

BUSINESS IN PHILADELPHIA DURING THE BRITISH OCCUPATION, 1777-1778

THE USUAL historical narrative passes over the British occupation of Philadelphia, during the winter season of 1777-78, with a brief statement of advent and departure, and the occasional observation that the royal forces lived comfortably, if not somewhat extravagantly, in gross contrast with the sufferings of the continentals nearby at Valley Forge. A pageant and festival, honoring Sir William Howe upon his departure in May, receive frequent mention, as do the military exploits of the rebel forces in the vicinity. Actually, the stay of the British troops in the Quaker city revealed the apathy of many inhabitants toward the revolution and pampered the cupidity of those who catered to the military. The presence of a large body of foreign troops profoundly affected the economic life of the community.

Shortly after eight o'clock on the morning of September 26, 1777, Lord Cornwallis, commanding a British and Hessian force of grenadiers, dragoons, and artillery, approached the city of Philadelphia,¹ and by ten o'clock his staff took formal possession of the rebel capital, as Captain John Montresor, chief engineer, observed, "amidst the acclamation of some thousands of the inhabitants mostly women and children."² While to many Philadelphians the coming of the British army meant a separation from family, friends, and business, to others it promised relief from irksome exactions and arbitrary restrictions imposed by a Continental Congress whose authority was by no means generally accepted. As the summer of 1777 approached, this body ordered all private stores of goods, especially flour and iron, to be removed beyond the city limits. Residences and shops were searched and seizures were made with promises of future compensation. The frequency of petty larceny by continental troopers, and the impressment of horses, wagons, and blankets by inferior officers,³ may have

¹ John André, *André's Journal, an Authentic Record of the Movements and Engagements of the British Army from June 1777 to November 1778 as recorded from Day to Day by Major John André*, edited by Henry Cabot Lodge (Boston, 1903), I. 99.

² John Montresor, "Journal of Captain John Montresor," edited by G. D. Scull, *THE PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY* (1882), VI. 41.

³ James Allen, "Diary of James Allen, Esq., of Philadelphia, Counsellor-at-Law, 1770-1778," *THE PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY* (1885), IX. 282.

led civilians to wonder if life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness really were self-evident truths.

Since January, 1777, the citizens of Philadelphia had felt the reality of war in the sixfold rise in prices of coffee, sugar, salt, and flour.⁴ By June, salt brought twelve dollars per barrel, double its price at the opening of the year,⁵ and by July was almost unobtainable.⁶ Loaf sugar, selling for ten shillings a pound early in July,⁷ rose to twenty-five by September.⁸ The inconvenience caused by the curtailment of trade with the West Indies was aggravated by a steady depreciation of paper currency,⁹ so that the hoarding of provisions and speculation in commodity prices were natural consequences. It is not surprising, therefore, that the seizure of private stores savored of injury as well as of insult.

When the occupation of Philadelphia by the enemy appeared inevitable, and the American forces prepared to withdraw, one of their first objectives was to prevent the shipment of provisions to the city. Patriots were permitted to accompany the army, and any who chose to remain in town did so at his own risk. Thus, when the British arrived, the story was told that one citizen met another and congratulated him upon the occasion, in anticipation of having punch for one shilling six pence a bowl and wine for five shillings a quart! The editor of the newspaper relating this incident added, with disgust, "A circumstance this which reconciled him to holding his property, liberty and life at the will of an arbitrary master."¹⁰ But his esteemed contemporary, James Humphreys, Jr., who remained in Philadelphia during the British occupation, was enthusiastic.¹¹

It is with the greatest satisfaction the printer congratulates his fellow citizens upon the happy fulfillment of his hopes, expressed in one of his former papers, "that we should shortly have the fleet lying before this city"—and upon the happy renewal of trade and business. Nothing can afford every well wisher to the prosperity of this province greater joy, than the present pleasing view of our wharfs crowded with vessels and merchandize of every kind.

The leading Whig merchants vacated their places of business and

⁴ Allen Diary, *loc. cit.*, IX. 196.

⁵ *Ibid.*, IX. 282.

⁶ *Ibid.*, IX. 286.

⁷ *Ibid.*, IX. 282.

⁸ *Ibid.*, IX. 289.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Pennsylvania Packet and General Advertiser* (August 4, 1778), 3.

