

***“For the Defense of the Liberties and Independence of the United States”: Remembering a Forgotten Militia Post and Quasi-War Cantonment in Plainfield, New Jersey (Part 2 of 2)***

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*The area around Green Brook Park in Plainfield, New Jersey, was the site of two significant military encampments during the revolution and the new nation's first international conflict, the Quasi-War. This is part two of a two-part article arguing the significance of the site in both conflicts through an analysis of surviving primary-source material. (The first installment was published in the Summer 2022 issue of this journal.) This article concerns the Quasi-War-era cantonment established in Plainfield, known as the Union Camp. Established in October 1799, the Union Camp served as a winter cantonment for three regiments of the “New Army,” raised in anticipation of possible war with France. This article examines the reasons why the New Army's officers, especially Inspector General Alexander Hamilton, chose to quarter three regiments (known as the Union Brigade) in Plainfield. It also examines the hutting practices used at the Union Camp to shelter the three regiments, and the many ways the men of the New Army both relied on previous experience from the revolution while also innovating. Lastly, it discusses many aspects of life in camp, issues with health and supplies, and the interactions of a controversial army with the local population.*

**Hamilton's Army in Plainfield**

New Jersey is not often the first place that comes to mind in discussions of the Quasi-War (1798–1800). Yet the impact of the Quasi-War on New Jersey is a worthy subject to explore. This period was one of intense division and debate, and one of the greatest debates concerned the issue of a standing army. That debate directly impacted the Garden State, where three regiments of the

“New Army,” a provisional army overseen by Alexander Hamilton, were cantoned in a log hut city at the Vermeule property in Plainfield during the winter of 1799–1800.<sup>1</sup> Known as the Union Camp, this winter cantonment represents one of the most significant impacts of the Quasi-War on the State of New Jersey, and presents a fascinating opportunity to study this important subject in the political and military development of the early republic.

### **The New Army in Context**

The United States in the late 1790s shares some similarities with today, especially political polarization. Government was divided between the Federalists and the Democratic Republicans. Partisan newspapers became quite prominent during this period. Intrigue, influence, suspicion, accusation, and concerns about corruption all appeared in the political landscape of the 1790s. One of the greatest issues that divided the country at that time concerned relations with France and Britain. Intimately tied in with that issue were competing ideas about the role of the army and navy. As the French Revolution progressed, Britain and France went to war in 1793, during President Washington’s administration. This divided the United States along lines of pro-British and pro-French support, with the Federalists generally supporting the British and Democratic Republicans favoring the French. President Washington worked very hard to promote neutrality, realizing the danger to the young republic should it become embroiled in these European conflicts. American shipping during the 1790s was particularly vulnerable. In 1794, Washington and Alexander Hamilton developed the Jay Treaty, which normalized trade relations with Great Britain and settled some unfinished business from the revolution. In response, the French government (the Directory) increasingly viewed the United States as a hostile power, and attacked American

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<sup>1</sup> Richard H. Kohn, *Eagle and Sword: The Federalists and the Creation of the Military Establishment in America, 1783–1802* (New York: Free Press, 1975), 248.

shipping, particularly in the West Indies.<sup>2</sup> By the time John Adams took office as president in 1797, the situation with France had worsened. Between October 1796 and July 1797, France seized more than 300 American vessels in the Caribbean and even along the eastern seaboard, hamstringing American commerce.<sup>3</sup> Even New Jersey residents saw the results firsthand, such as Richard Hartshorne of Middletown (head of the family that still owned Sandy Hook), a marine insurance underwriter.<sup>4</sup> The French issued an act on March 2, 1797, annulling the principles of free ships and free goods. Historian Alexander De Conde notes how marine insurance jumped 10 percent, practically overnight, and led insurance underwriters to demand “war premiums” or even refuse to insure vessels bound for French ports and the British West Indies.<sup>5</sup> The surviving boxes of French and British spoliation claims and associated correspondence belonging to Richard Hartshorne stand as a testament to the vulnerability of American shipping during this period. Richard even corresponded with Alexander Hamilton, then in New York City, asking for a legal opinion regarding a ship he was involved with that had been seized in the Caribbean.<sup>6</sup>

Adams took an aggressive stance toward France, expanding the navy, constructing harbor defenses, and giving defiant public speeches against France’s actions. In spring 1798, the Directory refused to receive American diplomats unless they apologized for Adams’s comments and paid a bribe of £50,000 (the infamous XYZ affair). When news of this reached the United States,

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<sup>2</sup> The USS *Constitution* Museum, “The Quasi-War with France (1798–1800).” [Ussconstitution.org, https://ussconstitutionmuseum.org/major-events/the-quasi-war-with-france/](https://ussconstitutionmuseum.org/major-events/the-quasi-war-with-france/) (accessed, 11/16/21).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph W. Hammond, *Hartshorne Family Papers 1670–2014: A Descriptive Guide* (Monmouth County Historical Association, 2015), 4.

<sup>5</sup> Alexander De Conde, *The Quasi-War; The Politics and Diplomacy of the Undeclared War with France 1797–1801* (New York: Scribner, 1966), 20.

<sup>6</sup> Letter, Alexander Hamilton to Richard Hartshorne (September 12, 1797), box 8, folder 4, Hartshorne Family Papers. Monmouth County Historical Association.

Americans were incensed, anti-French sentiment reached a fever pitch, and the two countries were brought ever closer to open conflict.<sup>7</sup>

Adams's response to France's actions was the Quasi-War, or "Half-War," a limited undeclared war fought entirely at sea. Adams had always desired a limited naval war to protect American merchant shipping and demonstrate American resolve, never wanting it to develop further into a war involving troops.<sup>8</sup> However, the measures approved by Congress to prosecute the Quasi-War included the immediate raising of 12 new army regiments (to which would be added an additional 10,000 men, raised only in the event of formal war with France). This was significant, as the army then consisted of little more than four regiments on the western frontier. The raising of 12 new regiments (which was fiercely debated) was a major policy position of Hamilton and the "High Federalists" (those closely aligned with Hamilton's political vision), including Timothy Pickering (secretary of state), Oliver Wolcott (secretary of the treasury), and James McHenry (secretary of war), and New Jersey's own Johnathan Dayton (then Speaker of the House).<sup>9</sup> These men were driven by a vision of creating a modern, standing European-style army, as well as concerns over a possible French invasion. Democratic Republicans opposed the army on the grounds that it was unnecessary, that a French invasion was unlikely, that the army would only present opportunities for Federalist political patronage, and that it would be used to intimidate political opposition.<sup>10</sup> Concerns were also voiced about increased taxes to fund the army.

President Adams was not entirely opposed to an army (though the navy was really his priority). Adams was strongly opposed to Hamilton *being in charge* of that army. Though

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<sup>7</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789–1815* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 240–245.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>9</sup> Kohn, 224–229.

<sup>10</sup> Kohn, 224–229.

technically a private citizen, Hamilton continued to exert influence on cabinet members Adams had retained from the Washington administration. Adams was highly suspicious of Hamilton's ambitions, one of which was his desire to lead a grand European-style army.<sup>11</sup>

When the issue of leading this newly approved army came up in 1798, Adams sought to mitigate Hamilton's influence. In order to bring prestige to the army, and to help unify the country, Adams called George Washington out of retirement, offering him the top rank of lieutenant general.<sup>12</sup> Washington, however (66 years old by this point), realized the exertions of raising and directing an army would be too great. Washington, to Adams's chagrin, agreed to serve, but only if Hamilton was appointed inspector general. Second in command, the inspector general was responsible for the everyday administration of the army. Washington trusted his old aide-de-camp, and the knowledge Hamilton had acquired from his time on Washington's staff was considerable. Adams also respected Hamilton's military skills, though he did not want him in this position. After much controversy and debate, Hamilton was given the post in October of 1798.<sup>13</sup> The end of 1798 and the first half of 1799 were consumed with establishing recruiting structures in the States, sorting out the command structure of the army, and appointing officers who had to be politically orthodox Federalists. Hamilton as inspector general commanded all army regiments north of Virginia, with Charles Cotesworth Pinckney in charge of those regiments raised in the south.<sup>14</sup>

### **Hutting on the Green Brook: Establishing the Union Camp**

The Vermeule property reenters the picture in August 1799, due to the necessity of finding winter quarters for the newly raised regiments. As early as December 1798, Washington wrote to Secretary of War McHenry recommending that two regiments be quartered in the "Vicinity of

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<sup>11</sup> Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 266.

<sup>12</sup> De Conde, *The Quasi-War*, 96–97.

