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*Family Perspectives on the American Revolution:  
The Blackden-Stoddard Letters (June 3, 1773, to October 29, 1778)*

*Shelfmark*

California State University, Fullerton (CSUF).

University Archives and Special Collections.

SC 64.

War Memorabilia Collection.

Durkee/Blackden Correspondence.

June 3, 1773, to October 29, 1778.

Six letters (numbered 7 to 12 below).

*Introduction*

The six letters edited here are part of the “Durkee/Blackden Correspondence” of the “War Memorabilia Collection” that is held in CSUF’s University Archives and Special Collections. They were donated to CSUF in 1973. The letters’ dimensions are approximately 8 by 10 inches. They are written in cursive, in black ink, and on stationary paper that has aged from light tan to light brown. Most are in fair, but fragile condition; some have crease marks, frayed margins, or holes; and some of them show traces of the red wax seals with which they were once sealed.

The letters originate from various places along the Eastern Seaboard of Great Britain’s North American colonies (between Pennsylvania and Connecticut), and they were written just prior and during the Revolutionary War, namely between June 3, 1773 (letter 7), and October 29, 1778 (letter 12). They are authored by Josiah Stoddard (letter 7) and Samuel Blackden (letters 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12), and they are addressed to Sally Blackden who was Josiah Stoddard’s sister and Samuel Blackden’s wife. The letters mention home life, farm life, and family matters, as well as illness (letter 7), travel (letters 7 and 12), servants/slaves (letter 12), prices for various goods and services (letters 8 and 11), General George Washington (letter 10), Count Casimir Pulaski (letter 11), troop movements (letters 8, 10, 10, and 11), and several other military matters (such as opportunities for promotion and payroll). These letters are historically significant because they provide a bottom-up look at life during the American Revolution. The letters indicate that Samuel Blackden was tired of being away from home and wanted nothing more than to return to his wife Sally (letter 11).

The transcriptions below preserve the lines, spelling, and capitalization of the original letters. Any additions are enclosed by square brackets. Loss and illegible deletions are indicated by three dots enclosed by square brackets.

*Edition: Letter 7, Josiah Stoddard to Sally Blackden,  
June 3, 1773, Salisbury, Connecticut*

Front:

Salisbury<sup>1</sup> June 3rd. 1773

Dear Sister

I am at length permitted to revisit my own Country  
I think I was never more sincerely gratified tho[ugh]  
I heard some time ago that you was gone to New Haven<sup>2</sup>  
- was really disappointed in not seeing you at home -  
- am sure you have not chang[e]d situations for the  
worse. I suppose now I might often find you  
adjusting a Curtain or Side Board than prepar-  
ing to make a Visit. I need not recommend to You  
not to keep yourself too much confin[e]d for women  
will find an excuse to call upon Miss such a one. -  
I have seen many new & strange things in  
my Travels which wou[l]d swell a Letter beyond reas-  
onable Bounds - never was so healthy in my Life  
as since my going on the Lake.

I expect to come to New Haven for Polly in about  
a month - am much griev[e]d at her illness - we are  
all anxious to know how fast she mends. I beg  
You wou[l]d divert her thoughts from home if it is  
serviceable for her to stay. James Gro.r [?]<sup>3</sup> is perfectly  
well & cares much less about his Mamma than  
any of his acquaintances nigher hand -  
Pray don[']t fail writing to me immediately & let  
me know all the news You can. You must call  
it weakness if You please; but I am very impatient  
till I see Miss.... You can at least let me know  
where she is - shou[l]d have wrote for this Opportunity  
but thought the conveyance too uncertain - I am in  
a Dilemma till I hear from You. which way I shall  
go, whither to come directly to N[ew] Haven or go another  
way, be it either way shall be very happy to see you once  
more - from Your affect[ionat]e Brother  
Josiah Stoddard

Front left side:

Sister Eldrigdes Youngest child has  
had a short turn of the pleurisy<sup>4</sup>  
but is since well  
Compliments to all friends, but above  
all my sincerest good wishes to my worthy

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<sup>1</sup> Presumably Salisbury, Connecticut.

<sup>2</sup> New Haven, Connecticut.

<sup>3</sup> Possibly Gro[sveno]r.

<sup>4</sup> A lung/chest condition.

