

MARYLAND MILITIAMAN CHRISTOPHER JOHNSTONE:
A LETTER TO HIS WIFE DESCRIBING THE AFTERMATH
OF THE BATTLE OF GREEN SPRING

The following letter was written by Christopher Johnstone of Baltimore County, Maryland, whose Maryland militia unit was serving with the Lafayette's Army in Virginia in the summer of 1781. Born in Scotland in 1750, Johnstone had married Susannah Stith, and was the father of a young daughter named Maria. Written ten days following the Battle of Green Spring, Johnstone's letter is one of the few surviving personal documents that describes the aftermath of the battle and its impact upon the town of Williamsburg. Christopher Johnstone survived the Revolutionary War, returned to Maryland, and died on March 6th, 1819.

Note: This version of his letter was transcribed from a photocopy in the collection of the Library of Virginia in Richmond. The original remains in the hands of the Manuscripts Department of the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore (Revolutionary War Collection, MS 1814).

Richmond July 16th 1781

Monday Morning

My Dr. Girl

I was last evening made happy by your kind letter of the 9th current. I have read it over several times to make amends for the shortness of it--but that because as you say ten minutes only was allotted you to write in. It affords me much pleasure to find Maria can suck a thumb or titty yet. Your describing her lying on the floor kicking up her heels was kind, I can almost see her. On the 6th I wrote you from Ruffins ferry -- the same evening a very severe engagement happened twixt an advanced part of our army & the greatest part of the Enemy, near James Town. Advice was brought us on our march of this & orders to push on which we accordingly did for 6 miles, but night coming on put an end to the action before we could reach the scene of it, to the great joy of our good Wives at least. Next day the Enemy who remained no wise constrained to fight, embarked on board their shipping & are gone down towards Portsmouth. Some of their Horse crossed James River and are up in Bedford County ravaging & Destroying the low & great. On the Saturday morning our Horse that lay about 15 Miles from Jas. Town went to reconnoiter the Enemy not knowing they had embarked & were all night on horseback.

On Sunday morning we entered James Town while their vessels lay in the river. From thence we proceeded to Williamsburg where we found the inhabitants in the utmost Distress, the Enemy having eat them out of House & Home & carried off almost every Negro in the place, to that they have added the small Pox which is so unusually dispersed there that not a House in Town is clear of it. I called on Mrs. Taswell, who has ten Children down with it. Poor woman, she lost her husband about three months ago, & every House servant she had is gone off, also Mr. Prentices negroes, her little son too has got the Small Pox. We remained in Wmsbg searching for British Goods & Wines, Rum Sugar, & old Rags for the Sick & wounded till Thursday when we set out for Ruffins ferry a second time & we flattered ourselves with getting leave to proceed to Baltimore but no sooner had we arrived there, than an order from the Marquis arrived also-- ordering us to this place & when we get Discharged I really cannot say. It is what we all want much, as from what I have said of our Marching & Countermarching, you may suppose we are Much fatigued as well as our Horses. However I am perfectly in health & stand the fatigue pretty well hitherto. I would write you further but Mr. Patton the intended bearer hereof waits. God bless you & my Dear little Maria. Adieu, Yrs very affectionately--

Christopher Johnstone.