

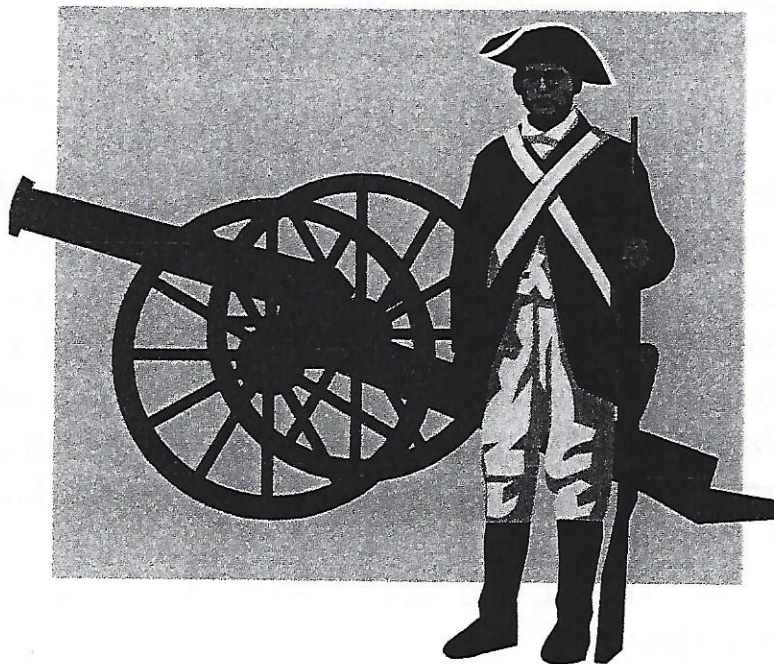
# Historical Society of Plainfield

Presents

**A Day in the Life of a Revolutionary War Soldier**

**“The Battle of the Short Hills”**

Prepared by the Elizabeth Keating Education Program



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The Elizabeth Keating Education Program, administered by the Historical Society of Plainfield, has been made possible in part by funding from the New Jersey Historical Commission, a Division of Cultural Affairs in the Department of State, through a grant administered by the Union County Division of Cultural and Heritage Affairs, the Plainfield Foundation, and the New Jersey Historical Commission, a Division of Cultural Affairs in the Department of State.

## **About The Battle of the Short Hills...**

On Thursday, the 26<sup>th</sup> of June in 1777, a major battle was fought for the Watchung Mountains, known in the history books as the Battle of the Short Hills. The British stronghold in New York was Staten Island. The British army advanced from Perth Amboy under the command of Sir William Howe. Near the site of the present-day Plainfield Country Club (Woodland Avenue and Old Raritan Road), a severe engagement occurred. The American troops, greatly outnumbered, had to fall back to the Gap, later known as the Bloody Gap. Although the American forces lost about two hundred troops in the battle, they were able to hold off the British long enough for General Washington and the rest of the main army to move back to the protection of the Watchung Mountains.

Many people believe that on that date, General George Washington met with his scouts at the Drake House and there he reviewed his information, issued orders, ate his lunch, and curled up for a short nap. It is very likely that General Washington did visit Nathaniel at the Drake House, since it was the only house on the old military road available for use by General Washington during his marches north and south. The major accomplishment of the Battle of the Short Hills was that it showed the strength of the Continental Army (the Americans) in New Jersey, kept Washington's army intact, and forced the British to give up their efforts to occupy the state.

The Battle of the Short Hills was fought on a very hot summer day in June. In spite of the weather, the soldiers had to carry heavy packs weighing as much as 125 pounds and wear heavy wool clothing, which was quite hot in the summer. As you color, you will learn about the hardships of the Revolutionary War.