Sister Polly. tell her I hope shortly to see  
her in the Bloom of fifteen

Back: [modern hand] 12 - From Salisbury - June 3 1773 - From - Josiah Stoddard

Salisbury  
To  
Mrs Blackden  
New Haven

*Edition: Letter 8, Samuel Blackden to Sally Blackden,  
November 27, 1776, Sawpit (Connecticut/New York)*

Front: [top line(s) of page are missing]

by the most authentic Account between 15 and 16 Hundred  
men which is a Pretty Good Price for What They Got  
There is not any kind of Goods to be had here  
but on my way home I will try to get you silk for a Cloak  
tho[ugh] I do not think it is to be had anywhere but at Grove  
Bonds store at Wapuns<sup>5</sup> Creek below Poughkepsie<sup>6</sup> [sic] -  
I gave you a bit of Ribbon which I lit [?] of and tho[ugh]t  
Pretty for you and therefore you got it -  
About next tomorrow week, [?] I expect  
[...] - it for Home (at least for a season) - I have [...]  
As Man out to Catch a few Oysters for you Much I shall  
send by Hale - Wait Patiently my Chances for  
fulfilling of the Promises and they shall not trail [?]  
on the trail [...] but always sincerely [sic]  
affectionate - Sam Blackden

Back: [traces of red wax seal] [modern hand] 9 - From - Sawpity - Nov. 27 1776 - from  
S. Blackden

Mrs Blackden  
Hazelbrooke  
Salisbury

*Edition: Letter 9, Samuel Blackden to Sally Blackden,  
November 27, 1776, Sawpit (Connecticut/New York)*

Front:

Sawpity<sup>7</sup> Novem[be]r 27. 1776 -  
My Dear Sally -  
Your very acceptable letter of the 24th  
Came to hand today and is the first and only one  
I have had from home since I left you, Except one  
of the 17th from [?] Luther<sup>8</sup> which I got last Night.  
You dear little slut how you Volly [?] me for

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<sup>5</sup> Possibly Wappinger(s) Creek, New York.

<sup>6</sup> Poughkeepsie, New York.

<sup>7</sup> Sawpit, at the time disputed between Connecticut and New York.

<sup>8</sup> Sally's brother.

my fondness do you think I am asham[e]d of it  
 no indeed you are mistaken; tis true I wou[l]d  
 Give anything to have you always near me  
 but when I cannot the Reflection of Past  
 moments is some Consolation -  
 I observe what you say with Respect  
 To King - I beg and intreat [sic] you to make  
 yourself perfectly easy on that Account, I have  
 determin[e]d Rather to Give up everything, than you  
 shou[l]d be uneasy, indeed you know my absince [sic] is  
 merely Accidental or I shou[l]d have finish[e]d the  
 matter before - you desire me to Consult my

Back:

my [sic] own Happiness and interest, but Why mine, Sure I have not  
 a pleasure nor a wish but what Centers in the Happiness of my  
 dear Sally, and if any Spark of ambition is in me Surely tis it is  
 to make myself worthy of her Who I Esteem the Worthiest  
 of her sex - I am Surprized [sic] you have not kill[e]d What Beef  
 you want for Present Use, and Desire you will get Mr.  
 Grenold, Smith or somebody Else - to Kill the Fattest Cow  
 there is on the Farm, and Put her Up against I Come to  
 See you - You mention your fur Coat - Tho[ugh] I shou[l]d  
 be as Proud as anybody to see my little Charmer in it, yet  
 it is yours, and if you have a mind to try your fortune  
 (and at Present it is not in My Power to Give you a share  
 any other way) you have my free consent and I Hope  
 your Success will be equal To your merit and Plan you  
 in a Chariot and four - With Respect to Fort Washington<sup>9</sup>  
 the Enemy had not heard of our arrival or they wou[l]d  
 not have attack[e]d it, Or Had they known Our Formidable  
 Brigade of Militia been there the Rogues [?]wou[l]d have had  
 bloody Noses - However Thanks To Heaven they last [...]

*Edition: Letter 10, Samuel Blackden to Sally Blackden,  
 September 9, 1777, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

Front:

Philadelphia Septem[be]r. 9th. 1777 -  
 My Dear Sally -  
 I arrived here last night from Peekskill.<sup>10</sup> I  
 understand that our Noble General Washington within one Mile  
 of the Tyrants Army, possessed of a situation on every Account  
 Favorable and advantageous, shou[l]d they move forward they  
 must incounter [sic] all the Afflictions his superior [...] Enables.  
 to throw in their way, shou[l]d they go back I trust their Retreat  
 is both a great measure obstructed if not Cut off - The Enemy  
 are said to be from 10. to 17. thousand, but in general it is

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<sup>9</sup> Fort Washington (Manhattan), New York, captured by the British on November 16, 1776.

