

Autobiography of William Tong(ue)

from 'Tong – Tonge – Tongue and Allied Families'
second edition by H.F. Stout - 1974

(William Tong b. 8 Aug, 1765, d. 8 Feb 1848 started the Tong line in America that I am connected to. He had 26 children with two wives. His Father, John Tongue, was the first from the line to show up in America. To date, we have not been able to make the connection to England.)

My Dear Children:

Having been requested by you to commit to writing some of the events of my life * * * I herewith give you a very brief account of what I have seen and done during a lifetime * * * spent [in] a series of most interesting events.

I was born in Prince George's county in the State of Maryland on the 9th day of August 1756. The place of my nativity is on Piscataway Creek; but seven miles from Mount Vernon, where our venerated Washington lived and where his ashes now repose.

My parents were born and reared in the same county. My grandparents, both on the paternal and maternal side, emigrated from England and settled in the State of Maryland about the same time the grandfather of General Washington settled in Virginia.

I am the oldest son of a family of two sons and five daughters. My parents were poor but industrious, honest and pious. My father was remarkable for his love of truth and some of my earliest recollections were plans which he adopted to instill the same righteous principle in the hearts and minds of his children. You are aware that I was born during what is sometimes termed the 'old French War' Some of the events that transpired about the close of that ware I remember, particularly the return of some Colonial troops who had been in the English service and had assisted in the capture of Quebec, etc. There is probably nothing further in my early life which would materially interest you until the commencement of the Revolutionary War. All the commotion, the alarms, and apprehensions, the hopes and fears (consequent upon the vacillating policy of the mother country in reference to her colonial difficulties) which preceded that memorable struggle are fresh in my memory; but these are all detailed history and are within our reach, I shall pass them by, it being my wish to give you nothing more than a concise account of those scenes in which I was an actor.

In the month of February 1775, I joined an independent company of Maryland troops under the command of Captain Rezin Bell. This was one of three similar companies which were organized under the supervision of the 'Maryland Committee of Safety', for the purposes of resisting the depredations of Lord Dunmore's fleet upon the parts contiguous to the rivers Potomac and Patuxent, and upon neighboring regions adjacent to Chesapeake Bay. You must bear in mind that this was prior to the battle of Lexington and the commencement of the war proper. At this period, no general or united military organization had taken place, and the company to which I was attached acted under the authority of the State of Maryland and not under the control of the Continental Congress. Thus you perceive that my native State was among the first of the 'Old Thirteen' to prepare for the fearful crisis which was approaching, and that I volunteered as a member of one of the first companies that was raised to resist the aggressions of our country's oppressors. The members of these three companies were styled 'Minute Men' to signify that they were ready to turn out at a minute's warning.

The first active service in which I was engaged was an encounter with a part of Dunmore's marines at St. George's Island near the mouth of the Potomac, in the month of March 1775. The inhabitants of the island, alarmed at the approach of the fleet, fled with as much of their effects as in their haste they could collect and convey to their retreat. After having plundered the island of such movables as were left and having burned the houses which had been evacuated, Lord Dunmore's men went upon the mainland and there renewed their infamous work of burning, robbing, and destroying. Here they were met by Capt. Bell's company, were fired upon, returned

the fire and immediately returned to their shipping, leaving much of their ill-gotten property behind them. In this skirmish Captain Bell was slightly wounded in the abdomen.

Shortly after this affair, the fleet ascended the Patuxent, robbed several warehouses and burned many dwellings, beside doing much additional damage to the country. During the latter part of the same year, or early in 1776, the whole extent of the country, on both sides of the Patuxent, from lower Marlborough to the mouth of the river, was ravaged by this band of piratical plunderers. All the houses within their reach were burned and every article of movable property which had not been removed out of their way, was either destroyed or stolen.

During this season of alarm and distress, all we could do was watch the movements of the enemy and attack such small parties as ventured beyond the reach of their artillery. The first year of my service expired in February 1776 when I entered another company of the same description as the first to which I was attached. This latter company was commanded by Capt. Thomas Dent. During this year, we had but little service to perform as the military operation about Long Island, New York City and in the State of New Jersey appeared to engross the almost entire attention of the enemy so our region of the country was comparatively tranquil.

In April 1777, a British fleet of about thirty sail ascended the Potomac as far as Mount Vernon and burned the dwelling house and the out-buildings of Colonel Lisle, upon the Maryland side of the river directly opposite the residence of General Washington. The enemy also carried away all his stock that had not been removed out of reach. It was there I was engaged in an affair of some danger. On the third morning after the destruction of Colonel Lisle's property, a part of the enemy in three boats rowed toward the shore and attempted to land. In the meantime a number of scattering volunteers, myself in the number, amounting in all to 68, under the command of Captain Lisle, had concealed themselves amid the thick growth of the swamp which skirted the river near the landing place of the enemy.

Just as they were about to step on shore, we rushed from our ambuscade, fired upon them, killed 7 and captured 13 of their number. We were now in the most imminent danger as we were exposed to the artillery of the fleet and our only hope was in a rapid retreat behind a hill nearly a mile distant. This was effected without loss or injury to our party although during the greater part of the time, which we occupied in reaching our retreat, the cannon shot were falling all around us often covering us with sand, pebbles, etc. After we reached our place of safety, the commander of the fleet sent us a flag, accompanied by a message proposing an exchange of prisoners, stating that there were American prisoners on board. To this proposition Captain Lisle replied that if there were American prisoners on board the fleet and if the British commander would furnish him a list of their names and places of residence an exchange could be made; but if instead of American soldiers he had refugees and Tories, they might remain with him. Shortly afterward, the fleet weighted anchor and dropped down the bay. From this time until Captain Dent's company joined the Continental Army under Washington, I had but little to do though I was at all times ready for service and our company's organization was kept up during the interval.

