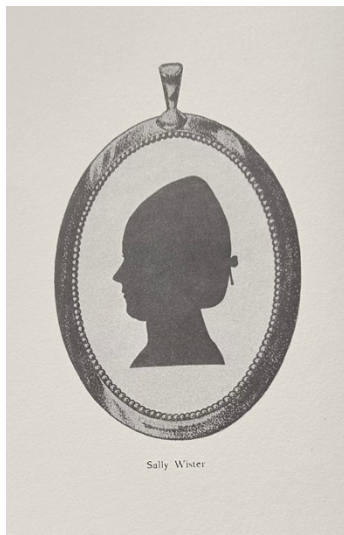


Sally Wister: The Story of a Young Quaker Girl's Struggle, Growth, and Unfulfilled Love during the American Revolution

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In September of 1777, a sixteen-year-old Quaker girl from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, named Sally Wister began her journal of her experience during the American Revolution. She and her family had moved out of their home in the city to stay with friends, the Foulke family, in the countryside as the fighting between the American and British armies drew near. Separated from her home and her best friend Deborah, who remained in the city, her journal was a means of contact, a way to keep hope alive that she would see her friend again soon. For nine months, she detailed her thoughts and fears of war, and her experience of a new reality, one which contrasted greatly with her pacifist Quaker beliefs. Yet, she was also able to use her faith to ease her fear of the war. Published in 1902, Sally's journal is a story of a young Quaker girl whose life was disrupted by the Revolutionary War. It is a story of struggle, growth, and unfulfilled love.

“To Deborah Norris:- ‘Tho’ I have not the least shadow of an opportunity to send a letter, if I do write, I will keep a sort of journal of the time that may expire before I see thee...” (65), Sally wrote on September 25th, 1777. It was her first entry in her journal. As a result of the British army's encroachment, and eventual occupation of Philadelphia that year, her communication with her dear

friend had been severed.¹ Sally began by detailing her first encounter with soldiers of the American army, an experience which, as for most Quakers, with war antithetical to their beliefs, filled her with fear. She described three hundred men of the Philadelphia Militia appearing at the Foulke's doorstep asking for something to drink: "I then thought it time for me to retreat; so, figure me (mightily scar'd, as not having presence of mind enough to face so many of the Military), running in at one door, and out another, all in a shake with fear..." (66).

However, her fear of the militiamen began to ease as she spent more time with them, "...seeing the officers appear gentlemanly, and the soldiers civil, I call'd reason to my aid" (66-67). Sally had never been around soldiers or officers before, and their participation in the war conflicted with her own religious beliefs about violence and warfare. However, this first experience with soldiers and officers ended graciously, "...so with many blessings, and as many adieus, they marched off" (67). Thus, Sally's beliefs about soldiers and officers began to shift slightly.

Sally's beliefs were largely influenced by her home of Pennsylvania, which was established in 1682. Pennsylvania attracted many Quakers, and they adopted a strong opposition to war.² This was influenced by the founder of the colony, William Penn, who intended Pennsylvania to be a peaceful place with religious tolerance and a government which did not involve itself in war.³ Three years before the start of Sally's journal, the First Continental Congress met in Philadelphia in order to discuss and send grievances to the King of Great Britain. This was unsettling to Quakers there, as they were afraid this would result in violence.⁴ Consequently, by 1776, the many Quakers were not in support of independence through war.⁵ The idea of brotherhood was of tremendous importance to the Quaker community. They referred to themselves as a Society of Friends and considered participation in war as a sin.⁷

Fortunately, Sally was also able to use her faith to ease her fears of the violence. She wrote on September 26th, after having been informed that the British army was drawing nearer to Deborah,

“May the Almighty take you under His protection, for without His divine aid all assistance is vain. May heaven’s guardian arm protect my absent friends, From danger guard them, and from want defend” (72).

