

Chapter One

The First Generation: Lewis Fisher (1745-1816) and Mary Barbara Till (1749-1841)

I. New Jersey Tory

Lewis Fisher was born about 1740 or 1745, probably in Bergen County, New Jersey, the son of Michael and Maria Fisher, of German or possibly Dutch ancestry. He married **Mary Barbara Till** in 1772. She was born in 1749 and was the daughter of George Till. Lewis Fisher (his name was anglicized from Ludwig or Lodewick Fisher about the time of the American Revolution) died 13 April 1816 at Fredericton, New Brunswick, and was buried in the Old Burying Ground there. Mary Barbara (Till) Fisher died 15 February 1841 and was buried beside her husband.¹

Lewis Fisher's father Michael Fisher was a farmer in Franklin township, Bergen County, New Jersey. He was born in 1722 and died 20 March 1802. He was buried in Ramapo Lutheran Church Cemetery with his wife who died 24 September 1812, aged 89. His will, dated 6 January 1802, mentioned his wife Mary and seven sons and one daughter: Lodwick, David, Peter, Conrad, Michael M., Harmanes, Rynhart, and Anna (the wife of David Bayard). In addition to the farm, his estate consisted of "horses, horned cattle, sheep and live stock; bed, cupboard, wagon, weaving loom and other utensils".² A bicentennial map produced by the Mahwah Historical Society shows

¹ Untitled Fisher Manuscript, Provincial Archives of New Brunswick (PANB), MC 1, Fisher family history file; and Isabel Louise Hill, *The Old Burying Ground, Fredericton, New Brunswick*, (Fredericton: Fredericton Heritage Trust, 1981), II, p.34. The Fisher manuscript states that Lewis Fisher was aged 76 in 1816 when he died. The grave stone, however, shows his year of birth as 1745 but it was erected in the 1920s by a descendant, Lady Annie Connell (Fisher) Parkin. Georgianna Fisher (1822-1897) wrote the Fisher manuscript in the 1880s or 1890s based on recollections of conversations with her grandmother, Mary Barbara Fisher. A complete transcription of it with my annotations is available in Appendix I. William Fisher, a cousin of Georgianna, revised and expanded it in the 1890s and his version is cited separately when quoted.

² Will of Michael Fisher, *New Jersey Colonial Documents*, Calendar of Wills, 1801-1805, pp.161-62; and Ramapo Lutheran Church Cemetery, Mahwah, New Jersey. The untitled Fisher manuscript provides the name of another son of Michael Fisher named "Marinus" or "Monaris" who

Michael Fisher's land in the Masonicus area of Franklin township (now the town of Mahwah) on the present Airmont Avenue south of its intersection with Hilltop Road. Road returns provide evidence that Michael Fisher was in this location from at least 1769.³ The Ramapo district was on the border of New Jersey and New York, where the lush farmlands of the Hackensack and Passaic River valleys gave way to the mountainous highlands of northern New Jersey and southern New York. Though the Dutch from New Amsterdam had settled most of Bergen County in the 1600s, German Lutherans from the Palatine had settled the Ramapo tract in the years after 1713. As such, Ramapo stood out as a German enclave in Bergen County where as late as 1800 most of the inhabitants still spoke Dutch in the home.⁴

Little is known about the parents of Mary Barbara Till. The Fisher manuscript, for which she was the primary source, states that her or her father George Till, it is not clear which, was born in Germany. The *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* entry for her son Peter, however, suggests that "she was probably of English parentage" although it is not clear on what basis. It seems possible that Till was an anglicized version of a German surname like Thiel, Thile or Diehl.⁵ According to Peter Fisher's obituary in 1848 both his father and his "grand father served with [the] Royalist Army" but it is uncertain whether the grandfather referred to is Michael Fisher or George Till.⁶

We do not know what Lewis Fisher did for a living in New Jersey. The will makes it clear that his father was a farmer. Lewis did not make a claim for lost property to the British Government after the American Revolution. Nor is there a record of the State of New Jersey confiscating land owned in his name. From this lack of evidence, we

probably had died without heirs before the will was written in 1802.

³ Mahwah Historical Society, Map of Mahwah, 1709-1876, compiled by C. K. Tholl, 1975.

⁴ Ruth M. Keeseey, *Loyalty and Reprisal: The Loyalists of Bergen County, New Jersey and Their Estates*, PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 1957. pp.8-10.

⁵ Untitled Fisher Manuscript, PANB, MC 1, Fisher family history file; and "Peter Fisher", *Dictionary of Canadian Biography, 1835-1850* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), pp.288-291.