<sup>13</sup> Kohn., 230–238.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Brunswick in New Jersey.”<sup>15</sup> Hamilton, accordingly, began searching for a site by late summer 1799. In late August, Hamilton wrote to Lieutenant Colonel Aaron Ogden (future governor of New Jersey), who commanded the 11th Regiment and was Hamilton’s chief scout for a local site to quarter the troops.<sup>16</sup> Hamilton wrote:

Some point in the vicinity of the *Raritan* in the State of New-Jersey has been thought of as a fit station for three Regiments, (the 10th. 11th. 12th.). I request that you will, without delay, cause a careful examination to be made in that Quarter whether a fit situation can be found for the purpose. It must of course have upon it Wood sufficient and proper for the construction of the huts and for fuel; a convenient and adequate supply of good Water; a healthful site and a plentiful surrounding Country are also indispensable requisites.<sup>17</sup>

Hamilton added that a prospective site would be “as nearly intermediate as maybe to Philadelphia and New York.”<sup>18</sup> Hamilton administered from New York City, and the nation’s capital remained in Philadelphia (though during this period, Trenton often became the temporary capital while yellow fever raged in the city).<sup>19</sup> The Vermeule property was still located on one of the key routes between New York and Philadelphia, the Old York Road.<sup>20</sup> Situated on this route, partway between the two cities, the Vermeule property was well suited to the situation.

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<sup>15</sup> Letter, George Washington to James McHenry (December 13, 1798), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-22-02-0183>.

<sup>16</sup> Born in Elizabeth in 1756, Ogden studied law at Princeton, served during the revolution in the 1st New Jersey Regiment as a brigade major, and became influential in state and national politics after the war. He eventually served a term as New Jersey governor beginning in 1812. “Gov. Aaron Ogden,” Nga.org, <https://www.nga.org/governor/aaron-ogden/> (accessed 12/14/21).

<sup>17</sup> Letter, Alexander Hamilton to Aaron Ogden (August 22, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-23-02-0351>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> De Conde, 163.

<sup>20</sup> James and Margaret Cawley, *Along the Old York Road* (Rutgers University Press, 1965), 91–92.



Left, a 1799 ad detailing the route of the Swift-Sure line with mention of Scotch Plains.<sup>21</sup> Courtesy Newspapers.com. Right, the Stage House Tavern in downtown Scotch Plains, overnight stop on the Swift-Sure line. Still standing, it is a helpful landmark to understand the centrality and convenience of this area, and why the cantonment was placed nearby in Plainfield. Author's photograph.

Hamilton concluded that hutting the army, as in the revolution, was the most viable option. However, he also expressed interest in reusing the old barracks built during the Seven Years War. He wrote to Ogden, “If I recollect rightly there are Barracks at Amboy. Will you make enquiry as to their present State, the number they will accommodate and the repairs they may require.”<sup>22</sup> Just as the Crown forces in 1776–77 had reused the old Seven Years War–era barracks in Perth Amboy during the Forage War, Hamilton considered bringing them back into service. Unfortunately, Ogden replied, “I have viewed also in my rout the barracks at Amboy they are out of repair, 1700 dollars is demanded for them; and by three hundred dollars repair, they might accommodate 300 men.”<sup>23</sup> While Ogden was out on that particular route, between August 22 and 30, he first identified the Vermeule property on the Green Brook. He relayed his first impressions to Hamilton:

This site affords a great abundance of good wood for hutting and for fuel lying 800 yards in length and 400 yards in breadth—The stream running lengthways immediately (sic) in the rear of the wood can supply most excellent water for any number of men whatever—it

<sup>21</sup> “The Swift-Sure, A New Line of Stages Now Running Between Philadelphia and New York,” *Philadelphia Enquirer* (Philadelphia, PA), August 29, 1799. Accessed through Newspapers.com.

<sup>22</sup> Letter, Hamilton to Ogden (August 22, 1799), <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-23-02-0351>.

<sup>23</sup> Letter, Aaron Ogden to Alexander Hamilton (August 30, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-0960>.

is abundant, rapid, and never fails, being fed by springs—The situation is elevated above the stream about 15 feet, is perfectly dry and altogether suitable, being in a healthy, pleasant well-inhabited and plentiful country. The Mountain, called the first mountain, and which is the continuation of Newark mountain, runs about one mile in the rear, affording stone for Chimnies and fuel at a cheap rate, for a permanent cantonment, for a great many winters, to come—It is a protection from the north west winds, and renders this station, comparatively, warm and comfortable, and (if it be worth while to mention,) it contains some very strong fast-holds against a superior enemy, within a short distance of the proposed cantonment.<sup>24</sup>

Just as the roads were conducive to good communication, the site itself appeared plentiful with natural resources in timber and stone, a steady supply of water from the Green Brook, and elevated dry ground on which to erect huts. Ogden's opinion that the site would be well suited for a "permanent cantonment, for a great many winters, to come," speaks to the high Federalists intentions that the army become a permanent institution. Ogden's mention of "strong fast-holds" in the vicinity of the proposed camp is also interesting. One interpretation would be the remains of possible redoubts or strong positions around the camp from the Forage War period (1777). Such features were mentioned by C. C. Vermeule and were fairly common, erected by both sides that winter in the area around New Brunswick.<sup>25</sup> Some examples of shallow redoubts also survive from Washington's Middlebrook encampment.<sup>26</sup> "Fast-holds" could also refer to the passes in the Watchung Mountains above the Vermeule property, which proved so strategic during the revolution and could be made defensible if necessary. Notably, Ogden does not mention any remains of a physical fort from the earlier militia camp. This further reinforces the notion that Vermeule descendants in the nineteenth century, who claimed to have seen the physical remains of a Revolutionary War fort, likely misidentified the remains of the Quasi-War cantonment. If a

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<sup>24</sup> Letter, Aaron Ogden to Alexander Hamilton (August 30, 1799), <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-0960>.

<sup>25</sup> Vermeule, "The Revolutionary Camp Ground at Plainfield, New Jersey," Green Brook Historical Society.

<sup>26</sup> Geoffrey Fouad and Richard Veit, *A Preliminary Cartographic and Archaeological Investigation of the Middlebrook Encampments* (Performed for the Bridgewater Township Engineering Department: August 2020), introduction.



fort were still standing on the Vermeule property in 1799, Ogden most likely would have mentioned it in his assessment.

After scouting the property, Aaron Ogden began negotiations with Cornelius and Eder Vermeule, the sons of Cornelius Vermeule. Eder and Cornelius had been very active as officers in the local militia during the revolution and were heavily involved with the militia post on their father's property. Though the Vermeule brothers were willing once again to offer their land for military use, negotiations dragged on through September 1799. Feeling that the Vermeules demanded too high a price (60 dollars per acre), he requested that Ogden consider other options, including the reuse of barracks in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.<sup>27</sup> Ogden, in numerous letters, maintained that the Green Brook presented the best possible opportunity.<sup>28</sup>

Ultimately, Ogden prevailed. The land for the cantonment was purchased for \$4,450.<sup>29</sup> Deeds created October 2, 1799, between the government and Cornelius and Eder Vermeule record the transfer of approximately 88 acres for the cantonment.<sup>30</sup> A full chain of title search is necessary to definitively fix the exact boundaries of the cantonment. However, available information and reasonable approximations based on the deeds suggests that the camp would have been situated within the bounds of present Clinton and West End Avenues. The northeast boundary of the cantonment was likely in-line with present Melrose Avenue, and the southwest boundary near present Albert Avenue. It extended between the Green Brook in the west, possibly as far as present Second Street in the east. The area of present Compton Avenue likely marks the center of the

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<sup>27</sup> Letter, Alexander Hamilton to Aaron Ogden (September 9, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-1014>.

<sup>28</sup> Letter, Aaron Ogden to Alexander Hamilton (September 24, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-1164>.

<sup>29</sup> Letter, Aaron Ogden to Alexander Hamilton (October 3, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-1270>.

<sup>30</sup> Vermeule, "The Revolutionary Camp Ground at Plainfield, New Jersey," Green Brook Historical Society.

cantonment.<sup>31</sup> This makes sense given the topography. The area around Compton Avenue, which is now a residential neighborhood, is probably the “situation . . . elevated above the stream about 15 feet . . . perfectly dry and altogether suitable,” which Ogden referred to in his earlier letter. The neighborhood is the high ground, with a bluff falling away to the west. The area between the bluff and the stream, present-day Green Brook Park, would not have been as suitable for hutting given its lower elevation and wetter conditions.

Established in early October, the Union Camp (as it became known) was designated the winter quarters for the 11th, 12th, and 13th Regiments. The men that composed these regiments hailed primarily from New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New England.<sup>32</sup> The 11th regiment was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Aaron Ogden, the 12th by Lieutenant Colonel William S. Smith, and the 13th by Lieutenant Colonel Timothy Taylor.<sup>33</sup> In addition to the 12th regiment, William S. Smith was placed in charge of the entire Union Camp. Smith was John Adams’s son-in-law, married to his daughter Abigail. Smith was made a lieutenant colonel, an attempt by the high command to satisfy Adams, who had unsuccessfully pushed for Smith’s appointment as adjutant general.<sup>34</sup> Smith accepted, and though Adams felt Smith had been insulted, his lesser appointment still gave Adams a loyal officer within the New Army’s command structure.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Vermeule, “The Revolutionary Camp Ground” and personal communication, author to Joseph A. Grabas CTP, NTP (10/12/21).

