



Occupation of New York City by the British, 1776 (concluded)

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OCCUPATION OF NEW YORK CITY BY THE BRITISH,

1776.

EXTRACTS FROM THE DIARY OF THE MORAVIAN CONGREGATION.

(Concluded from page 148.)

SEPTEMBER.

Sunday 1st.—We had our preaching in the forenoon and in the ev'ning as usual; and in the afternoon the Congregation meeting. At the preachings we had goodly companies of strangers.

Tuesday 3d.—The ev'ning meeting was on the Watchword and Text. The rebel army begun to re-collect themselves; and the greatest part marched towards Harlem and along the East river, some miles from here; the king's army advanced eastward on Long Island, opposite the Hell Gate, and thereabouts.

Monday 9th.—Whereas the troubles of War were now near Watts' House, Phil. Sypher fetched his wife, child, and goods back from thence to town, as also the things out of the Chapel-House that had been there; and it was just high time, else they might have been lost; for this house soon after was plundered by the king's troops. Several other people came back from those parts. By the measures and proceedings of the Rebel army, it appeared evident, that they intended to leave the city; for as they had begun last week, so all this week, they removed their sick, their stores, and ammunition, and gradually the soldiers marched away. They likewise took the bells out of all the Churches and conveyed them away.

Wednesday 11th and Thursday 12th.—Night and day they were busy to bring their things away; and it appeared plain, that there would be a change soon; the reports were various. Almost daily there was firing from Long Island to Horn's Hook, and the ship yards here.

Friday 13th.—In the afternoon, some Men of War went up the East river; the few cannons left, fired on the ships, which caused that they fired back from Long Island and Governor's Island and very smartly. Isaac Van Vleck, who is too much bewildered in the matter, made haste to get out of town.

Saturday 14th.—In the afternoon more ships went up the East river, which being fired on again, brought on another smart cannonading; some Houses were damaged, and it was very unsafe to walk in the streets. The remainder of the Rebel army hasted away, and so did the members of the Committee, and others of the deluded people.

Sunday 15th.—Soon in the morning when the tide served, more ships passed up both the North and East river; and though what was yet in town of the Rebel troops got away as fast as they could, yet they fired again on the ships, as they did likewise from Powles Hook; which caused a cannonading which made the houses shake, and the sound of it was terrible. One large ball, supposed to come from Powles Hook flew against the North Church, just opposite the chapel,¹ broke, and a part of it went back into a neighboring cellar kitchen where a negro woman was, who came running over to the kitchen of the chapel-house; where also Sypher's family was, who had been there all night, as they lived near the fort, where the houses were most exposed to the firing. After some time the firing ceased, and at the usual time we had the forenoon's preaching, in all stillness; the only service kept in the city. About this time the king's troops had landed on York Island, about three miles from the city; there was some slaughter, and the rebels were made to retreat towards Harlem. In the afternoon at three was the congregation meeting; but the evening preaching we thought proper to drop. There was a good deal of commotion in the town; the Continental stores were broken open, and people carried off the provisions; the boats crossed to Powles' Hook backward and forward yet till toward evening; some people going away and others coming in; but then the ferry boats

¹ Moravian, in Fair, now Fulton Street, opposite the North Dutch Church.

withdrew, and the passage was stopped. Some of the king's officers from the ships came on shore, and were joyfully received by some of the inhabitants. The king's flag was put up again in the fort, and the Rebels' taken down. And thus the city was now delivered from those Usurpers who had oppressed it so long.

Monday, Sept. 16th.—In the forenoon the first of the English troops came to town. They were drawn up in two lines in the Broad Way; Governor Tryon and others of the officers were present, and a great concourse of people. Joy and gladness seemed to appear in all countenances, and persons who had been strangers one to the other formerly, were now very sociable together, and friendly. Bro. Shewkirk, who accidentally came to it, met with several instances of that kind. The first that was done was, that all the houses of those who have had a part and a share in the Rebellion were marked as forfeited. Many indeed were marked by persons who had no order to do so, and did it perhaps to one or the other from some personal resentment. Bro. Shewkirk, walking through the streets, saw to his grief, that several houses belonging to our people were likewise marked; as Sister Kilburn's, Hilah Waldron's, and Sister Bouquet's, King's, Isaac Van Vleck's, &c. He wrote afterwards to Governor Tryon, congratulating him on the late happy event, and at the same time interceded in behalf of the 2 Ww's¹ houses. The word of this day was remarkable: "Israel shall be saved in the Lord, with an everlasting salvation; ye shall not be confounded world without end." The following day everything was pretty quiet, though almost daily they brought in prisoners, who were lodged in the Dutch and Presbyterian churches. The fear one had of the city's being destroyed by fire subsided, and the inhabitants thought themselves now pretty secure; little thinking that destruction was so near.

