

George Washington's Drummer Boy

In a little known grave in south-western Marion County, Indiana, lie the remains of an old soldier traditionally acclaimed as "George Washington's drummer boy." This is the grave of Sergeant John George, a Revolutionary War veteran of the First Battalion of the New Jersey Continental Line.

Through extensive and alert research by Chester Swift of Indianapolis into Revolutionary war records, muster rolls, field reports, pension records, etc., there is evidence that Sergeant George might have been the personal drummer boy of Washington's Headquarters Guard during a large portion of the Revolutionary War.

John George was born in Raritan, New Jersey, on November 11, 1759. On January 1, 1777, at the age of 17, George enlisted as a private in Captain John Flahaven's company of Col. Matthias Ogden's First New Jersey Battalion. On September 8th of that year, Private George, who was listed on the company's rolls as a drummer, fought in his first battle, a short engagement at Clay Creek, which was a prelude to the important Battle of Brandywine. Later, Ogden's battalion was to participate in the battles of Germantown and Monmouth, serving as a part of the famous Maxwell Brigade.

The Maxwell Brigade served during the entire war under the personal command of General Washington and was considered to be one of the elite units of the American army. According to John George's service records, he served his first three-year enlistment as a private and a drummer with the brigade at a salary of \$7.30 a month. When his three-year enlistment expired, George reenlisted as a sergeant in Captain Aaron Ogden's company of the First Battalion (Maxwell's Brigade) for the duration of the war.

The First Battalion wintered with Washington at historic Valley Forge in the snows of 1777-78. It was also present at Yorktown when British General Cornwallis surrendered his command in October of 1781. After the actual fighting ended in the war, Sergeant George continued to serve with the Continental Army until the peace treaty was signed in 1783. Records indicate that he was discharged along with the last of Washington's Guard at New Windsor, New York, in June of 1783. He and other members of the Guard were decorated with the badge of Military Merit by Washington in recognition of their more than six years of faithful service to his commander.

After his discharge from the army, Sergeant George migrated to Mercer County, Kentucky, to receive his 100 acre veteran's land grant for his wartime service. His Kentucky farm was near the historic old frontier settlement of Harrodsburg. The old veteran farmed his land grant for over fifty years. While farming in Mercer County, George married and raised a large family. In 1821, George applied for and received a Revolutionary War pension for his military service almost forty years previous. He first received nine dollars a month, but his pension records indicates that this was later increased to twelve dollars because he had been a non-commissioned officer.

At the death of his wife in Mercer County, George migrated to Perry Township in Marion County, Indiana, to reside with his daughter and her husband. This was in June of 1838, and the old drummer was now about eighty years of age. His daughter had married Peter Stuck and their residence was just east of where the campus of Indiana Central College is now located.

The old soldier lived with the Stucks until his death on November 28, 1847. He was buried in an early Perry Township cemetery, Round Hill Cemetery, now at the intersection of Epler Road and South Meridian Street. His grave is just a few yards from the main entrance of the cemetery and is marked with the usual simple government stone.

Down through the years, the older residents of Perry Township have maintained that Sergeant George was definitely a drummer boy of Washington's Guard and many claimed to have seen a certificate signed by Washington personally, confirming George's assignment as a drummer with the Guard. The certificate has been lost for many years, but the research of Revolutionary War records indicates that John George could have been the Guard's drummer for more than half of the war.

The Great old soldier's great-great grand son, Colonel Walter H. Unversaw now lives in Kokomo, and is chairman of a memorial fund that is raising money to erect a suitable monument at the grave of Sergeant John George. The monument will be a life size figure of a Revolutionary war drummer boy, honoring the "Legendary" drummer boy of George Washington, now buried in a almost forgotten grave in Indiana.