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## "Howe's Strolling Company": British Military Theatre in New York and Philadelphia, 1777 and 1778

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Jared A. Brown\*

*"HOWE'S STROLLING COMPANY":  
BRITISH MILITARY THEATRE IN NEW YORK AND  
PHILADELPHIA, 1777 AND 1778*

In September 1776, General Sir William Howe's troops took possession of New York City, having badly defeated Washington's forces in the Battle of Long Island. Howe, who had accepted his assignment in America with the greatest reluctance, set about making life as pleasant as possible for himself and for those around him. He had grown greatly concerned about the morale and comfort of his troops in a city that, compared to London, was little more than a backwater. Howe wrote to Lord George Germain, Secretary of State for the American Colonies, in England: "The troops had been so much harassed in the course of the last campaign, that I could not but wish that no manoeuvre of the enemy might hinder them from enjoying that repose, in their winter quarters, which their late fatigues rendered necessary, and their services entitled them to expect."<sup>1</sup>

In order that they might enjoy their repose more fully, the British army took over the John Street Theatre, built in 1767 by the American Company, re-named it the Theatre Royal, and commenced a remarkable series of performances that, under various commanders, was to last for seven years. So closely associated with the theatre did Howe's officers become that they were referred to by Captain Thomas Stanley (who had acted with Burgoyne's officers in Boston in 1775) as "Howe's strolling company."<sup>2</sup>

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Many Whig families departed New York when the English troops took possession of the city. The population of New York was less than twenty thousand civilians during the war, but the British soldiers at times numbered as many as fifteen thousand, so the city became a garrison town. Since the army was isolated during the winter and suffered from long periods of enforced idleness, it is not surprising that the military command sponsored various amusements, of which the theatre was one. A holiday spirit pervaded Tory New York in early 1777, as an account of the festivities held in celebration of the queen's birthday, published in *The New York Gazette: and the Weekly Mercury* on 20 January 1777, indicated: "His Majesty's Commissioners gave a grand Entertainment to the Governors and Officers of Distinction, both British and Hessian; and in the Evening a very splendid Exhibition of Fire Works . . . Sir WILLIAM HOWE gave an elegant Ball and Supper in the Evening."<sup>3</sup>

To these elegant entertainments was added the re-opening of the John Street Theatre the following week. A notice to the public appeared in the *Mercury*, announcing: "The THEATRE in this City, having been some Time in Preparation, is intended to be opened in a few Days, for the charitable Purpose of relieving the Widows and Orphans of Sailors and Soldiers who have fallen in Support of the Constitutional Rights of Great Britain in America. It is requested that such Gentlemen of the Navy and Army, whose Talents and Inclinations induce them to assist in so laudable an Undertaking, be pleased to send their Names, (directed to T. C.) to the Printer of this Paper before Tuesday Night next."<sup>4</sup>

The theatre re-opened on 25 January with a performance of Henry Fielding's satiric masterpiece, *Tom Thumb*. As to the quality of the performance, we can only guess. A "review" of the production was printed in Hugh Gaine's *Mercury*, but it can hardly be regarded as an objective account. It may not have been written by Gaine at all, but by one of the officers who took part in the performance. In any case, the notice must certainly have pleased the military thespians: ". . . the Spirit with which this favourite Piece was supported by the Performers, prove their Taste and strong Conception of the Humour," the *Mercury's* critic wrote. "The Play was introduced by a Prologue written and spoken by Captain Stanly; we have great Pleasure in applauding this first Effort of his infant Muse, as replete with true poetic Genius. The Scenes painted

by Captain De Lancey has [*sic*] great Merit, and would not disgrace a Theatre, tho' under the Management of a Garrick."<sup>5</sup>

Stanley's prologue, which began "Once more ambitious of theatric glory, / Howe's strolling company appears before ye,"<sup>6</sup> was repeated the following year in Philadelphia when Howe's officers began a series of performances there.<sup>7</sup>

Prologues (and occasional epilogues) were a regular feature of the performances of the military actors in America, following the conventional eighteenth-century British practice. The military performers sometimes used the original prologues written for the plays they produced, but frequently an officer would compose a prologue especially suited to the occasion. These often contained military allusions, calculated to appeal to an audience composed primarily of soldiers. Generally, the prologue was delivered by an actor from the play or afterpiece, but occasionally it was spoken by someone who had no other connection with the performance.

