



United States History, an LDS  
Perspective  
(1215 – Present)

**VOLUME 1**

**Epoch 1 - 1215 - 1603**

The Magna Carta, Ruler's Law vs. People's Law, The Reformation, Henry VIII, The Church of England, Bloody Mary, Good Queen Bess, Protestantism.

**Epoch 2 – 1603 – 1763**

King James 1, Founding of Jamestown, The Puritans, The Pilgrims, The Mayflower Compact, Founding the Thirteen Colonies.

**Epoch 3 – 1763 – 1789**

Causes of the American Revolution, Declaration of Independence, The Founding Fathers

**Epoch 4 – 1789 – 1830**

The Bill of Rights, Amendment 11, The Early Administrations, The War of 1812, The National Anthem, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, John Adams

**Epoch 5 – 1830 – 1850**

The Oregon Trail, The Alamo, The Mexican War, Indian Wars, Utopian Societies, The Gold Rush, The Westward Movement, The Telegraph, Morse Code

**Epoch 6 – 1850 – 1901**

Abraham Lincoln, The Missouri compromise, The Civil War, Kansas-Nebraska Act, Slavery, Underground Railroad, Amendments 13-15

**Epoch 7 – 1901 – 1941**

The Progressive Era, The Automobile, Monopolies, Andrew Carnegie, John Morgan, John Rockefeller, World War I, The Wright Brothers, Amendments 16&17

**Epoch 8 – 1941- 1963**

The Second World War – Pacific Theater only

**Epoch 9 – 1963 – Present**

Religious Movements, Rock Music, Space Exploration, The Civil Rights Movement, The Vietnam War, Watergate, Amendments 24-26

(Excerpt on next page)

## Valley Forge

United States History, an LDS Perspective, Volume 1.

"Valley Forge" is found on pages 201-206.

Washington's army of about 10,000 soldiers spent the winter camped at Valley Forge, about 20 miles northwest of Philadelphia, entering the camp on December 17. During the recent fighting the countryside had been stripped bare of food. What was left was being sold to the British. Both the Continental Congress and the Pennsylvania legislature protested Washington's decision to build a winter encampment for his weary troops. They wanted him to drive Howe from Philadelphia. Many people criticized Washington at this time. They said he made a habit of failure, and pointed out his defeats at Long Island, White Plains, Brandywine, and Germantown. They called him a dictator, a self-appointed king, and a military incompetent. They agreed with the Attorney General of Pennsylvania, who said,

*Thousands of lives and millions of dollars of property are yearly sacrificed to the insufficiency of our Commander-in-Chief. Two battles he has lost for us by two such blunders as might have disgraced a soldier of three months' standing, and yet we are so attracted to this man that I fear we shall rather sink with him than throw him off our shoulders.* (Earl Schenck Miers, *The Golden Book History of the United States*, page 237)

Armchair generals were quick to compare Gate's impressive victory at Saratoga with Washington's string of failures. The composition of Congress had greatly changed since Washington's unanimous appointment in 1775. Several of its members were now openly critical of him. They felt he had been over-praised, given too much power, and was a dull and clumsy commander. Only two Congressmen now remained of the Congress that had elected Washington to command the army, and most of the new Congress had never met Washington, thus they were scarcely able or competent to judge either his qualifications or his character.

One of those armchair generals was a French officer who had joined the American effort, General Thomas Conway. As time passed, Conway became openly critical of Washington, considering him inept as a general, and suggested that Gates would be a much more qualified commander in chief – with, of course, Conway at his side. In October 1777 Conway wrote Gates a letter filled with criticism of General Washington: "Heaven has determined to save your country, or [otherwise] a weak general and bad counselors would have ruined it." (Andrew M. Allison, *The Real George Washington*, pages 258-259) Washington chanced to learn of the letter's condemnation and instead of making an official charge against Conway, he simply sent a note to Congress that if they felt the same he would resign from his command as he said he would when he first accepted the position.

