

# Lucy Knox on the home front during the Revolutionary War, 1777

## Introduction

---

Like many others before and after her, Lucy Knox performed a continuous juggling act as a busy wife and mother. Born into an aristocratic family, she had the advantage of a good education. At the age of seventeen she was disowned by her family when she married Henry Knox, her merchant-class suitor. Due to her heightened involvement as a patriot in Revolutionary America, Lucy faced challenges beyond the typical home front duties, making her a unique witness to history. She was not reluctant to discuss affairs of state in a frank and forthright manner with her husband. Henry quickly climbed the military ranks to become chief of artillery in the Continental Army, and thus a key player in the war.

In this letter to her husband, Lucy described local unrest, including the arrest of Boston men suspected of holding Tory sentiments and the involvement of the local mob in Revolutionary politics. She also reported on the high cost of goods, noting that “the price of every thing is so exorbitant indeed it is difficult to get the necessaries of life here.” While remaining alert to political and military affairs, she simultaneously tended to the needs of her family and dealt with hardship. Of thirteen children born to the Knoxes, only three lived beyond infancy. Lucy let her vulnerability show as she wrote of her anxiety about providing for the health and welfare of the family while her husband was in the field. In her case, the demanding position of wife and mother came with the consciousness that the eyes of future generations would be on her, her husband, and her contemporaries as they forged a new Republic.

## Questions for Discussion

---

Read the document introduction and transcript in order to answer the following questions.

1. Select and describe one of the hardships that Lucy Knox endured while remaining in Boston in 1777.
2. To what extent did Lucy Knox face problems encountered today by relatives of Americans serving in the Armed Forces? Explain your response.
3. What does this letter reveal to us about the treatment of disease in the eighteenth century?
4. Defend the following statement: Lucy Knox and women like her were true American patriots.

## Lucy Knox on the home front during the Revolutionary War, 1777

## Image

Mrs K  
 Boston May — 1777  
 As I can think of no address which would convey an idea of my  
 Affection and esteem, I will trust privately, rather than do injustice to my heart,  
 a heart wholly absorbed <sup>in</sup> love and anxiety for you — I cannot at this time tell  
 where you are, nor form any judgment where you are going — we hear both through  
 an in notice, but what their vent is, we cannot hear, nor form any judgment,  
 nor have we yet been able to conjecture what a situation, for us who are at such a  
 distance — how much more we suffer for you than you for yourselves — all my hopes  
 are, that it will not, cannot last, — a french general, who styles himself com-  
 mander in Chief of the Continental Artillery, is now in town, he says his appointment  
 is from Mr. Dear — that he is going immediately to head quarters, to take the  
 command, that he is a major genl and a real one, who knows but I may  
 have my share again — thus I am sure of, he will never suffer any ~~one~~ to  
 command him, in that department, — if he does, he has not that seal, which  
 I now think him possessed of —  
 Polly is very unwell — he has  
 a terrible breaking out — which Dr. Bullpuck says, is very like a leprosy, Dr.  
 Gardner thinks it the itch, which has lain so long in his blood, as to ~~be~~ <sup>corrupt</sup> it  
 to that degree that the cure will be difficult — he is as thin as gabriel sobornut was  
 but in good spirits, and says he has an appetite — but that he is not permitted to  
 indulge, I am very anxious about him — and at times fear we shall lose him,  
 or at least that the humour in the blood, has taken such deep root — as to entitle

Lucy Knox to Henry Knox, May 1777. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC05895 p. 1)

## Lucy Knox on the home front during the Revolutionary War, 1777

his future days — this will be handed you by Capt Sergeant who will also deliver you  
 your box of ~~potatoes~~ pickles — I have got seven yards of linen for breeches for you — am  
 afraid to have it made up here, for fear it should ~~not~~ be spoiled, as it cost twenty  
 shillings per yard — sure there must be a tailor in Morristown — if there is not done  
 well at me — seven pound lawful — for two pair of breeches is a great deal of  
 money — too much not to have them made neat — the pretty waistcoat I wrote  
 you of upon examination I found to be painted — that the first washing would have  
 spoiled — but I <sup>will</sup> be upon the look out for you — I wrote you last Thursday by Col  
 Healey — and the same day by the post — can you not get some covers furnished, it  
 would save us a very great expence — in effect at this day, when the price of  
 every thing is so exorbitant, indeed it is difficult — to get the necessaries of life  
 here, at any price. the evil increases daily — beef is at eight pence a pound — if you  
 will take half an ac neck, shins, and ad. you may get it for seven pence — for butter  
 we give ten shillings a pound — for eggs two pence a <sup>piece</sup> ~~piece~~ ~~piece~~ — and for very  
 ordinary libra wine, twenty shillings a gallon — as for flour it is not to be had at  
 any price for egles, nor spirit — a pretty bad we are in — this and the behaviour  
 of our town meeting has almost made me a Tory — will you believe me when I tell you that  
 Mr. Caring is among the number — who they have passed a vote to confine in  
 close jail, until they can determine what farther is to be done with them — this upon the  
 suspicion of their being Tory — I do not mean to blame them for riding themselves  
 of their persons — who in case of an attack, would take a part against them — but  
 their meddling with that old gentleman, who has been superannuated, this ten years or  
 more from us other motive, but to share his estate — the Colonels — Crafts, Revere, Jan

