
John Nice (1739-1806)

Family Papers, 1764-1864

1 box, 2 vols., 0.4 lin. feet

Collection 451

Abstract

John Nice (b.1739) was the third of four children born to Winnard and Mary Nice of Germantown, Pennsylvania. Nice joined the army as a young man, and by the age of twenty-one had achieved the rank of captain. He married Sarah Engle in 1772, and the couple had seven children. Nice continued to serve through the Revolutionary War, and died in Philadelphia in 1806.

Papers of John include records pertaining to Captain Nice's service in the Sixth and Thirteenth Pennsylvania Lines during the American Revolution, such as muster rolls, pay rolls, and orders. Also included are a few personal papers, as well as scattered correspondence, estate documents, and miscellaneous papers pertaining to the Nice, Engle, and Dugan families.

Background note

John Nice, the son of Winnard and Mary Nice, was born in Germantown in 1739. The Nice (or Neus) family had arrived in Pennsylvania during the time of William Penn. In 1772 John Nice married Sarah Engle (b. 1747), the daughter of Cornelius and Catherine, and they had seven children, five of whom outlived their father: James, Mary, Ann, Washington, and Levi.

At the age of eighteen John Nice received a commission in the colonial army, and at twenty-one was promoted to the rank of captain. In March 1776 he received a commission as captain the Pennsylvania Musketry Battalion, commanded by Samuel Atlee. At the Battle of Long Island, fought in August 1776, Captain Nice was taken prisoner. He was exchanged in December of that year. In 1777 Atlee's battalion combined with another unit to form the Thirteenth Pennsylvania Line of the Continental Army. The Thirteenth Pennsylvania was commanded by Col. Walter Stewart, and John Nice was again given a captain's commission. Nice served with the Thirteenth through the Battles of Germantown and Brandywine, and was then sent to the Sixth Pennsylvania Line in July 1778. Over the course of the next several years, the Sixth saw action in New York and New Jersey before being sent to Virginia for the Yorktown Campaign. The regiment was disbanded in 1783.

John Nice died in 1806 and was buried in Hoods Cemetery in Philadelphia.

Scope & content

This collection relates primarily to Captain John Nice's service in the Revolutionary War, including his service with the Thirteenth and Sixth Pennsylvania lines. These papers include orderly books, muster rolls, pay rolls, receipt books, and miscellaneous notes and journal entries pertaining to troop movements and battles. Also included in the collection are miscellaneous other papers pertaining to the Nice family and to the Engles, the family of Captain Nice's wife, Sarah. Among these materials are wills, estate inventories, correspondence, and miscellaneous family papers.

Nice's orderly book from the Thirteenth Pennsylvania Line includes transcribed orders from the regiment's colonel and officers, orders for marches and troop movements, orders pertaining to soldiers' conduct (including the prohibition of selling liquor in camp), and instructions on parading, marching, and presentation. All of these orders were given in 1777, and many of them were issued by Colonel Walter Stewart.

Other records concerning the war include muster and pay rolls from the Thirteenth and Sixth Pennsylvania Lines. There is not a complete set of these documents and they only partially document Nice's companies; they occur at odd intervals and a couple of them are for other companies within the regiment. In addition, a receipt book recorded pay received by the soldiers, and a "necessary roll" lists articles of clothing they received.

Two very small volumes chronicle aspects of the Battle of Long Island in 1776 and the 1778 campaign in which Capt. Nice was involved. The first volume includes a few short pages summarizing the events of the Battle of Long Island, with particular emphasis on prisoners taken. Following are a few short pages providing a synopsis of the 1778 Campaign. The next volume, slightly larger, includes more detailed diary entries of Nice's activities during June of the 1778 campaign (published in PMHB), and is followed by a listing of prisoners taken at the Battle of Long Island in August 1776.

Among the miscellaneous family papers are some scattered correspondence of the Nice and Engle families, including an 1805 letter to John Nice from his brother-in-law Samuel Engle, a letter from Levi Nice (son of John) to his mother, a letter from Levi to his sister Ann, and a letter to Levi Nice concerning his father's military service. Sarah (Engle) Nice's brother Levi is represented by two letters, one to an unnamed uncle regarding his career path, and another to his mother and his uncle Paul.

