

REVOLUTIONARY LANCASTER

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Published by
Lancaster County Chapter
Pennsylvania Society of Sons of the Revolution
1998

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Lancaster was greatly involved in the Revolutionary War as a source of leadership, fighting men, military hospitals, prisons and especially arms and supplies. In many ways it was the Wild West of the colonies, the second city of Pennsylvania and the largest noncoastal city in America. The city and county supplied some of the best fighting men but because of their undisciplined nature caused some problems to their leaders. Although there were a few plainclothes sects who opposed war, there were many Scotch-Irish, Germans and Welsh who were ready to fight. Lancaster had several German gunsmiths who made the famous long rifled barrel "Pennsylvania Rifle" and craftsmen who made the Conestoga wagons that carried the pioneers west. Philadelphia on the other hand had many Tories and Quakers which made some patriots uneasy about meeting there.

Because of taxation without representation and the Boston Massacre of March 5, 1770, Lancaster's leading citizens met on June 10, 1770. They adopted a resolution boycotting all British goods and stating that those who broke the rule would be declared traitors. The Boston Tea Party of December 16, 1773 caused Parliament to place severe repressive measures on Boston.

The chief burgess of Lancaster, William A. Atlee, conferred with Edward Shippen, the city's leading senior citizen, and called a meeting for June 15, 1774. A Committee of Correspondence was formed to communicate with other patriotic groups. It consisted of attorneys George Ross, William Atlee, and Jasper Yeates; gunsmith and inventor William Henry; merchants James Webb, Ludwig Lauman and Matthias Slough, owner of the famous White Swan Tavern; silversmith Charles Hall and William Bausman, who became chief burgess 1774-1777. A second meeting was held July 9, 1774 to select delegates for a meeting in Philadelphia on July 15. Many radicals were clamoring for independence but the senior leaders, although calling for unity, were more conservative and hoped for a nonviolent solution. Seven Lancaster Resolves were taken to Philadelphia with 153 pounds of silver to help Boston. In Philadelphia 26 Resolves were prepared along with plans for a Continental Congress. Because of the large

number of Tories in Philadelphia Virginia suggested Lancaster for the first Continental Congress. Friends in Philadelphia assured the delegates that the city was safe, so they met September 5 in Carpenters Hall. They rejected conciliation and proclaimed a Declaration of Colonial Rights and Grievances and formed the Continental Association to enforce a British boycott. The Provincial Assembly of Pennsylvania approved the action of Congress and appointed George Ross to attend the next meeting of Congress on May 10, 1775.

April 1775 saw the British troops march on Lexington and Concord. A special meeting of the Lancaster committee was convened on May 1 at which time Lancaster declared war on Britain. Military companies sprang up. The first was "Sons of Liberty" from the Scotch-Irish community. Another was a rifle company commanded by James Ross, son of George Ross. On June 14 Congress directed that Pennsylvania supply six companies but soon there were nine. George Ross helped select Colonel William Thompson as commander of Pennsylvania's troops and he also convinced Dr. Edward Hand of Lancaster to form a company because of his experience in the French and Indian War. This proved to be a very wise act. The Pennsylvania troops marched to Boston where everyone was greatly impressed with the accuracy of Hand's riflemen but not with their discipline.

Congress now directed an attack on Canada by a two-pronged force. Benedict Arnold would lead a force through Maine with three companies of Lancaster riflemen under Captains Ross and Smith. The other unit would go up the Hudson under General Montgomery who took Montreal. The two units almost took Quebec, the key to Canada, but they failed, and many Lancaster riflemen ended up on prison ships in Boston.

George Ross was active in Lancaster on the Committee of Safety and helped form a military association of home guards called the Associators. Those who refused to join were harassed, fined and some sent to Virginia if they were suspected of spying. Gunsmiths were forced to make military arms and if they refused, they would be labeled traitors and have their tools confiscated. A radical element in

Lancaster who felt their leaders were not moving fast enough won an election late 1775. Although Ross and his friends lost seats in Congress, they retained control of the powerful Committee of Safety and formed a new battalion of Associators with George Ross appointed colonel. The new delegates from Lancaster to the Assembly were headed by the fiery Alexander Lowery of Maytown.

