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OUR ANCESTORS IN THE BRITISH PRISONS OF THE REVOLUTION

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READ BEFORE THE
LEBANON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
FEBRUARY 23, 1912

By CAPT. H. M. M. RICHARDS, Litt.D.

Vol. 6

No. 1

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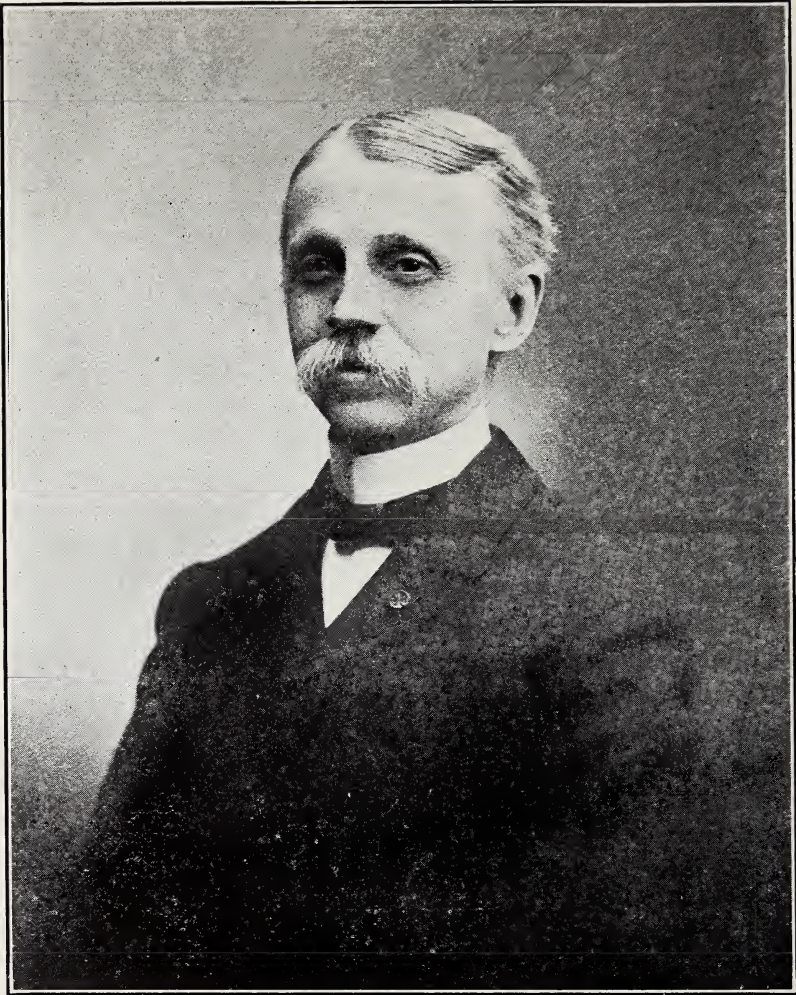
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CAPT. H. M. M. RICHARDS, LITT.D.

Our Ancestors in the British Prisons of the Revolution

By **CAPT. H. M. M. RICHARDS, Litt.D.**

Our books, our papers and our magazines are filled with the deeds of our fathers during the Revolutionary War. Every child is familiar with the stories of their heroism in battle on land and sea, with their patriotic sacrifices for the cause of liberty, and with the terrible sufferings they endured at Valley Forge, on their winter march to Trenton and Princeton, in the hospital, and on so many other occasions when weary, hungry and naked. With all this, how many of us have even heard of the British Prisons of the Revolution, and how few of us know of the awful scenes enacted within them.

And they were awful. So terrible were the sufferings of these victims of heartless and rapacious British hirelings that the student of history, who today reads the scanty memoirs emanating from the pens of a few of the very few survivors, can hardly be brought to give credence to what he sees on the printed page. There are men still living who have passed through the horrors of Andersonville, Florence, Salisbury, Libby, and other prison pens of our Civil War, and humanity stands aghast at what they have to say of their experience while there, but it is doubtful whether the sufferings of those confined in the British Prisons of our Revolutionary War did not even exceed these horrors, if such be possible.

When Dante wanted to give a preliminary idea of the fearful misery which fell to the lot of those who were consigned to the gloomy abode of Satan, he wrote over the portal to the infernal regions these words, "Who enters here leave Hope behind."

He could think of nothing more terrible or awe-inspiring. And there is nothing more terrible, for to live without hope is worse than death itself. It was in this way thousands of Revolutionary patriots entered the doors of their prisons, to issue from them no more as living beings.

It is a subject of unusual interest to us because our fathers were active participants in these scenes. Indeed, it was the capture of large numbers of our Pennsylvania German ancestors, at the battle of Long Island and the subsequent surrender of Fort Washington, which made necessary the origin of these places of torture. They were those who first suffered and died in them, and who became, thus, the first martyrs of our war for freedom.

