

Transportation Troubles in Lancaster County During the Revolution

It is but natural when speaking of events connected with Revolutionary times in Lancaster county that our thoughts go first to the soldiers who went forth to fight for our country's liberty. They went to scenes of activity, and hardships as well, but the cause of their going brought to the little borough of Lancaster an individual activity greater than had ever been known. Therefore, some facts concerning the general conditions occasioned by the war will show that the people of Lancaster, borough and county, who remained at home deserve consideration as well. They were given much work to do, and undoubtedly did it with credit.

Gunsmiths, who had been plying their trade in leisurely fashion, the production of their labors intended mostly to preserve life against Indian hostilities, were now hard pressed for weapons, whose use had another meaning. Given the men and arms to fight the big cause of a country's freedom, necessity compelled the further requirements of munition, food, clothing, horses and wagons. Why was it that when orders were issued for these needs Lancaster county was, in most every case, required to furnish the largest portion? Was it because of its fertility or its generosity, or just its natural ability to do better than the best, which somebody else could do?

In proof of the foregoing, notice how on June 3, 1776, when the Provincial Council (1 "resolved" that, of

the 10,000 men to be called out for the militia, Pennsylvania must furnish 6,000. This number was reduced to 4,500 (2) because 1,500 were already in the service of the Province. Then, when the proportions were drawn, the division being made between eight counties, Philadelphia and Lancaster were given 746 (3) each, it being the largest number required. Concerning the means of transportation at this time an item on the minutes of the Board of War for April 3, 1777, says:

“A circular letter was wrote to the following Persons, requesting that each would procure, with all possible dispatch, at least one hundred wagons, to be sent to Robert Irwin, the Waggon Master General, for the purpose of removing the public stores from this City to the west side of Schuylkill.”

This order was for people in Philadelphia, Chester and Bucks counties, but attached to it was an additional item explaining that

“Two Letters were likewise wrote to the committee of Lancaster county, and General Mifflin at Reading, to procure the Wagons to be sent to town, for the beforemention'd purpose.” (4)

Another time, July 31, 1777, when the Supreme Executive Council thought it necessary to have a large number of wagons on hand to use in the vicinity of Philadelphia on account of the approach of the enemy, six different counties were called on to supply the demand. Lancaster county was asked for six hundred or more, (5) while the next highest number asked for was four hundred. Concerning this impress of wagons and their use, a halt was called a few days following the order by a letter from the Supreme Executive Council to William Henry, which said:

“Philadelphia, August 7, 1777.—The Fleet of the enemy not having made its appearance at our Capes since Thursday evening last, it is doubtful whether there will be occasion for the Waggon which have been ordered from your county, and as the expense of them will be enormous, you are therefore hereby directed to stop the waggons from coming down until farther orders. You will please to give notice to the several Waggon-Masters in your county, by express, if necessary, of this order, that it may be effectually complied with.

“THOMAS WHARTON, JR.,
“President.” (6)

In the meanwhile companies forming here had been supplied with the necessary equipment. Troops going to the front from the West and from the South were promised arms, provisions and clothing when arriving at Lancaster. In January, 1777, Colonel Mackey requested quarters to be ready for 620 men(7) coming from Carlisle, and asked that shoes and stocking be sent to meet them on the road. In August, of the same year, Colonel Galbraith wrote to Colonel Rogers that he should have his people provide their own rations until they arrive at Lancaster.(8) Washington, in his letter to Congress from “camp near Potts-Grove, September 23, 1777,”(9) opens with the sentence—“Sir, I have not had the honor of addressing you since your adjournment to Lancaster,” He mentions later on that “If there are any shoes and blankets to be had in Lancaster or that part of the country, I earnestly intreat you to have them taken up for the use of the army.” And in conclusion states, “I have ordered all the Virginia militia, who are tolerably armed, to come forward and join the army. Those who have no arms are to wait at Frederic-

town in Maryland till they hear whether any can be provided for them at Lancaster: you will, therefore, be pleased to make inquiry what number can be procured there, and send an express to Frederic, with orders for as many men to come forward as there are arms." Truly, Lancaster, in many cases, must have seemed like the promised land. Col Galbraith, in his communication to Colonel Rogers,(10) in June, 1777, said "Everything will be provided for the men at Lancaster, or at the camp, except Blankets." Perhaps his estimate of the capability of the county to meet all conditions was an unintentional prophecy. For is it not possible, even to the present time, to comply with the fact that everything wanted can be gotten at Lancaster?

