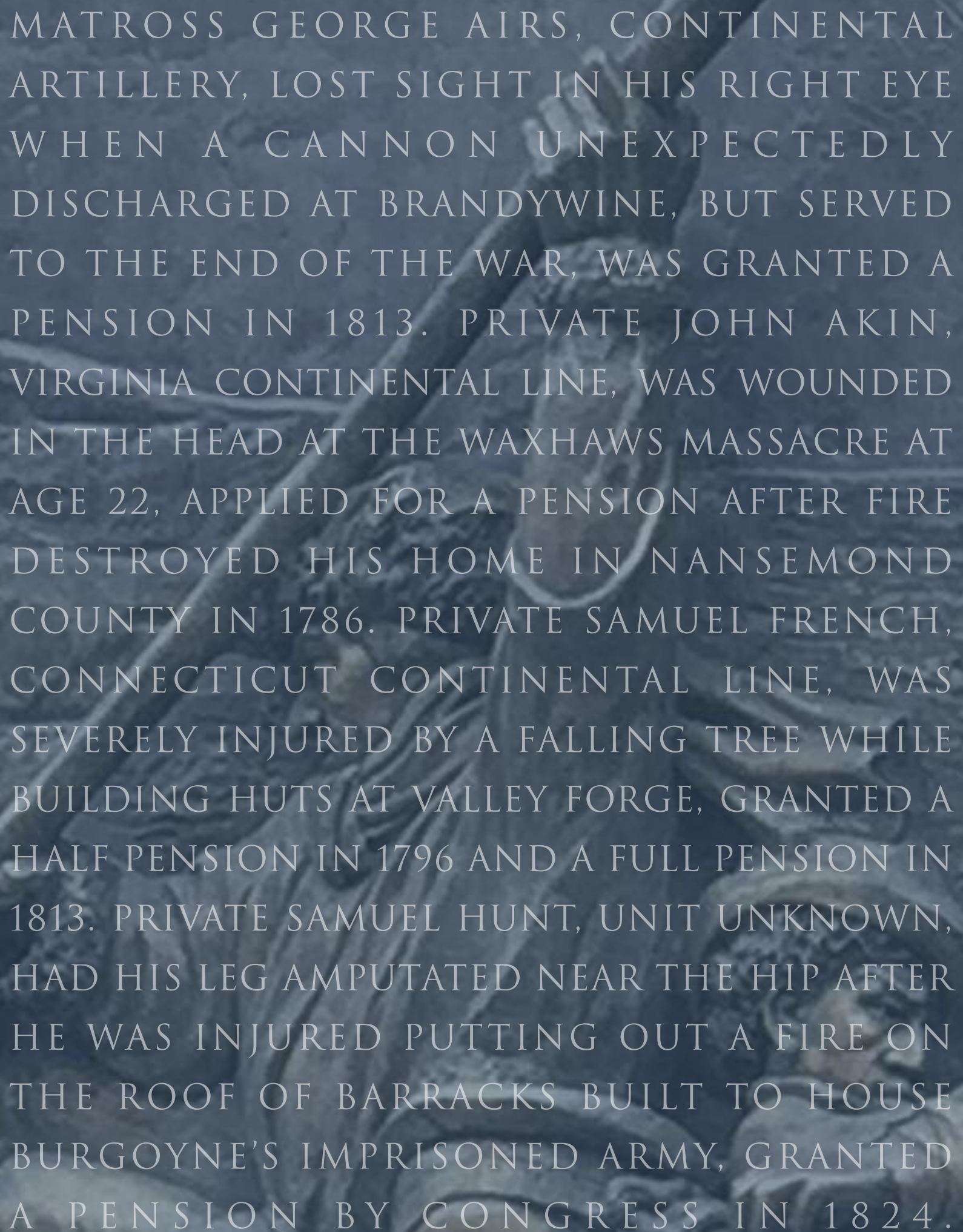


AMERICA'S FIRST VETERANS



AN EXHIBITION AT THE
AMERICAN REVOLUTION INSTITUTE
OF THE SOCIETY OF THE CINCINNATI

NOVEMBER 8, 2019
THROUGH APRIL 5, 2020



MATROSS GEORGE AIRS, CONTINENTAL ARTILLERY, LOST SIGHT IN HIS RIGHT EYE WHEN A CANNON UNEXPECTEDLY DISCHARGED AT BRANDYWINE, BUT SERVED TO THE END OF THE WAR, WAS GRANTED A PENSION IN 1813. PRIVATE JOHN AKIN, VIRGINIA CONTINENTAL LINE, WAS WOUNDED IN THE HEAD AT THE WAXHAW MASSACRE AT AGE 22, APPLIED FOR A PENSION AFTER FIRE DESTROYED HIS HOME IN NANSEMOND COUNTY IN 1786. PRIVATE SAMUEL FRENCH, CONNECTICUT CONTINENTAL LINE, WAS SEVERELY INJURED BY A FALLING TREE WHILE BUILDING HUTS AT VALLEY FORGE, GRANTED A HALF PENSION IN 1796 AND A FULL PENSION IN 1813. PRIVATE SAMUEL HUNT, UNIT UNKNOWN, HAD HIS LEG AMPUTATED NEAR THE HIP AFTER HE WAS INJURED PUTTING OUT A FIRE ON THE ROOF OF BARRACKS BUILT TO HOUSE BURGOYNE'S IMPRISONED ARMY, GRANTED A PENSION BY CONGRESS IN 1824.

AMERICA'S FIRST VETERANS

Over a quarter of a million American men served in the armed forces that won our independence. Between eighty and ninety thousand of them served in the Continental Army, an all volunteer army of citizens. All of these men risked their lives. Those who survived the war became America's first veterans—the world's first veterans of an army of free men.

The American republic owed its existence to them, but in the first years after the Revolutionary War, Americans found it difficult to acknowledge that debt, much less honor their service. Most American soldiers returned from their service in the Revolutionary War with nothing more than the personal satisfaction of duty faithfully performed. Following British practice, Congress provided small pensions for men disabled in service. Most men discharged in good health received nothing. The generals who had led them were celebrated as heroes, but ordinary soldiers were rarely honored in the first decades after the war.

