

Ashley Briggs

Research Paper: *Liberty's Children*

Sarah (Sally) Wister was born on July 20, 1761 to Daniel and Lowry. She was the oldest of five children (Elizabeth, Hannah, Susannah, and John). She stood out from most Quakers with her colorful, fashionable clothes that complimented her tall, pleasing figure. She was well educated. She studied reading, writing, classic literature, and arithmetic. During the war, Sally's good friend Deborah wrote her letters describing the events taking place in Sally's hometown, Philadelphia. As Myers suggests, the girls "had kept up with a frequent correspondence until the British occupation of the city; then communication being practically broken off, Sally's confidences to Deborah took the form of a journal."

Unlike many Quakers, the Wisters were wealthy. They regularly visited their second home in nearby Germantown. However, things were different now. The Revolutionary War broke out and fighting spread throughout the colonies, and the Wisters were looking to escape the close proximity of the fighting. They were afraid they would be in danger if they stayed in Philadelphia. Philadelphia was an important location serving as the meeting place for the Constitutional Convention and the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Myers states, that the "British capture of New York and the threatening out-look for Philadelphia doubtless induced them thus soon to leave the city and take refuge at the Foulke farm."

Although the Wisters were sympathetic to the American cause, they were afraid that their association with the Quakers would be put them in an unfavorable position. Most Quakers were Loyalists, and refused to participate in war since they opposed violence. So in 1776, 15-year old Sally and her family fled to North Wales, 15 miles away. Hannah Foulke, a relative through marriage, invited the family to stay with her family consisting of her and her three adult children. The farmhouse was a large two-story stone building. The two families shared the house until the following July. Myers states that the "Foulkes retained one side of the house and gave up the other with its furnishings to the Wisters," creating a pleasant and friendly living arrangement for both families.

According to Myers, Sally was updating her journal frequently with events, and occasionally she'd put down her pen when "a dull round of the same thing" occurred. However, as Myers notes, many important events took place, such as the British capture of Philadelphia, the Battle of Germantown, the surrender of Burgoyne, the winter encampment at Valley Forge, the Conway Cabal against Washington, and France's acknowledgement of American Independence. Things back home were worsening. Deborah wrote Sally about the fall of Philadelphia, the corrupt scenes of dead bodies, and wagons full of Philadelphia militiamen barging into homes searching for food and drink.

As Myers points out, the Wisters and Foulkes did not "enjoy the peace and quiet of their solitary situation" for long, but instead, were interrupted by the noises of war. Large groups of wagons filled with Philadelphia militia arrived at the farmhouse begging for food and water. The families were told that Hessians were approaching. This turned out to be a false report, but the families knew the war was closing in on them. On October 19, a brigadier of American soldiers led by General William Smallwood took up quarters in the Foulke house. Sally felt safe and protected with the military equipment and personnel

around. While the troops were stationed there, Sally took “much pleasure in their society”, especially Major William Truman Stoddert (Myers). The Major, as he was known, was very intriguing to Sally, though nothing became of them.

Many things were happening on the war front: the British captured Fort Mercer and Mifflin, opening a supply route to Philadelphia. On December 5, the British approach Chestnut Hill, which was only six miles away. The next day, The Major returned to the farmhouse “ill with fever, brought on by exposure to cold and fatiguing camp life”, and instead of being “lively, alert and blooming”, he was “pale, thin, and dejected, too weak to rise” (Myers). This was the last time that Sally and the Major spent time together.

In early November, General Smallwood received orders to part for Valley Forge. On December 20, General Smallwood’s army leaves for winter quarters, and British General William Howe returned to Philadelphia. According to Myers, in the latter part of February, Sally makes a visit to Whitemarsh, where George Washington’s troops had been posted. Sally reported of “ragged huts, imitations of chimneys, and many other ruinous objects” in the “barren hills of Whitemarsh” that were the remains of the encampment of the Army. The journal entries became less and less as paper becomes scarce (Myers).

After a quiet period, more troops arrive on May 11, 1778. On the evening of June 3, a horseman delivers a message that read, “Let the troop lie on their arms, and be ready to march at a moment’s warning”. This frightened Sally, but the soldiers informed her that it meant that the British were in motion. The Regiment was also moving to new quarters.

On June 19, the Wisters get “the welcome news that the British have withdrawn from the city” (Myers). Sally’s last journal described how eager she was to return home, and by July, Sally wrote how happy she was to be back with her friends. Sally kept writing; her poetry appears in the *Philadelphia Portfolio*. She spent much of her later life occupied with religious matters, never marrying. She ultimately died in April 1804.

Sources Cited:

Myers, Albert Cook. “Sally Wister’s Journal: A True Narrative.” Ferris and Leach Publishers, 12 December 1902. Web. 07 May 2014.
<http://www.foulke.org/history/docs/wister/wister1.html>.

Teaching Strategy: 8th Grade U.S. History I

Divide the class up into groups of two. Have each group responsible for reading a chapter. Then have each group do a 5-minute presentation including the following:

Visual Aid: Choose between posters or PowerPoint presentations

Participation in PowerPoint Presentations: Give each student a chart with the names of all children in the Liberty’s Children. As groups present their chapter, have the rest of the class fill in the chart with information about that person.