The duties of the residents of the hustling little borough in the county of Lancaster were not ended with manufacturing necessities and supplying demands of soldiers going through the place. Another duty was to guard and care for the prisoners of war. This was accepted with complaisance. William Atlee cheerfully remarked, when reporting affairs at Lancaster to President Wharton, on January 6, 1777,(11) that "on the 5th instant, Capt. Murray and his guard arrived here with the Hessian Prisoners (I think about eight hundred and thirty) who are placed in our barracks. They are rather crowded at present, being seventeen in a room, but in the course of a week we shall be able to give them more room, as the carpenters are now busy in laying in floors in the additional buildings. and when that is done we can stow away a few more." General Washington and his men took good care, before the war was over, to make it possible to "stow away a few more."

When the Supreme Executive Council came here to hold its sessions, in September, 1777, it added more to the atmosphere of activity. A line of expresses(12) were put in continuous passage from here to headquarters and return, so that the latest news from the seat of war could be had as quickly as possible. War news in those days could not be had from the flash on a wire. It meant the sound of hoofs coming down King street, from the east. Then, as there were no newspaper offices in the windows of which war bulletins could be read, it is reasonable to suppose that interested persons dropped their minor tasks and went to the Court House. Here, no doubt, they waited impatiently for somebody to come out who would tell them the news which the rider had just brought in. Owing to the lack of means to acquaint the people with events occurring, which held for them so much significance, an effort was made to remedy this deficiency. A petition(13) from a number of residents, including Rev. Helfenstein, to the Supreme Executive Council, explains the situation. It reads:

“Lancaster, January the 11th, 1778.

“To the Honorable President and Supreme Executive Council of the State of Pennsylvania:

“We, the subscribers have, with the greatest satisfaction, taken notice of that wise method your Honors have adopted to dispose a number of News Papers among the English inhabitants of this State. The Tenor of this humble address is to ask with due respect, the same kindness for the Germans; the most part of them cannot read English, and some don't understand it; they are used to Dutch News Papers, which (is well known) can-

not be provided from the places where they were got formerly. It would be too hazardous for a Printer to undertake the Publication of a paper in the present unsettled state of affairs, and more particularly as it is quite a new Thing here. But should Your Honours be kindly pleased to shew the same benevolence to the Germans as is done to the English in this case, a Printer might adventure to furnish the German Public with a Weekly News Paper. There is no need for urging the necessity & utility of dispersing in the German language Facts of the seven military and Civil Transactions, which always will have their weight and influence, and as we never have observed in the least instance, that Your Honours have made any difference between the Inhabitants of this State in respect of Nations, but always have acted with equal Care toward them. We, whose names are hereunder written, are not only part for whom we solicit this favor, but have it in view more chiefly for the Germans throughout the Country."

This petition must have been recognized in some way as the following month a newspaper made its appearance. Mr. F. R. Diffenderffer, in his paper on "Early German Printers of Lancaster," (14) says that Francis Bailey printed "The Pennsylvania New-Sheet," from February until June, in 1778. That Mr. Bailey was very busy printing "in the German tongue" can be gathered from two items from Laurens to Washington: (15)

"The bearer hereof is charged with a Packet containing five hundred copies of the Oath of Allegiance and Abjuration; and he is directed to call on Mr. Bailey, printer at Lancaster, for two hundred Copies of the Act for

granting Pardons, printed in the German Tongue," 28 April, 1778.