⁶ Daniel Johnson, ed., *Vital Statistics from New Brunswick Newspapers*, vol. 12 (No. 551).

may assume that he had little property in his own name.⁷ It seems likely that as the eldest son he may have farmed some of his father's land in Masonicus on the assumption that it would pass to him some day. It is also possible the he lived and worked in nearby Paramus which revolutionary war documents give as his place of residence. Mary Fisher later recalled of their first year in New Brunswick that "it was a hard winter to those that had left good homes". Whatever their status, from her lament it seems they lived in relative comfort in New Jersey.⁸

The American Revolution or War of Independence was the decisive event in the history of North America. The schism between Great Britain and its American colonies ultimately defined the political map of the continent, creating the countries of the United States and Canada. It was also the first civil war, pitting loyal Americans against patriotic Americans but whereas the later Civil War pitted north against south, this revolt much more literally pitted neighbour against neighbour, and brother against brother. Its root causes were a long series of ill-considered moves by the British Government between 1763 and 1774, largely involving the taxation of the American colonies to support the British military establishment. In spite of these measures, many American colonists remained loyal to the British Crown or believed that their differences still could be resolved through negotiation. By 1774, a vocal and growing minority of Americans demanded political or military action to throw off the yoke of British taxation and assert the freedom and independence of the colonies. This sentiment was strongest in the colonies of Massachusetts and Virginia—the oldest and most "American" of the colonies. Loyalty to the Crown was strongest in the middle colonies of New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania which had large German and Dutch populations. But no hard and fast rules said who would remain loyal and who would take up arms against the

⁷ American Loyalist Claims Commission, Index, British Treasury Fonds, National Archives of Canada (NAC), MG 15, T 79, reel B-4556; and Ruth M. Keeseey, *Loyalty and Reprisal: The Loyalists of Bergen County, New Jersey and Their Estates*, PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 1957. Keeseey does not list Lewis Fisher among the Bergen County loyalists whose land was confiscated.

⁸ Untitled Fisher Manuscript, PANB, MC 1, Fisher family history file; and New York state, *The Public Papers of George Clinton, First Governor of New York, 1775-1795, 1801-1804*, vol. 1 (New York and Albany: Wynkoop, Hallenbeck & Crawford, 1899), p.484.

British.⁹

We will never know for sure what motivated Lewis Fisher to remain loyal to the Crown but likely factors are his ethnicity and place of origin. Loyalty to the Crown prevailed in Bergen County generally and particularly so in the Ramapo settlement. The loyalism of Bergen County has been the source of much embarrassment to local historians since the Revolution, but there is no denying its strength. The Germans of Ramapo proved even more loyal than the Jersey Dutch of the rest of Bergen County. Local resident David Baldwin warned a New York patriot committee on 29 June 1776 that the “people of Ramapo were in correspondence with the British men of war” and gave the names of three men. When the Continental Army commanded by General George Washington retreated through Ramapo in early December 1776, Sergeant John Smith of Rhode Island recorded in his diary that “the inhabitants Abus[e]d us Cal[l]ing us Dam[ne]d Rebels and would not sell Us any thing for money the Soldiers Kill[e]d their fowles and one Stole a hive of Bees at Noon Day and Car[r]ied it off with him”.¹⁰ Even historian Adrian Leiby, who makes the case that the Dutch of the Hackensack Valley were more patriotic than is commonly acknowledged, admits the loyalism of the Ramapo Germans whom he argues were “out of step with Jersey Dutch society”.¹¹ Lewis Fisher and his wife were of German descent. Reflecting Ramapo sentiment, his brother Peter Fisher and their sister Anne’s husband David Bayard also remained loyal to the Crown and fought with the loyalists.¹²

Though their five other brothers probably shared their views in varying degrees, they apparently watched the struggle unfold from the sidelines with the silent majority of Americans. Most of the inhabitants of Bergen County, however, would have sympathized with their neighbours in Hackensack who had resolved on 14 March 1775,

⁹ Christopher Hibbert, *Redcoats and Rebels: The War for America, 1770-1781* (London: Grafton Books, 1990), pp.3-41. Hibbert provides a good overview of these events, though there are many other good histories of the American Revolution.

¹⁰ Ruth M. Keeseey, *Loyalty and Reprisal: The Loyalists of Bergen County, New Jersey and Their Estates*, PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 1957, pp.25-29, and 276.

¹¹ Adrian C. Leiby, *The Revolutionary War in the Hackensack Valley: The Jersey Dutch and the Neutral Ground* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), p.137.

¹² “Muster Rolls of the New Jersey Volunteers”, NAC, RG 8, C 1856 to C 1859, reels C-4216 and C-4217.

