

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers* 2, 1886 – 1887 June 5, '86 to May 21, '87)

To Mr. Editor: –

Attending an evening auction and buying books by the lot, I came into possession of the “Journals of Major Samuel Shaw” the first American consul at Canton with a life of the author by President Quincy of Harvard University: who states in the preface “a deep sentiment will be excited by the narrative of the military life of Major Shaw composed chiefly of letters to his nearest relatives and friends from his enlistment in the American Army in December 1775 to its final disbandment at West Point in January, 1784; and describing almost every important event in the war of the American Revolution. Written at the moment of victory or defeat, amidst poverty and privation, they illustrate the character of the writer, and also feelingly exhibit the principles, motives, and spirit of that class of soldiers of our Revolution to which he belonged, a class that entered the Army at the commencement of the struggle for Independence under the impulse of patriotic zeal, and sustained by the same sentiment, continued in it until it's close, undeterred by the dangers or disasters, neither moved by the sufferings they endured, nor disgusted by the neglect or the wrongs they experienced from their country. On these men more than any other the arm of Washington leaned: yet of them individually history has little to record.”

Much of this may be called confidential narrative. I shall give you a few extracts to show how well they set off that which is stated in the Introduction. They will also show the warm attachment Major Shaw had for his commander-in-chief: he writes of his steady, amiable character, his fortitude, patience and bravery in the field, and his wisdom in counsel; his writings fully develop that which we have so long been impressed with in the greatness of Washington. But slight reference will be made to the life of Major Shaw in the East. – Samuel Shaw was born in Boston in 1754. He was a pupil of the Latin School. His progress there is said to have evinced great quickness of intellect, and he became familiar with Latin poets and historians. He was destined for commercial pursuits, in which he was assiduously occupied when the political circumstances of the times gave an unanticipated direction to his thoughts and fortunes. His counting house education was thorough, and this will account for his appointment after the war. He was uncle of Robert G Shaw who was the father of Colonel Shaw, the first to lead a colored regiment in our Civil War. He was killed at Fort Wagner. Shaw on the day of attaining his manhood enrolled in the Army then collecting at Cambridge under the auspices of Washington. He was soon made lieutenant of Artillery. He writes, “The drum beats at daybreak, when all hands turn out to man the lines, stay till sunrise, and then all are marched off to prayers.” He was in a movement that completed the investment of the town of Boston, which resulted in its evacuation by the British. April 17th he was in New York where he had a talk with General Putnam. He thought that by securing Québec the savages would be prevented from being stirred up against us. After having been a twelve month in N. Y. without contracting an acquaintance worth his while he further says: “So much of the attention of the inhabitants is engrossed by self, that but a small share of it alights on strangers.” refers to the news that England intends to put Hessians and Waldeckers in this campaign, but thinks it an array on paper. General Howe has arrived with an army from Halifax; on Sunday he sent a boat with a flag and a letter to Mr. Washington. But the adjutant said he knew no such person as Mr. Washington. Lord Howe's next letter was

directed to George Washington Esquire, etc. September 18/76 writes of our retreat from Long Island, and then that the way in with his linen, stockings, and surtout, – everything but what he had on had been captured by the enemy. But he was cheerful, “I had many things superfluous, I shall lay down as a future maxim a soldier has no business with more than he can carry on his back.” He refers to the Southern heroes that there are good men among them; but it would be well if every distinction of this or that colony or province could be buried with that of America. Nov 76. God help us! As for our Army the militia gone and going home, the time of enlistment of our regular troops expiring, and little or nothing done toward raising new ones. Men will have to be engaged with bounties. I do not think it improbable some of the states will be under the necessity of drafting men. When I joined the Army I thought I would find as much virtue among our people as is recorded of ancient Sparta or Rome. Numberless instances might be brought to show how miserably I was disappointed. I mention one. The militia, whose term expired yesterday were desired to tarry for the good of their country only four days, and out of the whole number there were not sufficient to form one regiment. Tell it not in Britain.” Shaw writes of the disaster at Fort Washington where 1600 of our people were taken prisoners. “It will make a pretty story for Lord Howe to write about. However, we must not be discouraged.”