Friday 20th.—Bro. Jacobson came from Staten Island, and it was a true mutual joy to see one another; as, for a couple of months we could have no communication with Staten

¹ Widows.

Island. By him we heard that our people there were all well.

Saturday 21st.—In the first hour of the day, soon after midnight, the whole city was alarmed by a dreadful fire. Bro. Shewkirk, who was alone in the chapel-house, was not a little struck, when he saw the whole air red, and thought it to be very near; but going into the street, he found that it was in the low west end of the town; and went thither. When he came down the Broad Way, he met with Sister Sykes and her children. She was almost spent carrying the child, and a large bundle besides. He took the bundle, and went back with them, and let them in to our house; when he left them, and returned with their prentice to the fire, taking some buckets along. The fire was then in the lower part of Broad street, Stone street, &c. It spread so violently that all what was done was but of little effect; if one was in one street and looked about, it broke out already again in another street above; and thus it raged all the night, and till about noon. The wind was pretty high from southeast, and drove the flames to the northwest. It broke out about White Hall; destroyed a part of Broad street, Stone street, Beaver street, the Broadway, and then the streets going to the North River, and all along the North river as far as the King's College. Great pain was taken to save Trinity church, the oldest and largest of the English churches, but in vain; it was destroyed, as also the old Lutheran church; and St. Paul's, at the upper end of the Broadway, escaped very narrowly. Some of our families brought of their goods to our house. Bro. Shewkirk had the pleasure to be a comfort to our neighbors, who were much frightened the fire might come this way; and indeed, if the wind had shifted to the west as it had the appearance a couple of times, the whole city might have been destroyed. The corner house of our street, going to the Broadway, caught already; Bro. Shewkirk ordered our long ladder, and the others to be fetched out of our burying ground; which were of service in carrying the water up to the roof of said house in buckets; and by the industry of all the people the fire was put out. Several of our people have sustained con-

siderable loss : Sister Kilburn has lost two houses ; Pell's three houses ; Jacobson one, and Widow Zoeller her's ; and others have lost a part of their goods ; as Lepper, Eastman, &c.

There are great reasons to suspect that some wicked incendiaries had a hand in this dreadful fire, which has consumed the fourth part of the city ; several persons have been apprehended ; moreover there were few hands of the inhabitants to assist ; the bells being carried off, no timely alarm was given ; the engines were out of order ; the fire company broke ; and also no proper order and directions, &c. ; all which contributed to the spreading of the flames.

Sunday 22d.—The forenoon's preaching was on Lam. 3: 22, 23. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed ; because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning ; great is Thy faithfulness ;"—and attended with that sensation which the present time and circumstances naturally afforded ; we thanked the Lord with melted hearts for His undeserved mercies, and could practically attest that they are new every morning. In the afternoon's Congregation Meeting the to-day's suitable Watch-word was spoken upon. "The Lord God will help me ; therefore I shall not be confounded." In the ev'ning was the usual preaching.

Monday 23d.—The fire has thrown a great damp on the former joyful sensation ; numbers of people were carried to Jail, on suspicion to have had a hand in the fire, and to have been on the Rebel's side ; it is said about 200 ; however, on examination, the most men were as fast discharged.¹

¹ "Mr. David Grim, a merchant of New York, who saw the conflagration,"—says Mr. Lossing, in his *Field Book of the Revolution*, vol. ii. page 613—"has left a record of the event. He says the fire broke out in a low groggery and brothel, a wooden building, on the wharf near Whitehall slip. It was discovered between one and two o'clock in the morning of the twenty-first of September. The wind was from the southwest. There were but few inhabitants in the city ; and the flames, for a while unchecked, spread rapidly. All the houses between Whitehall and Broad Streets, up to Beaver Street, were consumed, when the wind veered to the southeast, and drove the fire toward Broadway. It consumed all on each side of Beaver Street to the Bowling Green ; a little above which it crossed Broadway, and swept all the buildings on both sides, as far as Exchange Street. On the west

Bro. Conrad, also, was taken to Jail, but after a couple of days he came out again. Daniel Van Vleck expected the same, which made his wife and family much distressed; for he had often talked too inconsiderate, and in a wrong spirit; however it blew over. After all, it is observable, that those of our people who had kept themselves free from the Infatuation, were acknowledged as such, and met with nothing disagreeable of that kind.