*(Illustrations and Special Research Assistance by Steven Buonaspina)*

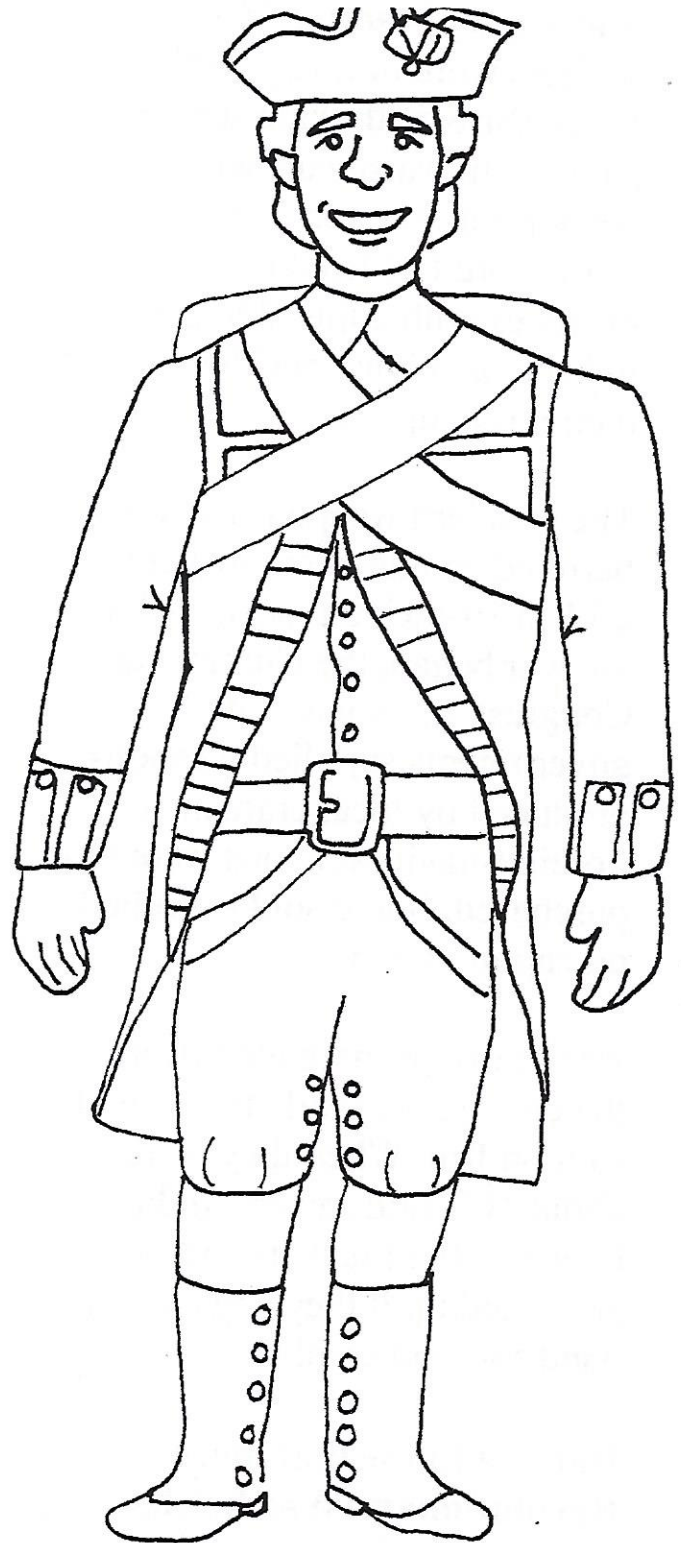
## Typical British Uniform

The British wore red overcoats made of heavy wool. They were itchy and tight. The red uniform concealed the appearance of blood. They also wore breeches so tight and they had to be put on wet.

The soldiers spent an average of 3 hours dressing and were inspected often. Their belts, which formed an "X", held their bayonets and cartridge boxes. Their back packs held extra clothing, food, blankets, musket balls, and tents, and weighed over 100 pounds.

Many British soldiers were criminals who faced jail or death, so they chose the army. Rules were very serious and soldiers were whipped frequently. The average salary was 2 cents per day.

