

investigated.

The magnitude of the problem of supplying the army was laid before Congress on November 24, when a committee report based on a conference with the commissary general was read. The report noted that "on conferring with the commissary general upon the supplies of flour for the army in the middle district [where General Washington was headquartered], he informed the committee, that he knew of no other magazines established for this purpose than those at Lancaster and York Town [Pennsylvania]; that he could not ascertain the quantity of flour therein, but supposed the former contained 1,000 and the latter 5,000 barrels." The commissary added that these magazines would soon be exhausted, "the consumption of the army being about 200 barrels a day." Supplying the army, even with this limited amount of flour, could be interrupted, in which case "he imagined the army would want bread." The commissary told the commissioners that he had been relying on his supply of beef from the area near Washington's headquarters, adding that "this resource could not be lasting," and he did not expect cattle could be procured elsewhere. The commissary had not yet engaged pork for the army, because the butchering season was not yet at hand, but he was faced with a shortage of casks in which to store it, and even they would be useless unless sufficient salt could be procured to cure the meat. He added that "if salt should be sent to the North [Hudson] River, he did not know where to obtain teams to transport it from thence, as some that he had sent to camp, and ordered on to the river, were employed in the army." The commissioners concluded their report to Congress with the warning that "the present prospect of supplies of provision for the army in this district is very precarious, and, unless more effectual measures are speedily adopted, disagreeable consequences must necessarily follow."

Congress responded by ordering the commissary general to "proceed to head quarters, and hire 12 or more mills within six miles of [it], and covered by the army, to purchase or impress wheat in the sheaf; if the farmers cannot be prevailed on to thrash for the troops, to solicit the General to spare 150 men from the army for that purpose, and set the mills to work. By these means, a present supply may be obtained, which bad weather cannot prevent, and time will be gained for establishing at Pottsgrove, Reading, Lancaster &c. magazines of flour for three months...." Congress concluded by appointing another committee "to devise ways and means for providing a sufficient supply of provisions for the army."

Committees, reports, resolutions, and then more committees, and yet Washington's army was on the brink of starvation and the shortage of shoes and clothing was so acute that disbanding the army might soon be unavoidable. There were a variety of factors accounting for the lack of supplies, but one member of Congress, Henry Laurens, who had been elected president of that body on November 1, placed the blame directly on Congress. In a letter written to his son dated November 30 he exclaimed: "Why were we not as active in July to guard against the Inclemency of January as we affect to be now in November--now perhaps when too late to enable our Troops to keep the Field. I did not fail to speak my