The British Prisons and Prison Ships were so numerous that it would be impossible, with the limited space at our command, even briefly to treat of them all. They were located principally in New York City and on its bay. For a time, during the British occupation of Philadelphia, prisons were established in that city, but, wherever located, there was the same cruelty, the same suffering, the same unnecessary mortality. As it is proposed, in this paper, to confine ourselves to the earlier operations in the vicinity of New York City it will be of interest to name, at least, the various prisons of that locality of which use was made during the war.

From the lack of accommodations on shore, in the very beginning, various vessels intended for transports, supply ships, etc., were utilized, on which the prisoners taken at Long Island and Fort Washington were briefly confined. Sundry buildings in the city, however, having been seized, including several sugar-houses, dissenting churches, Columbia College and the Hospital, the soldiers were gradually removed to them, and, eventually, the vessels, whose number became largely augmented, were assigned entirely to the prisoners captured on American privateers, and other seamen not in the Continental service, together with the foreign French and Spanish captives of the English.

PRISONS ON SHORE.

When the British occupied New York City the only existing prisons were the New Jail and the New Bridewell, be-

tween the City Hall (afterwards the Custom House) and Broadway. The former, later the Hall of Records, was made a Provost Prison, in which officers and men of note were confined. At one time they were so crowded in this building that, when they lay down to sleep, all in the row were obliged to turn over at the same time at the call, "Turn over! Left! Right!"

The sugar houses comprised the following:

Van Cortlandt's, which stood on the northwest corner of Trinity church-yard.

Rhinelanders, on the corner of William and Duane streets.

Liberty Street Sugar House, occupied later by numbers 34 and 36 of that street, a tall, narrow building five stories in height and with dismal underground dungeons. This became the worst and most infamous of all the New York shore prisons. In its gloomy abode jail fever was ever present. During the hot weather of July, 1777, companies of twenty at a time would be sent out for half an hour's outing in the court yard. Inside, groups of six stood for ten minutes at a time at the windows for a breath of air. There were no seats; the filthy straw bedding was never changed. Every day, at least a dozen corpses were dragged out and pitched, like dead dogs, into the ditches and morasses beyond the city.

The North Dutch Church, on William street, contained eight hundred prisoners, and there were perhaps as many in the Middle Dutch Church, just north of the Liberty Street Sugar House. The Friends' Meeting House, on Liberty streetⁿ was also used as a prison, together with other buildings erected for the worship of God, as the Quaker Meeting House, on Queen street, in charge of Dr. Dibuke, who had been at least once convicted of stealing in Europe, and had fled to America for protection. Here many hundreds perished from lack of attention, one of the prisoners (Captain Jabez Fitch), stating that "he had often been in danger of being stabbed for attempting to speak to a prisoner in ye yard," and that the inhuman gaoler "often made application of his cane among ye sick instead of other medicines." Others of these were the Presbyterian Church, at New Utrecht, the Presbyterian Church in Wall street, the Scotch Church in Cedar street, the

two latter with the Brick Church and Friends' Meeting House, being, later, converted into hospitals, also the Baptist Meeting House, and the French Church.

In addition to the buildings just enumerated, possession was taken of Columbia College, and this, likewise, was turned into a prison.

THE PRISON SHIPS.

Prior to their occupation of New York City after the victory on Long Island, and before arrangements could be made to provide sufficient buildings for prison purposes, the British consigned the many captives in their hands to various transports and provision ships then anchored in the bay.

Amongst the first of these was the transport "Pacific," the "Lord Rochford," which lay off Utrecht, the "Woolly," the snow (a two-masted, square-rigged vessel) "Mentor," the "Whitby," the "Grosvenor," anchored in the North River, and the "Jersey," followed by "The Good Hope," "Prince of Wales," "Falmouth," "Kitty," "Scorpion," "Stromboli," "Hunter," "Frederick," "John," "Chatham," "Glasgow," "Woodlands," "Scheldt," "Clyde," and doubtless even others.

These vessels were mostly anchored in the North River and at Gravesend Bay, but were later, with a few exceptions, moved to the smooth and out-of-the-way waters of the Wallabout, the site of our present New York Navy Yard. The first of them to be taken there on October 20th, 1776, was the large transport "Whitby," which was placed near Remsen's Mill, followed by two large vessels in May, 1777, to which many of the prisoners were then transferred.

So great was the suffering on all of these vessels that, in various instances, those confined within them deliberately set them on fire hoping to perish in the conflagration, which, in fact, became the fate of not a few. This happened to one of the two vessels, just mentioned, on a Sunday afternoon in the middle of October, 1777, and to the remaining one in February, 1778. "The Good Hope" was destroyed in the same manner on October 18th, 1778, and a like attempt was made on the "Old Hell," as the "Jersey" was called.

THE BATTLE AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

The battle of Long Island was fought very largely by Pennsylvania-Germans. The 5,000 troops, engaged on the American side, consisted of the two battalions of Col. Miles' Pennsylvania Rifle Regiment, on the extreme left; Atlee's Pennsylvania Musketry Battalion, with the Maryland and Delaware Regiments, in the center, supported, somewhat to the rear, by a part of Lutz's Berks County Battalion of Pennsylvania Associators, and the Seventeenth Connecticut Regiment, together with, eventually, the remnant of Col. Miles' Regiment who hung on to the flank of the advancing enemy while retreating. The right of the army consisted of Col. Kichlein's Northampton County (Pennsylvania) Associators, the remainder of Lutz's Berks County Associators, also Associators of various battalions from Lancaster and York counties, joined, as the fight progressed, by Col. Atlee and his men.