“That we are and will continue to be loyal subjects to his Majesty King George, and that we will venture our lives and fortunes to support the dignity of his Crown...That we disavow all riotous mobs whatsoever”, and furthermore resolved, “That we have not, nor (for the future) will not, be concerned in any case whatsoever, with any unconstitutional measures”. Other resolutions endorsed petitioning the throne as the best means to redress their grievances and supporting the King’s officials in their lawful duties.¹³ Surprisingly, several of the men who passed these resolutions became leading patriots in the county.¹⁴

The patriot cause seized the initiative in New Jersey, as elsewhere, in 1775 and 1776 through the formation local committees of correspondence and safety which then elected delegates to province-wide congresses, formed militia units and, in effect, created an alternative government to the royal governor and provincial assembly. The majority—either loyal to the Crown or undecided—watched in stunned silence. The patriots passed resolutions and demanded that other Americans swear oaths to uphold the cause of liberty. Measures like this shrewdly eliminated the middle ground and forced the neutral or undecided to take a stand. The patriots singled out those who refused to swear the oaths, dubbed “Tories”, for the tactics of intimidation, from threats and vandalism to tarring and feathering or worse. They fined or imprisoned those who spoke “contemptuously or disrespectfully” of the local committees, provincial or continental congresses, or spoke out against measures adopted by them. Militia men signed up for “Tory-hunt service” for which the provincial congresses paid them their expenses.¹⁵ The zeal of the patriots in Tory-hunting ultimately even disturbed General George Washington, who wrote to the patriot governor of New Jersey, William Livingston, decrying the actions of the New Jersey militia: “Their Officers are generally of the lowest Class of People; and, instead of setting a good Example to their men, are leading them into every Kind of Mischief, one Species of which is Plundering the Inhabitants, under pretence of their being Tories. A Law should, in my opinion, be

¹³ *Minutes of the Provincial Congress and Council of Safety of the State of New Jersey, 1775-1776*, (Trenton, NJ: Naar, Day, & Naar, 1879), p.98.

¹⁴ Adrian C. Leiby, *The Revolutionary War in the Hackensack Valley*, p.19.

¹⁵ Susan Burgess Shenstone, *So Obstinate Loyal: James Moody, 1744-1809*, (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000), pp.30-32. See also Adrian C. Leiby, *The Revolutionary War in the Hackensack Valley*, pp.28-29.

passed, to put a Stop to this kind of lawless Rapine; for, unless there is something done to prevent it, the People will throw themselves, of Choice, into the hands of the British Troops".¹⁶

We do not know if the excesses of the patriots turned Lewis Fisher against their cause, or if he suffered any of these indignities. The events of 1776, however, conspired to push many living in Bergen County towards a more open display of support for the British Crown. With the Declaration of Independence on 4 July 1776, the patriots signalled the end of formal negotiations. The opening moves of the conflict, however, proved disastrous for the patriot cause. General Sir William Howe's British and German Army quickly defeated Washington's Continental Army on Long Island and then again on Manhattan Island. When the British crossed the Hudson River on 20 November into New Jersey, Washington withdrew from his camp at Hackensack, Bergen County and retreated through New Jersey. The British advance guard under General Lord Cornwallis pursued the patriots and harried them wherever possible. Washington's demoralized and bedraggled force crossed the Delaware River on 7 December to the safety of Philadelphia.¹⁷

Lewis Fisher too made a crucial move on 7 December 1776, which decided his fate and that of his descendants, when he enlisted with the loyalist regiment called the New Jersey Volunteers.¹⁸ The British successes in New York and New Jersey had rallied the flagging spirits of the loyalists in those states. Prominent men formed loyal militia units to fight along side the British and German regulars in defence of their homes, and thousands of loyal Americans flocked to enlist. General Howe had commissioned Brigadier General Cortlandt Skinner, the last royal Attorney-General of New Jersey, on 4

¹⁶ George Washington to William Livingston, 24 January 1777, United States, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, George Washington papers, Series 3c, Letter book 1, p.394 (available on-line).

¹⁷ Christopher Hibbert, *Redcoats and Rebels: The War for America*, pp.119-132; Douglas Marshall and Howard Peckham, *Campaigns of the American Revolution: An Atlas of Manuscript Maps* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1976), pp.26-27, 34.

¹⁸ "Muster Rolls of the New Jersey Volunteers", NAC, RG 8, C 1856 to C 1859, reels C-4216 and C-4217. His enlistment is dated to 7 December 1776 though that might not be the exact "day" he joined.

