

Treasures from the Sherman Room

An Introduction to Brimfield History from the Library's Historical Collections

June 2021

Issue No. 18

Wasmus Journal

In 1778, during the Revolutionary War, four Hessian prisoners of war were housed in Brimfield. They had served in a German regiment under British General "Gentleman Johnny" Burgoyne and were captured during the Battle of Bennington on August 16, 1777. One of them was Julius Wasmus, a surgeon, who from approximately June of 1776 until he was reunited with his family in 1783, kept a detailed journal. The journal was later published as *An Eyewitness Account of the American Revolution and New England Life: The Journal of J.F. Wasmus, German Company Surgeon, 1776-1783*. A description of the book states that it "offers first-hand accounts of military affairs such as the Battle of Bennington, as well as detailed observations of the climate, geography, and societal customs of New England and New York." The following is one month from his time in Brimfield

January, 1778

- 1st We all went to Mr. Williams to wish him luck in the new year.
- 2nd Cornet Stutzer wants to visit his brother in Springfield and I decided to go accompany him.
- 3rd. Because tomorrow will be Sunday and no horses will be available, we could not start our journey to Springfield; moreover, the inhabitants consider it a sin to travel without a weighty cause on Sunday.
- 4th. Our trip is fixed for tomorrow. There are many people in this place, and perhaps everywhere, who have not been baptized and therefore do not take holy communion. Major Danielson has not been baptized, nor have his 2 daughters, both over 20 years old. Brig. Ge, Danielson was probably not baptized either.
- 5th. Last night it snowed heavily, and this morning the weather continues to be quite stormy. We rode away at 10 o'clock and were in Palmer at noon where we ate lunch in

the same inn where we had eaten chocolate with a spoon on Sept. 20 of last year. We continued our trip at 1 o'clock and arrived at South Springfield at 4 o'clock when we crossed the Connecticut River in great danger. In West Springfield, we reached the house of Capt. Morgan where we spent the night.

- 6th. After eating breakfast, we rode back and stopped first at Mr. Stebbins, from where we visited the Country Squire Stutzer. More than 200 men from our Braunschweig corps were working in Springfield. They had rented themselves out to the farmers, lived well, worked as much as they wished to and were in good spirits. We rode back to Palmer.
- 7th. We set out early in the morning and were back in Brimfield at noon. On our march today, we rode with an aide-de-camp of Ge, Gates, who told us that when they left Ticonderoga, the English had to burn all the baggage; that was terrible news for us! – Yet this kind gentleman has surely lied to us; after all, they [English] had enough time to send their baggage etc. ahead to Canada. He also told us a great deal about the talents of our former Master Clerk Senf, and that he was captain of engineers in their army. I was pleased about that because he [Senf] is a good and righteous man who was, however, too harshly treated by us in spite of his work and ability. I will have more to say about that at another time.
- 9th. The news is spreading here that 50,000 Russians are going to come to America next spring. Although this has not been confirmed, the inhabitants are very much afraid and are anxiously asking whether it is true that the Russians are such a barbaric nation. When you tell them, their fear increases; whenever he hears of the Russians, my landlord quickly reads a chapter from the Bible. –
- 10th. We occupy ourselves with hunting and for want of deer, we shoot squirrels. There are grey, black and red ones here; the grey and black are best to eat. They are very tasty and have beautiful pelts; they are far bigger than the Eichhorner [squirrels] in Germany. There are also grey, red and black foxes here. These and another animal, the raccoon, which is as big as a fox, have very beautiful pelts. In addition, there are many wildcats, which are bigger than the house cats and also have beautiful pelts; they kill sheep and are almost as dangerous as wolves. There is also a kind of animal, similar to our hamster, which is of reddish color and mostly stays underground like the hamster; it is called woodchuck by the English. Then there is an animal called a skunk, which is as big as a house cat, of black color with a white stripe across head and back and with 4 white feet; the tip of the long tail is white. My landlord's dog killed one and unless the dog had moved out because of the stench, we could not have stayed in the house. When the animal is attacked, it pisses [sic] in its long hairy tail and thus wards off the dogs. The urine of this animal causes a horrible stench from which one could easily suffocate; the dog did not lose the scent for 4 weeks. The skunk is also known in Canada.