¹¹ *Pennsylvania Ledger and Weekly Advertiser* (November 26, 1777), 2.

withdrew to Lancaster or York. The British transports brought to the city a host of merchants and artisans who preempted the deserted shops and advertised their arrival in the local newspaper.¹² James McDowell took over Gilbert Barclay's store in Second Street, while Bird's London Store superseded Mrs. Devine's business. George Leyburn occupied the shop of Francis Tilghman, as did William Robb that of William Redwood. Ninian Mangies succeeded Thomas Gilpin, John Brander followed Isaac Cox, while Thomas Blaine acquired the quarters of Mease and Caldwell.¹³ Many others arrived soon after the army, the majority merchants or shopkeepers. Richard Sause, a hardware dealer, occupied the tailor shop of John M'Culla. John Tench and Robert Donaldson, wholesale grocers, took over the warehouse of Smith and Stapler, at Old Ferry wharf. Samuel Kerr and Company, wine merchants, took possession of John Mitchell's place of business. Alexander Macaulay and Company sold dry goods in Dr. Smith's premises. They crowded Market and Front Streets,¹⁴ until it was estimated, in February, 1778, that there were one hundred twenty-one new stores kept by Englishmen, Irishmen, Scotchmen, or Americans.¹⁵ Some of the newcomers were from Virginia, others came from Baltimore, New York, and Boston, while a few arrived from Halifax and London.

At the outset, civilians found provisions scarce and high in price, with paper money an inconvenient medium and specie difficult to secure, except by those who sold to the army of occupation.¹⁶ About four weeks passed before ships arrived from New York with supplies and provisions. Then, according to Captain Johann Heinrichs, a German officer, "Everything became as lively, even livelier than in peace-times."¹⁷ Toward the end of November, 1777, the wharves

¹² Robert Morton, "The Diary of Robert Morton, kept in Philadelphia while that City was occupied by the British Army," *THE PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY* (1877), I. 33, note.

¹³ J. Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia, 1609-1884* (Philadelphia, 1884), II. 366-67.

¹⁴ *Pennsylvania Ledger* (December, 1777-January, 1778), *passim*.

¹⁵ Christopher Marshall, *Extracts from the Diary of Christopher Marshall kept in Philadelphia and Lancaster during the American Revolution, 1774-1781*, edited by William Duane (Albany, 1877), 169.

¹⁶ John F. Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania, in the Olden Time* (Philadelphia, 1845), II. 284-85.

¹⁷ Ray W. Pettengill, translator, *Letters from America 1776-1779, being Letters of Brunswick, Hessian, and Waldeck Officers with the British Armies during the Revolution* (Boston, 1924), 188.

were once more lined with shipping, and civilians were permitted to go to nearby mills for flour.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Mrs. Henry Drinker, the wife of an exiled Quaker, recorded in her journal that, during this season, she was obliged to pay three shillings a pound for beef, four shillings for veal, seven shillings six pence for butter, four shillings six pence for chocolate, six shillings for brown sugar, and two shillings six pence for candles, while she found it difficult to secure flour at three pounds per hundred-weight.¹⁹

Many suffered from the price situation. The poor were housed in the Fourth Street Meeting House and in Carpenters' Hall.²⁰ Whigs who remained in the city to guard their possessions met with discrimination and extortion in their dealings with the Tory opportunists.²¹ Even the Quakers received little consideration and their merchants were greatly handicapped in securing goods for trade. So serious did their lot become that a number petitioned the Society of Friends in Ireland for special shipments of provisions on extended terms of credit.²² They met with a prompt response and a relief fund was subscribed abroad.²³

Several factors affected the supply of provisions during the autumn and early winter, due to the military occupation. In the first place, the Continental Congress and the Pennsylvania Assembly declared that any one bringing fuel or provisions into Philadelphia would be liable to punishment by death, and to enforce this decree detachments of light troops guarded approaches to the city.²⁴ While Washington only partially succeeded in dismantling the mills in the region toward Wilmington, the British supply, for a time, was seriously reduced.²⁵ He was more successful in cutting off traffic from the countryside and the Schuylkill River, whence produce might easily be

¹⁸ Mrs. Henry Drinker, "Extracts from the Journal of Mrs. Henry Drinker, of Philadelphia, from September 25, 1777, to July 4, 1778," *THE PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY* (1889), XIII. 302.

¹⁹ Drinker Journal, *loc. cit.*, XIII. 300-01.

²⁰ Morton Diary, *loc. cit.*, I. 35.

²¹ *Marshall Diary*, 142-43.

²² "Letter of Friends in Philadelphia to Friends in Ireland," *THE PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY* (1896), XX. 125-26.

²³ "Letter of Friends," *loc. cit.*, XX. 127.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, XX. 125.