Referring to defeat of the British at Trenton and the taking of the Hessians that has given our affairs a different turn. Of Washington he says: “Our Army love our General very much, but yet have one thing against him, which is the little care he takes of himself in any action. His personal bravery, and the desire he has of animating his troops by example, make him fearless of any danger.” In February 1777 from Morristown N.J. “The enemy have retired where they are so narrowly watched they can not get forage without fighting for it: our Army is in good spirits and growing stronger every day. The Southern troops begin to come in; a few days since a company of volunteers, headed by the parson of the parish a churchman, came in from Virginia. I mention this as an instance that there are some exceptions to that almost general rule that churchmen are Tories. This basis of a poem by Read is thus a recorded fact:

The pastor came! His snowy locks  
Hallowed his brow of thought and care;  
And calmly, as shepherds lead their flocks,  
He led into the house of prayer.

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The pastor rose: the prayer was strong  
The Psalm was warrior David's song  
The text, a few short words of might  
The Lord of Hosts shall arm the right!

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Even as he spoke his frame renewed  
In eloquence of attitude  
Rose as it seemed a shoulder higher  
Then swept his kindling glance of fire  
From startled pew to breathless choir  
When suddenly his mantle wide  
His hands, impatient, flung aside

And lo! to meet their wondering eyes  
Complete in all a warrior's guise.

In September '77 he writes of the misfortunes at Brandywine “have occasion to some delay and depression of spirits. After this the Army had hoped to gain some advantage of the enemy but were disappointed. The general crossed the Schuylkill and returned.” He treats of the politicians. “The hot-headed politicians will no doubt censure this part of his conduct, while the judicious will approve of it. An important piece of intelligence arrived last night in camp. Burgoyne has received another check.

In Nov. 77 he writes of the people of Pennsylvania: "I might live here and age without forming one valuable or agreeable connection. The state is the most disaffected of any of the thirteen. A melancholy experience makes it undeniable that at a time when the enemy are in the bowels of their state and possessed of their capital city, they have not more than 12 or 1300 militia in the field, and not two thirds of their quota. Pitiful exertion! Had the N.E. states preserved a similar line of conduct, Mr. Burgoyne, instead of being at this time their prisoner had been dealing chains and death to them now his master. One third of the inhabitants pretend conscience, another are a set who wish to enjoy their property on any terms, while the remainder are wrangling about a form of government.” In June 79 Major Shaw writes: “Patriotic and glorious enthusiasm has given place to avarice and rascally practices; its depreciation is equal to that of the currency, – 30 to one.” Washington in 78 wrote in the same strain. In October 79 Shaw writes hopefully of the assistance from France, as with that John Bull's day in America will be short.

Did anyone ever write so cheerfully of Valley Forge? “The Army have, after the fatigues of the campaign, completed their huts, and are now in comfortable quarters. Hutting was a monstrous undertaking at Valley Forge in 77 but it has now become an easy employment, and should the war continue a few years, it will be a mere matter of amusement.” “In 80 our Army is very small and Charleston has fallen,” refers to pecuniary embarrassment on account of depreciation of the currency. One quartermaster general has had no money for 10 months. In Sept 80 he writes a friend: “how little do we know the human heart! Arnold has gone to the enemy.” Of the importance of West Point: “The loss of any three capitals of this continent would not have been a misfortune of equal magnitude. West Point and its dependencies constitute the palladium of American independence.” Late in 80. “The war is but just begun.” On 13 February 1781. “We visited the French at Rhode Island. Their politeness and attention to us could not be excelled. He had never seen such troops in March 1781 notes retrieved from Cornwallis. Here is an outfit of the times. Clothing for his brother a fresh campaigner.

Beaver hat	15. ""
Coat faced and lined with Scarlett	60. ""
3 white-lined vests and breeches	25. ""
6 ruffled shirts and stocks	10. ""
6 pair hose	10. ""
Boots	10. ""
Sword	10. ""