In September 1777, the company entered the Continental service as part of the regiment of Maryland troops, under command of Col. Luke Marberry. The regiment constituted a part of the division under the command of General Smallwood. You are aware that about this period all of General Washington's efforts were directed to the preservation of Philadelphia as the movements of the British army, under Sir William Howe, plainly indicated his design to attack that city. Soon after we joined the [Continental] army we commenced moving towards the North.

At the Battle of Brandywine, General Smallwood's division of Maryland militia was posted upon the left wing of the American army in order to prevent the British from surrounding and attacking the regulars in rear. Whilst occupying that position, the British made several attempts to break our lines but without success. Here the right wing was guarded by the New Jersey militia under General Foreman. I was at Warren Tavern, but one mile from Paoli Hill, on the night of that savage massacre, and on the next day, I saw the mangled remains of the poor soldiers who had been betrayed by a faithless sentinel and butchered by a perfidious enemy in defiance of all established rules of civilized warfare. At the battle of Germantown, as at the battle of Brandywine, our division formed the left wing of the army and performed the same service as at the latter engagement.

Here again the British made several attempts to break our lines, but were uniformly repulsed. It was at Germantown that our colonel [Marberry] was captured in a very singular manner. During the heat of the action, a sudden and severe fire of musketry was opened upon our division by an advance party of the enemy who were endeavoring to surround us but who accidentally encountered our lines, which owing to an intense fog, were visible at only a few paces distant. As soon as the firing commenced, Colonel Marberry advanced a short distance from the lines to discover, if possible, the strength and position of the enemy who, upon our returning their fire, instantly fell back and as they were moving off, fell in with him and made him prisoner. He was detained as a prisoner from that time to the close of the war.

You are aware that shortly after the battle of Germantown, General Washington went into winter quarters at Valley Forge, where all the Maryland militia were discharged and returned to their homes. It may be remembered as a fact worthy of notice that every man of Captain Dent's company returned in safety.

From the time of our company's discharge after the battle of Germantown until the close of the war, I was ever ready to answer any call that might be made for my services. We had our regular days fro training until after the siege of Yorktown, nor was our company disbanded until after the treaty of 1783.

On the 4th day of August 1776, I was married to Eleanor Ford, daughter of William Ford, Jr. She was born and reared in the same county and neighborhood with myself and we had known each other from early childhood. I lived with her in peace until the 7th day of December 1793, when she was taken from me after an illness of not quite 48 hours. By her I had thirteen children, six sons and seven daughters, all of whom lived to be heads of families with the exception of two who died in infancy.

On the 4th day of 1796 (Newman's "Maryland Records" says 1794, which birth records would seem to confirm), I was married to Elizabeth Thomas, the daughter of Captain John Thomas of Charles county, Maryland, who is still living and is the faithful companion of my old age. By her I have had thirteen children, seven sons and six daughters. My youngest child is almost 23 years of age. I have been the father of twenty-six children, thirteen sons and thirteen daughters. Eighteen of my children are still living and it affords me the highest gratification to say that none of these have, by their conduct, brought disgrace upon their father or saddened his old age with shame and mortification by misdoings. My posterity including great-grandchildren amounts to at least two hundred soles, who reside in Ohio, Illinois, Missouri, Arkansas and Texas. They are all, so far as I know, in comfortable circumstances and maintain a respectable standing in society.

I have lived almost 90 years and of my health and physical strength you can form some estimate from the fact that on the 13th day of November 1834, I started on horseback and alone, and traveled in that manner from Fredericktown, Mo., through Illinois, Kentucky, Ohio, Virginia and Maryland to Washington City. The object of this trip was to secure payment of my pension by the United States and Maryland, for my service during the Revolutionary war [Granted 1835.]

I was present when the attempt was made on the life of General Jackson by the lunatic Lawrence and heard the trial upon the following day. I receive annually from the United States, forty dollars, and the same sum from the State of Maryland for my Revolutionary services. During all my life I have neither given to, nor received from a fellow creature a blow in anger but have always endeavored to act the part of the peacemaker and reconciler of difficulties between my neighbors, who have unfortunately been at variance. I have lived in a age of innovation and have witnessed the rapid and resistless march of improvements in almost everything pertaining to the welfare of mankind. I have seen my native country in her infancy with a population of but three million, struggling for her independence against the most powerful and grasping Nation on earth. I have seen her successfully emerge from the unequal and fearful contest and from that day to this have beheld her steadily advancing with giant strides to the very summit of National renown and greatness. Now it is my privilege to contemplate that country, with a vastly extended territory, reaching from the Atlantic to the Pacific, as the home and pride of 17,000,000 freemen, who represent a great political brotherhood and who enjoy the means of happiness, both individual and social, than were ever bestowed up the same number of people at any previous period in the world's history and my prayer to Heaven is that the Union of these States may be perpetual, that

party strife and political animosity may never break the ties that bind them together, in happy and prosperous union, the sister Republics of the great Confederacy; that the American people may yet rise higher and higher in the scale of National prosperity and greatness until our happy country shall become emphatically the light of the world, the instructress of all mankind in the important lesson of political, moral and religious liberty.

My sands of life have nearly run out. God has been merciful to me amidst all the trying vicissitudes through which I have passed and though I must soon walk through the valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no evil, for God, my Shepherd, will be with me and his rod and staff, they will comfort me.

Dated at Fredericktown, Mo., Oct 7, 1844

Signed by William Tong