²⁵ Worthington Chauncey Ford, editor, *Defences of Philadelphia in 1777* (Brooklyn, 1897), 71-72, 77, 85.

brought into the city.²⁶ By the middle of November, 1777, trade with Delaware was substantially curtailed.²⁷

A second factor in the food and fuel situation was the policy of regulation adopted by the British commander-in-chief. Sir William Howe appointed as wardens of the port of Philadelphia Francis Gilbert and John Henderson, to whom was given authority over importers and masters of vessels.²⁸ Early in December, the commanding general issued regulations enumerating certain commodities. No rum or spirits of low quality were to be sold to individuals in quantity more than one hogshead or less than ten gallons, and none without a permit. Not more than one hogshead of molasses could be sold at a time without a license. Not over one bushel of salt was to be sold to a customer without special permission. Finally, the sale of medicines required special licenses. These regulations were issued over the signature of Joseph Galloway, the newly appointed superintendent-general of Philadelphia.²⁹ The numerous inns, taverns, alehouses, tippling places, and dram shops were subjected to license under penalty of confiscation.³⁰ There were violations, as one might expect, and the sudden disappearance of one Jewish shopkeeper, Barnard Solomon, who sold rum without a license, brought forth the offer of a five-guinea reward for information leading to his apprehension.³¹

Regulations increased throughout the winter. To insure adequate naval stores, Howe ordered a return on all such materials within the city, and forbade their sale without permission.³² He permitted civilians to cut wood only in the region north and west of Philadelphia, reserving the timber south of the city for military use.³³ Early in February, the British quartermaster-general called for a return on all oil in the possession of civilians,³⁴ and, shortly after, a report on forage.³⁵ The number of auctioneers so increased that they were

²⁶ Ford, *op. cit.*, 69-70, 77, 79-80, 97.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 119, 127.

²⁸ *Pennsylvania Ledger* (December 6, 1777), 1.

²⁹ Morton Diary, *loc. cit.*, I, 35-36, note.

³⁰ *Pennsylvania Ledger* (December 17, 1777), 1.

³¹ *Ibid.* (February 4, 1778), 2.

³² *Ibid.* (January 14, 1778), 2.

³³ *Ibid.* (January 21, 1778), 1.

³⁴ *Ibid.* (February 18, 1778), 1.

³⁵ *Ibid.* (February 28, 1778), *supp.*, 2.

licensed.³⁶ Forestalling and profiteering in meat, poultry, dairy products, or vegetables were forbidden under penalty of confiscation.³⁷ A decree was issued by Galloway ordering police magistrates to license draymen and porters, as well as vehicles, which were to be plainly marked with the license number. Portage rates were specified in general at five shillings per thousand pounds, with graduated rates for hauling wine, rum, molasses, sugar, tobacco, barrels, boxes, iron, anchors, cordage, millstones and tea-chests.³⁸ As citizens attempted to trade with colonial ports not held by the British, such traffic was naturally prohibited.³⁹

The continental blockade of Philadelphia and the British regulations within the city were augmented by a third factor in the food and fuel problem, namely, the great increase in population. After a considerable exodus of the Whigs in the autumn of 1777, a census of inhabitants revealed 21,767. Cornwallis ascertained 3,508 dwellings, of which 587 were untenanted. Of the 287 store buildings, many were vacant.⁴⁰ Captain Montresor estimated in the spring of 1778 that the combined military and civilian population of the city totalled about 60,000. Vacant premises were at a premium.⁴¹

When the troops were quartered for the winter, and commerce with Europe was resumed, business became profitable, especially for those firms already established. The recently vacated shops on Market and Front Streets afforded some a more profitable location. Samuel Jefferys, a watchmaker, moved into Front Street at the corner of Black-Horse Alley, where he repaired watches "with neatness and dispatch."⁴² Joseph Stansbury moved his crockery store likewise to Front Street, between Market and Chestnut, where he also sold linens, dimity, and even loaf sugar.⁴³ Edward Hanlon, a wine cooper, advertised his location, thanking his friends for past custom and hoping they would continue their patronage.⁴⁴ Dr. William Drewet Smith announced that he would continue to dispense drugs at his shop

³⁶ *Pennsylvania Ledger* (January 21, 1778), 3.

³⁷ *Ibid.* (January 24, 1778), 3.

³⁸ *Ibid.* (February 21, 1778), 2.

³⁹ *Ibid.* (April 15, 1778), 2.

⁴⁰ Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia*, II. 407.

⁴¹ Montresor Journal, *loc. cit.*, VI. 287.

⁴² *Pennsylvania Ledger* (October 25, 1777), 3.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* (December 31, 1777), 3.

in Second Street, adding that he needed an assistant who was "well recommended for honesty and sobriety."⁴⁵ Robert Bell, a stationer, continued his business, as did many others. Indeed, the self-exiled Whigs looked back with considerable bitterness upon those who profited by their absence.

