requests, I have detached Col. Arnold with 1000 Men to penetrate into Canada by Way of Kennebeck River, &, if possible, to make himself Master of Quebec. By this Manoeuvre I proposed, either to divert Carlton from St. Johns, which would leave a free Passage to General Schuyler, or, if this did not take Effect, Quebec in its present defenseless State must fall into his Hands an easy Prey. I made all possible Inquiry as to the Distance, the Safety of the Rout, & the Danger of the Season, being too far advanced, but found nothing in either to deter me from proceeding, more especially, as it met with very general Approbation, from all, whom I consulted upon it.⁵⁶

Of course, if Washington had consulted with Deane early on, then the Connecticut delegate had probably already brought secret news of the plan to Philadelphia.

16.6 OUTREACH TO THE CANADIANS AND IROQUOIS

As part of the preparation for Arnold’s march, Gen. Washington issued an address to the inhabitants of Canada. It was dated 5 September and several hundred printed copies were packed with Arnold’s supplies:

Friends and Brethren: The unnatural Contest between the English Colonies, and Great Britain has now risen to such a Height, that Arms alone must decide it.

The Colonies, confiding in the Justice of their Cause and the purity of their intentions, have reluctantly appealed to that Being, in whose hands are all Human Events: He has hitherto smiled upon their virtuous Efforts: The Hand of Tyranny has been arrested in its Ravages, and the British Arms, which have shone with so much Splendor in every part of the Globe, are now tarnished with disgrace and disappointment. Generals of approved experience, who boasted of subduing this great Continent, find themselves circumscribed within the limits of a single City and its Suburbs, suffering all the shame and distress of a Siege. While the Freeborn Sons of America, animated by the genuine principles of Liberty and Love of their Country, with increasing Union, Firmness and discipline, repel every attack and despise every Danger.

⁵⁴ Roberts, *March to Quebec*, 619.

⁵⁵ Roberts, *March to Quebec*, 472, 130, 173, 197, 653.

⁵⁶ PGW:RW, 2:27-8.

Above all we rejoice that our Enemies have been deceived with Regard to you: They have persuaded themselves, they have even dared to say, that the Canadians were not capable of distinguishing between the Blessings of Liberty and the Wretchedness of Slavery; that gratifying the Vanity of a little Circle of Nobility would blind the Eyes of the people of Canada. By such Artifices they hoped to bend you to their Views; but they have been deceived: Instead of finding in you that poverty of Soul, and baseness of Spirit, they see with a Chagrin equal to our Joy, that you are enlightened, generous, and Virtuous; that you will not renounce your own Rights, or serve as Instruments to deprive your Fellow subjects of theirs. Come then, my Brethern, Unite with us in an indissoluble Union. Let us run together to the same Goal. We have taken up Arms in Defence of our Liberty, our Property; our Wives and our Children: We are determined to preserve them or die. We look forward with pleasure to that day not far remote (we hope) when the Inhabitants of America shall have one Sentiment and the full Enjoyment of the blessings of a Free Government.

Incited by these Motives and encouraged by the advice of many Friends of Liberty among you, the Great American Congress have sent an Army into your Province, under the command of General Schuyler; not to plunder but to protect you; to animate and bring forth into Action those sentiments of Freedom you have declared, and which the Tools of dispositism would extinguish through the whole Creation. To co-operate with this design and to frustrate those cruel and perfidious Schemes, which would deluge our Frontier with the Blood of Women and Children, I have detached Colonel Arnold into your Country, with a part of the Army under my Command. I have enjoined upon him, and I am certain that he will consider himself, and act as in the Country of his Patrons and best Friends. Necessaries and Accommodations of every kind which you may furnish, he will thankfully receive, and render the full Value. I invite you therefore as Friends and Brethren, to provide him with such supplies as your Country affords; and I pledge myself not only for your safety and security, but for ample Compensation. Let no Man desert his habitation. Let no Man flee as before an Enemy.

The cause of America and of liberty is the cause of every virtuous American Citizen Whatever may be his Religion or his descent, the United Colonies know no distinction, but such as Slavery, Corruption and Arbitrary Domination may create. Come then ye generous Citizens, range yourselves under the Standard of general Liberty, against which all the force and Artifice of Tyranny will never be able to prevail. I am, etc.

This text was translated into French and printed. Gen. Charles Lee checked the French text, and may also have had a hand in the writing along with Joseph Reed.⁵⁷

Washington did not share the bitter anti-Catholicism of New England culture, and tried to suppress it for the sake of an alliance with the French Canadians and French Catholic Indians. New Englanders, especially those from port towns, had a tradition of celebrating the Fifth of November, the anniversary of the thwarting of the Guy Fawkes plot in Britain, with anti-Catholic parades and bonfires. In most towns, the culmination of the holiday was when young men and boys burned their effigy of the pope in a bonfire. (In Boston, that bonfire was

⁵⁷ WGW, 3:478-80. Alden, *General Charles Lee*, 323. Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 67.

often preceded by a riotous brawl between neighborhood gangs.) On 5 November 1775 Gen. Washington squelched such celebrations by his soldiers:

As the Commander in Chief has been apprized of a design form'd for the observance of that ridiculous and childish custom of burning the Effigy of the pope—He cannot help expressing his surprise that there should be Officers and Soldiers in this army so void of common sense, as not to see the impropriety of such a step at this Juncture; at a Time when we are solliciting, and have really obtain'd, the friendship and alliance of the people of Canada, whom we ought to consider as Brethren embarked in the same Cause. The defence of the general Liberty of America: At such a juncture, and in such Circumstances, to be insulting their Religion, is so monstrous, as not to be suffered or excused; indeed instead of offering the most remote insult, it is our duty to address public thanks to these our Brethren, as to them we are so much indebted for every late happy Success over the common Enemy in Canada.⁵⁸

This order may well have been composed by Stephen Moylan, recently recalled to headquarters as Washington's temporary secretary. Moylan was himself a Catholic with brothers in the priesthood (see section 5.5).

After John Adams raised the possibility of an attack on Nova Scotia in early November 1775, the Congress asked Washington to send “two capable Persons” to gather intelligence there. On 19 November he wrote back with assurances that he would as soon as he could find such people. These agents were

to inquire into the State of that Colony the Disposition of the Inhabitants towards the American Cause, and the Condition of the Fortifications, Dock-Yards, the Quantity of Artillery and warlike Stores, and the number of Soldiers, Sailors, and Ships of War there, and transmit the earliest intelligence to General Washington⁵⁹

On 24 November Washington gave that task to Aaron Willard (1725-1781) of Lancaster, Massachusetts, a veteran officer of the French and Indian War.⁶⁰ Willard recommended Moses Child (1731-1793) of Groton as his companion.⁶¹

On 5 February 1776 Willard and Child returned with their report. They had gone to Campobello, but did not cross the Bay of Fundy to Halifax because of Gov. Francis Legge's martial-law restrictions. Any newcomer to Halifax had to report to a justice of the peace within two hours or be deemed a spy; anyone harboring such a person would be deemed a rebel and traitor. Willard and Child concluded:

⁵⁸ WGW, 4:65.

⁵⁹ Washington to Willard, 24 November 1775, WGW, 4:112.

⁶⁰ Nourse, *Military Annals of Lancaster, Massachusetts*, 68, 130, 146. Willard, *Willard Genealogy*, 104.

⁶¹ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1665. Green, *Groton During the Revolution*, 249-50.

From our own knowledge, and the best information from others, about eight parts out of ten of the inhabitants of *Nova-Scotia* would engage in the common cause of *America*, could they be protected. There are no fortifications in the Province, only at *Halifax*, and those much out of repair; but they are at work on them. They have picketed the town in, and have about one hundred and fifty pieces of cannon, not mounted, and about twenty or thirty pieces mounted in the town. There were at *Halifax* about two hundred soldiers, the beginning of *January*, 1776, which were all that there were in the Province at that time; but we are credibly informed that there are two regiments arrived there since that time. There was only one ship-of-war, of sixty guns, at *Halifax*, and one, of fourteen, at *Annapolis*, at the time aforesaid.⁶²

On 14 February the general passed that report on to the Congress, stating: “They have not answered the purposes of their commission, by any means, as they only went but a little way into that country.”⁶³ In less than two months, the situation at Halifax would change drastically with the arrival of the evacuation fleet from Boston, rendering the two men’s dubious information completely unusable.

Through most of his period in Cambridge, Washington received updates about Arnold and Montgomery’s joint attack on Canada. Given his distance from them, he could do very little to help those officers except to try to make potential Native allies happy when they visited. Schuyler was conducting the formal negotiations for the army, and on 18 July the Continental Congress had commissioned the Rev. Samuel Kirkland (1741-1808), a Presbyterian missionary, to seek the friendship or neutrality of the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy.

Late in September, Kirkland arrived in Cambridge from western New York with Skenandoah or Skenando (1705-1816) of the Oneidas. At his death the *Utica Patriot* stated, “Skenando’s person was tall, well made, and robust. His countenance was intelligent, . . . Although he could speak but little English.” Having embarrassed himself with a drunken celebration of a treaty in 1755, Skenandoah had taken up Christianity, sworn off alcohol, and become a respected leader in both war and peace.⁶⁴ Washington understood Skenandoah was “an Oneida Chief, of considerable Rank in his own Country,” and told the Massachusetts House:

He has come on a Visit to the Camp, principally to satisfy his Curiosity; But as his Tribe has been very friendly to the United Colonies and his Report to his Nation, at his Return, have important Consequences to the public Interest, I have Studiously endeavour’d to make his Visit agreeable. Having express’d an Inclination to pay his Respects to the General Court, I thought it proper to let them know who he was and upon what Errand he came; Not doubting, but your

⁶² *American Archives*, series 4, 4:1149-50.

⁶³ PGW:RW, 4:331.

⁶⁴ Dwight, *Travels in New-England and New-York*, 4:200-2.

Honorable Board will join with me in shewing him all proper Civilities. I have directed a present to be prepared for him at his Return.⁶⁵

On the same day the general gave Kirkland a letter to carry to the Congress in Philadelphia and £32 for his journey. The letter concluded:

I cannot but congratulate the Honorable Congress on the happy Temper of the Canadians and Indians, our Accounts of which are now fully confirmed by some intercepted Letters from Officers in Cannada to General Gage and others in Boston. . .⁶⁶

Before the end of the Boston siege, the Iroquois Confederacy started to split, with the Mohawks leading most of their allies in support of the British. The Oneidas and Tuscaroras, encouraged by Skenandoah and Kirkland, sided with the Americans for the rest of the war.

16.7 COLONEL LOUIS ATAYATAGHRONGHTA

On 27 July John Hurd of Haverhill, New Hampshire, sent a letter to the chairman of New Hampshire's Committee of Safety by Col. Jacob Bayley:

. . .an Indian by name Louis of the Caghnawaga Tribe, who is just come in here from Montreal by way of the Lake Memphrimagog & Upper Coho'os—the same who sent us those advices in the letter wch. I carried down & communicated to the Congress in the last Sessions. He has all along appeared friendly to the New England people, is very intelligent & has the character among the Indian traders of an honest Fellow, who has always stood by & made good his word . . . That yr Committee of Safety as well as the Gentn. of the Massachusetts & the Generals at Cambridge would not be displeas'd with an oppo. to converse with him, for which reason we have persuaded Louis (having given a few small presents & engaging some pay for his time) to make a Journey down Country, paying a visit first to you or yr. Committee at Exeter & thence to the Army at Cambridge & Colonel Bayley is so good to undertake conducting him, having formerly had some acquaintance with him, his time is short, he says, he could not leave Montreal without a pass from the Governor & and promise to return in about twenty days, as if going out upon a hunt, he speaks very good French, & English tolerably well, so as to be easily understood—⁶⁷

Bayley and his Caughnawaga contact arrived in Cambridge on 1 August.⁶⁸

Louis, known as Colonel Louis and as Atayataghronghta (His Body Is Taken Down from Hanging), had been born Lewis Cook at Saratoga around 1740. His mother was Abenaki and

⁶⁵ WGW, 3:525.

⁶⁶ WGW, 3:526. Skenandoah became ill a few days after he and Kirkland left Cambridge, perhaps with the dysentery then epidemic behind the American lines—see section 15.5. Glatthaar and Martin, *Forgotten Allies*, 94–6.

⁶⁷ *New Hampshire Provincial Papers*, 7:569–70.

⁶⁸ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:29.

his father of African descent, probably a British officer's servant, possibly enslaved. During King George's War, a French and Indian raiding party captured the family. Seeing the boy's African features, a French officer wanted to claim and sell him, but his mother asked Mohawk chiefs to intervene. The Mohawks at Caughnawaga adopted the mother and child. Lewis was then raised as a Catholic, learning to speak French and spelling his name in the French style. As a young man Louis fought for the French Empire in 1756-1760, apparently taking the title of colonel during that war.⁶⁹ Like several other men on both sides of the siege lines around Boston, he had been at Braddock's retreat in 1756—but he fought on the French side.⁷⁰

After the conquest of Canada, the colony's new governors promised to respect the rights of the French-speaking Catholic Indians, known as the Seven Nations. Still, the Caughnawaga community outside Montreal developed little loyalty to the British. Ethan Allen's attack on Fort Ticonderoga told them that war had broken out within that empire. According to Louis's account, in the spring of 1775 he was hunting near Lake Saint Francis when

...two Americans came to me, and brought me a letter from General Bailey, to carry to Cagnawagha in Montreal. . . . This letter said, My brothers. . . don't take up any arms against the Americans, because I want to fight against the British. And I. . . left all my hunt in the woods. . . and carried this. . . letter to Caghnawagha and delivered it to a chief. . . and he opened the. . . letter and was likely to be hung for it. And I returned to Lake St. Francis to get my furs and skins. And. . . General Bailey received me well and he took me to Boston and to Cambridge to see General Washington.⁷¹

Colonel Louis probably hoped to learn about what the "Bostonians" (the Native term for the American side of the war at this point) might offer his community if they became allies. It is not clear whether he was acting on his own or as a scout for his community, but he does not seem to have been the leader or chief that his American contacts took him for.

On 4 August 1775 Washington wrote to the Congress about their conversation:

Yesterday a Chief of the Cagnewaga Tribe, who lives within 6 miles from Montreal, came in here accompanied by a Col: Bailey of Cohoss. His Accounts of the Temper and Disposition of the Indians are very favourable; He says they have been strongly solicited by Governor Carlton to engage against us: But his Nation is totally averse; that Threats as well as Intreaties have been used without Effect;

⁶⁹ Hutchins, *Tribes and the American Constitution*, 7.

⁷⁰ Hough, *History of St. Lawrence and Franklin Counties*, 183. Thanks to David Preston for reporting this detail and source.

⁷¹ Hutchins, *Tribes and the American Constitution*, 6, quoting a document in the Papers of the Continental Congress. Hutchins dates this account to early January 1776 because Louis had apparently not learned that Gen. Richard Montgomery was dead; Hutchins, *Tribes and the American Constitution*, 255.

That the Canadians are well disposed to the English Colonies and if any Expedition is meditated against Canada, the Indians in that Quarter will give all their Assistance. I have endeavoured to cherish those favorable Dispositions and recommended to him to cultivate them on his return. What I have said, I enforced with a Present, which I understood would be agreeable and as he is represented to be a man of weight and consequence in his own Tribe, I flatter myself his visit will have a good Effect. His Account of Governor Carlton's Force and Situation at St. Johns corresponds with what we have already had from that Quarter.⁷²

Colonel Louis said that at that meeting, "the General asked me how would be the best way to keep the Seven Nations from taking up arms against the Americans."⁷³

The day before Washington wrote, Louis had met with a joint committee of the Massachusetts assembly and Council. Among their exchanges:

Q. Has the Governour of *Canada* prevailed on the *St. François Indians* to take up Arms against these Colonies?

A. The Governour sent out Messrs. *St. Lue* and *Boehpassion*, to invite the several Tribes of *Indians* to take up Arms against you. At his desire they held a Grand Council, and the *French* Officers gave each man half a pound of powder and a drink of brandy, and an ox among them for a feast. They answered, no body had taken Arms against them, and they would not take Arms against any body to trouble them; and they chose to rest in peace. Upon this answer, the Officers told them, if you do not take up Arms the Yankees will come and destroy you all. The *Indians* answered again, when those men come here to destroy us, then we will take up Arms and defend ourselves; but we will not go to seek people to quarrel with them. The Officers then told them, if you will not take up Arms, the Regulars will come and destroy you and take your Lands. They answered, you may come as soon as you have a mind to; and whoever comes to attack us, we will take Arms and defend ourselves. The Officers tried to engage their young men to take Arms, by putting two Johannes a-piece into their hands; but when the Chiefs knew it, they took the money from them and returned it to the Officers, and told the young men if they offered to engage they would put them to death.⁷⁴

Colin G. Calloway suggests that Louis shaped the last detail to please his American audience because "Such an extreme assertion of authority seems unlikely in Abenaki society."⁷⁵

Colonel Louis returned to Caghnawagha, where Britain's top liaisons to the Indians awaited him. As he described for an American official later, those men asked "me to take up the tomahawk in the Grand Council against the Americans. . . . they said I must have known the news by the letter that I carried to Caghnawagha. I then told them that I was for the

⁷² WGW, 3:397-8.

⁷³ Hutchins, *Tribes and the American Constitution*, 6.

⁷⁴ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:301-2.

⁷⁵ Calloway, *American Revolution in Indian Country*, 68.

Americans.” When the Seven Nations had a council of war, Louis said, he argued “that we must be with the Americans and join them only.”⁷⁶

In the fall of 1775 Colonel Louis led Caughnawagas and other Native warriors as part of Gen. Philip Schuyler’s army besieging Fort St. Johns on the Richelieu River.⁷⁷ He was with Gen. Montgomery’s army during the first part of its thrust toward Montreal and then Quebec, but was returning south during Montgomery and Arnold’s attempt to storm the city.⁷⁸ With twelve companions he met with Gen. Schuyler in Albany on 5 January and then went to Hartford to meet with Gov. Jonathan Trumbull. Both men wrote to Washington about those meetings, with an alert that the men were on their way to Cambridge. On 16 January Washington wrote back to Schuyler:

Our Caghnewaga Friends are not arrived yet; I will try to make suitable Provision for them during their Stay, and use every Means in my Power to confirm their favourable Disposition towards us. They will not, I am fearful, have such Ideas of our Strength, as I could wish. This, however, shall be strongly inculcated.⁷⁹

On 21 January Jeduthan Baldwin wrote in his diary, “13 Ingions came from Canady to see Genl. Washington.”⁸⁰ On his first visit, Colonel Louis was a solitary representative from Caughnawaga. This time he brought twelve others, as well as his record of fighting for the Americans in Canada. On 24 January Washington told the Congress:

On Sunday Evening 13. of the Coghnewaga Indians arrived here on a Visit. I shall take care to entertain them in such a manner during their stay here, that they may return impressed with Sentiments of Friendship for us, and also of our great strength. One of them is Colonel Louis, who Honored me with a visit once before.⁸¹

The previous day, officers had taken the Caughnawagas to see the fortifications Baldwin was constructing in east Cambridge.⁸²

John Adams passed through Cambridge on 24 January as he prepared to return to Philadelphia, and Washington drew him into the effort to entertain the visiting Caughnawagas. In his diary, Adams wrote of these Natives: “Louis, their Principal, speaks

⁷⁶ Hutchins, *Tribes and the American Constitution*, 6-7.

⁷⁷ Hutchins, *Tribes and the American Constitution*, 7.

⁷⁸ John Trumbull, who was at the Cambridge headquarters during Colonel Louis’s first visit, sketched him in 1785 to include in the painting *The Death of General Montgomery* though he had not been present at that event.

⁷⁹ WGW, 4:253.

⁸⁰ Baldwin, *Revolutionary Journal*, 23.

⁸¹ WGW, 4:274-5.

⁸² Baldwin, *Revolutionary Journal*, 24.

English and french as well as Indian.”⁸³ He described their dinner in more detail in a letter to his wife:

...I dined at Coll. Mifflins with the General, and Lady, and a vast Collection of other Company, among whom were six or seven Sachems and Warriours, of the French Cagnawaga Indians, with several of their Wives and Children. A savage Feast they made of it, yet were very polite in the Indian style. . . .

I was introduced to them by the General as one of the grand Council Fire at Philadelphia which made them prick up their Ears, they came and shook Hands with me, and made me low Bows, and scrapes &c. In short I was much pleased with this Days entertainment.

The General is to make them presents in Cloaths and Trinketts, they have visited the Lines at Cambridge and are going to see those at Roxbury.⁸⁴

Colonel Louis did not want just entertainment, cloth, and trinkets. He wanted a commission in the Continental Army and authorization to raise a Native regiment.

Washington was wary of going that far, both because it seemed to go beyond the Congress’s policy and because of the expense, as he told Schuyler three days later:

I am a little embarrassed to know in what Manner to conduct myself with Respect to the Caghnawaga Indians now here. They have, notwithstanding the Treaty of Neutrality which I find they entered into with you the other Day (agreeably to what appears to be the Sense of Congress), signified to me a Desire of taking up Arms in Behalf of the United Colonies. The Chief of them, and whom I understand is now the first Man of the Nation, intends (as it is intimated to me) to apply to me for a Commission, with Assurances of raising four or five Hundred Men when he returns. My Embarrassment does not proceed so much from the Improprity of encouraging these People to depart from their Neutrality (accepting their own voluntary Offer rather) as from the Expense, which probably may follow. I am sensible that if they do not desire to be idle, that they will be for or against us. I am sensible also, that no Artifices will be left unessayed to engage them against us. Their proffer’d services, therefore ought not to be rejected; but how far (under the little Knowledge I have of these People’s Policy, and real Intentions and your Want of their Aid) I ought to go, is the Question that puzzles me. I will endeavour, however, to please them by yielding in Appearance to their Demands; reserving, at the same Time, the Power in you to regulate their Numbers and Movements, of which you shall be more fully informed when any Thing is fixed. At present what they have mentioned is a Kind of out Door’s Talk. They expect and are waiting to see Colonel Bedel (who promised to meet them here) before they open themselves fully.⁸⁵

Col. Timothy Bedel (1737-1787) of New Hampshire commanded rangers during Montgomery’s expedition.

⁸³ DAJA, 2:227.

⁸⁴ AFC, 1:343.

⁸⁵ WGW, 4:280-1.

After the “out-door’s talk,” Colonel Louis and his fellow Caughnawagas returned to the north. The tide of the war there had turned, and most Mohawk communities would ally with the British. Louis, however, continued to work with the Americans. On 15 June 1779 he received a commission as lieutenant colonel in the Continental Army from the Congress, thus becoming the highest-ranking person of either Native or African descent to fight on either side of the war.⁸⁶

16.8 CHIEFS “OF ENGLISH EXTRACTION”

According to John Adams, one of the Caughnawaga sachems whom he met on 24 January 1776 was “an Englishman a Native of this Colony whose Name was Williams, captivated in his Infancy with his Mother, and adopted by some kind Squaw.”⁸⁷ Adams’s information could not have been completely accurate because the Caughnawaga Mohawks surnamed Williams were all descended from Eunice Williams, captured from Deerfield in 1704 when she was only a child herself.

If Adams was correct about meeting a warrior named Williams, he must have been Thomas Williams or Tehoragwanegen (c. 1758-1848), at that time the only living male descendant of Eunice Williams. He was the son of one of Eunice Williams’s daughters, raised by the other daughter after being orphaned. Though Thomas Williams was probably still in his late teens in 1776, two circumstances make it plausible that he could have been among the Caughnawaga warriors to visit Cambridge that year. First, his Williams heritage might have made him a natural ambassador to the “Bostonians.” Eunice Williams maintained some links to her relatives in Massachusetts, and even visited Boston in 1743; Thomas’s grandmother and adopted parents had brought him on a visit to Longmeadow in 1761.⁸⁸ Second, by 1777 Thomas Williams was a chief at Caughnawaga. Williams achieved that status by leading men from the community against the Americans as early as October 1776, and fought in several British campaigns. Unlike Colonel Louis, Thomas Williams left no first-hand account of his life, and thus no evidence of visiting Washington at Cambridge.⁸⁹

It is possible that Adams was mistaken in hearing the name Williams, but correct about the sachem’s history. In that case, he most likely met Jean Baptist or Ogaghragighte, who introduced himself as “a New-Englander taken prisoner in his infancy” during the outdoor meeting a week later. This might be the same man as John Baptist Toietakherontie, identified as a hunting companion of Thomas Williams in 1783, who John Demos wrote “may also have

⁸⁶ Hutchins, *Tribes and the American Constitution*, 11, vii.

⁸⁷ AFC, 1:343.

⁸⁸ Demos, *Unredeemed Captive*, 227-8, 235. Haefeli and Sweeney, *Captors and Captives*, 264, 270.

⁸⁹ The major source on Thomas Williams is his grandson Eleazer Williams’s *Life of Te-ho-ra-gwa-ne-gen* (1859). Published for American readers, it minimizes his warfare against the Continental Army.

had some Williams blood.”⁹⁰ However, that Christian name was not rare. To confuse matters further, on 29 March 1775 a Montreal Whig told the Boston Committee of Correspondence that he had heard that “all the chiefs of the Caghnawaga tribe [are]. . . of English extraction, captivated in their infancy.”⁹¹ Therefore, Adams may have heard that personal history from other men.

16.9 THE “OUT-DOOR’S TALK”

On 30 January Washington told Congress, he met in formal, Native fashion with “thirteen of our Caughnawaga friends,” plus “three of the tribe of the St. John’s and Passamaquoddy Indians.”⁹²

That event began with the Caughnawaga chief Jean Baptist or Ogaghragighte stating:

We were sent by the Five Tribes of Canada Indians, consisting of the Caughnawagas, &c., &c., to see General Schuyler, at Albany, and then to come to you, to inquire into the cause of the quarrel between the people of England and our brothers in this country.

This is a treaty of peace, entered into between General Schuyler, &c., and our people, and we shall be very glad if you will put your name to it, and certify that you like it, and the promise mentioned in it.

Gen. Washington signed a copy of the Treaty of Albany that Schuyler had negotiated. Jean Baptist continued:

We are very glad that a firm peace is now made between us and our brothers. We now look upon ourselves to be free, and like our brothers of New-England. The rest of our people staid at home, to take care of our Castle and publick concerns, and sent us to do this work, which they will abide by, and hold as strong as if they had been all here.

I am now in my own country, where I was born, and want liberty to raise men to fight for its defence. We wish that you would give us a letter to General Schuyler, and inform him that if he wants men to call upon us, and we will join him.

Another of the Native men, unidentified in the record, then said, “St. Luke La Corne is a very bad man, and we shall be very glad if he was sent from Canada; he is always making mischief there.”⁹³ This referred to a French knight who had been “superintendent of all the Indians in Canada, while it was in the hands of the French”; his son-in-law was now the equivalent official for the British.⁹⁴ He helped to capture Ethan Allen in the fall, but in early

⁹⁰ Williams, *Life of Te-ho-ra-gwa-ne-gen*, 38. Demos, *Unredeemed Captive*, 242.

⁹¹ Maine, *Documentary History*, 14:420.

⁹² WGW, 4:292.

⁹³ *American Archives*, series 4, 4:893.

⁹⁴ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 707.

December the Americans had captured him.⁹⁵ Again, this statement from the chief was something that Washington and the other Americans were pleased to hear.

The next recorded speaker was a man from the St. John's or Maliseet community from what is now the border of Maine and New Brunswick. He told Washington:

We are very glad to see you, and that we have met our Caughnawaga friends here. The English people are mad, and very cross, and want us to fight against the New-England people. God is on the side of our brothers, and they will beat them. There is a Providence in our meeting our Caughnawaga friends at this time, who have come so far from Canada.

We want to go home quick, to tell our friends what we have seen and done here, and next Spring many of our Nation will come and help the New-England people.

We are in much want of powder to hunt with. The old English people will not let us have any, unless we will fight against our brothers and countrymen.⁹⁶

Ernest Clarke noted that Gov. Francis Legge of Nova Scotia had sent the St. John's community ammunition and clothing in exchange for the same assurances of friendship that Washington was hearing.⁹⁷

It is possible that the St. John's representative was Ambroise St. Aubin, also called Ambrose Var (d. 1780). In the previous fall he visited the Massachusetts legislature in Watertown.⁹⁸ Ambroise would return to Watertown in the summer of 1776 for discussions with the Massachusetts Council on behalf of the Maliseet, coming in response to letters from that body and from Washington.⁹⁹ Washington also sent letters to the Passamaquoddy and Micmac communities in Maine soon after the January conference, but they do not survive.¹⁰⁰

On 1 February, two days after the "out-door's talk," Washington wrote happily to Schuyler:

⁹⁵ *American Archives*, series 4:973, 1095, 156.

⁹⁶ *American Archives*, series 4, 4:893-4.

⁹⁷ Clarke, *Siege of Fort Cumberland*, 26.

⁹⁸ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1458-9, 1463, 1464. Johnston, *History of the Towns of Bristol and Bremen*, 2:355.

⁹⁹ Maine, *Documentary History*, 24:166, 168-9, 179. Pierre Tomah of the Micmacs accompanied Ambroise St. Aubin to Massachusetts in the fall of 1775. He does not appear to have been at the conference in Cambridge on 30 January, based on his letter from Maine dated 5 February 1776; *American Archives*, series 4, 4:946.

¹⁰⁰ On 24 December 1776, Gen. Washington sent a letter to the Micmacs that begins: "It gave me great Pleasure to hear by Major Shaw, that you Kept the chain of Friendship, which I sent you in February last from Cambridge bright and unbroken." In 1867 Frederic Kidder stated, "A similar letter was sent to the Passamaquoddy tribe, and was in their possession in 1852." Kidder, *Military Operations in Eastern Maine and Nova Scotia*, 59. The lack of copies of these letters in the headquarters files might indicate some lapse in staffing in February 1776.

I have now the Pleasure to inform you, that in a Talk they honoured me with Yesterday, they put the Matter upon the Footing I wished; that is, to join the Forces in Canada, whenever you shall call for their Assistance. They requested me to certify my Approbation of the Treaty they had concluded with you, which I did. Upon the Occasion they expressed much Satisfaction, and said that they were now happy, that a firm Peace was made between them and their Brothers, and that they were now free like the New England People. I heartily wish that this Union may be lasting, and that nothing may cast up to interrupt it. The Expediency of calling upon them, I shall leave to you. Circumstances and Policy will suggest the Occasion.

The general advanced Bedel £100 for the journey home, and he and the Caughnawagas departed.¹⁰¹

16.10 INVASION OF CANADA

Col. Arnold's first message back to headquarters dated 25 September brought several items of bad news.¹⁰² "The Indians with Higgins set out by land, and are not yet arrived," it said; the Loyalist minister Jacob Bailey later wrote with pleasure that the Norridgewocks and Pegwackets had decided not to guide the expedition after all.¹⁰³ A private named James McCormick had killed a fellow soldier after a quarrel, probably while drunk. A court martial within the expedition condemned McCormick to hang, but at the last minute Arnold decided to send him back to the Cambridge camp and let Washington choose how to proceed. Reportedly McCormick died in the camp's military jail the day before he was to be executed.¹⁰⁴ Finally, Capt. Morgan of the riflemen had refused to take orders from Lt. Col. Greene, saying that the general had promised he could answer only to Arnold; avoiding conflict, the colonel had sent the riflemen ahead. Washington wrote a letter to Morgan admonishing him to respect army rank.¹⁰⁵

Arnold's next letter was dated 13 October and sent from the "Second Portage from Kennebec to the Dead River." He enclosed a copy of his day-by-day journal so far, and added a postscript:

Your excellency may possibly think we have been tardy in our march. . . . we have been obliged to force up against a very rapid stream, where you would have taken the men for amphibious animals, as they were great part of the time under water.

Arnold expected to reach the Chaudiere River in eight to ten days.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ WGW, 4:301-2.

¹⁰² Lefkowitz, *Benedict Arnold's Army*, 304n18.

¹⁰³ Bartlet, *Frontier Missionary*, 262.

¹⁰⁴ Roberts, *March to Quebec*, 67, 436, 547.

¹⁰⁵ Martin, *Benedict Arnold*, 121. WGW, 4:2-3.

¹⁰⁶ Roberts, *March to Quebec*, 71-3.

On 27 October Arnold acknowledged he was three days behind schedule, and most of his soldiers even later. The column had lost several of their bateaux in waterfalls and rapids. He had ordered Lt. Col. Greene and Lt. Col. Roger Enos (1729-1808) to come ahead with fifteen days' provisions and send back the sick and feeble men with the rest. The colonel expected his advance guard to reach Sartigan in three to four days.¹⁰⁷ Washington had told Arnold he could turn back if conditions were "too hazardous to proceed in your own judgment and that of your principal officers (whom you are to consult)." Arnold had called such a council on 23 October, but the officers refused to turn back unless he ordered them to.¹⁰⁸

By the time Washington received Arnold's 27 October letter in mid-November, he had also received one that Lt. Col. Enos sent from Brunswick:

I am on my return from Colonel *Arnold's* detachment. I brought up the rear of the whole; Captains *McCobb's*, *Williams's* and *Scotts's* Companies were assigned to my division. We proceeded as far as fifty miles up the *Dead River*, and then were obliged to return, for want of provisions. When we arrived at the Great Carrying Place, by what I could learn from the division forward, that provisions was like to be short, I wrote to Colonel *Arnold*, and desired him to take an account of the provisions forward. He wrote me word that there were twenty-five days' provisions for all the divisions ahead, but, to my surprise, before we got over the Great Carrying Place, Major *Bigelow*, with ninety men, were sent back from Colonel *Greene's* division to mine, for provisions. I let them have all I could spare. I continued my march with all expedition, and when about fifty miles up the *Dead River*, overtook Colonel *Greene* with his division, entirely out of provisions; and by reason of men being sent back with orders from Colonel *Arnold* for me to furnish them with provisions to carry them to the inhabitants, my division was reduced to four days' provisions. Colonel *Arnold* was gone ahead; the chief of the officers of Colonel *Greene's* division and mine were together, when we took the situation of our divisions into consideration; and upon the whole, for several reasons, it was thought best for my whole division to return. and furnish those that proceeded with all our provisions except three days' to bring us back, which I did without loss of time. A more particular account shall be able to give when I return to *Cambridge*. Shall lose no time if able to ride. I have for many days been unwell. Expect the whole of my division at this place to-morrow, when shall set out on our march to *Cambridge*.¹⁰⁹

The general sent copies of both letters to the Continental Congress, adding that, "notwithstanding the great defection, I do not despair of Col: Arnold's success." He planned to judge Enos's conduct after the lieutenant colonel returned to Cambridge.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Roberts, *March to Quebec*, 77-8.

¹⁰⁸ Martin, *Benedict Arnold*, 131.

¹⁰⁹ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1610.

¹¹⁰ WGW, 4:100.

