



Haverford Township Historical Society



THE BRITISH IN HAVERFORD – ANOTHER LOOK

By Clarissa F. Dillon, Ph.D.

[To the editor, Haverford Township Historical Society:

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This is an update for the recent article in the newsletter. Here is information about my background: Clarissa F. Dillon has been exploring the question of what people here had to eat during the fall of 1777 and the winter/spring of 1778. She has given talks on the subject at The Tredyffrin / Easttown Historical Society, the 2016 annual conference of the Association for Living History, Farm and Agricultural Museums, and at the Valley Forge lecture series. She is scheduled to speak at The Berks County History Center in April 2018. She has a doctorate in History from Bryn Mawr College and has been active in “living history” since 1973.]

In the recent article about British incursions into Haverford Township in 1777 and 1778 [see [British Invasion of Haverford Township](#)], there were several comments that need clarification. Although the British planned to purchase supplies in the Philadelphia market, and did purchase foodstuffs from farmers who brought things into the city, food and other items were also appropriated from the inhabitants. Diaries tell us of such seizures. On 30 October 1777, Christopher Marshall recorded:

... the inhabitants of Philadelphia in great distress for provisions, as the soldiers seized all that was in the market and were also seizing and taking away out of people’s cellars.¹

Sarah Logan Fisher reported “plundering” by the Hessians in her 1 November 1777 diary entry.²

The British also scoured the countryside around the city. They took away enormous quantities of foodstuffs, animals, clothing, wood, and a lot of other things as well. There is a splendid record of reported losses by Chester County residents.³ A recurring comment in the complaints noted that there had been no payments or consideration for items taken. Out of more than 700 reports, there are only these five reports of payment for items commandeered:

- John Bailey, West Bradford, lost horses valued at £30, harness at £90, total value £120, received £45;
- Caleb Smedley, Willistown, lost 1 mare valued at £24, received £12;
- Elias Davis, Goshen, lost 1 horse valued at £30, gear at £0.15.0, total value £30.15.0, received £7.10.0;
- James Coffman, Tinicum, lost 7 horses £170, 7 sheep £3.10.0, total value £173.10.0, received £46;
- James Norris, Easttown, lost 1 mare valued at £22, received £10.⁴

Not all residents of Chester County went to report losses. Benjamin Hawley, farmer and one-time schoolmaster, noted several incidents in his diary⁵ but his name does not appear in the Register.

During the period of occupation, with all the losses, how did people survive? To date, I have only found two references that report assistance from family, friends, or neighbors. Sarah Logan Fisher received

butter and honey from her uncle in December 1777.⁶ Elizabeth Drinker recorded that, in response to a request from Edward Drinker's widow, she "...gave her Beef and Biscuit &c..."⁷ More information may lie, as yet undiscovered, in diaries, letters, account books, and other period sources.

The phrase "accounts were settled" in Morgan's article indicates that claims were paid. A question arises: **who** paid? So far, I have found no reference to payments, other than those given above, for losses claimed.

Endnotes

¹ Extracts from the *Diary of Christopher Marshall...1774-1781*, ed. by William Duane. (Albany: Joel Munsell, 1877), p. 136.

² Sarah Logan Fisher, "A Diary of Trifling Occurrences' Philadelphia, 1776-1778." *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*. (Philadelphia: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Oct. 1958), Vol. LXXXII, No. 4), p. 154.

³ "A Register of Damages..." (Unpublished manuscript/typescript in The Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA). This is the source for the list of Haverford residents' losses in Morgan's article. The collection has been retitled "The British Depredations Book" and is on reference shelving.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14; p. 90; p. 180; p. 222; p. 246.

⁵ "The Diary of Benjamin Hawley, Chester County, 1769-1782" (Unpublished manuscript/typescript in The Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA), p. 169, p. 185.

⁶ *Fisher, op. cit.*, p. 458.

⁷ *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, ed. by Elaine Forman Crane. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), p.253.

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