



A miniature (c.1789) of the General by Irish-American artist John Ramage (c. 1748-1802); who interestingly fought as a loyalist during the war, serving at one time in Rawdon's Volunteers of Ireland (Regt.)

WAR AND WASHINGTON

While “Yankee Doodle” is the tune most usually associated with the Revolutionary War, there is little record of its being actually much sung at *that* time -- certainly not in the army. Much more commonly heard in the American camps, taverns, homes, and on the march was Jonathan Mitchell Sewall’s (1748-1808) “War and Washington.”¹ The song, sung to the tune “The British Grenadiers,” appeared at least as early as 1778 in Sewall’s “Epilogue to Cato;” which latter was read at the Valley Forge encampment following a performance there, acted by army officers and staff, of Joseph Addison’s acclaimed and heroic tragedy of 1712.

It was and has been some point of amusement that the Rebels entertained the seemingly extravagant notion of taking and annexing Canada. Yet, as Seawell’s popular song here shows, there were even such, and of such fervor, who did and would talk of conquering Britain itself, perhaps even all of Europe! Proud boast indeed. And whether “Washington” himself would have approved is open to question. But we can at least applaud the pluck and gumption of it; and which serves as a reminder of the merit and benefit sometimes to be had in elevating one’s sights and aspirations beyond conventional reckoning.

¹ See *The Private Soldier Under Washington* (1902) by Charles Knowles Bolton p. 240, and *The Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army & American Character, 1775-1783* (1979) by Charles Royster p. 248. See also *A Narrative of Joshua Davis* (1811) by Joshua Davis, pp. 30-32. Respecting Seawell: “Jonathan Mitchell Sewall (1748-1808), a lawyer-poet of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, who versified *Washington’s Farewell Address* and paraphrased parts of the Bible and of Ossian, contributed to [Joseph Dennie’s] the *Port Folio* in 1801 a few short versions of Ossian. His *Eulogy on Washington and Poems* were published in 1801.” *Joseph Dennie and his Circle* by Milton Ellis, Bulletin of the University of Texas, July 1915, no. 40, p. 166.

Vain Britons, boast no longer with proud indignity,
By land your conquering legions, your matchless strength at sea,
Since we, your braver sons incensed, our swords have girded on.
Huzza, huzza, huzza, huzza, for war and Washington.

Urged on by North and vengeance those valiant champions came,
Loud bellowing Tea and Treason, and George was all on flame,
Yet sacrilegious as it seems, we rebels still live on,
And laugh at all their empty puffs, huzza for Washington!
Still deaf to mild entreaties, still blind to England's good,
You have for thirty pieces betrayed your country's blood.
Like [A]Esop's greedy cur you'll gain a shadow for your bone.
Yet find us fearful shades indeed inspired by Washington.

Mysterious! unexampled! incomprehensible!
The blundering schemes of Britain their folly, pride, and zeal.
Like lions how ye growl and threat! mere asses have you shown,
And ye shall share an ass's fate, and drudge for Washington!

Your dark unfathomed councils our weakest heads defeat,
Our children rout your armies, our boats destroy your fleet,
And to complete the dire disgrace, cooped up within a town [Boston.]
You live the scorn of all our host, the slaves of Washington!

Great Heaven! is this the nation whose thundering arms were hurled.
Through Europe, Afric, India? whose navy ruled a world?
The lustre of your former deeds, whole ages of renown.
Lost in a moment, or transferred to us and Washington!

Yet think not thirst of glory unsheaths our vengeful swords,
To rend your bands asunder, or cast away your cords,
'T is heaven-born freedom fires us all, and strengthens each brave son.
From him who humbly guides the plough, to god-like Washington.

For this, oh could our wishes your ancient rage inspire.
Your armies should be doubled, in numbers, force, and fire.
Then might the glorious conflict prove which best deserved the boon,
America or Albion, a George or Washington!

Fired with the great idea, our Fathers' shades would rise,
To view the stern contention, the gods desert their skies;
And Wolfe, 'midst hosts of heroes, superior bending down,
Cry out with eager transport, God save great Washington!

Should George, too choice of Britons, to foreign realms apply,
And madly arm half Europe, yet still we would defy

Turk, Hessian, Jew, and Infidel, or all those powers in one,
While Adams guards our senate, our camp great Washington!

Should warlike weapons fail us, disdainful slavish fears,
To swords we'll beat our ploughshares, our pruning-hooks to spears,
And rush, all desperate, on our foe, nor breathe till battle won.
Then shout, and shout America! and conquering Washington!

Proud France should view with terror, and haughty Spain revere.
While every warlike nation would court alliance here;
And George, his minions trembling round, dismounting from his throne
Pay homage to America and glorious Washington!

William Thomas Sherman, www.gunjones.com
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