Congress refused to accept Washington's resignation, but did allow themselves to listen to the plotting scheme of Conway and other military men who were opposed to Washington. A five member Board of War was established by Congress, which had powers over the army, including Washington, and three of Washington's enemies were appointed to it, Generals Gates, Conway, and Thomas Mifflin. Gates was made president of the Board while retaining his field command. The board's inspector general was to be none other than Thomas Conway. Mifflin was made quartermaster general, responsible for obtaining food, clothing and military supplies for the army. He was generally absent, spending most of his time adding to Washington's miseries by not procuring the badly needed supplies. Congress had thus unwittingly made Gates, Mifflin, and Conway all superior to Washington. In their new positions, each of these men was now only a step away from replacing Washington as the commander in chief, and all harbored the secret desire of doing just that.

The plot dragged on through the brutal winter of Valley Forge. In his role as inspector general, Conway twice visited Washington at his Valley Forge headquarters. Both times he was so coolly received by Washington that he protested to Congress. Washington freely admitted that there was some truth to Conway's charge. "My feelings will not permit me to make professions of friendship to the man I deem my enemy and whose system of conduct forbids it. At the same time, truth authorizes me to say that he was received and treated with proper respect to his official character." (Ibid., page 261) At the same time, Washington once again acknowledged that he was a fallible human being and perhaps actually deserved some of the criticism that was being heaped upon him. "Why should I expect to be exempt from censure, the unfailling lot of an elevated station?...My heart tells me it has been my unremitting aim to do the best circumstances would permit. Yet I may have been very often mistaken in my judgment of the means and may, in many instances, deserve the imputation [accusation] of error." (Ibid., page 262)

*I pursued the great line of my duty and the object in view (as far as my judgment could direct) as pointedly as the needle to the pole. So soon, then, as the public gets dissatisfied with my services, or a person is found better qualified to answer her expectation, I shall quit the helm with as much satisfaction and retire to a private station with as much content as ever the wearied pilgrim felt upon his safe arrival in the Holy Land or haven of hope; and shall wish most devoutly that those who come after may meet with more prosperous gales than I have done, and less difficulty.* (Ibid., page 263)

Gradually, word spread that a plot was under way to oust Washington. Members of the army cried out in anger, and Congress, when it reconvened in the spring of 1778, was newly supportive of Washington. Conway, miffed at

not receiving an expected promotion, threatened in April to resign, and was stunned when Congress accepted it. By May 1778 the dangerous threat of the *Conway Cabal* (secret plot) was over. Conway himself was gone. The Board of War steadily fell into disrepute, and those politicians and generals who had deceitfully attempted to depose the General saw their influence fading rather than growing. In the end Washington stood taller than before. When Gates finally apologized, Washington generously responded that he wished to bury the whole affair in silence.

*My temper leads me to peace and harmony with all men; and it is particularly my wish to avoid any personal feuds or dissensions with those who are embarked in the same great national interest with myself, as every difference of this kind must in its consequences be very injurious. (Ibid., page 264)*

Now back to the story of the men at Valley Forge. Many of the troops lacked shoes and other clothing, and they also suffered from severe shortages of food. Blood from their bare feet sometimes stained the snow as they worked. Washington watched sick men die because there was not even straw to protect them from the wet, cold ground. Some cut up their blankets to wrap around their feet. By December of 1777, 3,000 men were unfit for military duty because they lacked warm clothing. Six weeks later, the number was 4,000. Even officers were without uniforms and wore blankets and bed-coverings on parade. The army lacked decent weapons which were so crude that Benjamin Franklin was prompted to suggest giving the soldiers bows and arrow since a man could shoot four arrows as fast as one bullet. A Connecticut private, James Sullivan Martin, recorded his observations of the time he spent in Valley Forge.