On 28 November the general told the Congress: “Colonel Enos is arrived and under arrest, he acknowledges he had no Orders for coming away, his Trial cannot come on, until I hear from Col. Arnold, from whom there is no Account since I wrote you last.” All he could share with the Congress was news that had come through Albany:

You doubtless will have heard ere this reaches, of General Montgomery having got Possession of Montreal, I congratulate you thereon, he has troubles with his Troops as well as I have—all I can learn of Colo: Arnold is that he is near Quebec, I hope Montgomery will be able to proceed to his Assistance I shall be very uneasy until I hear they are joined.

Looking ahead, the general feared that by the time he might hear more from Arnold, Enos would no longer be part of the army; as a Connecticut man, his enlistment ran out in early December.¹¹¹

Therefore, on 28 November Gen. Lee presided over “A Court of Inquiry...to examine into the conduct of Lieutenant-Colonel *Enos*, who appears to have left Colonel *Arnold*, his commanding officer, without leave.” Greene, Heath, Stark, and two majors also sat. The next day, that board decided

after receiving all the information within their power, that Colonel *Enos*’s misconduct (if he has been guilty of misconduct) is not of so very heinous a nature as was first supposed, but that it is necessary, for the satisfaction of the world, and for his own honour, that a Court-Martial should be immediately held for his trial.¹¹²

That court-martial convened under Gen. Sullivan on 1 December.

Three captains and two lieutenants from Enos’s division testified that they had insisted that the colonel return.¹¹³ Sullivan later recalled more dramatic detail:

witnesses of undoubted veracity, (some of whom I have been personally acquainted with for a number of years, and know them to be persons of truth,) [said] that so much provision had been sent forward, to support the other divisions, as left them so small a quantity that their men were almost famished with hunger on their return: and some would undoubtedly have starved, had they not, by accident, come across and killed a large moose.¹¹⁴

There were, of course, no officers from the rest of Arnold’s expedition to provide any other perspectives. Faced with that evidence, Sullivan’s court decided unanimously “that Colonel *Enos* was under a necessity of returning with the division under his command, and therefore

¹¹¹ WGW, 4:120-3.

¹¹² *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1701.

¹¹³ *American Archives*, series 4, 4:238-40.

¹¹⁴ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1710.

acquit him with honour.”¹¹⁵ Washington’s general orders for 4 December announced that Enos had been cleared.¹¹⁶

That same day, Gen. Washington received a letter from Arnold dated 8 November in which the colonel expressed surprise that “Colonel *Enos’s* division. . . are all gone back.”¹¹⁷ Furthermore, Arnold had never told his commander about the extent of the expedition’s food problems—that men had been eating pet dogs, breeches leather, and flour intended for powdering wigs.¹¹⁸ Washington may thus have doubted the claims of Enos’s officers that they were close to starvation. Their testimony was true—but their division had also gone away with more than their share of the remaining food.

Over the next few weeks, more reports came in from Arnold, who had finally reached Quebec but found himself short of men. Washington had already seemed dubious about the court-martial’s verdict on Enos when he reported it to the Congress, and his disapproval of the lieutenant colonel now became evident. Enos sent his last letter to Washington on 18 January 1776:

By some misfortune or other, I am satisfied I do not stand in that character, at Head-Quarters, which, as a Field-Officer, is necessary to my being serviceable to the great cause in which we are engaged; I must, therefore, beg your Excellency’s permission to resign my command, as Lieutenant-Colonel of the Sixteenth Regiment, to which I was appointed for the present campaign. No dislike to the service, but a regard to my honour, solely, is the motive of this request.¹¹⁹

Throughout the next year Enos would try to regain his reputation, soliciting testimonials from Sullivan, Heath, and others. As men from Arnold’s expedition returned, however, the full story came out.

Arnold’s 8 November letter, which mentioned Enos’s departure, contained mostly good news. His advance guard had reached French settlements. A letter from Gen. Montgomery had arrived. “About forty savages”—perhaps from St. Francis—had joined the column. An informant from Quebec had described the city’s defenses, and Arnold thought that he and Montgomery would have enough men to overcome them.¹²⁰ Washington replied on 5 December, the day after he received that letter: “It is not in the power of any man to

¹¹⁵ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1709-10.

¹¹⁶ PGW:RW, 4:139.

¹¹⁷ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1635.

¹¹⁸ Roberts, *March to Quebec*, 635, 139, 260-1, 440.

¹¹⁹ *American Archives*, series 4, 4:768. For the rest of Enos’s career, see Darley, *Voices from a Wilderness Expedition*, 195-203.

¹²⁰ Roberts, *March to Quebec*, 85.

command success, but you have done more, you have deserved it.”¹²¹ He promised Arnold a regiment in the reorganized army. He sent the Congress that news from Canada, saying, “affairs carry a pleasing aspect in that quarter.”¹²²

Washington continued to watch Arnold’s progress from afar, with a long delay between events and when he heard about them. On 20 November the colonel wrote he had surrounded Point Aux Trembles “with about 550 effective men” and was waiting for Montgomery. But his soldiers were “almost naked and in want of every necessary,” with “no more than 5 rounds to each man.” He estimated that Gen. Montgomery would need to bring 2,500 men to reduce the town.¹²³ On 5 December Montgomery arrived with artillery and clothing, but only “about 300 men.” Nevertheless, Arnold insisted, Quebec’s “wretched, motley garrison” could not hold out for long.¹²⁴

On 18 November Gen. Schuyler had the pleasure of reporting to the Congress that Montgomery had taken Montreal. In the course of that same letter, he wrote: “I shall . . . do every thing in my power to put a finishing stroke to the campaign, and make the best arrangement in my power in order to ensure success to the next; this done, I must beg leave to retire.”¹²⁵ Schuyler was in poor health, one reason he was back in Albany while Montgomery led the troops in to Canada. He was also discouraged by difficulties in supplies and pay. When Washington heard that news, he urged Schuyler to stay on. The New Yorker replied on 5 January:

I could point out particular persons of rank in the Army who have frequently declared, that the General commanding in this quarter, ought to be of the Colony from whence the majority of the troops came; but it is not from opinions or principles of individuals that I have drawn the following conclusion: That troops from the Colony of *Connecticut*, will not bear with a General from another Colony; it is from the daily and common conversation of all ranks of people from that Colony, both in and out of the Army¹²⁶

Washington responded on 16 January with more encouragement to stay. By the time that letter arrived in Albany, the American army in Canada was in crisis, and Schuyler remained in his post.

At the end of 1775 Montgomery and Arnold faced the same problem that Washington did: many of their men had enlisted only to 31 December and could start to go home

¹²¹ WGW, 4:148. This was a paraphrase from Joseph Addison’s play *Cato*, which Washington quoted elsewhere as well; Longmore, *Invention of George Washington*, 174.

¹²² Washington to Congress, 4 December 1775, WGW, 4:144.

¹²³ Roberts, *March to Quebec*, 93-4.

¹²⁴ Roberts, *March to Quebec*, 101-2.

¹²⁵ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1596.

¹²⁶ *American Archives*, series 4, 4:581.

afterward. They ordered an assault on the city. Montgomery was killed, Arnold wounded in the leg. Capt. Morgan took over command of the attack and was captured with many of his men. Washington received news of this failure more than two weeks later, on 17 January.¹²⁷

It took him ten days to send a response:

I received the melancholy Account of the unfortunate Attack on the City of Quebec, attended with the Fall of General Montgomery and other brave officers and Men, and of your being wounded. This unhappy Affair affects me in a very sensible Manner and I sincerely condole with you upon the Occasion. . . .

I need not mention to you the great Importance of this Place, and the consequent Possession of all Canada, in the scale of American Affairs. You are well apprized of it. To whomsoever it belongs, in their Favour probably, will the Ballance turn. If it is in ours, Success, I think will most certainly crown our virtuous Struggles. If it is in theirs, the Contest at best, will be doubtful, hazardous and bloody. The glorious Work must be accomplished in the Course of this Winter, otherwise it will become difficult; most probably, impracticable: for Administration knowing that it will be impossible ever to reduce us to a State of Slavery and arbitrary Rule without it, will certainly send a large Reinforcement there in the Spring. I am fully convinced that your Exertions will be invariably directed to this grand Object, and I already view the approaching Day, when you and your brave Followers will enter this important Fortress with every Honor and Triumph, attendant on Victory, and Conquest. Then will you have added the only Link wanting in the great Chain of continental Union, and render the Freedom of your Country secure.¹²⁸

On the same day Washington wrote to Schuyler in a much less positive tone: “I am much afraid from the Complexion of the Letters from that Place, that there is little Hope of Arnold’s continuing the Blockade without Assistance from Wooster, which he is determined not to give.”¹²⁹

16.11 THE INVASION LINGERS

The popular history of Montgomery and Arnold’s invasion of Canada reaches a climax with the doomed attack on Quebec on 31 December. However, the siege of that city actually continued for several more weeks. The Congress voted to raise more troops for Canada and to send a top general while Washington dispatched three new regiments to that front.¹³⁰ Gates called Arnold, promoted to brigadier general, “a most persevering hero.”¹³¹

American troops remained in Canada for months, past the end of the siege of Boston. The number of soldiers in Arnold’s army actually went up significantly in March 1776.¹³²

¹²⁷ Martin, *Benedict Arnold*, 185.

¹²⁸ WGW, 4:281-2.

¹²⁹ WGW, 4:278.

¹³⁰ Martin, *Benedict Arnold*, 187.

¹³¹ Martin, *Benedict Arnold*, 188.

¹³² Lesser, *Sinews of Independence*, 17-8.

Washington wrote his last letter to Arnold from Cambridge on 3 April, sending it with Gen. John Thomas. In it he shared the good news that Boston was now in American hands and expressed continued hopes for conquering Canada:

The Enemy have quitted this Harbour last Week. We have no certain Accounts of their Destination. It is generally believed they are gone to Hallifax. If true, it is probable they will attempt to penetrate Canada on the Opening of the St. Lawrence. I hope before that happens, you will be in full Possession of Quebec, and have it's Avenues well secured; upon which depends the Fate of this Campaign in those Parts.

I have dispatch'd two companies of Colonel Knox's Regimt. of Artillery to you from hence, two Mortars &c. as you will see at Foot hereof. If any Thing else is wanting that cannot be had in Canada, and in my Power to send, they shall be forwarded with all possible Expedition, upon my being informed thereof.

The Chief Part of the Troops are march'd from hence towards New York. I will set off To-morrow. If the Enemy will not find us full Employment, and it is necessary, you may expect a Detachment from thence to your Assistance.¹³³

Rather than ending with a bang, the Continental Army's invasion of Canada petered out that summer in the smallpox epidemic that took Thomas's life.

16.12 THE SEEDS OF A FRENCH ALLIANCE

On 10 December Rhode Island governor Nicholas Cooke reported, two Frenchmen arrived in Providence from Haiti aboard a ship "despatched some time since from this place for powder." They were Pierre Penet (1749-1801) and Emmanuel de Pliarne (d. 1776).¹³⁴ Cooke met with them and sent them on to Cambridge the next day, telling Washington:

Mr. Penet comes extremely well recommended to our Committee for providing powder from a merchant of character at the Cape. He hath proposals to make for supplying the United Colonies with arms and warlike stores. I am informed that the other gentleman is a person of some consequence.¹³⁵

For decades British-Americans had fought and distrusted the French, but the rebellion against the Crown made them ready to explore new alliances—though very gingerly.

Washington invited the two Frenchmen to his headquarters for supper along with Dr. John Morgan, who had studied medicine in Paris (see section 15.9). On 14 December he sent them to the Congress in Philadelphia, writing to John Hancock:

¹³³ WGW, 4:461.

¹³⁴ Schaeper, "Pierre Penet." *Daughters of the American Revolution Magazine*, 117 (1983), 854-6. For Penet's later career, see Thomas F. Powell, *Penet's Square: An Episode in the Early History of Northern New York* (Lakemont, N.Y.: North Country Books, 1976).

¹³⁵ *American Archives*, series 4, 4:235.

They propose a plan for supplying this Continent with arms and ammunition, which appears to me very eligible. As I am not acquainted with the extent of schemes, already formed by Congress for the attainment of these necessary articles, I have declined entering into any engagements with them, but have prevailed with them to proceed, at the publick expense, to Philadelphia, and there, through you, to lay their proposals before Congress, or a Committee of Congress, to whose attention I beg leave to recommend them, and the important business they come upon. . . .

P. S. I have given these gentlemen reason to expect that they can get back to the Capes as commodiously and speedily from Philadelphia as they could from Providence, in which I should be very sorry if they were disappointed.¹³⁶

Dr. Morgan's wife Mary sent letters home to Philadelphia with the Frenchmen, asking her family to entertain them, but not necessarily at dinner—"a dish of coffee the Countenance and Conversation of my agreeable brother [Rev. Jacob Duché] is all that we desire."¹³⁷

Penet and De Pliarne wrote from Providence on 18 December in a letter translated by Stephen Moylan:

Deign Sir we pray you, to prevail on Madam Your Lady, to accept of Some of the Fruits of our Colonies, to which we have added, one bottle of Martinique Liquors—two bottles of Ratifia three [*bobans*—a word Moylan did not know] of fruit preserved in brandy—one dozen of Oranges, and fifty Small Loaves of Sugar.¹³⁸

The next day, the Rev. Dr. Samuel Cooper recorded visiting headquarters and being "Treated with Oranges and a Glass of Wine."¹³⁹

Before the end of the year, Penet and De Pliarne began meeting with a secret committee of the Congress. On 1 January they agreed to open trade through the port of Nantes, with Robert Morris handling the business from the American side.¹⁴⁰ These men did not represent the French government; they were merchants, seeking profitable business and repeatedly disappointed when the Americans did not pay for their weapons with hard money. Nonetheless, this contact was the beginning of the French-American alliance.

¹³⁶ WGW, 4:162-3.

¹³⁷ Cambridge, *An Historic Guide to Cambridge*, 88.

¹³⁸ PGW:RW, 2:577.

¹³⁹ *American Historical Review*, 6:328.

¹⁴⁰ Rappleye, *Robert Morris*, 48-9.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

WORKING WITH CIVIL GOVERNMENTS AND INSTITUTIONS

In managing the Continental Army, Gen. George Washington answered to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. In addition, he dealt directly with the governments of the four New England colonies, all in different stages of transition from royal control, and occasionally with other authorities and institutions.

As a Whig, George Washington felt keenly that a nation's military had to be subordinate to its elected civilian government. Nevertheless, as commander-in-chief he became acutely aware of difficulties in working under the Congress: the delays in communication and decision-making, the political concerns and appointments, the uneven supply of necessities. Furthermore, Washington's years as a wealthy planter, in charge of hundreds of people and beholden to very few, meant he was not used to having his judgments or character questioned.

While the general was in Cambridge, he also shifted his thinking on relations with the government in London. Like most Americans, he began the war hoping that there was still a chance that George III's ministers would change their American policy and that the colonies would remain within the British Empire with more autonomy. By early 1776 Washington was quietly discussing the prospect of independence.

17.1 NEW ENGLAND GOVERNMENTS IN TRANSITION

Of the thirteen North American colonies that eventually participated in the Second Continental Congress, only Connecticut and Rhode Island elected their governors. The ministry in London appointed the governor in the rest of the colonies, and in most appointed the governor's Council as well. When war began, the royal governors were isolated in different ways, and a variety of official and extralegal legislative bodies under Patriot leadership took control.

Connecticut was the only colony in rebellion whose local government stayed intact. Gov. Jonathan Trumbull and the legislature remained in office, strongly supporting the Patriot cause. Washington maintained a steady correspondence with Trumbull, with one major rough patch (see section 17.4). Two of Trumbull's sons were with the army at Cambridge: Joseph as commissary general (see section 5.4) and John as aide-de-camp to Washington and others (see section 5.9). Their proximity may have provided an additional channel for communication, or added to the stresses.

In Rhode Island, the legislature elected the governor. That body gave Joseph Wanton a sixth term in office in May 1775 even though he had protested its vote to send troops to the Boston siege. When it became clear that Wanton would not sign commissions for army officers, however, the legislature pushed him out of power. Deputy Governor Nicholas Cooke (1712-1782) took over. A sea captain and merchant, Cooke came from Providence rather than Newport, reflecting a shift of political power in Rhode Island during the war. He had served in the colony's Assembly, as Deputy Governor for one term starting in 1768, and as head of the Providence Committee of Inspection enforcing the Congress's boycott of goods from Britain. In November 1775 Cooke formally became governor. Washington recognized that Rhode Island's small size and population meant that it could not furnish many more troops than it already had; he wrote to Cooke mostly about naval matters (including an attempt to seize gunpowder in Bermuda) and strengthening the defenses of Narragansett Bay.¹

New Hampshire's royal governor, John Wentworth, struggled to maintain his authority after the outbreak of war. He convened the colony's legislature in May 1775, but it soon became clear that Patriot officials and crowds were defying him. On 13 June Wentworth fled to the fort in Portsmouth harbor, and on 23 August he sailed for Boston. The colony's Fourth Provincial Congress, a shadow legislature also elected in May, stepped into the political vacuum and asserted command of the New Hampshire troops at the siege (see section 4.2). This body worked through local committees organized by town and county, producing a patchwork of authorities with common goals.²

On 26 July 1775 a delegation from the New Hampshire Committee of Safety—who was in this group is uncertain—visited Washington at Cambridge. They discussed various matters, including how the new commander expected the colony to pay and supply its troops, and whether the Continental Congress would pay for companies guarding New Hampshire's "Western Frontiers" (lands claimed by Canada and New York).³ This visit apparently left Washington unsure about the structure of New Hampshire's emergency government. He preferred to address letters to the individual men presiding over bodies, but on 4 August he sent a letter about the gunpowder shortage (see section 11.4) to "the Hon. The Committee of Safety for New Hampshire."⁴ Soon it became clear that Matthew Thornton (1714-1803) was both president of the Provincial Congress and chairman of its Committee of Safety, and further letters from headquarters went to him. Thornton was an

¹ Bicknell, *The History of the State of Rhode Island*, 3:1093-8.

² Walker, *New Hampshire's Five Provincial Congresses*, 28-35.

³ New Hampshire, *Documents and Records*, 7:573, 612. New Hampshire's Committee of Safety evidently did not keep the sort of records that its Provincial Congress did, so there is no clear evidence of how it chose its subcommittee to go to Cambridge or who was on it. Washington's 27 July 1775 letter to General Schuyler shows when they met. WGW, 3:370.

⁴ New Hampshire, *Documents and Records*, 7:571.

Irish-born physician in Londonderry, New Hampshire, who later signed the Declaration of Independence.⁵

On 5 January 1776 New Hampshire enacted a new constitution, the first of the thirteen rebelling colonies to do so. This document vested all power in the legislature, with a Committee of Safety comprised of six to twelve legislative leaders to decide matters between sessions. Thornton became speaker of the reconstituted assembly. Through the end of the siege Washington and his staff continued to address all their correspondence to Thornton as president of the “New Hampshire Convention.” There seems to have been less friction between the New Hampshire authorities and Washington than between them and Gen. John Sullivan; his hair-trigger defensiveness produced some striking exchanges.⁶

Ordinarily Gen. Washington preferred to deal with colonial governments rather than bypass them by going to local committees, but he made exceptions. In October, a British ship carrying flour sailed into Portsmouth harbor by mistake and was seized by the local militia. The Portsmouth committee of safety and Washington exchanged several letters over how to dispose of that that ship’s cargo: the town and its garrison were short of flour, but it could also be useful to the army around Boston. Eventually they agreed to split the supply.⁷

17.2 WORKING WITH MASSACHUSETTS AUTHORITIES

In Massachusetts, the legislature was formally called the General Court. The charter of 1692 provided for a governor appointed in London with a Council elected annually by the General Court, its members subject to the governor’s veto. By the late 1760s the Council had become as sharp a thorn in the royal governor’s side as the lower house of the General Court, and one of the major changes of Parliament’s Massachusetts Government Act of 1774 was to make the Council entirely appointed. The uprisings of that September (see section 1.4) were directed primarily at the men who had dared to accept appointments to that Council contrary to the previous constitution.

In October 1774 the Massachusetts Provincial Congress formed as a shadow legislature, elected in the same way as the lower house of the General Court. Though this body was not authorized by law, and there were no fines for not participating, more towns sent representatives to it than usually sent representatives to the General Court.⁸ From fall 1774 to summer 1775 the Provincial Congress was the *de facto* government of Massachusetts outside Boston and a few coastal points where British troops were stationed. Its Committee of Safety exercised executive power when the legislature was adjourned.

⁵ Walker, *New Hampshire’s Five Provincial Congresses*, 65-6.

⁶ New Hampshire, *Documents and Records*, 7:612-4.

⁷ New Hampshire, *Documents and Records*, 7:617-20.

⁸ Waters, *Otis Family*, 84. Patterson, *Political Parties in Revolutionary Massachusetts*, 110.

In July 1775, after the Continental Congress advised the colonies to reconstitute their governments, Massachusetts had a new round of legislative elections. Towns sent representatives to the General Court. That body in turn elected a Council of twenty-eight men, including the province's delegates to the Continental Congress. For the next few years, the Massachusetts government basically functioned as it had from 1692 to 1774 whenever there was no governor: the Council exercised executive power with the senior member present presiding over meetings.⁹ The lower house of the General Court, usually called the house or assembly, had an elected speaker: James Warren (1726-1808), a Plymouth merchant who had also been president of the Provincial Congress and was soon chosen paymaster general for the Continental Army (see section 5.6). Gen. Washington therefore addressed most of his letters about Massachusetts government to Warren.

There was some tension between Washington as army commander and the Massachusetts government, which had the most troops in the fight and the most territory at stake. On 29 July the General Court asked for soldiers from the Continental Army to defend the colony's coasts, appointing a committee to carry this message: Dr. Benjamin Church, Benjamin Woodbridge (c. 1737-1817), and Dummer Sewall (1737-1832) from the house; and James Otis, Sr. (1725-1783), and William Sever (1729-1809), two senior members of the Council.¹⁰ Two days later, Washington sent a polite but firm reply to speaker Warren:

I have considered the Application made me yesterday from the General Court, with all the attention due to the Situation of the People, in whose behalf it is made, and the Respect due to such a Recommendation. Upon referring to my Instructions and Consulting with those Members of Congress who are Present, as well as the General Officers, they all agree that it would not be consistent with my Duty to detach any Part of the Army now here on any Particular Provincial Service. It has been debated in Congress and Settled, that the Militia, or other Internal Strength of each Province, is to be applied for Defence against those Small and Particular Depredations which were to be expected, and to which they were Supposed to be competent. This will appear the more Proper, when it is considered that every Town and, indeed, every Part of our Sea Coast, which is exposed to these Depredations, would have an equal claim upon this Army; It is the Misfortune of our Situation which exposes us to these Ravages, against which, in my Judgement, no such Temporary Relief would possibly secure us. . . . It would give me great pleasure to have it in my power, to extend Protection and Safety to every Individual; but the wisdom of the General Court will anticipate me in the necessity of conducting our Operations on a General and impartial Scale, so as to exclude any first cause of Complaint and Jealousy.¹¹

⁹ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:289.

¹⁰ Woodbridge and Sewall were both from Lincoln County in what is now Maine, probably reflecting that that was the part of the colony that felt most endangered. *American Archives*, series 4, 3:31.

¹¹ PGW:RW, 3:379-80.

The colony pushed back. On 2 August the Council appointed members Benjamin Greenleaf (1732-1799, a Newburyport jurist), John Winthrop (1714-1779, a Harvard professor), and Joseph Palmer (1716-1788, a Braintree merchant) “to wait on his Excellency General Washington and to Request him to inform this Board of the Extent of the Powers delegated to him by the Honourable Continental Congress.”¹² This appears to have been a polite way of testing the general’s resolution not to put Continental resources toward defending the Massachusetts coasts. While Washington did on occasion send army companies to important ports when British warships appeared to threaten them, he did not change how he deployed the bulk of his troops. Even when Pearson Jones (1747-1781) of Falmouth arrived at headquarters on 24 October with news that the Royal Navy had bombarded that town in Maine, the commander left coastal defense to the province. Only if the British appeared to threaten a major port, such as Marblehead or Portsmouth, did the general feel he could spare troops from the siege lines.¹³

In January Washington learned from Joseph Reed that some Massachusetts politicians were feeling neglected, either officially or socially. The general had tried to maintain polite relationships and continued to do so in public. Privately, he expressed exasperation in a reply to Reed on 14 January:

My constant attention to the great and perplexing objects, which continually rise to my view, absorbs all lesser considerations, and indeed scarcely allows me time to reflect, that there is such a body in existence as the General Court of this colony, but when I am reminded of it by a committee; nor can I, upon recollection, discover in what instances (I wish they would be more explicit) I have been inattentive to, or slighted them. They could not, surely, conceive that there was a propriety in unbosoming the secrets of an army to them; that it was necessary to ask their opinion of throwing up an intrenchment, forming a battalion, &c., &c. It must, therefore, be what I before hinted to you; and how to remedy it I hardly know, as I am acquainted with few of the members, never go out of my own lines, or see any of them in them.¹⁴

The next day, Washington heard that Warren, John Adams, and Joseph Hawley, a respected member of the assembly from Northampton, were dining together nearby, and invited them all to attend a council of war at headquarters (see section 11.6). Ultimately, the successful end of the siege smoothed over any differences or hurt feelings. See Appendix D for the Massachusetts General Court’s formal thanks to General Washington and his reply.

¹² PGW:RW, 1:240.

¹³ Freeman, *George Washington*, 3:560.

¹⁴ WGW, 4:240-1.

17.3 RELATIONSHIPS WITH TOWN GOVERNMENTS

New Englanders governed themselves through town meetings, with basically all property-owning white men qualified to participate. Those meetings elected selectmen, usually seven prominent citizens, to conduct town business in between meetings, and a variety of other town officials. The Massachusetts Government Act's limit on these meetings had provoked widespread resentment and defiance. However, citizens seem to have recognized that the war delayed the return of normal local government.

The Continental Army's encampment overwhelmed Cambridge and the other towns surrounding Boston, just as the British occupation had shut down that capital and Charlestown. After arriving from Maryland, Daniel McCurtin wrote that the buildings in Cambridge made him "believe that it was a very flourishing town in the time of peace"—clearly suggesting that it was no longer flourishing. Similarly, he wrote that Roxbury

has been a pleasant place, but the Regulars have spoiled it much with their cannon balls, and it is now in a manner desolate, the people having left their houses and given them to the Soldiers for to make Barracks of them for to protect their rights and libertys.¹⁵

Gen. Washington's correspondence contains no letters to the selectmen of Cambridge or the other towns where the Continental Army was encamped, and there are no local stories of those officials interacting with him.¹⁶

Some of the selectmen of Boston had chosen to remain inside the besieged town, not out of loyalty to the Crown but to try to protect people and property. On two occasions they contacted Washington, passing on messages from high-ranking British officers. These letters presented difficulties for the general because he perceived that British commanders were using the selectmen as intermediaries in order to avoid dealing with him directly and thus recognizing his military status. The first incident arose in October 1775, when the Boston selectmen sent a letter to the Patriot merchant William Phillips (1722-1804) about Christopher French, an imprisoned British officer (see section 13.9). Nothing came of this idea. Washington's second and more important exchange with the Boston selectmen came in March 1776 as the British were preparing to evacuate (see section 18.7).

At some point in late March 1776 after the American army had entered Boston, the town's selectmen presented Washington with a complimentary address. Washington replied:

¹⁵ Balch, *Papers Relating Chiefly to the Maryland Line*, 4:12.

¹⁶ In the 1800s such Cambridge historians as John Langdon Sibley interviewed people for any local lore about Washington. They reportedly "came up with nothing more important concerning Washington than the fact that he enjoyed the society of Tory ladies whose husbands or fathers were in exile, and went out of his way to assure them that he would see to it that they were not molested"; *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, 12:502.

Your congratulations on the success of the American arms give me the greatest pleasure.

I most sincerely rejoice with you on being once more in possession of your former habitations; and, what greatly adds to my happiness, that this desirable event has been effected with so little effusion of human blood.

I am exceedingly obliged by the good opinion you are pleased to entertain of my conduct. Your virtuous efforts in the cause of freedom, and the unparalleled fortitude with which you have sustained the greatest of all human calamities, justly entitle you to the grateful remembrance of your American brethren; and I heartily pray that the hand of tyranny may never more disturb your repose, and that every blessing of a kind Providence may give happiness and prosperity to the town of Boston.¹⁷

As with his final exchange with the Massachusetts legislature, the success of the siege had erased past difficulties.

17.4 MENDING FENCES WITH GOVERNOR TRUMBULL

Gen. Washington had to exercise some internal diplomacy in his exchanges with Gov. Jonathan Trumbull of Connecticut during the fall of 1775. On 8 September the commander sent the governor a somewhat abrupt letter about troops that had recently been enlisted in Connecticut:

Upon the receipt of this you will please to give directions, that all the New Levies march immediately to this Camp. By a Resolution of Congress the Troops on the Continental Establishment, were not to be employed for the Defence of the Coasts, or of any particular Province, the Militia being deemed competent to that Service. When I directed these Troops to remain in their own Province, I had some reason to expect a Remove from Boston to New York, in which case they would have been able to give them more speedy opposition, But as that Suspicion now appears groundless, there will be an Impropriety in continuing them where they now are, consistent with the above Resolve.¹⁸

Three days before that, Trumbull had written to Washington that “We are infested with Ministerial Ships and Transports—I gave your Commissary General [i.e., the governor’s son Joseph] Narrative yesterday. . . . I have Ordered the new raised Levies to Guard and defend” New London and Stonington. “This appears absolutely necessary for their Security at present—Hope this use of them ’till these dangers are over, will neither injure or hinder any of your Operations.”¹⁹ So Trumbull was taken aback by Washington’s orders and by the tone in which they were expressed.

¹⁷ Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston*, 317.

¹⁸ PGW:RW, 1:437.

¹⁹ PGW:RW, 1:416.

On 14 September Trumbull shared the general's letter with his Council, which characterized it as "a peremptory and unconditional demand."²⁰ Nonetheless, the governor and Council complied with those instructions and sent the Connecticut troops toward Boston. But Trumbull also snapped back in genteel terms:

I am surprised that mine of the 5th instant was not received, or not judged worthy of notice, as no mention is made of it. . . . I hoped some of the new levies might have been left here, till these dangers were over, without injury to any of your operations. I own that it must be left to your judgment. Yet it would have given me pleasure to have been acquainted that you did consider it.

I thank Divine Providence and you for this early warning to great care and watchfulness, that so the Union of the Colonies may be settled on a permanent and happy Basis.

You may depend on our utmost exertions for the defence and security of the constitutional rights and liberty of the colonies, and of our own in particular. None has shown greater forwardness, and thereby rendered itself more the object of ministerial vengeance. I am, with great esteem and regard for your personal character, . . .²¹

The general realized that he had to mend fences.

Washington replied on 21 September:

It gives me real concern to observe yours of the 15th Inst. that you should think it Necessary to distinguish between my Personal and Public Character and confine your Esteem to the former.

Upon a Reperusal of mine of the 8th Inst., I cannot think the construction you have made on [sic] and unless it was, I should have hoped the Respect I really have, and which, I flattered myself, I had manifested to you, would have called for the most favorable, in the Disposition of the Continental Troops. I have long been sensible that it would be impossible to please, not Individuals merely, but particular Provinces, whose Partial Necessities would occasionally call for Assistance; I, therefore, thought myself happy, that the Congress had settled the Point, and apprehended I should stand excused to all, for acting in the Line which not only appeared to me to be that of Policy and Propriety, but of express and positive Duty; If, to the other Fatigues and Cares of my Station, that is to be added of giving Reasons for all Orders, and explaining the grounds and Principles on which they are formed; my Personal Trouble will perhaps, be of the least Concern, the Public will be most affected.

You may be assured, Sir, nothing was intended that might be construed into Disrespect; and at so interesting a Period, nothing less ought to disturb the Harmony so Necessary for the happy success of our Public operations, the Omission of acknowledging in precise Terms, the Receipt of your Favor of the 5th Inst. was purely accidental. . . .

I am by no Means insensible to the situation of the People on the Coast; I wish I could extend Protection to all; but the numerous Detachments, necessary

²⁰ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:710.

²¹ PGW:RW, 1:469.

to remedy the Evil, would amount to a Dissolution of the Army, or make the most important Operations of the Campaign depend upon the Piratical Expeditions of 2 or 3 Men of War and Transports.

The Spirit and Zeal of the Colony of Connecticut is unquestionable; and whatever may be the Hostile Intentions of the Men of War, I hope their utmost Efforts can do little more than alarm the Coast. I am, with great Esteem and Regard, for both your Personal and Public Character, sir, etc.²²

The governor did not reply again before the end of the month. Washington sent a short letter on 5 October reporting on some new intelligence, but no personal remarks.

Gen. Washington had to wait another week before seeing Trumbull's 9 October reply:

I have to acknowledge the receipt of your Letter of the 24th of Septr.—have no disposition to increase the weight of your Burdens, which in the multiplicity of your business must be sufficiently heavy, nor inclination to disturb the harmony so necessary to the happy success of our public operations; am persuaded no such difficulty will any more happen.

It is unhappy that Jealousies should be excited, or disputes of any sort be litigated between any of the Colonies, to disunite them at a time our Liberty, our property, our *all* is at stake. If our Enemies prevail, which our disunion may occasion, our Jealousies will then appear frivolous, and all our disputed Claims of no Value to either Side.²³

Trumbull went on to the topic of a conference in Cambridge on 12 October with members of the Continental Congress. The Connecticut legislature was meeting that day, he said, so he planned to send the deputy governor in his place. Trumbull concluded, "had the meeting been earlier, it would have afforded me satisfaction to have attended, given me the pleasure of waiting on You and the other Gentlemen, beside gratifying my Curiosity to see the Works the Army have made." Was the governor truly regretful, or using the legislative session as an excuse not to come to Cambridge? Gen. Washington could only guess. He replied on 13 October: "I hope upon some other occasion you will do us the favor of a Visit, I shall be happy in every opportunity to manifest my Respect and Regard for the Government of Connecticut."²⁴

The following month, Washington wrote to Gov. Trumbull to criticize a vote of the Connecticut assembly:

...the gentlemen informed me that your Assembly, to induce their men to enlist more readily into the service, have passed a vote advancing their pay twenty shillings per month over and above that allowed by Congress. It is seldom that I interfere in the determinations of any publick body, or venture to hold forth any

²² WGW, 3:503-5.

²³ American Archives, series 4, 3:988.

²⁴ WGW, 4:29.

opinion contrary to the decisions which they form; but upon this occasion, and being requested by the Commissioners to give my sentiments, I must take the liberty to mention, (especially as the influence of that vote will be general and Continental,) that according to my ideas, and those of every general officer I have consulted with, a more mistaken policy could not have been adopted, or one that would, in its consequences, more effectually prevent the great object Congress have in view, and which the situation of our affairs so loudly calls for, the levying of a new Army.²⁵

While being very clear about the damage he foresaw, Washington was no longer peremptory in his tone. Furthermore, he was careful to couch his complaint as a rare example of objecting to a legislative move.

