

Papers of the War Department: 1784 – 1800

Margaret Cochran Corbin and the Papers of the War Department

excerpts from Megan Brett article at <http://www.18thcenturycommon.org>

Within the records of the early United States War Department ... there are glimpses into the life of relatively ordinary Americans ... who served their country during the war for Independence. Although the official copies of these records were destroyed in a fire in November, 1800, a project to approximate the papers of the early War Department in digital form reconstructs that resource by bringing together digital copies of letter books, sender and receiver copies from archives in the United States, France, and Great Britain.

Included in the papers of the War Department is a letter book kept by William Price, Commissary of Military Stores at West Point from 1784 to 1787. In the early years of the 1780s, West Point was home to the Corps of Invalids, a regiment of permanently disabled Revolutionary War veterans that had been established in 1777. Although the Corps was disbanded in 1783, at least one of its members remained in the Hudson Valley and appears in Price's letter books: Margaret Cochran Corbin, also known as "Captain Molly."

... Because Congress guaranteed Corbin a lifelong pension, her welfare became the responsibility of Price, West Point's Commissary.

The Papers of the War Department is an online, open-source documentary edition of papers of the War Department in the last decades of the eighteenth century. <http://wardepartmentpapers.org>

War Department letters referencing "Captain Molly" sent by William Price to Henry Knox

William Price: Deputy Commissary of Military Stores and officer in charge at West Point, 1785-1786

Henry Knox: Major General; Commanding General of the Army, December 1783 – June 1784; Elected By Congress as Secretary at War, March 1785; Appointed Secretary of the War Department by Washington, September 1789 – December 1794

1. Report from West Point, May 17, 1786, William Price to Henry Knox. United States Military Academy: Letterbook No.1 West Point 1784-86,

West Point 17 May 17 1786

Sir

Mr. jefford has been to Goshen and [undecipherable}, and every red is another account of his Proceedings - he was gone five days upon the [undecipherable]

I have sent by Mr. Donneston an account of Mrs. Swims for taking care of Capt Molly --
The Honn 26/1 Major Gen Knox, Secretary at War-- I am [undecipherable) you

Original Image: <http://wardepartmentpapers.org/docimage.php?id=1507&docCollID=1624>

2. Garrison and Hudson in Want of Payment, Captain Molly Needs Shifts, April 21, 1787, William Price to Henry Knox, United States Military Academy: Letterbook No.2 West Point 1786-90

Summary: Captain Molly is in need of shifts, which Price wants to know if he should order.

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3. Enclosed Returns and Receipts, Order in Favor of James Morrow, Account of Captain Molly, June 4, 1788, William Price to Henry Knox, United States Military Academy: Letterbook No.2 West Point 1786-90

Summary: Includes an account for the maintenance of Captain Molly for 48 weeks, to be presented by Mrs. Randal who is currently taking care of her.

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4. Powder and Saltpeter Sold, Contracts Received, Shifts Needed, June 12, 1787, William Price to Henry Knox, United States Military Academy: Letterbook No.2 West Point 1786 – 90

Summary: Price hopes the shifts for Captain Molly are done and that Knows will send them because she is in need.

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5. Forwarding of Ordnance and Store Returns, August 13, 1787, William Price to Henry Knox, United States Military Academy: Letterbook No.2 West Point 1786 – 90

. . . Enclosed is Receipts for one hundred and Thirty pounds Six Shillings Equal to 325 72/96 Dollars, which I have paid to sundry persons as per Receipts -- One hundred & Fifteen pounds, 18/ of it, out of the money which I Received from you July 30, 1787. The other fourteen pounds 8/ is for taking Care of Capt. Molly twenty four weeks-- Twelve of which was from October 26th, 1785 to January 18th 1786 Inclusive -- The Other twelve is from July 6 to September 27 1786 Inclusive as the Receipts will show -- all the above Receipts as duplicates --

I have also enclosed a duplicate Receipt for what articles I delivered seven [undecipherable word], as you directed in your letter

I am sir [symbol for etc]

The Honorable

Major Genl Knox

Secretary at War

Original Image: <http://wardepartmentpapers.org/docimage.php?id=2578&docColID=2776>

6. Report from West Point, January 31, 1786, William Price to Henry Knox, United States Military Academy: Letterbook No.1 West Point 1784-86

...Enclosed is an account of Mrs Elizabeth Simms for taking care of Capt Molly twelve weeks, as the Bearer will return you and forward the money by him - I am at a loss what to do with Capt Molly. She is first an offensive person that people are unwilling to take her in charge, this woman informs me that she cannot keep her longer than the first of March, and I cannot any that is willing to keep her for that money and find her every thing to eat and drink - if you should think proper to extend one or two rations to her and will be better than money and may induce some person to keep her...

Original image: <http://wardepartmentpapers.org/docimage.php?id=1308&docCollID=1414>

7. Various Payments Due, Damage to Magazine by Wind, December 4, 1788, William Price to Henry Knox, United States Military Academy: Letterbook No.2 West Point, 1786-90

Summary: Mr. Garrison who delivered wood to West Point last winter and Mrs. Randal who is taking care of Captain Molly both request payment for their services.

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