

SCHS News



The Newsletter of the Stafford County Historical Society

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PRESIDENT'S PEN

Dear Friends,

Happy Spring! The frogs are once again serenading us with their delightful songs and the trees are beginning to bud.

In this edition we have new information about Hunter's Iron Works provided by a guest contributor. I think you will find this article very interesting.

For those of you who missed our March meeting, Jane Conner and Scott Mayausky updated us on the Museum Foundation's current efforts in working with the county to establish a museum in the new Stafford County Town Center.

I would like to extend my condolences to the families of Gabriella Pribble and Steven Gambaro, both former members, who have passed away. Both were very active in our organization in years gone by and are greatly missed.

We would like to hear from you! Do you have any suggestions for program topics or speakers that you think would be interesting to our members? Please let us know.

With best regards,

Rick MacGregor

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Cover Illustration: Nathaniel Waller Ford (1820-1880) and family

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FEATURE ARTICLE: JAMES HUNTER'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE SIEGE OF YORKTOWN

By William W. Reynolds
Sarasota, Florida

Continental and French Army units marched from their New York encampments in August 1781 on their way to Yorktown, Virginia, under the overall command of Gen. George Washington, with the objective of trapping and capturing a British army under Lord Cornwallis. They marched to Trenton, New Jersey, took shipping to Christiana Bridge (Christiana), Delaware, and portaged to Head of Elk (Elkton), Maryland, where about 2,000 sailed with the fleet carrying the American siege artillery, while the remaining 5,000 marched to Baltimore whence French transport vessels conveyed them to James River. Generals Washington and Rochambeau and their staffs rode overland from Head of Elk to Williamsburg, followed by two of Washington's officers traveling separately, Brig. Gen. Henry Knox, Artillery Commander, and Col. Timothy Pickering, Quartermaster General, both of whom paused at Fredericksburg, Virginia, to place orders with ironmaster James Hunter.

To complete the setting within which Knox and Pickering operated, Washington and Rochambeau arrived in Williamsburg on September 14, where Gen. Lafayette's force of Continentals, Virginia Militia, and French troops, backed by a French fleet under Admiral de Grasse, had Cornwallis trapped at Yorktown and Gloucester Point. Washington moved his Continental-French force to the Yorktown lines on September 28, the first gun of the Siege of Yorktown fired on October 9, and Cornwallis surrendered on October 19. The Continental Army brought over 700 tons of supplies from New York and Philadelphia, including 545 tons of ordnance and associated materiel. Nevertheless, Knox and Pickering identified the need for ironwork that was not in their inventory and sought a "local" supplier.

General Knox's Mission

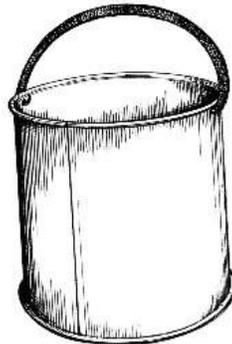
General Knox knew that some of the beds for the ten 10-inch mortars brought from the New Windsor, New York, artillery park were in poor condition and required ironwork available only from a forge. He had no time to obtain the necessary ironwork while in Philadelphia so determined to obtain it en route. He and his aide, Maj. Samuel Shaw, left Head of Elk late on September 9 via one of the vessels requisitioned for the ordnance fleet and landed at Annapolis on September 11. From there they rode overland to Falmouth where they met with James Hunter on September 14. There Knox placed an order for "half ton of iron, one inch thick, and 5 inches wide and one quarter of a ton, of round iron bolts of one and a quarter inch diameter" (Gen. Knox in account with S. Shaw, 1781; Knox to Hunter, Sept. 27, 1781, HKP). The five-inch by one-inch bars were for trunnion cap squares while the inch-and-a-quarter bolts were for bed bolting, both for the 10-inch mortar beds (T. Patten, "Return of Iron Wanted for Carriages and Bends," MsF). While Knox continued to Williamsburg where he arrived September 16, Hunter began forging the requested ironwork; he completed it in three days. An unfortunate communications lapse between these men plus a serious shortage of transportation alternatives resulted in that ironwork being delivered after October 19 (Hunter to Knox, October 9, 1781 and October 19, 1781, HKP). While that was too late to impact the actual siege, had that action

lasted significantly longer as Washington and Knox expected, Knox probably would have used this ironwork to repair and deploy additional mortars.