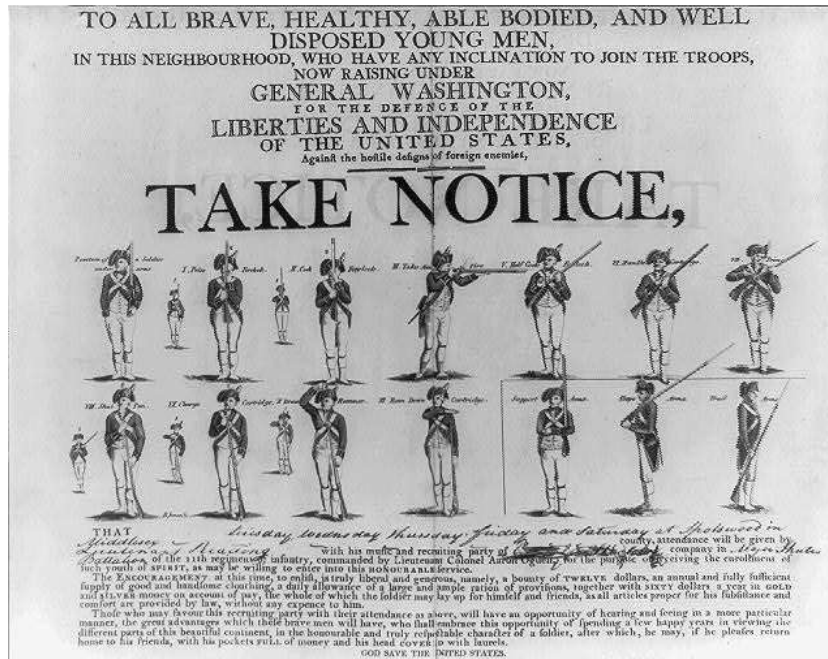
<sup>32</sup> Orderly Book, published in the Proceedings of the Union County Historical Society of Union County, N.J., Vol. II, 1923–1934, 42–43.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., and Orderly Book, 13th Regt. (kept by Lt. Gallup Lodowick during the Quasi-War with France), The Gilder Lehrman Institute.

<sup>34</sup> Kohn, 233–34 and 240.

<sup>35</sup> Letter, John Adams to Abigail Adams (December 31, 1798), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/?q=Page-Ref%3AADMS-04-13-02-pb-0337&s=1511311112&r=1>, and Kohn, 233–240.

The 11th and 12th Regiments rendezvoused at Elizabeth and arrived at camp on October 15.<sup>36</sup> The 13th Regiment traveled from New Haven and marched through Elizabeth on October 28, where the *New Jersey Journal* reported that “their music was excellent, and their marching perfectly military.”<sup>37</sup> Smith recorded their arrival, writing to his wife, Abigail: “The scene was brilliant, and attended by the whole of the inhabitants of the adjacent country.”<sup>38</sup>



Quasi-War broadside soliciting recruits for the army, specifically the 11th Regiment, under command of Lieutenant Colonel Aaron Ogden. Often misidentified as being from the revolution. Rare Book Division Broadside Collection, broadside portfolio 211 no. 4a. Courtesy Library of Congress.

## Hutting Practices and Revolutionary War Precedent

Unlike the earlier militia post, shelter at the Union Camp is better documented. Earlier army cantonments from the revolution largely informed Hamilton's and his officers' plans for the Union Camp, especially the plans for log huts. Hamilton sent out specific orders for the construction of log huts in early October. He directed that enough materials be collected to build

<sup>36</sup> Letters, William Smith to Alexander Hamilton (October 12, 1799) and (October 14, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-1355> and <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-1371>. The 11th Regiment was made up of mainly New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware men, and the 12th of New Yorkers.

<sup>37</sup> Footnote 1, Massachusetts Historical Society annotations on a letter, William Smith to Abigail Adams Smith (October 28, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-14-02-0028>.

<sup>38</sup> Letter, William Smith to Abigail Adams Smith (October 28, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-14-02-0028>.

huts for three regiments (which he estimated at about 500 men each).<sup>39</sup> The cantonment eventually hosted approximately 1,507 men.<sup>40</sup> At the Union Camp, the size of the regiments was rather lopsided, with the 11th regiment being the largest (reporting 683 combined officers and enlisted men). The 12th and 13th reported 392 and 432 men total, respectively.<sup>41</sup> Eventually two companies of artillerymen also made their way to camp.<sup>42</sup> Recruiting efforts were hampered by the conditions of the army. For example, Richard Kohn asserts that lack of money and inferior equipment led to poor morale, encouraged desertion, and hampered recruitment. Ultimately, less than half the number of men enlisted in the 12 regiments as were authorized.<sup>43</sup>

In planning the camp, Hamilton anticipated that more men might be recruited, or that a larger force would reuse the cantonment in subsequent winters.<sup>44</sup> On October 4, Hamilton stated his first conception of the dimensions for huts. He called for enlisted men's huts, 14 by 14 feet.<sup>45</sup> This is nearly identical to the standardized 14-by-16-foot huts designed 20 years earlier at the Middlebrook cantonment (1778–79). Hamilton also designated 12 privates or corporals to each hut, as in the revolution.<sup>46</sup> Finally he ordered huts built in lines and at set distances, which also originates at Middlebrook, where Washington implemented new standardization in hutting and other practices in camp following their difficult experience at Valley Forge.<sup>47</sup> As in the revolution,

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<sup>39</sup> Letter, Alexander Hamilton to William Smith (October 4, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-1287>.

<sup>40</sup> Number calculated from figures recorded by Adjutant General North when he inspected the Union brigade in April 1800. "Remarks on the Brigade under the command of Lt. Col. Comdt. Smith," April 7, 1800, Alexander Hamilton Papers: General Correspondence, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss246120130/>.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Letter, William Smith to Alexander Hamilton (November 15, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/?q=%22union%20camp%22&s=111131113&sa=&r=12&sr=>.

<sup>43</sup> Kohn, 248.

<sup>44</sup> Letter, Alexander Hamilton to William Smith (October 4, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-1287>.

<sup>45</sup> Letter, Alexander Hamilton to William Smith (October 4, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-1287>.

<sup>46</sup> Elliott, *Surviving the Winters*, 112–113, and Letter, Alexander Hamilton to William Smith (October 4, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-1287>.

<sup>47</sup> Elliott, 112–113.

Hamilton stated that enlisted men would be found among the ranks who possessed the necessary skills to build huts. He wrote to Smith, “Nails are also directed to be procured and a competent number of Carpenters tools—It is presumed that men will be found in the Regiments who can execute such parts as may require a degree of Carpenter’s knowledge.”<sup>48</sup>

However, the desire to economize both space and building materials led to changes that both built on, and departed from, Revolutionary War precedent. Hamilton wrote to Smith on October 12 with a new idea: “I am now of opinion that it will be found expedient to have them [huts] of the dimensions of Eighteen by sixteen feet and to unite two hutts under one roof.”<sup>49</sup> The idea of elongating and enlarging the huts was echoed in more detail two days later by Lieutenant Colonel Nathan Rice, who was planning the huts for the 14th, 15th, and 16th regiments at their campground in Oxford, Massachusetts. Rice wrote to Hamilton:

I had myself considered that both in view of œconomy, & conveniences it would be best to construct the huts . . . that the soldiers of each company complete, might be contained in two hutts of 40 by 16 feet, with a chimney in the centre, which will give two rooms, of 16 by 18 feet . . . The mode I have suggested will require only twenty six hutts for the non Commissioned officers & privates of a complete Regiment whereas Sixty of the dimentions of fourteen feet Square & twelve to a hutt, will not more than contain them.<sup>50</sup>

This design may have been inspired by hutting practices at the close of the revolution. At the New Windsor cantonment (1782–83), the final winter cantonment of the Continental Army, plans for “double-huts” were created by then Colonel Timothy Pickering. His design featured two huts of 16 by 18 feet joined together and partitioned, with a door, window, and chimney in each.<sup>51</sup>

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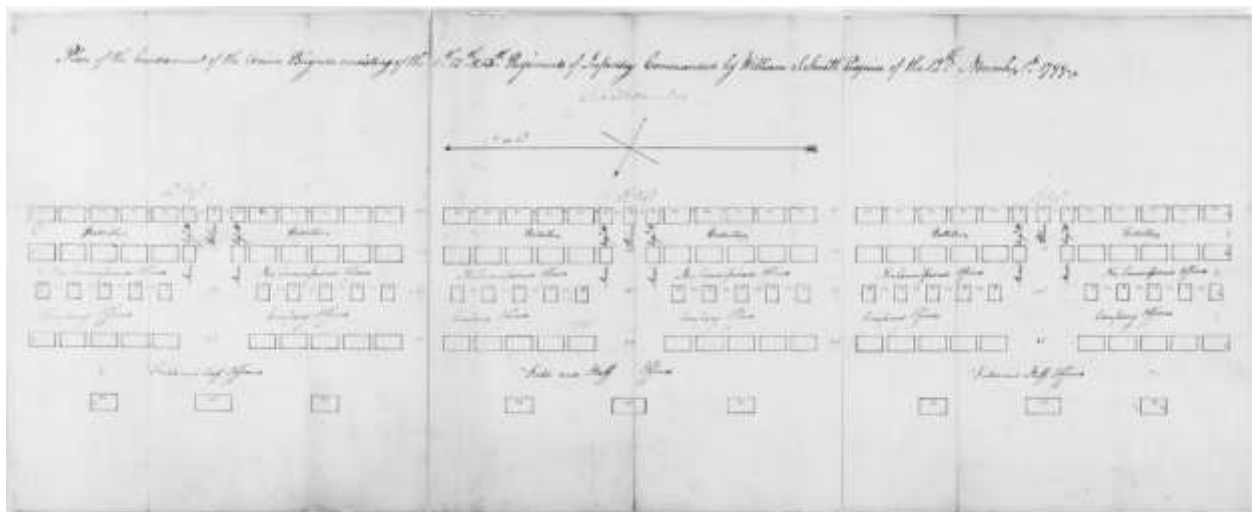
<sup>48</sup> Hamilton to Smith (October 4, 1799).

