

“the most alarming scene I ever remember”

A Loyalist's Daughter at the End of the American Revolution

Anna Rawle, Philadelphia, on mob attacks on Loyalists after the surrender of Cornwallis, 1781

On October 19, 1781, General Cornwallis surrendered his army to General Washington at Yorktown, Virginia. For Loyalists, the news was devastating, and for many it was quickly followed by mob attacks on their homes and persons. Anna Rawle, the twenty-four-year old daughter of a prominent Loyalist Quaker family in Philadelphia, recounted the experiences of her family and Loyalist friends in the days after Cornwallis's surrender.

October 22, 1781. — Second day.¹ The first thing I heard this morning was that Lord Cornwallis had surrendered to the French and Americans — intelligence [news] as surprising as vexatious. People who are so stupidly regardless of their own interests are undeserving of compassion, but one cannot help lamenting that the fate of so many worthy persons should be connected with the failure or success of the British army. Uncle Howell came in soon after breakfast, and though he is neither Whig nor Tory [Patriot not Loyalist], looked as if he had sat up all night. He was glad to see all here so cheerful, he said. When he was gone Ben Shoemaker² arrived; he was told it as he came along and was astonished. However, as there is no letter from Washington, we flatter ourselves that it is not true. . . .

October 24, 1781. — Fourth day. I feel in a most unsettled humor. I can neither read, work or give my attention one moment to anything. It is too true that Cornwallis is taken. Tilghman³ is just arrived with dispatches from Washington which confirm it. B. S. came here and showed us some papers. Long conversations we often have together on the melancholy situation of things.

October 25, 1781. — Fifth day. I suppose, dear Mammy,⁴ thee would not have imagined this house to be illuminated⁵ last night, but it was. A mob surrounded it, broke the shutters and the glass of the windows and were coming in, none but forlorn women here. We for a time listened for their attacks in fear and trembling till, finding them grow more loud and violent, not knowing what to do, we ran into the yard. Warm Whigs of one side and Hartleys⁶ of the other⁷ (who were treated even worse than we), rendered it impossible for us to escape that way.

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¹ Second day after news arrived of Cornwallis's surrender.

² Ben Shoemaker: stepbrother of Anna Rawle; son of Samuel Shoemaker by his first wife Hannah.

³ Lieut. Col. Tench Tilghman, aide-de-camp of Gen. Washington, who delivered news of the surrender to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia.

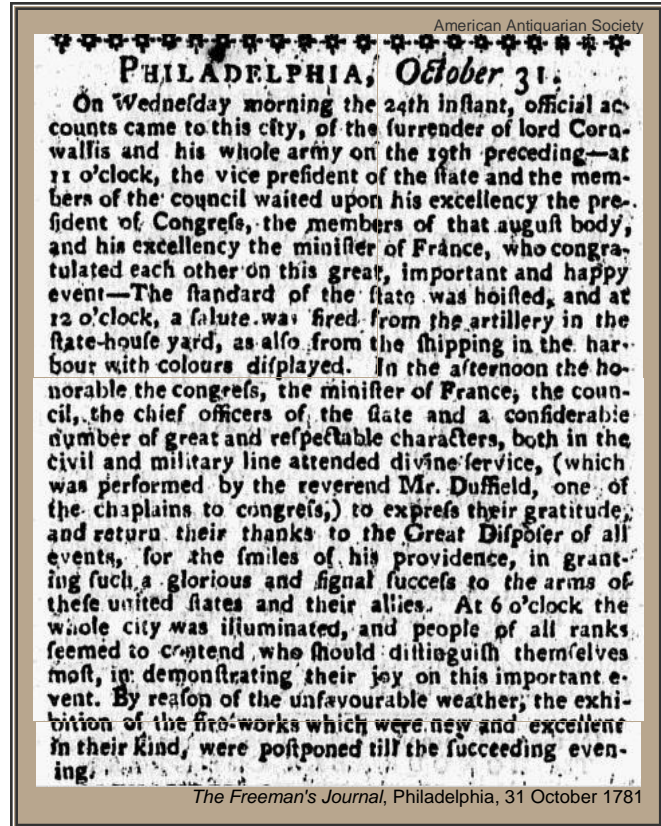
⁴ Francis Rawle Shoemaker. Anna Rawle wrote the journal for her mother who was staying in New York City for the time.

⁵ Mobs attacked Loyalists' and Quakers' houses that did not have candles in the windows to celebrate the victory at Yorktown.

⁶ James Hartley: Philadelphia merchant.

⁷ I.e., Patriots on one side of us, and Loyalists on the other side who were also being attacked.

