



Background Information for Educators

By the summer of 1780, the American Colonies were five (5) years into the Revolutionary War and the battles were being won mostly by the British. The winter encampment at Morristown had been one of the worst on record and morale amongst the Continental troops was low, and supplies were desperately needed. Most soldiers were lacking proper food and clothing, and desertion and other retaliations from the soldiers was a daily concern of Washington's. While he had been planning an attack on New York City, hoping to reclaim it from the British, he was waiting on the arrival of the French troops, and their provisions, before moving forward with the plan.

Washington needed to move his army away from Morristown, seeking strategic placement to the British and new areas for his troops to forage. Placed near the highlands of Garret Mountain and the Passaic River was the home of Theunis Dey, a wealthy landowner and the Colonel of the Bergen County Militia. His manor home in the Preakness Valley sat at the helm of 600 acres of property; approximately 300 acres was a working farm and approximately 300 acres was forest. The Dey's home, referred to at the time as Bloomsburg Manor, was also well positioned geographically. Its location was safe from the British while at the same time being able to keep an eye on New York harbor, where Washington could keep track of the movement of British ships.¹

Washington and his army made their way from their encampment at Morristown to headquarter at Col. Dey's home in Preakness, arriving on July 1, 1780. Alongside Washington was his Secretary Benjamin Harrison and his Aides-de-Camp, Alexander Hamilton, David Humphrey, Richard Kidder Meade, and Tench Tillman. William Colfax commanded the Lifeguard, a unit with the Continental Army which consisted of approximately 50 men whose sole purpose was to protect Washington from attack. Another 2,500 troops were encamped around the Dey family property.

The Dey family home was large enough that the family was not displaced by Washington's arrival. Theunis' wife Hester, their daughter-in-law Hannah, and their daughter Esther were all living in the home during the summer of 1780, including Hannah's 3 small children. These women were all founding members of the "Ladies of Trenton" and raised money for the troops as well as spun fibers for cloth and clothing (Trenton July 4, 1780).²

¹ [From George Washington to Major Henry Lee, Jr., 27 June 1780 \(archives.gov\)](#)

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To accommodate the large number of people arriving with Washington, the Dey family divided their home in half using the center hallway as the dividing point. The central hall (on both the first and second floor) was used to divide the house in half, the east half was occupied by Washington and his staff, while the west half was used by the Dey family. Since the hallway is a long open space, the doors could remain opened on both ends to provide cool breezes and air circulation during the hot summer months.

On July 14, 1780 Washington received news that the French troops led by General Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, comte de Rochambeau, had arrived at Newport, Rhode Island. While France had long been considered an ally, and had been aiding the colonies since 1775, it was not until their arrival in Narragansett Bay that they officially joined the Continental Troops in the war effort.³

Although Washington had been waiting anxiously for Rochambeau's arrival, when the British learned of the French troops placement off of Rhode Island they sent their fleet out of New York Harbor in order to prevent them from landing. Instead of meeting with Rochambeau, Washington took this as an opportunity to attack New York.⁴

On July 29, 1780, Washington and his army leave the Dey Mansion and head into New York only to find out that the British had sent their fleet back into New York Harbor. Washington would stay in the lower Hudson Valley region throughout August and September of 1780.

One of Washington's final pieces of correspondence from the Dey Mansion that July was to give the command of West Point to Major General Benedict Arnold. Arnold had been a valued and admired military officer who had often been overlooked for promotion and after months of insisting on being given the command of West Point, a key fort along the Hudson River, Washington finally gave in to the request. On August 3, 1780 Arnold was officially given command of the fort and almost immediately began his plans for turning it over to the British.⁵

Unbeknownst to Washington, Arnold had promised to turn the fort over to the British for a sum of what today would be worth approximately \$4 million. On September 21, while Washington was meeting with Rochambeau in Connecticut, Arnold met with British spy John Andre to hand over the plans for West Point and its defenses. Andre was caught by Colonial militia and the plot was discovered.

Washington, having learned of Arnold's treasonous act, made his way back through New York to capture Benedict Arnold. It is of no use, however, as Arnold has already fled to the safety of the British.