<sup>10</sup> Peekskill, New York.

believed they are about twelve thousand strong - General  
 Washington has men Enough and to spare, and in all Hum[an] [?]  
 Probability such a Compleat [sic] stroke will be struck in a few days, a[nd] [?]  
 [w]ill put an End to the Ravages of the most brutal miscrean[ts]  
 that ever disgraced the Name of Soldiers, Indeed while I am  
 Writing this I am Affraid [sic] I am Loosing [sic] that share in th[e]  
 glorious contest Which every sincere friend to the Libertys of  
 mankind wou[ld] wish to have, however tis duty that detain[s]  
 me or I shou[ld] not have time to write this - I set out the  
 moment the baggage Arrives and do not expect to have t[he]  
 heartfelt Satisfaction of Writing to the D[ea]r Girl of my Choice  
 until the Affair is over; therefore my D[ea]r Girl Accept of  
 every Good Wish for your health and happiness and be As[sure]d  
 that our Country shall not be disappointed in the Conduct  
 of your - S[am]. B[lackden].

Back: [traces of red wax seal] [modern hand] From Philadelphia - Sept 9 1777 - From  
 S. B. [printed] SEPT 9.

Paid 4.16  
 Mrs. Sally Blackden  
 at Salisburg  
 To the Care of Capt[ain] W. Tuly  
 Hartford  
 Connecticut  
 Post paid -

*Edition: Letter 11, Samuel Blackden to Sally Blackden,  
 November 22, 1777, Camp White Marsh, Pennsylvania*

Front left: [traces of red wax seal] [several lines of quill attempts, spelling "Samuel,"  
 "Sam," "Blacked," "the," etc.] [modern hand] From Camp White Marsh - 15 miles  
 from Philadelphia - Nov. 22 1777. - (From Sam' Blackden)

Philadelphus  
 Novemb[er] 21 from Philadelphia  
 Mrs. Sally Blackden  
 Salisbury

Front right:

Camp White Marsh<sup>11</sup> 15 Miles from Philadelphia  
 November 22. 1777 -  
 My Dear Sally -  
 your agreeable [sic] letter of 5th of October came to  
 hand, and shou[ld] have been answer[e]d before this, but I have been wait[ing].  
 for the determination of a Matter, Which I wish[e]d to inform you of;  
 tho[ugh] indeed no good opportunity has offer[e]d before the Present  
 General Count Polaski<sup>12</sup> (a Polish Nobleman) who  
 commands all the Light Horse,<sup>13</sup> proposed to me to accept of the

<sup>11</sup> Whitmarsh Township, Pennsylvania.

<sup>12</sup> Count Casimir Pulaski (1745-1779).

<sup>13</sup> Light cavalry.

Appointment of Quarter Master General; which was very Agreeable [sic] to my inclinations; and I had determin'd [sic] to Accept of it, but Upon Making the Proper Enquiry into the Ranks &. &. <sup>14</sup> [?] I found it cou[l]d not be Accepted, without sacrefising [sic] a better prospect, wherefore I declin[e]d it - I congratulate you my Charming Girl on the success of the American arms to the Northward, and Wish to God I cou[l]d Relate something equally agreeable [sic] to you from this Quarter, but I am ever Unfortunate in that particular - Our Fort on the Island in the River which commands the Navigation, was a few days ago[n]e[sic] Evacuated; after all my brave Resistance for several weeks, since which we are at a loss to Conjecture What our Movements will be, for they seem intirely[sic] to depend Upon those of the Enemy, This morning three Brigades of Troops from The Northward Arrived in Camp, Which is a Considerable Reinforce[men]t to our Army, Which Receives no Assistance, from the inhabitants of the Country; Who are 99 to out of every hundred, Forces - they have in this state 70 thousand militia and We never more than 8 or 9 Hundred to Join the Army; Indeed had Mr. Howe Ventur'[e]d as much in New England as he has here, I believe he wou[l]d have finish[e]d his business before now, however thank God they are Rich and as they won[']t Fight, they must be made to pay those that do In a few days We intend to send a man Home When I shall write you fully Concerning business, in the mean time I

