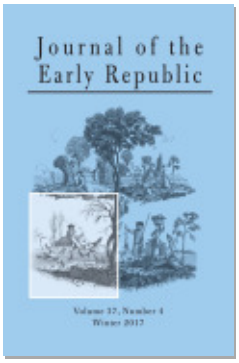
The Papers of George Washington: The Revolutionary War Series, Volume 23: 22 October–December 1779 ed. by William M. Ferraro (review)



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is particularly interested in illuminating Martha Washington, who has been the subject of limited scholarly attention. We learn from those who observed Martha that she was friendly, cheerful, dignified, domestic, devoted, agreeable, and intelligent, but not well-read. It's hard not to wonder how much of this picture of Martha was an image carefully crafted by a woman who knew she was in the public eye. Quotes from her letters addressing handling of her slaves, for instance, paint a picture of a shrewder and less amiable figure.

Many of the incidents in Fraser's story could have been drawn out and made more comprehensible with relevant historiography. Work on women's political involvement in particular would help illuminate to what extent Martha was a political being in her own right. The dynamics of Revolutionary War camp life, the political symbolism of social events, and Martha's duties running the Mount Vernon estate could all have been explored more fully and fruitfully with insights gleaned from the ample scholarship on these topics. Such context might also have led to more nuanced conclusions throughout the book.

Nonetheless, Fraser has crafted a readable, thorough tale worth telling. It will certainly be of interest to the general public, but scholars will also find much that is valuable. Fraser's synthesis of a wealth of primary sources can serve as a resource for Washington scholars and for those engaged in histories of women, marriage, the family, politics, and war in the late eighteenth century.

Cassandra Good is assistant professor of history at Marymount University. She is the author of *Founding Friendships: Friendships Between Men and Women in the Early American Republic* (New York, 2015) and is currently working on a biography of George and Martha Washington's family.

The Papers of George Washington: The Revolutionary War Series, Volume 23: 22 October–December 1779. Edited by William M. Ferraro. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015. Pp. 904. Cloth, $95.00.)

Reviewed by David Head

The Papers of George Washington Project, begun in 1968, marches on, with the end now in sight. Sixty-three out of a planned ninety volumes

have been published, with completion said to be coming within the next eight years. Once finished, more than 140,000 Washington documents will have been gathered, edited, annotated, and published in both printed form and as a digital edition as part of the Founders Online and Rotunda collections. The present volume covers a little more than two months at the end of 1779. It shows Washington principally as an administrator. He did no fighting but a lot of writing as he waited for news of operations in Georgia, saw his hopes for a Franco–American assault on British-occupied New York City dashed, weighed options for winter quarters, and dealt with the minutiae of manning, managing, and supplying an army.

One of the volume's key themes is Washington's search for information. It begins with the general looking in vain for reliable news from Savannah, where the southern army, under General Benjamin Lincoln, and the French navy, under Charles-Hector, Comte d'Estaing, were attempting to dislodge the British. Though repulsed in mid-October, Washington did not learn of the battle's outcome under November 10. In the meantime, Washington, eager to move against New York, worried. "We have wasted so long in anxious expectation of the French fleet . . . without hearing any thing from it, or of it, since its first arrival at Georgia," he wrote his stepson, Jacky Custis, "that we begin to fear that some great convulsion in the Earth has caused a chasm between this and that state that cannot be past [*sic*]—or why if nothing is done, or doing, are we not informd [*sic*] of it?" (225). Washington had an underappreciated talent for sarcasm. The general also looked in vain for reliable information on British operations in New York, and he worked his spy network without much success. It was not until late December that Washington finally learned that the British army was embarking on ships for an unknown destination. It would turn out to be intended for an assault on Charlestown, which the British would capture in the spring, but he had also heard that the Chesapeake could be a target. British operations in New Jersey were also a source of consternation for Washington. Were they simply looking for forage? Or were their movements part of some grander design? As so often was the case, Washington had few solid leads and had to make decisions, committing resources and men's lives, based on the unknowable.

Supply problems were another recurring theme. There are more than a few letters about horses and hay and flour and coats and blankets. With winter approaching, locating sufficient clothes and blankets caught

Washington's attention. He received notice from the clothier general, James Wilkinson, that the purchasing agent for Connecticut had obtained "a competency of Shirts, Shoes, Hats & under Cloths for the troops of that state" (215). Washington then passed the information along to Major General William Heath with instructions that the Connecticut line "ought to draw no more of the above [items] than they are absolutely in need of at present" (319). The men of the Nutmeg State had sufficient "under Cloths" to last them the winter, according to Washington. It is amusing now to think about the august General Washington immersed in such details but it also testifies to his enormous workload and the overwhelming stress of his command.

The volume's editorial work is top notch. Extensive footnotes place each document in context, source the information discussed, and provide voluminous cross-references to other relevant documents. I wonder, though, about how useful for research the printed book is when compared with the digital edition, which provides research tools the printed book cannot match. There is keyword searching, of course, but the digital edition also has links embedded in the notes that quickly take you to the document mentioned. Want to follow Washington's correspondence with a particular person, say the abovementioned Heath? You can click through the links, one letter to the next. Using the book, you would have to flip through the pages to find the referenced letters. They are not cited by page number, so you have to look by date, letter by letter, page by page. This is a problem in a 900-page volume that covers only ten weeks. For each day there are numerous letters. Plus, if the document cross-referenced in the notes is in another volume—again, quite likely when the volume covers such a short time span—you have to go find that volume. Pretty soon, you will be surrounded by a mountain of books. With the digital edition, you just click, click, click. Some people will prefer working with the printed book. I do not much enjoy reading long sections of text on a computer screen, and once I have narrowed things down to letters I want to read closely and ponder, I like to have a paper copy in front of me. It is useful to have both versions for different kinds of work.

More than fifty years in the making, the Papers of George Washington Project is a work for the ages, and the powerful new tools available in the digital edition promise to reveal new insights into George Washington and his world. Though he is already the subject of a library of books,

the papers provide such rich raw materials the many more new books will follow.

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Boy Soldiers of the American Revolution. By Caroline Cox. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016. Pp. 232. Cloth, $29.95.)

Reviewed by John A. Ruddiman

Soldiering, according to early modern expectations, was a man's work. Military service required strength and endurance. Armies consequently had little use for boys. In the Revolutionary War, Congress and the rebellious states set sixteen as an age limit for their recruiters and draft policies. Nevertheless, Caroline Cox has identified hundreds of boys who joined regiments fighting for American independence. Most of these boys were between thirteen and fifteen years old, but some were as young as nine. She estimates that 1.5 to 2.5 percent of Continental soldiers were younger than sixteen. Cox's work opens windows into the diversity of experiences in the Revolutionary War and the relationship between soldiering and work. Ultimately, her analysis of boy soldiers highlights changing expectations about children and childhood as one century flowed into the next.

Cox's book rests on exhaustive investigation of nineteenth-century pension applications, read in combination with memoirs and military records. Congress offered pensions to indigent veterans of the Revolution in 1818 and expanded eligibility in 1832 to all who served at least nine months. The resulting 80,000 application records—now digitized, but only organized alphabetically by last name—are a rich mine. These records impose real limits, however. Details can be scant and memories faulty, and these aged veterans faced audiences who possessed far different understandings of the war and soldiering. Cox acknowledges that pension applications could be self-serving, prone to error or deceit, and layered with shifting meanings. But she correctly points out that applicants did not lie about information incidental to their application—the