17.5 WASHINGTON'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS

Because of Whig concerns about the authority of civil governments, American commanders had to be careful in how they communicated. For example, on 28 June 1775 Gen. Artemas Ward erred in responding to a resolution by writing, "the committee of safety are hereby ordered to deliver..." That committee immediately protested to the larger congress that "it is of vast importance that no orders are issued by the Military or obeyed by the Civil powers, but such as are directed by the honorable representative body of the people."²⁶ Similar concerns about the danger of a military dictatorship prompted Washington's 26 June 1775 speech to the New York Provincial Congress promising, "When we assumed the Soldier, we did not lay aside the Citizen" (see section 3.6).

The Continental Congress held authority over officers' commissions and high staff positions, such as the quartermaster general and commissary general (see sections 5.3 and 5.4). Washington often recommended men for those appointments. On occasion the Congress invited him to name someone to those posts and then officially approved his choice. At other times the commander passed on the names of men who had applied for positions or ranks while making clear that he did *not* endorse them. In the first year of the war the Congress usually went along with Washington's preferences, perhaps delaying a choice rather than naming someone he would dislike. Nevertheless, all parties to these discussions made clear that the Congress had ultimate authority on personnel matters. Gen. Washington did not run into the criticism that Gen. John Sullivan received after he promised some New Hampshire officers commissions that he could not legally offer (see section 4.10).

As commander-in-chief, Gen. Washington had more authority over how he deployed his troops, and at times he stretched that authority and then asked the Congress for retroactive approval. These decisions included sending Col. Benedict Arnold north to Canada (see section 16.5), launching armed schooners (see section 12.4), and allowing the

²⁵ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:632.

²⁶ Martyn, *Artemas Ward*, 113.

reenlistment of black soldiers (see section 9.8). In some cases, Washington waited for an opportune time to tell the Congress and then assured that body that he would abide by its decisions. For example, on 19 January 1776 he wrote:

If these reasons are not sufficient to justify my conduct in the opinion of Congress, if the measure contravenes any resolution of theirs, they will please to countermand the levying and marching of the regiments as soon as possible, and do me the justice to believe, that my intentions were good, if my judgment has erred.²⁷

At no point during the Boston campaign did the Congress directly override Washington's initiatives.

At times in the summer of 1775, Washington received visitors from the Congress. On 1 August, as quoted above, he told the Massachusetts General Court that he had been "Consulting with those Members of Congress who are Present."²⁸ Since the Congress was still in session that day, finishing business before they adjourned until September, the general may have been referring to *former* delegates John Sullivan and Thomas Mifflin, who had been in the Congress when it defined his mission. In mid-August, John Hancock (1737-1793) arrived with the rest of the Massachusetts delegation: Samuel Adams (1722-1803), John Adams (1735-1826), Robert Treat Paine (1731-1811), and Thomas Cushing (1725-1788). They were delivering Continental currency for the army (see sections 5.5 and 5.9). Silas Deane (1737-1789) of Connecticut was at the Cambridge headquarters on 20 August, writing to Gen. Schuyler about Benedict Arnold.²⁹ These visits appear to have been brief, without pressing business.

Deferring to the Congress often put Washington in the position of pleading for policy decisions or necessary supplies. He became practiced at painting a dire picture of how the Continental Army would suffer if the delegates did not act soon. For example, on 21 September 1775 Washington wrote to the Congress about the lack of currency for paying the army salaries and bills, among other things:

It gives me great Pain to be obliged to solicit the Attention of the Hon. Congress to the State of the Army, in Terms which imply the Slightest Apprehension of being neglected: But my Situation is inexpressibly distressing to see the Winter fast approaching upon a naked Army, The time of their Service within a few Weeks of expiring, and no Provision yet made for such important Events. Added to this the Military Chest is totally exhausted. The Paymaster has not a single Dollar in Hand. The Commissary General assures me he has strained his Credit to the utmost for the Subsistence of the Army:—The Quarter Master General is

²⁷ WGW, 4:259-60.

²⁸ PGW:RW, 3:379.

²⁹ LoD, 1:704-5. Lossing, *Philip Schuyler*, 1:384-5, dates that letter on 10 August 1775, but Deane was still in Connecticut five days after that date.

precisely in the same situation, and the greater part of the Army in a State not far from mutiny, upon the Deduction from their stated Allowance. I know not to whom to impute this Failure, but I am of opinion, if the Evil is not immediately remedied and more Punctuality observed in future, the Army must absolutely break up. I hoped I had expressed myself so fully on this Subject both by Letter and to those members of the Hon: Congress who have Honored the Camp with a Visit, that no Disappointment could possibly happen.³⁰

That letter was read in the Congress on 29 September. The legislature decided to send a small committee to Cambridge to confer with Gen. Washington about “the State of the Army” overall. Unfortunately, the shortage of money continued.

17.6 THE CONGRESS DECIDES TO SEND A COMMITTEE

On 29 September the Continental Congress resolved:

That a Committee of three members of this Congress be appointed to repair immediately to the camp at Cambridge, to confer with General Washington, and with the governor of Connecticut, and the lieut-Governor of Rhode Island, the council of Massachusetts, and the President of the convention of New Hampshire, and such other persons as to the said Committee shall seem proper, touching the most effectual method of continuing, supporting, and regulating a continental army.

The next day, the Congress chose “Mr. Lynch, Dr. Franklin, and Mr. Harrison” to comprise that committee. A second group—John Rutledge of South Carolina, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia, Thomas Johnson of Maryland, Robert R. Livingston of New York, and Samuel Adams of Massachusetts—was appointed to draw up instructions for the first.³¹

Beneath that formal legislative record was a bitter sectional dispute. In a letter dated 30 September but evidently written in part the next day, Samuel Ward of Rhode Island described the maneuvering to his brother Henry:

A Letter from Genl. Washington relative to the forming a new Army, and that Paragraph of Govr. Cooke’s Letter that only Capt. Ward amongst all the Rhode Island officers had received a continental Commission alarmed the Congress, or rather some Members of it. A Motion was made that a Comee. should be appointed to consult Genl. Washington, the Depy. Govr. of Rhode Island, the Govr. of Connecticut, the Council of the Massachusetts Bay & the President of the Congress of New Hampshire upon the best Method of continuing supporting & regulating a continental Army. Mr. Adams the Con[necticu]t Gentlemen & myself were against it & many others but least We should be supposed to think our Army would not bear Inspection We did not exert ourselves and suffered the Motion to be carried without calling the Colonies when a Major[it]y of them were against it. Letters to the Governors &c go by this Express that they may

³⁰ WGW, 3:512.

³¹ JCC, 3:265-6.

meet the Comee. 12th next Month at Cambridge. The Gentn. fond of the Motion wished a very different Comee. from that actually appointed. I saw their Aim and proposed to the New England Cols. a Plan for defeating them & succeeded saving that We failed in getting Colo. [Eliphalet] Dyer appointed with the other Gentn. The Comee. as it now stands is Dr. Franklin Mr. Lynch & Colo. Harrison, the two first You are well acquainted with the last is a Virginian a Friend of Liberty a Man of Sense & Spirit but not at all Times so wise & judicious as some from that glorious Colony. A Comee. is appointed to draw Instructions for them I imagine they will sett out on Tuesday next. I wish You could accompany Govr. Cooke to Cambridge. Your Advice & Pen I think would do your Country most essential Service. It is agreed that an Army for the Winter must be formed out of that now in Service, the Southern Gentlemen wish to reduce the Wages of the privates and raise those of the Officers. With Regard to the last they are right for in the present Camp officers can't support themselves upon their present Pay, as to the first they are certainly wrong for no Man can live tolerably for less. They could hire they say good Men in the Southern Colonies for ten shillings per Month less but I believe they would not be so good by twenty. A Letter to General Washington would have superceded the necessity of any Comee. but as we have suffered one I would have the best made of it. Upon this Principle I ardently wish You to attend the Depy. Govr. & at the same time that you nobly sacrifice every other Consideration to the Good of America, I would have you take Care of the New England Colonies in general (the great Support of Liberty) & of our own little Colony in particular. Neither of the Gentn. save Dr. Franklin is equal to you in natural or acquired abilities. Some of the southern Gentn. seem to consider this matter as an affair between New England & the other Colonies & upon that Plan balloted for Gentn. only of the other Colonies. (Colo. Dyer & Colo. Harrison had equal Votes at first, upon a second Tryal another Southern Member came in & turned the Vote for Colo. Harrison). I believe he will do well. I wish our Troops to reinlist but wish the Terms may be good.³²

Thus, though an oversight committee would visit Cambridge and demand steps toward fiscal austerity, the three members of that committee were basically sympathetic toward Gen. Washington.

Thomas Lynch (1727-1776) was a delegate to the Congress from South Carolina.³³ Silas Deane described him this way in September 1774:

Mr. Lynch is a gentleman about sixty. . . is of immense fortune, and has his family with him. He wears the manufacture of this country; is plain, sensible, above ceremony, and carries with him more force in his very appearance than most powdered folks in their conversation. He wears his hair strait, his clothes in the plainest order, and is highly esteemed.³⁴

³² LoD, 2:84-5.

³³ Lynch's son Thomas Lynch, Jr. (1749-1779), was also elected to the Continental Congress the following year; he signed the Declaration of Independence while his father was too ill to do so.

³⁴ NYHSC, 19:21.

John Adams told James Warren that Lynch “is an oppulent Planter of Great Understanding and Integrity and the best Affections to our Country and Cause.”³⁵ Samuel Adams called him “a Man of Sense and Virtue.”³⁶ By eighteenth-century legislative custom Lynch, as the first man named to the committee, would have been its chairman.³⁷ However, reports about the committee were inconsistent; most listed Lynch first, but there are other signs, such as in the committee’s letter to the Congress, that he deferred to Franklin’s seniority.³⁸

Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) was without doubt the most famous and respected member of the Continental Congress. John Adams wrote, “There is no abler or better American, that I know of.” As a delegate from Pennsylvania, Franklin also represented the colony supplying most of the riflemen in the Continental Army (see section 8.7). Though he had never commanded troops, he had experience in organizing and supplying the Pennsylvania and British armies in earlier wars. At sixty-nine years old, Franklin was undertaking a fairly arduous journey to Cambridge. He might have been eager to do so because, though he had lived his entire adult life in Philadelphia and London, he was a native of Boston with relatives and friends to see in New England.

While southern delegates in Congress voted for Benjamin Harrison (1726-1791) as a fellow southerner, members also knew that he was a friend of Gen. Washington. Indeed, the letter he had written to his fellow Virginian in July had proved all too friendly after the British had intercepted and published it (with an embarrassing interpolation—see sections 7.3 and 13.8). Samuel Adams stated disapprovingly: “Coll Harrisons Character may be drawn from his Confidential Letter publishd not long ago in Madam Drapers Gazette.”³⁹ In 1774 Deane’s first impression of Harrison had been “an uncommonly large man, and appears rather rough in his address and speech.”⁴⁰ At this time John Adams called him: “the Friend and Correspondent of the General, but it seems by a certain Letter under some degree of Prejudice against our dear New Englandmen. These Prejudices however, have arisen from Misrepresentation and may be easily removed.”⁴¹ Decades later, after political disputes, Adams wrote with more bitterness:

³⁵ PJA, 3:172. LoD, 2:80.

³⁶ LoD, 2:102.

³⁷ See Hancock to Washington, 30 September, LoD, 2:82. and the official record of the meeting at headquarters; *American Archives*, series 4, 3:847, 1156.

³⁸ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1155-6. See also the letter of the New Hampshire delegates; Washington’s letter to the Congress on 12 October; and his letter to Schuyler on 26 October; *American Archives*, series 4, 3:935; WGW, 4:22, 46.

³⁹ LoD, 2:101-2.

⁴⁰ LoD, 1:61. Twentieth-century authors took to giving Harrison uncommonly specific measurements: 6’4”, 249 pounds. The source of that data is unknown.

⁴¹ PJA, 3:172.

Although Harrison was another Sir John Falstaff, excepting in his Larcenies and Robberies, his Conversation disgusting to every Man of Delicacy or decorum, Obscæne, profane, impious, perpetually ridiculing the Bible, calling it the Worst Book in the World, yet as I saw he was to be often nominated with Us in Business, I took no notice of his Vices or Follies, but treated him. . . with uniform Politeness.⁴²

Regardless of what he thought of Harrison's private habits and jokes, Gen. Washington probably welcomed him as a supporter.

John Adams viewed the impetus behind the committee this way, as stated in his 2 October letter to John Winthrop:

I conjecture that the Reduction of the Pay of the private Soldiers, and the Introduction of Some Gentlemen from other Colonies, into the Service as officers will be principal objects.

The Pay of the Privates is generally, if not universally thought to be too high, especially in Winter: but whether a Reduction of it would not give Such a Disgust as to endanger the Service, I dont know. If the War should continue, and the Pay is not reduced this Fall this Congress will certainly reduce it next Spring, and in a Way that will perhaps be dangerous, at least attended with many Inconveniences. This Way will be by each Colony furnishing its Quota of Men as well as Money.

The other Thing that is wished by many is not so reasonable. It is altogether absurd to Suppose, that the Council of Massachusetts should appoint Gentn. from the southern Colonies, when Connecticut, Rhode Island and N. Hampshire do not. But it is idle to expect it of either.

The Council, if they are Men of Honour cannot appoint Gentlemen whom they dont know, to command Regiments or Companies in their service. Nor can they pay a Regard to any Recommendation of Strangers, to the Exclusion of Persons whom they know. Besides it is certain that the Massachusetts has Numbers of Gentlemen, who have no Command in the Army at all, and who would now be glad to get in, who are better qualified, with knowledge both of Theory and Practice than any who can be had upon the Continent. They have been more in War, and longer in the study of it. Besides can it be Supposed that the private Men will be easy to be commanded by Strangers to the Exclusion of Gentlemen, whom they know being their Neighbours. It is moreover a Reflection, and would be a Disgrace upon that Province to send abroad for Commanders of their own Men, it would suppose that it had not Men fit for officers than which nothing can be further from the Truth.

But I must desist. . .⁴³

Gen. Washington, with his vision of an army without sectional divisions (see section 8.6) and his contacts among men from the south, no doubt supported the idea of finding a place for gentlemen from outside New England in the officer corps. The idea of cutting the privates' pay was more problematic. Maintaining the best face, the general told the Congress on 12

⁴² DAJA, 3:371. See also DAJA, 3:367.

⁴³ LoD, 2:96. PJA, 3:182-3.

October that the upcoming meeting was “An Event which has given me the highest Satisfaction.”⁴⁴

17.7 PREPARATIONS FOR THE CONFERENCE

Well before that letter to the Congress, the commander had responded to news of the committee by asking his generals for their thoughts about the issues on the agenda. On 5 October he sent them a message laying out these questions:

What number of men are sufficient for a Winters Campaign?

Can the pay of the Privates be reduced and how much?

What Rations should be allowed the Men?

What Regulations are further necessary for the Government of the Forces?

To the above queries of the Congress, I have to add several of my own, which I also request your Opinion upon viz.: —

For how long a time ought the Men in the present Army (should we set about enlisting them) be Engaged?

What method would you recommend, as most eligible to Cloath a new raised Army with a degree of Decency and regularity? Would you advise it to be done by the Continent? In that case would you lower the Men's Wages, and make no deduction for Cloathing, or let it stand, and make stoppages? and how much a month?

As there appears to be great irregularity in the manner of paying the Men, and much discontent has prevailed on that accot. in what manner, and at what fixed period would you advise it to be done under a new Establishment?

What sized Regiments would you recommend under this Establishment; that is, how many men to a Company? how many Companies to a Regiment; and how officered?

Is there any method by which the best of the present officers in this Army can be chosen, without impeding the Inlistment of the Men, by such choice, and preference. Under any compleat establishment, even if all the Privates in the Army were engaged again, many of the present Officers must be discharged, as there is an overproportion; of course we ought to retain the best.

Washington asked the generals to come to a council at headquarters at Sunday 8 October starting at ten o'clock. Gates, Greene, and Sullivan prepared answers in writing; the others apparently did not.⁴⁵

Washington and his generals understood that they, as military commanders, would not be deciding those questions; rather, they were forming recommendations for the civil authorities. They were nonetheless quite specific. The American generals unanimously agreed that the army should consist of at least 20,372 men, plus riflemen and artillery, divided into twenty-six regiments and enlisted through 1 December 1776. They agreed that privates' pay and provisions should not be cut, though the cost of their uniforms (design determined

⁴⁴ WGW, 4:22.

⁴⁵ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1040-3.

by the generals themselves, naturally) could come out of that pay. There were only two areas of any recorded disagreement:

1. Washington, Lee, Heath, Sullivan, and Greene favored paying the men once a month while Ward, Putnam, Thomas, Spencer, and Gates (the older generals) recommended paying once a quarter. Since the army was still having trouble paying the men at all, this discussion was in some respect theoretical.
2. At the meeting, Washington additionally asked “Whether it will be advisable to enlist any negroes in the new army? or whether there be a distinction between such as are slaves and those that are free?” All the generals rejected the idea of enlisting slaves, and “a great majority” agreed “to reject negroes altogether” (see section 9.7).

The commander therefore felt prepared to meet with the Congress’s committee, as scheduled for 12 October.

As it turned out, the three delegates did not set off from Philadelphia until 4 October and did not arrive in Cambridge until the 15th.⁴⁶ Letters had gone out to all the New England governments asking that they send representatives to Cambridge, followed by more letters about rescheduling. As soon as they arrived, the Congress delegates said, they were ready “to perform the duty imposed by the Congress, but the President of the Congress of *New-Hampshire* was detained, by the illness of his family, from attending.”⁴⁷ The men therefore waited for two days, viewing the siege lines and meeting various officers and officials.⁴⁸

Deputy Governor Cooke had come from Rhode Island (without Henry Ward). As discussed in section 17.4, Gov. Trumbull of Connecticut told Washington that he could not attend because of a legislative session; instead he sent Deputy Governor Matthew Griswold (1714-1799), an attorney and judge from Lyme, and Nathaniel Wales (1722-1783), a member of the Council from Windham. Wales had also been part of a committee from Connecticut that forged an alliance with the Massachusetts Provincial Congress in February 1775.⁴⁹

On 10 October the Massachusetts Council appointed three of its most senior members to represent that colony’s civil government in the meeting:

1. James Otis, Sr., a Barnstable merchant who was father of the famous Boston lawyer and politician of the same name (by this time insane) and of Mercy Warren, wife of the Massachusetts speaker. He had already met with the general at least once (see section 17.2).

⁴⁶ LoD, 2:209.

⁴⁷ LoD, 2:243.

⁴⁸ *American Historical Review*, 6:322.

⁴⁹ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 103.

2. William Sever, a merchant from Kingston. Like Otis, he had visited Washington at headquarters back in July as part of a General Court delegation. His wife Sarah was James Warren's sister.
3. Walter Spooner (1720-1803) of Dartmouth. In June he had traveled to Lake Champlain for the Massachusetts Provincial Congress to inspect the troops at Fort Ticonderoga and Crown Point; Col. Benedict Arnold resented this inquiry.⁵⁰

Both Otis and Sever had presided over meetings of the Council, but its senior member was James Bowdoin (1727-1790), who had been ill for most of the year. On 17 October Bowdoin had recovered enough to take his seat on the Council for the first time and to dine at Washington's headquarters with the Congress delegates, the Rev. Dr. Samuel Cooper, and others.⁵¹ Bowdoin was a Boston merchant and one of the senior leaders of the Massachusetts Whigs; known for his learning, he later helped to found the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.⁵² The next day the Council formally added Bowdoin to its committee to attend the meeting at Washington's headquarters.

17.8 THE CIVIL-MILITARY CONFERENCE

On the morning of Wednesday 18 October Gen. Washington began the series of meetings by assembling his generals to respond to “an intimation from the Congress, that an attack upon *Boston*, if practicable, was much desired.”⁵³ Historian John Ferling posits that Washington was annoyed by the delegates' hints that the army had not done enough to drive away the British and convened this meeting to demonstrate what he had learned the previous month—that none of his subordinate generals were ready to attack.⁵⁴ Conversely, it is possible that the commander-in-chief hoped that the delegates' presence would push the generals toward his more aggressive line of thinking. Either way, once again the generals unanimously opposed launching an assault (see section 11.5). Washington's own opinion was not recorded. That consensus deflected whatever pressure there was for an attack, and Washington could move on to decisions about organizing the army.

The generals left the conference room at headquarters—most likely the front room used for dining—and the civil officials came in. With Matthew Thornton still not present to represent New Hampshire, Washington asked Gen. Sullivan to remain. Joseph Reed

⁵⁰ Spooner, *Records of William Spooner*, 1:106-10.

⁵¹ *American Historical Review*, 6:322.

⁵² See Frank Edward Manuel and Fritzie Prigohzy Manuel, *James Bowdoin and the Patriot Philosophers* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2004). Bowdoin College was named in his honor.

⁵³ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1153. PGW:RW reprints notes on this conference that vary in punctuation, spelling, and abbreviations. The *American Archives* text is primarily quoted here for ease of reading.

⁵⁴ Ferling, *First of Men*, 134. Ferling, *Ascent of George Washington*, 93-4.

continued to take notes. The meeting began with someone reading entirely through the Congress's instructions, and then the men went back to consider each issue individually. In all, this conference took five days, until 22 October meeting even on the Sabbath. It is uncertain whether the participants shared meals, but Ferling noted that in October the commander-in-chief ordered over two hundred bottles of wine for his headquarters.⁵⁵

On the first day, the civil authorities unanimously accepted the generals' recommendation on the size and organization of the Continental Army for the upcoming year. They agreed that cutting soldiers' pay could have "dangerous consequences," but also chose not to raise the pay of officers as Washington wanted. The next day, with Thornton present, the meeting established standards for the size of a regiment, the food provided to each soldier, and muskets (see section 17.10). That afternoon there was a dinner at widow Dorothy Coolidge's tavern near the Watertown bridge hosted by the Massachusetts House, "with General Washington, the general Officers of the Army, Committee of Continental Congress... Govr. Cook of R. Island, Lt. Governor Grizzald of Connecticut, and a great Number of Gentlemen of this and other Colonies," according to attendee Samuel Cooper.⁵⁶ James Warren described the fare as "the best Dinner we could get for them, Turtle, Codfish, &c."⁵⁷

On 20 October the men agreed on the basics of a uniform ("dyed brown"), where the army's food would come from, and the authority to impress vehicles and horses for military use "at a reasonable rate." One of the most potentially contentious issues was decided with innocuous language:

3d. By whom the Officers should be chosen or recommended, and how the best Officers and men, in the present Army, may be engaged for the next, making a complete arrangement of the whole?

Agreed, That such Officers as have served in the present Army to approbation, and are willing to stay, be preferred; if there are more of them than are necessary for the new Army, the General to distinguish such as he deems best qualified.

Washington, rather than the colonial governments, thus received authority over which officers to retain. Since the army was expected to shrink, the question of commissioning new officers from outside New England did not come up.⁵⁸

On 21 October, with Sullivan no longer present, the meeting made its major decisions about whether to extend the Continental Army for another year. After "a full discussion and

⁵⁵ Ferling, *First of Men*, 123.

⁵⁶ *American Historical Review*, 6:322. MHSP, 7:217. Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 280.

⁵⁷ PJA, 3:218. In 1789 Washington returned to Coolidge's tavern and called it "a very indifferent one." DGW, 5:493.

⁵⁸ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1158.

consideration of all circumstances,” the men agreed that officers should “signify in writing, as soon as possible, which of them will continue to serve and defend their Country, and which of them will retire.” Those that Gen. Washington approved should then start recruiting men “upon the same pay and allowance of provisions as is now given.” Once again the participants agreed that cutting the privates’ pay was not a good idea. However, the Congress’s understanding of monthly pay was based on calendar months while the New England colonies traditionally calculated by lunar months—meaning that the soldiers experienced a 6% drop in real pay (see section 8.13). The meeting set the period for the next year’s enlistment through 31 December 1776-- a month longer than the council of generals had suggested.⁵⁹ The following day, Washington’s general orders announced that officers planning to retire should tell their colonels, and “Those brave Men, and true Patriots, who are resolved to continue to serve and defend their Brethren, Privileges and Property, are to consider themselves engaged to the last day of December 1776.”⁶⁰

In writing back to the Congress on 24 October the three delegates were anxious to explain why they had authorized Washington and his officers to start recruiting a new army without the full legislature’s approval:

Under these circumstances, we thought it our duty to consent that the General should immediately proceed to a new enlistment of the present Army for the next year, without waiting for the directions of Congress, being convinced, by the opinion not only of the gentlemen we were directed to consult, but of every officer we conversed with on the subject, that every moment’s delay was big with danger. We have, however, reserved, in the terms of the new enlistment, a right in Congress to disband at pleasure, without mentioning the month’s additional pay, voted the soldiers in case they had enlisted at five Dollars per month. . . .

One more reason for despatch is, that men may much more probably enlist before, than after, they feel the hardships of a winter campaign.

As to the soldiers’ pay, the delegates had even examined Massachusetts legislative records to see what the colony had paid men enlisted in 1758-59.⁶¹

The last piece of business on 21 October was to make “holding a treacherous correspondence with or giving intelligence to the enemy” a capital crime under the articles of war, a response to the discovery of Dr. Benjamin Church’s ciphered letter (see chapter 14). The next day, the meeting continued to discuss changes to the articles of war, probably using a memorandum from judge advocate general William Tudor.⁶² As for Church himself, the

⁵⁹ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1158.

⁶⁰ General orders, 22 October 1775, WGWS, 4:37.

⁶¹ LoD, 2:244.

⁶² *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1163-4. Tudor recommended cutting back on the number of offenses that required a general court-martial instead of a regimental court-martial and increasing the possible punishments in several ways.

participants referred him “for trial and punishment, to the General Court of *Massachusetts-Bay*,” and decided to await instructions from the Congress on further procedures.⁶³

Washington then seized the opportunity to bring up other “such matters as have been mentioned in the General’s letters to the Congress, upon which no order has been made.”⁶⁴ One question was particularly ironic, considering where the meeting took place:

It was then deliberated, what should be done with Tory property; how is it to be applied or treated? Some of the Tories have estates near the Camp at *Cambridge*, which have wood upon them, and other articles wanted for the Army; ought they to be meddled with?

The meeting passed this question up to the whole Congress. Later Washington asked some authority to fix “a reasonable price” on wood, hay, and other commodities; the meeting sent that issue over to the Massachusetts legislature.⁶⁵

The delegates from Philadelphia asked the civil officials from the region how many troops each of their colonies “could and would furnish by the 10th of *March* next, and on what terms?” The Massachusetts men said they thought their colony could supply 20,000 men “if absolutely necessary, on the terms of the present Army, (viz: a coat, forty Shillings per month, one month’s wages being advanced).” Connecticut suggested 8,000, New Hampshire 3,000, and Rhode Island 1,500. That hopeful total would have been 32,500 soldiers, far more than the Continental Army had ever had.⁶⁶

The New England officials then left the room, perhaps to attend the last part of Sunday meeting, and “the Delegates then proceeded to confer with the General on several other matters of general concern.”⁶⁷ This smaller discussion continued until 24 October running through a wide variety of issues, some of them politically sensitive:

- the treatment of prisoners of war, and prisoner exchanges.
- rules for privateers and the six army schooners (see section 12.6).
- black soldiers (the delegates endorsed the generals’ position against enlisting any—see section 9.7).
- Native soldiers (see section 16.3).
- higher pay for artificers, or skilled workmen.
- reorganizing the artillery regiment, since “*Colo Gridly* is become very obnoxious to that Corps” (see section 10.9).

⁶³ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1158-60.

⁶⁴ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1159.

⁶⁵ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1160.

⁶⁶ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1160.

⁶⁷ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1160.

- the scarcity of money, lead, flint, and tents. (As for gunpowder, the general raised the possibility that that supply would become so *large* that the army might sell some to local authorities.)
- what to do if part of the British forces attacked New York.
- on what schedule to pay the soldiers—the delegates chose a monthly schedule.

In most cases, the delegates approved Washington’s recommendations, or endorsed actions he had already taken.

The group left some issues up to the whole Congress, such as a new director for the medical department and a system of express riders along the coast. Commissary General Joseph Trumbull being sick, he was not available to explain his department’s need for more clerks and assistant commissaries than had been budgeted for, so the delegates asked him and Quartermaster Thomas Mifflin to “draw up a Memorial to the Congress” about their staff needs for Washington to review and send on.⁶⁸ Near the end of the discussions, Washington asked how much damage to Boston the Congress was willing to stomach:

...the General wishes to know how far it may be deemed proper and advisable to avail himself of the season to destroy the Troops, who propose to winter at *Boston*, by a bombardment, when the harbour is blocked up; or, in other words, whether the loss of the Town, and the property therein, are to be so considered as that an attack upon the Troops there should be avoided, when it evidently appears that the Town must of consequence be destroyed.

The three delegates replied that this was “a matter of too much importance to be determined by them,” and promised to refer it to the whole Congress—which of course was chaired by John Hancock, who had extensive property in Boston.⁶⁹

17.9 POLITICAL FOLLOW-UP

During the delegates’ time in Massachusetts, there was some jockeying among the generals for their attention. On 23 October Gen. Artemas Ward wrote to John Adams from the Roxbury camp:

Yesterday I Recd. your favour of the fifth Instant, a week after the arival of Mr Lynch, although I had been twice in his company before. I have indeavoured to treat the Gentlemen Committe with Decency and Politeness, I invited them to Roxbury twice. The day after I invited them Mr. Lynch came to Roxbury, but did not dine with me, he being Ingaged to dine with Genl. Washington as he said. The next day I was at Cambridge, and mentioned to Washington his and the Comte. dining with me. He answered they could not untill they had finished their business and he would let me know when they would come and dine with me.

⁶⁸ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1162-3.

⁶⁹ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1163.

Major [Samuel] Osgood informs me Genl. Washington told the Comtte. that I depended on their dining with me this day. This day Genl. Gates wrote to the field officers of ye Connecticut forces, that the Comte. did accept their invitation to dine with them, and accordingly came and dined with them. When they came I informed them I expected they would have dined with me, they said they thought till then, that accepting of the one invitation, was accepting the other; that is they were one and ye same invitation. I afterward invited them to dine with me tomorrow. They told me if they did not set out on their Journey they were Engaged to dine with Genl. Putnam. I think I have given a true state of facts, and now Judge whither, I have been deficient in inviting, and whither I have not been Ill treated. What would not some men do, to make this Colony and the Inhabitants thereof appear contemptible?⁷⁰

Of course, by the time Ward's complaint had arrived in Philadelphia, the visit was over. James Warren also felt a little left out of the big conference: "I know little about it. There seems to be such a reservedness among those concerned here, that my pride won't permit me to Ask many Questions."⁷¹

On 19 October Franklin wrote a letter from "Cambridge Head Quarters" to a son-in-law saying, "I suppose we shall leave this Place next Week. I shall not return in Company with the other Delegates, as I must call for my Sister, and we shall hardly be able to travel so fast, but I expect to be at Philada. within a few Days of them." He added a characteristic discussion of how to pay for the war through frugality:

For my own Part tho' I am for the most prudent Parsimony of the publick Treasure, I am not terrified by the Expencc of this War, should it continue ever so long. A little more Frugality, or a little more Industrv in Individuals will with Ease defray it. Suppose it 100,000£ a Month or 1,200,000£ a Year. If 500,000 Families will each spend a Shilling a Week less, or earn a Shilling a Week more; or if they will spend 6 pence a Week less and earn 6 pence a Week more, they may pay the whole Sum without otherwise feeling it. Forbearing to drink Tea saves three fourths of the Money; and 500,000 Women doing each threepence Worth of Spinning or Knitting in a Week will pay the rest.⁷²

On 24 October Franklin wrote that the delegates planned to leave the next day, but on 26 October he was once again writing from "Head Quarters, Cambridge."⁷³ Finally, about two o'clock the Pennsylvania delegate set out with some of his learned local friends—James Bowdoin, Prof. John and Hannah Winthrop, and the Rev. Dr. Samuel Cooper—for the house that Bowdoin had appropriated for his use in Middleborough.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ PJA, 3:234-5.

⁷¹ James Warren to John Adams, 20-22 October 1775, PJA, 3:220.

⁷² LoD, 2:209.

⁷³ LoD, 2:245, 255.

⁷⁴ *American Historical Review*, 6:323.

Franklin's party visited Josiah Quincy in Braintree the next day. The gentlemen recommended that Quincy send his scheme for blocking up Boston harbor to Gen. Washington, prompting a correspondence of enthusiastic ideas and reports from Braintree and polite replies from Cambridge and then New York.⁷⁵ Franklin went on to Warwick, Rhode Island, where his sister Jane Mecom was staying with a branch of the Greene family; she was a refugee from occupied Boston, and he brought her to his home in Philadelphia. On 10 November Robert Treat Paine's wife Sally wrote from Taunton that "Doctor Franklin. . . was So kind as to Call at our house for Letters or any thing that I wanted to Send to you. He made but a Short Stay with us we would have been Glad for more of his Company."⁷⁶

After the meeting ended, Joseph Reed sat down to make copies of his official notes for all the participants; because of his own departure for home, however, Stephen Moylan had to complete that task in November. Trumbull and Mifflin prepared their memoranda. The three delegates began their journey back to Philadelphia, where they passed on Gen. Washington's recommendations. On 13 November Lynch wrote back to the general:

I am happy to inform you that Congress has agreed to every Recommendation of the Committee and have gone beyond it in allowing the additional pay to the officers. I rejoice at this but cant think with Patience that pityfull wretches who stood cavilling with you when entreated to serve the next Campaign shoud reap the Benefit of this addition. They will now be ready enough but hope you will be able to refuse them with the Contempt they deserve and to find better in their Rooms. Coud not some of the Gentlemen at Camp inlist the New England Men who have been perswaded to leave you, Frazier told me he coud. It woud be a Capital Point to convince the World that it is not necessary to have bad Officers of that Country in order to raise Men there. I can scarce bear their Tyranny. . . .

I have a Letter from undoubted authority that assures me, that the Destruction of the Parliamentary Army in America will certainly produce Peace and by another that the Seizing Quebec will produce the same Effect. I have no doubt America stands now indebted to her General for the One & will before the Return of Spring for the other. Mistake me not, I have not altered my mind a jot since I left you. I mean not to anticipate your Determinations, but only to approve your Design to hover like an Eagle over your Prey, always ready to Pounce [on] it when the proper Time comes; I have not forgot your Proposition relative to that City; I try to pave the way for it, and wait for the Season as you do. . . .