The first advertisement in New York for a military production appeared in Gaine's *Mercury* on 27 January announcing a performance for the 30th:

*For the BENEFIT of the ORPHANS and  
WIDOWS of SOLDIERS, &c. &c.  
At the THEATRE in John Street,  
ON THURSDAY NEXT,  
Will be PERFORMED, the COMEDY of the  
LYAR  
WITH THE ENTERTAINMENT OF  
TOM THUMB  
The CHARACTERS by GENTLEMEN of the  
NAVY and ARMY.  
BOXES, ONE DOLLAR. PIT, THREE  
SHILLINGS, and GALLERY, TWO SHILLINGS  
Sterling.*

TICKETS to be had at Hugh Gaine's Printer, and at the Coffee-House.  
Positively no Person to be admitted behind the Scenes.

*Vivant Rex & Regina.<sup>8</sup>*

In all, Gaine's *Mercury* advertised eighteen performances in 1777, and two others were advertised in *The Royal American Gazette*. But it is probable that not all the advertised performances were given. The scheduled productions on May 1 were definitely cancelled (as a newspaper advertisement informed the public), and the likelihood is that four other performances were cancelled at the last moment, as well. In 1778, the

managers of the theatre published an account of the 1777 season's income and expenditures, and they indicated that only fifteen performances had been given.

The following productions were advertised or reviewed:

January 25:	<i>Tom Thumb</i>
January 30:	<i>The Lyar and Tom Thumb</i>
February 6:	<i>The Lyar and The Upholsterer</i>
February 13:	<i>The Beaux' Stratagem and The Upholsterer</i>
February 18:	<i>The Beaux' Stratagem and Miss in Her Teens</i>
February 27:	<i>The Beaux' Stratagem and The "Duce" is in Him</i>
March 7:	<i>The Lyar and The "Duce" is in Him</i>
March 13:	<i>The Inconstant and The Upholsterer</i>
March 20:	<i>The Inconstant and Chrononhotonthologos</i>
March 27:	<i>The Drummer and Chrononhotonthologos</i>
April 4:	<i>Venice Preserved and The Lying Valet</i>
April 7:	<i>The Drummer and The "Duce" is in Him</i>
April 17:	<i>The Inconstant and Chrononhotonthologos</i>
April 24:	<i>Rule a Wife and Have a Wife</i> and an unspecified farce
May 1:	<i>Rule a Wife and Have a Wife and The Mock Doctor</i>
May 5:	<i>Rule a Wife and Have a Wife and The "Duce" is in Him</i>
May 12:	<i>Rule a Wife and Have a Wife and an unspecified farce</i>
May 20:	<i>The Beaux' Stratagem and Polly Honeycomb</i>
May 22:	<i>The Lyar and Polly Honeycomb</i>
May 29:	<i>The Beaux' Stratagem and The Citizen</i> <sup>9</sup>

The schedule of performances would seem to indicate that each production was given about one week's rehearsal. Eighteenth-century theatrical practice demanded less rehearsal time than at present, but it is difficult to imagine that amateur performers, unskilled at memorization, could have learned the roles in two plays in less than a week's time. And the seven days or so spent in rehearsal must have been busy ones for the officer-actors, leaving them little time for military duties.

