



Joshua Gray In The American Revolution

By Maureen Rukstalis

The tension in the American Colonies leading up to the 1770's was steadily increasing. The British pressed for more revenue and taxes were imposed on paper, sugar, imported goods and more. By 1773, the tax on tea had the pot simmering and ready to explode. On April 19, 1775, the British Army and the Americans met in battle at Lexington and Concord which finally ignited the American War of Independence. Local militia men were called to arms taking them away from their homes and families to fight for the Colonies. One of those men was Joshua Gray of Yarmouth.

Joshua Gray was born in North Yarmouth, Maine, to Andrew and Phebe (Chandler) Gray. When Joshua was 2 years old, his mother died and his father, fearing that his son would be kidnapped by the hostile local tribe, sent him to live with his aunt Mrs. Hannah

Hallet. Her husband Thomas Hallet was a wealthy man and they lived in the mansion in Yarmouth Port. Thomas would later adopt Joshua and make him his heir.

On April 19, 1775, Joshua Gray would answer the call to arms and marched to Marshfield to defend the seacoast. He served as a captain under Colonel Carey's regiment. His service was for 2 days. He was discharged on December 31, 1775. On January 31, 1776, he was named First Major under Nathaniel Freeman but declined.

We have learned more about Captain Joshua Gray's military service by reading his letters to his wife Mary. The letters begin early in 1776 as she addressed them to Joshua in Colonel Carey's camp in Roxbury which is located on Fort Hill.

Fort Hill was chosen by George Washington after conferring with Henry Knox and others as an ideal location to monitor the activities of the British troops around Boston. The road adjacent to the hill was the only connection to Boston through the Boston Neck. From their vantage point movement as far away as Charlestown could be observed as well as observing the shipping from the harbor. To the left of the Hill was the road that led to the town of Dedham and beyond which the troops could also control.

Roxbury was quite rural at this time and Fort Hill had a few homes and farms. There was the First Church of Roxbury which offered the use of their grounds to the troops. It is rumored that it was from this church that Revere and Dawes left for their "Midnight Ride". The Parsonage nearby, which is now known as the Dillaway-Thomas House, became the headquarters for General John Thomas of the Continental Army during the siege of Boston. From the second floor of this building, the General and staff could see the fortifications on Boston Neck and the Battles of Bunker Hill and Charles town.

On February 20, 1776, Joshua wrote to Mary stating that he had arrived at Roxbury Camp on Saturday night, February 10. On Sunday, he and his men were settled into comfortable barracks. He said that several houses were burned on "Dugster" Neck on February 14. At present there was no smallpox in the camp.

On February 24, 1776, Joshua complained that duty was hard, but he expected it to get harder. A 13 inch mortar hit Roxbury Camp that had been fired from Cambridge. He was expecting to be transferred to "Dogster" Neck to entrench there and a battle to begin. He related that the night before their sentry had captured 3 Regular sentries. Someone was taken away from Colonel Bailey's regiment with smallpox.

March 5, 1776, from Roxbury Camp Joshua told Mary that on the night of March 2, his troop began to fire shot and bombard "Borston". They continued from Sunday night until

Monday morning. Joshua went on main guard in Roxbury Fort and at 7:00 PM they began firing, bombarded on both sides. Bombs and shot few 6 an 7 at a time. That same night 21 men went to Digester Hill and a 3:00 they were relieved with 3,00 but little damage was done there, 2 men killed, 5 or 6 wounded in the whole of our camp. Now we have to get fortifying "Dogster" Hill. Cannon and mortar ready to bombard. I have some sick in my company: Lewis Thacher, Benoni Studley, Nathaniel Hallet, Miller Whilden.

On March 11, 1776, Joshua wrote Mary from Roxbury Camp there was heavy cannonfire last Saturday night on "Dogster" Hill. There were casualties, 4 men killed and one hut was damaged. There were 500-600 cannon balls. The shipping in Boston seems to be moving.

Sunday, March 17, 1776, Joshua wrote Mary that shipping and regulars left the town of Boston without destroying it. I understand and that small pox is in a number of houses and no doubt the town is left with the infection of small pox all over. I do not intend to go in myself to town.

March 21, 1776, We have orders to go to "Dogster" Hill to be stationed there until fourth orders. I hope I shall be at Plymouth the first or second of April if I am well. On June 20, 1776, the Town of Yarmouth voted unanimously and declared Independence from King George. Joshua Gray was a member of the committee that presented this document to the town.

(scroll down to see one of Joshua's letters)

Northbury Camp March 1776 My Dear I take this opportunity
to write a few Lines to you again to let you know that I am in Health
at present which I desire to bless God for hoping these Lines will find you
my Dear and our Children all in the same and all our friends and Relations
Sunday the 17 of March the Shipping and Soldiers left the Town of Boston
without Destroying it I understand that the small Pox is a Number of Houses
and no doubt the Town is left with the infection of the small Pox all
over I do not intend to go ⁱⁿ my self in to Town but I would not have you
be concern'd about it to much march as we have orders this after Noon to go
Dorchester hill to be Station on their till further order ~~to go~~ I hope
I shall be at Plymouth the first or second day of April if I am
well and now my Dear if you can send my horse to Plymouth for
~~me~~ to Brother Hedges or if you can leave home you self and get
Sgt Macher Horse and put in my stable and come you self to
Plymouth I should be glad

and if if you come a Saturday or Monday but not put you
self to ~~to~~ much trouble a boate being in a host I must
Conclude your Loving and kind husband untill Death

Joshua Gray

Roxbury Camp

March 1826

Carrie

Dec 31 / 82

Wm. Lloyd Garrison
Boston