**Did you know that the British stronghold in New York was Staten Island?**



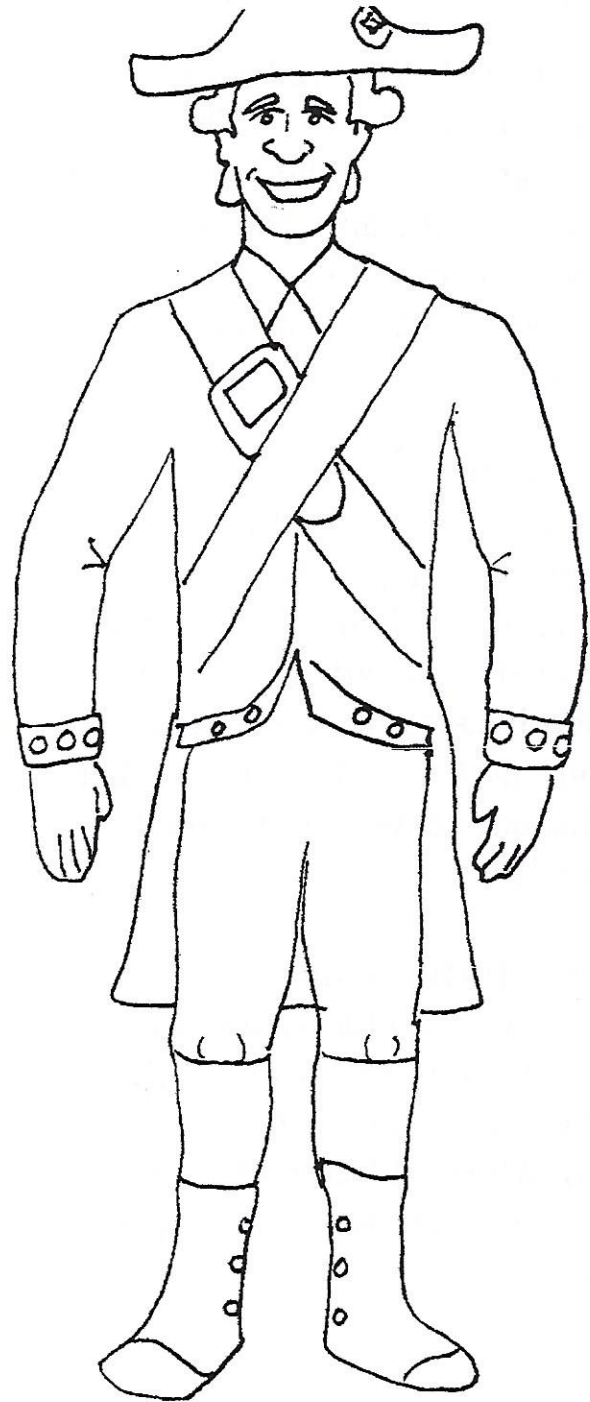
## Typical American Uniform

Uniforms were scarce in Washington's army. Most soldiers wore ordinary clothes. Work shirts with wide sleeves, along with waistcoats with pewter buttons were common. They wore fall-front knee breeches with adjustable gussets in back, and knee buckles to keep their socks up.

The standard weapon was a long-barreled, single-shot musket with a 14 to 19-inch bayonet. After the war began, the Continental Congress and some state governments supplied weapons produced by local craftsmen. Foreign-made weapons were also purchased. Some soldiers relied on captured guns.

As the troops marched toward the enemy, the battle began with cannon fire. When they were about 100 yards apart, soldiers began to fire muskets. They advanced until they engaged in hand-to-hand combat.

**Did you know that more Revolutionary War battles were fought in New Jersey than in any other state?**



## Camp Women

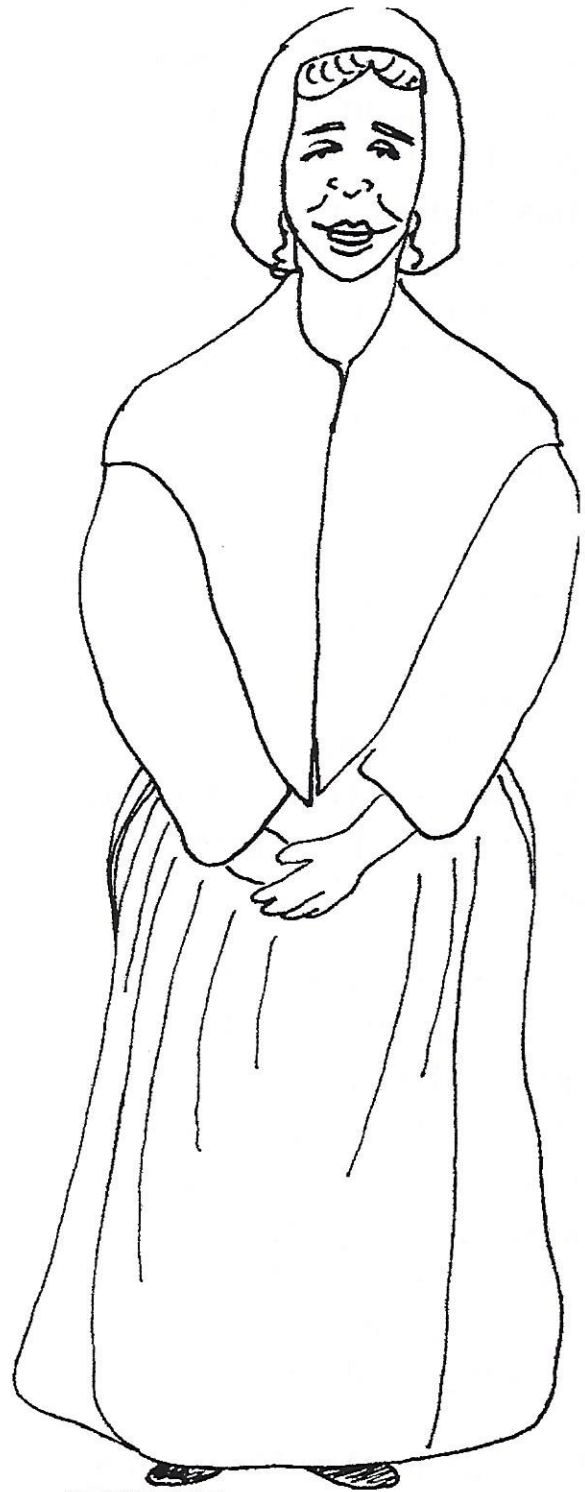
Many women did not stay at home when their husbands went off to war. These women flocked to the army camps to join male relatives. There they helped maintain army morale while doing traditional women's chores--cooking, laundry, nursing, and so forth. Many could not pay their own way if they were not on the list of those who drew rations.

