

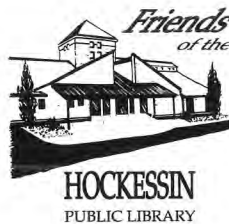
HOCKESSIN

A PICTORIAL HISTORY

SECOND EDITION

BY

JOSEPH R. LAKE, JR.



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The two wonderful photographs on this page are from the album of a student at the West Chester State Normal School (College). They were taken about 1900 and identified only as "New Castle and Chester Counties." Above, a child with a flute entertains a flock of sheep, while, below, a pastural scene with dairy cows grazing quietly beside a small stream could have been taken anywhere in the Hockessin area of years past.



CHAPTER IV

THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

"At sunrise this morning, September 9, two other divisions of this army under Lord Cornwallis and Major-General Grant marched from head quarters at Nichol's house, Mill Creek Hundred, by a bye road to Hockessin Meeting House—Quaker meeting four miles distance and encamped".

Major Montresor's Journal, British Army 1777.

September 8, 1777... as on many early September mornings in the peaceful Hockessin valley, fluffy cumulus clouds were appearing one by one making preparation for an afternoon thunder shower. A few locusts sang out the warning that the day would be seasonably warm. A dog may have been barking. Aside from these noises, however, the valley was still. There was little human activity about. There were no wagons on the Wilmington road; no animals were being driven to the fields awaiting harvest; nor was there any laughter of children playing in the vicinity of the farmhouses; only stillness.

News had reached the valley by travelers the evening before that a British Army, nearly 15,000 men strong, was preparing to move from the Newark area. The main elements of the British Army had been stationed there since their skirmish at Cooch's Bridge on September 3 with principal elements of General Washington's Continental Army. Now numbering between 9,000 and 11,000 men strong, Washington's troops were encamped near the village of Stanton on the banks of Red Clay Creek. While the majority of the travelers' tales probably gave indication that the target of the British move was the strategic port of Wilmington, others had seen British soldiers crossing White Clay Creek and moving to the northeast along a primitive road in the general direction of Pike Creek. It was most likely the latter story that caused anxiety among the inhabitants of Hockessin. They hastily prepared their carriages and wagons. Valuables were loaded at random. The women and children were being sent to homes of relatives in nearby Pennsylvania. Only the roads east and north would be safe for travel. From historical source material still available, it appears that the men, for the most part, chose to remain behind. They continued their work in the fields, assisted by slaves and hired freed men, and prayed that the wave of destruction would pass another way. Not enough time had passed for men not

to reflect back upon stories of terror and wars in Europe in the preceding five centuries. They were inwardly frightened.

As a consequence of the evacuation, the stillness of the morning was replaced by the sounds of human effort, a flood of refugees, seeking safety wherever they thought safety could be discovered. Despite the primitive transportation and communication systems, it is likely that new rumors arrived with each passing traveler. Word that Colonial forces were also preparing for battle heightened anxiety. The battle lines were forming, but the exact field, valley, or hill on which the confrontation would take place was of the greatest matter of concern to all. No one really wanted to become the victim of a great historical event.

The British military expedition now approaching the Hockessin area was the vanguard of the Crown's military might in the new world. It involved more than 15,000 soldiers, aided by impressed slaves from Maryland, and was supported by two hundred and sixty naval vessels in the Elk River, light field artillery pieces, thousands of work animals and wagons, engineering and medical staffs, plus an elite officer corps. All would be used to execute the plan for the restoration of royal authority in the middle Atlantic area and the capture of the Colonial capital of Philadelphia. Should the plan be successful, the British reasoned that a combined psychological and military defeat of Colonial military forces would weaken, if not shatter, resistance and end organized rebellion.