Of these the vast majority of all the Associators were Pennsylvania-German. Many of the Maryland Regiment were of the same origin, and probably a portion of the Delaware Regiment. In Miles' Rifle Regiment, besides many scattered throughout other companies, the following commands were nearly all Pennsylvania-German:

Captain Lewis Farmer, from Philadelphia County.

Captain Henry Shade, from Northampton County.

of the First Battalion.

Captain Peter Grubb, Jr., from Lancaster (now Lebanon) County.

Captain Henry Christ, Jr., from Berks County.

of the Second Battalion.

In Atlee's Musketry Battalion where, likewise, many were scattered throughout the various companies, those of Captain Thomas Herbert and Captain Abraham DeHuff, both from Lancaster County, were practically all Pennsylvania-German.

In July, 1776, Fort Washington was erected at Kingsbridge, near New York City, and, on November 16th, 1776, was captured after an engagement, with the survivors of its garrison, as a result of combined treachery and mismanagement. In its

garrison were the Third and Fifth Pennsylvania Battalions, together with the broken companies of Atlee's Musketry Battalion, Kichlein's and other Pennsylvania-German Associators. In the Fifth Pennsylvania Battalion were the Pennsylvania-German companies of:

Captain John Spohn, from Berks County.

Captain Peter Decker, from Berks County.

Captain John Miller, from Germantown.

Captain Nathaniel Vansandt, from Berks and Bucks Counties.

It has doubtless already been apparent to the reader how largely our little county of Lebanon, then a part of Lancaster County, was identified with these operations and their results. Because Lebanon was then a part of its parent county, Lancaster, the task of grouping all its patriots and citizens together is quite impossible. Its soldiers were to be found in many organizations. We can say definitely, however, that, as regards the operations just outlined, the following were all Lebanonians:

Captain Grubb's Company, in the Second Battalion of Col Miles' Rifle Regiment.

These officers of Col. Cunningham's First Battalion, Flying Camp (commanded in the battle of Long Island by Lieut. Col. William Hay), with, presumably, many of their men:

Captain Jacob Klotz, Third Company.

Second Lieut. Robert Coleman, of Capt. James Watson's Second Company.

Second Lieut. ——— Weiser, of Capt. Timothy Green's Eighth Company.

Third Lieut. Henry Buehler, of Capt. John McQuown's Ninth Company.

What were the losses sustained in this campaign is the question which must now be answered if we are to form any opinion of the sacrifices made by our ancestors as they languished in the British prisons to which their reverses at Long Island and Fort Washington doomed them.

The records of the Third Battalion, taken at the surrender of Fort Washington, are lacking in every detail, but, from the meagre returns on hand, especially those of October 7th, 1776, their losses in killed, wounded and missing were some 350, of which practically all were the latter.

In the case of the Fifth Battalion we have what appears to be an official return of its commander, Major John Beatty, taken immediately after November 16th, 1776, which gives:

Rank and file fit for duty, sick and present (Nov. 15) ..	280
Ditto taken prisoners	237
<hr/>	
Killed and escaped	43

We are especially fortunate in having further data of this battalion, comprising muster rolls (even if incomplete), and like wise a correct "List of Prisoners returned from New York to barracks at Philadelphia, Jan. 11th, 1777," showing that of the 237 originally captured but 83 were liberated on December 26th, 1776. It is sad to glance at the list of those recorded as "died in prison," "died of wounds," "died two days prior to exchange," of which there were thirteen in Capt. Vansandt's company alone. The rest are marked as "escaped, or absent sick." In other words they were unaccounted for, and the bones of most of them today rest in unknown graves because few indeed were those who succeeded in escaping from their prisons.

As regards the various battalions of Associators there is practically nothing on record. We can but surmise their losses by comparison with such as are known of other organizations. We are fortunate, however, in having the muster rolls of Capt. Arndt's Company from Northampton County, in Col. Kichlein's Battalion, which shows that they went into the battle of Long Island with 102 officers and men of whom but 33 were left after the surrender of Fort Washington, the remainder being killed, wounded or captured.

Lutz's Berks County Battalion of Associators lost its commander, Lieut. Col. Lutz, its major, three captains, one lieutenant, and fully three hundred men, so far as we can tell from data on hand.

The First Battalion of Associators, Col. Michael Swope,

from York County, suffered severely at Long Island and Fort Washington. Capt. Graeff's company was captured in the former battle, only eighteen men returning to join their command; Capt. Stake's company lost many in the latter engagement. Ensign Jacob Barnitz, of York, was wounded at Long Island and lay for fifteen months in prison.

The losses of the Lancaster County Associators were equally severe but no data is obtainable.

