

Notes on Colonel Houssacker.

At the May meeting the writer read a short paper on an "Old Road Petition," and in commenting upon the names attached thereto, remarked that from their large number and the prominent character of many of their owners, a good article might be written. Among the rest he indicated that of Colonel Nicholas Houssacker, who, after first serving as the Colonel of a Lancaster county regiment, went over to the British at the battle of Trenton, carrying about a score of his men with him. Since then some facts have come into his possession concerning Colonel Houssacker, and these are herewith presented.

This man was a German, and probably foreign born. He appears to have been a soldier of fortune. I have never seen an extended sketch of his career and do not know whether one was ever written. As little is known of him, I will here record the few facts that have come under my notice. By early occupation he was a shoemaker (as I think I have seen either in the Col. Rec. or Archives, but which record I am unable at this moment to find), and resided in Lebanon. He appears to have taken no special part in the early Revolutionary measure adopted in this county. His name does not appear as a delegate at any of the meetings held in this city. Neither was he prominent in political life prior to that time. But he comes to the front in 1777 as the Colonel of a regiment. (My grandfather served in it as an enlisted volunteer.) How he

reached such high command without any previous distinction seems unaccountable. It is possible that he may have been a trained soldier in the Fatherland. Graydon says he "was considered a capable disciplinarian."

Graydon's Account.

The fullest sketch I have found of this man Nicholas Houssacker is in Graydon's Memoirs, and I will here give the main facts as detailed by him. Graydon was captured at the battle of Long Island, and, along with the other prisoners, was taken to New York city, where he gave his parole and was accorded the freedom of the city. Here he met the traitor, Houssacker, of whom he writes as follows:

"He had been originally commissioned a Major in Wayne's battalion. He had been, if I mistake not, an Adjutant of the Royal Americans; and was considered a capable disciplinarian.

"He was a German, or rather a man of no country or any country; a citizen of the world, a soldier of fortune, a true mercenary. Thinking that our cause was going down rapidly, he saw no reason for adhering any longer to it; but came over to the enemy in the season of our extreme adversity, though he did not reach us until after the affairs of Trenton and Princeton. Not liking the name of a deserter, he called himself a prisoner, but certainly, if he was one, he had made much better terms than we had. He told us, however, that all was over; and that General Washington was reduced to the necessity of giving enormous bounties for only two or three weeks' service; that by means of these, and haranging his troops, he contrived to keep a few in the field,

but there was not the smallest doubt that the business was up and America subdued. His inference was that we ought immediately make our peace. 'What do you shut yourselves up here for?' said he, in his rattling manner, to Miles, Atlee and Magaw, with whom he was acquainted. 'Why don't you go to the coffee house and mix with the British army, as I do? They will use you well, you may depend upon it.' And, to be sure, the thing was easy enough; it was only to change sides and cry "peccavi," and receive forgiveness. Nevertheless, Colonel Houssacker made no proselytes to his opinion, or rather to his principle."*

His Property Confiscated.

Colonel Houssacker was the owner of several properties in Lebanon. These were seized and sold as the property of an attainted traitor, by order of the provincial authorities. President Moore, on February 19, 1782, signed a deed conveying to one, William Bailey, a two-story house and lot of ground, sold as the property of Nicholas Houssacker, an attainted traitor, "situated in the town of Lebanon, in the county of Lancaster," for the sum of £2,200, subject to one-fourth of the said sum to be reduced to a yearly ground rent payable to the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania." Col. Rec., Vol. 13, p. 199.

On April 4, 1782, President Moore signed another deed conveying to John Doyle, a certain lot of ground in Lebanon, containing about five acres, seized and sold as the property of Nicholas Houssacker, for £775 specie. Col. Rec., Vol. 13, p. 251.

*Graydon's Memoirs, pp. 237-38.

His Widow Asks Indemnity From the British Government.

I am indebted to Dr. S. P. Heilman, the Secretary of the Lebanon County Historical Society, for copies of the following documents, the originals of which are in the archives of that society. They throw further light on the life and fortunes of Colonel Hous-sacker:

“Leetori Benevole Salutem.

“I do certify that Nicolaus Haus-secker, of Germantown Township, Philadelphia County, Bachelor, and Cathrin Elisabeth Guth, of said place, spinster, were lawfully joined together in Holy Matrimony on the tenth Day of June, in the year of our Lord one thousand and seven Hundred and fifty-eight.

“Given in Germantown Township, Philadelphia County.

“Witness my Hand and Seal.

“MICHAEL SCHLATTER,

“Minister of the Gospel.”

“An Account of Losses Sustained by Elizabeth Houssegger, Widow, and the children of the late Nicholas Hous-seger, last of Lebanon, in the County of Lancaster, of the Province of Penn-sylvania, a Captain in an American Regiment in the Service of His Majesty, the King of Great Brittain, in consequence of his Attachment to the British Government:

A piece of meadow ground, con-taining Six Acres, valued at

Six pounds Sterling per acre. £ 36

A Lot of Land, in the Town of Lebanon, purchased at three hundred and Fifty Pounds, and whereon Mr. Housseger built an elegant Dwelling House, and made other improvements, valued at £1,100 Sterling..... 1,100

Sterling £1,136

“Dauphin (Late Lancaster) County, in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, ss.:

“The 10th Day of August, Anno Domini, 1786, Before me, the subscriber, one of the Justices of the Court of Common Pleas, and of the Peace, in and for the said County, Personally came and appeared Elizabeth Housseger, widow of Nicholas Housseger, late of Lebanon Town, in the County aforesaid, and on the Solemn Oath taken on the Holy Evangelists of Almighty God, deposeth and Saith: That her said Husband was rightfully owner of a House and Lot, and about Six Acres of Meadow Ground in Lebanon aforesaid; That she and the Children of the said Nicholas Housseger have been dispossessed of the house and the same sold by Congress by reason of her said Husband having taken Arms in Support of the King’s Authority in America. That the said House and Land were Worth when her Husband left the same at least one thousand one hundred and thirty-six Pounds Sterling.

her

“ELIZABETH X HOUSSEGER.

mark.

“Sworn and subscribed Before me, the Day and year aforesaid.

“INO CLONINGER ”

To this is affixed an affidavit by John Gradin, a Justice of the Peace of Louisburg (now Harrisburg), to the fact that the said John Gloninger is a duly appointed Judge of the Court.

From the foregoing official documents it will be seen that Colonel Houssacker died some time prior to 1786, where is not stated, and that his widow then made application to the British Government to be reimbursed for the value of her husband's property, which had been seized and sold by the authorities of the State of Pennsylvania. Whether her petition was successful and some compensation was made to her for her losses, I do not know. But as commissioners were appointed to adjudicate the claims of loyalists arising out of their adherence to the British crown, it is probable she was repaid a portion of the loss sustained

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