Periodically, scheduled performances could not be gotten ready on time, and a previously performed play had to be substituted for the announced one. Such was the case on 27 February. *The Inconstant* was originally advertised, but a notice in the *Mercury* of the 24th announced that *The Beaux' Stratagem* would be performed instead.<sup>10</sup>

A problem of a different sort was responsible for the cancellation of the performance on 1 May attesting to the fact that, at least occasionally, military duties took precedence over theatrical ones. *The Royal American Gazette* carried this notice: "The Comedy of Rule a Wife and have a Wife, which was to have been played this Night, is obliged to be put off, as the Gentlemen expected in Town, who were to have played it, are not yet returned."<sup>11</sup>

Although there are no records of how well the performances were attended, it seems likely that audiences were reasonably large, as the management felt confident enough to raise the prices during the season. Whereas tickets for the pit had originally been priced at three shillings and tickets for the gallery at two shillings, by February 13th admission to the pit had been raised to one dollar, and those purchasing tickets for the gallery found that the price had doubled to four shillings.<sup>12</sup>

A record of the first season's income and expenditures was published in *The Royal Gazette* in 1778. It revealed that more than £ 2,875 had been taken in, and nearly £ 2,765 had been expended. If fifteen performances were given, as is likely, the nightly average income would have been slightly in excess of £ 190. That figure compares favorably to the income of subsequent years in which theatrical performances were given by British military officers stationed in New York, indicating that the Theatre Royal was well-patronized in its first season of operation.

The expenditures for 1777 were given as follows:

	£	s.	d.
To fitting up the house (compleatly) from bare walls, and the different dresses and contingent charges, vouched by the bills and receipts of Printers, Shopkeepers, Carpenters, Attendants, Guards, Musick, Taylors, Milleners Hairdressers, Painters, Doorkeepers, &c. & c. amount to	2,452	5	4
To amount of Candles as per acct	292	19	0
To amount of some Losses by tickets and bad money received at the doors	19	10	0

Income for 1777 was broken down as follows:

Credit			
By amount of fifteen plays	2,722	6	0
By amount of Ld. Howe's subscription	78	13	4
By amount of Sir. Wm. Howe's do [ditto]	74	15	8

In addition, £ 515, 4s, and 5d was "paid in charity to the widows and orphans of soldiers, Hessian and British, as per certificates and receipts."<sup>13</sup>

William Dunlap, the first historian of the American theatre, and a prominent playwright and manager in his own right, provided a substantial amount of detail concerning the New York theatrical season

of 1777, in his *History of the American Theatre*, published in 1833. But Dunlap relied heavily on his memory of forty-six years before in his account of that season's performances (he was eleven years old in 1777), as well as on conjecture and supposition when he wrote his history. The result was a colorful, but frequently inaccurate account—although it is often difficult to separate the genuine from the supposed in his history. For example, he may have been correct in stating that "the expence of a night's performance was £80, or 200 dollars."<sup>14</sup> If this is accurate, it would have been a good deal of money to have spent for amateur presentations in a theatre that the actors had appropriated, and for which they paid no rent. But we know that the typical expenses in subsequent seasons exceeded £80 per performance, so that Dunlap's figure may well be correct.

Dunlap also asserted that the manager and "principal low comedian" in 1777 was Dr. Hammond Beaumont, Surgeon General of His Majesty's army in America, and that "women's characters, as in the time of Shakespeare, were frequently performed by the younger subalterns of the army, and we have before us the name of Lieutenant Pennefeather as Estifania, in the well-known *Rule a Wife* of Beaumont and Fletcher."<sup>15</sup>

Dunlap further claimed that some of the women's roles were played by the unidentified mistress of Major Williams, and that "her comedy had great merit." Other soldiers' mistresses participated in the productions as well, and were "paid for their services at the rate of two, three, and four guineas each performance." The military performers included Major Williams, the company's leading actor, "Captain Oliver Delancy, 17th Dragoons, Captain Michael Seix, 22d Foot, Captain Wm. Loftus, Guards, Captain Edward Bradden, 15th Foot, Lieut. Pennefeather, Captain Phipps, Captain Stanley. . . ."<sup>16</sup>

Another officer who Dunlap claimed took part in the productions, as scene painter as well as actor, was Captain (later Major) John André. But André's participation seems unlikely, since he had been exchanged to the British as a prisoner of war only a few days before the performances began. André was not even attached to Howe's New York headquarters at the time. André certainly did paint scenery for Howe's strolling company at the Southwark Theatre in Philadelphia in 1778, and Dunlap may have confused the two occasions.

