

Incidents at the Time of the American Revolution, connected with some Members of the Society of Friends.

As is well known, the British Army, under General Howe, landed at the head of the Elk River in north-eastern Maryland on the 28th of the Eighth Month, 1777, and marched forward into Pennsylvania. Washington's army, which had been at Wilmington, Delaware, near the southern boundary of Pennsylvania, moved to intercept it, and the hostile armies met near Birmingham Friends' Meeting House, and the Battle of Brandywine ensued, resulting in the defeat of Washington, who retreated to Pottsgrove, now Pottstown, on the north-east bank of the Schuylkill River, where the American Army was on the 20th of the Ninth Month, 1777.

The British moved northward, and on the same date were located on the south bank of the Schuylkill River, the right wing resting at Valley Forge, opposite Fatland Ford, and the left wing being near Moore Hall, and about in the position where Phoenixville now stands. Washington detached a small part of his army, and sent it to endeavor to cut off the supplies on the rear of the British. This detachment was encamped on the night of the 20th of the Ninth Month, near Paoli, where it was surprised by the British, and a battle ensued, popularly known as "the massacre of Paoli," though probably not more of a massacre than all battles are.

Edward Randolph, who was, or had been a Friend, was attached to this section of the army, whether as an officer or a private, I do not know. He was grievously wounded, and left on the field as dead. A British officer and soldier passed him, and the soldier raised his musket and was about to shoot the prostrate man, when the officer restrained him, saying that powder was too scarce to waste on dead rebels. The couple passed on, leaving the supposed dead man as they found him. But Edward

Randolph, though very seriously wounded, was not dead, and he was subsequently found and taken to a neighbouring farmhouse. There he was nursed, and recovered. He afterwards became a worthy member of Philadelphia North Meeting, and for some years occupied the position of an Elder; he lies buried in Friends' Western Burial Ground.

Washington himself appears to have made a personal recognisance of the position of the British Army, and passing down the north side of the Schuylkill, seems to have arrived in the afternoon of the 21st at the residence of my grandfather, James Vaux, which was at Fatland Ford, on the north side of the Schuylkill River, opposite Valley Forge, where the right wing of the British Army was located. The house was on the crest of the hill, the ground sloping off in front to the river and overlooking the Valley Forge district. Thus Washington was in a position to view a large part of the army of his antagonist.

Washington supped with my grandfather, remained over night, and took breakfast with him on the morning of the 22nd, when he departed. The afternoon of the same day Howe himself crossed the river and went to my grandfather's house, where he took supper, remained over night, and took breakfast there on the morning of the 23rd. On the previous evening, he probably issued from my grandfather's house the order for his army to cross the river, which it did during that night and the morning of the 23rd. It is quite probable that Howe slept in the same bed that Washington had occupied the previous night. He said to my grandfather that from what he could see with his spy-glass, he must have had some prominent officer of the rebel army with him the night before. My grandfather replied, "Yes," he had General Washington. "Oh," said Howe, "I wish I had only known that, and I would have tried to catch him." It will thus be seen how the whole future of the American cause was involved in this trifling incident, for the hope of success undoubtedly rested almost entirely upon Washington's life.

The whole of Howe's army was thus across the river by three o'clock on the afternoon of the 23rd, and as it embraced some fifteen to twenty thousand men, it must

have occupied a very large part of my grandfather's 300 acres, and also considerable areas on adjoining land.

The leading incidents above stated were often talked about in my family when I was a child, and my brother and sisters, who were much older than myself, had them direct from my grandfather, I being only ten years old when he died.

My grandfather was an Englishman, born in London, but some years before this had removed to America, and located on a large plantation in the place indicated. Like most Friends he endeavored to maintain a strict neutrality, but his sympathies were with the American cause, to which he ultimately took the affirmation of allegiance. For this he was dealt with by his Monthly Meeting, and was several years under dealing. He was, however, retained in membership, and was sent as a representative to the Quarterly Meeting soon after.

A few years later he represented Montgomery County in the Pennsylvania State Legislature.

Howe's army rapidly advanced and took possession of Philadelphia. The battle of Germantown occurred on the 4th of the Tenth Month, and Washington was repulsed and fell back, later crossing the Schuylkill River and going into winter quarters at Valley Forge in the Twelfth Month of the same year. The whole encampment was in full view from my grandfather's house, laid out almost as a map before him. The northern end of the celebrated Sullivan's bridge was on his plantation; and, as the American picket line on that side of the river must have been far beyond his house, it is evident that his intercourse with the officers and privates of the army must have been constant.

In the Fourth Month, 1778, Elizabeth Drinker and several other Friends visited Washington at Valley Forge for the purpose of interesting him in procuring the release of the Friends, of whom her husband was one, who were exiled in Virginia, for their supposed sympathy with the Royalist cause.¹ Beyond obtaining a pass to Lancaster she was unsuccessful in her efforts. The following extracts

¹ See *Exiles in Virginia; with Observations on the Conduct of the Society of Friends during the Revolutionary War.* 1777-1778. Phila., 1848.

from her diary show the interest which my grandfather took in her mission :—

April 6, 1778. We came to James Vaux's with J. V. himself, who came over to invite us. We crossed ye large Bridge over Schuylkill just by his house. We drank tea and lodged there. Rowland Evans and wife came to see us in ye evening. Israel Morris and ye lads went to lodge with them, as they live near.