It took decades, but Americans gradually realized that the common soldiers of our Revolutionary War were heroes, too. Those who lived to be old men were finally recognized as honored veterans of a revolution that had created the first great republic of modern times. In 1818 Congress decided to award pensions to veterans in financial need, and in 1832 Congress voted to extend pensions to nearly all of the surviving soldiers and sailors of the Revolution. These were the first pensions paid to veterans without regard to rank, financial distress, or physical disability. They reflected the gratitude of a free people for the brave Americans who secured their freedom.

Our commitment to the veterans of our time is a legacy of the American Revolution and our commitment, two hundred years ago, to honor and care for America's first veterans.

A Pensioner of the Revolution

John Neagle (1796-1865)

1830

Oil on canvas

The Society of the Cincinnati, Museum purchase, 2017

Most portraits of soldiers who fought for American independence depict elegant, attractive men in the prime of life. This painting of a veteran of the Revolutionary War is

something different—a somber and arresting image of a poor man that hints at the struggles many soldiers of the Revolution faced in old age. John Neagle painted the portrait in 1830, when the nation’s attention was drawn to the plight of its aging veterans.

The subject was a homeless veteran living on the street in Philadelphia. His name, Neagle said, was Joseph Winter. A German immigrant who arrived in America before the Revolutionary War, Winter was one of thousands of young men who served in the war for American independence. After the war he worked as a weaver in Bethlehem,

Pennsylvania, but with approaching old age he had lost his livelihood and family and become, in Neagle’s words, “a lone wanderer in a world evincing but little feeling or sympathy for him.”