The prisoners from Montgomery's victory at Montreal arrived in Lancaster where the privates were placed in barracks at Duke and Walnut Street. Officers could rent rooms or houses if they had the money. One of the most famous prisoners was Captain John André, an accomplished talented officer who lived with Caleb Cope. André would later die on the scaffold as a spy and Cope had his house destroyed by radicals. Matthias Slough sold his famous White Swan Tavern to devote full time to his job as Purchasing Agent and Deputy Commissary General of the Continental Army. Adam Reigart, who owned the Grape Tavern that housed the Whig headquarters, became a lieutenant colonel in the local militia and later served in the Pennsylvania Assembly. Another enterprising area resident was Robert Fulton, inventor of the first commercially successful steam powered ship, who grew up in Lancaster County and was greatly influenced by gunsmith William Henry.

In December 1775 General Henry Knox went to Boston and captured the high ground at Dorchester Heights with help from Edward Hand's riflemen. A bombardment of Boston convinced Sir William Howe to leave Boston and proceed to New York. General Washington began to fortify Long Island and placed Hand in the center on the south shore with a musket regiment under Colonel Samuel Atlee, brother of William Atlee. Howe outflanked the Continentals, and many were captured including Atlee and Miles. Atlee was later released and served in the Continental Congress 1778-1782 and became mayor of Philadelphia in 1790. Washington escaped across the East River in New York in the fog at night while Hand provided a rear guard. Washington failed to hold New York when Fort Mifflin fell while Hand prevented a flanking movement of the British when he destroyed a bridge north of the city. The Continental Army retreated into New

Jersey after losing 2,800 prisoners. Lancaster lost 400 and only 50 survived the terrible prison ships. General Howe missed an opportunity to destroy the Continental Army and later had to face a Court of Inquiry in London.

In the summer of 1776 radicals tried to force the Assembly to vote for independence and a mob of 5,000 forced the Pennsylvania Assembly to disband in shambles. On June 14 a conference of 107 representatives of all counties (nine from Lancaster) met to form a new government with an election scheduled for July 8. The Continental Congress was arguing over independence. A vote on July 1 showed Pennsylvania to be the only state opposed to it. On July 4 in a second vote Pennsylvania went along with the other 12 as opponents Dickinson and Robert Morris were absent. A big celebration was held in Lancaster and the Associators under George Ross pledged 10 new battalions. A huge wooden coat of arms of the King was taken from the courthouse and burned as were royal commissions by Lancaster officials.

On July 18 a State Constitutional Convention was held in Philadelphia with Benjamin Franklin elected president and George Ross vice president. A new government was formed with a Declaration of Rights following that of Virginia proposed by George Mason. On August 2 delegates at the Continental Congress, including George Ross, signed the Declaration of Independence. Now they had to fight for it.

Rector Thomas Barton of the Church of England in Lancaster, like others, refused to break his ordination vows concerning fidelity to the King and was forced to flee for his life. He went to New York to arrange transport to England but died there. The church was boarded over for the duration of the war and opened later as St. James Episcopal Church. Many famous people are buried in its churchyard.

Patriotic fever was high in Lancaster. Merchant Hubley donated his merchandise to the cause and had his pewter melted for bullets. Hubleys served on the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention and Council of Safety while two were

commanders of regiments. Jasper Yeates was appointed Commissioner of Indian Affairs to arrange defense against Indian attacks.

The British now began a movement south from New York and when they reached Trenton the Continental Congress left Philadelphia for Baltimore and public stores, records and the state treasury were moved to Lancaster. The Continentals rallied and with fresh troops from the South accomplished an amazing victory over a large Hessian force by crossing the icy Delaware River on Christmas Eve. Edward Hand's troops led the attack and brought 920 Hessian prisoners to Lancaster with supplies and weapons. John Hubley did a survey of their talents and soon most of them were working in local iron furnaces, foundries, tailor shops and shoe factories where most of the citizens could speak their language. They dug the famous Hessian ditch, three-quarters of a mile long, to divert a river to a hammer mill at Elizabeth Furnace which normally would have to shut down in winter because of poor water power. Of the 29,807 Hessian troops loaned to the British 17,313 returned, 1,200 perished and some 5,000 stayed in Lancaster County.