We had not been there many minutes before we were drove back by the sight of two men climbing the fence. We thought the mob were coming in through there, but it proved to be Coburn and . . . Shewell, who called to us not to be frightened, and fixed lights up at the windows which pacified the mob, and after three huzzas they moved off. A number of men came in afterwards to see us. French and J. B. nailed boards up at the broken panels, or it would not have been safe to have gone to bed. Coburn and Shewell were really very kind. Had it not been for them I really believe the house would have been pulled down. Even the firm Uncle Fisher⁸ was obliged to submit to have his windows illuminated, for they had pickaxes and iron bars with which they had done considerable injury to his house, and would soon have demolished it had not some of the Hodges⁹ and other people got in back and acted as they pleased. All Uncle's sons were out but Sammy,¹⁰ and if they had been at home it



was in vain to oppose them. In short it was the most alarming scene I ever remember. For two hours we had the disagreeable noise of stones banging about, glass crashing, and the tumultuous voices of a large body of men, as they were a long time at the different houses in the neighborhood. At last they were victorious, and it was one general illumination throughout the town.

As we had not the pleasure of seeing any of the gentlemen in the house, nor the furniture cut up, and goods stolen, nor been beat, nor pistols pointed at our breasts, we may count our sufferings slight compared to many others. Mr. Gibbs was obliged to make his escape over a fence, and while his wife was endeavoring to shield him from the rage of one of the men, she received a violent bruise in the breast and a blow in the face which made her nose bleed. Ben Shoemaker was here this morning; though exceedingly threatened he says he came off with the loss of four panes of glass. Some Whig friends put candles in the windows which made his peace with the mob, and they retired [went away]. John Drinker¹¹ has lost half the goods out of his shop and been beat by them. In short the sufferings of those they pleased to style Tories would fill a volume and shake the credulity of those who were not here on that memorable night, and today Philadelphia makes an uncommon appearance, which ought to cover the Whigs with eternal confusion. A neighbor of ours had the effrontery to tell Mrs. G[ibbs], that he was sorry for her furniture, but not for her windows — a ridiculous distinction that many of them make. J. Head has nothing left whole in his parlor. Uncle Penington¹² lost a good deal of

⁸ William Fisher, merchant and husband of Rawle's maternal great-aunt.

⁹ Andrew and Hugh Hodge, merchants.

¹⁰ Samuel W. Fisher.

¹¹ From the diary of Elizabeth Drinker, wife of John Drinker. "October 19. Ye [the] 17th of this month, October, Gen. Cornwallis was taken, for which we grievously suffered on ye 24th, by way of rejoicing. A mob assembled about 7 o'clock or before, and continued their insults until near 10, to those whose Houses were not illuminated. Scarcely one Friend's [Quaker's] House escaped. We had nearly 70 panes of glass broken; ye sash lights and two panels of the front Parlor broke in pieces; ye Door cracked and violently burst open; when they threw stones into ye House for some time, but did not enter. Some fared better and some worse. Some Houses, after breaking ye door, they entered, and destroyed the Furniture, &c. Many women and children were frightened into fits, and 'tis a mercy no lives were lost."

¹² Edward Penington, husband of the sister of Samuel Shoemaker, Anna's stepfather.

window-glass. Aunt Burge¹³ preserved hers through the care of some of her neighbors. The Drinkers and Walns make heavy complaints of the Carolinians in their neighborhood. Walns' pickles were thrown about the streets and barrels of sugar stolen. Grandmammy was the most composed of anybody here.

Was I not sure, my dearest Mother, that you would have very exaggerated accounts of this affair from others, and would probably be uneasy for the fate of our friends, I would be entirely silent about it, but as you will hear it from some one or another, not mentioning it will seem as if we had suffered exceedingly, and I hope I may depend on the safety of this opportunity.

People did nothing today but condole and inquire into each others' honorable losses. Amongst a great variety who were here was Aunt Rawle,¹⁴ Next to her sisters this was the family, she said, whom she felt most interested for; her visit was quite unexpected. Uncle and Aunt Howell went from here to Edgely this morning. Aunt Betsy to tea. Becky Fisher and her brother in the evening.

October 26, 1781. — Sixth day. Neighbor Waln and Ben[jamin]. Shoemaker were here in the afternoon. Juliet,¹⁵ Polly Foulke and James Fisher came to see us in the evening — the conversation as usual on the late disturbances. It seems universally agreed that Philadelphia will no longer be that happy asylum for the Quakers that it once was. Those joyful days when all was prosperity and peace are gone, never to return; and perhaps it is as necessary for our society¹⁶ to ask for terms as it was for Cornwallis.¹⁷ Juliet says all Uncle Penington's fine pictures are broken. His parlor was full of men, but it was nothing, he said, to Nancy's illness, who was for an hour or two out of her senses and terrified them exceedingly.



¹³ Beulah Burge, a sister of Samuel Shoemaker.

¹⁴ Hannah Rawle, great-uncle of Anna Rawle.

¹⁵ "Fancy name" given to and used by Sarah Burge in correspondence during the Revolutionary War.

¹⁶ The Society of Friends; Quakers.

¹⁷ I.e., ask for "terms of surrender" in acknowledgment of the Patriots' victory.