According to Dunlap, a civilian dancing teacher, William Hewlet (also known as "Hulett") occasionally performed with the military actors. If Hewlet was indeed associated with them at that time, it would have lent a touch of professionalism to their efforts, for Hewlet had been a professional actor with the American Company before the war.<sup>17</sup>

Despite Dunlap's assertion that Doctor Beaumont was the company's manager, it seems more likely that Beaumont did not assume that position until 1779. During the first year of the Theatre Royal's operation, Dr. Michael Morris appears to have been the co-manager, with Captain Michael Seix. Morris' name was listed at the beginning of the season as "Treasurer to the Charity,"<sup>18</sup> and Seix's name was given in an advertisement in the *Mercury* ten days before the final performance; the advertisement called on all creditors to "bring in their Accounts to Capt. Seix . . . in order to be discharged."<sup>19</sup>

Dunlap's other recollections must be treated with some skepticism as well. Still, his is the only detailed account of the 1777 season. Fortunately, the subsequent seasons of the military players in New York were better documented in contemporary reports.

It is difficult to argue with the notion that Howe and his officers still considered the war to be a farce in 1777.<sup>20</sup> Howe's tactics called for his army to settle down within a city during the winter months, during which he and they strove to enjoy the most comfortable life possible. With the advent of warm weather, the army would return to the prosecution of the war against the Americans (who had spent the winter in great discomfort outside the city), but on no account should their pleasure be disturbed until that time.<sup>21</sup> It is certain that the British spent many enjoyable winters in America, but their pursuit of enjoyment may have contributed to their ultimate defeat.

Howe's love of luxury—"nothing seemed to engross his attention but the faro table, the play house, the dancing assembly, and Mrs. Loring," commented Thomas Jones<sup>22</sup>—was debilitating in the long run, and weakened British resolve. Colonel Allan Maclean of the British forces revealed his concern on this account in a letter to Alexander Cummings on 30 March 1777. "I believe General Howe to be an honest man," Maclean wrote; "I am sure he is a brave man, but I am equally sure he is a very weak man and in every respect unqualified for a Commander-in-Chief, and he has got none but very silly fellows around him. . . . I could be very ludicrous on this occasion, but it is truly too serious a truth that brave men's lives should be sacrificed to be commanded by such a parcel of old women."<sup>23</sup>

And more than one hundred years later, George O. Seilhamer stated his belief that Howe's creation of a military theatre was a significant factor in the war. "To Howe's Thespians in New York in 1777," wrote Seilhamer, "America owes much as a promoting cause of the enervating indolence that made the achievement of independence possible."<sup>24</sup>



After Howe's thespians had concluded their theatrical adventures in New York, at the end of May 1777, Sir William was ordered to Philadelphia to mount an attack on the Americans there. But Howe was not to be rushed. He remained in New York until the last possible moment, proceeding to Philadelphia only when he could no longer delay it, capturing the city in September. The British military command was furious, believing that Howe's procrastination had cost the army valuable time, and that assistance was thus prevented from reaching the embattled General Burgoyne. Howe was unrepentant.<sup>25</sup>

Once in Philadelphia, the army busied itself with military duties for a time, building fortifications and opening the river for British supply ships. But by December the hard work was completed, and the twenty-three thousand soldiers in Howe's army settled in the city to wait as comfortably as possible for the return of warm weather. George Washington and the Continental Army were nearby during that winter of 1777-78, but the hardships they endured on the bleak hillsides of Valley Forge were in stark contrast to the dancing assemblies, cock-fighting bouts, races, and theatrical entertainments enjoyed by Howe and his troops in Philadelphia. Captain Johann Heinrichs, a Hessian mercenary with the British army, captured the spirit of that winter when he wrote in his letter-book, "Assemblies, Concerts, Comedies, Clubs and the like make us forget there is any war, save that it is a capital joke."<sup>26</sup>