General Cornwallis led a British expedition south to recapture Trenton. Edward Hand's sharpshooters delayed their march, and a major engagement took place at Stony Brook Bridge which was lost to the British. Fresh troops from New England arrived in time to push the British back and capture Princeton. The Continentals prepared for winter camp near Princeton and another severe winter created many problems with desertions of many volunteers. In Philadelphia Congress provided for compulsory enrollment of regular troops and appointed three new brigadier generals including Edward Hand. Also, that winter George Washington, Robert Morris and George Ross went to Ross's niece Betsy Ross to design a new flag. Using Washington's design, Betsy changed the stars to five points and Congress arranged them in a circle.

The Supreme Executive Council took government into its own hands that winter because the new constitution was not working. John Hubley was appointed a one-man government for Lancaster as well as Commissary of Supplies for the

Continental Army. He built a large powder magazine at Duke and James Streets and a storehouse at Prince and Chestnut. Serving in the Assembly then was George Ross, iron master Curtis Grubb, James Webb, and Matthias Slough.

Early in 1777 Howe pulled his troops out of North Jersey and put them on ships of the Royal Navy and sailed out of New York. He was apprehensive about sailing up the fortified Delaware Bay so sailed up the Chesapeake Bay and unloaded his force at Elk Point. Washington quickly moved south to Wilmington. Two battalions of Lancaster militia answered the call with Colonels Lowery, Greenawalt and Watson in charge. A messenger with this news burst into a Sunday service at Donegal Presbyterian Church where the minister declared that God was on our side. The men in the congregation went outside, circled the witness tree, and pledged their lives to liberty.

The Battle of Brandywine was a big defeat for Washington as he was outflanked. A second defeat occurred at Paoli when Wayne's troops were caught off guard and a final defeat occurred at Germantown. The British settled into Philadelphia where the tories welcomed them with parties while Washington's army had to settle for a miserable winter at Valley Forge.

Soon wagons loaded with wounded soldiers began arriving in Lancaster. There was room for some in Lancaster's makeshift hospitals, but most went to the county: to Reamstown, Lebanon and especially to the Ephrata Cloister and Moravian Center in Lititz. Many of the wounded men died of camp fever, typhus, and scarlet fever. Many were buried in mass graves with little ceremony and no records.

As the British approached Philadelphia, the Continental Congress, Pennsylvania Assembly and Supreme Executive Council fled on 700 wagons filled with families, official records, and the Liberty Bell. They headed north through Easton and Bethlehem and buried the Liberty Bell under a church floor in Allentown. Eventually the wagon train landed in Lancaster, a city already crowded with refugees and wounded soldiers, amid rumors that the British might head their way. The Congress managed to meet in the Lancaster Court House on September 27,

1777 and then moved on to the small town of York across the Susquehanna River where they wrote the Articles of Confederation. Robert Morris, the financial wizard of the War, found lodging in the elegant home of Baron Stiegel in Manheim. The tavern and ferry of John Wright at Columbia became very busy taking people across the Susquehanna River. On October 7 Washington declared Lancaster the supply center of his army and the Lancaster Court House became the temporary capital of Pennsylvania.

Things looked very bleak for the cause of liberty when, at last, some good news came that many called the turning point of the war. Gentleman Johnny Burgoyne was bringing a large force of British south from Canada, along with his mistress and wagons

of wine and champagne. He was expecting to tie up with Howe coming up from New York to cut New England off from the rest of the country but instead ran into Gates and Arnold who defeated him at Saratoga. At last Lancaster could celebrate as a band of British prisoners arrived from Saratoga.

In November of 1777 a weekly newspaper, The Pennsylvania Packet, was started in Lancaster with presses brought from Philadelphia, and in February of 1778 a German weekly, Das Pennsylvannische Zeitungs Blat, was begun.

