

<https://www.ushistory.org/march/phila/valleyforge.htm>

The British in Philadelphia: Part 1 of 3

The British Occupy the Capital



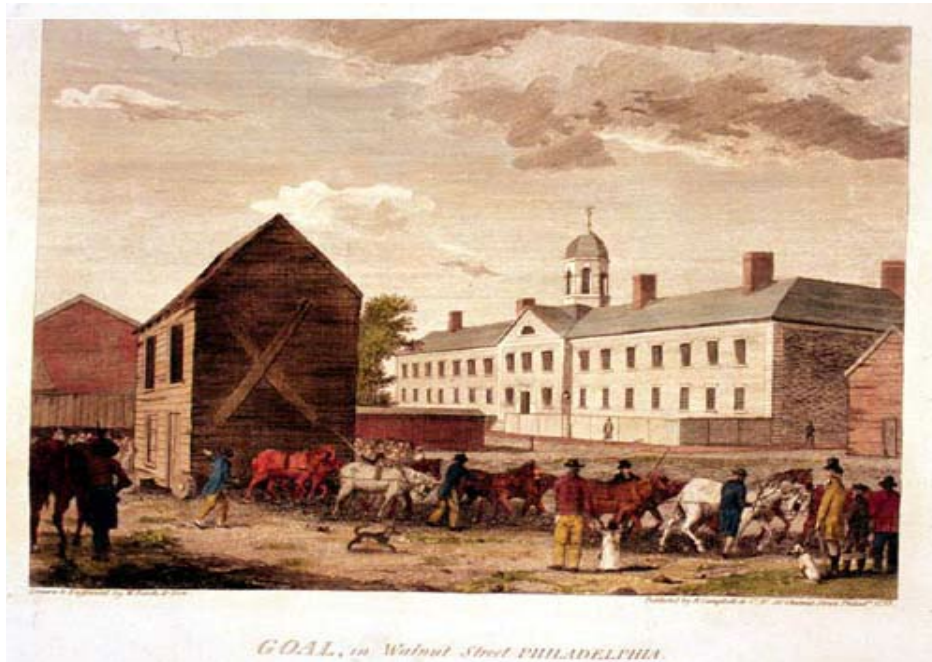
General Howe, Esqr. of the Connecticut and comander [sic] Army in America
Probst, Johann Michael, -1809, engraver
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

On September 26, 1777, the British marched into Philadelphia. In anticipation of their arrival, many patriots and businessmen had abandoned the city. Exacerbating matters, Washington's soldiers had looted Philadelphia, taking anything that might have been of use to the British.

Those citizens who remained were mostly a mixture of Loyalists, Quakers, and the poor. Three fourths of the population were woman and children. Most looked forward to British rule — after all they had always considered themselves loyal English citizens. Moreover,

they had long chafed under the excessive zeal of the American patriots who had been running the city.

British officers quartered in the finest houses, merchants from other towns started moving in, and the occupying Englishmen established a puppet government composed of local residents loyal to the crown.



GOAL, in Walnut Street PHILADELPHIA.

Walnut St. Goal (Jail)
W. Birch & Son

[*Birch's Views of Philadelphia*](#)

A City in Turmoil But the city was in turmoil. Churches were turned into hospitals, tending the wounded from the Brandywine and Germantown battles. The Walnut Street Jail was filled with American prisoners of war. Food, clothing, and firewood were scarce, thanks to an effective American supply blockade.

The British in Philadelphia: Part 2 of 3

The River is Opened But on November 16, 1777 the British captured two forts along the Delaware River which had kept supplies from

coming into the city — now they were ready to fully settle in for a warm, cozy, and party-filled winter.

But most Philadelphians had something new to worry about. While food started to trickle in, it was outrageously expensive. Most did not have the hard money necessary to pay for goods. An ever-increasing amount of looting began occurring, as did assaults and other crimes.

Quakers in the City Quakers, who did not gamble, dance, or go to theater were now living in a city of revelry where plays were performed, affairs were carried on in public, weekly balls were held at City Tavern, and gambling was a main form of entertainment.

Scrapes and Minor Attacks Lord Howe, instead of attempting a winter assault on the cold, vulnerable Americans instead chose to concentrate on dubious foraging expeditions and attacks on isolated posts. While they attacks were often successful, they cast a predatory character upon the British and aroused a whole bunch of bitterness.

Farewell Howe, Hello Clinton



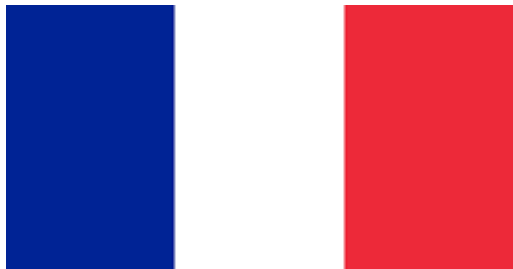
Sir Henry Clinton
Painting attributed to Andrea Soldi
circa 1762 - 1765

The British government grew dissatisfied with the results of Howe's campaign and recalled him to England replaced by Henry Clinton

Howe's fond officers prepared a party called the Meschianza for their departing leader. The Meschianza attended by the Tory belles of Philadelphia featured jousting, flower-festooned floats, and the most sumptuous meal in the city's history.

That very night, Howe prepared an assault against the Marquis de Lafayette at Barren Hill. He promised his guests they would be dining with the captured Frenchman the following day. They didn't.

The French Alliance



Late in Spring news of the French Alliance reached the British who feared being trapped in Philadelphia by French warships blockading the Delaware River and they opted to leave for New York.

Tory citizens were appalled that the British had decided to leave. They offered to raise 3,000 men if 2,000 British would stay to occupy the city. Howe left them hanging by urging them to make terms with Congress. The most active Tories left with the British.

In the end, the British slipped out of town. "They did not go away, they vanished."

The British in Philadelphia: Part 3 of 3

What Happened at Valley Forge While the British occupied Philadelphia, Washington and his army hunkered down for a harsh winter at Valley Forge. No battle was fought there, yet, it was the turning point of the Revolutionary War. It was here that the Continental army was desperately against the ropes — bloody, beaten, battle-weary — and ready to quit. Even General Washington conceded, "If the army does not get help soon, in all likelihood it will disband."

The question must be asked, "Why didn't they disband?"

We know what happened here. Early into the six-month encampment, there was hunger, disease, and despair. Raw weather stung and numbed the soldiers. Empty stomachs were common. Cries of "beef" echoed throughout the camp. The future promised only more desperation and starvation.

Some couldn't take the cold, hunger, and uncertainty any longer. There were dozens of desertions. Disease debilitated. Death descended in droves.



Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben
Charles Willson Peale, 1781-82

But by February of 1778, the weather eased somewhat — moving from brutal to merely miserable. In March, [General Nathanael Greene](#) was appointed head of the dismal Commissary Department and magically food and supplies started to trickle in. By April, [Baron von Steuben](#), a quirky mercenary who was not really a baron, began to magically transform threadbare troops into a fighting force. Also in April, the [Conway Cabal](#), a plot to remove George Washington from power, was quashed for good. May brought news of the French Alliance, and with it the military and financial support of France.

On June 19, 1778, exactly six months after the Americans arrived, a new army, eager to fight the British streamed out of Valley Forge toward New Jersey.

At Valley Forge, we read of words like "sacrifice" and conjure up images of bloody footprints, but the concept of suffering for freedom isn't easily to understood. What kept these men going? What happened at Valley Forge?

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