



Henry Knox (1750-1806)

Henry Knox was born in Boston, Massachusetts. He was a self-made and largely self-educated man: the son of a mostly absent shipmaster who died in 1762 when Henry was 16. Both tall and heavy compared with many of his contemporaries and jovial by disposition, Henry was a physically impressive presence, weighing some 280 pounds as an adult. Henry **studied** at Boston Public Latin Grammar School until his father's death, when he was apprenticed to a bookseller, which both gave him a livelihood and completed his education through reading the books sold by his master.

Henry opened his own **bookstore** in Boston in 1771, advertising works for sale on a wide variety of topics of "polite literature," as well as stationery, wall paper and "Ladies Pocket Memorandum Books." His bookstore became a gathering place for young well-to-do Bostonians, whose behavior Henry emulated. He stocked a large number of military works for (British) officer customers, and mastered the content of these books. He joined the local artillery company at the age of 18 and had risen to the rank of second lieutenant of the Boston Regiment's grenadiers by 1772.

He married **Lucy Flucker** in 1774. In contrast to Henry, who was "in trade," she was among Boston's political and financial elite. Henry refused a commission as a British officer from his father-in-law, thus starting a break with Lucy's Loyalist family. With the outbreak of hostilities in Boston in 1775, Henry and Lucy escaped through British lines in the summer, and Henry met George Washington. Henry started as a civilian consultant to the Continental Army and then was commissioned.

At the beginning of 1776, Henry led a raid and captured cannon and munitions from the British at Fort Ticonderoga, hauling the guns 300 miles through winter ice in western Massachusetts to Washington's forces in Boston. Henry was promoted to brigadier general in 1776, and distinguished himself in the **battles of Trenton and Princeton**, Brandywine, Germantown and **Monmouth**.

In the winter of 1778-79, General Knox supervised the creation and use of the **Pluckemin Cantonment**, where, under his leadership, American military training was begun before the creation of West Point. The Cantonment was located to the south and east of the Vanderveer House.

After the Revolution, Henry continued to be a key player in American military affairs, becoming Secretary at War in 1785, reporting to Congress before the drafting of the Constitution, and then Secretary of War after its ratification. A Federalist, Knox was a crucial figure in Indian affairs. He resigned as Secretary in 1794 and "retired" to his estate "Montpelier" as a gentleman farmer in Thomaston, Maine, thanks to the extensive lands inherited in Maine by Lucy and land tracts he purchased speculatively. At Montpelier, he was occupied by a number of business enterprises, and died there at the age of 56.