Dr. William Shippen from Philadelphia was in charge of the military hospitals that were in deplorable condition. Medical supplies and drugs that normally came from Europe were non-existent. He was greatly criticized by two other very prominent physicians, Dr. Benjamin Rush who signed the Declaration, and Dr. John Morgan, founder of the first medical school. An investigation by Congress declared Shippen innocent. A Dr. William Brown of Lititz provided some help when he published the first pharmacopoeia in America listing drugs that could be prepared from plants in Pennsylvania.

By 1778 the quest for independence looked very glum. The British were enjoying the hospitality of Philadelphia and New York and devastating the surrounding countryside. The new constitution was not working, and no one trusted

the Continental currency. Christopher Marshall of Lancaster was keeping a diary of the war and noted that Lancaster's population had jumped from 4,000 before the war to 7,000, including prisoners. A dozen gunsmiths were working hard to supply the army's demands. Some help came in the form of a British commissary in Lancaster which supplied British prisoners with food and clothing. Some of their supplies entered the black market of Lancaster. There was growing concern that the prisoners could stage a revolt and seize the Continentals' supplies. Guards were increased but it was found that there was a steady trickle of escapes. It was discovered that a little old lady who was allowed into the prison with her wagon to sell fruit was helping escapees to get out while 15 tories ran an underground to New York. There was increased tory activity as some leaders like Furstner of Lancaster and Rankin of York became turncoats.

Edward Hand was ordered to Fort Pitt to keep an eye on hostile Indians and some British outposts, but a smallpox epidemic hindered his work. Furthermore, he found that frontiersmen had little interest in liberty. Even General Washington was coming under attack by his peers: Generals Gates, Mifflin, and Conway. Baron von Steuben was recruited by Benjamin Franklin to teach the ragtag troops some discipline at Valley Forge. He first came to Lancaster where the German community had a ball in his honor at the Black Horse Tavern. Tom Paine was now living in Lancaster where he wrote the fifth of his pamphlets on "The Crisis." He tried to encourage the Continentals by pointing out that the lazy fun-loving British in Philadelphia were sitting ducks.

Once again amid despair Lancaster had news to celebrate. Benjamin Franklin and his emissaries finally succeeded in convincing the French to recognize the independence of the United States. A 13-gun salute in Lancaster was followed by dancing and bonfires. There was some bad news, too, when Lancaster learned that President Wharton of the Supreme Executive Council died. A large funeral ceremony was held in Lancaster and he was buried in front of the altar at Trinity Lutheran Church.

The British now feared that France would move on their wealthy West Indies islands and decided to evacuate Philadelphia for New York. Washington took the opportunity to harass their rear guard and sent General Charles Lee to do the job. At Monmouth the British turned on Lee's troops and he ordered a retreat. The infuriated Washington rode into the retreating men and rallied them to fight but it was too late and the British escaped. Lee was relieved of his command and Washington gained some respect. Refugees began to move back to Philadelphia where they found the city in deplorable condition. The Supreme Council and State Assembly moved back but Lancaster would again be the capital of Pennsylvania from 1799 to 1812, at which time it moved to Harrisburg.

July 1778 saw a terrible Indian uprising in Wyoming and Cherry Valley where many women and children were killed. Generals John Sullivan and Edward Hand plus Hubley's 11th Pennsylvania Regiment of Lancaster militia drove the Indians and Tories out of 40 Indian villages as they escaped into Canada.

Financial problems still plagued the new states as few trusted the new currency. Christopher Marshall tried to instigate price controls with no success, but Lancaster still celebrated the third Fourth of July, now with toasts to King Louis and a speech by Marshall.

On July 14, 1779 George Ross died and was buried at St. James. His last appointment was as Judge of Court of the Admiralty. That court was very busy deciding who would get the prize money for privateering against British merchant ships. This contribution to the war effort was very lucrative and lured many good men from the fighting forces. The bad news was they were treated as pirates, not navy men, and most were hung when caught.