Among the more prominent firms which continued in operation during the British occupation was that of Willing, Morris and Company, conducted by Thomas Willing, a Quaker, and Robert Morris, a prominent Whig. The latter fled and left his partner to run the business of merchandising. Throughout their separation correspondence was frequent and Willing informed Morris of the most detailed transactions and petty troubles. Early in the autumn of 1777, he received word that about thirty-six thousand pounds in drafts on the firm had been protested in Europe.⁴⁶ The anticipation of their presentation and of his inability to accept them drove Willing almost to distraction. In his panic, he accepted every new rumor as fact and besieged Morris with requests for advice and assistance. Within a fortnight his fears subsided somewhat as Morris assured him that the protested drafts could not amount to more than eight thousand pounds, while the rumors were undoubtedly designed to injure the firm's credit abroad.⁴⁷ Morris, who was the financier of the firm, instructed his partner upon the technique of handling the drafts as they appeared.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, the rumor persisted that Hugh Wallace, a prominent New York merchant, held demands on Willing, Morris and Company for twenty-two thousand pounds, although their dealings had never exceeded half that sum. Willing wrote to Morris urging him to censure Wallace strongly for not counteracting reports injurious to the firm's credit.⁴⁹ Overwhelmed by details, Willing wrote to Morris, in desperation,⁵⁰

I lament from my Soul this Cruel separation from the Man I love, & when I think of y^e banishment from that stage on which you have trod with such unrival'd reputation, I feel an Anguish not to be express'd—I can say no more! we cannot, must not part forever—this is your proper scene, & here we must one day meet again. God grant it may be soon. . . .

⁴⁵ *Pennsylvania Ledger* (October 25, 1777), 3.

⁴⁶ Thomas Willing, *Willing Letters and Papers*, edited by Thomas Willing Balch (Philadelphia, 1922), 47-48.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

Thomas Willing's residence in Philadelphia during the British interim, while apparently inconsistent, enabled him to be of service to the American cause. He refused to take an oath of allegiance to the British sovereign, and, with his family, remained aloof from the gayeties of society, in which they were formerly conspicuous. He acted as a medium of communication between the opposing commanders, transmitting messages to and from Morris. Furthermore, by preserving the credit of his firm, Willing provided the means through which Robert Morris, later financier-general, maintained continental credit until the establishment of the Bank of North America.⁵¹

Soon after the arrival of the British in Philadelphia, opportunities were afforded for business dealings with the army. The commissary-general advertised for deliveries of forage, cattle, and sheep at the magazines, where they would be purchased at specified prices.⁵² Charles Fletcher, surgeon aboard H. M. S. *Roebuck*, offered to contract for a steady supply of fresh beef, mutton, milk, small beer, greens, turnips, potatoes, onions, sage, and mint for hospital use.⁵³ The quartermaster-general called for a return on the number of horses and wagons among the citizenry and hired those available. Hay and straw were requisitioned for delivery at the wharf of Willing, Morris and Company, where vendors were given receipts redeemable on demand in gold and silver at the rate of seven shillings six pence per dollar.⁵⁴ The chief engineer purchased billeting materials from loyalists who, he noticed, always demanded part payment in advance. Lumber and iron were also secured in this way or from hiding places revealed by individuals.⁵⁵ This practice later called forth advertisements such as the following from Whitehead Humphreys, an aggrieved Whig, upon his return to the city.⁵⁶

As soon as the enemy's army came to this City, a certain Joseph Fox, farrier, a noted traitor, seized on and took away near four tons of Blistered Steel, with the apparatus and all the utensils belonging to the subscriber's steel furnace; which, from the best information, he has sold to some persons in town. Should any of the inhabitants inform where the said steel or other articles are, or any part thereof, they may depend upon being handsomely rewarded.

⁵¹ Thomas Willing Balch, "Thomas Willing of Philadelphia," *THE PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY* (1922), XLVI. 9-10.

⁵² *Pennsylvania Ledger* (October 25, 1777), 1.

⁵³ *Ibid.* (December 17, 1777), 1.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* (October 25, 1777), 1.

⁵⁵ Montresor Journal, *loc. cit.*, VI. 198, 202.

⁵⁶ *Pennsylvania Packet* (July 9, 1778), 3.

Business catered to army trade. Benjamin Miller and Company, tobacconists and snuff makers, solicited the business of the army and navy commissaries.⁵⁷ Jonas Phillips, in addition to general merchandise, featured "a neat travelling camp-case, containing 33 different articles fit for a gentleman officer," and could procure any military goods on short notice.⁵⁸ Allen Meuros, a haberdasher on Third Street, offered to clean "officers epaulettes, old gold or silver lace, and buttons, with as much elegance as any in London or Paris."⁵⁹ Robert Semple, a wholesaler near the Bunch of Grapes Tavern, sold army shirts and shoes and other articles from England.⁶⁰ Philip Marchinton, a custom tailor, not only featured officers' uniforms, but "a quantity of good butter by the firkin on commission."⁶¹ Even James Humphreys, Jr., the printer, kept on hand *The American Military Pocket Atlas*, described as "an approved collection of correct Maps, both general and particular, of the British Colonies; especially those which now are or probably may be the theatre of war."⁶² He also sold a list of the army⁶³ and *The Seaman's Daily Assistant*, the latter "being a short, easy, and plain method of keeping a journal at sea."⁶⁴ Finally, the presence of so many soldiers proved a boon to apothecaries and physicians. A Mr. Montelius had the agency for Dr. Keyser's pills for venereal disorders, rheumatism, asthma, dropsy, and apoplexy, at ten, twenty, and forty shillings per box,⁶⁵ but even the printer sold them by the end of the occupation.⁶⁶