NOVEMBER.

In November new troubles began on account of the quartering of the soldiers, of whom more and more come in; as also many of their women and children. Many of the public buildings were already filled with Prisoners, or sick, &c.; especially all the Dutch and Presbyterian churches, as also the French church, the Baptists, and new Quaker meeting; and we were not without apprehension, that something of that nature might come upon us; and this the more, as the Chapel-House has the appearance of a spacious building; and just opposite the same they were fitting up the fine north church¹ of the English Dutch for Barracks.

Sunday 10th.—The communicants had a meeting, as many as are in town, in which Bro. Shewkirk kept a discourse in

side it consumed almost every building from Morris Street to Partition (Fulton) Street, devouring Trinity Church in its way, and destroyed all the buildings toward the North River. For a long time the new (St. Paul's) church was in peril, for the fire crept in its rear to Mortkile (Barclay) Street, and extended west of King's (Columbia) College to Murray Street. The exact number of buildings consumed was four hundred and ninety-three. The city then contained about four thousand houses." "The ruins," says Dunlap, "on the southeast side of the town were converted into dwelling places, by using the chimneys and parts of walls which were firm, and adding pieces of spars with old canvas from the ships, forming hovels—part hut and part tent. This was called Canvas Town, and there the vilest of the army and Tory refugees congregated. The Tories of the day attempted to fix the crime of incendiarism upon the Rebels, but could not. It was well known that the fire had an accidental origin; yet the libel continued to be reproduced."

¹ The North Dutch Church, in which the service was in English.

reference to the ensuing festival, and especially declared his mind on the subject of meddling with State affairs; sharing in the party spirit; and partaking of the well-known Infatuation, &c.; as has been the case with too many of us; though entirely repugnant to the mind of Christ, and our Congregation principles, which are Bible principles. He put the Brn. and Sisters in mind of the repeated advice he had given them at the beginning of these troubles, and the requests he had made to remain still, and not to mire themselves with that spirit; he showed at the same time from whence it comes to be so carried away; namely from a shallowness of heart, and an Itching for carnal Liberty, &c.

Saturday 16th.—From early in the morning till towards noon, a heavy cannonading was heard, tho' at a considerable distance; one heard afterwards that the king's troops had attacked the lines and the famous Fort Washington, and carried it;¹ several thousands of the rebels were taken prisoners &c. The king's army has been about 2 months thereabouts; and there have been, from time to time, sharp engagements, at the White Plains, &c.;² till at last they have driven them away from the York Island; and it was a matter of moment, as now one may hope that the communication with the Jerseys will be open'd, as also with the places up the East River; so that the Inhabitants may come to the city, and provisions be brought in; especially wood, which is not to be had, and is extremely dear; a cord of oak wood, bought formerly for 20s. now 4£s. Fort Constitution, or Lee, opposite Fort Washington, now Fort Kniphausen, on the Jersey side surrender'd, or was left by the rebels; and the king's troops got soon master of this part of the Jerseys, and advanced swiftly towards Philadelphia.

Monday 18th.—In the forenoon, about 11 o'clock, 2 officers, with 2 other gentlemen came to see the chapel and house; Bro. Shewkirk showed them about; one of the officers asked

¹ See Address of Edward F. DeLancey, before the New York Historical Society, December 7, 1876, printed in the Magazine of American History, New York, February, 1877.

² The battle of White Plains took place on Oct. 28.

whether service was kept in the chapel; and hearing it was, said, it would be a pity to take it; the other ran about very swiftly, and saw every part of the premises. Bro. Shewkirk, who easily could guess what the meaning was, as soon as they were gone, made application to the present commanding General Robertson, and to Governor Tryon. The former was not at home; the latter received him kindly, but said he could do nothing in the matter, as now all the power was lodged with the army; yet he would recommend the matter to the General; and this he did in a few lines he wrote under the petition, referring it to the favorable consideration of the General. Bro. Shewkirk carried it to him, but he was not come home yet, and so he left it there. He did not know that the 2000 and more prisoners taken in Fort Washington, had come already to town.¹ In the afternoon about 4 o'clock he saw at once the street before the window full of people. The serjeant of the guard came to the door, and asked whether this was the Moravian meeting? He was order'd to bring these 400 prisoners here by command of the Generals Smith and Robertson. If the latter had order'd it, it may be it was done before he came home to his quarters. Bro. Shewkirk, who was alone in the house, did not know what to do; he could not go away. By and by the Major who had command of the prisoners and another man came in; they looked at the Chapel, and said it was too small; the latter said he had told that before, he had been in the place before now, and knew it. He spoke to Bro. Shewkirk, and condoled with him that the place should be taken; they began to doubt of the certainty, and thought there was a mistake in the matter; another young man of the city who knows Bro. Shewkirk, and has now the care of the provisions for the rebel prisoners, was likewise inclined in our favour. These 3 persons went back-