The majority of Philadelphians in 1777 (the population, exclusive of occupying troops, was approximately twenty-two thousand) did not look with favor on the Rebel cause. Most of them were either British loyalists or they took a position of neutrality in the war for independence.<sup>27</sup> Some—perhaps most—citizens looked with disdain upon the British army's pursuit of luxury, but a large group threw itself into the festive atmosphere with relish. One individual who did so was Rebecca Franks, who wrote the breathless letter that follows to her friend, Mrs. William Paca (whose husband was a delegate to Congress) in 1778:

You can have no idea of the life of continued amusement I live in. I can scarce have a moment to myself. I have stole this while everybody is retired to dress for dinner. I am just come from under Mr. J. Black's hands and most elegantly am I dressed for a ball this evening at Smith's where we have one every Thursday. . . .

I spent Tuesday evening at Sir Wm. Howes where we had a concert and Dance. I asked his leave to send you a Handkerchief to show the fashions. He very politely gave me leave to send anything you wanted, tho' I told him you were a Delegate's Lady. . . .

I know you are as fond of a gay life as myself—you'd have an opportunity of rakeing as much as you choose either at Plays, Balls, Concerts or Assemblys. I've been but 3 evenings alone since we mov'd to town. I begin now to be almost tired.<sup>28</sup>

It was not only Tory families who welcomed the British with open

arms; the revelry included some Whigs as well. Whatever the reasons—they may have wished not to antagonize the enemy, or perhaps they harbored ambitions of sabotaging the British effort by infiltrating enemy ranks—a number of Whigs (attractive young women, in particular) took part in the various amusements. In all, according to one history of Philadelphia, “the winter of 1777-78 was a season of gayety unprecedented, probably, in the annals of the city.”<sup>29</sup>

Dramatic activities began to be planned as soon as the city was fortified.<sup>30</sup> The Southwark Theatre on South Street, a rough brick and wood structure built in 1766 by the American Company, which the British had been using as a hospital for the wounded,<sup>31</sup> stood ready to accommodate Howe's strolling players. On 24 December 1777 the soldiers placed an advertisement in *The Pennsylvania Ledger*, which was calculated to attract knowledgeable individuals to aid the military actors in their enterprise: “WANTED for the Play-house, a PERSON who writes quick, and a legible hand;—also, a Person well versed in accounts, to act as Clerk and Vice-Treasurer. Any people that have ever been employed about the Play-house, as carpenters or scene-shifters, may get employment by applying to the Printer.”<sup>32</sup> A Mr. Smith evidently answered the advertisement, for he was selected as Clerk and Vice-Treasurer.

The soldiers quickly proceeded to select plays for their first performances, and to put them in rehearsal. They were able to advertise the opening of the theatre in less than three weeks. A notice in the *Ledger* of January 14 announced: “For the BENEFIT of the WIDOWS and ORPHANS of the ARMY. On MONDAY next, the *Nineteenth* Instant, WILL BE REPRESENTED at the THEATRE, in *Southwark*, A COMEDY, Called, NO ONE'S ENEMY BUT HIS OWN. And THE DEUCE IS IN HIM. The CHARACTERS by the OFFICERS of the ARMY and NAVY. Admittance to the BOXES and PIT, A Dollar each; GALLERY Half a Dollar.”<sup>33</sup>

Altogether, thirteen performances seem to have been given by Howe's officers in Philadelphia in 1778. Most of these performances can be verified from handbills that still exist, and others were advertised in the *Pennsylvania Ledger*:

- |              |   |
|--------------|---|
| January 19:  | <i>No One's Enemy but His Own</i> and <i>The Deuce is in Him</i>                                |
| January 26:  | <i>The Minor</i> and <i>The Deuce is in Him</i>   |
| February 9:  | <i>The Minor</i> and <i>Duke and No Duke</i>  |
| February 16: | <i>The Constant Couple</i> and <i>Duke and No Duke</i>  |
| March 9:     | <i>The Inconstant</i> and <i>The Mock Doctor</i> , plus “a beautiful Exhibition of FIRE-WORKS.” |

