

# COLONEL HENRY CHAMPION

FEEDING STARVING TROOPS AT VALLEY FORGE

**C**olonel Henry Champion, born in East Haddam in 1723, was the grandson of Henry Champion, an original settler of Saybrook. He entered service in the colonial militia in 1741, and reached the rank of Lieutenant by 1750. Colonel Champion led forces in the French and Indian War, and earned the respect of important colonial militia leaders.

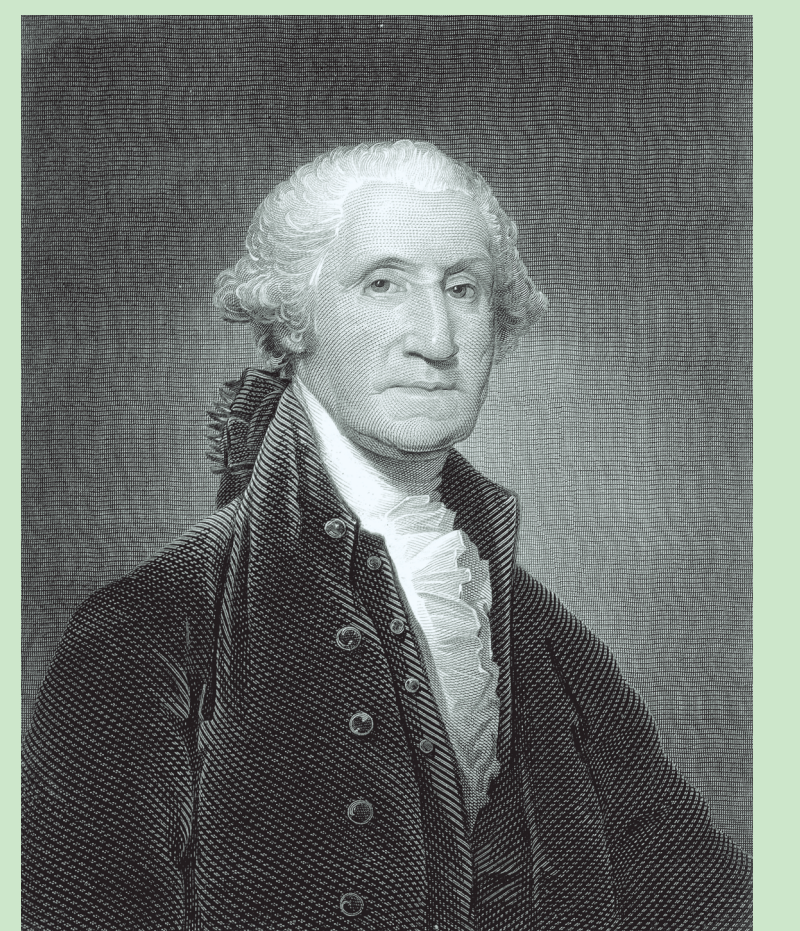


In 1775, Champion was selected to be a Commissary for the war effort by the Connecticut General Assembly. His duties were to procure goods and supply the Continental Army with provisions. Colonel Champion worked closely with the top colonial leaders, including General George Washington and Connecticut Governor Jonathan Trumbull. Family tradition contends that Deborah Champion, daughter of Henry, delivered dispatches from New London via horseback to General Washington in Boston. Because she was a woman, she was able to pass through British lines safely.

During the winter of 1777-1778, Champion was summoned by General George Washington to command a wagon train needed to feed starving troops at Valley Forge. A herd of beef cattle, purchased at great expense, was driven over 300 miles under the personal direction of Colonel Henry



Champion and his son, Epaphroditus. The beef was eaten by the starving troops in only five days. The Town of Colchester often served as a depot for assembling supplies to be delivered to troops. In March of 1777, teamsters and a load of supplies left Roger Bulkeley's house and were driven across the frozen Connecticut River to the army stationed in



Danbury. In 1778, Colonel Henry Champion was appointed sole Commissary General for the Eastern Department of the Continental Army.

Colonel Champion's prominent sons, Epaphroditus and Henry, also served in the Revolutionary War. Epaphroditus worked with his father in the Commissary of the Army and eventually reached the rank of Commissary General. Henry became an outstanding military leader and reached the rank of General.

In 1789, Colonel Henry Champion married a Colchester girl, Deborah Brainard. It is believed that the home he built in the Westchester section of Colchester, by well known house joiner, William Spratt in 1790, was for he and his bride. Colonel Henry Champion died July 23, 1797 after a long and influential life. The handsome gambrel house that he had built was lived in by his son General Henry Champion until he died in 1836. General Henry Champion's grave is marked by a classical white marble obelisk in the Westchester Cemetery on Cemetery Road in Colchester.