Common labor was in demand. Able-bodied men for the augmented night patrol of the city were wanted by the constable, early in the autumn. Wood-cutters for the army were sought through the winter months.⁶⁷ The quartermaster-general offered to hire teamsters at three shillings per day, New York currency, plus board.⁶⁸ There was also an opportunity to join the army or navy. The commander

⁵⁷ *Pennsylvania Ledger* (November 26, 1777), 3.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* (October 25, 1777), 3.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* (December 3, 1777), 1.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* (December 10, 1777), 3.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* (December 3, 1777), 3.

⁶² *Ibid.* (December 24, 1777), 2.

⁶³ *Ibid.* (December 17, 1777), 1.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* (December 31, 1777), 4.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* (May 23, 1778), 1.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* (May 9, 1778), 1.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* (November 5, 1777), 3.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

of the frigate *Delaware* recruited seamen and able-bodied landsmen, promising "every indulgence and encouragement their merits may deserve."⁶⁹ Other recruits were sought for the first battalion of Pennsylvania loyalists, under Sir William Howe's command, with the enticement that⁷⁰

All intrepid able-bodied heroes, who are willing to service his Majesty King George III'd. in defence of their Country, Laws, and Constitution, against the arbitrary usurpations of a tyrannical Congress, have now not only an opportunity of manifesting their spirit, by assisting in reducing their too-long deluded countrymen, but also of acquiring the polite accomplishments of a soldier, by serving only two years, or during the present rebellion in America. Such spirited fellows, who are willing to engage, will be rewarded at the end of the war besides their laurels, with fifty acres of land, where every gallant hero may retire, and enjoy his bottle and lass. Each volunteer will receive, as a bounty, five dollars, besides arms, cloathing, and accoutrements, and every other requisite proper to accomodate a gentleman soldier. . . .

The presence of so many officers created a demand for men servants whose accomplishments usually included hair-dressing and the grooming of horses. Cooks and housekeepers were much sought after, and boarding houses became common.⁷¹

The billeting of the army within the city limits and the utilization of all available housing and storage space created serious problems of safety and sanitation. The storing of inflammable goods beneath the roofs of dwellings led local insurance agents to warn landlords and tenants that no policy covered premises in which were stored hemp, flax, tallow, pitch, tar, turpentine, hay, straw, fodder, corn, and so forth, unless such stipulation had been made and an additional premium paid.⁷² Howe issued a proclamation ordering all citizens to rake and clean the streets before their shops and dwellings, and for sooty chimneys he levied a fine of twenty shillings upon the sweep who had served the tenants last.⁷³ In the spring of 1778, the fourth week of every month was set aside as "clean-up" week, during which all tenants were obliged to place rubbish in receptacles set upon the street for collection.⁷⁴ These measures of safety and sanitation con-

⁶⁹ *Pennsylvania Ledger* (October 25, 1777), 1.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* (October 29, 1777), 3.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* (November 26, 1777), 1.

⁷² *Ibid.* (December 31, 1777), 4.

⁷³ *Ibid.* (January 21, 1778), 1.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* (April 15, 1778), 2.

tributed greatly to the excellent state of public health which one woman, years later, remembered to have been a fact, notwithstanding the prevalence of dirt.⁷⁵ Burglary and petty larceny, however, were frequent, and the complaints against the soldiery led the commander-in-chief to issue a proclamation threatening exemplary punishment to any one who stole or offered stolen goods for sale. Civilians were warned against purchasing goods from soldiers or unauthorized strangers.⁷⁶ This decree was reiterated frequently during the occupation. As spring approached, trespassing over farmers' fields was strictly forbidden.⁷⁷

The year 1778 opened upon a city abounding in provisions and imported merchandise which brought a high price. Shopkeepers derived a tidy profit from army custom, while the troops lived a gay life and indulged in expensive entertainments.⁷⁸ A theater organized by British officers in Philadelphia in the old Southwark theater on South Street, above Fourth, gave employment to a staff consisting of a clerk, bookkeeper, treasurer, carpenters, scene-shifters, and door-men.⁷⁹ The plays, in which the actors were officers, were a great success and continued until the army departed.⁸⁰ This, of course, was but one side of the picture. Shopkeepers who did not cater to army trade were often obliged to sell out. While the royal forces seemed to want for nothing, the common people were distressed. Sales were small and only the adventurous loyalists profited, despite high costs and the risks of importation.⁸¹

High prices impressed almost all who left a record of this momentous season, and merchants found buying a problem. Dry goods glutted the market and agents abroad were warned accordingly. The average civilian purchased as little as possible, possessing largely currency, and shopkeepers naturally preferred hard money.⁸² Food products were in a steady demand and brought good prices: flour, seventy

⁷⁵ Watson, *op. cit.*, II. 284-85.

