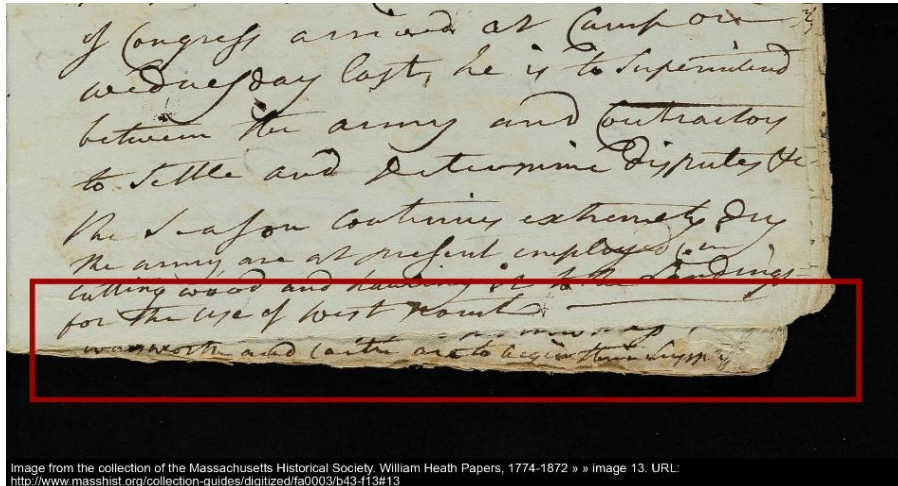**MHS Digital Volunteers -- Transcription tips for William Heath diaries**

Document created 3/20/2025; modified 4/2/2025

These tips relate to transcribing the documents featured in the MHS crowdsourcing website for the William Heath diaries project: https://www.masshist.org/mymhs/projecthub/project/8
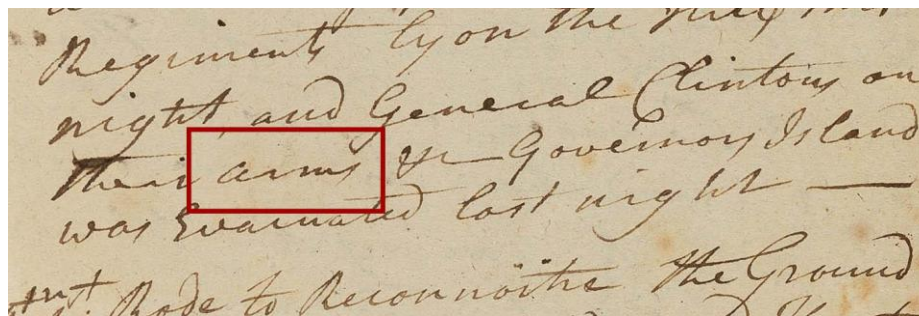
Due to the nature of William Heath's diaries, **the tops and bottoms of upcoming pages are often visible in advance**. Take note of the page's edges and only transcribe what is on the main page.

Example: Volume 13, Image 13

Notice how the page in the foreground has a slight upwards angle whereas the page in the background has a slight downwards angle. The text on the background image will be transcribed with its respective page (in this case, image 21).

Heath's letter "s" at the end of a word often looks like a "y." Thus, the word "arms" may look to you like "army." This is because he slashes the "s" downwards like a "y." You can be fooled by the letter "s" in the middle of a word. In the 1700s, writers used the "long s" which looks like a lower-case "f" to our eyes. Be on the lookout for this.

Example of "army" looking like "arms". Volume 2, Image 41

When coming across **unclear words**, spell them out to the best of your ability. Oftentimes, the visible letters will clue in the editor enough to figure it out. You can also check surrounding pages for the same word but written more clearly.

Heath's diaries are about the movements and strategies of the American colonial army against the British ("Regulars") Army. **When you see words that you can't quite make out, but you can read part of the word, try to work out the word in context of the war.** For example, f you see a word that you read as "Reconnoixxxx" you can think, well, the army uses the term "reconnoiter" (what we might call today "recon") so that is what the word probably is. You can finish a word by imagining the context of the word, even if you can't actually read the handwriting.

Use context clues when you can—for example, if Heath is writing about harbors, a word that starts with "s" and ends with "p" might be "ship".

If you can't read a word at all, or take a guess on it based on context, then write [illegible].

Make sure to type dashes (lines) as two short dashes together. Use capital letters when Heath uses capital letters.