

Portsmouth During the Revolutionary War

A Special Exhibition of Documents from the
Collection of the
Portsmouth Historical Society

In Cooperation with the 225th Anniversary
The Battle of Rhode Island Re-Enactment
August 30, 2003

Exhibit and Document Transcriptions by the
Curator's Battle of Rhode Island Committee
Portsmouth Historical Society
Portsmouth, Rhode Island

Recruitment for Troops
General Assembly Order sent to Portsmouth
1776

Portsmouth and the other towns are ordered to raise a fourteen member “artillery Company” which will “March out to Action” when needed. The artillery company would be provided by the colony with “two, three or four Pound Field Pieces on Carriages.” The Committee of Safety for each County would provide the cannon.

Recruitment for Troops

(Jan)uary 13th 1776

To t----- agistrates

Gentlemen,

Resolved ----- ene be an artillery Company to consist of Fourteen Men each including officers raised in each of the following Towns in this Colony to wit. Providence, Warwick, Cranston, East Greenwich, North Kingstown, South Kingstown Jamestown, Charlestown, Westerly Warren Bristol Barrington Portsmouth - Little Compton Tiverton Newport and Middletown and that each of said Towns be supply'd at the Charge of the Colony with two three or four Pound Field Pieces on Carriages with other appurtenances (excepting that Towns of Providence East Greenwich North Kingston and Newport which are already supplied) And that the said Companies meet half a Day in every Week to exercise the Cannon, and to be allowed one Shilling Lawful Money for their Time each - half day, and when they are called upon to March out to Action to be allowed the same Wages as the other Artillery Companies, That the officers on exercising Days be allowed as follows The Capt. Two - Shillings and six pence and the Lieutenant two Shillings Lawful Money per half Day which officers are to be chosen by the respective Towns and that they proceed to chuse [sic] the officers and the officers - enlist the Men immediately And an Ammunition Cant [sic] be - provided for each Town And that the Committee of Safety for each County be directed to see that each of the Towns be provided with cannon -(?) agreeable to this Note.

Noted and past

By(?) Order, J. Lyndon Cler.

In the Upper House

Read the same Day and Concurred

By Order, William Mumford prs. Secr'y

A true Copy

Witness Henry Ward Secry

BACK

The Town Clerk of Portsmouth

Bounty payments

Record of payments for soldier's enlistment.

June 29th and 30th 1780

Bounties and wages were used to encourage soldiers to join Portsmouth's Revolutionary War Company. David Gifford and Burrington Anthony both served as Captains in the Company. When the Portsmouth troops were called up by the General Assembly in 1776, they became part of the 1st Regiment of Rhode Island.

Bounty - Soldier's Enlistment

Portsmouth, June 29th

1780

Recd. Of Capt. David Gifford fifty Dollar in Silver it Being for the Use of a Bounty for enlisting a soldiar (sic)

Recd. by me Burrington

Anthony.

Committee

June 30th,

Received of Capt. David Gifford the sum of one Hundred fifty three Dollar one third to enlist Soldier for this towns Compliment.

William Anthony Jr.

**Blank Officer's Commission
Used in Revolutionary War
December 19, 1777**

“Resist, expel, kill, and destroy” the enemy is the order to new officers in this brigade commission. This commission is authorized by Nicholas Cooke who became governor after Governor Wanton refused to sign the commissions ordered by the General Assembly. This blank commission was preserved as “scrap paper” used to record town business.

By his Excellency *NICHOLAS COOKE*, Esq; Governor, Captain-General and Commander in Chief, of and over the State of *Rhode-Island* and *Providence Plantations*.

TO: _____ GREETING.