This British Army was commanded by an able military leader, Sir William Howe. Howe was not a fighter. He was a military strategist of the highest caliber. Under his command he selected three good soldiers to carry out the developed strategy: General Charles Cornwallis, Major-General Grant, and Lieutenant-General Wilhelm von Knyphausen, a mercenary recruited from the Hesse-Cassel region of central Germany, the ancestral home of King George III. The Army was

roughly divided into three infantry brigades, each with specialized support. The soldiers in the ranks were a combination of regulars, loyalists, volunteers, impressed slaves and Indian scouts. Their morale was high. Their success in defeating the Colonials at Cooch's Bridge had encouraged them and diminished doubts concerning their ability to perform in an alien and presumably hostile environment.

The size of this force brought more people into the Hockessin area in a single day than at any time before or since. Nearly all available foodstuffs, grains, livestock, and shelter in the area were needed to accommodate and feed the approaching army. For the local farmers, therefore, an economic disaster was marching in their direction.

The march from Newark to Hockessin was accomplished in two days. With good knowledge of the area, a single brigade, probably under the command of Cornwallis, was sent ahead of other elements to secure the route. In the vicinity of Pike Creek, near the intersection of today's North Star and Paper Mill Roads, earthen fortifications were erected to protect the exposed flank of the remainder of the Army. These soldiers occasionally came under fire from Colonial reconnaissance units active in the area from Pike Creek eastward to Red Clay Creek in the vicinity of Brandywine Springs, and as far north as property now occupied by the Sanford Preparatory School. Despite the harassment, the march continued.

Local farmers had hoped for a bountiful crop in 1777. With newly cleared acreage providing larger crops than were needed for subsistence, the surplus would produce cash. The cash would be used to purchase badly needed household supplies, improvements to dwellings and barns, tools and wagons. There is no evidence to indicate that these farmers were suffering from English taxation on imports or exports, or had complaints against the Royal administration of the Colony. While they were aware of the rebellion and attuned to the ideals of the Colonial radicals, such activities had little or no bearing on the quiet and contented Quaker farmers of the Hockessin valley. They could be identified as pacifists.

With fortifications erected in the Pike Creek area on September 8, the remaining units of the British Army left their Newark bivouac and proceeded along Paper Mill Road to join up with their advance party.

General Washington and his staff were confronted by the need for an immediate decision. The question was whether they should continue preparations for the defense of Wilmington, or shift position so as to counter the possibility of an attack on Philadelphia. There is presently no evidence to indicate that Washington had received prior intelligence of the British plan. This suggests that his intelligence operation was disorganized and ineffective, or that the majority of such intelligence was derived from reconnaissance reports. If the latter were true, Washington must wait until the British reached the Limerock or Limestone Road, as it is now called, before a decision was made. If the British moved northward on this road toward Pennsylvania, he must shift his defenses. If they moved southward, he must be prepared to do battle with them east of Stanton. In the meantime the Colonial forces could only slow the

British advance through harassment. If the British dispatched troops to pursue the guerrilla bands, they would be led southward into larger pockets of resistance and destroyed. If the casualty toll were great enough, a weakened and demoralized British force might go into battle before reaching either Wilmington or Philadelphia. The Americans could only stand and wait for more information on which a sound military judgment could be made. If a major move in American defenses became necessary in order to respond to a British thrust at Philadelphia, the American forces would be less prepared to meet the challenge than at Wilmington.

Before leaving the Pike Creek area, British soldiers and German mercenaries sacked at random the farms in the immediate area. Nearly everything that couldn't be carried was destroyed. Several buildings were set afire. In a 1958 interview, Mrs. Elizabeth Peach Atwell, whose ancestral farmstead was located along what is now Paper Mill Road, stated that of all the family's property at the time of the sacking, only a single porcelain plate was untouched.

In a similar fashion the Mermaid Tavern, located nearby on the Limestone Road, was apparently a target of the gatherers of military stores. Over the years, several relics have been unearthed at and near this location. Undoubtedly the cider and liquor supply was quickly substituted for less valuable provisions in the soldier's backpack.