"I have requested Major Brice, who is so obliging as to take charge of this, to receive from Mr. Bailey, printer at Lancaster, five hundred Copies of the Address to Foreign Officers and Soldiers printed in the German Tongue which he has promised to deliver to Your Excellency," 3 May, 1778.

And still another service was asked of these people who were manipulating the collateral affairs of war. That the military stores placed here had to be well guarded was evident, but the moving of these supplies to the army when required was much the harder part of the task. Facilities of transportation, before 1800, were much limited and as everything had to be moved in wagons, orders were executed with difficulty. The roads, over which went soldiers on foot, riders of express and heavily loaded wagons—were in poor condition. The people in 1770 complained, quoting from Mr. Diefendereff's paper, "An Early Road Petition," (16)—"That the great Road from the upper parts of the Said County, especially, from the Borough of Lancaster to Philadelphia, is by the constant use of it with heavy Loaded Carriages, and by its being laid in many places on very bad ground, now rendered almost impassable,....." Again, in 1773, an allusion to roads, in Judge Landis' paper on "The Lancaster Stage Dispatch," (17) shows that at that time there were stumps in the way large enough to upset a lady, or rather the vehicle in which she was riding. For these reasons it must be supposed that the roads a few years later were in an almost similar condition. Even now, orders issued from a stately Capitol, with a substantial quantity of funds to back them up, do not make

good roads over night. Hence, poor roads and a dearth of teams, combined with other difficulties, made a situation not very satisfactory for the affairs of George Ross, Jr., D. Q. M.

In December, 1776, Mr. Ross took up the various duties with the appointment he had just accepted. William Atlee, in his report from Lancaster, to the Council of Safety, December 31, 1776, said: "On the 23d of this month the Committee were honored with the Council's letter of the 9th instant, mentioning that the Council had sent a quantity of powder to our care. A quantity a Powder did arrive in Town a few Days before the receipt of that Letter, and General Miffin being then in Town with Col. Bird, from Reading, & they having appointed Mr. George Ross, Jr., a Deputy Quarter Master here, that Powder was by the General order into Mr. Ross' care, & is very probably the Powder meant by the Council." (18)

That the office of Deputy Quarter Master was no sinecure must be acknowledged if one would judge from the many things required and the attending difficulties. The powder which had just been brought to Lancaster became a source of trouble for "The Inhabitants being uneasy at the Powder & some other Stores being placed in our Court House & new Goal," (19) the committee directed to have it moved elsewhere. This removal and getting quarters for the soldiers at the taverns and private houses because the barracks was housing the prisoners seems to have been the initial work of the new Deputy Quarter Master. (20)

During the hard winter of 1777-1778 much clothing was required from this part of the country. Washington, when he wrote to Congress from "Headquarters, White-Marsh, Nov. 17,

1777," said: "Several general officers, unable to procure clothing in the common line, have employed agents to purchase up what could be found in different parts of the country. General Wayne, among others, has employed Mr. Zantzinger, of Lancaster, who has purchased to the amount of four thousand five hundred pounds, for which he desires a draught upon the treasury-board.—Inclosed you have a copy of his letter.—I am not clear whether this application should properly be made to the treasury, or the clothier-general, who should charge the money to the regiments for whom the clothes are, as so much advanced to them. If the latter should appear the most proper mode, I will order it to be done"(21). Congress took up this matter two different times, but gave it final consideration on December 10th, when in session it ordered "That a warrant issue on Thomas Smith, Esqr., commissioner of the continental loan office in the State of Pennsylvania, in favour of James Mease, Esqr., cloathier-general, for \$12,000, advanced him towards the payment of cloathing, purchased by Mr. Zantzinger, for the use of Brigadier General Wayne's division; the said cloathier-general to be accountable."(22). Knowing the urgent need of the suffering soldiers, it was not always possible for Mr. Ross to send the clothing when it was ready to be forwarded because of the lack of teams. In January, 1778, Congress ordered 30,000 barrels of flour, 12,000 to be stored at or near Lancaster. (23). In the same month an order was issued to the wagon-masters for wagons "with four horses and driver for services in camp"(24). Lancaster wagons were to call on Col. Ross for forage. In both these cases teams

were needed. It was now that matters concerning transportation were becoming complicated. Mr. Ross drew a clear picture of his troubles in a letter to Col. Gibson, and explains to him the unpleasant situation of affairs at this period. This letter is in Mr. Ross' handwriting, and is the property of the New York Public Library(25), through whose courtesy a copy was allowed for this paper.

