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THE JAMES PATTISON PAPERS 1777-1781
Royal Artillery Institution,
London.

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Introduction

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THE JAMES PATTISON PAPERS

INTRODUCTION

1. Origin of the Papers

The James Pattison Papers consist of official records compiled by the staff of General James Pattison, Royal Artillery, during his service in America, 1777-1780. They were deposited in the Royal Artillery Institution Library, Woolwich, London S.E.18, which was opened in 1806, probably by the family of Stephen Payne Adye, aide-de-camp, to Pattison in America, who died in 1794, and there they still remain.

2. James Pattison (c. 1723-1805)

Pattison, born in 1723 or 1724, the second son of a London merchant, entered the Royal Regiment of Artillery in 1740, and followed the career of a professional army officer for the remainder of his life. He married a daughter of Albert Borgard, first colonel commandant of the Royal Regiment and principal founder of the artillery service in Britain. Pattison was one of the first generation of artillery officers who were professionally trained, serving in a corps where commissions could not be purchased. Promotion for an able and well-connected officer such as he was therefore sure but slow. Pattison saw active service at Ghent in 1742, and at the end of the Seven Years War was appointed to command the companies detailed for service in Portugal. In 1769 he was sent to Venice to superintend the organisation of the Venetian artillery. Meanwhile he had risen to be lieutenant-colonel of the 4th battalion, Royal Regiment of Artillery, in 1761. In April 1777 he became colonel commandant of the 4th battalion upon the death of Colonel T. Ord, and in September arrived in New York to take over command of the Royal Artillery in America with the local rank of brigadier-general.

Pattison arrived with a considerable reinforcement of artillery which was brought into action almost straight away. He himself took part in the capture of Verplank's point and Forts Clinton and Montgomery on the Hudson River by Sir Henry Clinton in October 1777, and after that he accompanied the forces that were embarked from New York under Sir Thomas Wilson to join Sir William Howe on the Delaware, where they took part in the capture of Mud Island and Red Bank Redoubt in November. Pattison remained with the main British army in command of the artillery during the time it was in winter quarters at Philadelphia, and subsequently accompanied Clinton when he withdrew it to New York after succeeding Howe as Commander in Chief in the summer of 1778. The army now based at New York did not again operate in the field as a united whole, and in consequence Pattison remained at headquarters during the remainder of his service in America while subordinate officers accompanied the artillery detachments sent with the various small expeditions mounted from New York during that period. He was given added administrative responsibility when he was appointed.

military commandant of the city and garrison of New York on 5 July 1779. He had already been promoted major-general in February of that year.

From the beginning of 1780 Pattison began to complain of ill-health and, when the appointment of a military governor, lieutenant-general Robertson, allowed him to lay down his post of military commandant of New York, he took advantage of the Commander-in-Chief's offer of leave, returning to England in September 1780. He did not return to America, and was not again employed on active service, but he was advanced to lieutenant-general in 1787 and general in 1797, and was also for brief periods twice commander of the Woolwich garrison. Pattison died on 1 March 1805 at his house in Hill Street, Berkeley Square, aged 81.

3. Content of the Papers

The Pattison Papers comprise a number of quite different items:

(i) 'Brigade Orders, Royal Artillery, from 28 September 1777 till 21 February 1778, by Brigadier-general James Pattison.'

This is a register of the Brigade Orders, or extracts from them, issued by Pattison which was kept by his brigade-major, Edward Williams. These orders concern the administration and discipline of the artillery serving in America, and were issued nearly every day except when the army was actually on the march.

(ii) 'General Orders, from 27 September 1777 till 21 February 1778.'

This is a similar register kept by Captain Williams of the General Orders issued by the commander in chief or local commander. It is a very important source of information for the military operations of the period which it covers, being comparable with the registers kept by Colonel Stephen Kemble of the General Orders issued by Howe and Clinton from 1775 to 1778. Since Kemble's register for the period 20 November 1777 to 22 February 1778 has been lost, and since his earlier volume does not cover the operations undertaken from New York during the period in which Howe was operating on the Delaware, Pattison's register contains information not otherwise available of the strength, disposition, and movements of the British forces at the time. It also contains a record of officers' promotions and of the administration and discipline of an army engaged upon active operations against the enemy.