¹ Capt. Graydon, who was one of the prisoners taken at the capture of Fort Washington, says: that on the 17th ult. they were marched into the city, but previous to entering it "were drawn up for about an hour on the high ground near the East river. Here the officers being separated from the men, we were conducted into a church, where, if I mistake not, we signed a parole."—See *Memoirs*, Phila., 1846, p. 222.

ward and forward to make another inquiry ; at last one of them came back and told he had met with the Deputy Barrack Master, a Jew ; who had told him they must be here. Well—the gate on the men's side was open'd.

The serjeant of the guard, quite a civil man, advised to take all loose things out of the chapel before the prisoners came in. This was done accordingly. Phil. Sykes, who was come before this time, and extremely welcome, while Bro. Shewkirk was alone in the house, assisted herein ; as also young Wiley ; and it took up some time, during which the Major came again, and order'd the serjeant to wait awhile longer ; he would go to Genl. Robertson. After some time he came back, and addressed Bro. Shewkirk in a friendly manner ; saying, he had believed they would have been a disagreeable company ; and took the prisoners to the North Church.¹ Bro. Shewkirk thanked the Major for his kindness ; may the Lord reward him as also the other two men. The prisoners, with the guard, stood above half an hour in the street before our door, and many spectators, of whom none, so far as one could see, showed a wish for their coming in, but several signified the reverse, and were glad when it did not take place. An old gentleman, several weeks after, accosted Bro. Shewkirk in the street, and told him how sorry he had been when he saw these people standing before our door ; he had heard Bro. Rice, &c. After this affair was over, Bro. Shewkirk retreated to his room, and thanked our Saviour, with tears, for his visible help ; He has the hearts of all men in His hands. If these prisoners had come in, how much would our place have been ruined, as one may see by the North Church ; not to mention the painful thought of seeing a place dedicated to our Savior's praise, made a habitation of darkness and uncleanness. Praise be to Him and the Father !

As the winter quarters of the soldiers in this city were not settled yet, the apprehension was not over, that some would be put to us ; and so one of our neighbors thought, who in

¹ Corner of William and Fulton Streets.

time of peace was one of the Common Council men; but at the same time he assured Bro. Shewkirk that as far as he knew, none of the creditable and sensible men of the town wished it out of spite, &c. Bro. Shewkirk's character was well known, but the house was large, and there was want of room.

Saturday 30th.—About noon Bro. Wilson came to town from Second River, the passage being now open; we were glad to see him. He brought us the news, which was rather not welcome, that Abraham Van Vleck's, Waldron's, Ten Broeck's families, and also Sister Shewkirk were gone from Second River to North Branch.¹ We now gave it almost up to see the latter here this winter, and it seemed most probable that she would go to Bethlehem. If they had tarried, as Wilson's did, all of them might now already be in, or shortly come to town.

DECEMBER.

Sunday 1st.—This being the first Sunday in Advent, the weighty subject of our Lord's coming in the flesh was preached upon, both in the forenoon, and in the ev'ning. In the afternoon about two o'clock, a company of officers came into the House, looking for some quarter for themselves. It was assured by some that they would not disturb our church and service; some talked but of some rooms; others said they must have the whole house, and the chapel too. One, a Cornet of the Light Horse, marked one room for himself; desired to clear it this afternoon, and let him have a table and a couple of chairs, and he would willingly pay for it. After they were gone, Bro. Shewkirk, and Wilson who was just with him, went to Genl. Robertson. The Genl. was kind; he said he had given them no orders; he intended to have no place disturbed where service was kept. He took down Bro. Shewkirk's name and the matter; which chiefly was, not to disturb our chapel, nor to desire the whole house; Bro. Shewkirk offer'd a couple of rooms if necessary; and at

¹ Of Raritan River.

