

Woodbridge Township Historic Preservation Commission Essay

Diary Of Alfred Knottingham During The British Army Occupation

Time Of Woodbridge, New Jersey

December 2, 1776, to June 22, 1777

December 2, 1776 - Yesterday, I attended church and the brunt of the banter was about the painfully obvious arrival of the British Redcoats. Woodbridge residents were worried about these burly soldiers that had bogarted their way into our town and that nothing good was about to come of it. Although we were forewarned of their ceremonious arrival, we were still quite unprepared for these intruders. They stuck out like sore thumbs in their bright red coats with red piping, completed by a black tricorn hat. And because they were soldiers, a musket was their weapon of choice. Fear began to sweep Woodbridge, these menacing men meant business. They were said to be the most skilled army in the world. This did not look promising!.

January 6, 1777 - It was a dark, foggy, and dreary day. The sun had not shone for a few days now. It certainly felt like Woodbridge was under siege. There were Red Coats in every nook and cranny, and we residents just wanted peace. Those darn Red Coats were hoarding the salt and forcing us to buy it at exorbitant prices. I was sitting in my house when I heard muskets firing and yelling. I dived under my bed and started to make my own body create an earthquake. The gunshots rang on for two hours until finally, they subsided. I came out of hiding and peered out my window only to see the Continentals rolling big wagons ladened with salt and singing limericks. It was then I realized they had defeated the British during a skirmish and had taken 1,000 bushels of salt from them. The Red Coats weren't as salty as they used to be!

January 16, 1777 - I was walking down the street next to a woman named Elizabeth Inslee. Elizabeth sported a very valuable and spectacular diamond ring. She and I were having a conversation that centered around the departure of these darn Redcoats from Woodbridge; so we could live in peace. Elizabeth and I observed the British soldiers approaching, but we still kept walking at a steady pace; ignoring them. A surly looking Red Coat sauntered over to us, so I pretended to lose something and turned in the opposite direction to retrieve it. Elizabeth, however just kept walking fearlessly. I scurried in the other direction and looped around the block to meet Elizabeth, and rekindle our conversation in the hope that nothing happened to her. Just as I was halfway there, I heard Elizabeth's bloodcurdling scream for help. So, I sprinted as fast as I could. Upon arriving at the scene, I was mortified at what I saw. The surly Red Coat had Elizabeth pinned against the wall, holding a knife in one hand, while trying to sever the finger that was adorned with the expensive diamond ring! She screamed for help again. I ran to get a weapon, a piece of a board, a piece of metal pipe, anything. Luckily, the soldier's officer heard Elizabeth's screams, ran over to the scene, and neutralized the onslaught on Elizabeth. Elizabeth was spared, and so was her ring.

February 24, 1777 - Town elder Johnathan Inslee was captured by the Royalists, and they tortured him unnecessarily. The Redcoats forced him to wade through a river by Ford in his clothes, thereby arriving in New Brunswick soaking wet. He was thrown in prison in a very frigid cell. It took extremely persistent badgering on the part of his pleading wife; Grace Moore Inslee, for them to finally release the town Elder. Jonathan unfortunately, did not survive long enough to enjoy his freedom, he met an untimely demise after his ordeal.

March 8, 1777 - I woke up this day, to fetch myself some food from the barn. I milked the cow and got myself the remaining quarter loaf of bread that was leftover. I ventured down to my cellar, which was where I stored all of my meat. I got some mutton and then went to compose my meal. As I was putting everything on my plate and sitting down to have an

elegant breakfast, gunshots rang out. I heard screaming and saw people running. Some people took out shotguns, and other weapons to protect themselves. I took my breakfast, scurried down to my cellar and ate it there. It wasn't as good as eating it at the table would have been, but it was filling for me. I went back upstairs and took in the sights of a skirmish in progress at Strawberry Hill between our militia, and the Red Coats. I was afraid that if my head protruded too far, it might be the recipient of a wayward musket bullet. All I could do was shake my head, and pray that the Red Coats would just go and leave us poor Woodbridge residents be.

April 19, 1777 - It was a rainy and foggy day. A storm was brewing. The Red Coats Defeated a small infantry and captured Isaac Cotheal, a private in Captain Christopher Marsh's Company Of Light Horse. It was in the papers everywhere. This just increased the pressure that we received from the Red Coats. What more did they want from us? They took almost everything that we had. We decided as a community that enough was enough. It was time for a change, and for us to take our stand. But first, we had to prepare. After all, we were men, and men protected their land, their women, and their children!

June 21, 1777 - Tired, defeated and exasperated Woodbridge residents gathered for a meeting. The British had to go and go now. Learned men decided to tackle the British with strategy rather than brute force. We devised a plan of action to fight the British and rid ourselves of these brutes once and for all. We devised a plan and got our militia ready and charged at the Red Coats. The residents of Woodbridge that possessed guns, bravely put their skills to work against the British militia. The Redcoats were easily trapped because of the unfamiliarity of the terrain. There were fire rings, cages, pitfalls, and several concealed traps that took the Redcoats by surprise when we sprang into action. All hands were on deck from the community. When we were satisfied, we lured them to their demise by chanting about how the Red Coats are the worst military and several other things that flipped their

switches. As expected, they charged at us; undermining our might. . Unfortunately for them, we had been hoping for this. They fell for every single trap. They would become encased in a cage, or trapped on the ground where they were then killed by Continental soldiers. The battle was a long-fought one. Every hour, there were several dead and injured people that had to be pulled from the battlefield. There were gunshots from muskets and other guns that would ring out for miles. It was like World War 1 all over again but only in Woodbridge.

The battle raged on like a fire through the night and into the next day.

June 22, 1777 - I didn't get a wink of shuteye last night. All I heard was the yelling and the screaming of the militia and the Red Coats last night. They made deafening noises with their voices as well as with their weapons. The battle continued to go on for the day, afternoon, and evening. Trap after trap and gunshot after gunshot echoed. Woodbridge suffered casualties, but not as many as the Redcoats. It was finally in the night when the British general announced their surrender. We rejoiced at the sound of this news! Everyone was overjoyed and spent at the same time. Working together had been to our advantage, gone would be the surly Redcoats! Woodbridge emerged victoriously. Hooray for us, and salutes to the Continentals for their bravery and perseverance. Victory tasted sweet. Out with the Redcoats, Woodbridge was safe again!

Bibliography (Sources)

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