⁷⁶ *Pennsylvania Ledger* (November 12, 1777), 3.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* (March 2, 1778), 2.

⁷⁸ Allen Diary, *loc. cit.*, IX. 432, 436.

⁷⁹ Fred Lewis Pattee, "The British Theater in Philadelphia in 1778," *American Literature* (January, 1935), VI. 381-83.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, VI. 385-87.

⁸¹ Robert Proud, "Letters of Robert Proud, the Historian," *THE PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY* (1910), XXXIV. 70-71.

⁸² Proud Letters, *loc. cit.* (1905), XXIX. 229.

shillings per hundred-weight, cheese, two shillings six pence a pound, butter, two shillings a pound by the firkin, beef or pork, six pounds per hundred-weight. Wine was plentiful, but beer and ale were scarce and exorbitant. Trades people looked forward to a better market when country folk could once more shop in the city. However, the only decline anticipated was the price of flour.⁸³ Army demands obviously affected the price of provisions rather than of merchandise. Forage was obtained by periodic raids into the region about the city.⁸⁴

Meanwhile, the value of paper money in Philadelphia steadily declined, despite the efforts of public spirited citizens to maintain its purchasing power. Many women determined to purchase nothing with gold or silver, but soon found that shopkeepers would accept nothing else.⁸⁵ A considerable group of citizens, headed by Joseph Galloway, voluntarily agreed to accept the old legal tender of the commonwealth at par with specie,⁸⁶ but complaints were frequent that merchants discounted for hard money, and another association pledged itself to boycott such dealers.⁸⁷ Since the majority of importers undervalued the Pennsylvania currency, due to the difficulties of foreign exchange, the associates apologized through the press for having to consider their own interest at the expense of honest merchants.⁸⁸ However, the efforts of these well-intentioned citizens were offset by those who freely paid out gold and silver and thus further depressed the currency. Robert Morton, son of a distinguished Quaker merchant, observed with foreboding,⁸⁹

But from the enemies of the British constitution among ourselves, who give out their hard money for goods, from the almost universal preference of private interest to the public good, and from a deficiency of public virtue, it is highly probable the paper money will fall, and those newcomers having extracted all our hard money, will have us in a situation not long to survive our Ruin.

While Morton saw the issue as economic, a banker anonymously argued in the local news columns that British interest demanded the

⁸³ *Proud Letters*, XXXIV. 67-68.

⁸⁴ George Inman, "George Inman's Narrative of the American Revolution," *THE PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY* (1883), VII. 242.

⁸⁵ Morton Diary, *loc. cit.*, I. 32.

⁸⁶ *Pennsylvania Ledger* (November 12, 1777), 1.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* (November 26, 1777), 3.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* (December 3, 1777), 2.

⁸⁹ Morton Diary, *loc. cit.*, I. 32-33.

withholding of specie from the colonies, and a refusal to accept the old legal tender in trade reflected upon public faith in the ultimate success of British arms.⁹⁰ A few tradesmen partially conceded the issue, as did Jonas Backhouse, dry goods merchant, who advertised that he would accept paper money in part payment. Robert Rauthwell, his competitor, on the other hand, merely promised that "Two months Credit will be given to people of approved character, who may not have cash to purchase a quantity, on account of the old paper money not circulating."⁹¹

By spring, only hard money circulated in Philadelphia, to the loss of many who had hoarded the provincial currency, hoping for its ultimate redemption. Creditors became anxious over the collection of debts.⁹² Outside the city even the continental currency was no longer acceptable because of numerous counterfeits, supposedly made and circulated by the British. The public was warned and told how to detect clever imitations of continental scrip.⁹³ Those who had no means of obtaining gold or silver suffered materially, regardless of political faith. The currency situation affected landlords especially, who originally may have stipulated silver in rentals but now could collect only paper. Renters, hitherto in arrears, hastened to pay their obligations with interest, and landlords dared not protest this mild form of robbery.⁹⁴ The income of such persons literally vanished into rubbish. Since many Whigs remained in Philadelphia to profit from the custom of the enemy, they were later obliged to share with their Tory neighbors the entire tax levy for the year, to the delight of their less fortunate countrymen who considered this assessment only fair.⁹⁵

The mercenary character of so many of the inhabitants impressed itself upon the Hessian troops. One officer, writing home of the beauties of the region, observed that the inhabitants of Philadelphia were "very stout-hearted—for money."⁹⁶ Captain Johann Heinrichs, previously quoted, drolly compared the typical shopkeeper with the librarian of a circulating library who pressed his wares upon

⁹⁰ *Pennsylvania Ledger* (December 3, 1777), 2.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* (December 31, 1777), 3.