On July 15 Anthony Wayne led Pennsylvania troops on a daring night raid on Stony Point on the Hudson with muskets and bayonets which led to his nickname "Mad Anthony."

The British now turned their attention to the southern states as the new commander General Clinton ordered Cornwallis to take South Carolina where many

tories lived. Charleston was lost to the British and General Lincoln was captured but later released. This was the worst defeat of the war as 5,400 men were taken prisoner. Cornwallis with 8,000 troops continued north with success. Washington sent General Gates south to stop him, but he met defeat at Camden. Things were going badly in the north when troops in New Jersey had another severe winter of 1780-81. Many deserted and a Connecticut regiment staged a mutiny with bloodshed. Joseph Reed, president of the Supreme Council, went to New Jersey and helped put down the rebellion. Several Lancaster volunteers were released. Another mutiny occurred in York when troops would not accept Continental currency.

In September of 1780 the famous traitorous act by General Benedict Arnold occurred. He was planning to turn West Point, a Very strategic spot on the Hudson, over to the British. The plot was uncovered when Major André was captured in civilian clothes with the plans. Peggy Shippen, the belle of occupied Philadelphia, had just married Arnold. They both escaped to British New York and died in England. André was hanged as a spy when the British refused to exchange Arnold for him.

In the Spring of 1781 General Washington requested that General Hand be appointed Adjutant General and Congress approved. That summer Wayne and Greene began to make some progress in the South against Cornwallis who finally took refuge in Yorktown. He expected help from the Royal Navy, but the French fleet arrived just in time to block the Royal Navy. Washington, with French help, accomplished his first major victory of the war. General Wayne finally eliminated the remaining enemy in the South.

Also, in the summer of 1781 it was discovered that a plot was under way for captives to break out of Lancaster's military prison and seize 30 tons of gunpowder and guns. Congress sent its own personal guard units to Lancaster to deal with the situation. Lancaster again had cause for another great celebration with cannon and rifle volleys.

Eighty discharged soldiers met in Lancaster after Yorktown to demand their pay. Thirty armed troops marched to Philadelphia and were confronted by a New Jersey regiment. After a personal appeal by Pennsylvania President John Dickinson, the troops returned to Lancaster.

Thousands of loyalists left the United States for Canada, England, or the West Indies. It wasn't until 1783 that the peace accords were signed in Paris. On November 25, 1783 George Washington was finally able to march into New York where he had his famous farewell banquet for his officers at Fraunces Tavern.

General Hand returned to Lancaster and resumed his medical practice and some political activities. He had a grand ball at his home at Rock Ford to celebrate the victory. Rev. Muhlenberg, rector of Trinity Lutheran Church, refused to attend because he said no war should be celebrated.

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About the Author

Dr. Paul H. Ripple, whose Lancaster ancestors can be traced back to 1730, was born here in 1922. He attended McCaskey High School, Franklin and Marshall College and the School of Medicine of the University of Pennsylvania. Following an internship at the Lancaster General Hospital he served in the U.S. Air Force School of Aviation Medicine at Randolph Field, Texas where he attained the rank of Captain and became a Flight Surgeon. He then completed a residency in ophthalmology at Washington University Hospital in St. Louis, Missouri and became a diplomate of the American Board of Ophthalmology and a member of the American Academy of Ophthalmology. He served on the Staff of the Lancaster General Hospital, where he was Chief of his Department for twenty-five years. He also served on the staff of the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania as a clinical instructor.

Dr. Ripple is a member and past president of the Lancaster City and County Medical Society; a member and past president of the Sertoma Club of Lancaster; a member and first president of the Edward Hand Medical Heritage Foundation and a member and past president of the Historic Preservation Trust of Lancaster County. He served on the board of the Lancaster Blind Association, the Lancaster Community Gallery, and the James Buchanan Foundation.

Joining the Sons of the Revolution in 1972, Dr. Ripple was the Regent of the Lancaster Chapter between 1978 and 1980.

Dr. Ripple is married to the former Carolyn Wohlsen. They have two sons, a daughter and six grandchildren.