

## **Chester County Register of Revolutionary War Damages (British Depredations)**

This register, compiled in November 1782, contains accounts of property of Chester County residents seized or (not as frequently) destroyed, without compensation, by the British Army, aided by “adherents” (Pennsylvania Tories), during their march toward and occupation of Philadelphia, from the fall of 1777 until June 1778. Most of the accounts are for damages that occurred during the British march through Chester County in mid-September 1777. The township and borough tax assessors, acting upon the orders of the county commissioners, collected these accounts in their respective townships and boroughs. Each account consists of an inventory and appraisal of the goods and chattel alleged to have been seized, with in many cases the property-holder affirming or swearing, before a county justice of the peace, to its veracity.

The amount of property taken was often extensive, as when Joel Bailey of West Bradford Township stated that the British had taken belongings worth £141, including five horses, five “fat” sheep, 300 lbs. of cheese, and his smith tools. Vandalism was not uncommon; the widow Elizabeth Davis, for instance, reported that British soldiers had vandalized her home in Haverford Township, having “three desks, Cases of Drawrs, and several Chests, Voilently broke open Cut & Smashed with Tomahawks” and much kitchenware and other items “wantonly or willfully Broke.” Some of the victims were persons of modest means, such as the hapless Charles Porter of Birmingham Township, a “Very Poor Man” who claimed the loss of his “Good Cow” and “new Shirt.” Horses, saddles, and bridles were seized most often, but other goods and chattel taken frequently include food and fodder; cattle, sheep, and swine; bedding and blankets; clothing and fabrics; tools and kitchenware. Other items taken include fine handkerchiefs; pistols and guns; cash; books; and gold and silver watches.

Owners of the small number of slaves and indentured servants who either voluntarily left with, or were seized by, the British Army, claimed compensation for that loss as well. In some cases the property-holder declared that the slave or servant had been “deluded” (persuaded) to leave with the British. The wording of the law relating to British damages indicates that the legislators assumed that slaves and servants generally left of their own volition.

Mandated under a Pennsylvania statute of September 21<sup>st</sup> 1782, the main purpose of these accounts was to bolster the American position in the peace negotiations with Great Britain that had begun the previous April, with compensation to the aggrieved property owners being part of that settlement.<sup>1</sup> This was not to be, however, for the treaty resulting from these negotiations, the Treaty of Paris (1783), while recognizing American Independence, did not include compensation for colonists whose property had been seized during the war.

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<sup>1</sup>*Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania*, 10:530-33.

**Aggrieved property-holders, persons testifying on their behalf (including assessors), runaway slaves and servants, and Tory accomplices are indexed. The names of British officers and soldiers and of county commissioners and justices of the peace who received testimony are not indexed. If the record indicates that a person's residency changed between 1777-78 and 1782, there are two entries for that individual so that both residencies are included. A few accounts of British damages were made in 1783, and are from separate documents, rather than the register. A few commissioners' bills for work done in assembling British damages accounts also are indexed.**