Once Knox reached Virginia and learned the status of the British position at Yorktown, he became convinced that a prolonged siege would be required and wrote the Board of War to request additional ammunition. He also wrote James Hunter requesting all available 18-pound and 24-pound solid shot as well as certain smaller-caliber projectiles (Knox to Hunter, September 27, 1781, HKP). In response Hunter sent 300 18-pound shot and 250 24-pound shot, all of which arrived at Yorktown shortly after the siege ended (Hunter to Knox, October 19, 1781, HKP). As already mentioned, had more time been required to induce Cornwallis to surrender, these projectiles might have been fired at the British.

Colonel Pickering's Orders

Colonel Pickering left Head of Elk on September 9 on an overland journey to Williamsburg that allowed him to visit his assistant deputy quartermasters in Baltimore, Georgetown and Fredericksburg. When he arrived at the latter place on September 14, he was unable to locate Richard Young, ADQM for the counties around Fredericksburg, and the press of time prevented his visiting James Hunter at Falmouth, so he left Young an order on Hunter for 150 camp kettles. Part of this number was to go to a Maryland regiment at Georgetown and the balance to the Continental Army at Williamsburg (Pickering to Young, September 14, 1781, NRB). Young soon replied that Hunter could have this order completed in five days (Young to Pickering, September 14, 1781, MsF). Pickering continued to Williamsburg where he arrived on September 16. Eight days later he placed an order to Hunter through Young for 1,000 entrenching tools (spades, shovels and axes), of which Hunter produced 701 before Pickering asked him to switch his production back to camp kettles (Pickering to Young, September 24, 1781, NRB; Young to Pickering, October 1, 1781, MsF; Pickering to Young, October 8, 1781, NRB). By October 23 when all of Hunter's shipments had been received at Williamsburg or Yorktown, Hunter had produced 660 camp kettles for the Continental Army under Pickering's orders (Young to Pickering, October 11, 1781, MsF; Pickering to Robert Morris, December 7, 1781, NRB; Record of Disbursements, Quartermaster General's Department, December 31, 1781, NRB).



Continental Army sheet iron camp kettle design of 1782, similar to those produced by James Hunter in 1781. The latter were about eight inches in diameter and about nine inches high. Courtesy of John U. Rees.

Payment

In 1781 when the Continental Treasury was essentially empty and only hard currency procured goods and services, Superintendent of Finance Robert Morris found the means to pay for the things that were absolutely essential to the Yorktown Campaign. He empowered Colonel Pickering to commit hard currency payments, usually on a few months credit, for the Continental Army's needs while in Virginia. The ironwork James Hunter produced for Knox and Pickering was billed at \$3,320 "in specie" for which Pickering gave Hunter a bill of exchange on November 21, 1781, this bill was paid on January 21, 1782 (Pickering to Morris, December 7, 1781, NRB; Record of Disbursements, Quartermaster General's Department, December 31, 1781, NRB; Record of Accounts of the Commissioner for Settling the Accounts of the Quartermaster General's Department, NRB).

Note on Sources

The background material for this article was taken from William W. Reynolds, "Logistics of Victory: Moving the American Siege Artillery to Yorktown," *Military Collector & Historian*, Volume 70, No. 4 (Winter 2018), 367-384. The image of a camp kettle is from John U. Rees, "'To Subsist an Army Well...' Soldiers' Cooking Equipment, Provisions, and Food Preparation During the American War for Independence," *Military Collector & Historian*, Volume 53, No. 1 (Spring 2001), 9. The sources of letters shown parenthetically in the text are: Henry Knox Papers, Collection GLC02437, Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, New York, NY (HKP); U.S. Revolutionary War Miscellaneous Records (Manuscript File), 1775-1790s, Records Pertaining to Continental Army Staff Departments, Record Group 93, National Archives (MsF), accessible via Ancestry.com; and Numbered Record Books, Records Relating to Stores and Supplies, Record Group 93, National Archives (NRB), accessible via Fold3.com.

A GLIMPSE OF STAFFORD'S TIMBER INDUSTRY

Stafford's hilly terrain was well suited to the growing of timber and the cordwood industry put food on the tables of Stafford's families for generations. Cordwood was of size to be used in fireplaces and stoves and was shipped from Stafford to Alexandria, Washington, and Baltimore. Shipping points existed on Aquia and Potomac Creeks and on the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers. Nathaniel Waller Ford (1820-1880) was one of many men engaged in the cordwood business. He lived at Woodstock, the site of his house being beneath or very near the present Aquia Harbour subdivision country club. Not far from the Aquia Drive bridge over Aquia Creek he had a landing where schooners picked up cordwood (that part of the creek was deeper than it is now). A letter written to Nathaniel describes proposed designs for a steamboat to pull shiploads of cordwood to market.