By the evening of September 8, the American colonial forces had established a temporary front extending over the hills as far as the Limestone Road. The main force units of Washington's Army were concentrated a few miles south of Hockessin. Then and later insufficiency of reliable reconnaissance information probably contributed to Washington's defeat at Brandywine more than either his ability as a commander or the strength of his Army.

At Limestone Road the British turned northward toward the border between the colonies of Delaware and Pennsylvania. It was now obvious that Wilmington was not an immediate target. The British were now within easy reach of the great Nottingham road (old U.S. 1), a major corridor to Philadelphia.

Washington responded quickly. He needed a great natural defense line, possibly a river or a chain of high hills. The Brandywine valley at its junction with the Philadelphia road offered both advantages. If the British were to be stopped, they could be stopped here. Washington quickly moved his forces via Center Road, Kennett Road, and Pyles Ford Road into Pennsylvania, thence to the east bank of the Brandywine at Chadds Ford.

The fast-moving British expedition on September 8 reached the Hockessin area at the junction of Southwood and Limestone roads. An historical plaque today marks the place where the first British forces entered Pennsylvania.

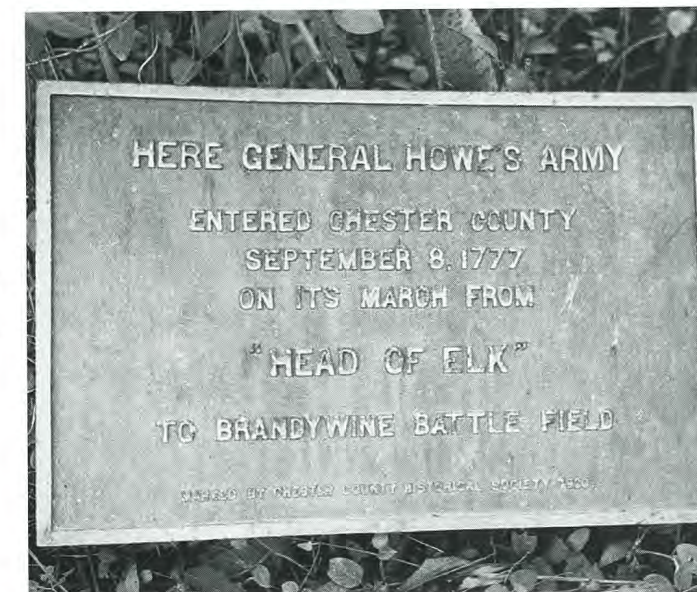
A farmstead was located here, occupied by David Brown. His wife and children had been evacuated to safety, but Brown himself, according to a descendant, remained behind. Upon seeing the approaching army, Brown, in fear of losing his home and most valuable possessions, moved his grains and animals into the approach road, where he offered them up as ransom for safety of his farm. Since there are

David Brown's house (about 1750) has seen many owners over the years. Brown, worried that the British might destroy the house, sold his livestock and valuables to the Crown's forces.



The junction of Southwood and Limestone Roads was the dividing point for the British expeditionary forces about to invade Pennsylvania in September, 1777.

Historical marker at the site where General Knyphausen's division of the British army entered Chester County, Pennsylvania via Limestone Road on September 8, 1777. General Howe marched to the Hockessin Friends Meeting House where he established a field headquarters.



indications that other farmers in the area made similar gestures to the British, there is the possibility that a community approach to the crisis had been decided upon among the members of the Quaker Meeting.

According to legend, a commanders' call was held at the Brown farmstead. All commanders of General rank were present. British reconnaissance reports now indicated that the Brandywine was indeed the logical point of confrontation between the opposing Armies. Here, Lord Howe made an important decision. He divided his forces. General Knyphausen, and his Hessian mercenaries, were ordered to proceed into Pennsylvania. Their mission would be to seal key transportation and communication routes to the south and west, thus closing them to Colonial militia. Once closed, the German division would proceed northward to the high ground overlooking the Brandywine, and show the colors.