March 16:	<i>The Inconstant and Lethe</i>
March 25:	<i>King Henry IV and The Mock Doctor</i>
March 30:	<i>King Henry IV and Lethe</i>
April 20:	<i>The Wonder and A Trip to Scotland</i>
April 24:	<i>The Wonder and The Mock Doctor</i>
May 1:	<i>The Liar and A Trip to Scotland</i>
May 6:	<i>The Liar and Duke and No Duke</i>
May 19	<i>Douglas and The Citizen</i>

A peculiar notice appeared in an advertisement in the *Ledger* of 24 January announcing the actors' second performance. "Gentlemen are earnestly requested not to attempt to bribe the Door-Keepers," the notice read, apparently indicating that attempted bribery had occurred on the 19th.<sup>34</sup>

From first to last, ticket prices were the same. It seems likely that the plays were well-attended, if the bribing of Box-Keepers and Door-Keepers are any indication. But no records of the financial dealings at the Southwark Theatre in 1778 have been preserved.

Nor can one know which of the plays the actors gave were the most popular, for no reviews of the productions were published. But the performers were evidently especially eager to produce *The Wonder*. An advertisement in the *Ledger* of 3 January announced: "The COMEDY, called *A Wonder or a Woman Keeps a Secret*, Is wanted for the use of the Theatre. Any person having it, that will either sell or lend it, is requested to apply to the Printer."<sup>35</sup>

Even when copies of plays were more easily found, the actors could never locate as many copies as they needed. Charles Durang, in his *History of the Philadelphia Stage*, quotes John North ("who had charge of the old South street theatre for many years, and until it was burned down, having been a lad when the English were in possession of the city") to the effect that generally only a single copy of each play could be located. "The officers used to sit all around a table on the stage, trying to copy out of *one book*. North said that one person would take the book one moment, and then another would snatch it for another minute, and so on. No wonder that they advertised for play-books,"<sup>36</sup> Durang concluded.

Among the audience, General Howe was frequently in attendance, seated in the "Royal Box" with his mistress, Mrs. Loring. Another distinguished spectator was the traitor Charles Lee, who had been captured by the British in 1777, and was preparing a plan for the subjugation of the American colonies. Lee sat with Howe in the general's box during a performance in March.<sup>37</sup>

As in New York, the plays performed by Howe's strolling company were acted by the officers of the General's staff, and the officers' wives and mistresses. The names of only two of the actors have been recorded, and the witness was again John North, whose memory may have been faulty by the time he passed his reminiscences on to Durang, many years after the event. According to North, however, both Captain André and Captain Delancey were among the performers. Delancey was an outstanding actor, North remembered, but André, he said, was not.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, Seilhamer doubted that André acted in Philadelphia, believing that André's "connection with the amateur theatricals of the period was confined to his contributions as a scenic artist."<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately, the newspapers of the day offer no information whatever concerning the identities of the actors.

Evidence that women played the female roles comes from advertisements in the *Pennsylvania Ledger* and from Durang, who characterized the performances in general as "well acted for amateurs."<sup>40</sup>

One actress's name is recorded. John North claimed that a "Miss Hyde sang and acted with the British officers . . . She sang 'Tally-Ho' between the play and the farce."<sup>41</sup>

The young and handsome André, a favorite of Philadelphia society as well as of General Howe, may or may not have acted, but his scene painting attracted considerable attention. One drop scene he painted was inscribed with his name on the back in large black letters.<sup>42</sup> Many of those who saw the drop were sufficiently impressed with it to remember it for many years. According to Durang: "It was a landscape, presenting a distant champagne country, and a winding rivulet extending from the front of the picture to the extreme distance. In the foreground and centre was a gentle cascade (the water exquisitely executed), overshadowed by a group of majestic forest trees. The perspective was excellently preserved; the foliage, verdure and general coloring, artistically toned and glazed."<sup>43</sup>