September to raise a regiment or brigade called the New Jersey Volunteers.¹⁹ Lieutenant-Colonel Abraham Van Buskirk of Teaneck, New Jersey raised and commanded its Fourth Battalion. Contrary to the popular impression of loyalist officers, he did not have large land holdings. Son of a well-to-do farmer active in local politics, Dr. Abraham Van Buskirk was a surgeon and sometime driver for his brother Lawrence's stagecoach operation. He had been associated with patriot cause early on, being elected as a moderate to the county committee and provincial congress. A man of principle, he broke with the patriots over the question of outright independence for the thirteen colonies, refusing to swear the oath of abjuration renouncing his loyalty to the Crown and resigning from the provincial congress.²⁰

The Van Buskirks were also leaders among the German Lutheran community of Ramapo. Taking an active role in the royal cause, Abraham Van Buskirk recruited over 100 men in November 1776, mostly German Lutherans from the Ramapo tract. Some said that he received his commission as Lieutenant-Colonel as a result of his successful recruiting.²¹ If he recruited over 100 men, his most successful recruit was perhaps Captain Peter Ruttan of Ramapo who is said to have signed up sixty men for the loyalist regiment.²² Lewis Fisher, his brother Peter, and brother-in-law David Bayard, were among those convinced by Ruttan and Van Buskirk to take up arms in defence of their beliefs. The muster rolls of the New Jersey Volunteers list Lewis Fisher as a private, evidence of his humble origins, in Peter Ruttan's company of the 4th Battalion, from 7 December 1776. Many of the other soldiers in Ruttan's company also came from Ramapo. In the muster rolls, Lewis's name appears variously as Ludwig, Lodewick, and Ludovic, but most often as "Lewis" Fisher. His brother Peter and David Bayard also

¹⁹ Susan Burgess Shensstone, *So Obstinate Loyal*, p.37. Shensstone provides a short biographical sketch of Skinner.

²⁰ Adrian C. Leiby, *The Revolutionary War in the Hackensack Valley*, pp.17, 61, and 78-79. Leiby's key source for Abraham Van Buskirk was the *Loyalist Transcripts* at the New York Public Library.

²¹ Adrian C. Leiby, *The Revolutionary War in the Hackensack Valley*, pp.17, 78-79.

²² Ruth M. Keesey, *Loyalty and Reprisal: The Loyalists of Bergen County, New Jersey and Their Estates*, PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 1957, p.167.

appear in the rolls.²³

Substantial patriot forces remained in the New York highlands north of Bergen County in spite of Washington's withdrawal to Philadelphia. Major-General William Heath held Forts Clinton and Montgomery on the Hudson River north of New York City with four brigades of 3,500 New York and Connecticut militia soldiers. Heath had sent a detachment of two regiments with about 400 men under Colonel Ebenezer Huntington on 13 November 1776 to establish Camp Ramapo on the Ramapo River at Suffern, New York, a strategic location guarding "the Clove", a pass through the mountains. It lay just a few miles distant from Lewis Fisher's home across the New Jersey border in Masonicus.²⁴ The patriots at Camp Ramapo provided another perspective on the outpouring of loyalist sentiment in Bergen County. Colonel Huntington remarked on 24 November: "By the best information the greatest part of the people are friendly to the British and will do them all the service in their power. If I had men to spare I would send a strong body to inspect their conduct". Huntington reacted more strongly when news of the formation of the Van Buskirk's battalion reached him the following day: "Bergen County is to raise a regiment to join the British Army...One Bucart [Buskirk] or some such hard name is appointed colonel and...they have given a specimen of their valor by shooting a Whig, one Zabriskie...Every man, and I was going to say every woman, within a large circle of this place who stand for Whigs, and for ought I know are really such, are continually distressing me from their fears and apprehensions of the enemy and Tories. They are confident the latter have so much knowledge of the country as to guide a body of troops any where among the mountains, their anxiety has gone far towards intimidating some of my own troops".²⁵

Skirmishing between the Continental Army and the New Jersey Volunteers broke out almost immediately, and Lewis did not enjoy service for long with his new regiment. The British, while pursuing Washington's army, had left Hackensack in the hands of the New Jersey Volunteers. On 14 December, General Heath marched twelve miles from

²³ "Muster Rolls of the New Jersey Volunteers", NAC, RG 8, C 1856 to C 1859, reels C-4216 and C-4217.

²⁴ Adrian C. Leiby, *The Revolutionary War in the Hackensack Valley*, p.89.

²⁵ Peter Force, ed. *American Archives: Consisting of a Collection of Authentick Records, State Papers, Debates and Letters and other notices of Public Affairs*, (Washington: M. St. Clair Clarke, 1837-1853), Fifth series, 1774-1783, Volume 3, pp.833, 840-841.