We are more fortunate in having an authentic report of the losses sustained by the commands of Col. Miles and Col. Atlee at Long Island, under date of September 8th, 1776, taken from a muster roll of these three battalions which was compared with the accounts kept by the British, secured under flag of truce. They show killed and missing as follows:

	Officers	Men
First Battalion, Rifle Regiment.....	13	120
Second Battalion, Rifle Regiment.....	7	48
Musketry Battalion	12	77

This does not include the losses sustained at Fort Washington, which are not recorded but which must have been heavy, among them being Capt. Abraham DeHuff and Lieut. Robert Caldwell, both of Lancaster County.

In the Pennsylvania Archives is given a list of twenty-seven privates, of Col. Miles' and Col. Atlee's Battalions, who were exchanged December 9th, 1776. As this is about the time those prisoners, taken at Long Island and Fort Washington, were released and exchanged, their term of service expiring, if it be a fact that this list is complete, and that these were the only survivors of the many originally taken prisoners from these battalions, it needs but little calculation to show what a fearful mortality must have occurred amongst them during their captivity. And yet all these figures, just given, agree with careful cotemporaneous calculations made, which variously estimate the number of prisoners taken in this campaign to have been about 800 to 1000 at Long Island, and 2900 at Fort Washington. Lossing, in his "Field Book of the Revolution," says that out of the 2600 private soldiers captured at Fort Washington in two months and four days 1900 were killed in the infamous sugar houses and other prisons in New York

City, and these figures are confirmed by Lieut. Henry Bedinger, one of the survivors. How many of the miserable remnant would have gotten out alive, even though their terms of service had expired, our Heavenly Father alone knows, had He not given to the American cause the victories at Trenton and Princeton, at the close of 1776, which placed in Washington's hands many prisoners to be used in exchange for those who were British captives, or, at least, put him in position to alleviate their sufferings.

As this paper is to confine itself to some account of the experience of our ancestors who were taken at Long Island and Fort Washington we dare not touch upon the awful horror which attaches itself to the Prison Ships, which were largely occupied by the privateer seamen who were captured. Space would forbid even though we were so inclined. However, it is not necessary. Our narrative will be sufficiently sad without taking up this topic, even though we keep ourselves to the limits which have been named.

At this point the question naturally arises as to who was responsible for the misery and sufferings in these prisons. In justice to the fair name of Great Britain it must be said that the superior officers of the British Army should not be held too accountable. While, to a certain extent, they might have alleviated suffering, and might have introduced more humane treatment, yet the chief blame rests with those subordinates in direct charge of the prisons. It was they who diverted the sufficient and good food, furnished by the government, to their own selfish purpose of gain, and substituted other material utterly unfit for human beings. They were the ones whose brutal treatment caused the death of thousands, and who seemed to be devoid of all sense of mercy or regard for the welfare of their fellow men. As our Civil War brought forth the infamous wretch, Captain Wirz of Andersonville Prison, so the War of the Revolution produced the monster Captain Cunningham, the Provost of British prisons in New York City.

CAPTAIN WILLIAM CUNNINGHAM.

William Cunningham was an Irishman, born in Dublin Barracks in 1738. His father was trumpeter in the Blue Dragoons. When sixteen he became an assistant to the riding-

master of the troop. In 1761 he was made sergeant of dragoons, but, peace being proclaimed the following year, the company to which he belonged was disbanded. He then took up the business of a "scaw-banker," enticing rustics and mechanics to ship to America on the promise of having their fortunes made in that country, but, through forged and wrongfully obtained indentures, secured their sale as servants and redemptioners upon arrival.

About 1774 he appears to have embarked from Newry, in the ship "Needham," for New York, with some of his victims who had been kidnapped in Ireland. These poor creatures are said to have been treated so cruelly by him on the passage that, in pity, they were set free by the authorities upon arrival at their destination.

When Cunningham first appeared in New York he offered himself as a horse-breaker and insinuated himself in the favor of the British officers by blatant toryism. He soon became obnoxious to the Whigs of that city, was mobbed, and fled to the "Asia" man-of-war for protection. From thence he went to Boston, where General Gage appointed him Provost Marshal. When the British took possession of New York he followed them to that place, burning with desire to be revenged upon his enemies, the Whigs.

He is said to have compassed the death of thousands of prisoners by selling their provisions, exchanging good for spoiled food, and even by poisoning them. Many also fell victims to his murderous violence. About two hundred and fifty of these poor creatures were taken out of their places of confinement at midnight and hanged, without trial, simply to gratify his blood-thirsty instincts. Private execution was conducted in the following manner. A guard was first dispatched from the Provost, about midnight, to the upper barracks, to order the people in the line of march to close their window shutters and put out their lights, forbidding them at the same time to presume to look out of their windows on pain of death. After this the prisoners were gagged, and conducted to the gallows just behind the upper barracks where they were hanged without ceremony, and afterwards buried by his assistant, a mulatto.

