



Bringing Northwestern Virginia's History  
into the Classroom

*It happened near me . . .*

## Pieces of the Past from Where *I* Live

**County:** Loudoun

**Date:** 1776-77

**Topic :** Impact of the American Revolution at home

**Background:** Nicholas Cresswell got just what he asked for as a

college graduation present from England—a trip to America. Shortly after observing buffalo on the frontier of Virginia, he learned that war had broken out between America and Britain. He returned east in a fix, as a Tory-supporting loyal Englishman. He kept a secret diary though (referring to Americans as “slebers”—rebels backwards!), right in Leesburg, observing the Revolution before him.

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**Tuesday, January 16<sup>th</sup>, 1776.** Mr. Kirk advises me to keep my intention of going home a secret or I am certain to be imprisoned. D—m the Rascals.

**Fri. Jan. 19<sup>th</sup>, 1776.** A pamphlet called “Commonsense” makes a great noise. One of the vilest things that ever was published to the world. Full of false representations, lies . . . and treason, whose principles are to subvert all Kingly Governments and erect an Independence Republic . . . The sentiments are adopted by a great number of people who are *indebted* to Great Britain.

**Fri. Jan. 26<sup>th</sup>, 1776.** Nothing but Independence will go down. The Devil is in the people.

**Monday, February 12<sup>th</sup>, 1776.** Court day. Great confusion, no business done. The populace deters the Magistrates and they in turn are courting the Rebel’s favour. Enlisting men upon credit for the Rebel Army. Their paper money is not yet arrived from the Mine.

**Thursday, October 10<sup>th</sup>, 1776.** . . . The 6<sup>th</sup> Reg[iment] of Virginians are camped here on their way Northward. A set of dirty, ragged people, badly clothed, badly disciplined and badly armed.

**Monday, October 28<sup>th</sup>, 1776.** General Muster of the County Militia in town, about 600 men appeared underarmed, with Tobacco sticks in general. Much rioting and confusion. Recruiting Officers for the *Sleber* army offer 12 Pounds bounty and 200 acres of land when the war is over, but get very few men.

**Wednesday, December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1776.** A mob of about 40 horsemen went through the town to-day on their way to Alexandria to search for Salt. If they find any they will take it by force. All of them armed with swords or large clubs. This article is exceedingly scarce, if none comes in the people will revolt.

**Monday, Jan. 6<sup>th</sup>, 1777.** News that Washington has taken 760 Hessian prisoners at Trenton. The minds of the people are much altered. A few days ago they had given up the cause for lost [but] are all liberty mad again. Their Recruiting parties could not get a man; now men are coming in by companies.

**Wednesday, January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1777.** This is a most unhappy country. Every necessary of life is at an extravagant price, some of them indeed is not to be had for money. Poor people are almost naked . . .

**Thursday, March 27<sup>th</sup>, 1777 . . .** The Happy fruits of Independence: the populace are grown so insolent, if you do not tacitly submit to every insult or imposition they think proper, they immediately call you a Tory and think that if you have that stigma upon your character they have a right, nay, even take it to be a *meritorious act* to knock your brains out . . .

## Making Sense of Evidence from the Past.

1. Nicholas Cresswell has to live a false life, not telling anyone he wants to go home, and noticing that even by *not* saying the right things, can get one in trouble. What is happening here during the Revolution on the home front? *Quote* two examples.  
One-  
  
Two-
2. How is the *economy* being affected by the Revolutionary War? Give two examples.  
One-  
  
Two-
3. According to Cresswell's loyalist-Tory thinking, most Americans who support the Revolution and Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* do so because . . .? [See Jan. 19, 1776]
4. What *physical* shape is the American army in (consider weapons, uniforms, etc.) ? Provide two examples from Nick's diary.  
One-  
  
Two-
5. If the soldiers signing up for Washington's Army take money and 200 acres of land (out west in the Ohio country where Cresswell had seen the buffalo)—what will happen to Virginia after the Revolution?
6. The "mob of about 40 horsemen" armed with "swords or large clubs" on the way to Alexandria "to search for salt" who Cresswell says "will take it by force"—what's this about? What is beginning to happen here without the British government?



Nicholas Cresswell, about 1774  
and two Leesburg buildings still standing  
that Cresswell would have known—  
the Stone McCabe's Ordinary (a tavern),  
and the log Stephenson's Silversmith Shop