Tappan, New York with 600 patriot soldiers to attack the loyalists based in the town. They scattered the loyalists, taking about fifty prisoners and a store of muskets. Lewis Fisher must have been among those scattered but not captured in this attack. Heath's force retired to Paramus where it joined up with Brigadier-General George Clinton's troop of light horse which had moved out from Camp Ramapough.²⁶ Heath's withdrawal had been hastened by the imminent return of British regulars to Hackensack to set up winter quarters. With Hackensack safe in their hands, the British ordered the New Jersey Volunteers to English Neighbourhood (now Englewood) near the banks of the Hudson River, quartering them in farmhouses spread along the road. Peter Zabriskie, a patriot from Hackensack, conceived of a plan to ambush these isolated troops and went to General Clinton at Camp Ramapough. On the extremely cold night of 19/20 December, Zabriskie led Clinton and 500 troops to attack the New Jersey Volunteers asleep in their quarters. Clinton detached 200 soldiers to seal off escape by the roads to Burdett's and Bull's ferries.²⁷ In Clinton's words, "About break a day we surprized and took their Advanced Guard, about a Mile from Bergen Woods. At the instant we had effected this and were about advancing to attack their Main Body, One of their Horse Men rode up & notwithstanding on being challenged was fired upon by one of our People; This alarmed their Party. They turned out, fired on our People; we returned the fire upon which they fled...". Roused by the act of this horseman, most of Van Buskirk's provincials made good their escape before the detachment could cut off their retreat. Still, Clinton's force killed four of five men, took eighteen muskets, eight horses and a wagon, and captured twenty-one men, including "Lodwick Fisher". A list of prisoners appended to Clinton's report of the raid is one of the earliest mentions of Lewis Fisher in official records.²⁸

Most of the captured men came from the Ramapo settlement and must have belonged to the advanced guard caught wholly by surprise. Indeed, it seems likely that

²⁶ Adrian C. Leiby, *The Revolutionary War in the Hackensack Valley*, p.90.

²⁷ Adrian C. Leiby, *The Revolutionary War in the Hackensack Valley*, pp.95-96. Leiby provides the most thorough account of Clinton's raid on English Neighborhood. It should be noted that other Zabriskies in Bergen County were loyal; Peter's brother John Zabriskie Jr. of New Bridge was a devoted loyalist.

²⁸ New York state, *The Public Papers of George Clinton, First Governor of New York, 1775-1795, 1801-1804*, vol. 1, pp.477-485.

Captain Peter Ruttan's company formed the advanced guard because Clinton's list of prisoners reveals that the patriots also captured Peter Fisher, David Bayard, and thirteen others from Ruttan's company. Ruttan, however, avoided capture. The list of prisoners shows that most of the men came from "Ramapough" [Ramapo] including Peter and Lodwick Fisher who lived "at or near Pyramus" [Paramus]. It also listed their personal effects: Peter had one copper penny and Lewis had "1 Stock Buckle 1 Copper & 1 Sleeve Button". David Bayard had nothing on him but the report said he lived one and a half miles west of Mr. Sydman's and had two horses, some cattle and hogs.²⁹

Thanks to the treachery of Peter Zabriskie, Lewis Fisher spent almost two years in the notorious New-Gate Prison near Hartford, Connecticut. It had been a copper mine since 1707 but mining had proved unprofitable by the early 1770s so the Government of Connecticut had purchased the site in 1773 for use as a prison. Conditions were terrible; the prisoners were kept below ground in a complex of mine shafts and caverns.³⁰ The British quickly inquired about the condition of the prisoners and took steps to secure their release. Captain Robert Mackenzie, a secretary to Sir William Howe, wrote to the British Commissioner for the exchange of prisoners, Lieutenant-Colonel Walcot of the 5th Regiment of Foot, on 3 February 1777 that "Information has been giv[e]n to General Howe that Sixteen Men of Skinners Brigade who were made Prisoners at Hackinsack are confined in Hartford Goal, ill treated, and that it is refused to exchange them....I am directed to desire you will be particular in your Demands for the immediate Release of the above Men, and to enquire into the Causes of their Detention".³¹ Negotiations

²⁹ New York state, *The Public Papers of George Clinton, First Governor of New York, 1775-1795, 1801-1804*, vol. 1, pp.483-485; and "Muster Roll of the New Jersey Volunteers", 18 November 1777, NAC, reel C-4216. The muster rolls and list of prisoners are in accord as to the sixteen men taken prisoner from Ruttan's company with some variations in the spelling of names. The thirteen others were Matthew Knaught, William Winter, William Sturr, Henry Wannamaker, Peter Wannamaker, John Wannamaker, Nicholas Wannamaker, Henry Sawbock, Samuel Demarest, Henry Manuel Jr., Jacob Cole, Jacob Norris, and Isaac Montonye. The muster roll lists them prisoners from 20 December 1776. According to Pat Wardell (e-mail 29 December 1999), a New Jersey local history shows that Peter Fisher, a Tory from Ramapo (Masonicus), was captured in Clinton's raid on English Neighborhood, 19 December 1776.

³⁰ Todd Braisted, e-mail to author; and www.chc.state.ct.us/old_new.htm. For more information see the web-site of "Old New-Gate Prison", East Granby, Connecticut.

