

{ SAMUEL DOWNING }



{ DANIEL WALDO }



{ LEMUEL COOK }



PHOTOS FROM 1864 EDITION OF LAST MEN OF THE REVOLUTION

Ghosts

BY MAUREEN TAYLOR

WITH A WAR JUST ENDED AND INDEPENDENCE DAY UPON US,

many Americans are recalling our other military conflicts. Today's war comes with 24-hour news coverage. Television, radio, the Web and newspapers bring us the sights, sounds and stories of war. We know the names and faces of the men and women serving our country.

This was not always the case. The Patriots of the American Revolution went into battle long before the advent of photography. Aside from portraits of the relatively affluent, most of their faces were unknowable to future

generations. Most, but not all. In 1864, the Rev. Elias Brewster Hillard, a Congregational minister from Connecticut, set out to immortalize the lives of the handful of surviving Patriots in his book, *The Last Men of the Revolution* (1864, reprinted by Barre Publishers, 1968).

Mr. Hillard graduated from Yale College in 1848 and finished Andover Theological Seminary in 1853. He was the son of Moses Hillard, a sea captain of Preston, Conn., who, according to Elias Hillard's grandson, gave

of the Revolution



{ WILLIAM HUTCHINGS }



{ ADAM LINK }



{ ALEXANDER MILLINER }

Elias his wandering spirit and strength of convictions. Always the intrepid traveler, Mr. Hillard journeyed to Maryland, Maine and rural New York to visit these centenarians.

Amazing as it might seem, as of 1862—some 79 years after the eight-year war ended—there were still 12 men collecting pensions for their Revolutionary War service. With the majority of them more than a century old, it was imperative that Mr. Hillard undertake his project with haste.

By 1864, when Mr. Hillard began his project, half of the pensioners had died. Still, he was able to record the remembrances of the remaining six in person—Lemuel Cook, Samuel Downing, William Hutchins, Adam Link, Alexander Milliner and the Rev. Daniel Waldo, who was so frail he died a month after Mr. Hillard interviewed him. The seventh biography in the volume, James Barham, was drawn from his pension application and was included because Mr. Hillard was not able to determine whether he was living or dead. It wasn't until 1966 that the Missouri Daughters of the American Revolution were able to verify his death date as 1857.

Mr. Hillard interviewed each of the six veterans he could locate, recorded their oral histories, photographed them and commissioned engravings of their dwellings to accompany the text. By 1864, photography was 25 years old but was still a novelty. Perhaps the publishers of *The Last Men of the Revolution* sought to capitalize on the burgeoning public interest in photography by printing this book. Regardless of their motivation for its publication, this volume was part of a growing number of books that combined photography with information.

Mr. Hillard himself was very conscious of the importance of photography to the book and to history. In fact, he cited photography as the primary reason for the book. Anticipating our visual society, Mr. Hillard was already aware of the power of a single picture. "What would not the modern student of history give for the privilege of looking on the faces of the men who fought for Grecian liberty at Marathon," he wrote, "or stood with Leonidas at Thermopylae." Or in keeping with the Revolutionary era, he wrote, "How precious a collection to every true American, did it exist, would be the portraits of the seven men who fell on the morning of the nineteenth of April, 1775 on Lexington Green." While the names of those seven were recorded, they died long before the invention of photography in 1839.

Today, we know the names and the faces of our military men and women, but when Mr. Hillard wrote his introduction, that was not the case. Countless men and women of the mid-19th century never sat for a portrait—painted or photographic. Mr. Hillard realized the importance of connecting historical narrative with pictures: "As we look upon their faces, as we learn the story of their lives, it will live again before us." He understood that the photographs accompanying the biographies provided a pictorial reminder that these stories were real, not fiction.

Gazing upon the images of the six men, you see the first Americans—men who fought against the British, some of whom heard George Washington speak. Mr. Hillard understood they were "the last generation that will be connected by living link with the great period in which our national independence was achieved." He believed that his generation was the last to actually see these survivors or hear their voices, but his publication made it

possible for individuals 150 years later to feel the reverberations of the Revolution through his interviews and pictures. Their memories bring it to life.

One pensioner, Lemuel Cook, recounted how Washington "ordered that there should be no laughing at the British; it was bad enough to have to surrender without being insulted." The stories of these men's lives compel us to think of the history of this country and the passage of time. Each biography is a combination of oral history and documented facts from pension documents, town records and local histories. The combination of historical facts and memories offers insights into the world in which these men lived—both before the American Revolution and afterward. Their participation in the Revolution changed them in many cases from boys into men, and led them to choose a path not determined by birth, but by selection. There is no doubt that these biographies are glimpses into life more than 200 years ago.

THE LAST MEN OF THE REVOLUTION

Samuel Downing (1764–1867) was 102 years old when interviewed in 1864. He recalled that as a small child his parents left him unattended in his birthplace of Newbury, Mass., for a short time during which he was approached by a traveler who offered to teach him a trade. That was the last time he saw his family. He lived with his "Aunt and Uncle" until he ran away to enlist at the age of 16 in 1780. He reminisced about Generals Washington, Arnold and Burgoyne. Mr. Downing remembered Arnold as "kind to his soldiers." Mr. Hillard related that, "When peace was declared he [Downing] remembers his unit burning 13 candles in every hut, one for each State." After the war, he married, had 13 children and eventually settled in New York State.