The Articles of War has all the amendments as reported. You will inforce them. You will not now suffer your Officers to sweep the Parade [with] the Skirts of their Coats or bottoms of their Trowsers, to cheat or to mess with their Men, to skulk in battle or sneak in Quarters. In short being now paid they must do their

⁷⁵ Josiah Quincy to George Washington, 31 October 1775; Washington to Quincy, 4 November 1775; Quincy to Washington, 19 February 1776; Quincy to Washington, 21 March 1776; Washington to Quincy, 24 March 1776; Quincy to Washington, 25 March 1776; Washington to Quincy, 25 April 1776.

⁷⁶ Paine, *Papers*, 3:112.

Duty & look as well as act like Gentlemen. Do not bate them an Ace, my Dear General, but depend on every Support of your Friends here.⁷⁷

Gen. Washington had obtained nearly all he wanted on paper for reorganizing the Continental Army. However, actual supplies would continue to be scarce.

17.10 STANDARDS FOR THE CONTINENTAL ARMY

On 19 October 1775 the conference at headquarters set the following standards for the Continental Army.⁷⁸

On the size of a regiment, starting in 1776:

That each Regiment consist of seven hundred and twenty-eight men, including Officers; that it be divided into eight Companies, each Company to consist of one Captain, two Lieutenants, one Ensign, four Sergeants, four Corporals, two Drums or Fifes, seventy-six Privates.

This established the first standard for troops from all colonies.

On a soldier's food rations and other provisions:

One pound of beef or three-quarters of a pound of pork, or one pound of salt fish, per day; one pound of bread or flour per day; three pints of peas or beans per week, or vegetables equivalent, at six Shillings per bushel for peas or beans; one pint of milk per man per day, or at the rate of one Penny per pint; one half pint of rice, or one pint of *Indian* meal, per man per week; one quart of spruce beer or cider per man, per day, or nine gallons of molasses per Company of one hundred men, per week; three pounds of candles to one hundred men, per week, for squads; twenty-four pounds of soft, or eight pounds of hard soap, for one hundred men, per week.

This was, of course, an ideal. The army around Boston had the advantages of being camped in one place, having easy access to a supportive countryside, and not facing wartime inflation. Still, its commissary department struggled to provide all this material.

On an infantryman's weapons:

That it be recommended to the several Conventions or Assemblies of the Colonies, respectively, to set and keep their Gunsmiths at work to manufacture good Firelocks with Bayonets; each Firelock to be made with a good Bridle Lock, three-quarters of an inch bore, and of good substance at the breech; the Barrel to be three feet eight inches in length; the Bayonet to be eighteen inches in the blade; with a steel Ramrod, the upper loop therefor being trumpet-mouthed. That the price to be given be fixed by the Assembly or Convention, or Committee of Safety of each Colony, and to import all that can be procured; and that the

⁷⁷ LoD, 2:337-8.

⁷⁸ *American Archives*, series 4, 3:1157.

good Arms of such soldiers as leave the service, be retained on a valuation made of them.

Again, this model weapon was an ideal. With all guns being handmade, and most soldiers having brought their own from home, the Continental Army had a wide variety of weapons.

17.11 MOVES TOWARD INDEPENDENCE

In addition to building relationships with American governments at various levels, Gen. Washington was also rethinking his relationship to the government in London. On 25 January 1775 he wrote to a neighbor, “The King’s Speech and Address of both Houses, prognosticate nothing favorable to us; but by some subsequent proceedings thereto, as well as by private letters from London, there is reason to believe the ministry would willingly change their ground, from a conviction the forcible measures will be inadequate to the end designed.” Like most North American colonists, Washington made a distinction between “the ministry”—Lord North and the other government ministers—and King George III. Even though the monarch criticized the defiant colonists in his speech, American Whigs maintained the hope that he was being misled by corrupt politicians, and would eventually respond to their complaints and preserve their rights under the British constitution.

Thus, in a letter to a friend in London on 31 May 1775 after the war had started, Washington wrote of the enemy forces, “we do not, nor cannot yet prevail upon ourselves to call them the King’s Troops.” Instead, he adopted the term “ministerial Army,” suggesting that corrupt or misguided ministers in the London government had precipitated the crisis.⁷⁹ The American colonists, this phrase implied, still had faith in the underlying British constitution. Washington continued using the “ministerial” terminology until 4 July 1776. However, on 6 November 1775 he referred to “the King’s Troops” for the first time in a letter to Col. Edward Phinney. While that short message might well have been drafted by an aide, on 30 January and 14 February 1776 the general used the same phrase in letters to the Congress, documents that he considered and revised carefully. Washington was changing his thoughts about the American colonies’ relationship to George III.

When Capt. William Palfrey presided over a church service for Martha Washington around the turn of the year (see section 7.10), he revised the language of the Book of Common Prayer to reflect the political situation. Palfrey still prayed for the king, but in a decidedly critical vein:

O Lord our heavenly Father, high and mighty, King of kings and Lord of lords,
who hast made of one blood all the nations upon earth, and whose common

⁷⁹ The phrase “ministerial” appears, for example, in Washington’s orders to a rifle company, 16 August 1775; letters to the Congress, 30 September and 31 December 1775; and general orders, 21 March 1776. For more discussion of this point, see Longmore, *Invention of George Washington*, 187, 283.

bounty is liberally bestowed upon thy unworthy creatures; most heartily we beseech thee to look down with mercy on his Majesty George the Third. Open his eyes and enlighten his understanding, that he may pursue the true interest of the people over whom thou, in thy providence, hast placed him. Remove far from him all wicked, corrupt men, and evil counsellors, that his throne may be established in justice and righteousness; and so replenish him with the grace of thy Holy Spirit that he may always incline to thy will and walk in thy way.

Have pity, O most merciful Father, upon the distresses of the inhabitants of this Western World. Succeed and prosper their endeavors for the establishment of peace, liberty, and safety. To that end, we humbly pray thee to bless the Continental Congress. Preside over their councils, and may they be led to such measures as may tend to thy glory, to the advancement of true religion, and to the happiness and prosperity of thy people. We also pray thee to bless our Provincial Assemblies, magistrates, and all in subordinate places of power and trust. Be with thy servant, the Commander-in-chief of the American forces. Afford him thy presence in all his undertakings; strengthen him, that he may vanquish and overcome all his enemies; and grant that we may, in thy due time, be restored to the enjoyment of those inestimable blessings we have been deprived of by the devices of cruel and bloodthirsty men, for the sake of thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord.⁸⁰

George III was officially head of the Church of England, the religion that the Washingtons practiced, so overthrowing his temporal authority also had a religious dimension.

Washington also came to see the “United Provinces” as a single unit that demanded loyalty from all Americans. According to historian Paul K. Longmore, the general started the year 1775 using the word “country” to refer to the colony a man had come from, as when he cajoled Gen. Thomas into remaining in the army “as a Native of America” as well as for his own “bleeding Country” (see section 4.3). Over time, Washington began to write more often of “our Common Country,” and by the end of the year he used “country” to mean all the united colonies.⁸¹

Although the Continental Congress officially denied any desire to make those colonies independent of Great Britain, some delegates were privately discussing that course. This became clear on 17 August 1775 when the *Boston News-Letter* published an intercepted letter that John Adams had sent to James Warren on 24 July:

We ought to have had in our Hands a Month ago, the whole Legislative, Executive and Judicial of the whole Continent, and have compleatly modelled a Constitution, to have raised a Naval Power and opened all our Ports wide, to have arrested every Friend to Government on the Continent and held them as Hostages for the poor Victims in Boston—And then opened the Door as wide as possible for Peace and Reconciliation: After this they might have petitioned and

⁸⁰ Palfrey, *Library of American Biography*, 7:405-6.

⁸¹ Longmore, *Invention of George Washington*, 188-9.

negotiated and addressed, etc. if they would. Is all this extravagant? Is it wild? Is it not the soundest Policy?⁸²

Though Adams proposed setting up an American government only to create a better position for negotiating with the government in London, he was clearly able to contemplate full independence.

Gen. Washington's secretary, Joseph Reed, reacted to that document by telling a friend: "Adams's letter is short and decisive, and points out our true line of conduct, which we must come to sooner or later if we expect peace and reconciliation on proper terms."⁸³ However, Reed was not ready to favor full independence. On 29 September he told his brother-in-law:

I have not time to discuss with you the impropriety of a republican government for America. It is a form of government which certainly has contributed more to the happiness of the people than any other, and therefore where practicable, is with me the most eligible. But unless the tyranny and folly of ministers press us into the formation of some new system, I think we may yet return to our old ground of 1763, a most desirable state, if with it we could return to our former unsuspecting confidence and affection for each other, but that is rather to be wished than expected.⁸⁴

As late as 8 October Reed still hoped for reconciliation with Britain, though he also wrote, "I have no notion of being hanged for half courage; when a subject draws a sword against his prince, he must cut his way through, if he means afterwards to sit down again in safety."⁸⁵

The most politically radical men in Washington's circle were, ironically, the retired British officers Horatio Gates and Charles Lee. Their frustrating experiences with the royal army had soured them on the British system and its leadership.⁸⁶ In July 1775 Gates told Thomas Jefferson that he was "uneasy" about the Congress's "Olive Branch" petition.⁸⁷ Following the council at headquarters on 20 October 1775 Gen. Lee wrote to Dr. Benjamin Rush in Philadelphia:

I hope you received my last letter wherein I hinted to you how necessary it is to be cautious in broaching your Republican doctrines, tho' I cannot, for my own part conceive that there should be two opinions on the subject, and think that the

⁸² PJA, 3:89. For the story behind this letter, see section 13.8.

⁸³ Reed to Thomas Bradford, 21 August 1775, in Reed, *Life and Correspondence*, 1:118.

⁸⁴ Reed to Charles Pettit, 29 September 1775, Reed, *Life and Correspondence*, 1:120.

⁸⁵ Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 75.

⁸⁶ Longmore noted that British republicans were far more critical of the king than American Whigs: "From 1767 to 1773, nearly every antimonarchical polemic published in the colonies originated from England. Moreover, no significant inclusion of the king in charges against the ministry appeared in America during that period." Longmore, *Invention of George Washington*, 187.

⁸⁷ Nelson, *General Horatio Gates*, 48.

most nonsensical idea that ever enter'd the head of that nonsensical animal, man, is to invest the most stupid and worthless part of his species (which a Prince from his education must undoubtedly be) with so great a part of his property as to enable him to take away the rest at his leisure, and to encourage him to every transgression of duty by assuring him of personal impunity, for such I think is the substance of those divine maxims of the English Constitution; viz: a *King can do no wrong*—his *Person is to be considered as Sacred*, and other similar disgusting absurdities—these beastly Barbarisms so shocking to common sense, and repugnant to the eternal rules of justice, strike my understanding, I say so forcibly, that there is no miracle recorded in sacred writ half so miraculous in my opinion, as that there shou'd be two men who are suffer'd to go about without bibs and bells, blockheads enough to give into 'em—but We must deal with the Animal beastly and barbarous as We find it — You are a Physician, and I believe an able one—Wou'd you venture to prescribe at once wholesome solid nutritious diet to a stomach weaken'd and contaminated by a flimsy windy and noxious course of feeding? It is the same in politicks. I am the more perswaded of the necessity of management in this article from the conversation held by all our late Virginia and Carolina Visitors [i.e., Harrison and Lynch]. They seem to me without exception to be exactly in the whimsical state of the Prince of Liliput hobbling with one high shoe and one low one—*homines qui nec totam servitutem pati possunt, nec totam libertatem* [“men who cannot endure either total slavery or total freedom,” a phrase from Tacitus]—I am apprehensive, that I have myself been too unguarded upon this subject—Poor Gates, who is as mad an enthusiast as Colonel Rumbald himself has frighten'd 'em out of their Wits—For God's sake then, let time and circumstances work—Our damn'd Tyrant of St. James's whose folly, if possible, surpasses his villany will if you give him ropes bring about the righteous event—Already the ton is amongst those, who are so hard to be wean'd from the Worship of the golden Calf, that they begin to suspect the K is full as bad as the worst of his Ministry, to have advanc'd such a proposition last year, wou'd have been thought treason and impiety. Next year—if you will have patience King and Tyrant will be a synonymous term as it was in the glorious epocha's of Greece—nay I am even sanguine enough to flatter myself that Nurses will soon frighten their naughty children if They do not cease crying that the King will fetch 'em away.⁸⁸

On 7 December Gates told Benjamin Franklin that he wished the Congress would stop wrangling over “forms of government” and establish Americans' freedom; the general acknowledged Franklin already felt that way, and intended his comments to sway others.⁸⁹

The person who did the most to convince Washington to turn against the king appears to be the king himself. In early November Americans received George III's 23 August “Proclamation for suppressing Rebellion and Sedition,” followed quickly by news that the monarch would not consider the Continental Congress's latest petition. Washington later wrote that this news convinced him that there was no hope for reconciliation.⁹⁰ The

⁸⁸ NYHSC, 4:213-4.

⁸⁹ Nelson, *General Horatio Gates*, 48.

⁹⁰ Longmore, *Invention of George Washington*, 192.

Congress's official response on 6 December still insisted, "We will not, on our part, lose the distinction between the King and his Ministers."⁹¹ However, on 26 October the king had opened a parliamentary session by stating:

The rebellious war now levied is become more general, and is manifestly carried on for the purpose of establishing an independent empire. I need not dwell upon the fatal effects of the success of such a plan. The object is too important, the spirit of the British nation too high, the resources with which God hath blessed her too numerous, to give up so many colonies which she has planted with great industry, nursed with great tenderness, encouraged with many commercial advantages, and protected and defended at much expense of blood and treasure.

It is now become the part of wisdom and (in its effects) of clemency to put a speedy end to these disorders by the most decisive exertions. For this purpose, I have increased my naval establishment, and greatly augmented my land forces; but in such a manner as may be the least burthensome to my kingdoms.

I have also the satisfaction to inform you that I have received the most friendly offers of foreign assistance, and if I shall make any treaties in consequence thereof, they shall be laid before you.⁹²

In other words, the British government was working out arrangements with European states for extra troops to suppress the North American rebellion.

When news of those latest royal policies reached North America, public opinion turned openly against remaining within the British Empire. Washington wrote sarcastically to Reed on 4 January 1776:

We are at length favoured with a sight of his Majesty's most gracious speech, breathing sentiments of tenderness and compassion for his deluded American subjects; the echo has not yet come to hand, but we know what it must be, and as Lord North said, and we ought to have believed, (and acted accordingly,) we now know the ultimatum of British justice.⁹³

On 22 January Gates reported, based on word from Philadelphia, "The Kings speech has had a Noble Effect in Fixing all the wavering to the cause of Freedom & America."⁹⁴ Since George III had already accused the rebellious Americans of seeking independence, they had little to lose by doing so.

Symbolically, Gen. Washington continued to show loyalty to Britain; he still had the army fly the "union flag" on Prospect Hill (see section 12.13). However, over the course of the siege his policies toward Americans who still supported the Crown became less lenient. In November he urged the New England governments to arrest Loyalists; in December he

⁹¹ JCC, 3:411.

⁹² George III et al., *Two Hundred Fifty Royal Speeches*, 9.

⁹³ WGW, 4:210.

⁹⁴ NYHSC, 4:252. Among those turned toward independence by this latest royal speech was Charles Lee; NYHSC, 4:266-7.

advocated administering loyalty oaths; and in January 1776 he told Lee to disarm Tories in New York.⁹⁵

17.12 THE EFFECTS OF PAINE'S COMMON SENSE

In January 1776 Thomas Paine, a British journalist recently relocated to Philadelphia, published an anonymous pamphlet called *Common Sense*. Within three months, he claimed, 120,000 copies were printed—though Paine had no way of counting and every reason to estimate upwards. It is more reliable to say that Philadelphia printers put out sixteen editions within the year, and that Patriot printers in other cities reprinted the text in more pamphlets and in their newspapers.⁹⁶

On 21 January a Philadelphian brought a copy of *Common Sense* to the Cambridge headquarters. The next day, Gen. Gates wrote to Gen. Lee, then headed to New York:

There is a Pamphlet come by Irwin from Philadelphia, entitled *Common Sense*—it is an excellent performance—I think our Friend Franklyn has been principally concern'd in the Composition—the Bearer also, has I fancy play'd his part.⁹⁷

Two days later Lee wrote to Washington from Stamford, Connecticut, on his way to New York:

Have you seen the pamphlet—*Common Sense*? I never saw such a masterly, irresistible performance. It will, if I mistake not, in concurrence with the transcendent folly and wickedness of the ministry, give the Coup-de-grace to Great Britain. In short, I own myself convinced, by the arguments, of the necessity of separation.⁹⁸

By the end of the month Gen. Washington was hinting at the same sentiment, telling Joseph Reed that more British naval attacks on the American coast “added to the sound doctrine and unanswerable reasoning contained in the pamphlet ‘*Common Sense*,’ will not leave numbers at a loss to decide upon the propriety of a separation.”⁹⁹ Washington was cautious about pushing the people toward independence too quickly, however. He used *Common Sense* to track how other gentlemen were thinking. On 6 March his brother-in-law Fielding Lewis wrote from Virginia: “The opinion for independency seems to be gaining

⁹⁵ Longmore, *Invention of George Washington*, 192-3.

⁹⁶ Loughran, *The Republic in Print*, 41-5.

⁹⁷ NYHSC, 4:252. It is unclear what Gates meant by “the Bearer”; John Adams had recently been at headquarters, and started south on 24 January, so Gates might have asked him to carry a letter to Lee, but Adams’s papers do not confirm that.

⁹⁸ NYHSC, 4:259-60.

⁹⁹ Reed, *Life and Correspondence*, 1:148. WGW, 4:297.

ground; indeed most of those who have read the Pamphlet Common Sense say it's unanswerable.”¹⁰⁰ On 1 April Washington passed this news on to Reed:

My countrymen I know from their form of government, and steady attachment heretofore to royalty, will come reluctantly into the idea of independency, but time and persecution bring many wonderful things to pass; and by private letters which I have lately received from Virginia, I find “Common Sense” is working a wonderful change there in the minds of many men.¹⁰¹

The general did not wish the Congress to take measures that the American people were not prepared for.

As a member of the provincial elite, and a temperamentally cautious man, Washington was particularly attuned to the opinions of the American gentility, and hoped that they would lead public opinion. Ironically, some of his troops had been well ahead of him in throwing off their traditional loyalty to the king. Back on 22 September 1775 Pvt. Daniel McCurtin of Maryland wrote in his journal: “This day the Regulars had fine sport firing powder, it being the King’s Damnation day, or Coronation day, as they call it.”¹⁰²

17.13 THE GENERAL AND HARVARD COLLEGE

Gen. Washington interacted with another important Massachusetts institution, nominally private but quite intertwined with the government: Harvard College. The college set Cambridge apart from the many other towns of rural Massachusetts and, because of its age and prestige, set Massachusetts apart from other colonies.

From the first night of the war, the American forces made use of that institution’s buildings. By the end of May, the Provincial Congress asked the college to formally close; most of its students and professors had already left, the latter leaving their houses for the use of the province. As a result, when Washington arrived in Cambridge, he found that “The Colleges and Houses of this Town are necessarily occupied by the Troops,” as he told the Congress on 10 July in a letter probably written from the college president’s house.¹⁰³

Over the next several months, Washington’s general orders referred occasionally to the college, but always as a *de facto* military base. On 27 July a court of enquiry met in a tutor’s chamber to consider public accusations against “Mr. Benjamin Whiting, now a prisoner in the College.”¹⁰⁴ On 17 August the court-martial proceedings for two colonels

¹⁰⁰ PGW:RW, 3:418-9.

¹⁰¹ WGW, 4:455.

¹⁰² Balch, *Papers Chiefly Relating to the Maryland Line*, 4:17.

¹⁰³ WGW, 3:323.

¹⁰⁴ WGW, 3:368. The chapel building, now called Holden Chapel, remains in Harvard Yard. Whiting was a New Hampshire man accused of royalist sympathies. He was acquitted, but remained under suspicion and finally left the U.S. after 1776.

accused of cowardice at Bunker Hill and afterwards were held “at the College Chapel.”¹⁰⁵ On 29 August the army’s parole password was “Georgia,” and the countersign was “Harvard.”¹⁰⁶ But those are the only mentions of the institution in the general’s surviving writings from the siege.

Harvard resumed classes in October in Concord, safely away from the siege lines (and from the influence of rowdy soldiers on the adolescent students). At the end of Washington’s stay in Cambridge, college officials scrambled to honor him “as an expression of the gratitude of this College for his eminent services in the cause of his country and to this Society.”¹⁰⁷ The Harvard corporation and overseers convened a special meeting in Watertown on 3 April with only treasurer John Hancock absent, and voted to make the general an honorary doctor of laws (L.L.D.). This was the first time Harvard awarded an honorary degree to a man who had not graduated from any college. It was also the first time Harvard conferred a degree outside of its regularly scheduled commencement—but the general was about to leave for New York. In fact, the Rev. Dr. Samuel Cooper wrote in his diary that he did not sign Washington’s diploma until 4 April and was then unable to see the general before he left for New York—leaving the possibility that the finished document had to be sent along later.¹⁰⁸

Judging by what little Washington said about this honor, it may have meant more to the college than to the general. He could not, after all, read the Latin document (though an English translation was published in the newspapers). But he did keep the diploma.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ WGW, 3:428.

¹⁰⁶ WGW, 3:455.

¹⁰⁷ Quincy, *History of Harvard University*, 2:167, 506-7. Quincy stated that the college had never before awarded the degree of L.L.D., but three years earlier it had given that honor to Prof. John Winthrop—who co-signed Washington’s diploma with his degrees listed; Henry H. Edes, “Professor John Winthrop, L.L.D.,” CSMP, 7:321-5.

¹⁰⁸ *American Historical Review*, 6:339.

¹⁰⁹ Washington’s diploma can be viewed online at <<http://memory.loc.gov/mss/mgw/mgw8b/124/0100/0167.jpg>>.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

BRINGING THE SIEGE TO A SUCCESSFUL END

On 16 and 18 January 1776 Gen. Washington convened councils of war to discuss how to use the heavy guns that Col. Henry Knox was bringing from Lake Ticonderoga (see sections 10.10 and 11.6). He told his generals of “the indispensable necessity of making a Bold attempt to Conquer the Ministerial Troops in Boston.”¹ The commanders wrote to the nearby colonies asking for more militia forces. However, they had not yet decided on the nature of the coming attack.

Over the next month, Washington and his officers explored different possibilities, visiting forward positions in the siege lines and at one point venturing onto the Dorchester peninsula to see how it might be occupied. Calling a new council on 16 February the commander-in-chief once again advocated an assault on the enemy by having Continental soldiers charge across the ice that had formed on either side of the Boston Neck. Every other general advised trying to take control of the high points in Dorchester. The council adopted that plan with an amphibious attack on Boston as a possible second step (see section 11.7). The question was how.

18.1 THE TOPOGRAPHY OF DORCHESTER HEIGHTS

The Dorchester peninsula was sparsely populated before the war, and by late 1775 most of those inhabitants had moved to safer ground. An 1859 town history stated:

There were then nine dwelling houses on the Neck. . . . The occupants of these houses were Mrs. Foster, Mr. Bird, Mr. Deluce, Mr. Williams, Mr. Farrington, Mr. Harrington, John Wiswall, Dea[con]. Blake and Oliver Wiswall. Mrs. Foster’s house was one of the best in the neighborhood, and it was difficult to convince the continentallers that it did not belong to a tory, as some of the rooms were even papered, which was considered very luxurious in those days. This house was the most westerly, and Dea. Blake’s the most easterly, of any on the peninsula, and these were both burnt by the British. . .²

Henry Pelham depicted those houses on his 1777 map of the siege.

¹ PGW:RW, 3:103.

² In the eighteenth century, people commonly referred to the entire peninsula as the “Dorchester Neck.” For clarity, this chapter (except in quotations) uses the term “neck” only for the low isthmus onto the peninsula. Dorchester Antiquarian and Historical Society, *History of the Town of Dorchester*, 333-4.

American commanders had discussed the value of fortifying the Dorchester peninsula as early as 15 June 1775 when the Massachusetts Committee of Safety had actually ordered the army to do that. Gen. John Thomas's Roxbury council had replied that the plan was impracticable (see section 4.4), so no one took any action for the rest of the year. At that time, with limited artillery power, the provincial army had little to gain from seizing that land besides preventing the enemy from doing so. Since the British commanders never tried to expand their lines again, however, that lack of action had no serious consequences.

With heavy artillery available in early 1776 the potential value of the Dorchester peninsula changed. Cannon on the peninsula's heights could threaten the shipping lane in and out of Boston harbor. Such guns could also fire on Boston itself, though not as easily. If the British troops tried to storm the heights to dislodge the Continental troops from those positions, they would face a terrain even more daunting than at Bunker Hill—provided the Americans had fortified themselves well.

On the other hand, any attempt to seize and fortify the Dorchester peninsula offered some daunting topographic obstacles. Its shape made holding it significantly more difficult than Charlestown, which the provincials had already tried to occupy and lost. The neck into Charlestown was on the far side of that peninsula from Boston; to threaten troops crossing that isthmus, the British needed to move a ship up the Charles or Mystic Rivers. In contrast, the Dorchester neck was on the side closest to Boston, within the range of the Royal Artillery guns at the town gate. It was close to sea level, and therefore more vulnerable. The first challenge the American commanders faced was, therefore, getting men across the isthmus with reasonable safety.

Furthermore, the Charlestown neck led immediately to the peninsula's high ground, which thus protected the troops' escape route. The Dorchester heights were twin peaks halfway down the peninsula, meaning it would take Continental soldiers longer to reach that position, and once there the enemy could cut them off by landing forces on the neck. The Dorchester peninsula was also significantly larger, requiring the American troops to guard more shoreline against amphibious landings. Castle William, the heavily fortified island in Boston harbor that housed hundreds of regulars, lay just east of the peninsula, so the British could attack quickly from two directions. On top of the topographical challenges was a meteorological one: winter had frozen the ground all around Boston, making it hard to dig trenches and throw up earthworks.

The Continental Army engineers and commanders had experienced the difficulty of fortifying in winter such a site when they built a redoubt at Lechmere's Point in east Cambridge. In November the troops had managed to complete a set of earthworks on Cobble Hill in only two nights.³ By contrast, fortifying Lechmere's Point required building a causeway over swampy low ground, then a "Covered Way onto Leachmor hill" to conceal

³ Heath, *Memoirs*, 24.

and protect the troops.⁴ Gen. Putnam and his men broke ground on the point on the foggy morning of 17 December but withdrew under fire from the Royal Navy and Royal Artillery. Gen. Heath led a second team to the same point on 18 December, expecting, a “bloody day”:

As soon as the men were placed in the works, two sentinels were posted to watch the British batteries, with orders, on discovering the discharge of cannon, to call out, *a shot!* The men in the works were ordered to be steady; on the signal of a shot, to settle down and remain so, until the shot had struck; or if a shell, until it had burst, then to rise and prosecute the work—no man to step out of his place. In a very short time, a shot was cried by the sentinels. It proved to be a shell, which fell and burst within a few feet of a part of the workmen, throwing the dirt among them, and a piece of the shell hitting a soldier’s hat. On the second discharge, the men fell as before; when, on rising, two or three heavy cannon-shot struck in the face of the work, the British having discharged the cannon in such time after the mortar, as that the shot might take effect just as the men arose after the bursting of the shell: but in this they did not succeed; the men being ordered to keep down until both had struck. Finding this deception to fail, a shell was broke in the air, directly over the party, at 60 or 70 feet high. This also had as little effect upon the Americans. The fire continued until the afternoon, when it ceased: and it was afterwards learnt that the commanding officer of the British artillery, who stood and observed the effect of their fire upon the Americans, went to their General, and informed him, that from his own observation, their fire had no other effect than to inure the Americans to danger, and advised its discontinuance. In the afternoon, Gen. Washington and several other General Officers came on to the Point.

Even though the position was now secure enough for the commander-in-chief to visit, it was not complete. Troops continued to dig in the hard ground on 19 and 20 December.⁵ Jeduthan Baldwin “Laid a platform for the Great Mortar” there on 26 December before he “Dind with Genl. Washington & Lady.”⁶ It thus took about a month from when American commanders first laid out the lines for an artillery battery at Lechmere’s Point on the night of 29 November to when it was ready for large artillery pieces, and Baldwin continued to work on the site through late February.⁷

The American commanders recognized the value of a battery so close to Boston. On 2 January 1776 Gen. Washington’s aide Stephen Moylan wrote to Joseph Reed in Philadelphia, “It will be possible to bombard Boston from Lechmere’s Point. Give us powder and authority, for that, you know, we want, as well as the other. I say give us these, and Boston can be set in flames.”⁸ But the commanders also saw how long it took for the Continental

⁴ Baldwin, *Revolutionary Journal*, 18.

⁵ Heath, *Memoirs*, 26.

⁶ Baldwin, *Revolutionary Journal*, 19.

⁷ Frothingham, *History of the Siege*, 270-1.

⁸ Reed, *Life and Correspondence*, 1:137.

forces to complete those earthworks. The British would not give a large expedition crossing the Dorchester neck that much time.

18.2 SEEKING A WAY TO FORTIFY DORCHESTER HEIGHTS

On 11 February 1776 Lt. Col. Rufus Putnam wrote to Gen. Washington from the camp at Roxbury, sending a map of important positions and a plan for building a covered way onto Dorchester peninsula:

You have Inclos'd a Chart, of some, of the most Important Posts and Riseing ground in and near Boston, which is as Exact as I am able to make from the little Leisure I have had to take Surveys of them; by this Draught it Appears that the Enemies works on the Neck is nearer the Causway going to Dorchester Point, than Bunker Hill is to the Cover'd way going on Leechmores Point, therefore if a Cover'd way was Necessary in that case, it will be in this, should your Excellency think proper to order works thrown up on any part of the point, how this Cover'd way will be made is a Question. to procure upland or Marsh Turf at this Season is in my Opinion absolutely Impossible, and nothing short of Timber instead of Turf will Answer the purpose, the Method I have tho't of is to side or Hew the Timber on two Sides only raising a single Tare [tier] on the side of the Causway, raising a Parrapet of Stone and Earth next the Enemy. the Timber to be well Spliced together and if need be a post with a brace in about Fifty feet to support the Timber against the stone & Earth, I know Stone are bad in a Parrapet, but as they are easily Procur'd from the walls at Dorchester, and I think cannot be Driven through the Timber by any shot whatever, I would place them at the bottom and Cover the top with Earth which might be procur'd by opening a pit for that purpos[.] About 200 Rods is Necessary to be made a Cover'd way which 80 Tons of Timber to Raise one Foot, and so in proportion to every foot, the Parrapet is High; I have been to the Swamp I mentioned to your Excellency the other Day, find it between 12 & 13 Miles from the lines of Dorchester; there is near 100 Tons already got out, besides a number of Mill Logs, the Carting from this place will be 12/ 4 [12 shillings per] Ton, One Hundred Tons more may be had on these lands, if the swamp Does not break and no Doubt but Timber may be had in other Places, what your Excellency may think of so Costly a work, I cannot tell, 'Tis the only method I know of, but wish a better way may be found out, I hope your Excellency will Pardon my Officiousness in suggesting, that I think this work may be Carried on with safety to the people Employ'd and to the Cause in general, as the Enemy cannot take Possession of Dorchester Hill at Present. Can we by any means Raise a Cover'd way in this frozen season it will be of no small Consequence in taking Possesion of this Ground in a favourable Hour, the People who have been Employ'd by Mr Davis in getting the Timber out of the Swamp will get no more unless your Excellency gives Orders for it.⁹

Putnam's plan for a "covered way" across the isthmus would, he acknowledged, take up tremendous resources. But he could see no other way to provide access to the peninsula for the long time necessary to build earthworks on the heights.

⁹ PGW:RW, 3:295-6.

On the same day that Putnam wrote that letter, Gen. Washington viewed the causeway with four of his generals—Ward, Putnam, Thomas, Spencer—and three engineers—Putnam, Col. Gridley, and Col. Knox.¹⁰ The next day, Washington and most of the same group went onto the peninsula itself to look at its high points. Capt. John Chester of Connecticut, stationed in Cambridge, recorded what he had heard about this visit:

Yesterday the Generals went on to Dorchester Hill & point to view & plan out the works to be done there, Knox and Gridley were with them.—Their plan I cannot as yet find out.—Gen. Putnam says Gridley laid out works enough for our whole army [to build] for two years if the frost was to continue in that time & in short thinks we cannot do much to purpose there while the frost is in ye ground. Something droll Happen'd as they were on the Point & within call of the Enemy. They observed two [British] officers on full speed on Horses from the Old to the New lines & concluded they were about to order the Artillery levelled at them. Just that instant they observed a fellow Deserting from us to them. This set em all a running & Scampering for life except the lame Col. Gridley & Putnam who never runs & tarried to wait on Gridley. They had left their Horses 1/2 a mile back & feard the Enemy might attempt to encompass them.¹¹

The frozen ground was obviously still a major obstacle to building earthworks. The commander continued to look for opportunities elsewhere. On 13 February Jeduthan Baldwin wrote, “Genl. Washington with a No. of the Genl. Officers came upon the [Lechmere’s] pint. found a good bridg of Ice to Boston.”¹²

One additional challenge for the Continental Army was the ongoing shortage of gunpowder and other ordnance. During a New Year’s thaw, Moylan had told Reed: “The Bay is open—every thing thaws here, except Old Put. He is still as hard as ever, crying out for powder—powder,—ye gods, give us powder.”¹³ Capt. Chester wrote on 13 February:

Great complaints are here made by ye Genls. of the want of Powder, which impedes everything—they think yt. even the town stocks ought to be delivered up to the army, for if we can do nothing here this season, forty times the quantity in the Country will be of no Service when the reinforcements arrive from England. If we can rout this Hornest Nest now we have everything to hope, if not we’ve everything to fear.¹⁴

In fact, gunpowder was slowly building up. On 18 February Washington told the Congress that the army had about 170 barrels of powder, enough to supply all the Continental soldiers

¹⁰ Martyn, *Artemas Ward*, 191, briefly quotes “a letter to Ward held by an ancestor [sic—descendant],” and says that the generals visited the causeway area and Dorchester peninsula on successive days.

¹¹ *Magazine of American History*, 8:127.

¹² Baldwin, *Revolutionary Journal*, 26.

¹³ Moylan to Joseph Reed, 2 January 1776, in Reed, *Life and Correspondence*, 1:139.