Additionally, the same day, Sally described her feelings towards the war: “The uncertainty of our position engrosses me quite. Perhaps to be in the midst of war, and ruin, and the clang of arms. But we must hope for the best” (73). This does not exclaim pride for American independence through warfare, rather it highlights Sally’s view of war as an unnecessarily violent means of gaining independence. Yet, while she does not want American independence through war, it can be inferred that she and her family are more supportive of the Americans than the British. This is especially evident in the many times she describes an uncertainty or fear towards the British, such as on September 26th, when talking about the officers and soldiers who came to her home: “The men, to our great joy, were Americans, and but 4 in all” (71-72). This statement, along with her prayers for Deborah as the British drew near, show that Sally and her family, and the Foulke family as well, are against the British cause.

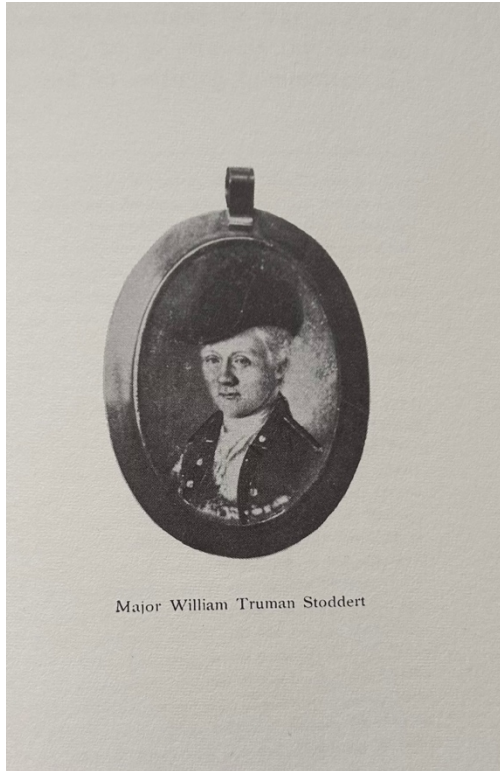
Nonetheless, Sally would find the war altering her life even more when she wrote on October 19th, 1777, “Cousin Prissa and myself were sitting at the door; I in a green skirt, dark short gown” (76). It is of interest here that Sally describes what she is wearing, as Quakers at this time often wore simple clothing, featuring plain colors, yet the wealthier Quaker families, such as Sally’s, could wear more colorful and extravagant dress.⁸ Sally continued, “Two genteel men of the military order rode up to the door: “Your servant, ladies,” ask’d if they cou’d have quarters for Genl. Smallwood” (76). Prissa Foulke, a daughter of the Foulke family, and Sally were approached by these soldiers, and the Foulkes agreed to quarter the men.

Later that evening, General Smallwood and his men from the First Maryland Regiment, along with a few men from a Virginia Regiment, arrived. Sally referred to the men from Maryland as

“Marylanders.” She was surprised by them, “How new is our situation! I feel in good spirits, though surrounded by an Army, the house full of officers, the yard alive with soldiers...” (81). She held preconceived beliefs about how officers and soldiers behaved, likely a result of her dedication to pacifist principles. Yet, upon her first interaction with these men, her beliefs were challenged: “They eat like other folks, talk like them, and behave themselves with elegance; so I will not be afraid of them, that I won’t” (81). It was at this moment that Sally’s ideas about men of the military started to change even more, although she seemed to base much of her opinion about them on their proper behavior, rather than their martial actions. This possibly displayed her naivety as a young girl, especially as the men would have behaved much differently in her home than on the battlefield.

Sally provided significant details about the visitors, ranging from their names and ranks to their features and personalities. These descriptions demonstrated her good-humored character, reminding the reader that she was still a teenage girl, one who was experiencing something entirely new. She described Colonel Line, an officer staying in the Foulke home, thus: “He entertains the highest notions of honour, is sensible and humane, and a brave officer; he is only seven and twenty years old, but by a long indisposition and constant fatigue, looks vastly older, and almost worn to a skeleton, but very lively and talkative” (83). The man who Sally described was George Lyne, a lieutenant colonel from King and Queen County, Virginia. He resigned from the army just two months later and became a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses.⁹ Thus, Sally’s description of him is interesting, as perhaps her description of him with “constant fatigue” and “almost worn to a skeleton,” hinted at reasons for his upcoming departure from military service. This description provides evidence of Sally’s reaction to living with many military men. This is a change that many young girls might consider frightening, but one that Sally faced with humor and grace.