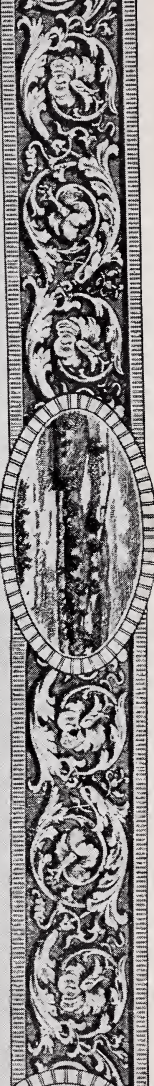
Fac-Simile of Certificate of Membership.

All of the symbols on the annexed fac-simile of the certificate of Membership in the Lebanon County Historical Society consist of amplifications of said symbols constituting the Seal of the Society, with the exception of two of them, namely: the Church picture and the Railroad Scene, which latter two are additions to the Certificate, and are not in the Seal. The fac-simile, 5 1-4x7 1-8 inches, is a reduced copy of the Certificate, the size of the latter being 9 1-4x12 1-2 inches, with a white margin on its four sides 1 1-2 inches in width, or 12x15 1-2 inches as the full size of the Certificate Sheet.

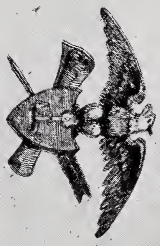
Reverting to the symbols given on the Seal, the Book, the Shield, the Eagle, the Candle, the Pen, the Scroll, the Canal and Canal Boat, the Plow, the Sheaves, the Furnace Illustration, the Valley Scene with the Classic Quittapahilla flowing through its centre, and the Mountain View—these have their historical bearings well set forth in a Paper entitled: "The Seal of the Lebanon County Historical Society," read before the Society by the Rev. Theo. E. Schmauk, D. D., October 28, 1910, and appearing in No. 6. Vol. V. of the Society's publications, quo vide.

The Church view is an actual picture of the old Hill Church, erected in 1837, near the site of which was erected and dedicated in the year 1744 the first Union Church in Lebanon County, Lutheran and Reformed, of which the Rev. John Casper Stoeber and the Rev. John Conrad Templeman respectively were the Pastors at the time.

This insert is to serve the two-fold purpose of thus being made a part of the records of the Society, and to furnish its members a valuable Souvenir.



1727
County Settled



1813
County Formed

This Certifies That at a regular meeting of the
Lebanon County Historical Society

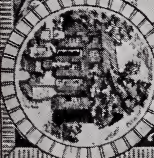
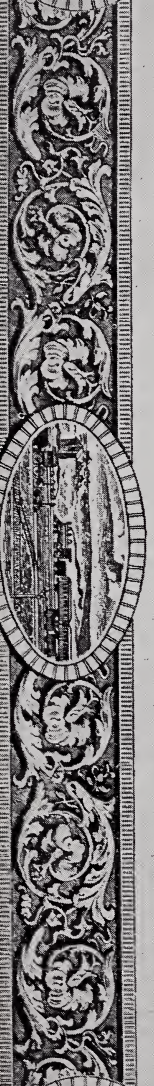
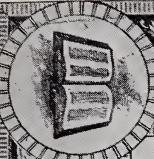
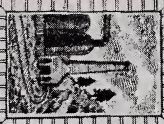
held on the _____ day of _____ 19__

was admitted a member of the Society

Witness the seal of the Society attested
at Lebanon, Pa. this _____ day of _____

19__

President
Secretary



This practice is said to have been stopped by the women along the line of march from the Provost to the barracks. They appealed to General Howe to prevent further executions, as the noise made by the sufferers, praying for mercy and appealing to Heaven for justice, was dreadful to hear.

It would seem from this account that, although the wretched men were gagged, as they were conveyed along the streets, their ferocious murderer could not deny himself the pleasure of hearing their shrieks of agony at the gallows (Danske Dandridge).

It is said of him, in a pamphlet entitled "The Old Martyrs' Prison," that "his hatred of the Americans found vent in torture by searing irons and secret scourges to those who fell under the ban of his displeasure. The prisoners were crowded together so closely that many fell ill from partial asphyxiation, and starved to death from want of the food which he sold to enrich himself."

They were given muddy and impure water to drink, and that not in sufficient quantities to sustain life. Their allowance, nominally, was two pounds of hard-tack and two of pork per week, and this was often uncooked, while either the pork or the biscuit, or both, were usually spoiled and most unwholesome.

Cunningham destroyed Nathan Hale's last letters containing messages to his loved ones, in order, as he said, that "the rebels should not know that they had a man in their army who could die with such firmness."

The complaints as to his cruel treatment of the prisoners in his charge finally became so great and numerous that, in the Fall of 1777, General Washington wrote to General Howe, or Clinton, reciting them, and requesting an examination into their truth. The result was a promise, from General Howe, that punishment would be meted the offender. He does not seem to have been very severely punished, as, so far as is known, he was merely transferred to Philadelphia, then in British hands, and placed in charge of its prisons, where he continued his inhuman practices, and where, we are told, one of his unhappy victims, driven to the last extreme of hunger, gnawed his own fingers, to the first joint, from the hand, before he ex-

pired. Others ate the mortar and stone which they chipped from the prison walls, while some were found with bits of wood and clay in their mouths, which, in their death agonies, they had sucked to find nourishment (Dr. Albigeine Waldo, an American Surgeon at Valley Forge).

