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VOSSELLER, E.

SOME HISTORICAL SCRAPS OF
THE REVOLUTION

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**A PAPER READ BEFORE THE
COLONEL LOWREY CHAPTER
DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERI-
CAN REVOLUTION
BY E. VOSELLER.**

**Some Historical Scraps of the Revo-
lution.**

Madam Regent and Daughters of the American Revolution: Once more, by your courtesy, a mere man is undertaking to entertain you for a brief space.

A young man of great force of character was graduated at Harvard in 1759. He studied medicine and began its practice, five years later, in Boston, and by his successful treatment of smallpox patients required a high reputation, not only among the people, but with the profession, as well. He grew in favor and influence as a physician, and was recognized also as a leader in the perplexing questions which began to arise on account of the strained relations between the Mother country and her colonies.

In politics he was far in advance of public opinion in general, holding the doctrine that the British Parliament had no right to levy a tax of any kind upon the colonies. And this view he expressed, not only privately, but in pub-

lic meetings also. And in this matter he showed great ability. He thus became the leading spokesman for the Radicals of that day, who were restless under the usurpation of authority shown by the British crown.

He was a member of the Boston committee of Correspondence and worked incessantly and effectively for the cause of the colonists. In fact, many of his valuable papers found their way to the Continental Congress. He was made delegate to various conventions and elected President of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress and also chairman of the committee of safety. Yet during all this pressure of public duties he remained the beloved physician, and no case was too humble for his best efforts. The successful outcome of the affair at Concord, where was fired the "shot that was heard around the world," was mainly due to the energy and vigilance of this man, and he was commissioned Major General by the Massachusetts Congress.

At the battle of Bunker Hill he was the ranking officer, but refusing to take rank above General Putnam fought as a volunteer.

When Elbridge Gerry said to him "I beg of you not to expose yourself, for your life is too valuable to us," he replied, "I know that I may fall, but where's the man who does not think it glorious and delightful to die for his country"? He was one of the last to

leave the redoubt where he had been fighting, and as he moved away a British officer who knew him called to him to surrender. As he turned, attracted by the voice, a stray bullet found his brain and he fell dead. The Continental Congress voted him a monument, but never built it.

He was young, only thirty-five, handsome, brilliant and efficient. He had already accomplished much and great things were expected of him. His death, being the first of note that had occurred in the opening war, produced a profound impression of gloom throughout the colonies. Thus fell Dr. Joseph Warren! It seemed as if the Great Ruler of events had selected the finest spirit of them all for this early sacrifice.

More than fifty years ago I heard a young lady sing a heroic song, built upon this sad event in our early history, that made such an impression on me that to this day I remember two lines of the poetry and the melody that carried them,

“And thus Warren fell! happy death!
noble fall!
To perish for Country at Liberty’s call.”

In 1773 Yale College also graduated a choice young man of unusual abilities, who taught school until the fight at Lexington, prompted him to join the army, in which he was rapidly promoted to a captaincy.

Brave and enterprising, he, with a

single associate, in New York harbor, at midnight, took an English sloop, loaded with provisions, from under the guns of a vessel of war.

Afterwards, at the request of Washington, he entered the British camp on Long Island to procure needed information, in which he succeeded, and would have made his escape, but a Tory kinsman recognized and betrayed him. He was taken to Gen. Howe's headquarters, where he frankly avowed his name, rank and character as a spy (which his papers revealed) and without even the form of a trial, was handed over to the Provost Marshal to be hanged. That officer, William Cunningham, forever infamous because of his cruelty to prisoners, denied him the services of a minister and even the use of a Bible. The more humane officer who superintended the execution, furnished him with materials to write letters to his mother, his betrothed and his sisters. These letters the brutal Cunningham destroyed before the face of his victim. We can't help a little thrill of satisfaction when we read that Cunningham himself was executed in England in 1791, for forgery. Our unfortunate captive was calm in his demeanor and with unfaltering voice, at the last moment, said, "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country." Thus spake brave Nathan Hale, the young Connecticut patriot, who had just passed his

twenty-first birthday. Passers by at the City Hall Park in New York City pause a moment as they see a life size figure, with his arms firmly bound behind his back, ready for the sacrifice, and read again his last patriotic words and wonder, it may be, whether they, under similar circumstances could act so great a part. These two choice spirits were from the higher walks in life.