Sally described another officer, one who seemed to catch her eye, Major William Truman Stoddert. Sally writes on October 20th, “Well here comes the glory, the Major, so bashful, so famous.



He shou'd come before the Captain, but never mind. I at first thought the Major cross and proud, but I was mistaken" (84). "The Major" as Sally calls him, was the nephew of General Smallwood, and was nineteen years old when he and Sally met. Major Stoddert was the grandson of a wealthy plantation owner, who upon his grandfather's recent passing had been left five hundred acres.¹¹ Sally's entry of October 21 showed she was aware of his high standing: "Worth a fortune of thirty thousand pounds, independent of anybody; the Major, moreover, is vastly bashful; so much he can hardly look at the ladies"

(88-89).

By October 26th, Sally and the Major's relationship took a possibly romantic turn: "We talk'd and laugh'd for an hour. He is very clever, amiable, and polite" (92). Sally seemed thrilled by this interaction, "The Major followed my example, drew his chair close to mine, and entertain'd me very agreeably. Oh, Debby; I have a thousand things to tell thee" (93-94). This description of the Major hinted that her feelings for him may have been requited. Furthermore, it represented her longing to see her friend, especially as she may have deemed it improper to share the feelings she had for the Major with anyone but her best friend. Perhaps, she felt them too indiscreet to put in writing.

For the remaining week that the Marylanders stayed, Sally detailed her time with the Major, taking walks, drinking tea, and having dinner. She wrote about one of these times on the evening of October 31st: "Another very charming conversation with the young Marylander. He seem'd possessed of very amiable manners; sensible and agreeable. He has by his unexceptionable deportment engag'd my esteem" (97). It is apparent that Sally was quite charmed by him, but the

very next day General Smallwood and his men departed. Sally was upset to see them go, not only because of the Major, but also because she found all the men very agreeable and charming, especially the General. She wrote of him on October 31st as well: “I declare this Genl is very, very entertaining, so good natur’d, so good humour’d, yet so sensible; I wonder he is not married. Are there no ladies form’d to his taste” (101)?

Since the arrival of the Maryland soldiers and officers, Sally has been confronted with a group that she had never been exposed to, men whose participation in war went against her faith. Although they challenged her beliefs, she became fond of these men, and wrote of her sadness upon their departure on November 1st: “I am very sorry; for when you have been with agreeable people, ‘tis impossible not to feel regret when they bid you adieu, perhaps forever. When they leave us we shall be immur’d in solitude” (102). Her use of “we” suggests that much of her family, and perhaps the Foulkes as well, found their time with the Maryland soldiers and officers pleasing. The Major was the only man she names in her description of the goodbye, quoting him directly, “Farewell ladies, till I see you again...” (103). The reason for General Smallwood and his troops departure in early November was that George Washington wanted them to go to Wilmington, Delaware. He wanted their help protecting supplies and defending his army to the south.¹⁰

For the next month Sally, perhaps heartbroken or with nothing of substance to share, wrote very little. However, the beginning of December brought the terrors of war near the Foulkes’ home. Again, Sally used her faith as a lens to understand the war and calm her fears. On December 5th she wrote, “It will be sufficiently dreadful if we are in hearing of the firing, to think of how many of our fellow-creatures are plung’d into the boundless ocean of eternity, few of them prepar’d to meet their fate. But they are summon’d before an all-merciful Judge, from whom they have a great deal to hope” (109). Sally described the great violence and death of the war and how dreadful it was to think of all the people losing their lives to the fighting. With her Quaker beliefs turning her strictly against

the violence of war, she seemed to think that these men were not prepared to face God upon their death. However, her own understanding of God as “all-merciful” provided her with hope that their souls would be saved nonetheless.