<sup>49</sup> Letter, Alexander Hamilton to William Smith (October 12, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/?q=%20Author%3A%22Hamilton%2C%20Alexander%22%20Recipient%3A%22Smith%2C%20William%20Stephens%22&s=1111311112&r=22>.

<sup>50</sup> Letter, Nathan Rice to Alexander Hamilton (October 14, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/?q=%22huts%22%20Period%3A%22Adams%20Presidency%22&s=1111311112&r=39>.

<sup>51</sup> Elliott, 168–170.

Very clear plans of these huts and the cantonment survive, which help to give an idea of what similar huts at the Union Camp may have looked like. Hutting practices at New Windsor are significant. As historian Steven Elliott argues, “Overall, the 1782–83 winter evinced a full maturation in the Continental way of making quarters. In size, order, and cleanliness, the New Windsor cantonment represented the culmination of the log hut city and the development of the army building it.”<sup>52</sup> Further research is necessary to establish more definitive connections between the New Windsor cantonment and the Union Camp. However, it is reasonable to suggest that Hamilton and his officers may have been influenced by hutting practices used at New Windsor, just as they drew from experience of earlier cantonments.



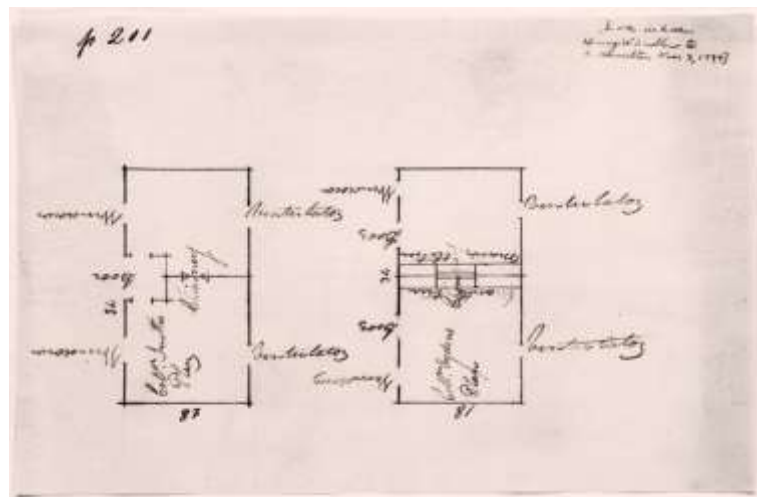
**Colonel Smith's plan of the cantonment, created in early November 1799, depicting the arrangement of the 11th, 12th, and 13th Regiments. Alexander Hamilton Papers: General Correspondence. Courtesy of the Library of Congress. Image enhanced and shared courtesy of Richard Palmatier, Union County Office of Cultural & Heritage Affairs.**

Plans for elongated huts were drawn up by William Smith and Aaron Ogden at the Union Camp. A plan of the camp drawn by Smith, dated November 12, depicts orderly rows of huts for privates, noncommissioned officers, company officers, and field and staff officers. Included in the

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 170.

plan are dimensions for the huts and the spacing between them. The majority of the huts, those for privates, company officers, and field officers, were 18 by 34 feet. Exceptions included noncommissioned officers huts, and those for the sergeants and chief musicians, which were smaller, at 16 by 18 feet.<sup>53</sup> Diagrams of the larger huts, drawn by Smith and Ogden, also survive. Each is 18 by 34, and built around a central chimney that most likely had two hearths, as the huts were partitioned in half.<sup>54</sup> This is a bit different from the double-huts at New Windsor, which had a chimney at either end.<sup>55</sup> The plans by Smith and Ogden are very similar to what Nathan Rice had envisioned for his regiments at Oxford and what Hamilton had suggested to Smith in October. These new huts, incorporating elements of their revolutionary forbearers, demonstrate a spirit of innovation, improvisation, and economizing on the part of the New Army's leadership.



**Colonel Smith's and Colonel Ogden's plans for huts. Each is 18 x 34 feet and partitioned in half with central chimneys. The locations of doors, windows, mantels, and "ventilators" are also marked on the diagram. Alexander Hamilton Papers: General Correspondence, Courtesy of the Library of Congress. Image enhanced and shared courtesy Richard Palmatier, Union County Office of Cultural & Heritage Affairs.**

<sup>53</sup> William S. Smith, "Plan of the Cantonment of the Union Brigade consisting of the 11th, 12th, and 13th Regiments of Infantry Commanded by William S. Smith Esquire of the 12th, November 1st, 1799," Alexander Hamilton Papers: General Correspondence, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss246120103/>.

<sup>54</sup> Drawing enclosed in a letter, Henry W. Ludlow to Alexander Hamilton (November 3, 1799). Alexander Hamilton Papers: General Correspondence, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss246120103/>.

<sup>55</sup> Elliott, 170.

Innovation is also evident in the chimney construction. Hamilton ordered the chimneys built to the most modern and efficient specifications, which at this time meant the designs of physicist Benjamin Thompson (Count Rumford). He designed a new type of fireplace, very shallow with a wide opening to reflect as much heat as possible. A “rounded breast” at the opening of the chimney helped direct the smoke up and out of the room. His works on the subject were published in 1796 and 1798, and were remarkably popular worldwide. Thomas Jefferson even installed Rumford fireplaces at Monticello.<sup>56</sup> Hamilton was influenced by his work and wrote to Smith: “Great attention to the construction of the Chimnies is a very important point as equall[y] conducive to the comfort of the Troops and to the œconomy of fuel. You are, I presume, apprised of the principles of Count Rumford on this point.”<sup>57</sup> The incorporation of Rumford’s principles demonstrates an innovative spirit on the part of Hamilton.

Chimneys at Middlebrook and Morristown were a combination of stone, wood, and clay.<sup>58</sup> At the Union Camp, however, chimneys were a combination of brick, stone, mortar, and (possibly) wood. Smith generally acquired brick locally, from neighboring towns such as Rahway. At times, he found it necessary to improvise the construction of the men’s chimneys, using a combination of available stone, brick, mortar, and wood.<sup>59</sup> Huts were built with central chimneys, under cover of roofs made of “Albany boards” (boards with a “standard” dimension of 14 feet long, though

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<sup>56</sup> Thompson was an American loyalist who fled Massachusetts for England in 1776, before becoming an employee of the Bavarian government for much of his life, and eventually a count of the Holy Roman Empire. He was a physicist who devoted much of his work to heat and improving fireplace design. Jim Buckley, “Rumford . . . The Fireplace That’s More Like It Used To Be Than Ever Before,” Rumford.com, <https://www.rumford.com/articleRumford.html>.

<sup>57</sup> Letter, Alexander Hamilton to William Smith (October 12, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-1351>.

<sup>58</sup> Rutsch, Edward S., and Kim M. Peters, “Forty Years of Archaeological Research at Morristown National Historical Park, Morristown, New Jersey,” *Historical Archaeology* 11 (1977): 24.

<sup>59</sup> Letter, William Smith to Alexander Hamilton (November 11, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-1633>.



typically of lesser quality, irregular width, and anywhere between 10 to 15 feet long).<sup>60</sup> At Middlebrook and Morristown, soldiers described “proper roofs” of riven wooden shingles.<sup>61</sup> The choice of boards at the Union Camp is likely due to a lack of suitable oak on the property for riven shingles, and also a desire to sell the boards again once they had been used.<sup>62</sup> Albany boards were also requested for building bunks inside the huts, and were to be left uncut for sale again after use.<sup>63</sup>

Hut-building dragged on into December as the weather worsened. At the Union Camp, enlisted men built their own huts first before building huts for the officers, as during the revolution.<sup>64</sup> Smith and his officers remained in tents well into December, due to delays in acquiring additional boards. An anxious Smith wrote to Hamilton that “the officers will be frost-bit, & conceive themselves very grosely neglected, in return for their attention, exertions and assiduity—in getting their men under cover.”<sup>65</sup> While some officers remained in their tents, some may have lodged with the locals. Sylvanus Seely, the sutler to the 11th regiment, sometimes lodged in local homes while supplying his regiment. In mid-November, an annoyed Seeley remembered: “I went to my lodgings and Ct. Folkner [11th Regiment] was in my bed so that I am forst to sleep with him.”<sup>66</sup> Seeley is interesting in that he served as a colonel in the Morris County militia, and may have been present at the Vermeule post in 1777.<sup>67</sup> At the behest of former General Elias

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<sup>60</sup> Letter, Alexander Hamilton to James McHenry (October 3, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-23-02-0450>.