³ [George Washington to Comte de Rochambeau, \[16 July 1780\] \(archives.gov\)](#)

⁴ [George Washington to Comte de Rochambeau, 27 July 1780 \(archives.gov\)](#)

⁵ [From George Washington to Benedict Arnold, 3 August 1780 \(archives.gov\)](#)

From on board the British Ship *Vulture*, Arnold writes to Washington asking him to protect his wife and his Aides-de-camp, as he assures that they were not part of the plot.⁶

Washington and his troops return to the Dey Mansion on October 9, 1780 and would remain there until November 27, where he would continue to strengthen the unification between the Continental Army and the French Army, a union that would ultimately win the war.

The following educational materials were created to encourage students to think about the events of the American Revolution through multiple perspectives:

- Suggested Vocabulary
- Continental Soldier, Militia Soldier, What's in a Haversack?
- Educational Videos
- Guided Questions

Please visit www.deymansion.org/virtual-field-trip to download these materials.

⁶ [Enclosure: Benedict Arnold to George Washington, 25 September ... \(archives.gov\)](#)

Guided Questions:

If you were living in the American Colonies in the 1770s how do you think you would be feeling about a possible war with England? Do you think you would have been a loyalist or Patriot? Why?

What were some of the reasons that people had for choosing their sides?

What is the difference between the Militia and the Continental Army?

Look over the images of both the soldier with the Militia and the soldier with the Continental Army, both are carrying similar items. Why are they carrying these items? What do you think would have been most important to them? Why?

*Did you notice that the soldier with the Militia was carrying a British musket and the soldier of the Continental Army was carrying a French one? Since the American Army had never existed before this time (Colony of England!) there were no American made weapons, only the weapons left from the French and Indian War (1754–1763) and those that were supplied with the aid of the French Troops.

After viewing the video of Catherine, the young woman who became a camp follower with the Continental Army, answer the following:

Why did she decide to follow the Army? What were some of her daily activities? Why were these activities important to the Army?

Soap making was just one of the important tasks that a camp follower would have to do. It was a long process to make and required two ingredients: lye, which is made the ashes of wood fires, and fat, which is the byproduct of butchering and cooking livestock (animals).

What does the process of making soap, and knowing how important soap was to the Army during this time, help us to understand the daily life of camp followers?

After viewing the video of Thomas, the young man who enlisted in the army, discuss the following:

What were some of the reasons that he enlisted? Do you think that you would have enlisted with the Continental Army? Why? Why not?

What were some of the difficulties soldiers in the Continental Army were faced with?

After viewing the video of Henry James, the Adjutant with the Continental Army, discuss the following:

Officers and Adjutant Officers did not fight in battle; however, they played a key role in the war. What were some of the important tasks performed by an Officer?
If you had the choice, would you choose to be an officer or a soldier? Why?

After watching these videos, whose perspectives were not heard or seen? We know that there were both freed and enslaved Africans living in the area at the time of the American Revolution. The Dey family had at least 3 people enslaved in their home. What do you think their experiences were like?

*We are working towards producing additional content to include the voices of those who are not yet represented here, stay tuned!

Adjutant: a military officer who acts as an assistant to a senior officer.

Artifact: an object made by, or used by, human beings from a particular period in history.

Bayonet: a blade that may be fixed to a musket.

Canteen: Water bottle.

Cartridge box: a container, or box, for holding bullets.

Civilian: a person *not* enlisted in an Army or Military unit.

Colonial Militia: A military unit of men who were not enlisted soldiers, but rather organized groups of ordinary citizens who helped support the Continental Army.

Company: A military unit or “team” of about 90 soldiers.

Continental Army: Army that fought with George Washington against the British in the American Revolution.

Correspondences: communication by receiving and sending letters with someone.

Forage: to search for food in nature.

Knee-breeches: The knee-length pants worn by men during the time of the American Revolution.

Loyalists: American Colonists who remained loyal to the King of England.

Messmates: a military term for the people you eat your meals with.

Musket: Revolutionary War era rifle.

Occupation: a job or profession.

Platoon: A military unit or “team” of about 20 to 30 soldiers.

Portmantau: a large suitcase.

Ration: a fixed amount of a commodity officially allowed to each person during a time of shortage, as in wartime.

Regiment: A military unit or “team” of several companies.

Regimental: Usually referencing a Military Jacket; a jack to a soldier’s uniform.

Siege: a military operation in which one side surrounds a town so that they can cut off essential supplies in the hopes of making the other side surrender.

Spy ring: a group of spies who secretly operated together.

Vital: extremely necessary and important.

Waistcoat: A vest.