You, the said _____ being appointed _____ in the Brigade ordered to be raised by the General Assembly of this State, held at Providence, on Friday the Nineteenth Day of December, A.D. 1777, for the Defence thereof in particular, and of the United States of America in general, are hereby, in the Name of the GOVERNOR and COMPANY of this State, authorized, empowered, and commissioned, to have, take and exercise, the Office of _____ And to command, guide and conduct the same, or any Part thereof. And in case of Invasion or Attack by a common Enemy, to infest or disturb this or any other of the said States, you are to alarm and gather together the _____ under your Command, or any Part thereof as you shall deem sufficient and therewith, to the utmost of your Skill and Ability, you are to resist, expel, kill, and destroy them, in order to preserve the Lives, Liberty and Properties of the good People of this and the other United States. You are also to follow such further Instructions, Directions and Orders, as shall, from Time to Time, be given forth, either by the General Assembly, or your superior Officers, And for your so doing this Commission shall be your sufficient Warrant.

GIVEN under my Hand, and Seal of the said State, this Day of _____ in the Year of our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and Seventy -

By His Excellency's Command

**Town Meeting vote on adoption of United States Constitution.
Portsmouth Freemen vote 12 to 60 to not adopt
May 24th, 1788**

The Nays have it 60 to 12. Portsmouth Freemen vote against adopting the Constitution in 1788. This vote reflects the overwhelming statewide vote of 2,708 against and 231 for the adoption of the Constitution. Rhode Islanders were concerned about war debt repayment and “paper money” issues as well as waiting for the adoption of the Bill of Rights. Rhode Island finally became the 13th state in 1790.

Agreeable to an Act of the General Assembly passed at the session Held in February AD 1788 the underwritten is the Names of the persons who gave their voices aloud in open Town Meeting of the Freemen of Portsmouth in the County of Newport & State of Rhode Island & Held on the 24th day of March AD 1788 whether the proposed Constitution as agreed in Philadelphia should be adopted or Negatived. The question being being [sic] put in yeas & nays-----

Yeas	Nays
Alexander Thomas - yea	Thomas Brownell - nay
Holder Chase - yea	Jonathan Cornell - nay
Giles Lawton, Jr. - yea	David Gifford - nay
Reuben Taylor - yea	Christopher Shearman - nay
Andrew McCorrie - yea	Gideon Durfee - nay
Pardon Sisson - yea	Elisha Coggeshall - nay
Robert Barker - yea	Clark Cornell - nay
Henry T. Shearman - yea	Richard Sisson - nay
Eaton (?) Barker - yea	Wm. Hall - nay
Tillinghast Almy - yea	George Sisson Blacksmith - nay
John Thurston - yea	Benjamin Hall - nay
Henry Lawton - yea	Giles Slocum, Jr. - nay
	Joseph Brownell, - nay
	John Tallman - nay
	Jonathan Freeborn - nay
	Benjamin Brownell - nay
	George Sisson - nay
	Jonathan Davenport - nay
	Restcom Sanford - nay
	Wm. Lawton - nay
	Wm. Burrington - nay
	Benjamin Fish - nay
	Gideon Dennis - nay
	George Lawton - nay
	Joseph Brownell Jun. - nay
	Burrington Anthony - nay
	Thos. Shaw - nay
	Elishah Cobb - nay
	Job Sisson - nay
	Samuel Hicks - nay
	George Brownell - nay
	George Hall - nay
	Joseph Sisson - nay

	Cook Willcock - nay
	James Cook - nay
	Christopher Shearman Jun - nay
	Joseph Shearman - nay
	Steven Brownell - nay
	Peleg Lawton - nay
	Joseph Kirby - nay
	John Sanford - nay
	Gidenon Shearman - nay
	Caleb Shearman - nay
	Robt Cani (?) - nay
	John Anthony - nay
	Job Cornell - nay
	Peleg Manchester - nay
	Nathan Brownell - nay
	William Burrington Jun - nay
	Stephen Slocum - nay
	Peleg Shearman - nay
	William Brightman - nay
	Oliver Brownell
	Sal, (?) Shearman - nay
	Sal, (?) Albro - nay
	Thos. Brownell Jun - nay
	James Greenman - nay
	Walter Cornell - nay
	Thos. Cory - nay
	George Cook - nay

Yeas 12 & nays 60

I hereby certify that the above & forgoing is a true copy of (cross outs) the names of each & every freeman & freeholder ye/yea or nay as they respectively give their voices in Town Meeting aforesaid And also that it is a true copy of the Original (on file - cross over)

W -(?) Abraham Anthony town Clerk

This is the original and (?) a copy of a certificate that went to Genl Assembly
(signed) W(?) A Anthony Ton Ck

Household Manifest – circa 1780's
List of losses during British occupation

From orchards to ox-carts and hogs to hay, Portsmouth families listed their claims against the British soldiers in hopes of getting payment for their losses. This is a list from Robert Binney and Elizabeth Heffernan. It gives us an idea of what a Portsmouth family might have owned before the Revolutionary War began.