*The army was now not only starved but naked; the greatest part were not only shirtless and barefoot, but destitute of all other clothing, especially blankets. I procured a small piece of raw cowhide and made myself a pair of moccasins, which kept my feet (while they lasted) from the frozen ground, although, as I well remember, the hard edges so galled [rubbed] my ankles while on a march that it was with much difficulty and pain that I could wear them afterwards. But the only alternative I had was to endure this inconvenience or go barefoot, as hundreds of my companions had to, till they might be tracked by their blood upon the rough, frozen ground. But hunger, nakedness, and sore shins were not the only difficulties we had at that time to encounter; we had hard duty to perform and little or no strength to perform it with....*

*We arrived at the Valley Forge in the evening. It was dark, there was no water to be found, and I was perishing with thirst. I searched for water till I was weary, and came to my tent without finding any; fatigue and thirst, joined with hunger, almost made me desperate. I felt at that instant as if I would have taken victuals or drink from the best friend I had on earth by force....Just after I arrived at my tent, two soldiers, whom I did not know, passed by. They had some water in their canteens which they told me they had found a good distance off, but could not direct me to the place, as it was very dark. I tried to beg a draft of water from them, but they were as rigid as Arabs. At length I persuaded them to sell me a drink for three pence, Pennsylvania currency, which was every cent of property I could then call my own, so great was the necessity I was then reduced to. (Ibid., pages 266-267)*

Washington voiced his own praise of his men to a John Banister, on April 21, 1778:

*No history now extant can furnish an instance of an army's suffering such uncommon hardships as ours has done. To see men without clothes to cover their nakedness, without blankets to lie on, without shoes (for the want of which their marches might be traced by the blood from their feet), and almost as often without provisions as with them, marching through the frost and snow, and at Christmas taking up their winter quarters within a day's march from the enemy, without a house or hut to cover them till they could be built, and submitting to it without a murmur, is a proof of patience and obedience which in my opinion can scarce be paralleled. (Ibid., pages 269-270)*

Martha Washington joined her husband at the Valley Forge encampment on February 20, 1778, following her usual custom of spending at least part of the winter season with him. She was immediately struck with the terrible destitution of the soldiers and began to take steps to help them. One eyewitness, a Mrs. Westlake and neighbor of the Potts family, recorded the following about Martha.

*I never in my life knew a woman so busy from early morning until late at night as was Lady Washington, providing comforts for the sick soldiers. Every day, excepting Sunday, the wives of officers in camp, and sometimes other women, were invited to Mr. Pott's [the place where the General stayed with his wife when she came that winter to visit] to assist her in knitting socks, patching garments, and making shirts for the poor soldiers, when materials could be procured. Every fair day she might be seen, with basket in hand and with a single attendant, going among the huts seeking the keenest and most needy sufferer, and giving all the comforts to them in her power. (Ibid., page 272)*

By spring of 1778, nearly a fourth of the soldiers, 2,500, had died of malnutrition, exposure to the cold, and such diseases as smallpox and typhoid fever. Hundreds of horses died of starvation. Despite their own starvation, the men could not bear to eat them. The rotting carcasses, which could not be buried in the frozen ground, contributed to the growing problem of disease. Many soldiers deserted to the British, some 2,000 of them, because of the terrible conditions so as to obtain food and clothing. General Washington was in a constant state of pleading and begging Congress to provide the Army with sufficient men and the basic necessities of life. One such correspondence is given below, as Washington described the sad situation of his men at their winter camp at Valley Forge.

*Since the month July we have had no assistance from the quartermaster-general, and to want of assistance from this department the commissary-general charges great part of his deficiency. To this I am to add, that, notwithstanding it is a standing order, and often repeated, that the troops shall always have two days' provisions by them, that they might be ready at any sudden call; yet an opportunity has scarcely ever offered, of taking advantage of the enemy, that has not been either totally obstructed or greatly impeded on this account. And this, the great and crying evil, is not all. The soap, vinegar, and other articles allowed by Congress, we see none of, nor have we seen them, I believe, since the battle of Brandywine. The first, indeed, we have now little occasion for; few men having more than one shirt, many only the moiety [approximately half] of one, and some none at all.*

*In addition to which, as a proof of the little benefit received from a clothier-general, and as a further proof of the inability of an army under the circumstances of this, to perform the common duties of soldiers (besides a number of men confined to hospitals for want of shoes, and others in farmers' houses on the same account), we have, by a field return this day made, no less than two thousand eight hundred and ninety-eight men now in camp unfit for duty, because they are barefoot and otherwise naked.*