last said he would go to Alderman Waddel. He was along with the officers in the street, before they came in, but told Wilson he had nothing to do with it; he only upon their desire had gone along with them, and hear what he knew of the matter, and they should come along with him. When they were on the way, they met one of those officers (the Genl's clerk), and indeed him who spoke the most imperiously, and that he would have the chapel; upon which the Genl. and they returned to the Genl's house. The officer spoke here quite in another tone, and said he had already told the other to look for another place, etc. The Genl. said he would see about the matter, and give an answer the next morning. The brethren went home, and Bro. Shewkirk held the congregation meeting for which the brethren and sisters were gathered together. Upon this occasion we found again that our neighbors were not against us. One said, it cannot be that they would take your place, the only place where public service was held when there was none in the whole city. In the ev'ning the room which the Cornet had marked was cleared, in case he should come; but none of them came again. Some time after, Dr. Edmunds belonging to the hospital came one day, and with much civility and modesty inquired after a room. Bro. Shewkirk, thinking perhaps it might be a means to be free from a further endeavor of somebody's being quartered here, and moreover wishing to have a man in the house in these days, offered him the room the Cornet had marked; and after some weeks he came, and proves a very civil and quiet gentleman, who causes little or no troubles.

Monday 2d.—The commissioners' extraordinary gracious proclamation in the name of the King, was published in the public papers; by virtue of which all rebels within 60 days may return without suffering any forfeiture or punishment; and it has had a great effect; numbers are come in, have signed the prescribed declaration, availed themselves of the benefit of the proclamation, and returned to the peaceable enjoyment of their property; though afterwards some of them have shown their insincerity and bad principles, going back

again to the rebels. The officers yesterday doubtless thought in a hurry to secure lodgings to themselves before the proclamation was published, as now they can't take houses as they please. This was also the answer Genl. Robertson gave to Bro. Wilson this morning, when he carried in his name, and mentioned again our house and chapel. The Genl. said the proclamation would settle these matters.

Tuesday 17th.—Sister Shewkirk returned at last, safe and well, to the joy of her husband, and of the brethren and sisters. She brought all their and the congregation things safe back. Bro. Wilson's whole family came at the same time to town; and though they met with many difficulties in their removal, yet it was doubtless the best they could do; for, in the time ensuing, the rebel parties came again into those places, and distressed those much who had joined the King; nay carried some of the men away prisoners.

Tuesday 31st.—Whereas it is at present very unsafe in the evenings to be out, on account of several late robberies, and persons having been knocked down besides, we were obliged to submit to the times and circumstances; and therefore the congregation members met at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, and had a love feast; to praise together our dear and gracious Lord for all his goodness bestowed on us during this year full of troubles. At the same time we read the weekly accounts of the Unity's Elders' Conference, to the end of the year 1775, having had no convenient time to read them before.

As to our memorabilia, they are mostly fresh in our remembrance. The entrance into the year, and first day was particularly blessed; and we took it then as a strengthening for what was to come afterwards, and the event has shown it so. In February the troubles began, and several of our people moved into the country, some of whom never returned since then; others came back and moved afterwards the second time.

However we kept the Easter season and Whitsuntide with blessing; and upon the whole, the first half year we could go on in our usual order. Afterwards we became, on account of the troubles of this unnatural war, a scattered congregation

as we are in part yet; and we are thankful that we could keep the ordinary meetings with the remnant that stayed; with them we had the holy communion on the 11th of August. As far as we know it of them that are come back after this city was again in the hands of its lawful Sovereign, our people, in the country and in the town, have experienced a gracious protection and preservation of their souls, bodies, and properties, especially if compared to what others have sustained; for generally speaking, all have had a share in the general calamity; what by being out of business, travelling expenses, the fire, and other casualties. By the dreadful fire, indeed, several of our people have sustained great losses. That in the present time of dearness our working brethren and sisters have had, and have work to earn a necessary livelihood, is a matter of thanks, especially at the total change of the former currency. We owe also thanks to the preserver of our lives that in the various infectious disorders of which incredible numbers of the rebel army have died, we have enjoyed health for the most part. And above all, we are very thankful that our chapel and house have been preserved to us from those destructions which have befallen the most of the other places of worship. A couple of times the danger was near; but HE helped.

We are sensible we have not deserved it, but rather the reverse; for but too many of us were not, and conducted themselves not as we ought to have done, and as our Lord might justly have expected it from us; yea, we are sensible that the inward loss which one or the other has sustained is not repaired yet; and here we must appeal to our compassionate High Priest to haste and to heal our numberless infirmities. Indeed these times have been a time of shaking, and what had no root is dropped off.