Levi Nice's receipt book, 1818-1864, is only one-third full and consists largely of rent payments. Many entries do not list the goods or services for which Nice was paying, although a few are for lumber and one entry is for "laying brick and stone." The names Kessler, Cowperthwait(e), and Whitehead appear frequently.

Other family papers involve the estates of Cornelius and Catherine Engle, parents of Sarah (Engle) Nice, as well as her brother Levi, for whom John Nice served as executor. There is also an obituary for John Nice, as well as an inventory of his belongings

(totaling \$524) at the time of his death in 1806. There are also lists of children born to Cornelius and Catherine Engle, and Winnard (spelling varies) and Mary Nice.

Truly miscellaneous papers including some receipts pertaining to the Dugan family, as well as some poetry written by Amanda Dugan in 1813. One of these poems, "Spoken by a Miss of 12 Years Old at the Ladies Exhibition," describes a young woman falling in love who aims to "keep my husband in subjection."

Separation report

None.

Bibliography

Cooper, Henrietta. "Extracts from the Diary of Captain John Nice, of the Pennsylvania Line." *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 16 (1892), pp. 399-410.

Early American Wars. "The Revolutionary War, American Units, Thirteenth Pennsylvania Regiment" <http://www.uswars.net/1775-1783/states/pa/pa-13.htm> (accessed 18 January 2005)

Early American Wars. "The Revolutionary War, American Units, Sixth Pennsylvania Regiment." <http://www.uswars.net/1775-1783/states/pa/pa-06.htm> (accessed 18 January 2005)

Sons of the American Revolution, Pennsylvania Society, Philadelphia - Continental Chapter, Revolutionary War Soldier Graves, http://www.sar.org/passar/graves/n_s.html (accessed 14 January 2005)

Subjects

Long Island, Battle of, New York, N.Y., 1776

United States – History – Revolution, 1775-1783 – Equipment and supplies

United States – History – Revolution, 1775-1783 – Personal narratives

United States -- History Revolution, 1775-1783 -- Prisoners and prisons

Engle, Catherine, d. 1800

Engle, Cornelius

Engle, Levi, d. 1804

Nice, John, d. 1806

Nice, Levi

Nice, Sarah, b. 1747

United States. Continental Army. Pennsylvania Regiment, Sixth.

United States. Continental Army. Pennsylvania Regiment, Thirteenth.

Administrative Information

Restrictions

The collection is open for research.

Acquisition information

Gift of Mary Adelaide Jacoby and Anne C. Cooper, 1915.
John Nice's orderly book (vol. 1), gift of Mrs. Anne N. James, 1905.

Alternative format

John Nice's June 1778 diary was published in *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 16 (1892), pp. 359-362, 399-410. His diary of the Battle of Long Island (not included in this collection) is also published there.

Preferred citation

Cite as: [Indicate cited item here], John Nice Family Papers (Collection 451), The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Processing note

Processing made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this finding aid do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

John Nice's orderly book formerly had the call number Am .6171.

Box and folder listing

Folder title	Date	Box	Folder
Summary of the Battle of Long Island, Memorandum of the 1778 campaign	1776, 1778	1	1
Diary of 1778 campaign, begun at Valley Forge	1778	1	2
List of officers taken prisoner at the Battle of Long Island	1776	1	2
Orderly book	1777	vol. 1	
Muster rolls and necessary roll, Thirteenth Pennsylvania	1777-1778	1	3
Pay rolls, Thirteenth Pennsylvania	1777-1778, n.d.	1	4
Receipt book for pay, Thirteenth Pennsylvania	1778	1	5
Muster rolls and pay rolls, Sixth Pennsylvania	1778-1779	1	6
Military drill and maneuver instructions	1778	1	7
Miscellaneous military papers	1764-1781, n.d.	1	8
John Nice's estate inventory, obituary	1806	1	9
Nice family papers	1805-1836, n.d.	1	10
Levi Nice receipt book	1818-1864	vol. 2	
Engle family papers	1780-1800, n.d.	1	11
Miscellaneous	1803-1826, n.d.	1	12