February 1783 some rumors of peace. The last language from the throne is different from any that has been used during the war as it is evident the British are tired of war. But is America prepared for the long-wished-for blessing. What system has she adequate to the government and prosperity of her rising empire? No money, no funds; and what is worse no disposition in the people to establish funds, the certain consequence of which must be the dearth of public credit.” Shaw refers to the obstinacy of Rhode Island in opposing some public measure. That a state should annul the proceedings of the other twelve – an awful defect in the Confederation. He sees the necessity of a supreme head. Thirteen wheels require a steady and powerful regulator. The prospect of peace makes a politician of a soldier. Reference is made to a want of a full representation in Congress to consider measures to raise means to pay the Army. That three of the states were opposed to any consideration for past services then came the address of the Army to Congress, and the anonymous letters from Newbury: these had called a delegation from the Army to be appointed to visit Congress: the action resulted in so little relief that there followed a meeting of the general officers of the Army, – the unexpected attendance of the Commander-in-chief highlighted the solemnity of the scene when he presented a paper to them of his own thoughts also a letter from a member of Congress. One circumstance in reading this letter must not be omitted. Washington after reading the first paragraph made a short pause, took out his spectacles, and begged the indulgence of his audience while he put them on, observing at the same time that he had grown gray in their service, and now found himself growing blind. There was something so natural, so unaffected in his appeal has rendered it superior to the most studied oratory. He had seen this great man in a variety of situations. He never appeared more truly so than in this assembly. On other occasions he had been supported by the exertions of an Army and the countenance of his friends: but in this he stood single and alone.

On the 19th of April 1783, just eight years from the day by which the Battle of Lexington hostilities were commenced their cessation was proclaimed to the American army by orders from General Washington, who also devolved upon Col. Knox the immediate command during the disbandment of the troops which occupied the remainder of the year. Maj. Strahl remained as aide-de-camp in the family of General Knox and assisted by his advice and influence the arduous and delicate duties incident to the process. He was present when Washington took his final leave of the officers of the Army. Having received testimonials from Washington and Knox, Shaw accepted a situation as factor and commercial agent in China from an association of capitalists; going out on the first vessel fitted out in this country. He returned to New York in May 1785. Gen. Knox offered him the place of a Secretary in the War Office, which he accepted and held for a year. Shaw sailed on his second voyage on Feb 4th 1786, arriving at Canton on 15 August. He had, by Congress, been elected consul from the United States at Canton “without being entitled to receive any salary, fees, or emoluments whatever.”

He returned to this country in 1789. His appointment as Consul was renewed by Washington. He sailed on a ship he had built, larger than any merchant vessel before launched in the United States (about 8 or 900 tons) Shaw again returned to the US in January 1792, and at a time when party spirit had begun its first demonstration in opposition to the policy and influence of Washington and had assailed the character of Gen. Knox. He defended his beloved general by word and pen. He sailed again to the East from New York in a ship of his own for Bombay. During his residence in Bombay,

he contracted a disease incident to the climate. Finding no relief from medical aid, he sailed for home in March 1794, the disease increased with the voyage, and he died near the Cape of Good Hope in his 40th year.

It was written of him, after referring to his bravery and conspicuous position in the late war “In his character of American Consul for the port of Canton, he was called to act a part which required much discretion and firmness. On the occasion of the Canton war Mr. Shaw represented the American interest in such a manner as to throw a luster on his commission, and give him great credit among the European merchants, and other eminent characters abroad, his conduct meeting the approbation of his government. Time will not allow of giving many interesting events recorded in his journal and letters while in the East which occupies as much of the book, referred to as his war life and as this is an association with that, I give his account of his reception at Calcutta by Earl Cornwallis, the Governor-general. This nobleman, though sent out on the ungrateful business of making reformation, correcting abuses, and curtailing the expenses of former establishments is, notwithstanding a faithful execution of the orders of his employers the favorite not only of the inhabitants at large but also of the Company's servants civil and military. His conduct is so unexceptionable, and as Shakespeare observes respecting Duncan he “hath been so clear in his great office” “that after the instances of rapacity and the speculation of which former governors have been guilty, his Lordship is justly the object of universal esteem. His levees are held Tuesdays for the Europeans and strangers, and Fridays for the natives. His Lordship received me in that easy manner which characterizes the courtier and gentleman. On these occasions he usually appears in his uniform as a general officer and with the insignia of his order – the star and garter.” There is no account of his dining with Cornwallis. While Burgoyne after his defeat was suspended from service several years Cornwallis escaped censure, received a vacant garter, and was twice appointed Governor-General of India, and Commander-in-Chief at Bengal and conducted a war in 1791 & 92. He also commanded in Ireland. These administrations were very successful and history makes him a just man. His monument is opposite Nelson's in St. Paul's.

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Dexter Editor  
Jany 29th 1887

<rev jnm05/2012>