¹⁴ *Magazine of American History*, 8:127.

and arriving militiamen with twenty-four rounds.¹⁵ Of course, he felt that was not enough, particularly for the cannon. For shells, the Royal Artillery's own supplies captured on the *Nancy* were supplemented with more taken from New York batteries.¹⁶

The British had watched the Americans strengthening their batteries, and had learned how "the militia of the country was called in." Gen. William Howe wished to forestall any attack. He later reported to the government in London:

having intelligence that the enemy intended to possess themselves of Dorchester Neck, I ordered a detachment from Castle William, on the 13th of February, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Leslie, and one composed of grenadiers and light infantry from Boston, commanded by Major Musgrave, to pass over the ice, with directions to destroy the houses and every kind of cover whatever upon the peninsula, which was executed, and six of the enemy's guard made prisoners.¹⁷

This raid took place in the early morning of 14 February, three days after Washington and his senior officers had visited the same ground. The British burned some of the houses on the peninsula to minimize the shelter available to the Continentals. American sources insisted that all their sentries had escaped, though barely, and the British captured only "An old inhabitant and his son."¹⁸ Nonetheless, this foray showed that the British army could still be dangerous, and that the Dorchester peninsula was vulnerable.

That raid probably also convinced Gen. Washington of the possibility of raiding Boston across the frozen parts of the harbor. On 16 February he assembled his council of war and proposed an attack across the ice on either side of Boston Neck. As described in section 11.7, Ward and Gates opposed this idea, arguing that it would be safer and wiser to take Dorchester heights. The Rev. William Gordon described Washington's response:

He did not appear enough sensible of the importance of Dorchester heights; and probably confided too much in the courage and perseverance of the continental troops and militia. When the votes were called for, the majority were against the attack. The commander in chief could not refrain from showing, that he was greatly dissatisfied.¹⁹

¹⁵ The postscript to this letter mentions an additional 3,000 pounds of powder. PGW:RW, 3:336-7. See also Washington's letter to Gov. Jonathan Trumbull, 22 February 1776, PGW:RW, 3:353-4.

¹⁶ Frothingham, *History of the Siege*, 295.

¹⁷ *Parliamentary Register*, 11:299.

¹⁸ Heath, *Memoirs*, 30. How, *Diary*, 6, says the British captured only "one old man." It is possible that American commanders denied the regulars had captured sentries to prevent other soldiers from becoming nervous about going onto the peninsula. It is also possible that Howe exaggerated the number of captures, or, since he was writing later, totaled the prisoners from different raids.

¹⁹ Gordon, *History of the Rise. . .*, 1:189. As a minister in Roxbury close to the American leaders, Gordon had good access to the planning and execution of the Continental Army's final move. He also had his favorites.

The council voted to focus on taking Dorchester. Finding a practical way to do that was “left wholly” to Ward, since he had suggested the idea. Unknown to Washington, Gordon wrote, the generals in Roxbury already had their troops “collecting fascines, gabions, &c.” for a fortification.²⁰

A fascine was a bundle of sticks bound together, and a gabion was a cylinder woven from sticks, ready to be filled with earth. Both were tools for strengthening earthworks, but they provided much less protection on their own. The American engineers knew the hard ground was still a major impediment to building forts fast enough to protect against a larger British assault. As he later described in a memoir, Lt. Col. Putnam discovered the answer on his way home from Cambridge:

I was invited to dine at head Quarters, & while at dinner General Washington desired me to tarry after dinner—& when we were alone he entered into a free conversation on the Subject of Storming the town of Boston—

That it was much better to draw the enemy out to Dorchester, then to attack him in Boston no one doubted, for if we could maintain our selves on that point or Neck of Land, our command of the town & Harbour of Boston would be such as would probably compel them to Leave the place.—

But the Cold weather which had made a Bridge of Ice for our passage into Boston, had also frozen the earth to a great depth, especially in the open country Such as was the hills on Dorchester Neck—So that it was impossible to make a Lodgment there in the usual way, however, the General directed me to consider the subject & if I could think of any way in which it could be don, to make report to him immediately—

and *now mark those Singuler circumstances* which I call providence—I left head quarters in company with an other Gentleman, & in our way come by Genl Heaths I had no thoughts of calling untill I came against his door, & then I Sais, let us call on Genl Heath, to which he agreed. I had no other motive but to pay my respects to the general. while there I cast my eye on a book which Lay on the table, Lettered on the back, *Mullers Field Engineer*. I immediately requested the General to lend it me. he denied me. I repeated my request. he again refused, & told me he never Lent his books. I then told him that he must recollect that he was one, who at Roxbury in a Measure compelled [me] to undertake a business which at the time I confessed I never had read a word about, & that he must let me have the book. after some more excuses on his part, close pressing on my part, I obtained the Loan of it—I arrived at my quarters about dark. it was the custom for the overseers of the workmen to report to me every evening what progress had ben made during the day. when I arrived there were Some of them already there. I put my book in the Chest, & if I had time I did not think of Looking in it that night—

the next morning as Soon as oppertunity offered I took my book from the Chest, and looking over the contents I found the word, Chandilears. what is that thought I it is Somthing I never heard of before, but no sooner did I turn to the

²⁰ Gordon, *History of the Rise...*, 1:189-90.

page where it was described with its use but I was ready to report a plan for making a Lodgment on Dorchester Neck—(infidels may Laugh if they please)²¹

The book that Putnam recalled finding was *The Field Engineer*, John Muller's 1760 translation of a French military-engineering manual.

An earlier book by Muller, *The Attac and Defence of Fortified Places*, contains this definition:

Chandeliers, are wooden frames, made of two pieces fixed cross-ways on two other pieces, at about four feet asunder, and upon their intersections are erected two vertical pieces of five feet high, each supported by three buttresses; the interval of these two pieces is filled up with fascines, to cover the troops upon occasion.²²

That book also offers an illustration of a chandelier on a page with other siege devices, including a fascine and a gabion. This simple technology offered a way for the Continental Army to construct parts of a fortification out of wood and move them quickly onto the peninsula to be assembled. Then the soldiers would have protection while they dug traditional, stronger earthworks. Gridley and Knox arrived a few minutes after Lt. Col. Putnam developed his idea, and quickly agreed with the plan. According to Putnam's memoir, "our report was approved of by the Genl & preparations imediately Set on foot to cary it into effect and every thing being ready for the enterprise."²³

18.3 THOROUGH PREPARATIONS

The provincial army's move onto the Charlestown peninsula on the night of 16 June 1775 was basically impromptu. Troops gathered on Cambridge common and carried shovels across the neck along with their guns. The commanding officers argued over what ground to fortify. The redoubt on Breed's Hill lacked such necessities as embrasures to fire out of. The troops along the rail fence found their own protection. When artillery companies arrived, one of them had gunpowder cartridges the wrong size for their field-guns (see section 10.4). To occupy the Dorchester peninsula, a more formidable task to begin with, Continental Army commanders determined to be thoroughly prepared.

Carpenters began to build the chandeliers; Col. Gridley's experience as commander of carpenters in the French and Indian War might have come in most handy at this time. As for the thinner wood needed for the fascines and gabions, a Dorchester tradition states:

Washington rode out to Dorchester, and selected the farm of Capt. John Homans, in the upper part of the town, as a suitable place to obtain fascines, or

²¹ Putnam, *Memoirs*, 56-8.

²² Muller, *Attac and Defense*, 4. It is possible that Putnam saw this volume and not *The Field Engineer*.

²³ Putnam, *Memoirs*, 58.

bundles of white birch faggots, with which to construct a fort, which must of necessity be done secretly. . . . A lieutenant and thirty men were detached to cut and make the fascines, and the citizens of this and the neighboring towns were called upon to cart them²⁴

Most likely the wood came from other places as well. Heath recalled, “Bundles of screwed hay were brought from Chelsea to be used in the works,” all the way on the other side of the siege lines.²⁵

Gen. Heath credited William Davis, a Boston merchant, with providing another idea for the fortifications:

The hills on which they were erected were steep, and clear of trees and bushes. Rows of barrels filled with earth were placed round the works. They presented only the appearance of strengthening the works; but the real design was, in case the enemy made an attack, to have rolled them down the hill. They would have descended with such increasing velocity, as must have thrown the assailants into the utmost confusion, and have killed and wounded great numbers.

Heath took that idea to Washington, “who highly approved of it, as did all the other officers.”²⁶ Gordon suggested that the same idea came from Thomas Mifflin; as quartermaster general, he almost certainly supplied many of the barrels.²⁷

On 9 August 1775 Washington had appointed John Goddard (1730-1816) of Brookline the “Wagon-Master General to the Army of the twelve United Colonies”; the Massachusetts Provincial Congress had already given Goddard the same position in its army. In late February 1776, he and his teamsters moved material into position—though perhaps not so close as to attract attention. Reportedly “Four or five pieces of cannon” were “concealed under the hay in Mr. Goddard’s barn” until early March.²⁸ Sources agree that the army used about three hundred wagons in its final push, so Goddard must have hired most of the farmers from Brookline, Dorchester, Roxbury, and surrounding towns with their teams of oxen.

The Continental commanders expected the British forces to attack some part of Dorchester as soon as they realized what was happening. Heath wrote:

It was therefore deliberated in Council, that, in case the British should come forth, a strong detachment of Americans from the Cambridge camp, in boats, should proceed down the river, and land at the bottom of the common in Boston. To this our General [i.e., Heath himself] made a most pointed opposition,

²⁴ Dorchester Antiquarian and Historical Society, *History of the Town of Dorchester*, 334.

²⁵ Heath, *Memoirs*, 32.

²⁶ Heath, *Memoirs*, 32-3.

²⁷ Gordon, *History of the Rise. . .*, 1:196.

²⁸ Woods, *Historical Sketches of Brookline*, 364-5.

alleging, that it would most assuredly produce only defeat and disgrace to the American army; that the British General must be supposed to be a master of his profession; that as such, he would first provide for the defence of the town, in every part, which was the great deposit of all his stores; that when this was done, if his troops would afford a redundancy, sufficient for a sally, he might attempt it; but it was to be remembered that, at any rate, the town would be defended; that it was impossible for troops, armed and disciplined as the Americans then were, to be pushed down in boats, at least one mile and a half, open to the fire of all the British batteries on the west side of the town, and to their whole park of artillery, which might be drawn to the bottom of the common long before the Americans could reach it, and be flanked also by the works on the neck; that under such a tremendous fire, the troops could not effect a landing; and that he would never give his vote for it. It was, however, carried, that the attempt should be made.²⁹

Putnam, Sullivan, Greene, and Gates worked from 18 to 25 February on a plan for attacking Boston at Washington's request.

According to Gordon, the American forces prepared "forty-five batteaus, each to carry eighty men, and two floating batteries, stationed at the mouth of Cambridge river."³⁰ Sullivan told John Adams, "the attack was to be made by 4000 we not having Boats to Carry more."³¹ Sullivan was to command one division of this assault, Greene the other, with Putnam overseeing them and Heath being left behind to guard Cambridge. The *batteaux* were to sail down the Charles behind three floating batteries, each carrying one twelve-pounder cannon.³² Sullivan's division was to land near the powder house on Boston Common and take possession of Beacon Hill and Mount Whoredom to the north. Greene's troops were to land "at Bartons point or a little South of It" and move south to the same heights.³³ The British had fortified most of the town to one degree or another, and Heath was correct in fearing that the boats on the water would be vulnerable to artillery fire. "How far our views would have succeeded, had an Opportunity offered for attempting the Execution, is impossible for me to say," Washington later wrote.

In the midst of this activity, the general had received yet another member of the Continental Congress. William Hooper (1742-1790) was a North Carolina delegate who had grown up in Boston. On 11 February one of his colleagues wrote, "Our friend Hooper has taken an opportunity when he could be best spared from Congress to fly to the Camp at Cambridge to see his Mother, who has lately got out of Boston, he has been gone about Ten

²⁹ Heath, *Memoirs*, 31.

³⁰ Gordon, *History of the Rise...*, 1:190.

³¹ PJA, 4:54.

³² PNG, 1:197.

³³ Washington to Congress, 7 March 1776, PGW:RW, 3:422. An official transcription of this letter delicately changed the Boston landmark of Mount Whoredom to "Mount Horam." Real estate developers later renamed it Mount Vernon in the commander-in-chief's honor.

days and will return as soon as possible”.³⁴ Hooper was in New York on 6 February, reached Cambridge a few days later, and stayed as late as 25 February, when Washington gave him a letter to the Congress. He was back in Philadelphia by 6 March.³⁵ There is no mention of him being involved in the army’s deliberations.

Gen. Washington appears to have accepted the feasibility of a move onto Dorchester Heights late on 25 February. At the end of that day, the engineer Jeduthan Baldwin wrote in his journal, “at Evning Recd. orders to go to Dotchester in the morning after I had waited on Genl. Washn.” Baldwin moved from Lechmere Point to the other wing of the army, lodging with Col. Ebenezer Leonard in Roxbury.³⁶ On 26 February general orders told all regimental commanders “to order all the Axes—Pick-axes—Spades—Shovels, and other intrenching Tools, now in their possession, to be forthwith sent to the Qr Master General’s Store in Cambridge.”³⁷

Washington had not mentioned Dorchester in earlier letters, but on 26 February he told the Congress, “We are making every necessary preparation for taking possession of Dorchester Heights as soon as possible, with a view of drawing the Enemy out. . . . If any thing will Induce them to hazard an engagement, It will be our attempting to fortifye these heights.”³⁸ To the Massachusetts Council he said he expected “to take possession of the heights of Dorchester. . . by the last of this Week,” and asked “whether it might not be best to direct the Militia of certain Towns most contigeous to Dorchester and Roxbury, to repair to the Lines at those places with their Arms, Ammunition and Accoutrements instantly upon a Signal given.”³⁹ Washington shared his basic plans with Joseph Reed “under the rose.”⁴⁰

On 27 February the general orders from headquarters spoke vaguely of a major move that required the soldiers’ bravery:

As the Season is now fast approaching, when every man must expect to be drawn into the Field of action, it is highly necessary that he should prepare his mind, as well as every thing necessary for it. It is a noble Cause we are engaged in, it is the Cause of virtue and mankind, every temporal advantage and comfort to us, and our posterity, depends upon the Vigour of our exertions; in short, Freedom, or Slavery must be the result of our conduct, there can therefore be no greater

³⁴ LoD, 3:230. *State Records of North Carolina*, 10:446.

³⁵ LoD, 3:208.

³⁶ Baldwin, *Revolutionary Journal*, 27-8. On 17 February, Baldwin had written, “Genl. Washington, Putnam & Gates came Down to See the works [and] ordered a Guard house to be built” at Lechmere’s Point. He worked on that project for the next nine days, at one point having “dug round & undermind large pieces of frosen Earth which we rold out on Skids of Several Tons weight each.”

³⁷ PGW:RW, 3:362.

³⁸ PGW:RW, 3:364.

³⁹ PGW:RW, 3:368.

⁴⁰ PGW:RW, 3:370.

Inducement to men to behave well: But it may not be amiss for the Troops to know, that if any Man in action shall presume to skulk, hide himself, or retreat from the enemy, without the orders of his commanding Officer; he will be *instantly shot down*, as an example of cowardice; Cowards having too frequently disconcerted the best form'd Troops, by their dastardly behavior.

Characteristically, Gen. Washington added an admonition for officers to attend to “Exactness of discipline, Alertness when on duty, and Cleanliness in their arms and persons.” He ordered an inspection of all the troops.⁴¹

People inside and outside the army noticed the preparations. Capt. Chester, now in Roxbury, told a friend on 27 February:

You may prepare yourself to hear news of some kind or other from this quarter—God send it to be good news—Night before last a number of heavy cannon &c. were carried on to Lechmore point. A bomb Battery is erecting there as well as on the East of Lamb’s Dam. We have 3 thirteen inch Mortars & 8 or 10 of a Lesser size, as well as a number of Hoitzers. Unhappy for us we are aback with regard to bombs.⁴²

Two days later, Ezekiel Price wrote in his diary, “Great talk of our taking possession of Dorchester Hill in a few days.”⁴³ Commanders expected the coming fight to be bloody. Gordon reported, “the doctors, surgeons, mates, &c. had been preparing two thousand bandages for broken legs, arms, and dangerous wounds.”

18.4 SETTING A DATE

On 27 February the Cambridge headquarters was alarmed by another report of “the Regulars coming over from the Castle to Dorchester.” Washington dispatched George Baylor to learn more, and eventually the aide returned with the news that the report was false. The commander then wrote to Ward:

But as a rascally Riffle man went in last Night & will no doubt give all the Intelligence he can, wd it not be prudent to keep Six or Eight trusty men by way of Lookouts or Patrols to Night on the point next the Castle as well as on Nuke Hill. At the same time ordering particular Regimts to be ready to March at a Moments warning to the Heights of Dorchester; For should the Enemy get

⁴¹ PGW:RW, 3:379-80.

⁴² *Magazine of American History*, 8:127.

⁴³ MHSP, 7:239. Martyn, *Artemas Ward*, 196, quotes other letters dated 1 March about rumors of the push onto the peninsula. An even more prescient observer was David Cobb of Taunton, who on 24 February told his brother-in-law: “The Bombardment of Boston takes place within 12 days from this, proberbly on the 5th of March, and I am as certain of the Town’s being carry’d, as I am of my own existance”; Paine, *Papers*, 3:158.

Possession of those Hills before us they would render it a difficult task to dispossess them—better it is therefore to prevent than to remedy an evil.⁴⁴

Ward, who had advocated taking possession of the peninsula for months, might have been a little annoyed at this late suggestion. On the other hand, there is evidence that the commander-in-chief had become more enthusiastic and impatient about the move onto the Dorchester peninsula than the general who had originally proposed it.

According to Gordon, “A council of war was called to fix the time for going upon the heights”; his history does not state when or where this meeting occurred, and no record of it appears in Washington’s papers. It may have been a smaller and less formal group than the official councils of war. Quartermaster General Mifflin was brought into the discussions for the first time because he was responsible for supplying the wood, carpenters, wagons, and other essential elements of the operation. Gordon wrote that Mifflin suggested the timing of the move:

He went prepossessed in favor of the night of March the 4th, a friend having reminded him, that probably the action would be the next day; and that it would have a wonderful effect upon the spirits of the New Englanders, to tell them when about engaging—“Remember the fifth of March, and avenge yourselves for the massacre at Boston.” When required to give his opinion, he spake in favor of the aforementioned night, and supported it in opposition to the contrary sentiment of gen. Gates, who for some reasons deemed it an improper time. After a debate, it was carried for that night, by a majority of one.⁴⁵

Moving onto the peninsula on 4 March as Mifflin suggested, also gave the army the advantage of working under a nearly full moon. Still, that was a couple of days behind the schedule Washington had hoped for when he wrote to the Massachusetts Council.

On “Saturday evening,” 2 March Washington sent this note to Gen. Ward:

After weighing all Circumstances of Tide &ca—& considering the hazard of having the Posts on Dorchester Neck taken by the Enemy, & the evil consequences which would result from it, the Gentlemen here, are of Opinion that we should go on there Munday Night. I give you this Early notice of it, that you may delay no time in preparing for it, as every thing here will be got in readiness to co-operate. In haste...

On the outside around the seal was written “Remember. . .Barrels.”⁴⁶

The commander followed up the next day with long, detailed instructions:

⁴⁴ PGW:RW, 3:384.

⁴⁵ Gordon, *History of the Rise. . .*, 1:190.

⁴⁶ PGW:RW, 3:401.

My Letter of last Night would inform you that the Genl Officers at this place thought it dangerous to delay taking Post on Dorchester Hills, lest they should be possess'd before us by the Enemy, and therefore Involve us in difficulties which we should not know how to extricate ourselves from—this opinion they were Inclined to adopt from a belief, indeed almost a certain knowledge, of the Enemys being apprised of our designs that way.

You should make choice of some good Regiments to go on the Morning after the Post is taken, under the Command of General Thomas, the number of Men you shall judge necessary for this Relief may be order'd—I should think from two to three thousand, as circumstances may require, would be enough. I shall send you from hence two Regiments to be at Roxbury early on Tuesday Morning to strengthen your Lines, and I shall send you to morrow Evening two Companies of Riflemen, which with the three now there may be part of the Relief to go on with Genl Thomas.—these Five Companies may be placed under the care of Captn Hugh Stephenson, subject to the Command of the Officer Commanding at the Post (Dorchester).—they will I think be able to gall the Enemy sorely in the March from their Boats & in Landing.

A Blind along the Causey should be thrown up, if possible, while the other work is about; especially on the Dorchester side, as that is nearest the Enemy's Guns, & most exposed. We calculate I think, that 800 Men would do the whole Causey with great ease in a Night, if the marsh is not got bad to Work again, & the tide gives no great Interruption—250 Axe men I should think would soon Fell the Trees for the Abettes, but what number it may take to get them, the Fascines, Chandeliers &ca. in place I know not—750 Men (the Working Party carrying their arms) will I should think be sufficient for a Covering Party, these to be posted on Nuke-Hill. on the little hill in front of the 2nd hill, looking in to Boston Bay—and near the point opposite the Castle. Sentries to be kept between the Parties, & some on the backside, looking towards Squantum.

As I have a very high opinion of the defence which may be made with Barrels from either of the Hills, I could wish you to have a number over—Perhaps single Barrels would be better than linking of them together, being less liable to accidents—The Hoops should be well Naild or else they will soon fly, & the Casks fall to Pieces.

You must take care that the Necessary notice is given to the Militia agreeable to the plan settld with General Thomas. I shall desire Colo. Gridley & Colo. Knox to be over tomorrow to lay out the Work—I recollect nothing more at present to mention to you; you will settle matters with the Officers with you, as what I have hear said is intended rather to convey my Ideas generally, than wishing them to be adhered to strictly.⁴⁷

Gen. Washington's references to "the Gentlemen here" and "the Gen'l officers at this place" show that he and his advisors at Cambridge—who included Gates and Mifflin—were pushing Ward toward action on 4 March. By the time Washington sent his instructions, the first stage of the operation had already begun.

⁴⁷ Like Washington's note of the night before, this letter survived in the Artemas Ward Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, but no copy is in the papers from Washington's headquarters. Haste or turnover in personnel might explain why no copy was made or filed as usual. PGW:RW, 3:408-10.

18.5 MOVING ONTO THE PENINSULA

The American operation began “between ten and eleven, on Saturday night,” 2 March with an artillery barrage from Cobble Hill, Lechmere’s Point, and Lamb’s Dam in Roxbury.⁴⁸ These were the Continentals’ three most advanced batteries, able to do the most damage to British positions in Boston. As it happened, the American artillerists might have done more damage to themselves. Heath wrote: “One of the American mortars of 13 inches, and two of 10 inches, were burst. They were not properly bedded, as the ground was hard frozen.”⁴⁹ The thirteen-inch mortar was the celebrated “Congress,” captured aboard the *Nancy* (see section 12.7).⁵⁰ Baldwin lamented, “the Congress was split with the 3d Shell or shells thrown from her.”⁵¹ The explosion wounded Lt. Col. David Mason, putting him out of combat for the rest of the war.⁵²

The Continental artillery kept up their barrage for the next two nights. Col. Knox reported that the three batteries fired the following missiles into Boston on the night of 4 March alone:⁵³

Lamb’s Dam	11 shells	80 balls
Lechmere’s Point	2	46
Cobble Hill	0	18

That was a very large amount for the Continental Army, considering their limited supply of shells and powder. The Royal Artillery was easily able to fire far more in return. However, the thunderous artillery battle was actually meant “To conceal the design of the Americans, and to divert the enemy’s attention.”⁵⁴ Heath wrote, “There was an almost incessant roar of cannon and mortars during the night, on both sides.”⁵⁵ The British return fire on 4 March covered the noise of soldiers moving onto the Dorchester peninsula.

Gordon’s history, based on letters he wrote at the time, describes the operation in dramatic detail:

The covering party of 800 men lead the way; then come the carts with the intrenching tools; after them the main Working body of about 1200 under gen. Thomas: a train of more than 300 carts, loaded with fascines, hay in bundles of 7 or 800 weight, &c. close the martial procession. The bundles of hay are designed

⁴⁸ Gordon, *History of the Rise...*, 1:191.

⁴⁹ Heath, *Memoirs*, 32.

⁵⁰ Gordon, *History of the Rise...*, 1:191.

⁵¹ Baldwin, *Revolutionary Journal*, 28. See also How, *Diary*, 8.

⁵² After recovering, Mason headed the artillery laboratory at Springfield, precursor to the Springfield Armory.

⁵³ Frothingham, *History of the Siege*, 298n1.

⁵⁴ Gordon, *History of the Rise...*, 1:191.

⁵⁵ Heath, *Memoirs*, 32.

for Dorchester Neck, which is very low, and exposed to be raked by the enemy; and are to be laid on the side next to them, to cover the Americans in passing and repassing. Every man knows his place and business. The covering party, when upon the ground, divides; half goes to the point nearest to Boston, the other to that next to the castle.⁵⁶

Those groups of about four hundred men were to watch for alarms from the British army positions in Boston and Castle William, and to hamper any amphibious landings. They reached the peninsula about eight o'clock.

Behind the first parade of carts, dropping bundles of hay to screen the traffic on the causeway from view, came the bulk of Gen. John Thomas's "Picked men." He led this column of 1,200 east toward the twin hills. With them came the engineers and, Thomas told his wife, "Sum Peases of artilyery & Two Companys of the Train."⁵⁷ Solomon Nash, an artilleryist, stated in his journal: "We Carrid Six Twelve Pounders and Six or Eight Feild Peaces over there and about 3 o'clock in the morning two Companys of the artillery went on."⁵⁸ Gordon stated that the night was "remarkably mild" for early March, with "a bright moon-light night above on the hills" but haze near ground level.

The operation was notably quiet, according to Gordon:

All possible silence is observed. But there is no occasion to order the whips to be taken from the waggoners, lest their impatience, and the difficulty of the roads should induce them to make use of them, and occasion an alarm. The whips used by the drivers of these ox-carts, are not formed for making much noise, and can give no alarm at a distance. The men in driving their oxen commonly make most noise with their voices; and now a regard to their own safety dictates to them, to speak to their cattle, as they move on, in a whispering note. There are no bad roads to require an exertion; for the frost: having been of long continuance, they are so hard frozen, as to be quite good. The wind lies to carry what noise cannot be avoided by driving the stakes and picking against the ground, (still frozen above eighteen inches deep in many places) into the harbour between the town and the castle, so that it cannot be heard and regarded by any who have no suspicion of what is carrying on, especially as there is a continued cannonade on both sides. Many of the carts make three trips, some four; for a vast quantity of materials has been collected, especially chandeliers and fascines.⁵⁹

Wagon-master John Goddard's son Joseph, aged fourteen in 1776, later told neighbors about driving a wagon onto the peninsula: "lest some incautious crack [of a whip] might betray

⁵⁶ Gordon, *History of the Rise...*, 1:192.

⁵⁷ Thomas to Hannah Thomas, 9 March 1776, published in edited form but reproduced and transcribed at <http://www.masshist.org/database/doc-viewer.php?item_id=2051>.

⁵⁸ Nash, *Journal*, 8. Douglas Southall Freeman deduced that some of those twelve-pounders must have come from New York; Freeman, *George Washington*, 4:37.

⁵⁹ Gordon, *History of the Rise...*, 1:192.

them, . . . the oxen were urged on with goads.”⁶⁰ William Sumner, born in Dorchester in 1748, recalled how he and his fellow drivers “spoke no loud word to each other or their teams”; he claimed to have moved three or even five loads, “with great satisfaction.”⁶¹

The soldiers unloaded the chandeliers, placed them as directed, and piled fascines between their uprights. According to Gordon, “General Thomas told me that he pulled out his watch and found that by ten o’clock at night, they had got two forts, one upon each hill, sufficient to defend them from small arms and grape shot.”⁶² Then, as Gen. Gates later told John Adams, they “began to Break Ground to thicken their defences against The Enemys Cannon.”⁶³ This required digging in the hard soil to raise earthworks and fill gabions. That work naturally tired the men, but fresh soldiers came onto the peninsula about four o’clock on the morning of 5 March. Among them was surgeon’s mate James Thacher, who recalled:

On passing Dorchester Neck I observed a vast number of large bundles of screwed hay, arranged in a line next the enemy, to protect our troops from a raking fire, to which we should have been greatly exposed, while passing and repassing. The carts were still in motion with materials; some of them have made three or four trips. On the heights we found two forts in considerable forwardness, and sufficient for a defence against small arms and grape shot.⁶⁴

During the Battle of Bunker Hill, Gen. Putnam had been unable to bring forward replacements for the soldiers who had dug the redoubt and then had to defend it; this time, the American commanders were careful to send in a large number of relief troops before any fighting began.⁶⁵

Along with the relief troops, there were two more arrivals before daybreak on 5 March. One was the commander-in-chief himself, according to Gordon:

Gen. Washington happens at that instant to be on one of the heights; thinks with his men; and says to those who are at hand,—“Remember it is the fifth of March, and avenge the death of your brethren.” It is instantly asked by such as are not near enough to hear—“What says the general?” His words are given in answer.

⁶⁰ Woods, *Historical Sketches of Brookline*, 364-5.

⁶¹ Weld, “The Old Sumner Homestead,” *Hyde Park Historical Record*, 2:26. Dorchester Antiquarian and Historical Society, *History of the Town of Dorchester*, 334-5. See also a statement taken from Jeremiah Smith Boies before he died in 1851 and printed in the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 17 March 1876, quoted in Winsor, *Memorial History of Boston*, 3:117.

⁶² MHSP, 63:603.

⁶³ PJA, 4:47.

⁶⁴ Thacher, *Military Journal*, 41.

⁶⁵ Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston*, 298.

They fly from man to man through all the troops upon the spot, and add fuel to the martial fire already kindled, and burning with uncommon intensesness.

Thacher also recalled Washington going onto the peninsula in early morning.⁶⁶

An unauthorized addition to the American contingent was Gen. Thomas's ten-year-old son. The brigadier added a postscript to his letter to his wife: "Your son John is well & in high Spirits he Ran away from [Oakley? a family slave] Privately on Tuesday morning & Got by the Centerys & Came to me on Dorfester where he has bin mostly sence."⁶⁷

By daylight, Thomas assured his wife in the same letter, "we Got 2 Hill Defenceble." Though the British bombardment on other positions had killed two Americans that night, there were no casualties among the troops on the peninsula.⁶⁸ Some of the later wagons brought frames for barracks to be assembled on the Dorchester hills—enough for six hundred soldiers, according to Gates. On 6 March, Jeduthan Baldwin wrote in his diary from Dorchester: "Washington, Putnam with other Genl. officers was Down to See us. Raisd 2 Barraks."⁶⁹ Though it took until the evening of 7 March to finish most of those buildings, they offer more evidence of the Continental Army's preparations and determination to hold that ground against attack.⁷⁰ (Meanwhile, the Massachusetts legislature tried to add spiritual support by declaring the 7th a fast day.)⁷¹

18.6 THE BRITISH COUNTERATTACK

Some British officers reportedly detected signs of activity on the Dorchester hills, but no one sent a warning to Gen. Howe. The British commander got his first look at the assembled works when the haze cleared shortly after dawn. He told his superior in London that the overnight construction of "three very extensive works, with strong abbaties round them, . . . must have been the employment of at least 12,000 men."⁷² Gen. Thomas described the British reaction from afar:

⁶⁶ Gordon, *History of the Rise. . .*, 1:195. Thacher, *Military Journal*, 41. Jenks, *An Eulogy... of the Late Hon. James Bowdoin, Esquire*, 19-20, stated that James Bowdoin's namesake son accompanied Washington onto Dorchester Heights on 4 March, though in what capacity is unclear.

⁶⁷ John Thomas to Hannah Thomas, 9 March 1776, John Thomas Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society. Thomas's letter can be read at <http://www.masshist.org/online/siege/doc-viewer.php?item_id=2051>.

⁶⁸ Heath, *Memoirs*, 33.

⁶⁹ Baldwin, *Revolutionary Journal*, 29.

⁷⁰ Gordon, *History of the Rise. . .*, 1:196. When he wrote on 9 March, Gen. Thomas himself was "in a Small hut."

⁷¹ PGW:RW, 3:343. How, *Diary*, 9.

⁷² *Parliamentary Register*, 11:299.

about Sunrise the Enemy & others in Boston appeared Numerous on the Tops of Houses & on the wharves vewing us with astonishment for the appearance was unexpected to them. The Cannonading which had bin kept up all Night from our Lines at Lambs Dam & from the Enemys Lines Likewise at Leachmere Point now Seased in These Quarters & the Enemy Turned there Fire Toward us an the Hills but They Soon Found it was to Little effect⁷³

Gen. Sullivan later reported:

They Endeavoured to Elevate their Cannons So as to Breach our works by Sinking the Hinder wheels of the Cannon into the Earth but after an unsucesful Fire of about two Hours, they grew weary of it and Desisted.⁷⁴

But Howe and his commanders, including Admiral Molyneux Shuldham, knew that leaving the peninsula in American hands would put both the town and the fleet at risk. He ordered preparations for an attack.

Washington and his generals had anticipated such a move. The general orders on 4 March told every regiment:

The Flag on Prospect-hill, and that at the Laboratory, on Cambridge Common, are ordered to be hoisted only upon a General Alarm; of this the whole Army is to take particular notice, and immediately upon those Colours being displayed, every Officer and Soldier, must repair to his alarm post—This is to remain a standing order, until the Commander in Chief shall please to direct otherwise.⁷⁵

Reinforcements went onto the Dorchester peninsula. Sullivan and Greene were waiting with their four thousand men near “Fort No. 2” in Cambridge. At the right signal, they would enter the batteaux and launch their counterattack on the west of Boston.

Gen. Thomas’s perspective of the British move was:

about Ten oClock we Discovered Large Bodys of Troops Imbarking in Boats with There artilery & they made a fermidable appearance after Sum Time They were Put on Board Transports & Several of The Ships Came Down Near the Castle as we Supposed with a Design to Land on our Shore & People Seeming in Spirits to Receve Them for we were now Got in a Good Poster of Defence & had Two Thousand men added to our Number the Enemy vewed us very Critically they Remained in that Situation that Night⁷⁶

Just as the Americans had moved onto the peninsula at night, the British commanders evidently thought that their best chance lay in landing under darkness. One division was to

⁷³ John Thomas to Hannah Thomas, 9 March 1776, John Thomas Papers.

⁷⁴ PJA, 4:54.

⁷⁵ PGW:RW, 3:411.

⁷⁶ John Thomas to Hannah Thomas, 9 March 1776, John Thomas Papers.

row from the Castle, the other from the town, landing at different parts of the peninsula—or possibly even at Roxbury.