Let us see now a brave and devoted patriot taken from the common people, of whom Lincoln said God must be very proud, for He had made so many of them. When the British fleet attacked Fort Sullivan, in Charleston harbor, June 1776, the flag of South Carolina, waving over the fort was shot down and fell outside the fort. Sergeant Jasper jumped down from one of the embrasures, seized the flag, climbed back, fastened it to a sponge staff, used for swabbing cannon, mounted the parapet, stuck the improvised flag staff in the sand of one of the bastions, while the bullets were rattling around him, and quietly returned to his place in the fort. On another occasion, aided by but one other soldier, he captured an entire British guard of ten men, setting free some patriot prisoners, whom they were conducting to Savannah. In recognition of this daring act Governor Rutledge took his own sword from his side and presented it to the Sergeant. He also offered him a Lieutenant's commission,

which Jasper modestly declined, because he could neither read nor write, saying "I am not fit to keep officers' company. I am but a Sergeant."

In this presence I ought not to speak of heroes only, but of heroines as well. Do you know about Emily Geiger? While Gen. Greene was pursuing Lord Rawdon towards Orangeburg, South Carolina, he wished to send a message to Gen. Sumter to take a position in front of the enemy and impede his flight. The errand was a most perilous one and no man was found bold enough to undertake it, for the Tories were everywhere on the alert. Emily Geiger, a girl of eighteen, volunteered to carry the letter to Sumter. Gen. Greene told her its contents, so that in case she found it necessary to destroy it the message might be delivered orally. The girl mounted her horse and started on her journey. She was arrested by some Tory scouts and as she was coming from the direction of Greene's army, it was suspected she might be carrying some message. She was taken to a house near by and a woman was employed to search her. When left alone she ate up Gen. Greene's letter, piece by piece, and no evidence being found against her, she was released with many apologies. She passed on to Sumter's camp and very soon he and Gen. Marion were co-operating with Gen. Greene.

Emily received her reward. This

brave deed of hers, becoming known, made her the heroine of the neighborhood. She married a rich planter and ever after they lived happily together and prospered.

But we must not forget our Molly. Molly Pitcher, whose story of her sudden rush into the limelight you all know so well. On that sweltering Sabbath day, June 28, 1778, during which more than a hundred soldiers died from heat and exhaustion, a shot from a British cannon instantly killed an American gunner while working his piece. His wife, Mary, had been fetching water from a spring near by. When he fell there appeared no one competent to fill his place and the piece was ordered to be removed. Mary heard the order and dropping her bucket and seizing a rammer vowed she would fill her husband's place at the gun and avenge his death. She did so, with skill and courage. The next morning Gen. Greene presented her to Washington, who was so pleased with her bravery that he gave her a commission as Sergeant, and had her name placed on the pay roll for life.

At the battle of Springfield, N. J., June 23d, 1780, when the wadding for the soldiers' guns was giving out, Rev. James Caldwell ran to his church and brought out an armful of hymn books, and as he distributed them to the soldiers shouted, "Give them Watts, boys, give them Watts."

These deeds and these deaths were highly dramatic and unconsciously those worthies placed themselves permanently in the history of their country. These are among the immortal names that were not born to die.

