

Captain Wiederholdt in Lancaster

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER

AMONG the books in the increasingly valuable library of the Lancaster County Historical Society is a complete set of a publication entitled, "Americana Germanica," in volume 5 of which appears the "Tagebuch des Capt. Wiederholdt"—Diary of Capt. Wiederholdt, a Hessian officer in the Revolutionary War. The first entry was made on October 7th, 1776; the last, on December 7th, 1780—four years later. The diary was edited by the distinguished scholars M. D. Learned and C. Grosse, and published in German. I am indebted to Mr. August Lerbscher, superintendent of the Stehli Silks Corporation and an honored member of the Lancaster County Historical Society, for a translation into English of that portion of Wiederholdt's diary which relates to Lancaster.

At the battle of Trenton, Capt. Wiederholdt and other Hessian soldiers were captured. On the 31st of December, 1776, he and other prisoners were taken in wagons, covered with ducking, to Philadelphia. Dr. Learned, the editor, states that this is one of the earliest references to the "Conestoga Wagon." On the 24th of January, 1777, they were quartered at Dumfries, Virginia, as prisoners of war.

Capt. Wiederholdt writes, in his diary:

"At the request of the officers, prisoners of war, I departed on the 5th of February for Lancaster, Pa., to secure certain papers which were in possession of a Lieutenant Muller. Lancaster is situated in Pennsylvania, about 160 miles from Dumfries. I rode 24 miles on the first day, through desolate country, passing the Aquoquanna and Bull Runn, both of which can be forded, when not swollen by rain or snow water. On the first night, I lodged at New Gatt. On the 6th, I proceeded to New Land's Ferry, passing through Leesburg, a pretty town, where I had dinner. The inn keeper's wife was pretty, attractive and very hospitable. This town is 24 miles from New Gatt, and 12 miles from New Land's Ferry, on the Potomac. On the 7th, I crossed the Potomac on a ferry and rode to Frederick Town, in Maryland. Frederick, about 12 to 14 miles from the Potomac, is a pretty town, inhabited mostly by Germans. I had breakfast there, fed my horse and proceeded on my journey to Towny Town [Taneytown?] about 24 to 26 miles from Frederick. I stayed here over night. It is a rather small place.

"On the 8th, I proceeded to York Town [Pa.], a pretty and rather large city, inhabited mostly by Germans, 36 miles from Towny Town. I passed a village (after having passed the Mono-

kavy creek) named McCollester, or Hannover, where I had dinner. Hannover is a rather small but pretty town. It, also, is inhabited mostly by Germans. It is 12 miles from York Town. Between the Monokavy creek and Hannover is a new and yet small village called Peter Little Town.

“On the 9th to Lancaster, passing the Shushkahanna [Susquehanna] river on a ferry about in the middle between York Town and Lancaster. The latter is a large and pretty city, inhabited mostly by Germans. Our prisoners of war in this city, consisting of non-commissioned officers and privates, were stationed in barracks, which were large and sanitary. They were not, however, allowed to leave the barracks.

“Lieutenant Muller had left Lancaster four days prior to my arrival, and, therefore, I could not accomplish anything. I left on the 10th, on my return journey, reaching Hannover on the same day, where I stayed overnight at a German inn. The inn-keeper was a scoundrel. At this time and place I was threatened to be hung by a mob of drunken German rascals, but was saved in the nick of time by the arrival of an American captain, of English descent, who was on his way home, with two other gentlemen. They took my part; and had it not been for their arrival I should have been hung or at least assaulted or badly battered up. The captain drove the mob from my room and severely criticized and reprimanded them for their cowardly behavior. His name was Archibald Arms. He lived in the vicinity of Georgetown, where he invited me to visit him. He was already an old man, but very polite and sensible. This incident shows plainly how much you may depend on this low class of Germans.

“On the 11th, we,—the captain, myself and his two escorts,—continued our journey to Monoskiser Ferry.

“On the 12th, to Leesburg, where we spent the night at the previously mentioned pretty innkeeper’s.”

On the 13th of February, Captain Wiederholdt returned to Dumfries, Virginia.

During the winter of 1777-8, Captain Wiederholdt and other officers of the Hessian army, were quartered, as prisoners of war, in Fredericksburg, Virginia. They enjoyed their detention in this attractive old town, and were treated with the honor and respect to which their rank entitled them. On March 1st, 1778, they departed from Fredericksburg with much regret, having been ordered to join their army on parole in Philadelphia.