According to Washington, the tide hampered the British movements: “about One thousand only were able to Imbark in Six transports in the Afternoon.” Then “a violent storm. . .arose in the Afternoon. . .& continued threw the Night.”⁷⁷ Heath wrote: “about midnight, the wind blew almost a hurricane from the south; many windows were forced in, sheds and fences blown down, and some vessels drove on shore.”⁷⁸ Inside Boston, selectman Timothy Newell put in his journal:

whether, a Hurrycane, or terrible sudden storm which arose, in the evening prevented, or a pretence only, can't say—nothing was attempted,—Indeed the violence of the storm rendered it impossible for any boat to land—Some of the Transports were driven on Governors Island, but got off and returned.⁷⁹

Howe canceled the assault. On 8 March Thomas watched as British boats from the Castle “Returned to Town & Landed Their Troops. . .about 2 oClock P.M.”⁸⁰

Up on the twin hills, the Continental soldiers, still mostly without barracks, “suffered from the rain and cold,” according to Gordon.⁸¹ Lt. Isaac Bangs called it “the most violent Storm of Wind & Rain mixed with Snow & Hail arose that ever I was exposed to.”⁸² The sight of the enemy withdrawing was no doubt pleasing. Some of those New England men might have seen the storm as a sign of God’s favor. Nevertheless, they continued to strengthen their works. Once they had dug below eighteen inches, the ground was softer. According to Heath, “The adjoining orchards were cut down to make the abattis,” their sharpened branches pointing out at any attackers.⁸³ Washington felt secure enough to let the short-term militia, called up for three days’ service, go home to their nearby towns.

The British army’s preparations to leave Boston, which had already begun in February, sped up. Gen. Gates described what the Americans could observe to John Adams in a letter written at the Cambridge headquarters on 8 March:

The behaviour of The Enemy since Monday strongly indicates their intention of removing from Boston; as their Heavy Cannon, Powder, &c. has been seen, and heard, Transporting from Bunkers Hill, and the upper parts of The Town, to the Wharfs next the Shiping, for several days past; and this morning a Quantity of Beding is Observed pulling on board Transports at the Long Warf: before we are

⁷⁷ Washington to Joseph Reed, 26 February–9 March 1776, PGW:RW, 3:373.

⁷⁸ Heath, *Memoirs*, 33.

⁷⁹ MHSC, series 4, 1:272.

⁸⁰ John Thomas to Hannah Thomas, 9 March 1776, John Thomas Papers.

⁸¹ Gordon, *History of the Rise. . .*, 2:196.

⁸² Bangs, *Journal*, 12.

⁸³ Heath, *Memoirs*, 32.

quite ready to advance our Batteries upon Dorchester Point, I suspect the Enemy will Embarque.

Gates concluded this letter with a renewed call for the Congress to pass an “Act of Independency.”⁸⁴

That same day Gen. Washington went back onto the Dorchester peninsula, losing a pistol (see section 18.8). As planned, the Continental forces tried to increase the pressure on the British by installing “a battery to the north-east of Bird’s Hill, near the water, with the intent to annoy the British shipping.”⁸⁵ Another detachment went forward to fortify Nook’s Hill, a small rise on the corner of the peninsula closest to Boston. The Royal Artillery spotted those men and drove them back with heavy fire from the Neck gates, killing three soldiers and a surgeon. James Wilkinson wrote that the British fired 32-pound balls, “the shot making trenches in the frozen earth which would have received the body of a horse.”⁸⁶ Shots from the Castle killed another man. The British forces did not appear to be giving up.

18.7 A LETTER FROM THE SELECTMEN AND OTHER SIGNS

On 8 March 1776 three Loyalists came out of Boston under a flag of truce with a letter for the commanding officer on the Neck. They handed Col. Ebenezer Leonard (1728-1801) of Oxford, Massachusetts, a message signed by four Boston selectmen:

As his Excellency General Howe is determined to leave the Town with the Troops Under his Command, a Number of the Respectable Inhabitants being very Anxious for its preservation & safety, have Applied to General Robertson for this purpose, who at their request has communicated the same to his Excellency Genl Howe, who has assured him that he has no intention of destroying the Town Unless the Troops under his command are molested during their Embarkation, or at their departure by the Armed force without, which declaration he gave Genl Robertson leave to communicate to the Inhabitants; If such an Opposition should take place we have the greatest reason to expect the Town will be exposed to Intire destruction. as our fears are quieted with regard to Genl Howe’s Intentions, we beg we may have some assurances that so dreadfull a Calamity may not be brought on by any measures without—as a Testimony of the truth of the Above we have signed our Names to this paper Carried out by Messrs Thomas & Jonathan Amory & Peter Johonnot who have at

⁸⁴ PJA, 4:47-9.

⁸⁵ Heath, *Memoirs*, 34.

⁸⁶ Wilkinson, *Memoirs*, 1:31.

the earnest Intreaties of the Inhabitants through the Lt. Governor Solicited a flag of Truce for this purpose.

John Scollay, Timothy Newell, Thomas Marshall, Samuel Austin⁸⁷

The next day, Col. Leonard wrote back from Roxbury to the three Loyalists:

Agreeably to a promise made to you at the lines yesterday, I waited upon his Excellency General Washington, and presented to him the paper (handed to me by you) from the Selectmen of Boston.

The answer I received from Him was to this effect: "That as it was an unauthenticated paper, without an address, and not obligatory upon General Howe, he would take no notice of it."⁸⁸

As Washington noted, Howe had not put any promises in writing. He had also avoided directly addressing the American general, thus acknowledging his equal status.

Even so, Leonard's reply assured the Loyalists, and the British officials behind them, that Washington had read the message closely. Indeed, the commander-in-chief's letters to the Congress and others show that the headquarters staff made several copies of it. Washington told Gov. Trumbull, "It seems very evident that they can no longer keep possession of the Town. . ."⁸⁹ Howe had thus conveyed his intentions to leave peacefully as long as the Americans did not attack his embarking forces. Washington had signified that he had seen that message without making any promises himself. Continental troops quickly understood the significance of the exchange.⁹⁰

On the evening of 8 March a man named Irvine, captain of a British troop transport ship, came to Washington's headquarters.⁹¹ He had "escaped from Boston the night before, with Six of his crew." Irvine shared a great deal of intelligence, some reliable (the British were surprised at the American bombardment) and some not (he identified Col. Percy as the commander of the abortive attack rather than Gen. Valentine Jones).⁹² Most important:

He further Informs that the Army is preparing to leave Boston and that they will do It in a day or two—That the Transports necessary for their embarkation were getting ready with the utmost expedition—That there had been great movements

⁸⁷ PGW:RW, 3:434. This document can be viewed at <http://memory.loc.gov/mss/mgw/mgw4/035/0600/0685.jpg>.

⁸⁸ *American Archives*, series 4, 5:110. Leonard's note can be viewed at: <http://memory.loc.gov/mss/mgw/mgw4/035/0600/0692.jpg>

⁸⁹ PGW:RW, 3:445. Washington also described the selectmen's message to Joseph Reed. PGW:RW, 3:376. Gen. John Thomas even sent a copy to his wife on 9 March 1776, showing how many people became privy to this letter that the commander-in-chief was supposedly taking no notice of.

⁹⁰ Nash, *Journal*, 8-9.

⁹¹ Another report spells this man's named as Erwin; NDAR, 4:253-6. He has not been identified.

⁹² Washington to Congress, 9 March 1776, PGW:RW, 3:423. Washington to Trumbull, 9 March 1776, PGW:RW, 3:445. See also Heath, *Memoirs*, 34.

& confusion among the Troops the night & day precedg his coming out, in hurrying down their Cannon, Artillery & other Stores to the wharffs with the utmost precipitation, and were putting em on board the Ships in such haste that no Account or Memorandum was taken of them; . . . That the Ship he commanded was taken up, places fitted & fitting for Officers to lodge, and Several Shot, Shells & Cannon already on board—That the Tories were to have the liberty of going where they please, If they can get Seamen to man the Vessells, of which there was a great scarcity—That on that account many Vessells cou'd not be carried away and wou'd be burnt—That many of the Inhabitants apprehended the Town would be destroy'd, And that It was generally thought that their destination is Hallifax.⁹³

The general still had to worry about whether the British commanders were trying to deceive him and where they would go next.⁹⁴ In the end, with the corroboration of the selectmen's message, he decided to accept Irvine's information.

On 10 March Robert Hanson Harrison told Gen. Ward:

By his Excellency's command I am to inform you that it is his desire that you give peremptory orders to the artillery officer commanding at Lam's Dam that he must not fire upon the Town of Boston tonight, unless the Enemy first begins a cannonade, and that he is not to fire thence upon the Town. If they begin and we have any cannon on Nuke Hill, his Excellency would have the fire returned from thence among the shipping and every damage to them that possibly can.

Notwithstanding the accounts received of the Enemy being about to evacuate the Town with all seeming hurry & expedition, his Excellency is apprehensive that Genl Howe has some design of having a brush before his departure and is only waiting in hopes of finding us off our guard. He therefore desires that you will be very vigilant and have every necessary precaution taken to prevent a surprise, and to give them a proper reception in case they attempt anything.⁹⁵

This summed up the Continental commanders' dilemma. On the one hand, they did not want to fire on the town if that would cause unnecessary damage and waste powder while the British were leaving. On the other hand, Washington still did not fully trust the British. Their evacuation was proceeding slowly.

⁹³ PGW:RW, 3:324.

⁹⁴ On 9 March, Gen. Heath even drew up a memorandum suggesting that Howe might actually be consolidating his forces for "a landing at any place between Cambridge and Squantum." MHSC, series 7, 4:7-8.

⁹⁵ *Magazine of History*, 15:51-2.

18.8 GENERAL WASHINGTON'S PISTOLS

Gen. Washington's account book contains a curious entry dated 1 September 1775:

To Cash for recovering my Pistols which had been stolen, & for repairing them afterwards...£1.10s.⁹⁶

No further information about this episode has turned up.

At some point during the siege, Capt. Nathan Barrett (1735-1791) of Concord offered the general a pair of pistols that had been captured with a British officer's horse during the battle on 19 April 1775. Washington declined the gift, and Barrett gave those pistols instead to Gen. Israel Putnam. Over a century later, a descendant donated them to the town of Lexington, and they now belong to the Lexington Historical Society.⁹⁷

The last appearance of Washington's pistols in the record of the siege offers a description of them. Col. William Henshaw's orderly book states on 9 March 1776:

His Excellency the General lost one of his pistols yesterday upon Dorchester Neck, whoever will bring it to him or leave it with General Thomas shall receive two dollars reward and no questions asked. It is a skrew'd barrel'd pistol, mounted with silver, and a head resembling a pugg dog at the butt.⁹⁸

This notice did not appear in the general orders issued from headquarters that day, and was therefore meant only for troops in the southern wing of the army. There is no information about whether this distinctive pistol ever resurfaced.

18.9 COUNCIL OF WAR IN ROXBURY

On the evening of 10 March Heath wrote, "two pieces of cannon, and two small mortars, were carried on to Noddle's Island," where they could threaten British shipping from the other side of the harbor. However, the Americans never used those guns because it seemed so clear that the British were preparing to evacuate.⁹⁹

Yet the ships—well over one hundred in all, military and civilian—still did not sail. On 13 March Gen. Washington told the Congress, he "fully expected before this, that the Town wou'd have been entirely evacuated."¹⁰⁰ He convened his generals for a council of war

⁹⁶ Washington and Kitman, *George Washington's Expense Account*, 44.

⁹⁷ Ripley, *History of the Fight at Concord*, 32. For a long time these pistols were said to have been captured from Maj. John Pitcairn. However, they are engraved with the arms of the Crosbie family, and are therefore more likely to have been the property of Capt. William Crosbie, another officer on the march to Concord.

⁹⁸ *American Antiquarian Society Proceedings*, 1:140.

⁹⁹ Heath, *Memoirs*, 35. A British artillery officer visited Noddle's Island and found no signs that the Americans were about to occupy it; French, *First Year*, 669.

¹⁰⁰ PGW:RW, 3:461.

at “Pierpoint Castle,” Gen. Ward’s headquarters in Roxbury. (Brigadier Joseph Frye did not attend, probably pleading illness—see section 4.13.) The commander announced:

That, from the present appearance of the Ministerial Fleet and Army—the Intelligence he had receiv’d from sundry Persons who had escaped from Boston, and from frequent observations, he had reason to believe that the Troops were about to evacuate the Town; that in all probability, they were destined for New York & would attempt to possess themselves of that City, by which means they would command the navigation of Hudsons River; open a communication with Canada, and cut off all intercourse between the Southern & Northern Colonies.¹⁰¹

He therefore asked if the council recommended sending any troops to New York. The meeting decided to send “five Regiments, with the Rifle Battalion, . . . as speedily as possible.” The generals also agreed that once the British military abandoned Boston, Massachusetts could defend it without needing Continental units.

Finally, Washington asked what the Americans should do “if the Ministerial Troops should continue in the harbour of Boston.” He suggested another effort to fortify Nook’s Hill. The council agreed that the Continental Army should build a battery on that hill if the British had not left town by the next day. The royal forces remained in Boston on 14 March. Once again the Americans prepared a large force, moving onto Nook’s Hill and entrenching on Saturday 16 March.

18.10 THE EVACUATION

With the American guns closer and even less chance of dislodging them, Gen. Howe ordered his men onto transports. Over a thousand royal officials and Loyalists had already been scrambling to get their families and belongings on board ships. The final withdrawal was more orderly. The soldiers from Charlestown were ferried across to Boston. The lines at the Neck were reinforced with trenches, crow’s-feet in the roads, and shells with long fuses to discourage any sudden charges by the rebels. All the cannons and mortars were spiked, blown up, or shoved into the water. Every boat to be left in town was disabled in some way. The last soldiers and officers headed for Long Wharf.¹⁰²

Gen. Sullivan, stationed on the siege lines in west Charlestown, described what he saw for John Adams:

they Embarked Early on Sunday morning and fell Down to the Castle. We Saw the Ships under way about 8 in the morning and the River full of Boats with Armed Soldiers. This gave an Alarm as Some Suspected they were about to Land at Dochester but having a full view of them with a Glass from Plowed Hill I found

¹⁰¹ PGW:RW, 3:459-60.

¹⁰² MHSC, series 4, 1:275-6.

they were going on board the Ships. I then took my Horse and Rode Down to Charlestown Neck where I had a Clear view of Bunkers Hill. I Saw the Sentries Standing as usual with their Firelocks Shouldered but finding they never moved I Soon Suspected what Regiment they belonged to and upon taking a Clear view with my Glass found they were only Effigies Set there by the flying Enemy. This Convinced me that they were Actually fled for if they meant to Decoy us they would have taken away Every appearance of Men. By this time I was Joined by Colo. Mifflin who with my Brigade Major agreed to go up Sending two persons Round the works to Examine whether there was any of them in the Rear of the works while we went up in the front. I at the Same time Sent for a Strong party to follow us on to the Hill to assist us in Running away (if necessary). We found no persons there and bravely Took a fortress Defended by Lifeless Sentries.¹⁰³

Soon Americans were sharing the story of the dummies “dressed in the Soldiers Habit with Laced Hatts and for a Gorget an Horse Shoe with Paper Ruffles their Pieces Shouldred fixed Bayonets with this Inscription wrote on the Breast (Viz) Welcome Brother Jonathan.”¹⁰⁴ Sullivan, Mifflin, and their companions “hailed the ferry Boat which came over” with word that the British army had indeed abandoned Boston. An American officer wrote that “about ten of Clock several Lads” came running down the Neck with the same message.¹⁰⁵

On receiving this news, Gen. Washington ordered Sullivan to lead his troops into Charlestown. Soon the fort on Bunker’s Hill and the burned town were under American guard.¹⁰⁶ Washington told Putnam to cross the Charles River with one or two thousand men immune to smallpox; they were to land on the Common and secure Beacon Hill and other high points.¹⁰⁷ At the same time, Ward marched up the Neck with five hundred more from Col. Leonard’s regiment, “drums beating and colors flying,” meeting the selectmen on their way.¹⁰⁸ Selectman Timothy Newell recorded that meeting from his perspective:

Immediately upon the fleet's sailing the Select Men set off, through the lines, to Roxbury to acquaint General Washington of the evacuation of the town. After sending a message Major [Joseph] Ward aid to General Ward, came to us at the lines and soon after the General himself, who received us in the most polite and affectionate manner, and permitted us to pass to Watertown to acquaint the Council of this happy event.¹⁰⁹

The commander himself attended a celebratory church service (see section 7.9).

¹⁰³ PJA, 4:54-5.

¹⁰⁴ French, *First Year*, 671. See also Stiles, *Literary Diary*, 2:2.

¹⁰⁵ Col. Jedidiah Huntington to Jabez Huntington, 17 March 1776, MHSP, 27:360.

¹⁰⁶ How, *Diary*, 11.

¹⁰⁷ Washington to Congress, 19 March 1776, PGW:RW, 3:489-90.

¹⁰⁸ *Scots Magazine*, 38:256.

¹⁰⁹ MHSC, series 4, 1:276.

On Monday 18 March one brigade of the Continental Army marched toward New York, and Gen. Washington entered the town he had viewed from a distance for more than eight months. Thomas Cushing reported, “General Washington & his Suit dined with Captain Erving.”¹¹⁰ The next day, the commander-in-chief finally wrote to the Congress:

It is with the greatest pleasure I inform you that on Sunday last, the 17th Instant [i.e., of this month], about 9 O’Clock in the forenoon, The Ministerial Army evacuated the Town of Boston, and that the Forces of the United Colonies are now in actual possession thereof. I beg leave to congratulate you Sir, & the honorable Congress—on this happy Event, and particularly as it was effected without endangering the lives & property of the remaining unhappy Inhabitants.¹¹¹

18.11 MOPPING UP IN BOSTON

All Continental troops were allowed to visit Boston on 20 March and two or three regiments were stationed there. James Thacher described the scene:

While marching through the streets, the inhabitants appeared at their doors and windows; though they manifested a lively joy on being liberated from a long imprisonment, they were not altogether free from a melancholy gloom which ten tedious months’ siege has spread over their countenances.¹¹²

Thacher’s regiment moved into “comfortable houses” now empty.

The following day, Gen. Washington issued a proclamation:

Whereas the ministerial army has abandoned the town of Boston, and the forces of the United Colonies under my command are in possession of the same; I have therefore thought it necessary for the preservation of peace, good order, and discipline, to publish the following orders, that no person offending therein may plead ignorance as an excuse for their misconduct.

All officers and soldiers are hereby ordered to live in the strictest peace and amity with the inhabitants; and no inhabitant, or other person, employed in his lawful business in the town is to be molested in his person or property, on any pretence whatever.

If any officer or soldier shall presume to strike, imprison, or otherwise ill-treat any of the inhabitants, he may depend on being punished with the utmost severity; and if any officer or soldier shall receive any insult from any of the inhabitants, he is to seek redress in a legal way, and no other.

¹¹⁰ NDAR, 4:391. John Erving (1690-1787) was an aged merchant and James Bowdoin’s father-in-law. Though his sons evacuated as Loyalists, he refused to leave Boston during the siege or afterwards. Washington probably dined with him as the oldest gentleman in town.

¹¹¹ Headquarters was so eager to send this report to the Congress that it was sent off without the commander-in-chief’s signature. PGW:RW, 3:489-90.

¹¹² Thacher, *Military Journal*, 27.

Any non-commissioned officer or soldier, or others under my command, who shall be guilty of robbing or plundering in the town, are to be immediately confined, and will be most rigidly punished. All officers are therefore ordered to be very vigilant in the discovery of such offenders, and report their names and crime to the commanding officer in the town, as soon as may be.

The inhabitants and others are called upon to make known to the Quartermaster-general, or any of his deputies, all stores belonging to the ministerial army, that may be remaining or secreted in the town; any person or persons whatsoever, that shall be known to conceal any of the said stores, or appropriate them to his or their own use, will be considered as an enemy to America, and treated accordingly.

The selectmen and other magistrates of the town are desired to return to the Commander-in-chief the names of all or any person or persons, they may suspect of being employed as spies upon the Continental army, that they may be dealt with accordingly.

All officers of the Continental army are enjoined to assist the civil magistrates in the execution of their duty, and to promote peace and good order. They are to prevent, as much as possible, the soldiers from frequenting tippling-houses, and strolling from their posts. Particular notice will be taken of such officers as are inattentive and remiss in their duty; and, on the contrary, such only as are active and vigilant will be entitled to future favor and promotion.¹¹³

Civilians from the Massachusetts countryside, including returning refugees, began to arrive in large numbers.¹¹⁴

For the rest of the month, Gen. Washington was busy inspecting parts of Boston and accepting the thanks of its inhabitants. He visited John Hancock's mansion on Beacon Hill and reported to the chairman of the Continental Congress that "your house has receiv'd no damage worth mentioning. Your furniture is in tolerable Order and the family pictures are all left entire and untouch'd."¹¹⁵ (Gen. James Grant had used that house as his quarters, meaning it was neither abandoned nor crowded with soldiers, and it benefited from being built of stone rather than wood.) Artillerists started to repair cannon and mortar that the British had spiked and left behind. The medical corps sifted through the supplies at British hospitals and Loyalist apothecaries. Mifflin estimated that the equipment the royal army had left behind was worth at least £25,000.¹¹⁶

Meanwhile, the general continued to worry that the British military would return. The evacuation fleet of more than one hundred ships was still at anchor in the outer harbor, well within sight. With the confirmed Loyalists safe on board, what would stop the Royal Navy from bombarding the town to destroy it? What would stop the army from landing troops anywhere along the Massachusetts coast? A small party of British engineers was still

¹¹³ PGW:RW, 3:501-2. Printers issued this address with different punctuation and capitalization.

¹¹⁴ Thacher, *Military Journal*, 27.

¹¹⁵ PGW:RW, 3:490.

¹¹⁶ Washington to Congress, 19 March 1776, PGW:RW, 3:490.

busy in Castle William, trying to render that fortress useless for the Americans. They burned the barracks and blew up some of the walls; Americans interpreted these explosions as a resumption of artillery fire. Finally the Royal Artillery engineers joined the fleet, and the ships sailed out to Nantasket Road.

On 24 March Washington and Ward discussed sending fire rafts toward the British ships in order to force them to disperse. The next day, the vessels started to move north, and the generals abandoned that plan.¹¹⁷ On 27 March the bulk of the British evacuation fleet set sail toward Halifax, Nova Scotia. Only a few warships remained in Massachusetts Bay to harass American shipping. Gen. Sullivan led another brigade of Continental soldiers south. A third brigade followed on 1 April and Gen. Spencer led the last on 4 April.

Washington hurried to finish his business in Massachusetts. On 28 March he attended the town's Thursday Lecture and a public dinner at the Bunch of Grapes tavern with his generals and town officials (see section 7.9). The Rev. Dr. Samuel Cooper recorded that he "Walk'd with the Generals &c. after Dinner to Fort Hill," where the American troops were fortifying the town against attack by sea.¹¹⁸ Boston's elite was eager to meet the commander. Merchant John Rowe recorded that on the afternoon of 26 March "I went with Mr. [Rev. Samuel] Parker and paid my respects to Generall Washington, who received us very politely." Five days later Rowe invited Washington to dine and received "a very polite answer" but no guests.¹¹⁹ The merchant was in denial that many people saw him as a Tory. In contrast, the solidly Whig merchant John Andrews reported that on 2 April "I had the honor of General Washington with his lady, General Gates, Mr. Custos and Lady, with Aid de Camps, &ca., to dine with me, with no earlier notice than half past eleven the same day."¹²⁰

That same day, Massachusetts militia lieutenant Isaac Bangs (1752-1780) came to headquarters to ask for a Continental commission. The hopeful young officer wrote, "We found the Genl. very busie in wrighting dispatches, &c., that he could not attend to Buisness of such small Consequence." Instead, Gen. Gates promised that if Bangs accompanied the army to New York he would receive a commission there.¹²¹

On 4 April the Rev. Dr. Cooper "went to Cambridg p. m. to wait on [the general] and take Leave." But the minister "found him set out for Boston, and f'm thence to N. York."¹²² Washington had left the John Vassall house to prepare for his next campaign.

¹¹⁷ French, *First Year*, 672.

¹¹⁸ *American Historical Review*, 6:339.

¹¹⁹ MHSP, 30:98.

¹²⁰ MHSP, 8:411.

¹²¹ Bangs, *Journal*, 20. Bangs came with Lt. Col. Jacobs, not identified. The Bangs journal can be viewed at <http://www.masshist.org/online/siege/doc-viewer.php?item_id=1997>.

¹²² *American Historical Review*, 6:339.

18.12 THE GENERAL'S "DISAPPOINTMENT"

On 19 March 1776, the same day that Gen. Washington told the Congress that the Continental Army had secured Boston, he wrote to Joseph Reed about the fortifications the British had left behind:

their Works all standing—upon examination of which, especially that at Bunkers Hill, we find amazingly strong. 20,000 Men could not have carried it against one thousand had that work been well defended. The Town of Boston was almost impregnable every avenue fortified.¹²³

The general did not, however, express regret at having proposed attacking that “impregnable” town. Nor did his official reports ever single out Gen. Ward for suggesting the move onto the Dorchester peninsula instead. Instead, Washington was soon retelling the siege’s end in this language: “I resolved to take possession of Dorchester point lying East of Boston. . . .”¹²⁴

Still, the commander had trouble embracing the siege as a success. Washington actually felt disappointed in how the campaign had turned out. On 27 March he told his Virginia friend Landon Carter how the weather had hindered the British counterattack:

That this remarkable Interposition of Providence was designed to answer some wise purpose I have no doubt of but as the proposed end of the Manouvre was to draw the Enemy to an Engagement under disadvantageous circumstances—as a premeditated Plan was laid for this purpose—and seemd to be succeeding to my utmost wish—and as no Men could be better disposed to make the Appeal than ours seemd Upon that occasion I can scarce forbear lamenting the disappointment as we were prepared for them at all points and had a chosen Corps of 4000 Men with Boats ready to push into Boston upon a signal given if the Enemt should have sent out large detachments.¹²⁵

Part of the general’s disappointment arose from how the British forces had withdrawn intact, able to attack at another time and place. On 1 February he had told Reed that it was essential “that the Troops In Boston should be destroyed” before they were removed.¹²⁶ If the Continental Army had captured that army or inflicted heavy losses, Washington and many other Americans believed, the government in London would pull back from the war.

Another part of Washington’s disappointment was probably the lack of a glorious battlefield victory. Until the Battle of Brandywine in 1777, when he again faced Gen. Howe, Washington kept trying to provoke such a decisive fight. Only after Howe defeated him badly

¹²³ PGW:RW, 3:494.

¹²⁴ PGW:RW, 3:566.

¹²⁵ PGW:RW, 3:544.

¹²⁶ PGW:RW, 3:238.

did he accept that the way to win the war was to keep the Continental Army together as a constant threat to the royal forces.

Privately, Gen. Washington was concerned that his public image had suffered from how he had conducted the siege. On 31 March he told his brother John Augustine Washington:

I believe I may, with great truth affirm, that no Man perhaps since the first Institution of Armys ever commanded one under more difficult Circumstances than I have done—to enumerate the particulars would fill a volume—many of my difficulties and distresses were of so peculiar a cast that in order to conceal them from the Enemy, I was obliged to conceal them from my friends, indeed from my own Army thereby subjecting my Conduct to interpretations unfavourable to my Character—especially by those at a distance, who could not, in the smallest degree, be acquainted with the Springs that govern'd it—I am happy however to find, and to hear from different Quarters, that my reputation stands fair—that my Conduct hitherto has given universal Satisfaction—the Addresses which I have received, and which I suppose will be published, from the general Court of this Colony (the same as our Genl Assembly) and from the Selectmen of Boston upon the evacuation of the Town & my approaching departure from the Colony, exhibits a pleasing testimony of their approbation of my conduct, and of their personal regard, which I have found in various other Instances; and wch, in retirement, will afford many comfortable reflections.¹²⁷

Indeed, the Massachusetts legislature, the Continental Congress, and other institutions showered Washington with praise. The siege of Boston entered the history books as Washington's first major victory in the Revolutionary War.

¹²⁷ PGW:RW, 3:569.



Figure 9. Map of the Dorchester peninsula in 1776, a detail of Henry Pelham’s “A Plan of Boston in New England with its Environs,” drawn in Boston and published in London in 1777. Lechmere’s Point is at upper right, above the town of Boston. Near the center is the narrow, well-fortified Boston neck. In the lower left quarter is the town of Dorchester, with a single road leading onto its large peninsula. Dorchester Heights appears as a jagged line of fortifications halfway down that peninsula, and Nook’s Hill, fortified last, is at its upper corner. Image from the American Memory Maps Collection, Library of Congress.

CONCLUSION

After the Battle of Bunker Hill, Gen. Thomas Gage and Gen. William Howe concluded that there was no value to the British army in entering another pitched battle with the zealous provincials besieging Boston. Both men recommended leaving the town, where resistance to Crown measures had been long and stubborn, and reestablishing imperial rule elsewhere in North America before trying to punish or subdue New England. British forces remained in Boston only because those generals did not want to make such a crucial move without the London government's approval, and that approval arrived too late for Howe to assemble a fleet before winter.¹

Thus, after June 1775 it was just a matter of time before the British military sailed away from Boston. The siege might well have proceeded in much the same way whether or not George Washington arrived as commander-in-chief.

But Washington did come to Massachusetts to take up that role. His presence may have changed the campaign in only small ways, but he had a large effect on the Continental Army during his first year as commander. Furthermore, Washington's experiences from July 1775 to April 1776 made a deep impact on him. He may not have been able to affect the siege greatly, but it greatly affected him.

Washington arrived in Cambridge as a fairly typical Virginia planter, expecting deference because of his race, wealth, and class. The more egalitarian society of New England, reflected in its army, startled and annoyed him. He was especially troubled to see black men armed and marching in the ranks. The general's complaints about undisciplined soldiers, inadequate officers, and slow enlistment at the end of 1775 are well known. What is not so visible, because it appears in his actions more than his writing, is how Washington came to change his mind and respect some of the values that he encountered during his time in New England. Many of his closest generals and aides, and much of his army throughout the war, came from that region.

The general was also able to instill some of his own guiding principles in his officers and men. The army that marched south in the spring of 1776 was significantly different from the army Washington had found nine months before. As commander he emphasized discipline, but he also tried to instill a national spirit, a loyalty to all the united colonies instead of primarily one's own. Washington's personal decisions played a role in widening the war as he sent troops up into Canada and off into the Atlantic.

Some of the general's biggest legacies to the American nation—his readiness to step down from power, his deference to civil authorities even when they were slow to act, his support for a

¹ Gruber, *Howe Brothers*, 29-31.

strong national government—lay well in the future. But during the siege of Boston, George Washington laid the foundation for his role as a national leader.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Toward the end of the war, Washington's headquarters staff made sure that most of his military papers were preserved, in both originals and transcripts. The triumph of the Revolution also prompted many families to preserve documents from that time, even diaries of young men who spent a lot of their time waiting around for something to happen (i.e., soldiers). Scholars do not lack material to study.

The most fruitful areas for research on the siege of Boston may well lie in documents that came not from Washington but from others within his orbit. For example, his household accounts, available for viewing online but not transcribed, might offer insights into the upper-class eighteenth-century diet. The archives of the army's logistical departments—the quartermaster general, commissary general, medical corps, and so on—offer a wealth of material for specialists. Newspaper databases make it possible to study the journalism of the siege, and how broadly reports from Massachusetts were transmitted and discussed.

The largest gaps in the history of Washington's first months as commander-in-chief involve the personal side of his life. We have many sources on events that took place on the ground floor of his Cambridge headquarters, but virtually no information on what happened one story up. The greatest gap in the record of Washington's whole life is his missing correspondence with his wife Martha. His early months at Cambridge were the couple's first extended period apart, and we know they exchanged letters during that time. The general's official correspondence is of course formal, and was often created with the help of aides. He was far more frank in letters to his former secretary Joseph Reed and his male relatives and friends back in Virginia. George's letters to Martha might have shown him at his most open and emotional. Then again, he may have felt a responsibility to shield her from his troubles. Because the Washingtons destroyed almost all of their personal correspondence, we will never know.

APPENDIX A

JOHN ADAMS AND THE APPOINTMENT OF GEN. WASHINGTON

In his autobiography and letters written after his presidency, John Adams left a detailed account of the process by which Washington became commander-in-chief. Adams's recollections, at times dramatic, have become the standard source for descriptions of that event. However, his memories contradict the contemporaneous record at some points and are unsupported by other sources.

In particular, there is no evidence to confirm Adams's memory of widespread opposition to appointing Washington commander-in-chief. Even in his letters to his wife Abigail, when Adams was at his most candid, he wrote nothing about disagreements over that appointment. Indeed, on 17 June he said that naming the Virginian "will have a great Effect, in cementing and securing the Union of these Colonies.—The Continent is really in earnest in defending the Country."¹ Though other colonies had at first been wary of adopting the New Englanders' cause, by that week "This Congress are all as deep, as the Delegates from the Massachusetts, and the whole Continent as forward as Boston."² Adams's letters from that time are frank about other disputes within the Congress.

Historians have therefore struggled to reconcile Adams's description with the documentation from 1775. Why did Adams not mention such a deep conflict at the time? Why did no other delegate hint that John Hancock hoped to be appointed commander-in-chief? If Edmund Pendleton "was very clear and full against" Washington's appointment, as Adams later wrote, why did Washington ask Pendleton to help write his will and his acceptance speech? On the latter puzzle, Douglas Southall Freeman suggested that Washington encouraged Pendleton to oppose his nomination as a devil's advocate—not an approach Washington used at other times.³ John Ferling guessed that the new general asked for Pendleton's advice on his speech as a way of coopting a former opponent.⁴ Such difficult explanations are necessary only if one accepts Adams's recollection as fully accurate.

Yet in other late-life descriptions of Revolutionary events, Adams exaggerated the opposition to his stances and the criticism he received. "The purpose of Adams's autobiographical recollections seems to have been to establish his own central role in these events," wrote Paul K. Longmore in a page-long endnote in *The Invention of George Washington* devoted to refuting Adams's account. There is a pattern in Adams's memories of

¹ AFC, 1:215.

² AFC, 1:225.

³ Freeman, *George Washington*, 3:434.

⁴ Ferling, *First of Men*, 115. Henriques, *Realistic Visionary*, 37, accepts this interpretation.

placing himself at center stage and portraying the opposition to him as larger than contemporaneous sources suggest.⁵

Longmore suggested that the difficult politicking Adams remembered actually involved the appointment of Charles Lee and how he ranked relative to other generals. Indeed, on 18 June 1775 Adams told Elbridge Gerry: “I have never, in all my lifetime, suffered more anxiety than in the conduct of this business. The choice of officers, and their pay, have given me great distress.”⁶ Maryland delegate Thomas Johnson was, according to a nephew, proud of having stopped the Congress from naming Charles Lee as second-in-command: “Mr. Johnson, in a speech of some length, portrayed his character as a disappointed foreigner, and not to be trusted. When he sat down the whole delegation from New York arose in a body, and said that every word the gentleman from Maryland had said was true.”⁷ On that question it would make sense for some New Englanders to support Artemas Ward, as Adams described.

For the record, here is what Adams wrote on the subject, starting with a passage from his autobiography, penned during Thomas Jefferson’s first administration.