<sup>61</sup> Elliott, 113.

<sup>62</sup> Ogden to Hamilton (August 30, 1799), <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-0960>.

<sup>63</sup> Hamilton to McHenry (October 3, 1799).

<sup>64</sup> Elliott, 132.

<sup>65</sup> Letter, William Smith to Hamilton (December 19, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-1849>.

<sup>66</sup> Sylvanus Seely, *Diaries of Sylvanus Seely, May 12, 1768– March 17, 1821: Volume 2*. (Morristown National Historic Park Library), 626.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 57. For men who list Seely as an officer at Vermeule’s, see the pension applications of Isaac Bedell, John Blowers, Nehemiah Day, Jacob Lacy, and Isaac Ball. Seeley himself wrote little about the Vermeule post in his diary.

Dayton, Seeley served the 11th regiment as sutler from June 1799 until the last troops left the cantonment in June 1800.<sup>68</sup> A prolific diarist, his day-to-day entries from this yearlong period provide great insight into daily life at the Union Camp.

Improvements to the huts were also made over the winter, with chimneys plastered, glass windows installed, sashes painted, and the interiors of some huts even improved with wood lath and plaster.<sup>69</sup> Though Hamilton and his officers innovated and improvised in their hut construction, the inexperience of officers and enlisted men saw a repetition of mistakes made at earlier cantonments. The problem of men relieving themselves in places other than dedicated “necessaries” appeared very early, and calls to mind a similar problem at Valley Forge.<sup>70</sup> From the general orders sent out on October 25:

The necessity of preventing the accumulation of filth on the ground . . . induces the Commanding Officer particularly to caution the Troops against the Common practice of satisfying the calls of nature in other places in the vicinity of the Camp than those allotted for the purpose. Parts of the camp are already become so offensive as to force him to a degree of Rigor to prevent a continuance of it.<sup>71</sup>

The “degree of rigor” was “five Lashes on his bare breach with a Cat well laid on,” for any offenders.<sup>72</sup> Fire (mixed with inexperience) also posed a danger. From the orders of November 21: “The Commanding Officer expressly forbids the making of fires in the huts before the chimnies are carried through the roofs. The incident from last night should be a warning to the troops and it is hoped they will profit by it.”<sup>73</sup> One might assume here that a hut caught fire. Sylvanus Seely noted the ever-present danger of fire in his diary, when, in March 1800, a fire threatened the hut housing his sutlery business. He wrote: “This morning, at 1/2 past 12 I had news brought me that

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<sup>68</sup> Seely, *Diary*, 610.

<sup>69</sup> Letter, William Smith to Hamilton (April 2, 1800), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-2359>.

<sup>70</sup> Elliott, 93–94.

<sup>71</sup> Orderly Book, 13th Regt., “Brigade Orders, October 25th, 1799,” The Gilder Lehrman Institute.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, “Brigade Orders, November 21st, 1799.”

my hut was all burnt down upon which I went over but find it is the next hut to mine and that they have torn the ruf of mine to save it and taken all my goods out and placed Centeryes [sentries] all round them to keep them safe.”<sup>74</sup>

### **The Union Brigade, the Local Inhabitants, and Issues with Camp Discipline**

The interactions between the soldiers at the Union Camp and the local inhabitants reflect concerns about standing armies in the early republic. Fears that soldiers would pose a threat to local populations appear very early, and numerous letters and general orders mention the desire to avoid unnecessary impact or disturbance to the local population.<sup>75</sup> Incidents between soldiers and the inhabitants often appear in general orders and announcements regarding court martials, such as one in November:

The Commanding Officer solicits the inhabitants who can identify the offending soldiers. . . . He is determined that no exertion in his power shall be wanting to protect the inhabitants from insult and plunder, and he flatters himself that all good Citizens will lend their aid in securing the peace of the Villiage in the vicinity of the camp and effectually guarding them from future insolence and riot.<sup>76</sup>

Despite more regular stationing of sentries around camp, incidents of soldiers leaving camp appear fairly common, and were sometimes accompanied by theft (usually of consumable items, as one might expect). An exhortation in January 1800, stated: “The robbing the inhabitants of their beehives and poultry is too degrading to the character of soldiers and several complaints of that kind being recently made induces the Commanding Officer to solicit the aid of all good soldiers to detect and bring the offending few to punishment and reform.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Seely, *Diary*, 639.

<sup>75</sup> Kohn, 250, and Letter, William Smith to Alexander Hamilton (October 28, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-1494>.

<sup>76</sup> Orderly Book, 13th Regt., “Brigade Orders, November 16th, 1799.”

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., “Union Brigade Orders, January 12th, 1800.”

However, the spirit of opportunity went both ways. The presence of three regiments in the vicinity of small towns like Scotch Plains and Plainfield presented a real commercial opportunity to the local inhabitants. In fact, by March, locals had built stores right outside the line of camp. Smith described this to Hamilton, writing: "I am much incommoded by the Conduct of Store keepers, who have built small Houses, near the line—I have centinels posted near to prevent soldiers going in their houses, but it has very little effect."<sup>78</sup>

Eventually a kind of supervised exchange was set up in camp. Locals sometimes bought and traded the equipment issued to the soldiers (much to the chagrin of the officers).<sup>79</sup> Soldiers selling and bartering their gear to locals, often in exchange for liquor, proved to be a widespread problem. In early November, Sylvanus Seely noted that "this evening the Suttlers and one tavron keeper met and concluded to try to stop the people about camp from retailing liquors by small measure."<sup>80</sup> Seely and his fellow sutlers may not have wanted competition with local sellers, as they were also suppliers of cider, brandy, and whiskey to the camp.<sup>81</sup> Hamilton expressed early concerns about liquor, writing to Smith in early October: "The spirit seems to be too much that which almost ruined our revolutionary army in the outset," and urged him to keep liquor rations small.<sup>82</sup>

Local enslaved people are also mentioned. The general orders of November 21 instructed to the "officer of the day and the officers of the camp guard the most pointed attention to prevent the negroes of the adjacent Country entering camp."<sup>83</sup> This seems to have been a reaction to

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<sup>78</sup> Letter, William Smith to Alexander Hamilton (March 19, 1800), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-2279>.

<sup>79</sup> Orderly Book, 13th Regt., "Brigade Orders November 25th, 1799."

<sup>80</sup> Seely, *Diary*, 626.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. Seely used his diary to record his daily purchases, including barrels of cider, brandy, and whiskey.

<sup>82</sup> Letter, Alexander Hamilton to William Smith (November 9, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-1619>.

<sup>83</sup> Orderly Book, 13th Regt., "Brigade Orders November 21st, 1799."

catching a group of “men playing at pitch penny with negroes.”<sup>84</sup> Further restrictions were then imposed:

No Negroes permitted to sell anything in Camp without a pass from his master sanctioned by the officer of the day with his signature. And articles offered for sale by negroes without permits must be seized and the negroes confined until his master may be informed of his situation. The articles seized will be deposited with the officer of the day until the master comes for them. The frequent disorders of the blacks robbing their masters of their poultry is so frequently laid to the troops and the Commanding Officer hopes when the negroes find that they cannot dispose of stolen articles they will cease to plunder their master and keep themselves more at home. Certainly their company must be dispensed with in this camp.<sup>85</sup>

Absence from camp, failure to turn out for roll call, drunkenness, interpersonal disputes, and desertion were the most common offenses at the Union Camp. Common punishments consisted of a term of hard labor, public humiliation, and deduction of pay.<sup>86</sup> The worst punishments were typically meted out for desertion and theft. In January, one soldier found guilty of repeated desertion was sentenced to pay the expenses of his apprehension, receive 99 lashes, and “have one half of his head shaved and one eye brow, and be publicly drummed out of the garrison with a halter about his neck, and be rendered incapable ever again to serve in the army of the US.”<sup>87</sup> In March, William Wright and John Rice were each sentenced to 100 lashes and the loss of a month’s pay for absence from camp and stealing poultry.<sup>88</sup> Some cases of desertion saw confinement to a term of hard labor at locations including Ellis Island and Fort Jay at Governors Island.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Pitch penny was a common game where men threw coins into a hole dug in the ground, or cut into a piece of furniture. It was often a form of gambling, which was pervasive in camp and bothered the commanding officers a great deal, like drunkenness and absence from camp. “Pitching Disc Games—History and Useful Information,” [Tradgames.org.uk](https://www.tradgames.org.uk/games/Pitching-Discs.htm), <https://www.tradgames.org.uk/games/Pitching-Discs.htm>.