The next day, Sally received a great surprise as the Major returned. However, Sally observed that he was not the lively man she was used to, but was instead pale and exhausted. She wrote, “I was surpris’d. Instead of the lively, alert, blooming Stodard, who was on his feet the instant we enter’d, he look’d pale, thin, and dejected, too weak to rise. A bow, and “How are you, Miss Sally” (110). Sally seemed upset by his illness but, yet again, her focus on class and the manners of gentlemen was in evidence. She described how whenever she entered a room the Major would immediately stand, but in this instance, his sickness had stripped him of this ability, although she noted that he still bowed and greeted her. This suggests that the Major’s manners were a significant reason for Sally’s admiration.

The Major stayed with Sally and her family for the duration of his illness. Sally wrote on the morning of December 7th about how his health seemed to be better and that they had been able to enjoy each other’s company once again: “How natural it was to see him. “Good morning, Miss Sally.” “Good morrow, Major, how does thee do to-day?” Major: “I feel quite recover’d.” Sally: “Well, I fancy this indisposition has sav’d thy head for a time.” Major: “No ma’am; for if I hear a firing, I shall soon be with them.” That was heroic” (111). However, Sally updated her journal about the Major’s illness on December 8th: “Third- or Fourth-day, I forget which, he was very ill; kept his chamber most of the day. In the evening I saw him. He has a violent sore mouth” (119).

While the Major recovered, Sally’s struggle with her feelings about the war continued. On December 11th, she wrote, “When the tea equipage was remov’d, the conversation turned on politicks, a subject I avoid. I gave Betsy a hint. I rose, she followed...” (123). The house had recently become the quarters of two new officers from Virginia, while the Major continued his second stay as

well. She described the officers' conversation, and hinted to her younger sister Betsy that she should take no part in a discussion of politics. This suggests an influence of her Quaker beliefs, and their focus on egalitarianism and opposition to war, as she does not even want to be present for a discussion of the day's politics. It is also possible that Sally avoided political discussions because of her strong focus on proper behavior, largely due to class influence. As a young girl from a wealthy family, the idea of girls being involved in political discussion may have been considered improper.

Soon, Sally and the Major said their final goodbye. Her description of their farewell at noon on December 13th was one that reflected great sadness: "He has gone. I saw him pass the bridge. The woods, which you enter immediately after crossing it, hinder'd us from following him farther. I seem to fancy he will return in the evening" (133). However, this hope was diminished as she wrote that night, "Stodard not come back. We shall not, I fancy, see him again for months, perhaps years, unless he should visit Philad. We shall miss his agreeable company" (133). It seems she spent much of her day hoping that he would return and was saddened that he never did. This sadness stayed with her for quite some time, as when the officers and soldiers from Virginia left on December 20, she wrote, "I feel sorry at their departure, yet 'tis a different kind from what I felt some time since. We had not contracted so great an intimacy with those last" (138). These men had not made as great an impact on her as had the Maryland officers and soldiers. This could have been due to her fondness for the Major, or perhaps because of her emphasis on the gentlemanly behavior the Marylanders had that the officers from Virginia did not. This can be evidenced by Sally's discussion of a Virginian soldier staying with them whom she calls "Tilly." On the evening of December 11th, she wrote, "I am vex'd at Tilly, who has his flute, and does nothing but play the fool" (125). She later complained, "How boyish he behaves" (125). Sally was referring to Robert Tilly of Virginia, who would serve in the army until August of 1778.¹² Thus, perhaps it was both the Major being from

Maryland and also because she believed that the Maryland officers and soldiers were more well-mannered, proper, and gentlemanly than the men from Virginia.

Nevertheless, Sally was most likely aware that a relationship between her and the Major could never be. There were three primary reasons for this: the Major was not a Quaker, but a member of the Church of England, and Quakers were not to marry those outside of the faith; he was an officer in the military; and he owned slaves.¹³ Quakers in Pennsylvania were very against slavery. In the 1760s Quakers began to oppose slavery strongly, and even petitioned for heavy duties to be imposed on the importation of slaves.¹⁴ With Sally's religious beliefs in great opposition to the Major's way of life, this prohibited a relationship between them, although perhaps she wished this not to be so.