*By the same return it appears that our whole strength in Continental troops, including the eastern brigades, which have joined us since the surrender of General Burgoyne, exclusive of the Maryland troops sent to Wilmington, amounts to no more than eight thousand two hundred in camp fit for duty; notwithstanding which, and that since the 4<sup>th</sup> instant, our numbers fit for duty, from the hardships and exposures they have undergone, particularly on account of blankets (numbers having been obliged, and still are, to sit up all night by fires, instead of taking comfortable rest in a natural and common way), have decreased near two thousand men.*

*We find, gentlemen, without knowing whether the army was really going into winter-quarters or not (for I am sure no resolution of mine would warrant the remonstrance [protest]), reprobating the measure as much as if they thought the soldiers were made of sticks or stones, and equally insensible of frost and snow; and moreover, as if they conceived it easily practicable for an inferior army, under the disadvantages I have described ours to be, which are by no means exaggerated, to confine a superior one, in all respects well appointed and provided for a winter's campaign, within the city of Philadelphia, and to cover from depredation and waste the States of Pennsylvania and Jersey.*

*But what makes this matter still more extraordinary in my eye is that these very gentlemen – who were well apprised of the nakedness of the troops from ocular [visual-for some from Congress had come to see the troops] demonstration, who thought their own soldiers worse clad than others, and who advised me near a month ago to postpone the execution of a plan I was about to adopt, in consequence of a resolve of Congress for seizing clothes, under strong assurances that an ample supply would be collected in ten days agreeably to a decree of the State (not one article of which, by the by, is yet come to hand) – should think a winter's campaign, and the covering of these states form the invasion of an enemy, so easy and practicable a business. I can assure those gentlemen, that it is a much easier and less distressing thing to draw remonstrances in a comfortable room by a good fireside than to occupy a cold bleak hill, and sleep under frost and snow, without clothes or blankets. However, although they seem to have little feeling for the naked and distressed soldiers, I feel superabundantly for them, and from my soul I pity those miseries which it is neither in my power to relieve nor prevent. (George Washington, published in *The Bookshelf for Boys and Girls*, volume 9, pages 196-198)*

One reason for the triumph over defeatism by the rest of the troops was that the General and his senior officers shared the hardship of their men instead of moving to more comfortable quarters. Washington felt that the best way for him to keep his men faithful to him was for him to live, sleep, eat, and carry on life during that winter just like they had to do. General Henry Knox and the man with whom Washington was quartered at Valley Forge, Isaac Potts, tell of the General retiring to a quiet grove where he could be alone and pray for his men. His grandson, George Washington Parke Custis, wrote that "Throughout the war, as it was understood in his military family, he (the General) gave a part of every day to private prayer and devotion." (Andrew M. Allison, *The Real George Washington*, page 273) The following is recorded by Ruth Anna Potts, wife of Isaac Potts.

*In 1777 while the American army lay at Valley Forge, a good old Quaker by the name of Potts had occasions to pass through a thick woods near headquarters. As he traversed the dark brown forest, he heard, at a distance before him, a voice which as he advanced became more fervid and interested. Approaching with slowness and circumspection [caution], whom should he behold in a dark bower [a leafy shelter], apparently formed for the purpose, but the Commander-in-Chief of the armies of the United Colonies on his knees in the act of devotion to the Ruler of the Universe! At the moment when Friend Potts, concealed by the trees, came up, Washington was interceding for his beloved country. With tones of gratitude that labored for adequate expression he adored that exuberant goodness which, from the depth of obscurity, had exalted him to the head of a great nation, and that nation fighting at fearful odds for all the world holds dear...Soon as the General had finished his devotions and had retired, Friend Potts returned to his house, and threw himself into a chair by the side of his wife. "Height! Isaac!" said she with tenderness, "thee seems agitated; what's the matter?" "Indeed, my dear" quoth he, "if I appear agitated 'tis no more than what I am. I have seen this day what I shall never forget. Till now I have thought that a Christian and a soldier were characters incompatible; but if George Washington be not a man of God, I am mistaken, and still more shall I be disappointed if God do not through him perform some great thing for this country. (Catherine Millard, *The Rewriting of America's History*, pages 73-74)*