Now in contrast with these, let me tell you of another, who sealed his devotion to his country with his life, who has been forgotten for a hundred and forty years, and who to day lies in an unknown grave. In December, 1776, Washington issued a call for volunteers, of whom he was sorely in need. He was planning the crossing of the Delaware. Away up in the forks of the Delaware, in Pennsylvania, Rev. John Rosburgh read the call to his congregation, preached a patriotic sermon, and urged his men to heed this call. Later on he himself led them into camp, turned them over to the military authorities, while he received a commission as chaplain. We all know the success that followed the crossing of the Delaware and in what shining fashion Washington killed or captured the Hessians at Trenton. It was of this event that Lord Germain said "Our hopes were all blasted by that unfortunate affair at Trenton." After this British disaster Gen. Howe, who had said the back of the Rebellion was broken, hurried Cornwallis over to Trenton with a large British force. As he was approaching Trenton on the Lawrenceville road, Washington, with two

battalions, impeded his progress all the afternoon. Toward evening the order was given for the American troops to withdraw to the south side of the Assaupink Creek, where the remainder of the army was encamped. While this was going on Chaplain Rosburgh was eating his supper in the "Blazing Star" tavern. He was aroused by the cry that the Hessians were coming. Rushing out he found his horse had been stolen. He found it impossible to cross the creek by the bridge and so ran up to the ford and was there overtaken by some Hessian Yagers. He surrendered but his captors showed no mercy but stabbed him to death, stripped his body and left him lying where he died. Some of his company, hearing of it, wrapped him in a cloak and hastily buried him where he fell. Later his body was taken up and buried in the burial ground of the First Presbyterian Church, of Trenton. The exact spot is not known. On the coming 23d of January, 1917, the Presbytery of New Brunswick, of which Chaplain Roseburgh was Moderator at the time of his death, will dedicate a monument to the memory of the splendid service and sacrifice made by this patriot for his country's cause.

After a council of war held in the "Merrick House," west of New Hope, Pa., about December 20, 1776, a trooper was sent across the river at Coryell's ferry, Lambertville, with a letter to

Daniel Bray, Kingwood. It had been decided to make an attack on Trenton, and when one of the council expressed a doubt as to the probability of securing enough boats, Washington said, "Leave that to me." He then went on to say he knew a young fellow up in Kingwood, named Daniel Bray, one of his trusted officers, who had never failed in any duty given him to do, and that he lived near the river and knew every ford and ferry boat from Coryell's to Easton. He would bring all the craft needed in good time. Meanwhile the trooper proceeded to Kingwood, where at midnight he aroused Capt. (afterwards General) Bray and delivered his letter. After ordering his horse saddled he returned with the orderly to Coryell's ferry, where Washington met him and in an upper room in the "Ferry Hotel" gave him his instructions with regard to the boats. Bray then started off in the night to find his helpers. He first rode to the home of Capt. David Jones, four miles inland, at Headquarters. Capt. Jones is buried in the Mt. Airy cemetery and his plain tombstone makes not the slightest mention of his military career. Bray then came on to Flemington and aroused Capt. Jacob Gearhart. These two were informed of the project and requested to select men to carry it out.

They met at Ringoes and afterward at Baptisttown, and carefully mapped out their work. There was need for the ut-

most precaution on account of the Tories, who were on the alert and keen to report information to the enemy. They went northward in three companies, breaking up into small groups as though on a hunting expedition, carrying guns, dressed in lineey suits, wearing rabbit and coon skin caps. They kept inland, not approaching the river until near the Lehigh. From there downward they cut out by night the boats of every ferry, the Durham boats, used for transporting iron ore and all other craft suitable for transporting an army. It was a dangerous and wearisome task to pilot these boats for fifty miles in mid-winter through the icy waters, to their hiding place behind Malta Island, just below Lambertville, which since then has been washed away. There were treacherous rocks and dangerous rapids to be avoided. But it was accomplished. Capt. Jacob Gearhart lies in an unmarked grave in our Presbyterian cemetery. At the recent meeting of our Hunterdon County Historical Society a committee was appointed to confer with you Daughters, whose forbears all had a hand in the glorious events of the Revolution, in regard to erecting a suitable memorial to the memory of Capt. Gearhart. Surely we ought not allow him to be forgotten. He carried a British bullet in his knee, which caused him to limp. He considered it a mark of distinction, and when a surgeon offered to remove it without

cost to him, he said: "No, I got that bullet in the Revolution, and I mean to carry it as long as I live." And so he did, for his beloved bullet was buried with him.

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