Other accounts surmise that the division of forces was less a strategic move than it was the resolution of a conflict of personalities and conduct. Howe, so the story goes, was greatly upset by the destructive behavior of the German soldiers. He often reminded his mercenary subordinate that the property he and his men were destroying belonged to subjects of the King of England who were usually loyal taxpayers. Knyphausen, on the other hand, contended that civilians should withstand punishment, and that whoever defied the King must be punished. Destruction, according to Knyphausen, was the settling of accounts for rebellion to authority. In a single day Knyphausen's mercenaries plundered two hundred and sixty-one cattle, five hundred and sixty-eight sheep, and one hundred horses. Unable to compromise on this issue, and having a sensed dislike for the character of the Hessian leader, Howe sent him into Pennsylvania where he was of strategic value, but also out of sight and mind. Whatever the reason for the decision, many of the old landmarks around Hockessin that we know today were probably saved from destruction by this decision. From Hockessin, columns of smoke could be seen to the north, where Knyphausen's troops burned numerous buildings along their route through New Garden Township. Upon receiving the news that the British had sent a force into Pennsylvania, Thomas Wharton, Jr., the President of the Pennsylvania Supreme Council, wrote on September 10:

"The time is at last come in which the fate of ourselves, our wives, children and posterity, must be speedily determined. General Howe, at the head of a British Army, the only hope and last resource of our enemies, has invaded this State ... Blessed be God!"

Howe and Cornwallis selected the highlands around the Hockessin Friends Meeting House as their field headquarters. Other farmhouses in the immediate vicinity were commandeered to quarter officers and their support staffs. The beautiful old Jackson house, Strathworth, that still today commands a view of the intersection of Valley Road and Lancaster Pike, appears to have been selected as a hos-

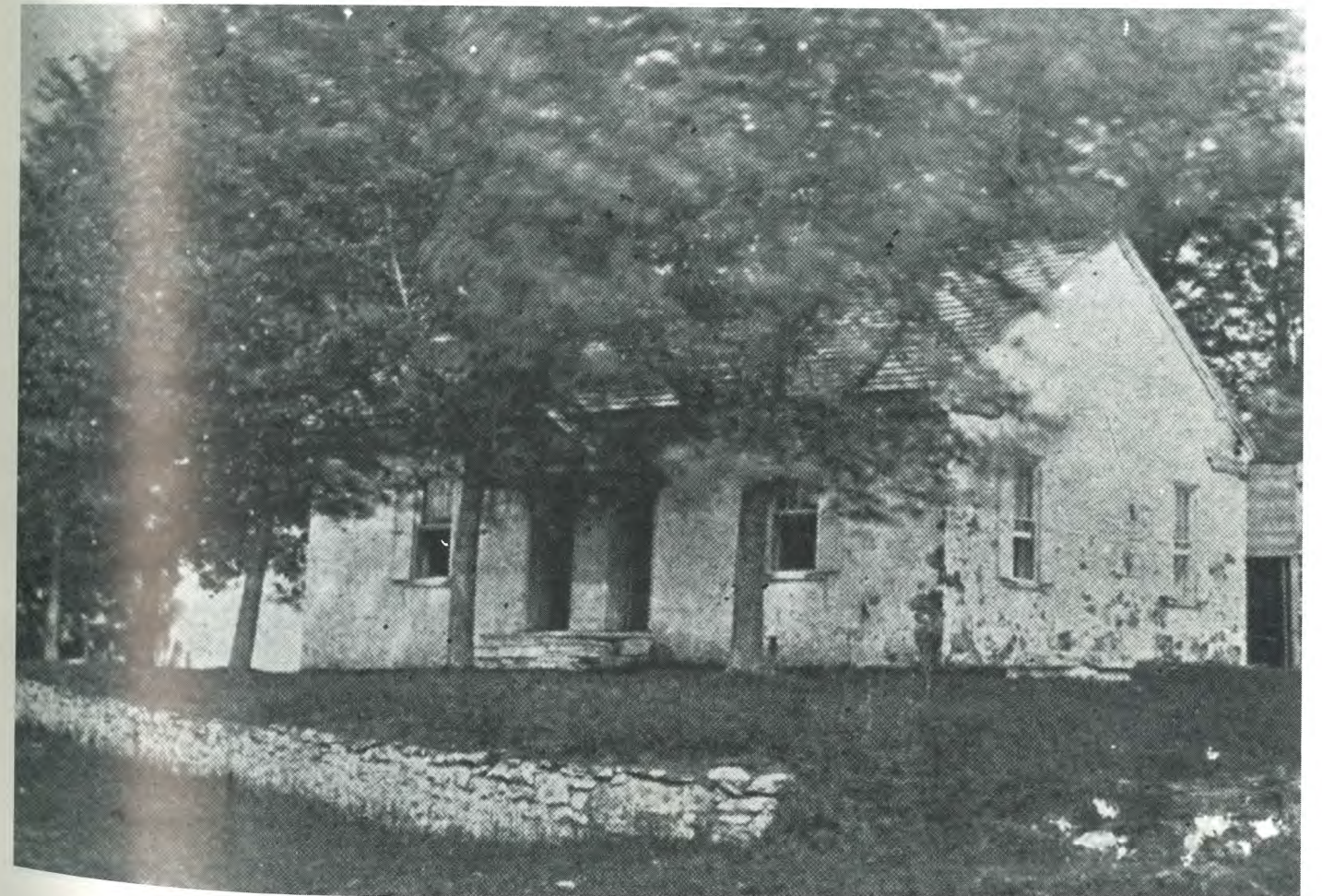
pital site. The British had taken as prisoners a number of wounded Colonial soldiers during the sporadic fighting that plagued the march from Newark. These men, as well as their own wounded, were treated under the most primitive conditions in this Hockessin house. A good testimony of these hospital conditions occurred in the early 1950s when Mrs. Richard Beard, then the owner of the Jackson house, decided to move several boxwood shrubs that were overgrowing the steps to the house. As the excavators removed the boxwoods, metal objects fell from the roots. Upon examination of the objects, they were found to be boot buckles, belt buckles, rifles, bayonets and personal effects of both British and Colonial soldiers. What had been discovered was a shallow mass grave containing an unknown number of brave soldiers of the American Revolution. These artifacts were later donated to the Metropolitan Museum in New York City.