Preparations for the departure of General Howe, who resigned as commander of the British forces after Burgoyne surrendered at Saratoga, began in April 1778. On the 29th of April, an advertisement in the *Ledger* hinted that the theatre would soon be closing, and that "Any person having any demands against the Theatre, are requested to bring in immediately, their accounts to Mr. Smith, at the Office of the Theatre in Front street."<sup>44</sup>

One day before the final performance in the theatre, a remarkable pageant, known as "The Meschianza," was given in honor of General Howe on the occasion of his imminent return to England. Captain André was in general charge of the affair, which must certainly have been the most lavishly theatrical of all the entertainments presented in America during the Revolution.

The Meschianza (the word is derived from two Italian words: *mescolare*, to mix, and *mischiare*, to mingle) incorporated a variety of events. The entertainment was given at Mrs. Wharton's country estate, which included a part of the Delaware River. Many vast pavilions were erected around the old mansion, designed and decorated principally by André and Captain Delancey. André himself did much of the painting of the ceilings and walls of the pavilions, designed to serve as ballrooms and supper-rooms. André also designed costumes for fifty young Philadelphia women who were invited to attend the pageant as special guests.

The Meschianza began with a lavish water procession, three divisions of boats carrying the guests from Knight's Wharf to the Wharton mansion. The procession was followed by a parade of the ladies (each lady accompanied by a costumed knight), a tournament in the Medieval style, a mock combat, another parade, a fireworks display (which was briefly interrupted by an American infantry company firing their guns in the direction of the estate), and a lavish dinner, which was described by a participant in the celebration: "In [the] room were two Tables, reaching from one end to the other. On the two tables were fifty large, elegant pyramids, with Jellies, Syllabub, Cakes, and Sweetmeats,"<sup>45</sup> as well as many other delicacies. André said that there were "430 covers" and "1200 dishes," and that "black slaves, in oriental dresses, with silver collars and bracelets, ranged in two lines, [bent] to the ground as the General and Admiral [Richard Howe] approached the saloon: all these, forming together the most brilliant assemblage of gay objects, . . . exhibited a *coup d'oeil* beyond description magnificent."<sup>46</sup>

As the supper ended, toasts were proposed to the health of the King, the Queen, and the other members of the royal family. All the guests sang "God Save the King," and more toasts were offered: to the army, the navy, the commanders of the British forces, and at last to the ladies and their knights. The party continued until dawn.<sup>47</sup> In all probability, a more lavish spectacle has never taken place in the midst of a bloody war, within a few miles of the enemy forces.

Even some Tories were indignant that so festive a celebration should have been held during the conflict. They were further irritated by General Howe's refusal to assault the American camp at Valley Forge, despite

the fact that he had been urged to do so on several occasions. For many years afterward in England, Howe's strategy (maintaining his army in health and luxury while the Americans suffered in discomfort) was the subject of severe criticism.<sup>48</sup> *The Royal Register* went so far as to say that Howe's "summers were consumed in fatiguing, expensive, and useless, operations, while the winters were passed away in lust and luxury."<sup>49</sup>

Howe's enthusiasm for high life in Philadelphia was a blessing for the Continental army. British inaction at the end of 1777 and during the first six months of the following year permitted the rebel forces to gain valuable time, recover their strength, and re-take the city in the summer of 1778.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Sir William Howe, letter of April 19, 1777, quoted in Troyer Steele Anderson, *The Command of the Howe Brothers during the American Revolution* (London, 1936), pp. 230-231.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Stanley, quoted in George O. Seilhamer, *History of the American Theatre: During the Revolution and After* (Philadelphia, 1889), II, 27.

<sup>3</sup>*The New York Gazette: and the Weekly Mercury*, printed by Hugh Gaine, at the Bible and Crown, in Hanover Square, New York, 20 January 1777.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 6 January 1777.

<sup>5</sup>*The New York Gazette: and the Weekly Mercury*, 27 January 1777.

<sup>6</sup>*The Royal American Gazette* (New York), 26 March 1778.