As the war progressed, these chores were increasingly required of them in return for their continued acceptance with the army.

The number of women present with the army throughout the war was, on average, about 1 for every 30 men (about 3 percent of the total number of troops).

Most importantly, besides these practical tasks, they provided some semblance of home life for the men in the army.

**Did you know that women provided the primary medical care in the colonial home?**



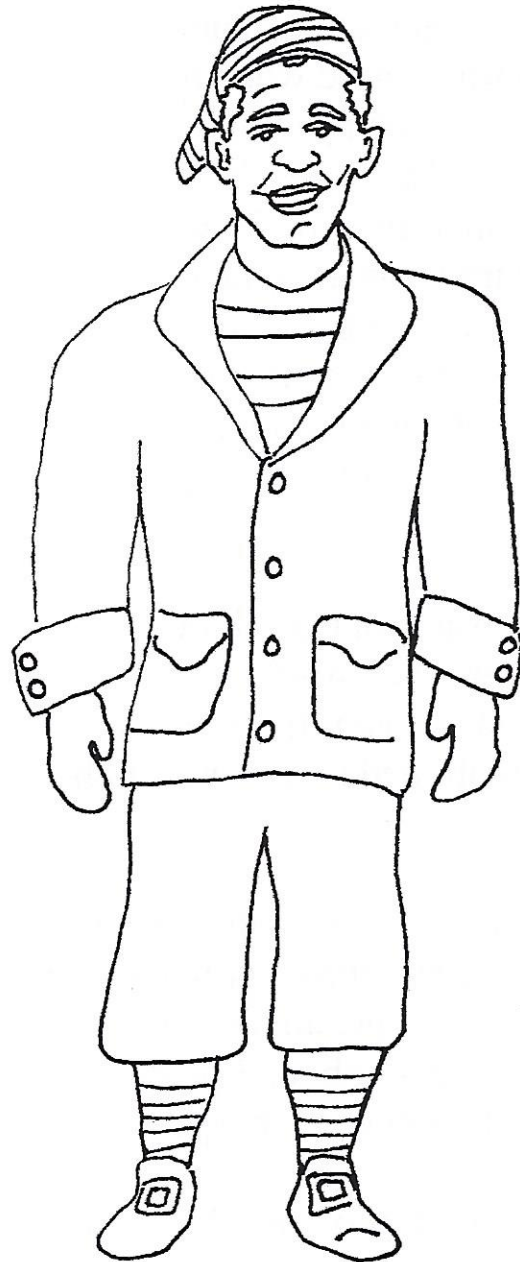
## African American Patriots

For some African Americans, the Revolution meant freedom. On March 5, 1770, in Boston, the “sons of liberty” rioted, and Crispus Attucks, a runaway slave, was killed. The incident is now known as the “**Boston Massacre.**” Attucks is often called the first casualty of the Revolutionary War.

Because so much of the fighting in the last years of the war took place in the South, many slaves escaped to British lines. The British, hoping to weaken the American war effort, emancipated and evacuated thousands of ex-slaves.

A few African Americans also won their freedom by fighting in the Continental Army despite the prejudices of patriot leaders. For the vast majority of African Americans, however, the liberties touted by the American Revolution remained more promise than reality.