Household Manifest
Circa 1780

The losses that Robert Binney and Elizabeth Heffernan met with by the
brittans Portsmouth.

1 orchard five akers [sic]
1 crib
1 cyder press and mill
2 cows and one calf
1 mare
5 hogs
12 goats ?
14 forkes
1 --jackass
1 ox cart
4 akers of corn
12 lode of hay
5 feather beds and bedding
4 bedsteds
1 desk
2 can of drawes ?
2 tables
12 chears [sic]
2 looking glases [sic]
1 -- of cortins
2 pare of andyens [sic]
3 copper tea cittel
1 pare of tongs and shovel
2 iron pot of cittel
4 trammels
18 putir [sic] platters
3 dozzen [sic] plates
2 large basons [sic]
1 caster with silver tops
2 large chest
30 yards of cloth
1 quardorn [sic]
1 candel [sic] mold

1 spitt
1 coffee mill
3 milk pans
1 chirn [sic]
2 lyucs [sic]
3 howes
2 barrels and 1 trunk of crockery ware 100 dollars
7 common gowns 30 dollars
4 aprons 10 dollars
6 pares of stays 20 dollars
3 large carpets for table
1 pare large stillards
2 iron bars
3 new damonush [sic] table cloths
2 plain ditto
1 pare wool cards
2 spaidis [sic]

Household Manifest - Circa 1780 – In more modern English

The losses that Robert Binney and Elizabeth Heffernan met with by the British in Portsmouth.

I orchard five acres.
1 crib
I cider press and mill
2 cows and one calf
1 mare
5 hogs
12 goats
14 forks
1 --jackass
1 ox cart
4 acres of corn
12 loads of hay
5 feather beds and bedding
4 bedsteads
1 desk
2 cans of drawers ?
2 tables
12 chairs
2 looking glasses (mirrors)
1 -- of curtains
2 pairs of andirons
3 copper tea kettles
1 pair of tongs and shovel
2 iron kettle pots
4 trammels
18 platters
3 dozen pewter plates
2 large basins
1 caster with silver tops
2 large chests
30 yards of cloth
1 quadroon [sic]
1 candle mold
1 spit
1 coffee mill

3 milk pans
1 churn
2 lyucs [sic]
3 hoes
2 barrels and 1 trunk of crockery ware 100 dollars
7 common gowns 30 dollars
4 aprons 10 dollars
6 pairs of stays 20 dollars
3 large carpets for table
1 pare large steelyards
2 iron bars
3 new damask tablecloths
2 plain tablecloths
1 pair wool cards
2 spades

Portsmouth during the Revolution

(based on James Garman's A History of Portsmouth Rhode Island 1638-1978)