Lucy Knox to Henry Knox, May 1777. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC05895 p. 2)

## Lucy Knox on the home front during the Revolutionary War, 1777

are the three leading men of the place - the first of them motioned to dissolve the meeting -  
 and let the people revenge their own cause - quite military was it not - or short the war  
 have so much the upper hand at present - that there was a man to have been shot  
 on Thursday next - and the genl dare not execute him, for fear of the consequences -  
 he is now brother to Dr Oliver's wife son is Col George of Salem - but so much for  
 the present - my head trembles to such a degree, that it has been as much trouble to me  
 to write what I have, as it will be to you to read it, I believe my nerves are much  
 weakened by the mercy I have taken, in the true meaning of the  
 word Adieu  
 your own Lucy Knox

our lovely baby sends her pap - pam - (as she calls him) a kiss

I want much to know if your soup is good for any thing - do not let  
 me by saying no

Lucy Knox to Henry Knox, May 1777. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC05895 p. 3)

## Lucy Knox on the home front during the Revolutionary War, 1777

### Transcript

---

Boston May –

As I can think of no address which would convey an idea of my affection and esteem, I will [*inserted: it*] omit intirely, rather than do injustice to my heart, a heart wholly absorbed [*struck: if*] [*inserted: in*] love and anxiety for you – I cannot at this time tell where you are nor form any judgment where you are going – we hear both Armys are in motion, but what thier rout is, we cannot hear. [*struck: nor form any judgment*], nor have we yet been able to conjecture – what a situation, for us who are at such a distance – how much more we suffer for you than you for yourselves – all my hopes are that it will not, cannot last, – A french general, who stiles himself commander in Chief of the Continetal Artillery, is now in town, he says his appointment is from M<sup>r</sup> Dean - that he is going immediately to head quarters to take the command. that he is a major gen.<sup>l</sup> and a deal [?] of it. who knows but I may have my Harry again – this I am sure of he will never suffer any [*strikeout: but*] one to command him in that department. – if he does he has not that Soul. which I now think him possessed of—

Billy is very unwell – he has a terrible breaking out [*strikeout*] which D<sup>r</sup> [Bullfich] says is very like a leprosy, D<sup>r</sup> Gardiner thinks it the itch, which has lain so long in his blood, as to [*strikeout*] [*inserted: corrupt*] it to that degree that the cure will be difficult – he is as thin as gabriel Johonnot now but in good spirits, and says he has an appetite – but that he is not permitted to indulge. I am very anxious about him, and at times fear we shall lose him, or at least that the humour in the blood, has taken such deep root as to embitter [2] his future days — this will be handed you by Cap<sup>t</sup> Searjant who will also deliver you your box of [*struck: pic*][*inserted: k*]les pickles – I have got seven yards of linnen for breeches for you, am affraid to have it made up here, for fear it should [*struck: not*] be spoiled, as it cost twenty shillings p<sup>r</sup> yard – sure there must be a tailor in morristown – if there is not dont scold at me – seven pound lawful – for two pair of breeches is a great deal of money – too much not to have them made neat – the pretty waiscoat I wrote you of upon examining I found to be painted – that the first washing would have spoiled – but I [*inserted: will*] be upon the look out for you — I wrote you last thursday by Col<sup>o</sup> Henley – and the same day by the post – can you not get some covers franked, it would save us a very great expence – an object at this day. when the price of

## Lucy Knox on the home front during the Revolutionary War, 1777

every thing is so exorbitant indeed it is difficult to get the necessarys of life here, at any price – the evil increases daily – beef is at eaight pence a pound [*struck: of*] if you will take half an ox neck, skins, and all you may get it for seven pence – for butter we give two shillings a pound – for eggs two pence a [*struck: peaiice peice peaiice*] [*inserted: piece*] – and for very ordinary lisbon wine, twenty shillings a gallon – as for flour it is not to be had at any price, nor cyder; nor Spirit – a pretty box we are in – this and the behaviour of our town meeting has almost made me a tory – will you believe me when I tell you that old M<sup>r</sup> Erving is among the number who they have passed a vote to confine in close jail untill they can determine what farther is to be done with them – this upon the suspicion of thier being torys – I do not mean to blame them for rid[*inserted: d*]ing themselves of those persons – who in case of an attack, would take a part against them, but there meddling with that old gentleman who has been superanuated this ten years can be from no other motive but to share his estate – the Colonels – Crafts, Revere & Sears [3] are the three leading men of the place – the first of these motioned to dissolve the meeting, and lett the people revenge their own cause – quite milatary was it not – in short the mob have so much the up[*inserted: p*]er hand at present – that there was a man to have been shot on thursday next – and the gen<sup>l</sup> dare not execute him, for fear of the consequences he is [one] brother to D<sup>r</sup> Oliver's wife Son to Col<sup>o</sup> Frye of Salem – but so much for the present. my hand trembles to such a degree that it has been as much trouble to me to write what I have, as it will be to you to read it, I believe my nerves are much

weakened by the mercury I have taken, in the true meaning of the  
word Adieu

Your own

Lucy Knox –

our lovely baby sends her pap – par – (as she calls him) a kiss –

I want much to know, if your Soup is good for any thing – do [*inserted: not*]  
mortify me by saying no