(iii) Five folio registers:

(a) A register of appointments of warrant officers in the artillery in America, 1777-1780. This and the next register were kept by John Grant, Commissary and Paymaster of Artillery in America.

(b) Copies of Bills of Lading for stores sent out by the Ordnance for the army and navy in America.

(c) 'Record of Commissions, Warrants and Appointments, granted

by Major-general Pattison, Commandant of New York. This was kept by John Le Chevalier Roome of New York whose appointment as secretary to the Commandant is the first record entered in this register. Some of the civil appointments, such as that of Inspector at the Brooklyn Ferry, have a copy of the officer's instructions appended.

(d) 'Day Book, Commandant's Office, New York.'

This is a register kept by Captain Adye, Pattison's aide-de-camp, of the passes, safe-conducts, and other permits and certificates issued from the Commandant's office between October 1779 and May 1780.

(e) Copies of orders concerning the government and administration of New York, May 1778 to July 1779, issued by Pattison's predecessor, Major-general Jones, and by the Superintendent of Police he appointed. These, the regulations in force when Pattison took over the government of the city, concern public order, health, services and amenities etc.

(iv), (v) Two letter books kept by Captain Adye, with some entries by Captain Williams, and containing copies of Pattison's official military correspondence, October 1777 to January 1781. Included are Pattison's letters to Viscount Townshend and Lord Amherst, Master General and Lieutenant General of the Ordnance, to the Board of Ordnance, and those of himself, his aide-de-camp and his brigade-major, to artillery officers in America. As well as dealing with official ordnance business, Pattison's letters contain accounts of the military operations in which he took part and of others with which he was not directly concerned. Pattison was an intelligent and well-qualified military observer and, while always a loyal officer, he took a realistic view of the military situation in America. His opinions as well as his facts therefore command the attention of the historian of the American War of Independence. The originals of some of Pattison's reports to England can be found in the Public Record Office in London, and the whole of the second of these letter books was published by the New York Historical Society in 1876.

(vi) A letter book kept by Captain Adye and containing copies of Pattison's official correspondence as Military Commandant of New York, July 1779 to August 1780. The majority of the letters were written by Adye on Pattison's behalf and they supplement and amplify the information contained in the Warrant Book and the Day Book, (iii)(c) and (iii)(d) above. This is an important source for the local history of New York during this period and it too was published by the New York Historical Society in 1876.

4. Bibliography

Edward Ely Curtis, The Organisation of the British Army in the American Revolution (New Haven, 1926).

Francis Duncan, History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery (London, 1872). Volume I, chapter xxviii, pp. 325-47, 'The Gunner'

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who governed New York', is an account of Pattison's life with special reference to his government of New York, 1779-80, based upon the papers described here and upon Pattison's private papers, then in the hands of his family's representatives, and to which Duncan had access.

The Kemble Papers vol. I, in the New York Historical Society's Collections, Publication Fund Series vol. 16, for 1883 (New York, 1884). Stephen Kemble was Deputy Adjutant General in America from June 1773 to October 1779. His private journal is printed here together with those of his registers, kept at the same time, which have survived and which contain his official record of the General Orders issued by his commanders in chief. There is also a short run, May-June 1778, of the orders issued in New York by General Jones, Pattison's predecessor.

The Narrative of Lieutenant-general Sir William Howe . . . relative to his conduct during his late command . . . in North America (London, 1780)

James Pattison, Letters, in the New York Historical Society's Collections, Publication Fund Series vol. 8, for 1875 (New York, 1876). Prints, with a short introduction, items (v) and (vi), apparently from a copy supplied by Captain Francis Duncan, R.A. (see the work by him, cited above)

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