Back left:

wish you cou[l]d find some Careful[sic] Steady man, Who Wou[l]d hire for the Winter, I want all the Horses that will do for sale, to be stabled and put in the best Order, and as Jacob Cannot alone take the proper Care, I wou[l]d have you get Help at any Rate - they are now Worth a Great Sum of Money, and Will in the Spring be Worth much more, I intend then to sell all I can Spare - Our pay Rolls are not made out So that I have not drew any Money but by the man Whom we Shall Send, you will Recive [sic] Money To finish with old Owen, and buy soon After with Every own to whom a Shilling is due - There is not a single Article in the Goods way in all this Country, not a skim of thread or yard of tape my Hair has been tied in a Strip of Eel Skin this two months Therefore for Gowns and Bonnets D[ea]r you must get them else where if possible, nor do I know a Single Article I can bring my Sweet Girl from hence unless a Receipt to make buckwheat Cakes may be Call'd so - they are a banditti of Rascals and Extortioners, I have paid three Shillings Currency for Washing a shirt - Rum is 16 dollars a Gallon brown sugar 2 dollars a pound butter 1 dollar a pound and Everything Else in proportion, yet we think nothing of all these things while we can Anyway contribute to the Establishment of Freedom, and the Protection of all that is Dear to us; with pleasure I look forward to those happy days when these Troubles are over, and I shall sit with thee the pride of my heart in my lap

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<sup>14</sup> Two ampersands: et cetera, et cetera.

and Recount the Many Adventures that Occur in the life of A  
 Soldier, When Whatever out possessions may be we shall be secure  
 in the enjoyment of them - That Heaven may bless my Charmer with  
 perfect health and Every Enjoyment is the Constant wish of her Ever  
 Affectionate  
 Sam Blackden

Back right: [hole in paper; no writing]

Edition: Letter 12, Samuel Blackden to Sally Blackden,  
 October 29, 1778, Salem (Connecticut?)