We were embarassed with more than one Difficulty. Not only the Party in favour of the Petition to the King, and the Party who were jealous of Independence, but a third Party, which was a Southern Party against a Northern and a Jealousy against a New England Army under the Command of a New England General. Whether this Jealousy was sincere, or whether it was mere pride and a haughty Ambition, of furnishing a Southern General to command the northern Army. But the Intention was very visible to me, that Col. Washington was their Object, and so many of our staunchest Men were in the Plan that We could carry nothing without conceding to it. Another Embarrassment which was never publicly known, and which was carefully concealed by those who knew it. The Massachusetts Delegates and other New England Delegates were divided. Mr. Hancock and Mr. Cushing hung back. Mr. Paine did not come forward, and even Mr. Samuel Adams was irresolute. Mr. Hancock himself had an Ambition to be appointed Commander in Chief. Whether he thought, An Election, a Compliment due to him and intended to have the honor of declining it or whether he would have accepted I know not. To the Compliment he had some Pretensions, for at that time his Exertions, Sacrifices and general Merit in the Cause of his Country, had been incomparably greater than those of Colonel Washington. But the Delicacy of his health, and his entire Want of Experience in actual Service, though an excellent Militia Officer, were decisive Objections to him in my Mind. In canvassing this Subject out of Doors, I found too that even among the Delegates of Virginia there were difficulties. The Apostolical Reasonings among themselves which should be greatest, were not less energetic Among the Saints of the Ancient dominion, than they were among Us of New England. In several Conversations I found more than one very cool about the Appointment of Washington, and particularly Mr. Pendleton was very clear and

⁵ Longmore, *Invention of George Washington*, 275.

⁶ PJA, 3:26.

⁷ Delaplaine, “Life of Thomas Johnson,” 269-70. That recollection dates from after Lee’s severe fall in popularity.

full against. Full of Anxieties concerning these Confusions, and apprehending daily that We should he[a]r very distressing News from Boston, I walked with Mr. Samuel Adams in the State house Yard, for a little Exercise and fresh Air, before the hour of Congress, and there represented to him the various dangers that surrounded Us. He agreed to them all, but said what shall We do? I answered him, that he knew I had taken great pains to get our Colleagues to agree upon some plan that We might be unanimous: but he knew that they would pledge themselves to nothing: but I was determined to take a Step, which should compell them and all the other Members of Congress, to declare themselves for or against something. I am determined this Morning to make a direct Motion that Congress should adopt the Army before Boston and appoint Colonel Washington Commander of it. Mr. Adams seemed to think very seriously of it, but said Nothing.—Accordingly When congress had assembled I rose in my place and in as short a Speech as the Subject would admit, represented the State of the Colonies, the Uncertainty in the Minds of the People, their great Expectations and Anxiety, the distresses of the Army, the danger of its dissolution, the difficulty of collecting another, and the probability that the British Army would take Advantage of our delays, march out of Boston and spread desolation as far as they could go. I concluded with a Motion in form that Congress would Adopt the Army at Cambridge and appoint a General, that though this was not the proper time to nominate a General, yet as I had reason to believe this was a point of the greatest difficulty, I had no hesitation to declare that I had but one Gentleman in my Mind for that important command, and that was a Gentleman from Virginia who was among Us and very well known to all of Us, a Gentleman whose Skill and Experience as an Officer, whose independent fortune, great Talents and excellent universal Character, would command the Approbation of all America, and unite the cordial Exertions of all the Colonies better than any other Person in the Union. Mr. Washington, who happened to sit near the Door, as soon as he heard me allude to him, from his Usual Modesty darted into the Library Room. Mr. Hancock, who was our President, which gave me an Opportunity to observe his Countenance, while I was speaking on the State of the Colonies, the Army at Cambridge and the Ennemy, heard me with visible pleasure, but when I came to describe Washington for the Commander, I never remarked a more sudden and sinking Change of Countenance. Mortification and resentment were expressed as forcibly as his Face could exhibit them. Mr. Samuel Adams Seconded the Motion, and that did not soften the Presidents Phisiognomy at all. The Subject came under debate and several Gentlemen declared themselves against the Appointment of Mr. Washington, not on Account of any personal Objection against him: but because the Army was all from New England, had a General of their own, appeared to be satisfied with him and had proved themselves able to imprison the British Army in Boston, which was all they expected or desired at that time. Mr. Pendleton of Virginia [and] Mr. Sherman of Connecticut were very explicit in declaring this Opinion, Mr. Cushing and several others more faintly expressed their Opposition and their fears of discontent in the Army and in New England. Mr. Paine expressed a great Opinion of General Ward and a strong friendship for him, having been his Classmate at Colledge, or at least his contemporary: but gave no Opinion upon the question. The Subject was postponed to a future day. In the mean time, pains were taken out of doors to obtain a Unanimity, and the Voices were generally so clearly in favour of Washington that the dissentient Members were persuaded to withdraw their

Opposition, and Mr. Washington was nominated, I believe by Mr. Thomas Johnson of Maryland, unanimously elected, and the Army adopted.⁸

This account was not published in Adams's lifetime, but some people read it privately and Adams probably retold the stories in it.

In the early 1800s some New England authors wrote that Adams himself had nominated Washington. This prompted relatives of Thomas Johnson to assert that he had done so. James Johnson wrote, most likely in a Baltimore newspaper:

The plain history of the nomination, which I have heard repeatedly from my uncle, Governor Johnson, is this: The eyes of all America were turned to Col. Washington, then a delegate from Virginia to Congress. The delegates from Virginia thought as a matter of delicacy that the nomination should be made by a delegate from another State. Richard Henry Lee, who introduced the resolution to declare the United States free and independent, came to Mr. Johnson, of Maryland, and told him the delegates from Virginia felt a delicacy in nominating their colleague for commander-in-chief, and wished the nomination to be made by a member from another State. Mr. Johnson agreed with him, and on the morning on which the nomination was made and unanimously confirmed, he met Mr. John Adams on the State House steps in Philadelphia, and told him that the Virginia delegation felt a delicacy in nominating Mr. Washington, and he wished him (Mr. Adams), the representative of a large State, the cradle of liberty, to nominate him. Mr. Adams made no reply, turned on his heel, and left him. As soon as the House was called to order, Mr. Johnson arose in his place and nominated Col. Washington commander-in-chief, which, as before stated, was confirmed. Mr. Johnson in all his conversation with me never claimed any peculiar merit in making the nomination, but one merit he always claimed, in preventing Charles Lee from being second in command. When he was nominated Mr. Johnson, in a speech of some length, portrayed his character as a disappointed foreigner, and not to be trusted. When he sat down the whole delegation from New York arose in a body, and said every word the gentleman from Maryland had said was true. Gen. Ward, of Massachusetts, was appointed first major-general, and Charles Lee the second.⁹

George Johnson wrote a similar letter published in *Niles' Weekly Register* on 7 June 1834.

In his last decade, Adams no longer remembered so clearly that Johnson had nominated Washington. In a 24 February 1821 letter to Richard Henry Lee (grandson of the delegate) he wrote:

I have read in some of our histories, that Governor Johnson, of Maryland, nominated Mr. Washington for commander-in-chief of the army. . . . As such motions were generally concerted beforehand, I presume Mr. Johnson was

⁸ DAJA, 3:321-3.

⁹ This text comes from Scharf, *History of Western Maryland*, 1:390. Context suggests that Scharf reprinted it from a newspaper, but the original has not been identified.

designated to nominate a general, because the gentlemen from Virginia declined, from delicacy, the nomination of their own colleague.¹⁰

Adams continued to recall the vote to make Washington a general as an “instance of apparent unanimity, and real regret in nearly one half,” as he wrote to William Plumer on 28 March 1813.¹¹ His longest description of the episode appears in a letter to James Lloyd written on 24 April 1815:

Should they adopt the army at Cambridge, or raise a new one of their own? This last project would require a long time, and it was very uncertain whether it would ever be practicable. If they adopted the army now on foot, who should command it? A New England army under a New England General, they were pleased to say, would be dangerous to the other colonies, for no man then dared to utter the word State or nation. Who, then, should be General? On this question, the members were greatly divided. A number were for Mr. Hancock, then President of Congress, and extremely popular throughout the United Colonies, and called “King Hancock” all over Europe. A greater number (can you believe it?) were for General Charles Lee, then in Philadelphia, extremely assiduous in his visits to all the members of Congress at their lodgings, and universally represented in America as a classical and universal scholar, as a scientific soldier, and as one of the greatest generals in the world, who had seen service with Burgoyne in Portugal and in Poland, &c., and who was covered over with wounds he had received in battles. In short, this General Lee was a kind of precursor of Miranda. He excited much such an enthusiasm, and made as many proselytes and partisans. A number were for Washington. But the greatest number were for Ward.

In the midst of this chaos, the Massachusetts delegates daily received letters from their friends and constituents at home, entreating them to urge Congress to a decision, for the army wanted many things, and every thing was uncertain. The anxiety of New England, and her members in Congress, may be well imagined, may be easily conceived. In this state of things, John Adams, who had previously taken unwearied pains with his own colleagues, and with other members, in private, to form some plan and agree upon something to be done, without success, met Samuel Adams in the State House yard in Philadelphia, from various walks and avocations. “What shall we do to get Congress to adopt our army?” said Samuel Adams to John Adams. “I will tell you what I am determined to do,” said John to Samuel. “I have taken pains enough to bring you to agree upon something, but you will not agree upon any thing, and now I am determined to take my own way, let come what will come.” “Well,” said Samuel, “what is your scheme?” Said John to Samuel, “I will go to Congress this morning, and move, that a day be appointed to take into consideration the adoption of the army before Boston, the appointment of a General, and officers; and I will nominate Washington for commander-in-chief.” . . .

[In editing his grandfather’s letters for publication, Charles Francis Adams cut a long passage here which he called “a mere amplification of that given in the Autobiography.”]

From this narration it appears, that Washington was the *creature of a principle*, and that principle was the *Union of the Colonies*. He knew it, and it is not

¹⁰ Adams, *Works of John Adams*, 10:396.

¹¹ Adams, *Works of John Adams*, 10:36.

wonderful that he preached union. But is it not wonderful that one party should now found their arguments in favor of union, principally on the authority of Washington, and that the other party, in his name, and under pretence of his authority, should intrigue and cabal the destruction of the Union! Good God! Is there a man or woman in the United States, of common sense and information, who wants the authority of Washington to prove the necessity of Union? Is there one who can abuse the name of Washington, to influence a separation or division? From this narration it also appears, that the boast of your correspondent, Mr. Randolph, is vain and unfounded. We owe no thanks to Virginia for Washington. Virginia is indebted to Massachusetts for Washington, not Massachusetts to Virginia. Massachusetts made him a general against the inclination of Virginia. Virginia never made him more than a colonel. . . .

Would Mr. Randolph now say, that John Adams was “ill-omened” in his exertions to get Washington appointed a general, not only against the judgment and inclinations of his own colleagues, but of the most respectable and able of the delegates from Virginia herself? . . .

Poor John Adams, upon his return to the army and his constituents, had enough to do to apologize for the part he had taken in the change. “Was it not unexampled to supersede a general, a commander-in-chief, universally esteemed, beloved and confided in by his army and their country, by appointing another, an entire stranger, whom they had never seen, whose name they had scarcely heard? Was there another army or country that would submit to it? Was it not astonishing that a high-spirited, independent militia had not shouldered their firelocks and marched home? or at least refused to receive the new commander? Was it not to have been expected, that the officers would have resigned their commissions, when such a flight of officers of high rank, all strangers, was sent and placed over them? How could you, in such critical circumstances, assist in putting the cause of your country at such imminent hazard?”

These questions, Mr. Lloyd, and many other questions of similar import, were put to me wherever I went, by my best friends, and I had no other way to soften their hard thoughts, but by appeals to their patriotism, by urging the policy and necessity of sacrificing all our feelings to the union of the colonies, and by panegyrics upon Washington, Lee, Gates, Mifflin, Reed, &c. In a few words, I was subjected to almost as bitter exprobrations for creating Washington commander-in-chief, as I had been, five years before, for saving Preston and his soldiers from an unrighteous judgment and execution. Are not these facts as new to you as any political tale that could be brought you from Arabia, or by a special messenger from Sirius, the dog-star?¹²

¹² Adams, *Works of John Adams*, 10:163-6.

APPENDIX B

CONGRESS'S COMMISSION AND INSTRUCTIONS

The commission that the Continental Congress presented to George Washington on Saturday, 17 June 1775, formally making him a general, was basic:

We, reposing special trust and confidence in your patriotism, valor, conduct, and fidelity, do, by these presents, constitute and appoint you to be General and Commander in chief, of the army of the United Colonies, and of all the forces now raised, or to be raised, by them, and of all others who shall voluntarily offer their service, and join the said Army for the Defence of American liberty, and for repelling every hostile invasion thereof: And you are hereby vested with full power and authority to act as you shall think for the good and welfare of the service.

And we do hereby strictly charge and require all Officers and Soldiers, under your command, to be obedient to your orders, and diligent in the exercise of their several duties.

And we do also enjoin and require you, to be careful in executing the great trust reposed in you, by causing strict discipline and order to be observed in the army, and that the soldiers be duly exercised, and provided with all convenient necessaries.

And you are to regulate your conduct in every respect by the rules and discipline of war, (as herewith given you,) and punctually to observe and follow such orders and directions, from time to time, as you shall receive from this, or a future Congress of these United Colonies, or committee of Congress.

This commission to continue in force, until revoked by this, or a future Congress.¹

Three days later, the Congress added more detailed instructions:

This Congress having appointed you to be General and Commander in chief of the Army of the united Colonies and of all the forces raised or to be raised by them and of all others who shall voluntarily offer their service and join the said army for the defence of American liberty and for repelling every hostile invasion thereof, you are to repair with all expedition to the colony of Massachusetts bay and take charge of the army of the united colonies.

For your better direction

1st You are to make a return to us as soon as possible of all forces which you shall have under your command together with their military stores and provisions. And also as exact an Account as you can obtain of the forces which compose the British Army in America.

¹JCC, 2:96.

2dly You are not to disband any of the men you find raised until further direction from this Congress and if you shall think their numbers not adequate to the purpose of security, you may recruit them to a number you shall think sufficient, not exceeding double that of the enemy.

3d In all cases of vacancy occasioned by the death or removal of a Colonel or other inferior officer, you are by brevet or warrant under your seal to appoint another person to fill up such vacancy until it shall be otherwise ordered by the provincial Convention or Assembly of the colony from whence the troops in which such vacancy happen, shall direct otherwise.

4. You are to victual at the continental expence all such volunteers as have joined or shall join the united Army.

5. You shall take every method in your power consistent with prudence, to destroy or make prisoners of all persons who now are or who hereafter shall appear in Arms against the good people of the united colonies.

6. And whereas all particulars cannot be foreseen, nor positive instructions for such emergencies so before hand given but that many things must be left to your prudent and discreet management, as occurrences may arise upon the place, or from time to that time fall out, you are therefore upon all such accidents or any occasions that may happen, to use your best circumspection and (advising with your council of war) to order and dispose of the said Army under your command as may be most advantageous for the obtaining the end for which these forces have been raised, making it your special care in discharge of the great trust committed unto you, that the liberties of America receive no detriment.²

²JCC, 2:100-1.

APPENDIX C

THE MASSACHUSETTS PROVINCIAL CONGRESS ADDRESSES THE GENERALS

On 1 July the Massachusetts Provincial Congress in Watertown formally welcomed the new Continental Army commander-in-chief with an address. It had been prepared by a committee consisting of speaker James Warren, Joseph Hawley, Dr. William Whiting, Daniel Hopkins, and Benjamin Greenleaf.

May it please your excellency:—The Congress of the Massachusetts colony, impressed with every sentiment of gratitude and respect, beg leave to congratulate you on your safe arrival, and to wish you all imaginable happiness and success in the execution of your elevated station.

While we applaud that attention to the public good, manifested in your appointment, we equally admire that disinterested virtue, and distinguished patriotism, which alone could call you from those enjoyments of domestic life, which a sublime and manly taste, joined with a most affluent fortune can afford, to hazard your life, and to endure the fatigues of war, in the defence of the rights of mankind and the good of your country.

The laudable zeal for the common cause of America, and compassion for the distresses of this colony, exhibited by the great despatch made in your journey hither, fully justify the universal satisfaction we have with pleasure observed on this occasion, and are promising presages, that the great expectations formed from your personal character and military abilities, are well founded.

We wish you may have found such regularity and discipline already established in the army, as may be agreeable to your expectations. The hurry with which it was necessarily collected, and the many disadvantages, arising from a suspension of government, under which we have raised and endeavored to regulate the forces of this colony, have rendered it a work of time; and though, in great measure effected, the completion of so difficult, and at the same time so necessary a task, is reserved to your excellency, and we doubt not will be properly considered and attended to.

We would not presume to prescribe to your excellency, but supposing you would choose to be informed of the general character of the soldiers who compose the army, beg leave to represent, that the greatest part of them have not before seen service; and although naturally brave, and of good understanding, yet, for want of experience in military life, have but little knowledge of divers things most essential to the preservation of health and even life. The youth of the army are not possessed of the absolute necessity of cleanliness in their dress and lodging, continual exercise, and strict temperance, to preserve them from diseases frequently prevailing in camps, especially among those, who, from their childhood, have been used to a laborious life.

We beg leave to assure you, that this Congress will, at all times, be ready to attend to such requisitions as you may have occasion to make to us; and to

contribute all the aid in our power, to the cause of America, and your happiness and ease in the discharge of the duties of your exalted office.

We most fervently implore Almighty God, that the blessings of Divine Providence may rest on you; that your head may be covered in the day of battle; that every necessary assistance may be afforded, and that you may be long continued, in life and health, a blessing to mankind.¹

The representatives clearly felt a little nervous about how Gen. Washington would react to the troops he was about to see.

The Provincial Congress offered a separate address to Gen. Charles Lee, showing how much they valued his presence:

Sir:—The Congress of the Massachusetts colony, possessed of the fullest evidence of your attachment to the rights of mankind and regard to the distresses, which America in general, and this colony in particular, are involved in, by the impolitic, wicked, and tyrannical system adopted by administration, and pursued with relentless and savage fury, do, with pleasure, embrace this opportunity to express the great satisfaction and gratitude they feel on your appointment as a major general in the American army. We sincerely congratulate you on your safe arrival here, and wish you all possible happiness and success in the execution of so important a trust.

We admire and respect the character of a man, who, disregarding the allurements of profit and distinction his merit might procure, engages in the cause of mankind, in defence of the injured, and relief of the oppressed. From your character, from your great abilities, and military experience, united with those of the commander in chief, under the smiles of providence, we flatter ourselves with the prospect of discipline and order, success and victory.

Be assured, sir, that it will give us great pleasure to be able to contribute to your happiness. May the favors and blessings of Heaven attend you. May Divine Providence guard and protect you, conduct you in the paths of honor and virtue, grant you the reward of the brave and virtuous here, the applause of mankind, and the approbation of your own conscience and eternal happiness hereafter.²

Gen. Washington replied to the Provincial Congress in writing on 4 July:

Your kind Congratulations on my Appointment & Arrival demand my warmest Acknowledgements, and will ever be retained in grateful Remembrance.

In exchanging the Enjoyments of domestic Life for the Duties of my present honourable, but arduous Station, I only emulate the Virtue & publick Spirit of the whole Province of the Massachusetts Bay, which with a Firmness, & Patriotism without Example in modern History, has sacrificed all the comforts of social & political Life, in Support of the Rights of Mankind, & the Welfare of our common Country. My highest Ambition is, to be the happy Instrument of vindicating those Rights, & to see this devoted Province again restored to Peace, Liberty & Safety.

The short space of Time which has elapsed since my Arrival does not permit me to decide upon the State of the Army—The Course of human Affairs forbids an Expectation, that Troops formed under such Circumstances, should at once possess the Order, Regularity & Discipline of Veterans—Whatever Deficiencies

¹ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 438-9.

² Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 440.

there may be, will I doubt not, soon be made up by the Activity & Zeal of the Officers, and the Docility & Obedience of the Men. These Qualities, united with their native Bravery, & Spirit, will afford a happy Presage of Success, & put a final Period to those Distresses which now overwhelm this once happy Country.

I most sincerely thank you, Gentlemen, for your Declaration of Readiness at all Times to assist me in the Discharge of the Duties of my Station. they are so complicated, & extended that I shall Need the Assistance of every good Man & Lover of his Country; I therefore repose the utmost Confidence in your Aids—In Return for your affectionate Wishes to my-self permit me to say, that I earnestly implore that Divine Being in whose hands are all human Events, to make you and your Constituents, as distinguished in private, & publick Happiness, as you have been by ministerial Oppression, by private & publick distress.³

Lee's reply showed that, while he was capable of expressing himself in many ways and at length, he understood the value of both brevity and flattery on such occasions:

Gentlemen:—Nothing can be so flattering to me, as the good opinion and approbation of the delegates of a free and uncorrupted people. I was educated in the highest reverence for the rights of mankind, and have acquired, by a long acquaintance, a most particular regard for the people of America. You may depend, therefore, gentlemen, on my zeal and integrity; I can promise you nothing from my abilities. God Almighty grant us success equal to the righteousness of the cause. I thank you, gentlemen, for an address which does me so much honor, and shall labor to deserve it.⁴

These addresses became part of the formal record of the Provincial Congress

³ PGW:RW, 1:59-60.

⁴ Lincoln, *Provincial Congress of Massachusetts*, 440-1.

APPENDIX D

THE MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL COURT THANKS WASHINGTON

On 29 March the Massachusetts General Court gave a formal thanks to Washington:

When the liberties of America were attacked by the violent hand of oppression; when Troops, hostile to the rights of humanity, invaded this Colony, seized our capital, and spread havock and, destruction around it; when our virtuous sons were murdered, and our houses destroyed by the Troops of Britain; the inhabitants of this and the other *American* Colonies, impelled by self-preservation and the love of freedom, forgetting their domestick concerns, determined resolutely and unitedly to oppose the sons of tyranny.

Convinced of the vast importance of having a gentleman of great military accomplishments, to discipline, lead, and conduct the forces of the Colonies, it gave us the greatest satisfaction to hear that the honourable Congress of the United Colonies had made choice of a gentleman thus qualified, who, leaving the pleasures of domestick and rural life, was ready to undertake the arduous task. And your nobly declining to accept the pecuniary emoluments annexed to this high office, fully evinced to us that a warm regard to the sacred rights of humanity, and sincere love to your country, solely influenced you in the acceptance of this important trust.

From your acknowledged abilities as a soldier, and your virtues in publick and private life, we had the most pleasing hopes; but the fortitude and equanimity so conspicuous in your conduct; the wisdom of your councils; the mild, yet strict government of the Army; your attention to the civil Constitution of this Colony; the regard you have at all times shown for the lives and health of those under your command; the fatigues you have with cheerfulness endured; the regard you have shown for the preservation of our Metropolis; and the great address with which our military operations have been conducted, have exceeded our most sanguine expectations, and demand the warmest returns of gratitude.

The Supreme Ruler of the Universe having smiled on our arms, and crowned your labours with remarkable success, we are now, without that effusion of blood we so much wished to avoid, again in the quiet possession of our capital. The wisdom and prudence of those movements which have obliged the enemy to abandon our Metropolis will ever be remembered by the inhabitants of this Colony.

May you still go on, approved by Heaven, revered by all good men, and dreaded by those tyrants who claim their fellow-men as their property. May the United Colonies be defended from slavery by your victorious arms. May they still see their enemies flying before you. And (the deliverance of your country being effected) may you, in retirement, enjoy that peace and satisfaction of mind, which always attends the good and great. And may future generations, in the peaceful enjoyment of that freedom, the exercise of which your sword shall have established, raise the richest and most lasting monuments to the name of *Washington*.¹

¹ *American Archives*, series 4, 5:539-40.

The general replied in kind:

GENTLEMEN: I return you my most sincere and hearty thanks for your polite Address; and feel myself called upon, by every principle of gratitude, to acknowledge the honour you have done me in this testimonial of your approbation of my appointment to the exalted station I now fill; and, what is more pleasing, of my conduct in discharging its important duties.

When the Councils of the *British* nation had formed a plan for enslaving *America*, and depriving her sons of their most sacred and invaluable privileges, against the clearest remonstrances of the Constitution, of justice, and of truth; and to execute their schemes, had appealed to the sword; I esteemed it my duty to take a part in the contest, and more especially, when called thereto by the unsolicited suffrages of the Representatives of a free People; wishing for no other reward than that arising from a conscientious discharge of the important trust, and that my services might contribute to the establishment of freedom and peace, upon a permanent foundation, and merit the applause of my countrymen, and every virtuous citizen.

Your professions of my attention to the civil Constitution of this Colony, whilst acting in the line of my department, also demand my grateful thanks. A regard to every Provincial institution, where not incompatible with the common interest, I hold a principle of duty and of policy, and shall ever form a part of my conduct. Had I not learned this before, the happy experience of the advantages resulting from a friendly intercourse with your honourable body, their ready and willing concurrence to aid and to counsel whenever called upon in cases of difficulty and emergency, would have taught me the useful lesson.

That the Metropolis of your Colony is now relieved from the cruel and oppressive invasion of those who were sent to erect the standard of lawless domination, and to trample on the rights of humanity, and is again open and free for its rightful possessors, must give pleasure to every virtuous and sympathetick heart; and being effected without the blood of our soldiers and fellow-citizens, must be ascribed to the interposition of that Providence which has manifestly appeared in our behalf, through the whole of this important struggle, as well as to the measures pursued for bringing about the happy event.

May that Being, who is powerful to save, and in whose hands is the fate of nations, look down with an eye of tender pity and compassion upon the whole of the United Colonies; may He continue to smile upon their councils and arms, and crown them with success whilst employed in the cause of virtue and of mankind; may this distressed Colony and its capital, and every part of this widely extended Continent, through His divine favour, be restored to more than their former lustre and once happy state; and have peace, liberty, and safety, secured upon a solid, permanent, and lasting foundation.²

As good Whigs, both the legislators and the general emphasized how the military had paid “attention to the civil Constitution of this Colony.”

² *American Archives*, series 4, 5:540-1.

APPENDIX E

TIMELINE AND SECTION INDEX

1718	Timothy Austin born	6.3
1727	Lydia Waldo born	6.3
1728	Horatio Gates born	4.12
1731	Martha Dandridge born	3.1, 7.4
1732	George Washington (GW) born	3.1
1737	Stephen Moylan born	5.5
1738	John Vassall born	1.1
1739	John Vassall's mother died	1.1
1741	Elizabeth Oliver born	1.8
	Joseph Reed born	5.8
	William Palfrey born	5.9
	Henry Vassall bought his brother John's house in Cambridge and married Penelope Royall of Medford	2.1
1744	Thomas Mifflin born	5.3, 5.9
1745	Robert Hanson Harrison born	5.8
	Mary Austin born to Timothy and Mary (Trumbull) Austin	6.3
	Horatio Gates joined the British army	4.12
1747	John Vassall's father died, and his grandfather Spencer Phips began to raise him	1.1
	Widower Timothy Austin married Lydia Waldo	6.3
1748	Caleb Gibbs born	5.10, 2.6
1752	GW appointed adjutant of Virginia's Northern Neck	3.1
	George Baylor born	5.9
1753	Edmund Randolph born	5.9
	Isaac Peirce born	5.2
	William Lee born?	9.9
1754	GW started the French and Indian War as a lieutenant colonel in the Virginia military	3.1
	John Parke Custis born to Martha (Dandridge) Custis	7.4
1755	Braddock's retreat—GW, Thomas Gage, Horatio Gates, and others survived the British military debacle	3.1, 4.5, 4.12, 16.7
1756	GW visited Boston to confer with Gov. William Shirley	3.7
	John Trumbull born	5.9
1757	John Vassall's grandfather died; John Vassall graduated from Harvard	1.1

1757 cont'd	GW's nephew George Lewis born	7.6
	Eleanor (Calvert) Custis born?	7.4
1759	John Vassall reached legal age, expanded the Cambridge property he inherited, and presumably had his new house built	1.1
	GW and wealthy young widow Martha (Dandridge) Custis married	3.1, 7.4
1761	John Vassall and Elizabeth Oliver married	1.2
1762	John and Elizabeth Vassall's son John born	1.8
	Brig. John Burgoyne and Capt. Charles Lee carried out daring raid in Spain	4.5
1763	Maj. Charles Lee retired on half-pay from British army	4.5
1764	John and Elizabeth Vassall's son Spencer Thomas born	1.8
1765	Stamp Act	
1766	John and Elizabeth Vassall's son Thomas Oliver born	1.8
1767	John and Elizabeth Vassall's daughter Elizabeth born	1.8
	Parliament enacted Townshend duties, prompting American boycotts	
1768	John and Elizabeth Vassall's daughter Elizabeth died, buried in Christ Church	1.8
1769	John and Elizabeth Vassall's son Robert Oliver born	1.8
	Henry Vassall died	2.1
	Darby Vassall likely born to Tony and Cuba Vassall	2.2
	Horatio Gates retired in frustration from the British army	4.12
1770	Boston Massacre on 5 March	
1771	John and Elizabeth Vassall's daughter Elizabeth born	1.8
1772	John Vassall bought house in Boston	1.2
1773	John and Elizabeth Vassall's son Leonard born	1.8
	Horatio and Elizabeth Gates settled in western Virginia	4.12
	Charles Lee arrived in Philadelphia	4.5
	Tea Act and tea boycott in America led to Boston Tea Party	
1774		
May	Gen. Thomas Gage arrived in Boston as new royal governor, bringing troops to enforce the new Massachusetts Government Act and Boston Port Bill	
summer	Virginia legislature deadlocked with royal governor Dunmore	3.2
August	Israel Putnam and Charles Lee visited Boston	4.5, 4.6
1 September	Gen. Gage had royal troops empty the Middlesex County powderhouse and take militia cannon; local crowds protested at Brattle and Sewall houses along the Watertown road	1.4
2 September	"Powder Alarm" brought huge protest crowds on Cambridge common demanding resignations from royal appointees Danforth, Lee, and Oliver	1.4

2 September 1774	Gov. Gage told London that John Vassall had agreed to serve on Council	1.5
5 September	First Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia; delegates included GW, Thomas Mifflin, and John Sullivan	3.2
7 September	John Vassall's nephew Henry reported being shot at in Lincoln	1.5
early September	John Vassall and family moved into Boston	1.5
7 October	Massachusetts Provincial Congress convened in defiance of royal law	
October	Nathanael Greene and friends in Rhode Island formed Kentish Guards	4.11
26 October	First Continental Congress adjourned	
14 December	New Hampshire militia stormed Fort William & Mary at Portsmouth	4.10
15 December	John Sullivan led a second raid on Fort William & Mary	4.10
30 December	Charles Lee visited GW at Mount Vernon	3.2
 1775		
22 February	Dr. Benjamin Church supplied information about Massachusetts Committee of Safety to Gen. Gage	14.6
16 April	Charles Lee visited GW at Mount Vernon	3.2
18 April	British troops, Patriot riders traveled west through Cambridge toward Massachusetts Provincial Congress arms stored in Concord	2.3
19 April	Battle of Lexington and Concord; Gen. William Heath and Dr. Joseph Warren led later parts of the battle	2.3, 4.8
20 April	Gen. Artemas Ward took command of the Massachusetts forces at Jonathan Hastings's house in Cambridge	2.3, 4.4
21 April	Massachusetts Provincial Congress made Col. Richard Gridley head of its artillery regiment	10.1
	Gov. Dunmore seized gunpowder in Williamsburg, Virginia, prompting a militia muster	2.3
22 April	Gen. John Thomas was in command of troops massed in Roxbury	4.7
23 April	Massachusetts Provincial Congress voted to replace its militia troops with an army enlisted through the end of 1775	2.3, 8.1
late April	Israel Putnam, Benedict Arnold, and Connecticut troops arrived in Cambridge	4.6
26 April	News of Lexington and Concord reached Mount Vernon	2.3
2 May	Horatio Gates visited GW at Mount Vernon	2.3, 4.12
3 May	Massachusetts Provincial Congress voted to secure the furniture in abandoned houses in Cambridge	2.4
4 May	GW and Richard Henry Lee set off for Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia	2.3
8 May	Rhode Island offered rank of general to Nathanael Greene	4.11

10 May 1775	Second Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia	3.3
mid-May	Massachusetts generals discussed whether to take the Dorchester peninsula and rejected the idea as impractical	4.3
15 May	Three companies of troops were stationed in the John Vassall house	2.5
	GW started to chair the Continental Congress's committees on military matters	3.3
19 May	Massachusetts Committee of Safety voted to clear John Vassall house for its own use	2.5
23 May	Gen. Greene reported to Gen. Ward in Cambridge	4.11
27 May	Skirmish over Noddle's Island, later called "Battle of Chelsea Creek"	4.6
	Joseph Smith appointed keeper of John Vassall's farm	2.7
14 June	Congress voted to pay for rifle companies from the Middle Colonies in an "American continental army"	3.3
15 June	Congress voted to adopt the New England army	3.3
	Congress voted to appoint GW commander-in-chief	3.3
	Gen. Ward and Gen. Thomas disagreed about taking the Dorchester peninsula	4.3, 18.1
16 June	GW accepted his appointment from the Congress	3.3
17 June	Battle of Bunker Hill; Dr. Joseph Warren killed	2.4
18 June	GW wrote first farewell letter to Martha confirming that he would be away until the winter	7.1
19 June	Congress gave GW his formal commission as general	3.3
21 June	Congress voted to provide a secretary and two aides for the commander-in-chief	5.8
22 June	Charles Lee gave up his British army pension and accepted an American commission as major general	4.5
	GW bought a carriage and other supplies	3.4
	Col. John Glover's regiment marched from Marblehead to Cambridge	2.6
23 June	GW, Gen. Philip Schuyler, Gen. Charles Lee, Joseph Reed, Thomas Mifflin, and other men departed Philadelphia	3.6
24 June	Seth Ingersoll Browne in charge of the John Vassall stables	2.8
24 June	Massachusetts Provincial Congress started planning to receive GW	3.7
25 June	GW and party reached New York	3.6
27 June	GW met with Schuyler and Wooster about Northern Department	3.6
	Horatio Gates and John Sullivan left Philadelphia for Cambridge	4.9, 4.10, 4.12
	Massachusetts Provincial Congress appointed William Henshaw adjutant general	5.2

