

Decision Activity: Elizabeth Beatty Fithian

I was born on March 26, 1752 in Neshaminy, Pennsylvania. I was the fourth child of Charles and Ann Beatty. My father was a highly respected clergyman from Neshaminy. He was also a huge supporter of the College of New Jersey (Princeton). He served as a trustee for the college for several years. Sadly, my father would die prematurely of yellow fever while on a visit to Barbados trying to raise money for the college in 1772. His death devastated our family. After a long courtship, I would marry Reverend Philip Vickers Fithian on October 27, 1775, eight months before the signing of the Declaration of independence.

Following Philip's death from exposure while serving as a military chaplain in New York, I would go on to marry Philip's second cousin Joel Fithian. Joel and I would have nine children together.

The death of my husband Philip on October 8, 1776, at the age of 29, affected me deeply. My husband and I were huge supporters of the revolutionary cause. He lived his life with a belief in duty and service as well as a strong religious devotion and commitment. Philip's death made me question my support for America's fight for independence. My faith had already been tested by the premature death of my father in 1772. Going forward, I had to find a way to carry on in order to live a life devoted to God and country!

What should Elizabeth do, in the middle of the Revolutionary War, following the tragic death of her husband Philip?

Select one option and explain your answer in 4 to 6 sentences.

- Remarry in order to have a family of her own.
- Move in with her brother Dr. John Beatty in Princeton, New Jersey.
- Move to another area of New Jersey to begin a new life.
- Continue to live in her husband's home in Greenwich, New Jersey.
- Other.

Interview Elizabeth shortly after the death of her husband in 1776. Select one question below and write or record what might have been her response.

- Would you put your personal welfare and interests before those of your country?
- Are your religious convictions more important than your family?
- As a widow, would you risk your life in support of the revolutionary cause?

Below is one of the last letters Philip Fithian wrote to his wife Elizabeth prior to his death. He wrote this letter 19 days before he died. Read and analyze the letter and answer the following guided questions:

1. Write a one sentence summary of this letter.
2. What was happening at the time this letter was written?
3. What did you find out from this letter that you might not learn anywhere else?

Camp Near Kings-Bridge, Sept. 19: 1776.

My dear Betsey.

1 Amidst all the Distress & Ruins of this dreadful War I am yet alive & yours. Our Enemies pursue
2 us close on from Place to place. But we drubbed them well last Monday since which they have
3 laid quiet. Your Brothers John, Reading & Arckee are well, I saw them since the Battle. We
4 expect to have a general Engagement soon, & are not dispirited in the least by our late Losses.
5 I hope to see my dear Betsey by the tenth of December & not before— But wonder much that
6 I do not hear from her; as it is now more than a Month since she wrote me a Word that I have
7 received:—And since that time I have wrote with this seven long Epistles, a full sheet in
8 each— One Aug.19—One 21st—26th— Sept: 1st 3d 9th & now the 19th.

9 I pray God daily that you may be preserved & in Health. My Duty to Mr. Green & Family. Last
10 Sund. & Monday were two terrible Days; But on Monday our brave Heroes made them give
11 Way. The English Army, Tories & All, is not supposed to be less than 30,000 strong. But our
12 Army wishes to attack them. Peace, & God's Blessing be with my Betsey, my dear Wife,
13 forever may you be happy.

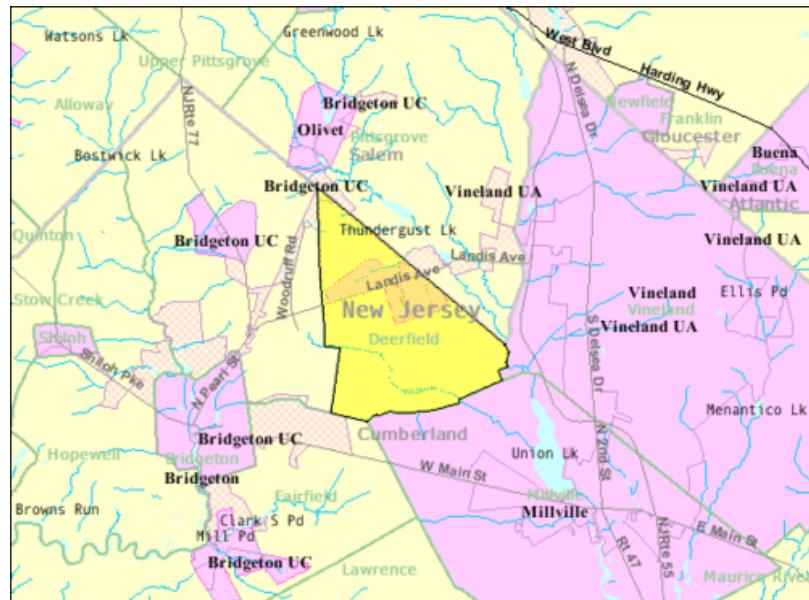
Philip V. Fithian.

Mrs. Betsey Fithian

Deerfield, West Jersey



Battle of Harlem Heights, New York



Deerfield, Cumberland County, NJ

[Philip Fithian's Private Journals and Personal Journeys: Self-Improvement, Fidelity, and Rebellion, 1766-1776 \(wm.edu\)](https://wm.edu/philip-fithian/Philip-Fithian-Private-Journals-and-Personal-Journeys-Self-Improvement-Fidelity-and-Rebellion-1766-1776.html)

[Teaching the Journal of American History \(oah.org\)](https://www.oah.org/teaching/jah/)