For many months following the departures of the Major and the officers from Virginia, Sally wrote very little. On May 11th, 1778, she explained, "The scarcity of paper, which is very great in this part of the country, and the last three months producing hardly any material, has prevented me from keeping a regular account of things..." (146). The next month, Sally's days were spent with her friends and family, and with officers and soldiers from the Continental army who stayed with them briefly. On June 19th, Sally heard exhilarating news: "...the English have entirely left the city" (183)! Thus, on the final day of her journal, June 20th, she wrote, "I now think of nothing but returning to Philadelphia. So now conclude this journal humbly hoping that the Great Disposer of events, who has graciously vouchsafe'd to protect us to this day through many dangers, will still be pleas'd to continue his protection" (185). These concluding sentences of her journal indicated her belief that God had been protecting her and her family all along. Her religious faith provided her peace and security in the face of war.

Throughout the nine months that her journal covers, Sally's life was disrupted as she had to leave both her home and her friends. Her experience as a young girl living in a time of war and

violence conflicted with her Quaker faith. However, her faith also provided her with a sense of peace and safety. After her journal ends, her life was restored to what it had been before the war, as she and her family returned to their home in Philadelphia in July of 1778.¹⁵ For the twenty-six years following the conclusion of her journal, Sally continued living with her mother. She never married, rather spending her time in devotion to her faith.¹⁶ It is unlikely that Sally and Major William Stoddert ever saw each other again. In 1781 he was transferred to the Fourth Maryland Regiment and remained in service there until 1783. The Major married a woman named Sally Massey from Virginia, and they lived on his large Maryland plantation until his death.¹⁷ His son noted that he died from “a disease caused by the hardships of camp life” (88n1). The Major was thirty-four years old at the time of his passing.

Sally passed in 1804, and her story was published in 1902 after being discovered by her nephew. Her journal is the story of the American Revolution through the eyes of a young Quaker girl. Sally’s religious beliefs of peace and pacifism were challenged by war, yet her experience also brought her connection to groups of people with whom she might otherwise never have become acquainted. The journal of Sally Wister gives a glimpse of what life was like for a young Quaker girl during a time of upheaval, a time where she overcame struggle, experienced growth, and perhaps endured the heartbreak of unfulfilled love.

Notes

1. Albert Cook Myers, introduction to Sally Wister, *Sally Wister's Journal* (Ferris & Leach, 1902), 4.
2. Edwin B. Bronner, "The Quakers and Non-Violence in Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 35 (1968): 2.
3. Bronner, "The Quakers and Non-Violence in Pennsylvania," 2.
4. Arthur J. Mekeel, "The Relation of the Quakers to the American Revolution," *Quaker History* 65, no. 1 (1976): 11.
5. Mekeel, "The Relation of the Quakers to the American Revolution," 13.
6. Peter Brock, *Pacifism in the United States: From the Colonial Era to the First World War* (Princeton University Press, 1970), 17.
7. Brock, *Pacifism in the United States*, 13.
8. Leanna Lee-Whitman, "Silks and Simplicity: A Study of Quaker Dress as Depicted in Portraits 1718-1855," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1987), 12-13.
9. Francis B. Heitman, "Historical Register of the Revolution"; *Journal House of Delegates, Virginia* Doc. No. 31; Stanard, *Virginia Register*, 199, as discussed in *Sally Wister's Journal*, 83, note 1.
10. Spencer Tucker, *U.S. Leadership in Wartime, Clashes, Controversy, and Compromise* (ABC-CLIO, 2009), 83.
11. Myers, "Introduction," *Sally Wister's Journal*, 31.
12. Heitman, "Historical Register of the Revolution," as discussed in *Sally Wister's Journal*, 121, note 2.
13. Myers, "Introduction," *Sally Wister's Journal*, 31.
14. Judith Jennings, "Mid-Eighteenth-Century British Quakerism and the Response to the Problem of Slavery," *Quaker History* 66 (1977): 25.
15. Myers, "Introduction," *Sally Wister's Journal*, 34.
16. Myers, "Introduction," *Sally Wister's Journal*, 40-41.
17. Myers, "Introduction," *Sally Wister's Journal*, 31.