A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston

Being the Diary of Lieutenant Frederick MacKenzie, Queen of the Royal British Fusiliers, January 3 - April 10, 1776

AND A LETTER

LIEUTENANT FREDERICK MACKENZIE

Issued by Allen French

(An early history of Congress and Exeter)

1789
A British Fusilier in Revolutionary Boston

Being the Diary of Lieutenant Frederick MacKenzie,
Ajan of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, January 5—April 30, 1775

With a Letter Describing His Voyage to America

Edited by Allen French

Cambridge
Harvard University Press
1926
INTRODUCTION

In much of the re-writing of American History which has been so general in the past few years, the main effort has been to penetrate the tradition which so heavily overlays it and by the use of contemporary documents to reach the actual facts. That this effort is wholesome, few will deny, nor can any harm come from knowing the truth about our ancestors. This would be reason enough for publishing any Revolutionary diary, but the one herewith presented, written in Boston in 1775 by Lieutenant Frederick Mackenzie, a British officer, has its own intrinsic value.

Until now the only portion of it printed was a part of the narrative of a single day, which has long been the standard account of Lord Percy's expedition to Lexington on the 19th of April, 1775. No writer upon that first day of our Revolution has drawn heavily upon this narrative. Yet, buried in the Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society (for March, 1860), it has not been easily accessible to the general reader, nor in convenient form for one assembling a library of Revolutionary Americana.

In writing my "Day of Lexington and Concord" two or more years ago, I depended greatly upon this narrative, and finding it of the highest value, wished to discover the remainder. The extract had been communicated to the Massachusetts Historical Society by Mrs. Frances Rose-Troup, an American married in England, but when at length I managed to get word from her, I found that she had lost track of the original diary and believed it destroyed. As it was my plan to visit England in the summer of...
1925, I wrote in advance to the Literary Supplement of the London Times, stating the object of my search. By good fortune a copy containing my letter came under the eyes of a descendant of the original writer, and on landing in England I was greeted by a letter from Lieutenant-Colonel Frederick Mackenzie saying that the ancestral diary was in his possession and at my service. Of his kindness and interest in my work then and ever since I can speak only in terms of gratitude and appreciation.

I had hoped that the diary would contain accounts of events of the siege of Boston, and particularly of the Battle of Bunker Hill, equal in value to the section which describes the events of the 19th of April. Unluckily the volume containing this information has been lost. A family memorandum of the year 1858 mentions the journals as covering the period from 1748 to 1791. All have been lost but eight volumes, including all those previous to 1775. Our volume begins with January of that year and ends with the 50th of April following. The next volume begins with the campaign which culminated in the capture of New York in 1776, so that almost the whole period of the siege of Boston is lacking. There is no record or memory of when the lost volumes left the Mackenzie family, and one can only hope that they will some day be found. Fortunately there still exists a single letter from the writer of the diary, written to his parents in 1773, describing his voyage to America in a troopship. That letter, with the Boston section of the diary, is incorporated in the present volume.

The general facts in regard to Frederick Mackenzie, the diarist, and his family, compiled from the Army Lists and from information communicated to me by his great-grandson, are as follows:

He was the only son of Mr. William Mackenzie, sometime merchant of Dublin, by his wife Mary Ann (born Basset), who was of French descent, belonging to one of the numerous Huguenot families which escaped to Ireland at the time of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. The son is believed to have received his first commission in the 23rd Regiment (Royal Welch Fusiliers) in the year 1745. He was promoted to a captaincy in Boston in the fall of 1775 and obtained his majority in August 1780. During a part of the British occupation of New York he acted as deputy adjutant-general. In 1787 he transferred from his old regiment to become lieutenant-colonel of the 37th Foot. He appears to have gone on half-pay for a time and lived in or near Exeter, as in 1794, at the time of the fear of a Napoleonic invasion, he raised and commanded the First Exeter Volunteers. He afterwards became "Assistant Barrack-Master General" at Headquarters, and was for some time Secretary of the Royal Military College. He died in the early part of 1824 at Teignmouth, Devon, but the exact date cannot be determined. He had three sons, of whom two, James (the "Jem" of the letter about the voyage to America) and George, became officers in their father's regiment. James was commissioned a second lieutenant in 1780. As a major he served with the Fusiliers in Egypt in 1801 and died there of dysentery on March 24th of that year.

George was born in Boston on June 15th, 1775, or two days before Bunker Hill, his mother having followed her husband from New York. He entered the 37th Regiment as an ensign in 1792, and four years later we find him a captain in the Fusiliers. He attained his majority in 1803. He disappears from the roster of