Again complaint was made and Cunningham was removed from Philadelphia only to be restored to his old position in New York. He remained there until November, 1783, when he embarked on board a British man-of-war, and America was no longer cursed with his presence. What then became of him is unknown although it is said that he was hanged, on August 10th, 1791, for forgery.

Oliver Bunce, in his "Romance of the Revolution," thus speaks of the inhumanity of Cunningham:

"But of all atrocities those committed in the prisons and prison ships of New York are the most execrable, and indeed there is nothing in history to excel the barbarities there inflicted. Twelve thousand suffered death by their inhuman, cruel, savage and barbarous usage on board the filthy and malignant prison ships . . . adding those who died and were poisoned in the infected prisons in the city, a much larger number would be necessary to include all those who suffered by command of British generals in New York. The scenes enacted in these prisons almost exceed belief. . . . Cunningham, the like of whom, for unpitiful, relentless cruelty, the world has not produced . . . thirsted for blood, and took an eager delight in murder."

SOME PERSONAL EXPERIENCES.

What has already been written could not better give a general idea of the misery pervading the shore prisons of New York. The sufferings on board the prison ships were fully as acute. In addition to the lack of food and water, the entire absence of all medical treatment and religious consolation, the presence of smallpox and malignant fevers with which the prisoners were constantly in contact, the filth resulting from unremoved fever excrement, unchanged straw bedding with unwashed clothing and living quarters, those in the vessels were denied, to a greater extent, the blessings of God's pure air. Confined in closed and unventilated quarters, during

the hot summer nights they died by scores and were hastily and imperfectly interred on the adjoining shore the next morning, only to have their poor remains washed out and exposed to the bleaching sun upon the recurrence of every storm.

As has been said already it is our purpose to confine this account to the experiences of those who were captured at Long Island and Fort Washington, because it was amongst them our ancestors were so largely to be found, and in their numbers were included our Lebanon County patriots.

There is no way of ascertaining just how many from our present county were made prisoners at that period. Doubtless the number was not so large as in the case of other counties, then, as now, much greater in territorial extent and much more largely inhabited. Neither are we so fortunate as to have preserved to us a record of personal experience on the part of any one from Lebanon County while in captivity. There are extant, however, reminiscences of others, belonging to the same organizations and captured at the same time. Their experiences could not have differed materially from the rest. Of course there is much remains untold, but it is proposed now to rehearse some of the salient points in these preserved records, and leave the rest to the imagination of the reader who has become, by this time, more or less familiar with the subject as a whole.

Captain Alexander Graydon, of the Third Pennsylvania Battalion, was captured at Fort Washington November 16th, 1776, paroled July 7th, 1777, exchanged April, 1778. He became the first prothonotary of Dauphin County, and died at Philadelphia May 2nd, 1818, aged 67. He says in his memoirs that, when in charge of his captors, a party of Highlanders, a British officer rode up at full gallop exclaiming, "What! taking prisoners! Kill them, kill every man of them!" Turning around Capt. Graydon took off his hat to this officer, saying, "Sir, I put myself under your protection," which seemed to sufficiently rebuke him, and saved their lives. One of the soldiers, desiring his cartridge box, seized the belt and nearly jerked him off his legs in an effort to secure it. Presently a Hessian came along, half drew his sword and thrust himself forward, grunting out in broken English, "Eh! you rebel! you damn rebel!"

They were then marched to an old stable, where, for nearly an hour, officers of the light infantry, mainly, "young and insolent puppies," amused themselves by abusing and cursing them, assuring them that every man of them would certainly be hanged.

Finally the prisoners were marched within six miles of New York, and Graydon's party of officers were well quartered in a house. "Here," he continues, "for the first time we drew provisions for the famished soldiers." Previous to entering the city they were drawn up, for about an hour, on the high ground near the East River, where the officers were separated from the men conducted in a church and allowed to sign a parole. Speaking of the prisons in which the privates were confined he says, "I once and once only ventured to penetrate into these abodes of human misery and despair. But to what purpose repeat my visit, when I had neither relief to administer nor comfort to bestow? . . . I endeavored to comfort them with the hope of exchange, but humanity forbade me to counsel them to rush on to sure destruction. . . . Our condition was a paradise to theirs. . . . Thousands of my unhappy countrymen were consigned to slow, consuming tortures, equally fatal and potent to destruction."

Jonathan Gillett (lieutenant probably), of West Harford, was a prisoner two years, and then allowed to go home to die. He exhibited every symptom of poison, as well as starvation. During his confinement he wrote a letter to his friends, on December 2nd, 1776, which has been preserved and is as follows: "My Friends:

"No doubt my misfortunes have reached your ears. Sad as it is, it is true as sad. I was made prisoner (at Long Island) the 27th day of August by a people called heshens, and by a party called Yagers, the most Inhuman of all Mortals. I can't give Room to picture them here but thus much—I at first Resolved not to be taken, but by the Impertunity of Seven taken with me, and being surrounded on all sides, I unhappily surrendered; would to God I never had—then I should never (have) known there unmerciful cruelties; they first disarmed me, then plundered me of all I had, watch, Buckles, money and sum clothing, after which they abused me by bruising my flesh with the butts of there (guns). They knocked me down;

I got up and they (kept on) beating me almost all the way to there (camp) where I got shot of them—the next thing was I was almost starved to death by them. I was kept here 8 days and then sent on board a ship, where I continued 39 days by (them was treated) much worse than when on shore—after I was set on (shore) at New York (I was) confined (under) a strong guard till the 20th day of November, after which I have had my liberty to walk part over the city between sun and sun.

