

Introduction: Henry Kneeland

Historians often debate the merits of focusing on individuals who make a significant contribution to history or to focus more on the lives of the everyday people who collectively contribute to the flow of human events. The American Revolution is rife with heroes like George Washington and Henry Knox, and villains like Benedict Arnold. Each of these three men contributed vastly more to the historical narrative than most, but what about Henry Aaron Francis Kickeland, a.k.a. Frantz Kiegland?, a.k.a. Henry Kneeland.

Many American soldiers who appeared by name and physical traits to be English were in fact German. To further complicate the historical record, the men who fought for the British and are collectively referred to as "Hessians" were actually from different parts of Germany. While often referred to as mercenaries, these Hessian troops were vassals who had been conscripted by German princes and offered under contract to fight for England. Many of the soldiers were forced to fight against their will, and so were more inclined to defect.

According to the History Channel, on August 26th, 1776 Washington actually ordered the dispersal of pamphlets to these Germans in the hope of luring them to the ranks of the American forces. Washington writes "The papers designed for the foreign (Hessian) Troops, have been put into several Channels, in order that they may be conveyed to them, and from the Information I had yesterday, I have reason to believe many have fallen into their Hands." It was Washington's strategy to force the German soldiers to fight their own countrymen. Perhaps they would defect and join them. Somehow, the author believes that Kneeland was captured at the Battle of Saratoga, and because of Washington's scheme to leave the men in camps as long as possible, managed to escape.

The problem of course was that the Americans lack something their debt-ridden British enemy did not, a financial incentive to join the cause. That does not appear to be the case with the mysterious Henry Kneeland. Even though Washington wanted desperately to initiate a draft, he was bound by the Articles of Confederation to rely upon the states for soldiers. Somehow, Kneeland was able to get town officials to lie about his identity. The penalty for American and British deserters was death, so in spite of his dubious background, a desperate Continental Army needed as many able-bodied men as possible.

In the end, Henry Kneeland mustered out of the American Revolution a soldier. He received a pension, and died at the ripe age of 94 on October 17, 1846. Even though his own widow married another Revolutionary War soldier, she was able to receive his pension seven years later. Just who was Henry (Henreich)? The documents point to a person who chose the right side at the right time. Either way, this ordinary man's story is quite extraordinary.

Primary Sources:

-*Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789, Volume XVIII :*

<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi->

[bin/ampage?collId=lljc&fileName=018/lljc018.db&recNum=0&itemLink=r?ammem/hlaw:@field%28DOCID
+@lit%28jc0181%29%29%230180001&linkText=1](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=lljc&fileName=018/lljc018.db&recNum=0&itemLink=r?ammem/hlaw:@field%28DOCID+%28lit%28jc0181%29%29%230180001&linkText=1)

-*Letter from Writings of Washington, Vol. 7: To SIR WILLIAM HOWE Head Quarters, Morris Town, January 13, 1777 regarding Hessian prisoners:*

<http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2404>

-*"George Washington to Nathaniel Gorham, President of Congress, 18 August 1776." (On encouraging Hessians to desert the British)*

<http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2404>

Print/Web Resources:

-*Print resource: "A Defence of the Hessians" Contributed by Joseph G. Rosengarten (Reprinted from "The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography." July, 1899. Philadelphia: 1899):*

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/33235/33235-h/33235-h.htm>

Teaching about Henry Kneeland

Lesson Plan Introduction

THERE IS NO LESSON PLAN INTRODUCTION

Suggested Grade Level: 8+

ACTIVITIES MENU:

Activity 1: "Soldiers for Hire."

- German mercenaries were pushed out of their home states as a result of economic turmoil. They were pulled into war for the financial and pride reasons.
- **Research** instances where people have been hired to participate in combat.
 - You might focus on child warriors in Africa, for instance.
- When you have completed your research:
 - Compose a **persuasive essay** to the President of the United States in which you urge him to support international measures to prevent children from being coerced into combat.

Activity 2: Document Analysis-German Mercenaries during the American Revolution

- Document search:
 - **Locate** the portions of the Declaration of Independence that lists the grievances of the American colonists. Find the portion that specifically refers to the Hessians.
 - **Answer:** "transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation."
 - For an online copy of the Declaration, please consult the National Archives at:
http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html
- Document analysis:
 - **Read** the following document:
 - <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2404>
 - **Answer** the following questions:
 - What is the purpose of the document? Who wrote the document for General George Washington?
 - What does George Washington have to say about the treatment of American prisoners of war compared to the British prisoners of war?
- Document analysis:
 - **Read** the following document:
 - <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2404>
 - **Answer** the following question:

- How did Washington attempt to lure Hessians to desert?
- Document analysis:
 - Using the internet, **research** the following:
 - Private hired soldiers
 - Geneva Convention protocol
 - **List** several current protocols for treatment of soldiers and war prisoners.
- **Summarize** the American Government's position regarding soldiers for hire and prisoners of war as compared to British soldiers for hire and prisoners of war.
 - How does that relate to the concept of becoming an American?
- **Compare and contrast** the past and present American position regarding soldiers for hire and prisoners of war.

Activity 3: "Henry Kneeland Confesses"

- During the American Revolution, soldiers were hired by the British to fight against the Americans. Henry Kneeland appears to be one soldier who in spite of a possible death sentence chose to escape a prisoner of war camp to become an American soldier.
- **Read** the article on Henry Kneeland.
- After reading the article:
 - **Imagine** that you are Henry Kneeland at ninety years old. Your granddaughter in Massachusetts has asked that you provide the reasons for leaving the British Army to become an American soldier.
 - In a **letter** provide the various reasons that you joined the American Army.