⁹² Proud Letters, *loc. cit.*, XXXIV. 69.

⁹³ *Pennsylvania Packet* (January 28, 1778), 2.

⁹⁴ Allen Diary, *loc. cit.*, IX. 295-96.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, IX. 429, 440-41.

⁹⁶ Pettengill, *op. cit.*, 191.

customers because of their English origin and foreign popularity. He then sagely explained,⁹⁷

Why artisans and artists do not prosper here is easy to understand; wages are too high and do not repay the costs, hence the merchant buying in England can sell things cheaper. But that wages are high is also natural. Journeymen and laborers are hard to get here, because each one can support himself more comfortably, easily, and agreeably by farming. For if he works three hours a day in the field, he has twenty-one hours left to sleep, yawn, breakfast, take a walk, gossip, and gape at the moon: this happy existence he cannot have in the workshop. Figure out for yourself the future epoch of American civilization. For as long as there is still enough land the farmers will not become artists.

Early in May, 1778, rumor of a departure of the British troops produced a marked effect on Philadelphia creditors. Porteous, Constable and Company requested "all persons indebted to them to discharge their accounts immediately. . . ."⁹⁸ Mr. Smith, at the office of the theater in Front Street, urged all creditors to present their claims at once, while Henry Bird of Bird's London Store, urged customers to settle their accounts before his departure.⁹⁹ James Seagrove, a wholesaler, announced that he was closing out his business.¹⁰⁰ Adding weight to the rumor, Willing, Morris and Company advertised four hundred barrels of peas for sale on behalf of the commissary-general. The City Vendue-Store likewise offered to dispose of army and navy goods.¹⁰¹ On the morning of June 18, 1778, the royal forces evacuated the city and withdrew into New Jersey.¹⁰² Many civilians departed, including servants and slaves who left without leave, and whose owners subsequently advertised for their return:¹⁰³

Ran away, the morning the British army left Philadelphia, a negro boy named Tony, country born, between fifteen and sixteen years of age, active and well made, a notorious rogue, and a great liar. Whoever brings him to the subscriber, living in Market-street, shall have Ten Pounds reward, and all reasonable charges.

Unlike Robert Bass, who had lost this colored boy, James Martin showed no inclination to move towards the recovery of his errant wife.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁷ *Pettengill*, 189-90.

⁹⁸ *Pennsylvania Ledger* (May 13, 1778), 3.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* (May 16, 1778), 3.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* (May 20, 1778), 3.

¹⁰² *André's Journal*, II. 3; *Montresor Journal*, *loc. cit.*, VI. 292.

¹⁰³ *Pennsylvania Packet* (July 14, 1778), 1.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* (July 16, 1778), 3.

Whereas my wife Elizabeth Martin, hath eloped from me, and gone off with the British army, I do hereby forewarn all persons trusting her on my account, as I will pay no debts of her contracting.

It was estimated that the troops left an indebtedness to Philadelphia business men of about ten thousand pounds sterling.¹⁰⁵

The exiled Whigs returned after a nine months' absence to find their property in a state of confusion. The market stalls between Third Street and the court house were ruined, and their restoration was accomplished through funds advanced by the butchers, who thereby secured a two-year lease of the premises.¹⁰⁶ Householders discovered ample evidence that their dwellings had been occupied by troops. Articles of furniture were quite generally missing, and other pieces were found in their place. Often, these missing items were found in vendue stores, where they had been sold by the British tenants. Business men found their fixtures scattered. Henry Miller, a printer, had fled from the city, unable to transport with him a completely equipped shop. During his absence, young Christopher Sower, of Germantown, printer to General Howe, with the aid of a colleague, carried off presses, frames, and type, and vanished with the British. As Miller had been equipped with type in various foreign languages, his loss was especially serious, and he requested his contemporaries to print an account of the robbery, bitterly concluding,¹⁰⁷

Thus an useful citizen advanced in years, an honest man, and a true and approved friend to America and the cause of liberty, has been robbed of the means of his support by a premeditated and concerted scheme of two men whose purpose and design at the same time has possibly been to deprive the Germans in this country of getting at the knowledge of public affairs, that so they might be kept in ignorance, and dupes to a party which since the beginning of this contest have done too much mischief in this state.

Throughout the remainder of the year 1778, former shopkeepers returned to Philadelphia and resumed business at the old or a new location. Abraham Shoemaker, "having been absent from the city of Philadelphia for some time past," announced his conveyancing business on Fourth Street, where he would sell property and lend money.¹⁰⁸ James Clark proposed "to dye as formerly, silks, cloths, stuffs, jeans, and all kinds of cotton cloth, thread, yarn and worsted

¹⁰⁵ *Pennsylvania Packet* (July 18, 1778), 3.

