The American Revolution
Excerpt taken from *Three Centuries – The Story of Chatham*
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Soon after December 1774, when the Provincial Congress resolved to cease the drinking or use of British tea after March 1, 1775, Chatham's military company was reorganized: Lt. Benjamin Godfrey (whose windmill still stands in Chase Park) was named captain; Richard Sears was appointed lieutenant, Joseph Crowell as ensign, and John Emery as military clerk. Later that year, on June 17, Capt. Godfrey would fight at the Battle of Bunker Hill during the Siege of Boston.

To defend the sea coast, a company of men was formed with volunteers from Chatham, Harwich, and Yarmouth. Among them was Hiat Young, a veteran of the French-Indian War.

Most of the Chatham men recruited joined the local coast guard, and almost all of them served on privateers that sought to interrupt British commerce, supplies, and reinforcements.

Later that year, in the fall, the schooner *Williams*, belonging to a Tory refugee from Halifax, Nova Scotia, was seized by armed cruisers and brought into Chatham Harbor. Another sloop, the *Elizabeth*, which was making its way from the West Indies to Halifax, was captured by an armed brigantine and also brought into Chatham Harbor as a prize of war in August 1776. In spring of 1777, the privateer *Wolf* was seized by a crew of Chatham and Harwich men, and later awarded by the Colony to Capt. Nathaniel Freeman of Harwich, whose second officer was Joseph Doane Jr. of Chatham.

The luck of Freeman's Chatham and Harwich sailors did not hold, however. They were captured by a British man-of-war disguised as a merchantman and taken to New York where they were thrown into prison and were exchanged for British prisoners.

Answering the Continental Army's frequent calls to enlist soldiers and finding the money to pay them was an ongoing concern for Chatham throughout the war. In August 1776, the town raised £32 to pay a bounty to soldiers who enlisted and £9 14 schillings for gunpowder for the town's use. To encourage enlistment, on May 19, 1777, the town voted to increase the bounty to £20 for each man who enlisted for service through January 10, 1778. For the men that enlisted for three years, or through the end of the war, £20 was paid at the time of muster. The town also agreed to take care of the families of soldiers, certainly an appealing offer for men of small means. In September of that year, the town voted to divide the town into twenty sections, and each section was to furnish one soldier. At the same time, four men were appointed to raise money to pay the men.

As the number of volunteers dwindled, the town realized it had to up the ante, so in March 1778, it voted to increase the bounty to £40 for ten soldiers to guard Gen. John Burgoyne, who surrendered at the Battle of Saratoga in October 1777. In April 1778, the town voted to procure the material and clothing called for by the Continental Army and two months later, voted to raise money "to hire five men for the Continental Army and four for the state."

But that still wasn't enough. In July 1778, the town voted to raise £150 for seven soldiers for the state and two more to guard Burgoyne, making the soldiers' wages £40 a month for six months of service.

But the town could not sustain the cash payments. By July 1779, the town sent Capt. Godfrey to find the men required and negotiate how much they would be paid in grain. In July 1780, the town voted to pay the wages in produce. By April 1782, little to no grain or produce could be mustered and no men "would go into service under any terms."

Lynn Van Dine has been a dedicated supporter and writer for the Atwood Museum. Three Centuries – The Story of Chatham, a book compiling the history of Chatham, is available for purchase the Atwood Museum Shop.