Daniel Waldo (1763–1864) enlisted in 1778 at about age 16 for what was initially only a month's service. He decided to re-enlist, which led to his becoming a prisoner of war of the British in 1779. He was held at one of the "sugar house" prisons in New York City until February 1780. These prisons were named for their original function as sugar refineries. Upon release, he returned to his native Windham, Conn., entering Yale College to become a minister in 1788. He eventually married and had five children, moving to New York State in 1835.



Lemuel Cook (1759–1866), another veteran who settled in New York, holds the distinction of being the oldest living member of this elite group of Revolutionary War soldiers. A veteran of the Battle of Brandywine, he was also present at Gen. Cornwallis' surrender. Trying to enlist when he was 16, he was told that because of his size he had to sign up for the duration of the war. He was discharged in 1784. Mr. Cook's colorful mem-

ories included his first encounter with French soldiers: “They were a dreadful proud nation.” Like the other veterans, he married, had children and re-settled in New York State.



Alexander Milliner (1760–1865) was enlisted by his stepfather and appeared on the rolls under his stepfather’s name of Maroney. He was told he was too young to be a soldier, so instead he became a drummer boy for the duration of the war. Mr. Milliner served at several major battles. He recounted a humorous story about Washington interrupting a group of boys playing a game by saying he would show them how to really play it—and did. He had recollections of both Gen. and Mrs. Washington, especially how she regarded the troops as her children. Mr. Milliner’s mother accompanied the troops as a washerwoman to be near her child. Discharged in New York State after serving six-and-a-half years, he claimed to have enlisted in the Navy in 1814 for five-and-a-half years, but Mr. Hillard was unable to verify his naval service. Alexander Milliner didn’t marry until he was 39 years old, and at the time of his interview, seven of his nine children were still living, as well as three generations of their descendants.



William Hutchins/Hutchings (1764–1864) enlisted when he was only 15 for the coastal defense of Maine, at that time still part of Massachusetts. According to Mr. Hutchings, he became a British prisoner at the battle of Castine, Maine, but they let him go because of his age. He remained in Maine until the end of the war, married a local girl and fathered 15 children. Mr. Hillard found him healthy in mind and body.



Adam Link (1761–1864) was another 16-year-old who joined the war effort. He wanted frontier service and recalled during his interview that, “Whatever else they may say of me, no man ever could call me a coward.” At 60, this remarkable man decided to walk from Pennsylvania to Ohio to start a new life. A true survivor, Mr. Link lived a sparse existence without luxuries. While he built a farm at age 70, he lived in a shelter constructed from a fallen tree.

These six men survived the Revolution and helped build the new nation. When *The Last Men* appeared in print, a now-unknown doctor wrote a letter remarking on the strength of these men, who were each more than 100 years old. He attributed long life to “a rural population, that lives with sufficient necessities and few luxuries of life, contented and laborious in the open air.” These elements were certainly part of the daily lives of these first Patriots.

In honor of their age and contributions, each man had their pensions increased by \$100 annually. This was more than double the original amount they subsisted on previously. As you consider the lives of your Revolutionary ancestors, keep in mind the words Mr. Hillard used to describe these Patriots: “History lives only in the persons who created it.” 🌲

— PHOTOGRAPHS

Do you have a photograph of your Revolutionary ancestor? You might have one and not know it. A perfect example is a newly rediscovered image of George Fishley at the Portsmouth (N.H.) Historical Society, www.seacoastnh.com/arts/please112402.html. There are a few steps you can take to discover images of your Revolutionary War ancestor.

Since photography dates back to 1839, it might be possible to find a portrait if your Patriot lived after that date. The type of photograph depends on when it was taken.

For instance, daguerreotypes, the first images, date from 1839 to c. 1865. They must be held at a particular angle to be visible due to their highly polished metal surface. Ambrotypes, developed in 1854, are photographs on glass and can be found in cases similar to daguerreotypes. You might even discover a paper photograph or metal photo, called a tintype, since both were available in 1855. The type of photograph you uncover, however, will depend on how long your Patriot lived.

Consult the *Sixth Census of the United States* (1840) that named military pensioners, including those from the Revolution and their widows. That census data appeared in *A Census of Pensioners for Revolutionary or Military Services, as Returned Under the Act for Taking the Sixth Census in 1840* (1841; reprint, Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1965). It is available in several online bookstores or you can search “Census of Pensioners” in an online search engine and find Web sites with data for specific geographic areas.

Another option is to consult the National Archives micropublication T498, 1790 Census, roll 3. Each citation provides the name, age and where the pensioner lived.

If you don’t own an image of those ancestors, contact historical societies in the area in which your ancestor lived. A good resource for these societies is Elizabeth Petty Bentley’s *Genealogist’s Address Book* (GPC, 1998).

Two researchers, Maureen A. Taylor (author of this article) and David Lambert, a librarian at the New England Historic Genealogical Society, have launched a project to locate all known photographs of the Revolutionary War pensioners that appeared in the 1840 census and to find related information for short biographies. If you would like to learn more about the project or share your images, please contact them at mtaylor@taylorandstrong.com.