Introduction

On September 26, 1777, the British began an eight-month occupation of the city of Philadelphia during the American Revolution. This allowed British troops to spend the winter billeted in comfortable quarters, while Washington’s troops suffered at Valley Forge. When France recognized the United States and declared war on Great Britain in February 1778 British war strategy changed to meet the new threat, and the army evacuated Philadelphia on June 18, 1778.

This letter of June 7, 1778, from newly promoted British army lieutenant Sam Mostyn to his patron in Wales describes some of the chaos and panic among loyalists in Philadelphia during the British evacuation. Fear of reprisals from patriots was exacerbated when, on May 8, the Supreme Council of Pennsylvania “publish’d a List of Persons whom they mean to treat as Traytors to the States of America” and ordered them to turn themselves in. As a result, some “were oblig’d . . . to leave This Town & put them selves on board the Ships, some for England and others to take their Chance with the Army.”

Questions for Discussion

Read the introduction, view the image, and read the transcript of Sam Mostyn’s letter. Then apply your knowledge of American and world history to answer the following questions:

1. Why did the British decide to evacuate Philadelphia in June of 1778?
2. Explain the emotional reaction of loyalists in Philadelphia once the order was given to the English troops to leave the city.
3. Describe the process that took place once the order to evacuate the city was given.
4. According to the letter, how did the “rebels” describe loyalists; what would be the fate of loyalists if they remained in Philadelphia?
5. Why was the evacuation an important event in the course of the Revolutionary War?
Yesterday Genl. Clinton was pleased to appoint me to be a Lieut. in the 1st regt. for which good fortune, I am your humble servant.

I am very happy to hear of your good fortune, and I shall be grateful to you if you will send me this news. I hope you will soon be in the line of life, as your goodness has shown me. I sincerely hope your amiable son will thrive.

I am very happy to hear of your news. I hope you will be well, and we are in great anxiety.
Samuel Mostyn to Thomas Pennant, June 7, 1778, page 2. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09023)
This Town I put them selves on board the Ships, some for England and others to take their Chance with the Army.

And now that I have taken up quite enough off time with my Sealed I shall take my Leav with wishing you Mr. Pennant of good Sickness & family all manner of Happines, & greatest of Blessings, Health.

Dear Sir, your most obliged Hum. Serv.

Sam. Mostyn  

Philadelphia, June 7th, 1778.

My comm is dated May 31, 1778.

Samuel Mostyn to Thomas Pennant, June 7, 1778, page 3. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09023)
Samuel Mostyn to Thomas Pennant, June 7, 1778, address. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09023)
D.' Sir

Yesterday Gen'. Clinton was pleas'd to appoint me to be a Leiut. in the 49th Reg'. for which good fortune, I am & ever shall be grateful to you & your good friend Judge Barrington, who I look up to as the first Cause of whatever Success I may be so fortunate as to meet with in the Line of Life your Goodness has thrown me into. I sincerely hope your Amiable Consort and the worthy Mostyn & Bichton families are well & happy:

I wou'd be glad to give you some News worth the Trouble of reading but I have none, except that the Comm'rs. are come, and we are in great anxiety [2] to know what Plan will be fix'd upon for the ensuing Campaign – Peace is not wish'd at all, nor hardly talk'd of as the Rebels have declar'd they will not treat but as Independent States. All the Goods of this Town, are put on board Ships, and fallen down the River by Order of the Commander in Chief – Many People who fear'd being left behind, have embark'd in these ships, all the heavy Baggage of the Army, the Women & Children are embark'd also; The Rebels have publish'd a List of Persons whom they mean to treat as Traytors to the States of America, if they will not give them selves up before the 21st of June 1778. [inserted: Even] then to take their Tryals for their several Treasons &c&c. This has oblig'd several People to leave [3] This Town & put them selves on board the Ships, some for England and others to take their Chance with the Army. –

And now that I have taken up quite enough of y' Time with my Scrawl I shall take my Leave with wishing you M'rs. Pennants y' good Sisters & family all manner of Happiness, & that greatest of Blessings, Health.

I am D.' Sir, your much
oblig'd Hum. Ser'.

Sam Mostyn
Lt. 49th Rg'.

I have not had the
Happiness to hear from
my D.' Parents since I
left England – owing I am
sure to the Accident of my going
over to the West Indies.

Philadelphia June 7th 1778. –
My Comm² is dated May 31ˢᵗ. 1778. –

Df. Sir, permit me by yf means to present my most respectful Comp⁸ to Lord Barrington & his
worthy Brother, & thanks for their kindness. –

Tho.⁸ Pennant Esq –

Downing near Holywell
N: Wales. Flintshire.

Mf Sam. Mostyn.