"Lancaster, 2 March 1778—Sir, I received your Note desiring me to furnish four Waggon's for the purpose of conveying some Cloathing to Headquarters—I am sorry that I am under the Necessity of Informing you that it is out of my Power to furnish them until I can send off an Express to the Wmaster General of this county—who lives about fifteen miles from this—A Similar Application happened last Wensday by a Lieut. Gamble for 5 teams for the same purpose—I did not know when to apply, the Wmaster of this District being gone with some teams to camp: I however Detirmin'd to wait on the President and Councils to know what was to be done—they told me they knew of no other Method than by sending off an Express to Wmaster of the County which I immediately did—he came down & to my great Surprise told me they could not be had—that he had received orders for a certain quota & that he (had) been making them up & Could procure no More without further orders—for which he apply'd to Councils & then was told they could give him no further Assistance—the WDepartment, but that the Assembly perhaps might see the Inconvenience & remedy the law—that they had gone as far as authorized by the Law in appointing him a Wmaster for this county & that he had appointed his

Deputys in Battalion Districts according to the Law—then in this hopeful situation, the WDepartment is—in order to forward Mr. Gamble's cloathing I have sent off two of my Forage teams & two Continental teams which happened to be here—Indeed the prospect of sending the quota of teams from this County is very discouraging. Several Brigades which were not to be less than 12 Waggon's to my certain Knowledge are gone to camp with but 7—& further the Wmaster of this District told me that he could not get a constable to execute a Warrant for bringing in some teams which had been warn'd & refused to attend—In short I am afraid if the Army depend on the present mode of procuring teams—they will be disapointed—for over & above the quota to be raised. I am call'd upon every day for more or less teams & shall be obliged on every application as I am on yours to send off an express to the Wmaster—which will delay the team or teams at least 3 days—those Sir are the difficulties the Department labours under & which I wish you and the whole Army to know.

“I am sir with respect

“Your humble Servant

“G. ROSS, JR., D. Q. M.”

Considering the drain on the county up to this time for supplies of all kinds, it is no wonder the inhabitants were holding back the small remaining part. But it did not make things easy for the wagon department. How must Mr. Ross have viewed the order for the purchase in Lancaster county of forty horses(26), issued eight days after his complaint to Col. Gibson? Here is another instance where, in the division between eleven counties, the largest part was asked of Lancas-

ter. The wagonmaster of the county, who shared with Mr. Ross the trials of the "hopeful situation" of the wagon department, was James Bailey. He lived near Marietta(27), and held the office of wagonmaster from January 9, 1778, until March 13,, 1778(28).

Col. Gibson, who requested Mr. Ross to forward some clothing to headquarters, was, undoubtedly, Col. John Gibson, son of Lancaster's first tavernkeeper, George Gibson. At the time the letter was written Col. John Gibson was at Valley Forge. Washington, in his letter to Congress from "Valley Forge, dated May 28, 1778," says: "Lieutenant-colonel John Gibson, of the sixth Virginia regiment, who, from his knowledge of the western country, and Indian nations and language, is ordered to repair to Pittsburg will have the honor of delivering you this. He is entitled, and has been ever since the twenty-fifth of October last, to a regiment in that line; and I must take the liberty to request that Congress will give him a commission of that date."

So the people who remained at home, those of the busy little borough and those of the fertile acres, worked hard and well to do their share in the cause of freedom.

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