**Did you know that Caesar, one of the Drake family slaves, served as a wagoneer during the Revolutionary War?**

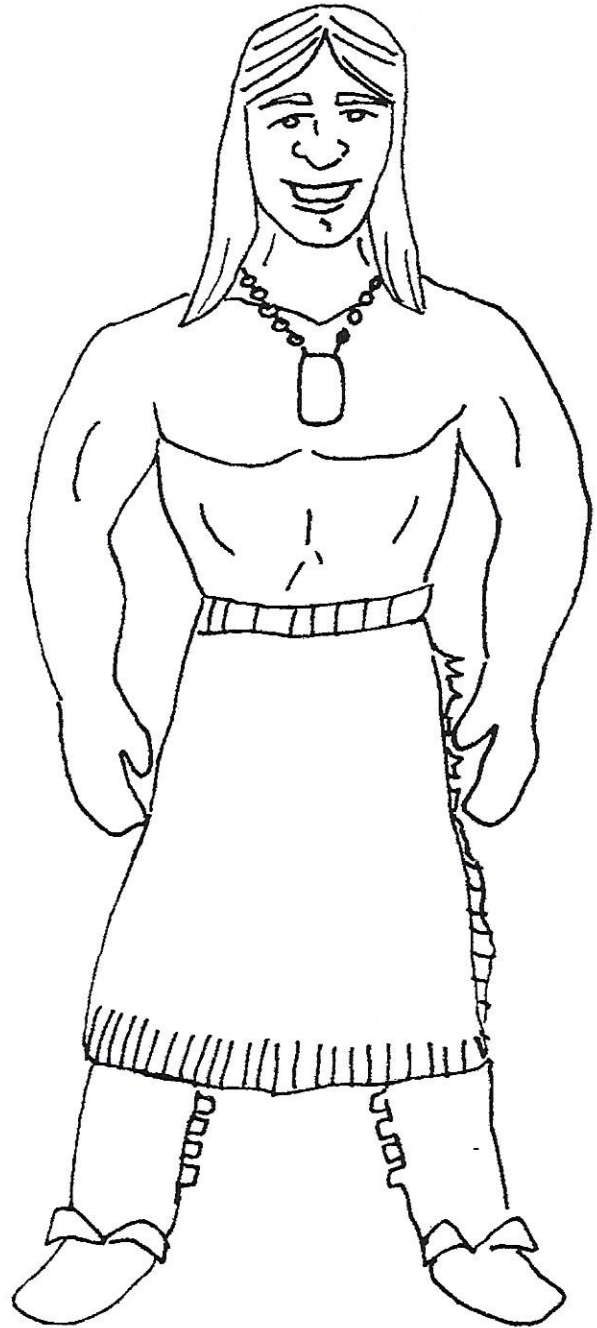


## Native Americans

Native Americans served on both sides of the war. Most Native American tribes east of the Mississippi were uncertain about which side, if either, to take during the Revolutionary War, and many remained neutral. A number of tribes, however, feared the Revolution would replace the British--who had worked hard to protect their lands from colonial encroachments--with the land-hungry colonials.

As a result, these tribes fought with the British or took advantage of the situation and acted against the colonists on their own. Patriots viewed the Indians as a threat throughout the war. The patriots' use of the term savages for the Native Americans gives a good indication of their overall attitude toward most tribes.

**Did you know that Native Americans in New Jersey were Lenni-Lenape and were also called Delaware Indians because they occupied territory along the Delaware River ?**



8 A Day in the Life of a Soldier

**Draw:**

**“A Day in the Life of a Soldier”**



## Test Your Memory

1. The British stronghold in New York was \_\_\_\_\_.
2. True or False. African Americans participated in the War of Independence.
3. General Howe led the \_\_\_\_\_ forces in the Battle of Short Hills.
4. The Battle of Short Hills took place in the year \_\_\_\_\_.
5. The American forces were led by General \_\_\_\_\_.
6. The British troops were known as \_\_\_\_\_ because of the color of their uniforms.
7. A rifle used during colonial times was called a \_\_\_\_\_.
8. True or False. More Revolutionary War battles were fought in New Jersey than in any other state.
9. \_\_\_\_\_, one of the Drake family slaves, served as a wagoneer during the Revolutionary War.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ provided primary medical care in the colonial home.

For further reading...

Sources:

[Female Camp Followers in the American Revolution: A Reading List](#) by John U. Rees  
[www.revwar75.com](http://www.revwar75.com)

### Acknowledgements

**Elizabeth Keating Education Program of the Historical Society of Plainfield Staff**

2003, Rebecca Williams, Educational Program Coordinator

2003, Jesse Levine, Educational Program Assistant

2013, Edits

Nancy Piwovar, Trustee Historical Society of Plainfield

## 10 A Day in the Life of a Soldier

### Answers to quiz:

1. Staten Island
2. True
3. British
4. 1777
5. George Washington
6. Redcoats
7. Musket
8. True
9. Cesar
10. Women