³¹ Great Britain, Public Record Office, Headquarters Papers of the British Army in America, PRO 30/55/398 (courtesy of Todd Braisted, New Jersey).

between the British and patriots eventually produced a general exchange of prisoners between July and October 1778. Lewis returned to duty on 2 October 1778, appearing in the muster rolls on active service again from that date. Though the loyalist muster rolls listed his brother Peter and brother-in-law David Bayard as prisoners until the end of the war, they had in fact escaped, received a parole, or deserted to the patriots before or during the general exchange, which had emptied Newgate prison.³² Both men probably returned to the relative tranquillity of their homes rather than risk continued active service with either army. They were still living at the time of Michael Fisher's death in 1802.³³

Lewis rejoined his regiment in October 1778 which was then stationed at the north end of Staten Island, New York. In the intervening two years, the New Jersey Volunteers had won a reputation for raiding the New Jersey countryside with impunity. From Staten Island, "Skinner's Greens" could cross the narrow channel to New Jersey at will, forage cattle and crops, terrorize local patriots, and rally and recruit the loyalist faithful. Bergen County became the "dread neutral ground" because of its proximity to the loyalist base and their expert knowledge of the terrain, towns, and inhabitants. Indeed, Cortlandt Skinner and Abraham Van Buskirk developed an extensive network of "spies" throughout New Jersey which provided them and the British command with valuable intelligence. Washington's forces based in the surrounding highlands plundered Bergen County with almost as much enthusiasm as the provincial corps and redcoats.³⁴

During Lewis Fisher's imprisonment, patriot forces had attacked the New Jersey Volunteers on Staten Island on 23 August 1777 and captured Lieutenant Edward Earle and Abraham's son Lieutenant Jacob Van Buskirk, among thirty or forty other men. William Livingston, the Governor of New Jersey, wanted to try them for treason and hang them but General Washington, however, insisted that they be treated as prisoners of war. Such an action would have set a bloody precedent, sure to provoke British

³² "Muster Rolls of the New Jersey Volunteers", NAC, RG 8, C 1856 to C 1859, reels C-4216 and C-4217; and Todd Braisted to Rob Fisher, 13 November 2002.

³³ Will of Michael Fisher, *New Jersey Colonial Documents*, Calendar of Wills, 1801-1805, pp.161-62.

³⁴ Adrian C. Leiby, *The Revolutionary War in the Hackensack Valley*, pp.103-109.

reprisals against patriot prisoners of war. The British Army, accompanied by the loyalist corps, invaded New Jersey from New York in September 1777. In the Fourth Battalion's most significant engagement during the period of Lewis's imprisonment, Van Buskirk won acclaim for its performance in battle on the Passaic. The loyalists from Bergen County favourably impressed General Sir Henry Clinton: "To give opportunity to the provincials, I ordered Buskirk's battalion to march through a corn field, with the intention of taking in flank a body of the rebels posted behind a stone wall, and which it would have been difficult to have removed by a front attack". Van Buskirk's men looked and acted like veterans, marching with such spirit that the patriots quit the position without firing a shot. American historian Adrian Leiby later conceded that "King George had no more daring soldiers than these Jersey Tories and no better regimental officer than Dr. Van Buskirk...patriots did themselves no honor to deny that Tories were first-rate fighters, whatever they might think of their principles".³⁵

With Lewis Fisher back in the ranks, in February 1779 the Fourth Battalion moved from Staten Island across the Hudson River to a new post at Hoboken, New Jersey on the estate of the loyalist William Bayard. In the summer of that year, the battalion moved to the fort at Paulus Hook (now Jersey City). A patriot force of about 400 men under Lieutenant-Colonel "Light-horse" Henry Lee attacked Paulus Hook on 19 August 1779 in an attempt to put an end to the marauding of the New Jersey Volunteers. Van Buskirk, however, had embarked with 130 men earlier that evening on a raid up Bergen Neck and was absent from the fort. In a bold move, Lee's men crossed the causeway through the marsh which separated Paulus Hook from the mainland. To their surprise, they faced no opposition from the fort because the remaining garrison believed it was their comrades returning from the raid. With bayonets fixed, Lee's force burst into the fort and captured the garrison after a short, desperate fight. The patriots withdrew with 150 prisoners but stumbled upon the returning New Jersey Volunteers at New Bridge. A fierce skirmish followed which resulted in the withdrawal of Lee's force to the safety of the highland forts. The Fourth Battalion returned to the fort at Paulus Hook where the commander of the garrison was later court-martialled. Lewis Fisher was not among the prisoners taken in this action and had likely accompanied Van Buskirk on the raid up

³⁵ Adrian C. Leiby, *The Revolutionary War in the Hackensack Valley*, pp.133-137.

