

## **Joshua Gray In The American Revolution By Maureen Rukstalis**

The tension in the American Colonies was steadily increasing leading up to the 1770's. The British pressed for more revenue and taxes were imposed on paper, sugar, imported goods such as fine dress material and more. By 1773, the tax on tea had the pot of rebellion simmering and ready to explode. On April 19, 1775, the British Army and the Americans met in battle at Lexington and Concord to finally ignite 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 on January 22, 1743, 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 in Yarmouth Port 194 miles south of their home in Maine which was at that time part of Massachusetts. 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 along with friends and family members marched 51 miles to Marshfield today considered the south shore of Boston to defend the coast. He served as a captain under Colonel Simeon Cary's regiment of Plymouth and Barnstable county militia. The British Redcoats had been encamped at the Thomas Farm to protect the Loyalists from the local rebels. When the British had word that the local militia was headed their way they abruptly left by boat. Therefore Joshua Gray's service was for 2 days. He was discharged on December 31, 1775 perhaps for reassignment. On January 31, 1776, he was named First Major under Nathaniel Freeman but declined. No particular reason was given.

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

General George Washington selected Fort Hill 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 the troops could observe movement as far away as Charlestown as well as ship activity in the harbor. Perpendicular to the Hill was the road that led West to the town of Dedham and beyond which the troops could also control. It proved to be an important to Knox bringing the cannons to Fort Hill undetected by the British.

Roxbury was quite rural at this time and Fort Hill had a few homes and farms. There was the First Church of Roxbury that 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 "Dogster" Neck now called Dorchester on February 14. As of that date there was no smallpox in the camp.

On February 24, 1776, in another letter 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 for a battle to begin. He related that the night before their sentry had captured 3 "legler" sentries. Also reported someone was taken away from Colonel Bailey's regiment with smallpox.

March 5, 1776, still 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 and 7 at a time. That same night 21 men went to "Dogster" 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 cannon fire last Saturday night on "Dogster" Hill. There were casualties, 4 men killed and one hut was damaged. There were 500-600 cannon balls according to the Pickeys. The shipping in Boston seems to be moving. " Pickeys is a slur used against Romani, Travelers or vagrants.

Sunday, March 17, 1776, Joshua wrote Mary that "shipping and "leglers: 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, Joshua wrote "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." He gave instructions to his wife to meet him at that time in Plymouth so that he may go home to Yarmouth.

On June 20, 1776, the citizens of 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.