April 7. Left James Vaux's after Breakfast, and changed one of our horses for C. Logans. We found ye roads exceedingly bad, some of us were frequently in and out of ye carriage.²

It is known from cotemporary manuscripts in my possession signed by Nicholas Waln and other Friends that my grandfather's plantation was devastated by the opposing armies, and that he suffered a loss of upwards of one thousand pounds in consequence.

One of my grandfather's sisters-in-law, an English lady, visited him at his plantation a few years later, after the war was over, and writes thus in her diary as to a walk she and others took whilst on this visit :—

First-day, 9 Mo. 10, 1786. Pretty soon after dinner we prepared for a walk to the River Schuylkill, about a mile through a beautiful and romantic woods, in which our innocent employ was to examine the different flowers, far exceeding ours in number at this season of the year. When we reached the side of the water our way was more rugged, with more bushes, which we were obliged to step high to avoid. Saw some remains of a bridge built over this river in the war, which was vainly thought could stand many a blast; however, one severe frost carried it quite away. [This was Sullivan's Bridge.] What a dismal situation brother and sister must have been in at that time, an army encamped on their plantation, pulling down every fence and pulling up every tree.

My great-grandfather, John Head, was an affluent merchant in Philadelphia during and before the Revolution, a leading citizen, and a Friend highly esteemed, having his membership at Market Street Meeting. He resided close to that Meeting House on Second Street, immediately opposite the place of worship belonging to the Episcopal sect, commonly known as "Christ Church."

In common with other wealthy merchants of those days when there were no Banks, John Head kept in his house a considerable percentage of his estate in gold and

² *Extracts from the Journal of Elizabeth Drinker, 1889, pp. 93, 94.*

silver coin. A part of the furniture of houses of that class of persons was an "Iron Chest" in which such treasure was kept. Such an article would be but little protection against thieves in the present day. The incident which follows appeared in a Philadelphia newspaper more than sixty years ago, and I have a good deal of hesitation in referring to it in this paper, as I do not know on what authority it is based, and I have never heard of any family tradition in relation to it. What seems to be a reference to the same incident, however, appears in at least one historical work, though no name is mentioned. Some of the statements which accompany the newspaper account are manifestly erroneous, and yet the parts which refer to John Head may be correct. I know that he had been kind to the congregation which worshipped across the street from his residence, and that they reciprocated his kindness by ringing the church chimes when his vessels were sighted in the Delaware. I quote from the article those parts which relate to him, leaving readers to form their own opinions as to the genuineness of the story.

During the period when the Continental Army lay near the City of Philadelphia, in 1776, the condition of American affairs became so hopeless that many despaired of success, and began to consider means for putting an end to the war. The Rev. J. Duche was at that time assistant rector of Christ Church and St. Peter's, the Rev. William White, afterwards Bishop, being rector. Gen. Washington attended the services of the Episcopal Church, and was an intimate friend and frequent guest of Mr. Duche. At the solicitation of some members of the Church, Mr. Duche addressed a letter to Gen. Washington advising an armistice or capitulation. The letter was without signature, but was traced to the author and subjected him to much public censure. [It seemed to be necessary to extricate Duche from his uncomfortable position, and he appears to have conferred with Washington and Robert Morris as to some plan by which to relieve the Continental Army, and thus place himself in a more favourable light. It was agreed that Robert Morris should call upon John Head and he accordingly] called upon his Quaker friend, explained the distressed situation of the army, the gloomy prospect of public affairs, and the necessity of raising a sum of money for immediate use. The merchant listened with much attention. "But," said he, "you know the principles of my sect, and that we cannot conscientiously do anything to promote or keep up a war." Morris renewed his expostulations, and with such good effect that the old gentleman, suddenly jumping up, said, "Robert, on that mantel is a key, in that room is an iron chest." He said no more but took his hat and walked out of the house. Morris understood the matter, took the key and opened the chest and took out

sixty thousand dollars in gold and silver, which was forthwith removed on drays, and was the means of relief to many a suffering soldier. Clothing and shoes were procured, and (not long after) the battle of Trenton was fought and affairs took a different turn.

I will close this paper with an account of a somewhat different character from the others, and yet in some degree kindred.

Another relative of mine, a younger brother of my grandfather (both, however, born in England), was a pronounced Royalist, and, though living in Philadelphia, where an extremely "rebel" feeling existed, he was so imprudent as to join with others of similar sentiments in singing in a prominent public place "God Save the King." The whole party was immediately arrested and put in confinement, but soon paroled, with the condition that each should keep to his house, and do nothing antagonistic to the American cause.

Soon afterwards my relative left the country by stealth, and fled to London, the place of his birth, where his parents continued to reside. At this time he was engaged to be married to a Philadelphia lady, to whom and one other person only he communicated his design.

After the war was over he went from London to Paris, and there before Benjamin Franklin took the affirmation of allegiance to the American government, and then returned to America. Soon afterwards he was married to his Philadelphia friend, who had waited so many long years for him.

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Information that upon the 14th of February, 1657/8, being the Lord's Day, Henry Feast, of Roydon, Essex, came into the parish church of Hunsdon, the minister being then in the pulpit, "after he had done his prayer before his sermon when he was about to take out his text," Feast stood up, and, with a loud voice, said, "The prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord." The minister asked if he applied that scripture to him, and the said Feast replied, but the informants could not understand what he said "by reason of the tumult that was in the church."

—*Extracts from Hertfordshire Sessions Rolls, i. 122.*