Bergen Neck.³⁶

Later that year, the British moved the battalion briefly to Governor's Island in New York harbour but then it returned to its old base on Staten Island. During the bitterly cold winter of 1779/1780, the Hudson River froze down to Sandy Hook. This allowed patriot General Lord Stirling to lead a force of 2,700 men over the ice to attack Staten Island. With the defenders safe and warm in their forts, the invaders suffered heavily in the frigid darkness and withdrew with heavy losses and few prisoners. The cold winter weather, however, did not prevent the New Jersey Volunteers from making retaliatory raids on Elizabethtown, Paramus, New Bridge and Newark. Van Buskirk achieved particular success in the raid on Elizabethtown, capturing fifty patriot officers and men without the loss of a man, and burning the local Court House and Presbyterian Meeting House against the latter of which he reported the loyalists "had particular Resentment" as a hotbed of patriot sentiment. The First and Fourth Battalions took part in the British Army's campaign in New Jersey in the summer of 1780 but did not see a great deal of action when the invasion ground to a halt.³⁷ Lewis Fisher was listed as "Sick in Reg[imen]t Hospital" in December 1780 but otherwise appeared regularly in the muster rolls of 1779 and 1780 and must have taken part in many of the battalion's raids and engagements during this period.³⁸

In 1781 the Battalion settled down to an extended period of garrison duty as the war turned against the British in other theatres. The surrender of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown in the South signalled the defeat of the British strategy and the waning of loyalist hopes. During the summer of 1781 the New Jersey Volunteers were

³⁶ Adrian C. Leiby, *The Revolutionary War in the Hackensack Valley*, pp.221-223; Todd W. Braisted, *A History of the 4th Battalion of New Jersey Volunteers* (On-line Institute for Advanced Loyalist Studies, 2000), www.royalprovincial.com; and William S. Stryker, *The New Jersey Volunteers (Loyalists) In the Revolutionary War* (Trenton, NJ: Naar, Day, & Naar, 1887), pp.10-19. Accounts vary as to the number of prisoners taken by Lee from 50 to 159.

³⁷ Todd W. Braisted, *A History of the 4th Battalion of New Jersey Volunteers* (On-line Institute for Advanced Loyalist Studies, 2000), www.royalprovincial.com; Adrian C. Leiby, *The Revolutionary War in the Hackensack Valley*, pp.226-227; and William S. Stryker, *The New Jersey Volunteers (Loyalists) In the Revolutionary War* (Trenton, NJ: Naar, Day, & Naar, 1887), pp.10-19.

³⁸ "Muster Rolls of the New Jersey Volunteers". Lewis Fisher's frequent participation in raids might explain why he could not return to his home at the conclusion of hostilities.

consolidated into three battalions from four by the disbandment of the Second Battalion. As a result, the Fourth Battalion, including Lewis Fisher's company, became the Third Battalion, still under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Abraham Van Buskirk. Captain Edward Earle assumed command of Lewis's company from Peter Ruttan who was placed under house arrest for reasons that are not entirely clear. The company was stationed on Staten Island for much of 1781 and 1782 but spent most of 1783 at New Town, Long Island.³⁹

The Third Battalion played a part in one major engagement during this period when the British attacked the patriot fort at New London, Connecticut. A large British force led by Brigadier General Benedict Arnold landed near New London on 6 September 1781 and won a hard-earned victory against a determined foe. According to nineteenth-century historian William Stryker, Lieutenant-Colonel Van Buskirk "distinguished himself, with his battalion, at the attack on Fort Griswold, in the harbour of New London, Connecticut, and in the massacre which followed, and is spoken of in the report by Arnold with applause for his great services". Van Buskirk's men "took part in the closing scene of the desperate defense of Fort Griswold" and the massacre of the garrison.⁴⁰ More recent research by historian Todd Braisted tells a different story. The British regulars did most of the fighting, accounting for the relatively low casualties suffered by Van Buskirk's battalion. After the patriots had shown a white flag of surrender, they opened fire on the British troops, who, enraged by this supposed deceit, stormed the fort, slaughtered the garrison, and burned the village of New London. The Third Battalion engaged mainly in transport and logistical support for the main attacking force. There is no way of knowing for certain whether Lewis Fisher took part in this action but it seems probable from his regular appearance in the muster rolls.⁴¹

Nothing is known about Mary Barbara Fisher's life during the revolutionary war. Her second child, a daughter named Elizabeth, was born in April 1777, after the patriots

³⁹ Todd W. Braisted, *A History of the 4th Battalion of New Jersey Volunteers*.

⁴⁰ William S. Stryker, *The New Jersey Volunteers (Loyalists) In the Revolutionary War*, pp.21, 31.