1774	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rhode Islanders protest British taxes. • Summer of 1774 the British blockaded Narragansett Bay. • 250 British troops attacked Prudence Island and drove off the local militia. • General Assembly set amounts for what each community should supply to defend against the British. Portsmouth was to have available 115 pounds of powder, 184 pounds of lead and 738 flints. • Money was set aside for the militia if it had to be called up. 10-15 sterling for officers, 40 shillings to 4 pounds for enlisted men.
1775	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portsmouth Company of the Newport County Regiment was created in June of 1775. • Officers were Captain Burrington Anthony, Lieutenant David Gifford and Ensign Stephen Borden.
1776	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May 4, 1776 General Assembly cut ties with King George. • Portsmouth minutemen were called up as part of the first regiment of Rhode Island. • British arrived on Aquidneck Island December 7, 1776. They occupied the island with 6,000 troops. • British had camps all over the island to defend against the colonists. Portsmouth camps were at Bristol Ferry, Town Pond, near Howland's Ferry, on Butt's Hill and at Sandy Point. • All ferries were stopped, but people did go on and off island secretly. • Darius Chase – fourteen year old Portsmouth boy was killed by the British when they destroyed the family farm and home and he tried to save his shotgun. • Portsmouth Company officers were Captain David Gifford, Lieutenant Thomas Earle and Ensign Cook Wilson (RI State Records). • Town Council records stop November 11, 1776. Next entry is Feb. 25th, 1780.
1777	<p>July, 1777 capture of British General Richard Prescott took place a house owned by Mr. Overing. Major General Charles Lee had been captured by British in New Jersey.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rhode Island officer William Barton was in Tiverton with his troops, and got word from a spy that General Prescott has staying at the Overing House. • Barton got permission to take 40 men to capture Prescott and exchange him for Charles Lee. • July 9, 1777 he took five whale boats and set off from Warwick Neck. The rowed between Prudence and Patience Island and came ashore about a mile from the Overing House. They arrived at midnight and surrounded the house. They got hold of General Prescott and Lieut. Barrington and left in just a few minutes. • Prescott was handed over to American troops and was eventually was exchanged for Lee. • Prescott's capture gave colonial troops some encouragement.
1778	<p>Summer of 1778 Battle of Rhode Island.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Washington wanted American troops to keep the British busy at New York while the French General dEstaing took his French forces to Newport. French troops were supposed to land near Lawton's Valley and the American troops under Sullivan were to come over from Tiverton at Howland's Ferry. Plan was the

	<p>drive British back to Newport and force them to leave the island.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • August 8th General Sullivan in Tiverton, Lafayette, and other American troops under Generals Varnum, Glover and Nathanael Greene. • British burned several of their ships off the west coast of Portsmouth to prevent the French from capturing them. British withdrew from Fort Butts toward Newport. • August 9th Sullivan landed and occupied Fort Butts and other former British location. • French General d’Staing left with the French fleet to take on the British fleet and that left General Sullivan’s plans uncertain. There was a big storm that hampered the Americans. • August 15th colonial army under Generals Varnum, Glover, Nathanael Greene and Colonel Christopher Greene set off down the East and West Roads. General John Hancock (signer of the Dec. of Independence) was in command of one of the lines. • August 21st French returned, but told Sullivan they were going to Boston for repairs. • August 22nd – French depart for Boston and many of Sullivan’s militia started to go home as their enlistments were up. Sullivan’s force went from 10,000 to 5,000. • August 29th British troops under Colonel Campbell ambushed American troops under Colonel Livingston on Union Street near the East Road. Americans withdrew north, British troops under Prescott (he had returned) pursued. British and Hessians in line from Quaker Hill, Turkey Hill, and Almy’s Hill. American line was one mile north by Butt’s Hill. Cannons started at 9 am. British fleet moved to Lehigh Hill and bombarded the American Right flank. Hand to hand fighting from Lehigh Hill to Almy’s Hill. British made three charges. Troops of First Rhode Island Regiment with 138 ex-slaves reinforced American troops and performed bravely. Bloody Run Brook got its name from battlefield bloodshed. By 4PM battle over. Lines remained same. Mass graves dug. • Sullivan planned to withdraw. 5, 000 British troops were on the way. Sullivan withdrew across Howland’s Ferry. Battle over. 1,000 British and Hessians killed, American losses 500. Only battle fought in Rhode Island. Last major action in New England
1779	British ended occupation.
1780	French under Rochambeau arrived on Aquidneck Island in July 1780 and were welcomed
1788	March 24 th Portsmouth residents vote not to accept Constitution
1790	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of Portsmouth residents claims against British 161,000 (dollars?) Houses and farms had been destroyed. British had cut down all the trees. • Portsmouth people trying to get back to normal. • Portsmouth had about 1500 residents.