<sup>85</sup> Orderly Book, 13th Regt., “Brigade Orders November 21st, 1799.”

<sup>86</sup> Orderly Book, Published in the Proceedings of the Union County Historical Society, 54.

<sup>87</sup> Orderly Book, 13th Regt., “Extract from General Orders January 4th, 1799.”

<sup>88</sup> Orderly Book, Published in the Proceedings of the Union County Historical Society, 68.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 69, and Orderly Book, 13th Regt., “Extract from General Orders, January 4th, 1800.”

## The Death of George Washington

Much of the soldiers' time was rather mundane, concerned with maintaining discipline and shelter. However, in December, the camp (and indeed the whole country) was rocked by the news of George Washington's death. President Adams ordered that "funeral honours be paid to him at all the military stations, and that the officers of the army and of the several corps of volunteers wear crape on the left arm by way of mourning, for six months."<sup>90</sup>

At the Union Camp, the commemoration consisted of a mock burial, orations, parading the troops, and the firing of muskets and fieldpieces. In preparation, Hamilton (who eventually became the highest ranking officer) instructed Adjutant General North on December 21: "You will have musket cartridges prepared and sent to the Union Camp, and you will also send there two pieces of Artillery with cartridges for them."<sup>91</sup> Held on December 26, 1799, the ceremony began in the early morning with 16 rounds of cannon fire, with an additional shot every half hour until sunset.<sup>92</sup>

At half past 11 o'clock, the regiments formed up and processed solemnly with a funeral bier (an urn draped in black broad cloth) meant to symbolize Washington's remains.<sup>93</sup> Much of the local population turned out and was included in the funeral procession as well.<sup>94</sup> For them, the ceremony, drilling, and firing of weapons by the brigade would have been quite a spectacle. The columns marched to a temporary monument, depositing the funeral bier, followed by the clergymen present delivering a eulogy. The ceremony concluded with parading past the monument, the musicians playing "The President's March" on unmuffled drums, horse soldiers

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<sup>90</sup> "General Orders December 21, 1799," National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-24-02-0099>.

<sup>91</sup> Letter, Alexander Hamilton to William North (December 21, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-24-02-0100>.

<sup>92</sup> Orderly Book, 13th Regt., "General Orders December 25th, 1799."

<sup>93</sup> Letter, William Smith to Alexander Hamilton (January 7, 1800) National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-24-02-0132>, and Orderly Book, 13th Regt., "General Orders December 25th, 1799."

<sup>94</sup> Seely, *Diary*, 631.

saluting with swords, and a dismissal.<sup>95</sup> Seely remarked that the ceremony was “very Sollom and after the bier was deposited there was a double sentry plast over it and is to be kept so for six months.”<sup>96</sup>

The death of Washington was profoundly impactful on the troops at the Union Camp. The officers even considered erecting a permanent marble monument in camp (though it likely never left the drawing stage).<sup>97</sup> Not only did they commemorate his death in December, but Smith held another on his birthday in February (at President Adams’s recommendation).<sup>98</sup> This, too, was initiated by the brigade artillery firing 16 rounds at noon, followed by maneuvers and an oration by Captain White of the 11th Regiment.<sup>99</sup>

### **Soldiers’ Health and Provisioning**

The site of the Union Camp was chosen because “none can be found in New-Jersey more pleasant, more salubrious, affording a fuller or more excellent supply of wood and water, having a soil more dry and suitable for troops or in a country, more abounding with all they may stand in need of.”<sup>100</sup> As troops arrived at camp, generally good health was reported. On November 12, Smith reported to Hamilton: “The Troops are in high health and very orderly, the officers are in Harmony with each other, and a perfect good understanding prevails between the Citizens and Soldiers.”<sup>101</sup> Sylvanus Seely recorded generally good health as well going into the winter, though he also recorded the occasional deaths of soldiers in his diary. On October 20, he recorded the first

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<sup>95</sup> Orderly Book, 13th Regt., “General Orders December 25th, 1799.”

<sup>96</sup> Seely, *Diary*, 631.

<sup>97</sup> Letter, William Smith to Alexander Hamilton (December 23, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-24-02-0107-0001>.

<sup>98</sup> Orderly Book, Published in the Proceedings of the Union County Historical Society, 47–8.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Letter, Aaron Ogden to Alexander Hamilton (September 24, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-1164>.

<sup>101</sup> Letter, William Smith to Alexander Hamilton (November 12, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-1646>.

death in camp, writing: "This day one of the other Regt. 12th was bureyed which is the first that hath died in Camp senc I have bin with it and none hath Died of ours which is the 11th Regt."<sup>102</sup> Seeley did not record another death for more than two months. On December 24, he wrote, "This day a Man died out of our Regt. which is the first one that hath died senc we ware imbodyed his name is Scofield belonging to Captn. White's Company."<sup>103</sup> In total, Seely reported the deaths of only five men during the Camp's existence. Adjutant General William North's inspection of the Union Brigade in April 1800 reported 7, 17, and 1 death in the 11th, 12th, and 13th regiments, respectively (and these being a total from the time the regiment was formed, not from when it arrived in camp).<sup>104</sup>

To accommodate the sick, Smith desired a hospital as early as February, writing:

I made every arrangement in my power, to accommodate the sick of each Regt. in a Hut appropriated for that purpose . . . But I am apprehensive in the approaching Spring, we shall be much incommoded, unless [our] Hospital is removed from the line, fevers will prevail, and may become infectious, unless our Hospital is detached from our Cantoonment, & has the benefit of an elivated & airy situation, which the rear grounds present.<sup>105</sup>

The "elevated and airy situation" toward the rear may refer to ground nearer the bluff, which falls away toward the Green Brook. By early April, Smith persevered in building separate hospital huts, 34 feet long and 20 feet wide, partitioned, with central chimneys.<sup>106</sup> The policy of keeping the sick separate also applied to food supplies and the possessions of the sick men:

The Commanding Officers of Regts. will order a fatigue party to form a Regimt. Hospital Garden, in front of each Hospital . . . The Centinels, at each hospital are to be particularly charged to prevent any person, taking articles from them, without the surgeon or one of his

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<sup>102</sup> Seely, *Diary*, 623.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 631.

<sup>104</sup> Inspections of the 11th, 12th, and 13th regiments (April 7, 1800), Images 43–49, Alexander Hamilton Papers: General Correspondence, Library of Congress, [https://www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.018\\_0598\\_0682/?sp=43](https://www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.018_0598_0682/?sp=43).

<sup>105</sup> Letter, William Smith to Alexander Hamilton (February 17, 1800), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-2083>.

<sup>106</sup> Letter, William Smith to Alexander Hamilton (March 7, 1800), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-2216>.



mates being present, or the hospital orderly— The plundering of gardens will be punished with severity.<sup>107</sup>

The main ailments in camp were fevers. Adjutant General North in mid-April reported: “The Troops are sickly, intermitting and remitting fever prevail, and it is to be feared many of them will fall a sacrifice to the situation if it is not speedily changed.”<sup>108</sup> Surviving returns such as North’s inspection in April show a greater number of men sick, but many of them still present for duty by comparison to fewer men in the regimental hospitals (for example, the 11th reported 67 sick-present and 6 sick-absent out of approximately 680 combined officers and enlisted men).<sup>109</sup> One major contributing factor to illness was contaminated water, attested to in North’s report with the simple line “the water is bad.”<sup>110</sup> In April, the men dug “regimental wells,” suggesting the Green Brook had become polluted.<sup>111</sup> North also noted shortages of soap, rice, meal, salt, candles, and vinegar.<sup>112</sup> Clothing (and much else that was issued to the troops) was also reported as being very poor. North reported, “The Clothing not of the best kind and badly put together—the socks useless, shoe buckles not furnished and might be dispensed with.”<sup>113</sup>

The supply situation at the Union Camp was not as bad as Private Joseph Plumb Martin outlined at Jockey Hollow in 1779–80, where he famously described going days without eating anything, gnawing on black birch bark, and watching men roast and eat their old shoes, and even a pet dog, until meager supplies of beef and meal were procured.<sup>114</sup> However, William Smith often

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<sup>107</sup> Orderly Book, Published in the Proceedings of the Union County Historical Society, 75–6.

<sup>108</sup> “Remarks on the Brigade under the command of Lt. Col. Comdt. Smith,” April 7, 1800, Alexander Hamilton Papers: General Correspondence, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss246120130/>.

<sup>109</sup> Inspections of the 11th, 12th, and 13th regiments (April 7, 1800), Images 43–49, Alexander Hamilton Papers: General Correspondence, Library of Congress, [https://www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.018\\_0598\\_0682/?sp=43](https://www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.018_0598_0682/?sp=43).

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Letter, Smith to Hamilton (April 2, 1800), <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-2359>.

<sup>112</sup> William North, “Inspection of the 7th of April, 1800: 11th Regiment,” Alexander Hamilton Papers: General Correspondence, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss246120130/>.