“I was after put on board siezed violently with the disentary—it followed me hard upwards of six weeks—after that a slow fever, but now am vastly better . . . my sincere love to you and my children. May God keep and preserve you at all times from sin, sickness and death . . . I will endeavor to faintly lead you into the poor ciation the soldiers are in, espechally those taken at Long Island where I was; in fact these cases are deplorable and they are Real objects of pity—they are still confined and in houses where there is no fire—poor mortals, with little or no clothes—perishing with hunger, offering eight dollars in paper for one in silver to Relieve their distressing hunger, occasioned for want of food—there natures are broke and gone, some almost loose there voices and some there hearing—they are crowded into churches and there guarded night and day. I can’t paint the horable appearance they make—it is shocking to human nature to behold them—Could I draw the curtain from before you; there expose to your view a lean jawd mortal, hunger laid his skinny hand (upon him) and whet to keenest Edge his stomach cravings, surrounded with tattered garments, Rotten Rags, close beset with unwelcome vermin. Could I do this, I say, possable I might in some (small) manner fix your idea with what appearance sum hundreds of these poor creatures make in houses where once people attempted to Implore God’s Blessings, &c., but I must say no more of these calamities. God be merciful to them—I can’t afford them no Relief. If I had money I soon would do it, but I have none for myself. . . .”

Another of those captured at Long Island, who left his memoirs of prison experience, was Capt. Jabez Fitch.

At first his party was taken, August 29th, to the transport “Pacific” where, at sundown, they were crowded into a leaky

and dirty lower deck where but half of their number could lie down at a time. Loaded cannon were pointed at them with the threat that they would be fired upon the least noise or disturbance during the night. When allowed to come on deck they were insulted in the most vulgar manner, and allowed no water "fit for a beast to drink," although there was a sufficiency of good water on hand. On Sunday, September 1st, they were removed to the ship "Lord Rochford," which lay off New Utrecht and was also crowded. On September 5th they were sent to the snow "Mentor," which was their prison for a long time, "commanded by one Davis, a very worthless, low-lived fellow." On October 7th they were sent on shore and conducted to a very large house on the west side of Broadway, on the corner south of Warren street near Bridewell.

Speaking of the private soldiers, he says that when most of the officers were set at liberty on parole, November 20th, "Ye first objects of our attention were ye poor men who had been unhappily captured with us. They had been landed about ye same time yt we were, and confined in several churches and other large Buildings, and although we had often Received Inteligence from them with ye most Deplorable Representation of their miserable Situation, yet when we came to visit them we found their sufferings vastly superior to what we had been able to conceive. Nor are words sufficient to convey an Adequate Idea of their Unparalleled Calamity. Well might ye Prophet say, 'They yt be slain with ye sword are better than they yt be slain with hunger, for these pine away, etc.'

"Their appearance in general Rather Resembled dead Corpses than living men. Indeed great numbers had already arrived at their long home, and ye Remainder appeared far advanced in ye same Journey; their accommodations were in all respects vastly inferior to what a New England Farmer would have provided for his cattle, and although ye commissary pretended to furnish them with two-thirds of ye allowance of ye King's Troops, yet they were cheated out of one-half of that. They were many times entirely neglected from Day to Day, and received no Provision at all; they were also frequently Imposed upon in Regard to ye Quality as well as Quantity of their provision, Especially in the necessary article of Bread of

which they often received such Rotten and mouldy stuff as was entirely unfit for use.

“ . . . A large number of ye most feeble were Removed down to ye Quaker Meeting House on Queen street, where many hundreds of them perished in a much more miserable Situation than ye dumb Beasts, while those whose particular business it was to provide them relief, paid very little or no attention to their unparalleled sufferings. . . . This house I understand was under ye Superintendence of one Dr. Dibuke. . . .”

This Dr. Dibuke is doubtless the same as the one mentioned by Elias Boudinot, in his journal, who says that, when the British army occupied New York, they found in jail a Frenchman, under condemnation for burglary and robbery, who was “a very loose and ignorant man,” and had been a servant. He was set over the prisoners in the hospital as a surgeon, though entirely ignorant of all medical art. Convinced that he was really murdering those in his charge even a British officer lodged complaint against him. In one instance, as he was about to give a dose of physic to several of the men, a young woman nurse made signs to them not to take it. After the doctor had gone she stated that she suspected it contained poison, and that she had several times heard this Frenchman say that he would have ten rebels dead in such a room and five dead in such another room the next morning, and it always so happened. The medicine was eventually given to a dog who died in a very short time. This same man, in later years, was condemned to die in England for some crime committed, and, at his execution, confessed to the murder of many rebels in prison at New York by poison, and stated that, upon his reporting to General Howe the number of prisoners dead, his pay was raised. He further confessed that he poisoned the wells used by the American Flying Camp, which caused such an uncommon mortality among them in the year 1776.