¹⁰⁶ *Pennsylvania Archives 1664-1790* (Philadelphia, 1853), VI. 369.

¹⁰⁷ *Pennsylvania Packet* (July 25, 1778), 1.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* (July 14, 1778), 1.

died blue, &c. Mens cloaths cleaned, scarlet cloaths re-dyed and stains taken out; the whole done with expedition and care. . . .¹¹⁰⁹ William Mentz, a bookbinder, opened a shop in Cherry Alley,¹¹⁰ while Benjamin Harbeson, a coppersmith, announced his resumption of business on Market Street, "on as reasonable terms as the times will afford."¹¹¹ Self-confident and independent, John Galloway, a tailor, on his return to the city informed his friends and the public that¹¹²

he follows his business as usual at his shop in Second Street opposite the city tavern. As the very high price of materials renders him incapable of giving the usual credit, he hopes those gentlemen who favor him with their commands, will consider the necessity of quick payment. All persons indebted to him are requested to make immediate payments, that he may be enabled to pay his own debts. He likewise desires all those who have any demands on him to bring in their accounts that they may be settled. He has for sale a few pieces of coloured cloths.

Business changed hands and newcomers in trade appeared. William Richards, an apothecary from Reading, opened a shop at Market and Second Streets and featured cork and mustard.¹¹³ Henry Hine-man, a stay-maker, advertised "all sorts of the most genteel and fashionable stays, according to the newest and most approved French and English tastes, and at the most reasonable rates. . . ."¹¹⁴ The Indian King, a tavern formerly kept by John Biddle, in Market Street, was reopened by William Whitehead, "who promised the best accommodations to travellers and their horses."¹¹⁵ Others sought opportunities for work. Two young men, trained as hair-dressers, desired positions as valets, each claiming he wrote "a tolerable good hand," understood "something of accounts," and could be well recommended for "sobriety and honesty."¹¹⁶ A "single middle aged man," who understood "all kinds of merchants business," and could "write and speak English, French, Dutch and German," desired work "as Clerk or to be employed in any other suitable business."¹¹⁷ Finally, Dr. Thomas Bond, Jr., of the General Hospital, advertised not only

¹¹⁰⁹ *Pennsylvania Packet* (July 16, 1778), 3.

¹¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* (September 3, 1778), 1.

¹¹¹¹ *Ibid.* (August 29, 1778), 2.

¹¹¹² *Ibid.* (August 6, 1778), 1.

¹¹¹³ *Ibid.* (August 25, 1778), 3.

¹¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* (September 1, 1778), 4.

¹¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* (August 25, 1778), 4.

¹¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* (July 16, 1778), 3.

¹¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* (July 9, 1778), 4.

for vinegar, lint, and old linen for bandages, promising therefor the highest prices, but he also offered "sufficient pay and encouragement" to "humane industrious women as nurses."¹¹⁸

High prices and the presence of many buyers with specie, however, lent to business a speculative aspect, and the conservative local editor advised the public to go slowly:¹¹⁹

The public is warned not to be anxious to make hasty purchases of cloathing or other necessities at the very extravagant prices at present extorted by the dealers. It should be considered, that the arrival of a superior naval force on the coasts of this country, sent for our relief by our great and good ally the King of France, has already broken the chain of cruizers, which heretofore disappointed almost every effort made by our European friends to supply us. But, considering the very exposed situation of the goods lately hurried away from this city (now waterborne in the bay of New-York) we may contemplate the likelihood of seeing some dozens of these valuable cargoes returning very soon to our wharfs, as prizes to the Count d'Estaing, and consigned to Congress for sale. It is certain that the French Admiral would not be able to find a more suitable market for these merchandise.

These hopes were not borne out, as Count D'Estaing had other plans.

The British occupation of Philadelphia, from September, 1777, to June, 1778, affected in a number of ways the organization and conduct of local business. It greatly stimulated the wholesale and retail trade in provisions and expendable army supplies. This unusual demand, combined with British payments in specie, materially raised the general price level. For the time being, the city was opened to British merchants as a ready market for their goods, and the standard of living was raised for those with the means to purchase. While the wealth of those who catered to the army of occupation was increased, the general level of prosperity was not raised and many whose services were not in demand suffered from poverty. Adventurous persons won and lost through excessive speculation. Places for recreation reaped a harvest. Finally, many Whigs, sympathetic with the revolutionist cause, did not hesitate to profit from the custom of the enemy.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

WILLARD O. MISHOFF

¹¹⁸ *Pennsylvania Packet*, 3.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* (July 14, 1778), 2.