28 June 1775	Gen. Ward assigned one room of the John Vassall house for sick soldiers from Gardner's regiment	2.5
30 June	Gen. Ward learned about the appointments of generals under GW and saw conflict ahead	4.2
	Massachusetts representatives Benjamin Church and Moses Gill welcome GW in Springfield	3.7
2 July	Provincial Congress received GW at Watertown	3.7
	GW and Lee arrived in Cambridge about 2:00 P.M.	3.7
	GW and Lee began to inspect the siege lines	3.7, 3.8
	Glover's regiment received muskets; was probably stationed in John Vassall house	2.6
3 July	Recovering from a wound at home, Col. Richard Gridley threatened to resign command of the artillery regiment	10.3
4 July	Joseph Reed appointed GW's secretary and Thomas Mifflin appointed his first aide de camp	5.8, 5.9
	GW ordered troops not to fish near the smallpox hospital	15.5
	Gen. Nathanael Greene sent a detachment of Rhode Island troops to welcome GW	3.8
	Massachusetts legislators James Warren and Joseph Hawley suggested how to solve the problem of generals' relative rank	4.2
	GW and Lee probably inspected positions in Chelsea	3.8
5 July	Committee of Safety authorized cutting hay from John Vassall lands	2.7
	After dining at Cambridge, GW and Lee inspected lines in Roxbury	3.8
	GW and Lee met volunteer military engineer Henry Knox	10.8
	Gen. John Spencer convinced Connecticut officers to petition their legislature on his behalf	4.3
5 and 7 July	GW staff bought household goods from Salem merchants Nathaniel Sparhawk and William Vans	6.1
6 July	Provincial Congress asked GW what he wanted in quarters	3.9
	GW met William Tudor, John Adams protégé seeking a staff job	5.7
7 July	GW affirmed dismissal of artillery captain John Callender for cowardice at Bunker Hill	10.4
	Seth Ingersoll Browne resigned from caring for artillery's horses	2.8
8 July	Committee of Safety decided to prepare John Vassall house for Gen. GW	3.9
	Henry Knox visited GW in Cambridge	10.8
	Committee of Safety hired Timothy Austin as headquarters steward	6.3
	Troops under Maj. Benjamin Tupper attacked British advance guard on the Boston Neck	11.2
early July	Abigail Adams met GW, Lee, and their aides	3.8

9 July 1775	Gen. John Sullivan and Gen. Horatio Gates arrived in Cambridge	4.10, 4.12, 6.6
	GW convened his first council of war, concerned mainly with defense	11.3
10 July	GW's first, long report back to the Continental Congress detailing the problems he has found in Massachusetts	4.3, 8.6, 9.6, 10.3
	GW's wrote to Massachusetts legislature about its army	8.2
	Gates issued orders for officers recruiting new men, excluding blacks	5.2, 9.6
11 July	Troops under Col. John Greaton made an amphibious attack on Long Island in Boston harbor	12.1
	Liberty Pole raised on Winter Hill	12.12
12 July	Gates distributed printed muster forms for officers to fill out	5.2
12 July?	GW and Timothy Austin agreed on his wages as steward	6.3
14 July	GW ordered generals to wear colored sashes to signal their ranks	4.14
	For the second time, GW ordered regiments to look after their latrines	15.4
15 July	GW gave £100 to a man going into Boston to establish a "secret correspondence," most likely the Rev. John Carnes	13.2,
	Mifflin paid bill for cleaning John Vassall house; GW probably moved in that day. Household staff probably included Timothy, Lydia, and Mary Austin. Military staff included Gates, Reed, and Mifflin	6.4, 2.6
	David Sanger ordered to fill the generals' barn with hay	2.7
late July	Greenleaf family loaned furniture for headquarters; William and Daniel Greenleaf visited for dinner with GW and aides	6.5
16 July	GW's general orders criticized unnecessary cutting of trees	15.1
18 July	Congress voted to make Gen. Thomas the senior brigadier	4.2
	The first riflemen arrived at Cambridge from Pennsylvania	8.7
	Putnam's Connecticut troops raised the "Appeal to Heaven" flag at Prospect Hill	12.12
19 July	Gen. Spencer quietly returned to camp	4.2
	Congress named Joseph Trumbull commissary general	5.4
	Austin hired Edward Hunt as a cook at headquarters	6.9
20 July	Continental Congress fast day; surgeon's mate James Thacher spotted GW on horseback	7.9
	GW asked Congress to take over the hospital system	15.7
21 July	Troops under Maj. Joseph Vose made an amphibious attack on the Nantasket lighthouse	12.1
	Escaping from Boston, Dr. Amos Windship brought British casualty figures from Bunker Hill to headquarters	13.1
22 July	GW divided the army into brigades under Ward, Lee, and Putnam	4.13

22 July 1775	Massachusetts House agreed to buy more beds for headquarters	6.5
	Massachusetts hired carpenter Joshua Davis to oversee building of boats and barracks	12.1, 15.1
23 July	GW and Lee wrote letters asking Gen. Thomas to stay on	4.2
	GW ordered officers to wear colored cockades on their hats to distinguish ranks	8.5
24 July	GW paid a French cook	6.9
25 July	Anthony Walton White visited headquarters seeking a position	5.9
	Dispatch rider Giles Alexander billed GW for dry goods	6.12
26 July	Delegation from the New Hampshire Committee of Safety visited GW to discuss pay and supplies	17.1
	GW ordered Thomas Oliver house be used as a hospital	15.8
27 July	Stephen Moylan had arrived in Cambridge	5.5
	Having impressed GW with his sketches of the British works, John Trumbull appointed aide de camp and assigned to map out all the enemy fortifications	5.9, 13.7
	Pvt. Thomas Machin and two other deserters brought to headquarters, some drunk	13.7
late July	Thomas Machin and John Trumbull assigned to map out British fortifications together	13.7
28 July	Joseph Reed ordered Lt. Col. Loammi Baldwin in Chelsea to send a secret letter into Boston and gather intelligence on British ships	13.2, 13.3
29 July	Congress appointed William Tudor as judge advocate general	5.7
	Massachusetts legislators Benjamin Church, Benjamin Woodbridge, Dummer Sewall, James Otis, and William Sever came to headquarters to seek Continental troops to defend the colony's coasts	17.2
30 July	Congress appointed James Warren paymaster general	5.6
30-31 July	Maj. Benjamin Tupper led a second raid on the Nantasket lighthouse; sniping and raids by the riflemen	12.1, 8.7
late July	Mathias Ogden and Aaron Burr came to headquarters seeking positions	5.9
1 August	GW ordered companies to appoint camp color men to keep camp clean	15.4
	Col. Louis of the Caughnawaga Mohawks and Jacob Bayley of New Hampshire came to Cambridge and met with GW and the Massachusetts legislature	16.7
2 August	Massachusetts legislators Benjamin Greenleaf, John Winthrop, and Joseph Palmer met with GW about his mandate from Congress and coastal defense	17.2
3 August	GW learned in a council of war that the army had much less gunpowder than thought; council resolved to raid Halifax	11.4
4 August	GW ordered riflemen and other soldiers to stop firing so often	8.7

4 August 1775	Lt. Col. Baldwin warned headquarters about a planned British raid on Chelsea; GW dismissed intelligence	13.3
	Lt. Col. Baldwin came to headquarters in the evening to report the wife of the British barrackmaster had left Boston; Gates took the news to the Massachusetts legislature	13.3
5 August	James Warren asked for GW's help in getting Benjamin Hichborn released from British custody; legislators John Pitts and Jonathan Brown came to headquarters to consult on prisoner exchange	13.8
6 August	British raided Chelsea	13.3
7 August	Jedediah Preble visited headquarters	6.6
	Col. John Glover leased the schooner <i>Hannah</i> for the army	12.4
8 August	Henry Knox dined at headquarters	6.8, 10.8
	Col. John Glover reported to GW as officer of the day	12.4
9 August	GW appointed John Goddard wagonmaster general	18.3
early August	Maj. Robert Magaw of Pennsylvania shared Gates's bedroom	5.3
early August	GW met with Benedict Arnold	16.2
11 August	Stephen Moylan appointed mustermaster general	5.5
	GW sent letter to Gen. Thomas Gage criticizing the British treatment of prisoners captured at Bunker Hill	13.9
13 August	Gen. Gage's reply on treatment of prisoners	13.9
	Two deserters from the Royal Navy ship <i>Lively</i> brought to headquarters	13.3
14 August	Thomas Mifflin became quartermaster general	5.3
	Reuben Colborn of Maine, Swashan and four other St. Francis Indians, and Paul Higgins and a company of Norridgewocks and Pegwackets arrived at Cambridge	16.4
15 August	Edmund Randolph and George Baylor appointed aides de camp; John Trumbull became an aide to Gen. Spencer	5.9
16 August	One of the Tewksbury brothers of Point Shirley came to headquarters with a secret letter from John Carnes and a request about sheep	13.6
17 August	Massachusetts delegates to Congress John Hancock, Thomas Cushing, Samuel Adams, Robert Treat Paine, and John Adams delivered \$172,520 in Continental currency to paymaster general Warren and visited headquarters	5.6, 17.5
	<i>Boston News-Letter</i> published intercepted letters from John Adams and a salaciously edited letter to GW from Benjamin Harrison	7.3, 13.8, 17.11
20 August	Connecticut delegate Silas Deane at headquarters	16.2, 17.5
	GW wrote to Gen. Philip Schuyler about plan for Arnold's expedition to Quebec, sending it east by Arnold's aide Eleazer Oswald	16.5
21 August	GW gave paymaster Warren \$1,000	5.6

21 August 1775	Work started in Beverly to equip the schooner <i>Hannah</i> for battle	12.4
22 August	GW ordered soldiers not to swim naked at the bridge in Cambridge	8.4
23 August?	GW commissioned Capt. Nicholson Broughton to command the <i>Hannah</i>	12.4
24 August	Volunteers from Glover's regiment arrived in Marblehead as crew for the <i>Hannah</i>	12.4
25 August	GW paid James Campbell for necessaries at headquarters	6.6
26 August	Gen. Sullivan led a move onto Plowed Hill	4.10, 11.2
28 August	Austin paid Mary Kettell for washing linen at headquarters	6.9
	GW banned new cider to curtail the dysentery epidemic	15.6
29 August	GW paid Jehoiakim Youkin for necessaries at headquarters	6.6
	GW asked the Massachusetts legislature to fix firewood prices	15.3
early September	Isaac Peirce was working as assistant to Gen. Gates	5.3
1 September	GW paid for recovering and repairing his stolen pistols	18.8
	GW's general orders remonstrated against body-snatching	15.11
2 September	Eleazer Oswald returned to Cambridge with Gen. Schuyler's endorsement of the Arnold expedition	16.5
	GW asked Nathaniel Tracy of Newburyport to prepare ships for the Arnold expedition	16.5, 13.1
5 September	The <i>Hannah</i> sailed out of Beverly for the first time	12.5
	GW called for volunteers for Arnold's expedition against Quebec	16.5
	GW and staff prepared a public address to the Canadians	16.6
6 September	GW issued standing invitation to field officer of the day, adjutant of the day, and officer of his guard to dine at headquarters	6.8
7 September	The <i>Hannah</i> recaptured the New Hampshire ship <i>Unity</i>	12.5
	GW ordered hearings on the new hospital system, which uniformly decided in favor of Surgeon-General Church over regimental surgeons	15.8
8 September	GW sent his generals his first proposal for an attack on Boston	11.5
	GW criticized Connecticut's deployment of Continental troops on its coast, prompting a testy reply from Gov. Jonathan Trumbull	17.4
9 September	Crew of the <i>Unity</i> arrived at Cambridge headquarters, alerting GW that it was owned by a Continental Congress delegate	12.5
9-10 September	Pennsylvania riflemen mutinied	8.8
10 September	Crew of <i>Hannah</i> refused to sail in dispute over prize money; GW told Col. Glover to treat men as mutineers	12.5
11 September	GW ended special duty rules for riflemen	8.8
	Council of war voted not to attack Boston as GW proposed	11.5
13 September	33 riflemen fined or imprisoned for mutiny	8.8

13 September 1775	Most soldiers on Arnold's expedition marched north from Cambridge	16.5
19 September	Dr. Benjamin Church tried to resign as Surgeon-General	14.2
	Edward Hunt paid in full for cooking at headquarters	6.9
21 September	GW sent first notice of the Hannah to a member of Congress	12.5
	GW officially reported to Congress about the Arnold expedition for the first time	16.5
22 September	Disobedient crew of the Hannah sentenced for mutiny	12.5
24 September	Gen. Gates urged Dr. Church to remain as Surgeon-General	14.2
	GW dismissed Maj. Scarborough Gridley from the artillery regiment	10.4, 10.9
25 September	Lucy Knox dined at headquarters	6.8
26 September	Maj. Benjamin Tupper led a raid on Governor's Island	11.2
	Congress debated whether to expel black soldiers	9.7
28 September	Godfrey Wenwood of Newport showed GW a letter in cipher his former wife had asked him to send into Boston; GW ordered Mary Wenwood brought to headquarters	14.1
29 September	Mary Wenwood revealed that Surgeon-General Benjamin Church had given her the ciphered letter; GW ordered Dr. Church arrested and asked legislative leaders James Warren and Joseph Hawley to come to headquarters	14.2
30 September	Congress voted to send Thomas Lynch, Benjamin Franklin, and Benjamin Harrison as a committee to Cambridge	17.6
late September	Sarah Mifflin joined her husband in the William Brattle house	5.4
late September	Rev. Samuel Kirkland and Oneida chief Skenandoah visited Cambridge	16.6
October	Seventeen-year-old Elizabeth Chapman began work on the headquarters staff	6.10
2 October	Rev. Samuel West and Elisha Porter decoded Dr. Church's ciphered letter	14.2
	Samuel Shaw came to headquarters from Boston, bringing London newspapers and seeking a commission	13.3
3 October	GW bought a horse from Anthony Walton White, but still declined to give him a job	5.9
	Emergency council of war about Dr. Church's secret correspondence	14.3
	Rhode Island delegates to Congress proposed forming a Continental Navy	12.6
early October	Gen. Putnam brought Capt. John Manley to headquarters, and GW commissioned him to command a schooner out of Beverly	12.7
early October	GW appointed Ephraim Bowen as naval agent in Plymouth	12.6
4 October	GW sent Moylan to Marblehead to work with Glover on outfitting schooners	5.5
5 October	GW convened generals to discuss what to advise the Congress about the new army	9.7, 17.7

5 October 1775	Lund Washington wrote to GW about Martha's determination to stay at Mount Vernon despite Governor Dunmore's moves	7.2
	GW reported Church arrest to Congress, for the first time reported having launched three schooners	14.5, 12.6
6 October	GW asked the Massachusetts legislature to authorize confiscation of houses for troops	15.1
about 6 October	GW received letter from William Cowley warning of John Connolly's work for Gov. Dunmore of Virginia	14.7
8 October	GW commissioned John Selman and Sion Martindale as schooner captains	12.6
by 9 October	GW invited Martha Washington to join him in Cambridge	7.2
9 October	Glover and Stephen Moylan rented a second schooner	12.5
10 October	Massachusetts Council chose members James Otis, William Sever, Walter Spooner, and (on 17 October) James Bowdoin to attend conference with committee from the Congress	17.7
	Skirmish with the <i>Nautilus</i> crippled the <i>Hannah</i>	12.5
	GW paid William Ryan for nicking a pair of horses	6.11
11 October	Reed ordered captains Broughton and Selman to hunt British ordnance brigs headed to Quebec	12.6
12 October	Joseph Frye left Ward's headquarters for his home in Maine	4.13
	Newton magistrate Abraham Fuller deposed William Cowley about what he had heard from Crown agent John Connolly; GW sent warning to Congress	14.7
	GW told Congress about two candidates for the post of Surgeon-General: Lt. Col. Edward Hand and Dr. Isaac Foster	15.9
13 October	Congress authorized armed ships	12.9
14 October	Massachusetts House asked for an inquiry about Dr. Church	14.5
15 October	Congress delegates Lynch, Franklin, and Harrison arrived in Cambridge for their conference with GW and regional authorities	17.7
	GW issued orders for the army to collect its own firewood	15.3
mid-October	Deputy Governor Nicholas Cooke of Rhode Island, Deputy Governor Matthew Griswold of Connecticut, and Connecticut legislator Nathaniel Wales arrived in Cambridge for the conference	17.7
16 October	Putnam's forces launched two floating batteries toward Boston; the gun on one exploded, killing and wounding several	10.2
17 October	Dinner at headquarters with the Congress delegates, James Bowdoin of the Massachusetts Council, Rev. Samuel Cooper, and others	17.7
	Congress appointed Dr. John Morgan the new Surgeon-General	15.9
18 October	GW convened the generals for a quick discussion of whether to attack Boston; all voted against it	11.5, 17.8
	Conference with civil authorities (and Gen. Sullivan representing New Hampshire) began at headquarters	17.8-10, 8.5, 9.7, 10.9

18 October 1775	Austin paid cooks for cooking two turtles	6.13
19 October	Matthew Thornton of the New Hampshire Provincial Congress arrived for the conference	17.8
	Massachusetts legislature hosted dinner for conference attendees and generals at Coolidge's tavern in Watertown	17.8
	Benjamin Hichborn escaped from a Royal Navy ship in Boston harbor; GW soon met with him at headquarters	13.8
21 October	Gen. Heath warned GW about an inquisitive minister named Page, suspected of being a spy	14.8
	Conference agreed to bring artillery from Lake Champlain to Boston	10.10
22 October	GW began push for men to enlist in new army in 1776	8.11
	The <i>Hancock</i> and <i>Franklin</i> sailed from Beverly to hunt British ordnance brigs	12.6
23 October	New England authorities left the conference at headquarters while GW continued meeting with the delegates from Congress	17.8
	Gen. Artemas Ward complained about the delegates and generals in Cambridge ignoring him in Roxbury	17.9
	Joseph Reed suggested a prisoner exchange for imprisoned Boston schoolmaster James Lovell	13.9
	Congress committee agreed to recommend commissioning Henry Knox and Rufus Putnam as assistant engineers	10.9
24 October	Conference with Congress delegates concluded	17.9
	GW sent Sullivan to Portsmouth to oversee defenses	4.10
	GW asked Congress if it was willing to let Boston be destroyed in order to drive the British away	11.5
26 October	Franklin finally left headquarters in company with learned friends	17.9
	Phillis Wheatley sent GW a laudatory poem	9.12
27 October	Dr. Church taken to Watertown for hearing by the Massachusetts legislature	14.5
28 October	Austin paid Mrs. Morrison to work in the headquarters kitchen	6.9
29 October	Capt. Manley sailed the <i>Lee</i> out of Beverly	12.7
late October	Reed appointed William Coit and Winborn Adams to command schooners	12.6
30 October	Commissary general Joseph Trumbull fell ill while home in Connecticut	5.4
	Joseph Reed left Cambridge and the post of GW's secretary	5.8
early November	Aide Edmund Randolph took leave because of a family crisis; Moylan recalled to headquarters as temporary secretary	5.9
early November	George III's proclamation for suppressing rebellion reached Cambridge and apparently convinced GW there was no hope for reconciliation	17.11
early November	Sent by Congress, John MacPherson came to headquarters with a secret proposal to destroy British ships	12.11

1 November 1775	Massachusetts authorized privateering and a prize court to handle captured ships	12.9
	Austin paid local blacksmith James Munro	6.12
	Massachusetts legislators Joseph Batchelder, Azor Orne, Eleazer Brooks, Daniel Hopkins, and Nathan Cushing came to headquarters to discuss wood and hay supplies	15.3
2 November	Joseph Wadsworth met with GW as deputy for Joseph Trumbull	5.4
	Council of war to appoint top officers in the new army	11.5
5 November	GW criticized New England tradition of burning the pope in effigy	16.6
6 November	Robert Hanson Harrison appointed aide de camp	5.8
	Austin bought slippers for GW	6.13
7 November	John and Elizabeth Vassall's baby Leonard died in Boston	1.5
8 November	GW ordered suspected spies Lemuel Cox and James Smithwick to be sent to Massachusetts Council	14.8
	GW advised Congress to make Henry Knox colonel over artillery regiment	10.9
	Lt. Henry Champion brought news of captures by the <i>Harrison</i> out of Plymouth to headquarters	12.8
9 November	Troops fought back small British raid on Lechmere's Point	8.9
	GW expressed worry that refugees might bring smallpox from Boston	15.5
13 November	Thomas Lynch told GW that Congress adopted all the conference's recommendations	17.9
14 November	GW ordered inquiries into Trumbull's commissary department	5.4
16 November	GW gave Henry Knox orders for his mission in New York	10.10
mid-November	GW received conflicting reports about the Arnold expedition from Arnold and Col. Roger Enos, who was on his way back	16.10
17 November	Martha Washington and family on the road from Mount Vernon	7.7
18 November	Benjamin Hichborn sent plans for attacking British ships in Boston harbor to GW under an assumed name	13.8
	GW proposed to meet with Gen. Ward in Roxbury about defenses and a possible raid on Castle William	11.6
21 November	Martha Washington and family arrived in Philadelphia	7.7
23 November	Capt. Martindale left Plymouth harbor on the <i>Washington</i>	12.8
24 November	Controversy in Philadelphia over a ball for Martha Washington	7.7
	GW sent Aaron Willard and Moses Child as spies to Halifax	16.6
25 November	Martha Washington agreed with canceling the ball	7.7
	Capt. Coit on the <i>Harrison</i> raided the fleet in Boston harbor	12.8
26 November	George Baylor left Cambridge to meet Martha Washington	7.7
	Col. Baldwin reported that a Loyalist from Marblehead had gone into Boston with news of Continental soldiers' discontent	13.3

27 November 1775	Martha Washington, Jack and Eleanor Custis, George Lewis, and Elizabeth Gates left Philadelphia	7.7
	GW reported overseeing new fortification on Cobble Hill	15.2, 18.1
28 November	GW had Col. Roger Enos arrested for leaving the Arnold expedition	16.10
29 November	Crew of the <i>Washington</i> mutinied	12.8
29 November	Capt. Manley on the <i>Lee</i> captured the British ordnance ship <i>Nancy</i>	12.7
	American engineers laid out plan for battery on Lechmere's Point	18.1
late November	Dr. Benjamin Church moved to a jail in Connecticut	14.5
late November	Dr. John and Mary Morgan arrived in Cambridge	15.9
late 1775	John Vassall and family moved to Halifax	1.5
1 December	Some Connecticut soldiers tried to leave as their enlistments ended; GW, Lee, and Putnam kept them in camp under guard	8.12
	Capt. Manley on the <i>Lee</i> captured the <i>Concord</i>	12.7
2 December	Weapons from the <i>Nancy</i> started to arrive in Cambridge	12.7
3 December	William Palfrey reported to GW on the unloading of the <i>Nancy</i>	5.9, 5.3
	GW attended sermon in Cambridge by Rev. Abiel Leonard of Connecticut	7.9
	Capt. Martindale of the <i>Washington</i> sailed out of Plymouth harbor and was promptly captured	12.8
4 December	Baylor met Martha Washington and party in Norwalk	7.7
	Hours after announcing that a court-martial had cleared Col. Enos, GW received a letter from Arnold undercutting that verdict and reporting contact with Gen. Richard Montgomery's forces	16.1
5 December	Massachusetts officers petitioned legislature to reward Pvt. Salem Poor for his actions at Bunker Hill	9.10
	Headquarters commanded Capt. Peleg Wadsworth to survey Cape Cod harbor	10.5
6 December	Large committee of Massachusetts legislators met GW to discuss traditional pay schedules	8.13
7 December	St. John's Island officials Thomas Wright, John Budd, and Phillip Callback, captured by GW's schooners, arrived at headquarters	12.8
9 December	Capt. Manley on the <i>Lee</i> captured the <i>Jenny</i>	12.7
10 December	All Connecticut regiments but one had left camp	8.13
11 December	Martha Washington, Elizabeth Gates, Jack and Eleanor Custis, and George Lewis arrived at headquarters with their personal servants	7.7
	Headquarters offered commissions in the artillery regiment to Thomas Crafts and George Trott; both refused	10.9
	French merchants Pierre Penet and Emmanuel de Pliarne visited GW in Cambridge to establish contacts for arms sales	16.12

11 December 1775	GW became convinced that the British commanders were deliberately trying to spread smallpox	15.5
	Congress formally established a Continental Navy	12.9
12 December	GW announced Henry Knox's commission as colonel of the artillery and Richard Gridley's new post as chief engineer	10.9
13 December	GW sent troops to Marblehead to protect port	8.9
14 December	Famed ranger Robert Rogers wrote to GW from a tavern in Medford, around the same time GW received a warning about Rogers from Rev. Eleazer Wheelock of New Hampshire	14.9
	Rhode Island Quakers Moses Brown, Thomas Steere, Thomas Lapham, Benjamin Arnold, and David Buffum came to headquarters asking to distribute relief to the poor and suffering on both sides of the war	15.5
16 December	Mrs. Morrison paid in full for work at headquarters	6.9
16?? December	Capt. Manley on the <i>Lee</i> captured the <i>Betsey</i> , sent by Gov. Dunmore from Virginia	12.7
17 December	Gen. Sullivan met with Robert Rogers and recommended that GW not meet with him or offer any pass	14.9
17-20 December	Troops secured Lechmere's Point and began to build a battery there	18.1
18 December	GW passed James Lovell's pleas for a prisoner exchange to Congress	13.9
	Prisoners from the <i>Betsey</i> arrived at headquarters, including Midshipman Atkinson, Loyalist Moses Kirkland, Virginia Patriots William Robinson and Thomas Matthews, and fifteen-year-old John Skey Eustace; GW dispatched intelligence to Philadelphia with Capt. James Chambers	14.7
20 December	Gen. Lee sent to Rhode Island to strengthen its defenses	4.5
25 December	William Robinson told GW how John Connolly was hiding his orders from Gov. Dunmore	14.7
	Engineer Jeduthan Baldwin visited GW at headquarters in the evening	7.10, 10.7
26 December	Jeduthan Baldwin dined at headquarters with the Washingtons	6.8, 10.7
30 December	GW unilaterally issued new policy letting black soldiers reenlist	9.8
31 December	William Palfrey presided over service at Christ Church, Cambridge, for Martha Washington	5.9, 7.10, 17.11
late December	GW and Dr. John Morgan discussed the hospital budget for the new year, arriving at vastly different numbers	15.9
late December	Captain Nicholson Broughton and John Selman met GW on the steps of headquarters, refused to reenlist as army officers, and were dismissed	12.8
late December	New England governments started to send militia regiments recruited on short-term basis to fill out the army	11.6

1776

1 January	Start of new enlistments in reorganized Continental Army; large Union flag raised on Prospect Hill	12.13
	Crown officials sent copies of George III's speech out to the American army	12.13, 17.11
early January	GW commissioned Charles Dyer, Daniel Waters, Samuel Tucker, and William Burke as schooner captains	12.9
5 January	With new troops and militia regiments in camp, GW repeated orders about tending to latrines	15.4
6 January	Washingtons' wedding anniversary	7.11
7 January	GW invited John Adams to "take pot-luck" at headquarters	6.8
8 January	Gen. Putnam led raid on Bunker's Hill timed to disrupt <i>Blockade of Boston</i> farce in Boston	11.2
	GW ordered Lee to New York to strengthen its defenses	4.5
16 January	GW proposed an attack on Boston at an unspecified time, and the generals agreed	11.6
17 January	GW received word of the failed assault on Quebec	16.10
	Austin bought a bell for the headquarters kitchen	6.13
18 January	Col. Roger Enos resigned from the army	16.10
	Thomas Machin commissioned as second lieutenant in Continental artillery	13.7
21 January	A Philadelphian named Irwin brought a copy of <i>Common Sense</i> to headquarters	17.12
	Col. Louis and twelve other Caughnawaga Indians came to Cambridge to meet with GW after helping the American invasion of Canada	16.7, 16.8, 16.9
24 January	The Washingtons, Gateses, and John Adams dined at Mifflin's house with Col. Louis and other Caughnawaga Indians	6.8, 16.7, 16.8
	Henry Knox came to headquarters with news that he had brought the heavy artillery as far as Framingham	10.10
30 January	GW met formally with Native leaders from the Caughnawaga, St. John's (Maliseet), and Passamquoddy nations	16.9
	John Skey Eustace confirmed for GW how British agent John Connolly had concealed his papers	14.7
2 February	Washingtons invited the Knoxes to dine at headquarters	6.8
5 February	Aaron Willard and Moses Child returned from Nova Scotia without having entered Halifax to gather intelligence	16.6
10 February	GW asked for William Palfrey to work at headquarters	5.9
	GW sent Phillis Wheatley's poem to Joseph Reed in Philadelphia	9.12
11 February	GW viewed the Dorchester Neck with generals Ward, Putnam, Thomas, and Spencer and engineers Putnam, Gridley, and Knox	18.2
	Lt. Col. Rufus Putnam wrote to GW about costs of building a covered way onto the Dorchester peninsula	18.2

12 February 1776	GW, Putnam, Gridley, Knox, and others went onto the Dorchester peninsula and raced off for fear of an artillery attack or raid	18.2
13 February	GW viewed the ice at Lechmere's Point	18.2
	Brief raid on mill at Charlestown	11.2
14 February	In early morning the British burned houses on the Dorchester peninsula	18.2
15 February	Joseph Frye returned to Cambridge as a brigadier general	4.13
mid-February	Robert Hooper, North Carolina delegate to Congress, visited headquarters	18.3
16 February	GW convened council of war to propose attack on Boston across ice; the generals instead voted to fortify Dorchester heights	11.7
16 February?	Lt. Col. Rufus Putnam found descriptions of chandeliers in a book on fortifications belonging to Gen. Heath	18.2
18 February	At GW's request, Putnam, Sullivan, Greene, and Gates began to prepare a detailed plan for attacking Boston	18.3
19 February	GW asked Sullivan not to sleep in the Isaac Royall house	4.10
20 February	GW ordered colonels to choose regimental colors for the coming campaign	12.14
22 February	Margaret Thomas paid for making shirts for William Lee	6.9, 9.11
25 February	GW approved the move onto Dorchester heights	18.3
26 February	GW and advisors in Cambridge scheduled the move for 4 March	5.3, 18.3
	GW told Congress of the plan to take Dorchester Heights	18.3
28 February	GW sent letter to Phillis Wheatley	9.12
late February	Short-term militia call-up to assist the move onto Dorchester peninsula and shore up the lines	
1 March	Margaret Thomas paid for making shirts for stable worker Peter	6.10
2 March	On Thomas Mifflin's suggestion, GW decided to move onto the Dorchester peninsula on the night of 4 March	18.4
	Artillery barrage began in the evening; troops in Cambridge prepared for amphibious assault on Boston if British army attacks Dorchester	18.5
4 March	American troops reached the Dorchester peninsula around 8:00 PM; chandeliers erected on heights by 10:00 PM; soldiers started to dig	18.5
5 March	Fresh troops came onto the Dorchester peninsula at 4:00 AM, along with GW	18.5
	In the afternoon and evening a violent storm stalled the British counterattack	18.6
	Elizabeth Hunt paid to do washing at headquarters	6.9
6 March	GW, Putnam, and other generals again visited Dorchester Heights	18.5

6 March 1776	Stephen Moylan and William Palfrey named aides de camp	5.5, 5.9
8 March	British pulled forces back into Boston, started preparing to leave	18.6
	GW again visited the Dorchester peninsula, losing a pistol	18.8
	Americans trying to build a battery on Nook's Hill driven back	18.8
	Three Loyalists gave Col. Ebenezer Leonard a letter from Boston selectmen saying Howe would not destroy the town if he could leave without being attacked	18.7
	A captain named Irvine came to headquarters with more intelligence about the British departure	18.7
9 March	Col. Leonard told the Loyalists GW could take no notice of the selectmen's message; meanwhile, copies were being shared all over the American lines	18.7
10 March	GW ordered Roxbury artillery not to fire on Boston unless fired upon; cannon moved onto Noddle's Island	18.7
11 March	GW formed the Life Guard under Capt. Caleb Gibbs of Marblehead and Lt. George Lewis, GW's nephew	5.10
13 March	GW convened council of war at Ward's headquarters; decided to send troops to New York in case British were headed there and take Nook's Hill	18.9, 8.9
13-14 March	GW warned troops about the threat of smallpox in Boston	15.5
16 March	Continental troops moved onto Nook's Hill, where cannon could damage the town of Boston and ships in the harbor	18.9
17 March	British military evacuates the town of Boston; Americans entered Charlestown, the Common, and the Neck	18.10
	GW attended sermon by Rev. Abiel Leonard in Cambridge	7.9
18 March	GW entered Boston	18.10
	Gen. Joseph Frye submitted his resignation, effective 11 April	4.13
19 March	Dr. John Morgan offered GW a horse; the general declined	15.9
21 March	GW issued orders for preservation of peace in Boston	18.11
	Lt. Thomas Machin assigned to help fortify Boston	13.7
22 March	Gen. Ward submitted his resignation, soon rescinded	4.3
24 March	GW and Ward discussed how to disperse British fleet in outer harbor	18.11
27 March	Most of the evacuation fleet sailed north toward Halifax	18.11
	GW sent Gen. Sullivan and a brigade south to New York	18.11
28 March	GW attended ceremony with Boston officials at Town House, Thursday lecture at the Old Brick Meetinghouse, dinner at Bunch of Grapes tavern, tour of Fort Hill in Boston	7.9, 17.3, 18.11
29 March	Boston town meeting sent Thomas Crafts, Thomas Marshall, and Paul Revere to ask GW to leave four cannon for the town	10.11
30 March	GW gave money to riflemen Curtis Birmingham, Timothy Feeley, and William Burns to return home	8.7
March	John Vassall and family sailed for England	1.5

1 April 1776	Another brigade of troops marched south	18.11
	GW recorded paying out £232 on “secret services”	13.6
2 April	Mercy Warren finally met Martha Washington and her family, but Martha declined an invitation to dine together	7.4, 7.8
	Boston merchant John Andrews hosted Washingtons, Custises, Gates, and aides for dinner on short notice	18.11
	GW at headquarters busy writing dispatches	18.11
3 April	GW gave Dr. John Morgan orders for moving the medical wing to New York	15.9
	Harvard boards met in Watertown to confer an honorary degree on GW	17.13
4 April	GW reported that paymaster James Warren had resigned	5.6
	GW left his Cambridge headquarters	18.11
	Gen. Spencer led the last brigade of Continental troops toward New York	18.11
16 May	Robert Hanson Harrison appointed GW’s secretary	5.8
2 June	Gen. John Thomas died of smallpox during Canada campaign	4.7
2 July	Congress voted for independence	
	British military started to land on Staten Island	
4 July	Congress issued its Declaration of Independence	
late 1776	Tony Vassall worked on the Isaac Royall estate in Medford	2.1
1777	John and Elizabeth Vassall’s daughter Mary born in London	1.8
1778	Massachusetts had Vassall estates evaluated for confiscation and sale	2.1
	Spencer Thomas Vassall commissioned as an ensign in the British army	1.9
1781	Massachusetts legislature granted pension to Tony Vassall	2.1
1782	Lt. Spencer Thomas Vassall arrived in besieged Gibraltar to participate in the last major campaign of the American War	1.9

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