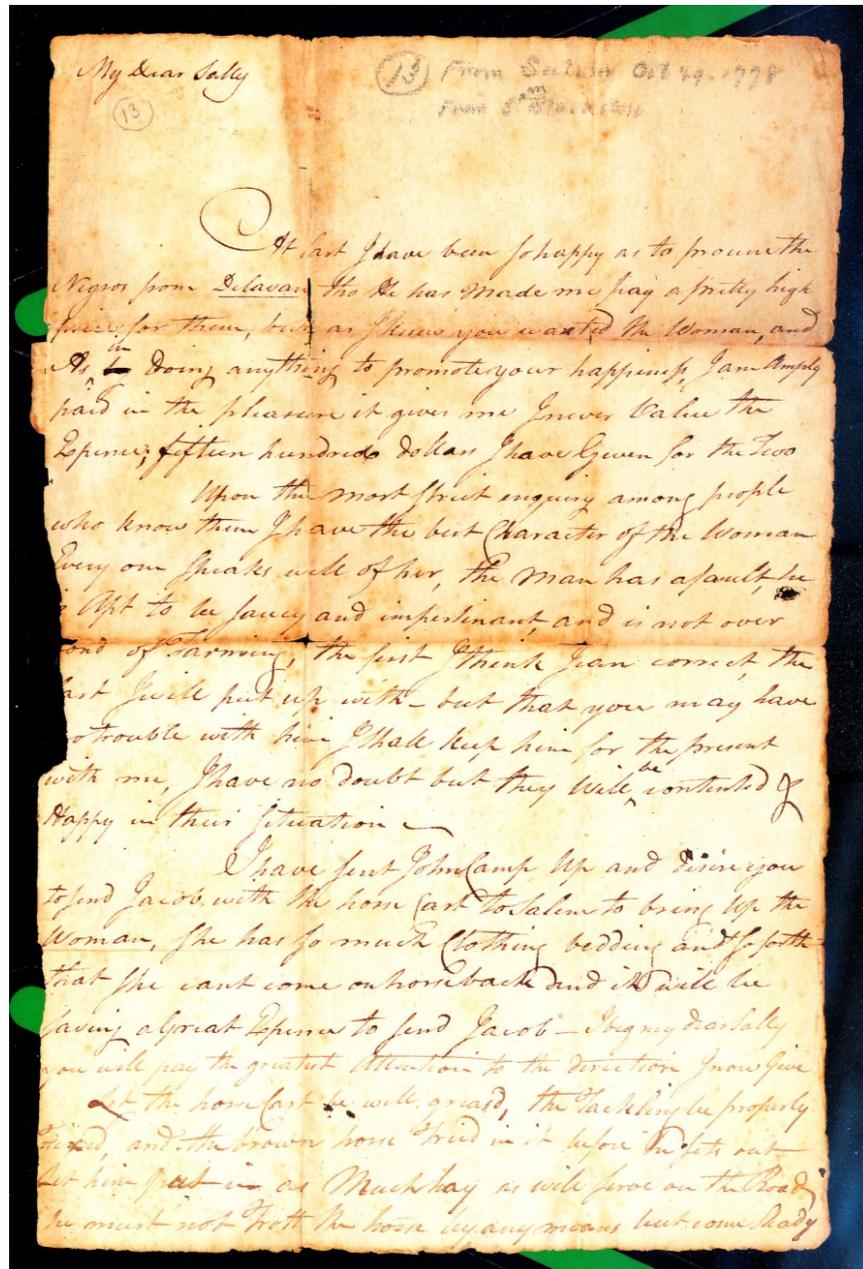


Figure (above): Letter 12, Samuel Blackden to Sally Blackden, October 29, 1778, Salem (Connecticut?),  
 Front.

Front: [modern hand] 13 - From Salem Oct 29. 1778 - From Sam Blackden

My Dear Sally

At last I have been so happy as to procure the  
Negros from Delavan<sup>15</sup> tho[ugh] He has Made me pay a pretty high  
price for them, but as I knew you wanted the Woman, and  
As by in Doing anything to promote your happiness, I am Amply  
paid in the pleasure it gives me I never Value the  
Expense; fifteen hundred dollars I have Given for the Two  
Upon the most strict inquiry among people  
who know them I have the best Character of the Woman  
Every one speaks well of her, the man has a fault, he  
[is] Apt to be saucy and impertinant [sic], and is not over  
[f]ond of Farming, the first I think I can correct, the  
[l]ast I will put up with - but that you may have  
[n]o trouble with him I shall keep him for the present  
with me, I have no doubt but they will be contented &  
Happy in their situation -  
I have sent to John Camp Up and desire you  
to send Jacob with the horse Cart to Salem<sup>16</sup> to bring Up the  
Woman, she has to much Clothing bedding and so forth  
that she can[']t come on horseback and it will be  
saving a Great Expense to send Jacob - I beg my dear Sally  
you will pay the greatest Attention to the direction I now Give  
Let the horse Cart be well greas[e]d, the Tackling be properly  
Fixed, and the brown horse Tried in it before he sets out  
Let him put in as Much hay as will serve on the Road  
he must not Trott the horse by any means but come steady

Back:

and Slowly On - I shall Meet him at Salem and his  
Honor is concern[e]d in the Good looks of the horse, - I wou[l]d  
have him set out Early next Tuesday morning but not travel  
harder than to be at Salem thursday afternoon, Twenty five  
Miles a day will do, the Reason of my being thus particular  
is that I suppose Jacob not much acquainted with Journeys &  
I want the Brown horse to be kept in Good Order for  
Work in the winter - Your own Good Sense and Judgement,  
my Lovely partner will dictate to you so keep a strict Eye and  
a Very steady hand with this Woman until you become  
perfectly acquainted [sic] with her - indeed my Love I need Say no mor[e]  
than to beg you to be attentive and you will Soon discover  
her Merit and her faults - I flatter myself continual[ly]  
with the hopes of being soon with you but at all Even[ts?]  
am Determin[e]d to be at home next winter in Consequ[ence?]  
you will have some attention paid to the favorite horses -  
I am My Charmer Just mounting My horse for  
a small Ride on duty and will conclude my letter when I  
stop. Adieu Heavens bless you -

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<sup>15</sup> Presumably a last name.

<sup>16</sup> Presumably Salem, Connecticut.

Salem Octob[er]. 29. 1778 -

My Charmer, I have come here and finish[e]d the Matter  
about the Negros Frank will stay with me and Jenny  
will Remain here untill Jacob arrives - By all means  
get Wilcox to Collect the sheep If he Rides a week let it be  
done - beg Luther to procure two Barrills [sic] of Pork for you  
and I will make him Amends - Yours in haste my D[ea]r Sally  
Sam Blackden

*ABOUT THE EDITOR: Stephanie Reilly of Hesperia, California, completed her B.A. in History at California State University, San Bernardino (2015). She is currently pursuing an M.A. in History at California State University, Fullerton, working on a comprehensive examination that analyzes ancient Greek military formation and tactics.*

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