In his “Journal of experiences after the battle of Long Island, Captain John Nice, of Col. Atlee’s Musketry Battalion, gives us the following itinerary of the movements of the prisoners, which is most useful in locating them.

“August 29—We were sent under a strong guard to a small

town four miles down the island, called Flat Bush, and were turned over to a battalion of Hessians who used us very well.

"August 31—The Highlanders relieved the Hessians and took charge of us. Sent all our private soldiers to Gravesend, where they were lodged in two churches.

"September 3—Under guard we went on board the snow "Mentor," Capt. Davis, and were placed on short allowance, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. Pork and 10 ounces of Bread per man daily.

"September 5—Our men were placed on the transports "Woolly" and "Rochford," where we lay until

"September 22, when we passed the Narrows and anchored between Governor's and Gallows Islands.

"September 29—Sailed up the North River and dropped anchor opposite Powl's Hook (Paulus Hook).

"October 7—We were landed in New York and signed a second parole. The New York and New England officers were put in a house together on the Holy Ground; the Marylanders, Delawarians and Pennsylvanians were lodged in the house of Mr. Mariner, on William Street, except the field officers, who had the liberty of hiring a house for themselves.

"October 9—Tonight I was insulted by a number of Highland officers, who rushed into the house, abused us with bad language, and struck Lieut. Carnaghan, of the Right Battalion, and Ensign Farnandaz, of the Maryland Battalion, and forced them away to the guard-house that night. Here they were treated very civil by the sergeant, and the next morning released by order of General Robertson. We heard during the day heavy cannonading in the direction of Forts Washington and Lee.

"November 16—Fort Washington was taken.

"November 18—The prisoners taken at Fort Washington were brought to New York; the officers lay in the Baptist meeting house that night."

Oliver Woodruff, captured at Fort Washington, left the following record: "We were marched to New York and went into different prisons. Eight hundred and sixteen went into the New Bridewell (between the City Hall and Broadway);

some into the Sugar House; others into the Dutch Church . . ." The New Bridewell was "a cold, open house, the windows not glazed," without straw to lie on and no fuel but one cart load per week.

We dare not multiply, as we readily might, these tales of misery and suffering. What has already been said is sufficient for our purpose. Surely nothing further is needed to picture the horrors through which our fathers passed who were amongst the unfortunate prisoners of Long Island and Fort Washington. We will therefore conclude by quoting from the account which Col. Ethan Allen, himself a prisoner, gave of what he there saw. He says:

"The prisoners (from Fort Washington) who were brought to New York were crowded into churches, and environed with slavish Hessian guards . . . and at other times by merciless Britons, whose mode of communicating ideas being unintelligible in this country served only to tantalize and insult the helpless and perishing; but above all the hellish delight and triumph of the tories over them, as they were dying by hundreds. This was too much for me to bear as a spectator; for I saw the tories exulting over the dead bodies of their countrymen. I have gone into the churches and seen sundry of the prisoners in the agonies of death, in consequence of very hunger; and others speechless and near death, biting pieces of chips; others pleading, for God's sake, for something to eat, and at the same time shivering with cold. Hollow groans saluted my ears, and despair seemed to be imprinted on every one of their countenances. The filth in these churches, in consequence of the fluxes, was almost beyond description. I have carefully sought to direct my steps so as to avoid it, but could not. They would beg for God's sake for one copper or morsel of bread. I have seen in one of the churches seven dead, at the same time, lying among the excrements of their bodies.

"It was a common practice with the enemy to convey the dead from these filthy places in carts, to be slightly buried, and I have seen whole gangs of tories making derision, and exulting over the dead. . . .

"The provision dealt out to the prisoners was by no means sufficient for the support of life. It was deficient in Quantity,

and much more so in Quality . . . it was loathsome and unfit to be eaten, and I am bold to aver it as my opinion, that it had been condemned and was of the very worst sort. . . . Their allowance of meat, as they told me, was quite trifling and of the basest sort . . . bad as it was, it was swallowed almost as quick as they got hold of it. I saw some of them sucking bones after they were speechless; others who could yet speak and had the use of their reason, urged me, in the strongest and most pathetic manner, to use my interest in their behalf . . . but as I could not do them any material service, and by any public attempt for that purpose I might endanger myself by frequenting places the most nauseous and contagious that could be conceived of, I refrained going into the churches. . . .

“The integrity of these suffering prisoners is incredible. Many hundreds of them, I am confident, submitted to death rather than enlist in the British service, which I am informed they most generally were pressed to do. . . .

“Meantime mortality raged to such an intolerable degree among the prisoners that the very school children in the street knew the mental design of it in some measure; at least they knew that they were starved to death. Some poor women contributed to their necessity till their children were almost starved; and all persons of common understanding knew that they were devoted to the cruellest and worst of deaths.”

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