CHRISTOPHER LUDWICK – Baker General

By: John Whiteside

Christopher Ludwick, sometimes known by the last name Ludwig, was born in Germany in 1720. His father, Heinrich, was a very successful baker and most likely taught his trade to Christopher. Christopher would soon serve in the Austrian Army, and later be conscripted into the Prussian Army. Eventually deciding to leave Eastern Europe, Ludwick moved to England where he enlisted in the Royal Navy and served as a baker for several years. After completing his duty as a seaman in the navy, as well as some time spent in the merchant marine, Ludwick decided to sail to America along with his bakery implements.

Arriving in Philadelphia in 1753, Ludwick set up his first bakery shop. The shop was an immediate success, allowing Ludwick to earn a sufficient income, enough to allow him to return to London for a time and learn to specialize in creating more unique bakery products. After a year of training, he returned to Philadelphia with his recipe for gingerbread and other delicious baked treats. He also met and married his new wife, Catherine, in 1755. His business success as a baker enabled him to quickly amass several homes in Philadelphia, and a farm in what was then Germantown, a town northwest of the city.

As war broke out, Ludwick was quick to aid in the cause for independence and he used his own funds to help support the war effort. In 1776 he volunteered to join as a member of the Flying Camp and went to New York. It was there that he began to learn about issues with prescribed rations of either bread or flour for the soldiers. The daily soldier ration called for one pound of bread or one pound of flour, as well as some other foodstuffs. As a baker, Ludwick knew he could make more than one pound of bread out of one pound of flour. He also realized that soldiers getting a flour ration often wasted most of it, unable to bake something worthwhile, or, trading it and being cheated out of its full value. He recommended that the flour ration be changed to bread only, as army bakers could make over 130 pounds of hard bread, using only 100 pounds of flour. This also prevented criminal fraud by unscrupulous bakers, saving the Continental Army needed funds and bread grain.

Ludwick would end up at Washington's winter camp at Morristown, New Jersey in 1776 – 1777, and would be engaged in baking thousands of loaves of bread for the soldiers, as well as maintaining the bread ovens at camp. In 1777, he would be appointed by Congress as Baker General of the Continental Army. In a letter dated September 5, 1777 sent by George

Washington, he directed Ludwick to leave the ovens at Morristown under the directions of another baker, and to travel to Philadelphia and, "set as many ovens as you can procure to work in baking hard bread." Washington clearly planned to be involved in the Philadelphia campaign for some time and wanted his best baker to keep the food chain viable.

Arriving at Valley Forge with the Continental Army, Ludwick set up his bake ovens throughout the encampment, with several near Washington's headquarters. He frequently dined with the Commander-in-Chief at his home and discussed the issue of feeding the army. Following the Philadelphia campaign, Ludwick returned to Morristown where he continued his baking. He wrote to Washington in January, 1780, that, "With two ovens, now at this place, we can furnish 1,500 loaves of bread daily." He complained that one of the ovens was now inoperable and he needed 400 bricks delivered in order to build a new oven. He also suggested that buckwheat meal and Indian meal be added into good flour before baking so nothing would be wasted.

Ludwick did submit his request to leave the army prior to the end of the war. His request was denied by Congress, so Ludwick remained in service through the remainder of the war. In 1785 he wrote to Washington, seeking his help in getting some renumeration for all of the personal expenses he supplied to the war effort. In part, Washington wrote to Congress on his behalf, "that he (Ludwick) has been the cause of much saving in many respects. And that his deportment in public life has afforded unquestionable proofs of his integrity and worth." In retirement, and following the death of his wife, Ludwick continued to bake bread to be given to the needy. He died on June 16, 1801 and was buried at Saint Michael's Lutheran Church graveyard, Germantown section, Philadelphia. In his will, he left $13,000 to educate the poor. That money, now administered by the Christopher Ludwick Foundation, Bryn Mawr, Pa., has grown to nearly six million dollars and results in annual awards to under privileged children totaling $250,000 each year. His cookie gingerbread molds, brought from Germany around 1754, can be seen today at the Museum of the American Revolution.

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CHRISTOPHER LUDWICK'S COOKIE BOARDS, Courtesy of American Revolutionary War Museum

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