⁴¹ Todd W. Braisted, *A History of the 4th Battalion of New Jersey Volunteers*. Braisted and Stryker differ significantly about the degree of involvement of the Third Battalion in the attack on New London. Stryker, writing in a patriotic vein, was probably trying to blacken the loyalists' reputation by tying them to the "atrocities" committed at New London.

had taken Lewis captive. She may have continued to live in their home or moved in with her in-laws with her two young children. Harassment of wives of soldiers serving in the loyalist regiments was common in the thirteen colonies but would have been less pronounced in Bergen County where loyalist sentiment was stronger and the New Jersey Volunteers frequently visited from their Staten Island base. In addition, Lewis had several brothers, at least outwardly patriotic, on their farms in the area who could deter harassment or furnish protection. After his release in October 1778, Lewis likely returned home secretly and brought Mary and their youngest daughter to the security of New York, behind British lines. Members of his regiment frequently returned to their Bergen County homes to tend their farms or see their families on brief, clandestine visits. Their third child, Henry, was born in 1780 on Staten Island, and their fourth child, Peter was born in 1782 on Staten Island. Lewis and Mary left their eldest daughter, Mary, aged four in 1778, with Lewis's parents in Masonicus. Their motivation is not known but it seems likely she would have had easier access to schooling in a settled community and perhaps could be a help to her grandmother, now approaching age sixty, about the house. In the event, when they evacuated New York they did not have time or opportunity to return for Mary, or decided to leave her with her grandparents for the same reasons.⁴²

In the preliminary peace settlement reached in January 1783, the British recognized the independence of the thirteen colonies. Benjamin Franklin informed British negotiators, however, that the American Congress could offer no assurances that the property and possessions of the American loyalists would be restored or respected. English public opinion demanded justice for the loyalists. It had been assumed by many of the negotiators that the two colonies in North America which had not revolted—Quebec and Nova Scotia—would be ceded to the Americans. Now, the

⁴² Untitled Fisher Manuscript, PANB, MC 1, Fisher family history file; and Herbert S. Ackerman and Arthur J. Goff, *Ramapo Church Records, 1755-1900* (Englewood, NJ: Bergen Historic Books, 1997, reprint of 1944 edition), pp.127-131. It should be noted that the date of birth for Elizabeth provided by the manuscript, 4 April 1777, is at variance with that in *Ramapo Church Records* which gives 4 May for the date of birth and 8 June 1778 for the baptism of Elizabeth, daughter of Lodewig and Polly Fisher. Presuming the date of birth in the transcript to mean 4 May 1778 (and not 1777), this may be a typographical or transcription error, or evidence of paternity other than Lewis Fisher who was in prison throughout 1777. John and Elizabeth Goerlogh were the witnesses to the baptism in 1778. The eldest daughter, Mary Fisher, married Michael Messinger and they are buried in the Ramapo Lutheran Cemetery.

necessity of compensation for the loyalists forced the British to insist on the retention of these colonies and, in effect, the political division of the northern continent. The Crown could compensate the loyalists with vacant lands from its vast northern territories much more easily than with funds from its depleted treasury.⁴³

News of the peace treaty reached the New World by March 1783 but instead of easing tensions, the proscription and persecution of loyalists and confiscation of their property intensified. State governments discovered they were under no obligation to protect the rights of loyalists and made no effort to do so. Violence against the hated Tories was common. Loyalists realized that they had little choice but to abandon their homes and emigrate to the colonies to the north where the British Crown still reigned. The might of the Royal Navy had ensured British control of Manhattan, Staten Island and Long Island throughout the war, and these island strongholds shone like a beacon to the dispossessed refugees. Thousands of them poured into New York in the weeks that followed the news of peace. British authorities were not well-prepared for the evacuation of thirty or forty thousand loyalists from the thirteen colonies.⁴⁴ In this chaotic situation, it can be imagined that the garrison of Long Island, including Lewis Fisher's battalion, had its hands full preserving some semblance of order. The Third Battalion of the New Jersey Volunteers covered the exodus and as a result was one of the last units to evacuate New York, sailing in September 1783 as part of the "fall fleet" bound for Nova Scotia. Lewis Fisher and his family embarked in the *Esther* which sailed towards the end of September with the *Martha*. In the dead of night, the *Martha* foundered on the rocks off Seal Island, near Cape Sable, Nova Scotia, with the loss of 115 lives.⁴⁵ The *Esther* while following "the wrong track came near being lost" but arrived safely at the mouth of the St. John River at the end of September 1783.⁴⁶

⁴³ W. S. MacNutt, *New Brunswick: A History, 1784-1867* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1984), p.14.

⁴⁴ W. S. MacNutt, *New Brunswick: A History*, pp.20-21.

⁴⁵ Peter Fisher, *The First History of New Brunswick*, pp.123-125; and Esther Clark Wright, *The Loyalists of New Brunswick*, (Hantsport, NS: Lancelot Press, 1981), pp.85-87.

⁴⁶ "Memorandum of the Fisher family from 1783: Information and Reminiscences of the Fisher family & c.", by Georgianna Fisher, revised by William Fisher, New Brunswick Museum (NBM), Manuscript F2-5; and "History and Reminiscences of the Fisher Family & c. & c.", NAC, Sir George Parkin papers, MG 30, D 44, Vol. 76. The two texts are very similar; see the appendix.