<sup>7</sup>Thomas Charles Pollock, *The Philadelphia Theatre in the Eighteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1933), p. 130.

<sup>8</sup>*The New York Gazette: and the Weekly Mercury*, 27 January 1777.

<sup>9</sup>From various issues of *The New York Gazette: and the Weekly Mercury* and *The Royal American Gazette*, 1777.

<sup>10</sup>*The New York Gazette: and the Weekly Mercury*, 24 February 1777.

<sup>11</sup>*The Royal American Gazette*, 1 May 1777.

<sup>12</sup>*The New York Gazette: and the Weekly Mercury*, 10 February 1777.

<sup>13</sup>*The Royal Gazette* (New York), 21 November 1778.

<sup>14</sup>William Dunlap, *History of the American Theatre* (London, 1833), I, 97.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>18</sup>*The New York Gazette: and the Weekly Mercury*, 10 February 1777.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 10 February 1777, and 19 May 1777.

<sup>20</sup>There is a considerable difference of opinion among historians on this point, however.

<sup>21</sup>Anderson, p. 294.

<sup>22</sup>Thomas Jones, *History of New York during the Revolutionary War* (New York, 1879), I, 253.

<sup>23</sup>Colonel Allen Maclean, quoted in Hugh F. Rankin, ed., *The American Revolution* (London, 1954), p. 114.

<sup>24</sup>Seilhamer, II, 32.

<sup>25</sup>Anderson, p. 240.

<sup>26</sup>"Extracts from the Letter-Book of Captain Johann Heinrichs of the Hessian Jager Corps, 1778-1780," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* Vol. XXII, No. 2 (1898), 139.

<sup>27</sup>Anne Hollingsworth Wharton, *Through Colonial Doorways* (Philadelphia, 1893), p. 25.

<sup>28</sup>"A Letter of Miss Rebecca Franks, 1778," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* Vol. XVI, No. 2 (1892), 216-217.

<sup>29</sup>John Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia, 1609-1884* (Philadelphia, 1884), II, 898.

<sup>30</sup>Fred Lewis Pattee, "The British Theater in Philadelphia in 1778," *American Literature*, Vol. VI (1935), 381.

<sup>31</sup>"Extracts from the Journal of Mrs. Henry Drinker of Philadelphia, from September 25, 1777, to July 4, 1778," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. XIII, No. 1 (1889), 300.

<sup>32</sup>*The Pennsylvania Ledger: or the Philadelphia Market-Day Advertiser* (Philadelphia), 24 December 1777.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 14 January 1778.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 24 January 1778.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 3 January 1778.

<sup>36</sup>Charles Durang, *History of the Philadelphia Stage, Between the Years 1749 and 1855* ([Philadelphia], 1868), I, 22.

<sup>37</sup>Pattee, pp. 387-388.

<sup>38</sup>Pollock, p. 35.

<sup>39</sup>Seilhamer, II, 31.

<sup>40</sup>Durang, I, 19.

<sup>41</sup>John North, quoted in Pollock, pp. 34-35.

<sup>42</sup>Seilhamer, II, 31.

<sup>43</sup>Durang, I, 19. André was not promoted to Major until 23 October 1779.

<sup>44</sup>*The Pennsylvania Ledger*, 29 April 1778.

<sup>45</sup>A participant in the Meschianza, quoted in Wharton, *Through Colonial Doorways*, p. 52.

<sup>46</sup>"Copy of a Letter from an Officer at Philadelphia to his Correspondent in London" [the author of the letter is presumed to have been John André], "Particulars of the Meschianza exhibited in America at the Departure of Gen. Howe," *The Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle* (August 1778), 356.

<sup>47</sup>Information concerning the Meschianza has been taken primarily from André's account in *The Gentleman's Magazine* (see note 46, above) and Wharton's *Through Colonial Doorways*.

<sup>48</sup>Anderson, pp. 299-301.

<sup>49</sup>*The Royal Register*, Vol. VIII, 163.