Two hundred years—minus two—from the time when the Hockessin Meeting House served as the headquarters of the British Army, the Society of Friends decided to renovate the historic room making it similar to the way it appeared in 1777. When all the Victorian trappings were removed from the walls, and a fireplace and ancient floors were exposed, it was easy to imagine that most historic day. Looking out through the small window panes, with their irregular glasses, you find yourself where Lord Howe may have stood gazing out over the green valley. In Yorkshire, northern England, a similarity of landscape is readily noticeable. Being from Yorkshire, Howe probably registered this in his mind and felt more at ease, more comfortable with the environment. You can picture great maps and rosters laid upon the floor with men in high black riding boots gazing down and addressing the strategy of the coming storm. Horsemen and carriages came and went the entire evening long. Cannonballs and muskets were stacked high around a thousand campfires. The valley appeared ablaze.

When morning came, the decisions were made. The British Army broke camp and marched to Kennett Square. They would approach John Chadd's ford from the southwest. One division, under Howe, would halt on Knyphausen's south flank. The remaining division would pass behind the German line and appear to assume the northern flank, but actually would cross the river at other fords, and commence an attack on Washington's rear elements. If the plan worked, and history proved it did, the road to Philadelphia would open to the British.

The Quaker Meeting House at Hockessin appears little used in 1895. Wagon sheds and carriage steps hide behind great oak trees.

From 1738 to the beginning of the 20th Century, the Hockessin Friends Meeting maintained separate worship rooms for men and women. This is shown in this rare 19th Century photograph of the building with its two, separate front doors.