Capt. Wiederholdt describes the march northward as follows:

“March 15th. It had rained all night but in the morning the weather cleared up, whereupon we departed from Peter Little Town, at 8:00 o’clock. We arrived at a German inn after 12:00

o'clock, having passed McColleston Town or Hannover on the way, and leaving again at 1:00 o'clock. One or two miles out, we met an American commissary officer of small stature but big feeling and so called 'high spirit.' Without ceremony of compliments, he said:

" 'You must return to Hannover.' "

" 'Why, sir?' "

" 'In town you may hear it.' "

" 'What name and rank are you, sir?' "

" 'My name is Petters. I am commissary of prisoners. Now you will turn and follow me.' "

" 'Yes, sir.' "

"After we had returned to town, he informed us that matters in respect to exchanging were not yet settled, and that we were, therefore, obliged to stay until this be done. We had to give him our word of honor not to leave town nor to venture outside of our quarters, after sun down. Lieutenant Sobbe and I were lucky to get good quarters. Our host was a born Swiss, by name of Spittler, a rich and well situated man. He had one single daughter, 13 years of age, who was developed and matured enough to be married. We stayed at this place until April 8th, leaving at 9:30 A. M. We traveled about 12 to 14 miles to an inn, where we intended to rest for dinner. Here we met the exception of an American tavern, for we could get nothing to eat and were compelled to put up in the open and partake of whatever we had with us. While eating dinner, a Mr. Braunslow brought letters to Sobbe and me from Fredericksburg, which were very much appreciated. At 3:00 P. M. we proceeded on our journey and camped two miles out of York Town, in three houses, under protest of the inhabitants.

"April 9th. We broke camp early, and since we could not take the straight road through York Town, we detoured and crossed the Shushkanna at the lower ferry, which was slow work. We marched to May Town, where we stayed over night, and proceeded early next morning. On the 10th of April, we arrived at Lancaster at 3:00 P. M. Here we stayed exactly one full week, finally receiving orders to proceed. On the 17th of April, at 1:00 P. M., we rested 15 miles out, at a single house, after passing the Conestoga creek.

"On the 18th, we departed early and marched about 20 miles, arriving at Whit [White] Horse, where we spent the night.

"On the 19th, we sent our express rider to General Boudenot, to inform him of our whereabouts. He (the general) arrived and read our credentials, after which we were allowed to proceed. This was near 12:00 o'clock, and we advanced 18 miles, leaving the highway to encamp, because they did not allow us to pass their

outposts. While we were at the Whit Horse inn a troop of American horsemen arrived and rested about one hour. With them was a troop of Indians, of the Mohawk tribe. These Indians are blacker or rather browner than the Delawares, having long-hanging black hair, a mischievous look in their eyes and a more savage appearance in general. They shoot with bow and arrow in a most admirable way. I have seen, with my own eyes, how they shot through a wine bottle at one hundred paces. Shooting at an angle, they can drive an arrow 200 paces. I took one of the bows and an arrow but as much as I would try I could not drive the arrow more than 100 paces. A bottle, or other object, I could not even hit at 30-40 paces. It requires lots of training and strength to shoot an arrow, and the whole force seems to be embodied in the thumb and forefinger of the right hand.

“On the 20th, we advanced toward Philadelphia, arriving there at noon. Here I found letters for me from Privy Councillor von Gilsae, Pastor Paulus, my brother and H. M.

“On the 6th of May I answered these letters, informing them of our exchange.

“On the 8th of May I received other letters from the Privy Councillor and H. M. These letters were dated November 11th, 1777.

“On the 20th of May I wrote and dispatched answers to these letters. Philadelphia is a large and pretty place and well suited for commerce, but it is not so well situated for this purpose as the city of New York. All the products of the province and interior have to be wheeled here by axle and the imports have to be dispatched inland likewise. The Delaware river is navigable for a good distance inland but only beneficial to the inhabitants of the border people. The Schuylkill is only navigable to small boats a short distance above the city, being blocked by a high waterfall about 6-8 miles above. The city is a rendezvous of all religious sects and nationalities, therefore a mixing place of all sects and denominations, nothing more or less than a Confluens Canaillorum. I believe that the Biblical towns of Sodom and Gomorrah could not beat it in regard to vice.”

As Captain Wiederholdt was a prisoner of war, the natural impression would be that he was not pressed with burdensome duties, yet according to his own confession letters received by him on the 20th of April were not answered until the 6th of May; and those received on May 8th were not answered until May 20th. It is also interesting to note that letters written in Europe on the 11th of November, 1777, were not received in Philadelphia until May 8th, 1778, a difference of nearly six months in time.

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