- 11th. Mr. Williams baptized his little daughter of 15 months himself, his wife handed him the child and he baptized her.
- 12th. I have mentioned that Brig. Gen. Danielson's wife and 2 daughters died of dysentery; none of them was baptized, just as the brig. gen. is not baptized.
- 14th. Continual NW wind and fair but very cold weather. Cornet Stutzer and Pastor Melzheimer have gone to Cambridge on horseback today to visit our Maj. Gen. von Riedesel.
- 16th. The Hartford newspaper announced that the Americans have captured an Engl. Ship on which were 9,000 regimentals and many other valuable items. Since there is a great want of this type of clothing here, the Americans will be very pleased. They also took 50 pieces [sic] of officers' wives prisoner, who will certainly be ransomed at once. –
- 17th. The Worcester newspaper reported that the King of England never would permit an exchange of his troops with his rebellious subjects just as he will not ratify the Convention of Saratoga. Thus, there is no chance for any exchange as yet. I have become acquainted with a few married couples in this village, none of whom is baptized. They in turn have produced 4 children, who are not baptized either.
- 23rd. The stormy NW wind drove snow in my face at night while I lay in bed; the houses are so ingeniously built that the wind drives the snow through just about everywhere. On the level ground, the snow lies 3 feet deep.
- 25th. Pastor Melzheimer returned from Cambridge and said that the army of Gen. Burgoyne expected the transport ships, destined to take them back to Europe, in the month of February; that barracks were being built in Rutland, 24 miles from here, for all prisoners of war and that we too would have to move there shortly, that, if left alone, our troops would desert from Winter Hill; that, when the army chaplain from the Hesse-Hanau Reg. decided to journey to Canada and asked Congress for permission, they not only sent him the passport but also 180 pounds of paper money for the church; that the Engl. Ship had arrived in Boston from Rhode Island, on which Ge. Howe had sent not only all kinds of necessities for our army such as pieces of clothing etc., but also 80,000 guineas. An excellent medicine.
- 26th, My landlord brought a piece of news home that almost caused him a stroke; 300 transport ships had arrived in Rhode Island with troops thought to be Russians. He had been told that the Russians neither give nor accept pardon; he who captures a Russian has to kill him at once. This news surely originates with Tories or Royalists and is

manufactures lies; I just cannot believe that Russian troops have come to America, although they would be the best soldiers for this country. In spite of the severe cold and the deep snow, the cattle are not put into stables. The 6 pigs my landlord has slaughtered weigh more than 1,400 lbs. and 2 over 1,480. All these are salted down; little or nothing is known about (curing) by smoking.

- 29th. When I asked him, my landlord said that unmarried people of both sexes were allowed to sleep together. I replied that it was impossible for me to believe this, but in order to make certain, I would ask his minister, Mr. Williams, about it. He did not seem to like that, however. – In the Hartford newspaper, we read that the King of France had encouraged the Canadians to take advantage of the opportunity to tear themselves away from the Engl. yoke and throw themselves upon the protection of the Congress of the 13 United Provinces. Thereupon, the Canadians quickly sent a delegation to Congress and asked for its protection. Coming, however, from a newspaper, this needs confirmation!
- 31st. The news is spreading that the Canadians have revolted, and the occupation forces have fled from all the posts via Quebec up to the Ile-d'Orleans where they had taken hold of themselves again. If this is true, then our baggage will surely be lost; but this is certainly a lie, for Governor General Carleton knows the Canadians and consequently enforces good order so that they cannot do such things. Moreover, the Canadians are too fearful; we will soon here that these were lies.