<sup>113</sup> “Remarks on the Brigade under the command of Lt. Col. Comdt. Smith,” Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss246120130/>.

<sup>114</sup> Joseph Plumb Martin, *A Narrative of a Revolutionary Soldier* (Signet Classics, New York: 2001), 148–9.

received (and passed on his own) complaints about the quality of rations, and their effects on the brigade's health. The Union Camp's contractor was Elias B. Dayton, the son of the former General Elias Dayton, and brother of Jonathan Dayton (the former Speaker of the House, then serving as a senator).<sup>115</sup> Dayton was responsible for obtaining a wide variety of goods for the camp, from the bricks and lime to build the chimneys, to the bread, beef, and pork that were important components of the men's rations. However, Smith complained to Hamilton: "I attribute the want of health amongst some of our men, to the badness of their bread, & the thinness of the beef."<sup>116</sup>

Smith again complained to Hamilton in May, writing: "I am forced to report that the troops are incommoded, and officers fretted by a repetition of the Issue of bad Provisions—as you will observe by the enclosed Complaints and statements from January to the Present date." Smith leveled accusations of profiteering against the baker, by underbaking bread to gain an advantage in weight and price. He reiterated: "I really attribute the indisposition of the troops, more to the badness of the Provision, & the badness of the bread than to any thing connected with our particular position."<sup>117</sup> Smith's letters also insinuated corruption (perhaps not surprising given Elias's familial connections).<sup>118</sup> The low quality of goods led soldiers to supplement their diets, buying from the sutlers or bartering with (and sometimes stealing from) locals. Smith even encouraged his officers to plant gardens for their companies in order to grow produce that would supplement their diets.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Letter, James McHenry to Alexander Hamilton (October 7, 1799), National archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-1317>, and "Brigadier General Elias. B. Dayton," [https://njcincinnati.org](https://njcincinnati.org/https://njcincinnati.org/elias-boudinot-dayton/), <https://njcincinnati.org/https://njcincinnati.org/elias-boudinot-dayton/>.

<sup>116</sup> Letter, William Smith to Alexander Hamilton (December 23, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-24-02-0109>.

<sup>117</sup> Letter, William Smith to Alexander Hamilton (May 1, 1800), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-2475>.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Orderly Book, Published in the Proceedings of the Union County Historical Society, 76.

In early May, the hospital system Smith put in place likely averted an outbreak of smallpox.

The first case of smallpox at the Union Camp occurred on May 1. Smith notified Hamilton:

It is my duty to inform you, that a Soldier of the 13th. Regt. broke out yesterday with the small-pox. . . . On the first symptoms, the soldier was moved to the hospital in the rear, & a Centinel placed to prevent any communication with him, except by the attendants at the Hospital who will also confine themselves to their station, untill your pleasure is known.<sup>120</sup>

Smith's quick thinking, isolating the infected man in the new hospitals he had built at the rear of the cantonment, likely averted a more serious outbreak. On May 14, Smith updated Hamilton, writing:

I have the pleasure to inform you that such attention has been paid, to the soldier who I reported on the 2d. inst. as having broke out with the small-pox, that he is in a fair way of a speedy recovery—and that there is no appearance of the disorder having been communicated to others. . . .<sup>121</sup>

Smith notes in his letter, "There are a number of men in that regiment & some few in the others, who have not had it," which could suggest a portion of the men previously had smallpox, by inoculation or otherwise. Hamilton mentioned inoculations of troops as early as June 1799.<sup>122</sup> Smith consulted Hamilton about inoculating troops in camp who had not yet had smallpox. Hamilton replied:

As the hot season is near at hand, and as the men will be so much debilitated by the disease as to be unfit for exercise for some time, I would prefer their not being inoculated, if effectual measures can be taken to prevent the infection from spreading—But if it should be your opinion and that of your Surgeons that this can not be done you will act in the case as shall appear to you proper.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Letter, William Smith to Alexander Hamilton (May 2, 1800), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-2486>.

<sup>121</sup> Letter, William Smith to Alexander Hamilton (May 14, 1800), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-2486>.

<sup>122</sup> Letter, Alexander Hamilton to George Ingersoll (June 12, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-0505>.

<sup>123</sup> Letter, Alexander Hamilton to William Smith (May 6, 1800), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-2511>.

Their correspondence offers little information on Smith's course of action regarding inoculations. However, another outbreak of smallpox does not appear to have occurred in camp. Despite myriad problems with rations, clothing, supplies, or contracts, Smith's averting an outbreak of smallpox stands as one of the victories of the Union Brigade.

**“A great Number of Men will be turned loose, perhaps disgrace themselves”: The New Army's Disbandment**

In October 1799, just as Union Camp was being established, Adams dispatched a diplomatic mission to engage the French in negotiations. Just as Smith and Ogden were beginning to construct huts at the Union Camp, Napoleon overthrew the Directory in the Coup of 18–19 Brumaire (November 9–10, 1799).<sup>124</sup> The French government had become more inclined to make peace by this time, observing the negative course of the Quasi-War for the country.<sup>125</sup> By spring of 1800, the New Army had also become a political liability in the United States.<sup>126</sup> Americans chafed under the burden of new land taxes to support it.<sup>127</sup> The interactions between civilians and soldiers were sometimes negative, and the soldiers were often portrayed as vagabonds, drunks, and more (especially in Republican newspapers).<sup>128</sup>

The army would only exist as long as the risk of war with France remained, and the overtures for peace led to its sudden disbanding. On May 14, Adams approved an Act of Congress that effectively disbanded the New Army's regiments. Military appointments were to be suspended, and the troops discharged by June 15, 1800.<sup>129</sup> Of course, the news was crushing. Major

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<sup>124</sup> Eymeric Job, “18 Brumaire: The Context and Course of a Coup D'État,” Napoleon.org, <https://www.napoleon.org/en/history-of-the-two-empires/articles/18-brumaire-the-context-and-course-of-a-coup-detat/> (accessed, 10/20/2022).

<sup>125</sup> Kohn, 251.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 256.

<sup>129</sup> “An Act,” Alexander Hamilton Papers: General Correspondence, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss246120135/>. The first four regiments of the army (the so-called “Old Army”) would

William Willcocks of the 12th wrote to Hamilton: “I well know, your feelings and sentiments, have anticipated every thing I could relate, of the impression made, upon our Brigade, by the late extraordinary Proceedings of Congress, and therefore avoid any detail.”<sup>130</sup> Willcocks hoped that Hamilton would travel to the Union Camp and inspect the troops, as the disbanding process was soon to begin. Even more, many of the officers hoped that some arrangement would be worked out by which they might remain in the army.<sup>131</sup>

Hamilton decided to inspect the Union Brigade on May 22. He wrote Aaron Ogden ahead of time, requesting a suitable house in the camp’s vicinity to serve as his headquarters.<sup>132</sup> Ogden found a home within one mile of the camp, where Hamilton made his headquarters until May 31 (unfortunately, the homeowner’s name is omitted).<sup>133</sup> Hamilton’s caravan left New York City on May 21, and his passage through Newark was reported in the *Centinel of Freedom* newspaper:

General Hamilton passed through this town on Wednesday last, on his way to Scotch Plains, as was supposed, to pass sentence of *disbandment* on the effeminate sons of Mars, now quartered at that place. We hope he has afforded them some *vivifying consolation*, as the all-terrific news had so fractured their animal faculties as to cause it to be despaired of, whether they could reach their various *lucrative* employments, which their *patriotism* had called them from.<sup>134</sup>

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remain, as would the “two regiments of artillerists and engineers, the two troops of light dragoons, or of the general and other staff, authorized by the several laws for the establishing and organizing the aforesaid corps.”

<sup>130</sup> Letter, William Willcocks to Alexander Hamilton (May 17, 1800), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/02-01-02-2605>.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Letter, Alexander Hamilton to Aaron Ogden (May 8, 1800), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-24-02-0380>.

<sup>133</sup> Letter, Aaron Ogden to Alexander Hamilton (May 13, 1800), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-24-02-0393>.

The name of the homeowner does not seem to appear in their correspondence, and more research is necessary to determine which home Hamilton stayed in and if it remains standing.

<sup>134</sup> Newspaper quoted in explanatory footnote 1, Letter, Alexander Hamilton to Aaron Ogden (May 8, 1800), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-24-02-0380>.