Eagle Iron Works
Washington Dec 12 1853

Sir—

We address you at the request of Mr. John Carter who called at our works for the purpose of making enquiry in relation to the cost of an Engine, Boiler, and paddle wheels for a Boat capable of towing four schooners carrying 25 Cords of wood each, at six miles per hour, the vessel not to draw over two & half feet of water. We have enquired of an experienced Ship &

Boat Builder & Constructor, as to the proper dimensions of a Boat for the above purpose, & will give you his opinion. He says, “on account of the small draft of water required it will be necessary to have the Boat at least 130 ft long, 26 feet Breadth of Beam & 6 feet depth of hold. It will require for a vessel of this size, and to perform the work required (if a condensing Engine) a cylinder of 26 ins diam & 6 feet stroke. Paddle wheels 15 ft diam & 5 ft wide on face, with Paddles 14 ins deep, with Boiler of 500 ft of fire surface if a non condensing or High Pressure Engine, it will require a cylinder of 15 in diam and six feet stroke.

The cost of the Boat without cabin will be \$6000. If a cabin is required the cost will be from \$600 to \$2000 additional according to the style and size that may be determined on. A condensing Engine of the size specified can be made, and we will contract for the same complete and ready for trial in the Boat for \$6000 or a non condensing Engine for \$5250.

We should be glad to hear from you on this subject.

Your obt Servants

William M. Ellis & Bro.

FALMOUTH KNOWS HOW TO THROW A PARTY

From the *Virginia Citizen* (Irvington, Virginia), May 11, 1906—“May 1st the young generation of Falmouth had a general good time. They had a banner worded ‘By the help of God we won the fight’ and a blooming bon fire. One man had his house decorated with flags and Japanese lanterns: the old town was wild to think once more old Stafford was dry. The Anti-saloon League is still at work.”

THEY CALLED STAFFORD HOME: NATHANIEL WALLER FORD (1820-1880)



Nathaniel W. Ford, who signed his personal letters “Waller,” was the son of Capt. William Ford (1788-1834) and Elizabeth Allen Hore (1792-1822) of Stafford. Nathaniel married Margaret Ursula Waller (1821-1901) of Bloomington. Part of the Bloomington tract is now occupied by Patawomeck Park in Wide Water. In 1843, Nathaniel purchased Woodstock on Aquia Creek. Part of this farm is now occupied by that section of Aquia Harbour subdivision that stands on the north side of the creek. Nathaniel was a magistrate in Stafford from

at least 1863 through his unexpected death in 1880. He also served in various other capacities in county government including being a Registrar and Commissioner of Elections and an Overseer of the Road. He represented the Aquia Township on the Board of Supervisors in 1870 when that

entity was first created. In addition to farming, Nathaniel sold cordwood and seems to have had his own schooner on which he shipped it to market.

THE STAFFORD COUNTY FAIR

In recent years, efforts have been made to re-institute the Stafford County Fair. While many are familiar with the nearby Fredericksburg Agricultural Fair, few remember when Stafford had its own such event. In August 1922, “The Stafford County Club and School Fair will be held early in November at Stafford Courthouse.” Whit D. Peyton was president and James Ashby was secretary (*Richmond Times-Dispatch*, Aug. 31, 1922). In 1924, “The third annual exhibition of the Stafford County Fair Association will be held at Stafford Court House October 30 and 31. On the second day an address will be delivered by Frank A. Buchanan of V. P. I., and a school parade will take place” (*Evening Star*, Oct. 4, 1924). The fair was held until at least 1925 (*Evening Star*, July 16, 1925).

BULLETIN BOARD

UPCOMING MEETINGS:

April 18—“Anglo-Native Interaction in Virginia’s Potomac River Valley” with Dr. Brad Hatch

May 16—“The Fitzhughs of Chatham through 1810” with John Hennessy

June 20—“The Effect of the Union Occupation on Stafford’s Civilians” with Rick and Jerrilynn MacGregor

NEWSLETTER DISSEMINATION: Successful dissemination of our newsletter requires that we have your current email address or that we are made aware of your specific lack of access to a computer. Please contact Doris McAdams at (dmac200592@msn.com) or 540-720-1321.

DUES WERE DUE IN JANUARY!

Dues for 2019 are due January 1st. Membership benefits include a subscription to the newsletter and participation at special events. Please don’t forget to renew your membership so you’ll not miss out on any of our 2019 activities. Mail your check or money order made payable to Stafford County Historical Society (SCHS) to:

Treasurer
Stafford County Historical Society
P. O. Box 1664
Stafford, VA 22555

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\$25 Family Annual Dues

\$5 Student
\$200 Individual Life Member

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