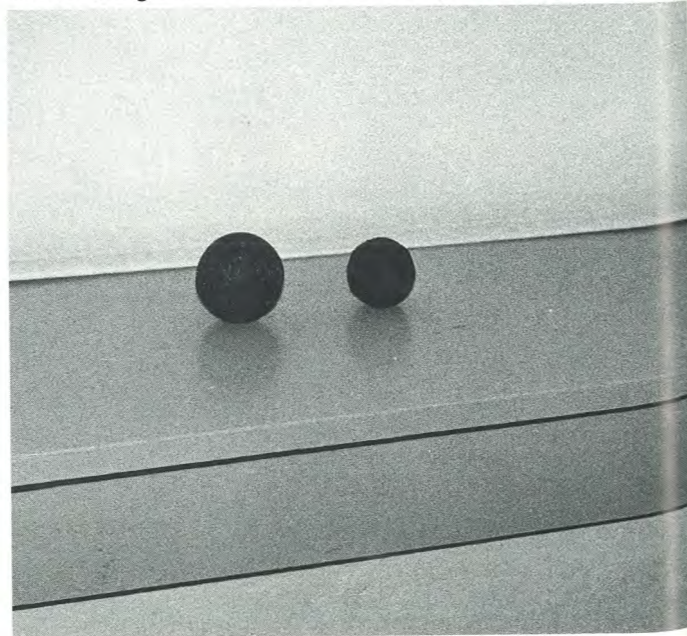
The recently restored interior of Hockessin Friends Meeting House. This room served as the headquarters of the British army on September 9, 1777.

While Knyphausen engaged forces at Chadds Ford, Cornwallis' division in a long march crossed the Brandywine over two upper neglected fords. When they appeared behind Washington's troops, very brisk fighting occurred but neither Generals Greene, Sullivan nor Lafayette could stem the tide. Each side had close to 1,000 casualties and, when night came, neither was inclined to continue. Washington's forces withdrew to Chester. Howe remained at Chadds Ford for a few days. He sent a reconnaissance group to Wilmington who captured President McKinley of Delaware and also many colonial records.

So on September 9 and 10, 1777, the army of America's last king marched out of the Hockessin valley forever. The hunger and human hardship that its passage brought upon the peaceful farmers here had a far more lasting meaning than the theoretical concepts of independence and human rights they brought there in the first place. Without grain for either animals or the table, the Hockessin farmer now had to expend whatever assets remained to endure the winter months ahead. Seed for the next year's crop was nonexistent, work animals had been requisitioned and carried

off by the departing Army, as had been wagons, tools and slaves.

As if the threat of starvation and disease were not enough, yet another problem arose. During the long march to the Brandywine, and even more so during the battle which followed, a number of Hessian and British soldiers deserted their ranks and fled into the surrounding countryside. At night these soldiers became guerrilla fighters, raid-



Cannon balls in the tavern at Mermaid were believed to have been used in the skirmishes between British and Americans in this area in September, 1777.



The Thomas Little house on Meeting House Hill, built in 1817, was once the community store and tavern. Although an earlier house on this site was occupied by British forces in 1777, the Little family managed to sell some livestock to Washington's army. It was recently the home of James A. Schulz.

ing the farms in the immediate area. They lived by stealing goods and food from the already victimized citizens.

This story of Hockessin's little moment of historical distinction actually had little impact on the outcome of the American Revolution. The time in which the command of the British Army was located here was important to its leaders. It allowed them time to develop a successful ground force strategy which, when put into action, proved highly successful against a similar force, but one less prepared for the engagement.

In 1874, historian William C. Armor wrote that: "Howe laid his plans skillfully (before Brandywine) and fortune favored their execution".

Unfortunately for the British, control of the seas would prove more critical than the possession of land or cities. The introduction of French naval power into the revolution was of far greater impact than the great land battles. Consequently, they could not hold on to their gains at Brandywine or Germantown.

The removal of armed forces from the valley did not end the violence or even the threat of violence. The revolution had destroyed established civil authority outside the major populated centers. Without law enforcement, there was a rapid increase in crime in areas such as Hockessin. The victims of this crime were the peaceful homesteaders.