Illustrative of the army's negative portrayal in the Republican-leaning press, this statement is very similar to portrayals of the Union Brigade and the army in one of the most virulent newspapers, the *Aurora* of Philadelphia.<sup>135</sup>

Also present to review the troops on May 22 was First Lady Abigail Adams. Her visit in May was her second visit to camp. On her way to Philadelphia in November 1799, Abigail stopped to visit the camp and her son-in-law William S. Smith, as the men set to work building their huts.<sup>136</sup> Always an astute observer, Abigail again recorded her impressions of the brigade during the May inspection. She wrote to John, commenting: "I have just returned from a Review of the troops which Genll. Hamilton and North have given them, and I regretted exceedingly that you could not see them before they were separated. Major Tousard will tell you how well they performed. I acted as the *Aurora* says, as your proxy praised and admired, and regreeted &c."<sup>137</sup> She elaborated further:

I found the officers with their harps hung upon the willows from the late resolutions of Congress, but they submit with a good grace. . . . There are some in the Brigade, Men of real military talents, and Men who are now trained to Service, seasoned, arm'd &c. who are willing to enlist and fill up the Regiments which Congress have ordered still to be kept up of Engineers and artificers.<sup>138</sup>

This echoes a similar observation made by Adjutant General North in April when he inspected the three regiments. North commented: "The discipline and police of the different regiments seem to be nearly on a par, and as good as can be expected from the inexperience of the majority of the officers."<sup>139</sup> Those officers were unfortunately in limbo as they looked for

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<sup>135</sup> *The Aurora General Advertiser*, November 6, 1799, 2.

<sup>136</sup> Letter, Abigail Adams to Mary Smith Cranch (November 13, 1799), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-14-02-0035>.

<sup>137</sup> Letter, Abigail Adams to John Adams (May 22, 1800), Massachusetts Historical Society, <https://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/doc?id=L18000522aa&rec=sheet&archive=&hi=&numRecs=&query=&queryid=&start=&tag=&num=10&bc=>.

<sup>138</sup> Letter, Abigail Adams to John Adams (May 22, 1800), Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>139</sup> "Remarks on the Brigade under the command of Lt. Col. Comdt. Smith," Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss246120130/>.

opportunities to stay on in the service. Smith also wrote to John Adams, requesting that a number of officers and men be retained in those forces that would be left standing.<sup>140</sup>

There was also a political element to the inspection. Hamilton reportedly encouraged the men and officers to back the Federalist ticket.<sup>141</sup> With the presidential election of 1800 looming, the Federalist party was rocked by internal turmoil. In recent Congressional elections, Federalists faced major setbacks. In New Jersey, for example, Federalists lost three out of five House seats, and Republicans won for the first time in the state.<sup>142</sup> Adams also made his independence from the high Federalists clear (having had enough of the political intrigue among his cabinet), dismissing Secretary of War James McHenry and Secretary of State Timothy Pickering in May. These actions infuriated high Federalists and led to schism in the party. Hamilton was not amenable to a second term for Adams. While publicly supporting Adams and General Charles C. Pinckney, Hamilton worked for Pinckney electoral votes. Since each elector cast two votes without formal distinction between president and vice president, Hamilton hoped Pinckney would gain the majority.<sup>143</sup>

The final issue the officers at the Union Camp faced was the orderly disbanding of the troops. Abigail Adams put it very simply when she wrote to John: “He [Smith] also thinks it best for those Men who are at a distance from their Homes to be taken by their officers on to the places where they were inlisted previous to the time of disbanding, or otherways a great Number of Men will be turnd loose, perhaps disgrace themselves.”<sup>144</sup> After being mustered and paid accordingly, the regiments would depart for their homes by mid-June, with emphasis placed on discipline and avoiding public disturbance.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Letter, William Smith to John Adams (May 21, 1800), Alexander Hamilton Papers: General Correspondence, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss246120136/>.

<sup>141</sup> Kohn, 267.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 264–7.

<sup>144</sup> Letter, Abigail Adams to John Adams (May 22, 1800), Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>145</sup> Orderly Book, Published in the Proceedings of the Union County Historical Society, 89–90.

While most of the troops ended up returning home, some may have stayed on in the service. William Ward Burrows expressed his desire to Hamilton to recruit 100 men from the disbanding brigade into the Marine Corps.<sup>146</sup> Major Anne-Louis de Tousard desired to recruit six companies of artillerists from the Union brigade.<sup>147</sup> Companies departed piecemeal until June 14, at which time Sylvanus Seely remembered: “We had a good deal of Company from the Counterey but the soldiers are nearly gone.”<sup>148</sup> Some officers remained a few days longer to deal with any remaining camp business, not all of it peaceful. As Seely reported on June 15: “After breakfast I came of and came to camp and my brother informs me that Captn. Curkland and Lt. Thompson of the 12th faught a Duel last night evening and the latter was wounded.”<sup>149</sup>

The materials for the huts were likely sold off, as had been the plan expressed in earlier letters. Locals probably salvaged the rest, as at other Revolutionary War cantonments. Seely attested to this, even salvaging some of the materials himself. On June 22, he went to Elizabeth and spoke with Colonel Ogden “on account of my boards at Camp and he tells me that he expets orders to sell the huts every day and advises me to be there and he will help me to them.”<sup>150</sup> Three days later, Seely happily reported: “I covered the back side of my hous with boards.”<sup>151</sup>

## Conclusion

The Union Camp of 1799–1800 represents one of the most significant impacts of the Quasi-War on the State of New Jersey, and the study of this site is a window into the bigger issues,

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<sup>146</sup> Letter, William Ward Burrows to Alexander Hamilton (May 27, 1800), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-24-02-0446>.

<sup>147</sup> Tousard was a French volunteer and hero of the American Revolution who had been commissioned as a major of the 2nd US Artillery during the Quasi-War. “Biography,” Anne-Louis de Tousard papers (1659–1932, bulk 1777–1820), Clements Library, University of Michigan, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/clementsead/umich-wcl-M-976tou?view=text>, and Letter, William Smith to Alexander Hamilton (May 31, 1800), National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-24-02-0464>.

<sup>148</sup> Seeley, *Diary*, 646.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 647.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 650.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*



challenges, and debates involved in raising the New Army. The reuse of the Vermeule property as a winter cantonment demonstrates the significance of the land's abundant resources and situation along a key stage-coach route between New York and Philadelphia. The design of the cantonment drew from its revolutionary forbearers, and practices that originated at earlier cantonments were reused at the Union Camp. Mistakes due to inexperience also plagued the Union Camp and call to mind similar situations at Valley Forge, especially poor sanitation and pollution of water supplies. Innovation and improvisation as the situation required are also key aspects of the Union Camp.

A study of the Union Camp highlights the many interactions between a controversial army and the public in the New Jersey countryside. The arrival of some 1,500 men in a rural area was a great economic opportunity for the locals. This is clear by their constant presence in and around the camp, bartering and selling with the soldiers, and even building stores right on the edge of the cantonment. Enslaved people, though restricted, may also have come to camp to trade and interact with the soldiers. Soldiers bartered and sold their equipment, sometimes in exchange for liquor and other consumable items. Soldiers also left camp frequently, sometimes acted disorderly in the local towns, and occasionally stole from the inhabitants.

The Union Camp also encountered issues with disease and supplies, which can be compared with those of the previous conflict. Inspections of the troops (especially in late April) show that equipment was severely lacking. Polluted water also contributed to illness in camp. Though better supplied compared to some earlier winter cantonments (Jockey Hollow in 1779 comes to mind), rations and equipment were often of low quality. William S. Smith attributed many of the soldier's health problems to poor rations more than any other factor. Soldiers at the Union Camp often supplemented their diets with items supplied by (and sometimes stolen from)

the locals or purchased from regimental sutlers, or produce they attempted to grow in camp gardens.

Despite issues with water, rations, and at times hygiene, serious illness resulting in death appears relatively low. Surviving returns, like those from Adjutant General North's inspection in April, show a greater number of men sick, but many of them still present for duty. By April, new hospital huts were used effectively to isolate sick men and prevent large outbreaks of disease. This effectiveness is best shown by Smith's averting an outbreak of smallpox in early May.

Finally the Union Camp is a case study in the contentious politics of the 1790s, and the development of military institutions in the early republic. The creation of the New Army was driven by the military and political visions of men like Alexander Hamilton and other high Federalists. The French crisis that developed into the Quasi-War provided an opportunity for Hamilton to realize some of these ambitions, though the rug was pulled out from under him as soon as John Adams began peace negotiations with the French. Many military developments came out of the Quasi-War. Most important were the development of military institutions and bureaucracy (such as the Navy Department, Marine Corps, and those army units that remained established after June 1800), a core group of officers who made the army their career, and the realization that a professional modern army was necessary for the emerging warfare of the nineteenth century.<sup>152</sup> The emergence of a core group of officers is an important aspect of the Union Camp, and the desire of many of these men to remain in the service after the New Army disbanded is very apparent from their correspondence and the observations of others, such as Abigail Adams. The political debates about the purpose of a standing army, its operation, and the impact it would have on civilians played out in the New Jersey countryside. The way the army

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<sup>152</sup> Kohn, 292–301.

interacted with civilians (and how it was characterized in Republican newspapers) affected its image, sometimes in negative ways. This was especially true toward its end. As peace seemed likely, the public became unhappy with the taxes to support the army, and negative incidents involving soldiers were highly publicized.

The Vermeule militia post and later Union Camp present valuable opportunities for new research. Clearly, the military use of the Vermeule property represents a unique situation with implications for many aspects of research involving New Jersey history, the American Revolution, and the early republic. Though largely unknown except in the domain of local history, this site is worthy of far more study.

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