One such criminal, or highwayman, was made legendary by the Victorian poet, Bayard Taylor, in his *Story of Kennett*. The "bad man" was named Sandy Flash. Sandy Flash was the nickname of a man born James Fitzpatrick of Doe Run, Chester County, Pennsylvania. Fitzpatrick's mother was believed to have been an Indian. His father was a Scotch-Irish immigrant. By all outward appearances, the Fitzpatrick farmstead was prosperous. The family lived in a spacious stone house surrounded by several out-buildings. The father apparently measured success by the compilation of material wealth, instead of money. This trait passed to Sandy, as well. To assure himself of his son's success, the elder Fitzpatrick signed a bond and indentured his boy to a local blacksmith. In the shop, Sandy learned a sought-after trade. He served well as an apprentice and grew to be a giant of a man. His character was marked by an almost uncontrolled spirit of individualism, probably learned from his mother, and a drive for success acquired from his father.

Once free, Sandy worked in many blacksmith shops and barns across the countryside of Pennsylvania and Delaware. He knew the area well. With his money, he purchased stylish clothes and the best horses. His nickname, Sandy Flash, came from his long flaxen hair and his agility on a horse.

Had there not been an American Revolution, or had he not enlisted in the armed forces of the Continental Congress, Sandy Flash would have remained a blacksmith and never entered the criminal history of Delaware. As it was, however, he did enter the Army as a private. For the first year he served with distinction and was wounded in battle in 1777. Then one day he refused to perform an undisclosed task and was flogged by an officer. For this act, Sandy swore revenge against the officer and developed a hatred for the Colonial cause. He deserted the Army and returned to the quiet hills of Chester County. Several attempts were made to arrest Sandy on the family farm, but each was unsuccessful. He welcomed the news that Lord Howe was marching on Philadelphia in September, 1777. He went to either Hockessin or Kennett Square and joined the British Army as a scout. His knowledge of the area supposedly assisted Howe in outflanking Washington at the Brandywine.

In the confusion of battle, Fitzpatrick slipped away. He returned to the farmstead. Within a short time he became aware that the Continental Army had learned of his assistance to the British and was actively pursuing him. He went into hiding. To support himself, he began his famous criminal career.

According to Taylor, Fitzpatrick met up with an older woman named Deborah Smith. Together they devised two plans of action. First, at night, Sandy Flash would rob travelers on the public roads. In the day time, Deb Smith would seek and find employment as a domestic in the homes of the most prosperous farmers in Hockessin, Mt.

Cuba, Kennett Square and Brandywine Hundred. He would never rob in the vicinity of the family farm. Once gainfully employed, Deb Smith would supply Sandy with information regarding the location of valuables in each of the farm houses. Sandy Flash would follow-up this tip with an armed raid on the farmstead. With the two plans combined, local farmers were not safe at night or in the daytime. Following a raid, Sandy Flash would retreat into the hills along Red Clay Creek or in Chester County and await further news from his feminine partner.

How many local folks were the victims of the Sandy Flash raids was not recorded, but these citizens did bring enormous pressure upon what governmental officials there were for immediate action to curb Sandy Flash. A Kennett Square journalist reported that public meetings were held in Hockessin and Kennett Square. Plans were made to entrap the "ruthless" Fitzpatrick. The fact that Sandy Flash was a "dead shot" with his three pistols only heightened the anxiety of the farmers. The traps were established, but one resulted in a gun fight between Fitzpatrick and a group of farmers. The result was the end of local vigilante action.

As sheriffs were appointed and law enforcement eventually restored, the search for Sandy Flash intensified. On August 22, 1778, he was surprised by an armed party near the entrance to a cave-like shelter in Chester County and arrested. Fitzpatrick was taken to a stockade in Chester. He stood trial for countless crimes. The jury found him guilty and he was hanged in Chester on September 27, 1778.