The painting attracted popular attention in early 1831, when John Sartain published a mezzotint engraving of the work titled *Patriotism and Age*. “This picture speaks a satire of melancholy truth,” one viewer commented, “that must reach the heart of every American, who is not forgetful of the blessings inherited from his forefathers. It is a burning shame that beggary and scoffing are the lot of those aged benefactors of their country.” This haunting image was a call to the conscience of the nation to care for those who had fought its battles and won its freedom.



Detail of *Second Street North from
Market St. with Christ Church*
Engraving by William Russell Birch
Philadelphia: W. Birch & Son, 1799
Library Company of Philadelphia
(graphic in exhibition)





CENTURIES OF NEGLECT

Roman legionaries discharged after twenty to thirty years of continuous military service were often awarded grants of land or one-time cash payments and honored as *veterani*. The term veteran was revived in the Renaissance and applied to men distinguished by long and illustrious service to the state rather than to long-serving common soldiers.

The royal officials who governed the warring states of early modern Europe and the aristocrats who commanded their armies regarded common soldiers with disdain. Officers, they believed, might be motivated by duty and honor, but common soldiers—typically recruited from the poor—were incapable of honor and had to be controlled by rigid discipline and managed with the lash.

They were, one English official warned, “men naturally brutish and bred up in all disorder, vice, and debauchery.” No European state acknowledged their faithful service or an obligation to care for their health or welfare after their military service ended.

The only exception was for men who had been disabled in service, or in the words of the Elizabethan “Acte for relief of Maimed Souldiours,” those who “lose their limbs or disable their bodies, in defense and service of Her Majesty and the State.” Soldiers who qualified under the act received a very small monthly pension. The government regarded those pensions as poor relief and not as just compensation for duty faithfully performed.



Detail of *Dick, or the Soldier's Return*
Thomas Burke, engraver, after W. Woolley
London: S. Morgan, 1801
The British Museum
(graphic in exhibition)

***An Universal
Military Dictionary***
Capt. George Smith
London: Printed for
J. Millan, 1779
The Society of the Cincinnati,
The Robert Charles Lawrence
Fergusson Collection

In his military dictionary published in 1779, Capt. George Smith, inspector of the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich, offered a definition of veteran that connected longevity of service to the privileges and honors one earned with that distinction:

VETERAN, in the Roman militia, a soldier who was grown old in the service, or who had made a certain number of campaigns, and on that account was intitled to certain benefits and privileges. Twenty years service were sufficient to intitle a man to the benefit of a veteran. These privileges consisted in being absolved from the military oath, in being exempted from all the functions of a soldier, in enjoying a certain salary or appointment, &c.



REVOLUTIONARY PROMISES

Recruiting and retaining enlisted men for the Continental Army was a constant challenge. In Europe, labor surpluses and chronic underemployment assured that armies could depend on landless laborers and the urban poor to fill their ranks. European governments offered their soldiers scant but steady pay and had no reason to offer other inducements. In America, labor shortages and low unemployment forced Congress and the states to offer a wide range of inducements to secure volunteers, including cash bounties at enlistment and promises of land warrants and one-time bonuses at discharge.

Maintaining an effective officer corps was just as challenging. Congress and the states made extravagant promises of post-war land grants and generous pay to attract officers. In 1778, Congress promised officers who served for the duration of the war half pay for seven years after the war's end. In 1780, Congress extended that promise to half pay for life.

At first these promises were made in a spirit of irrational optimism, and later, out of desperation. Congress offered future land grants when it had no land to give. It offered officers and soldiers pay when it had no power to tax and no hard money to spend. Paper money issued by Congress and the states depreciated so rapidly that soldiers' pay became worthless. Late in the war, enlisted men—many of them tired, poorly clothed, and hungry—began to mutiny. Officers resigned, protested, petitioned, and threatened dire action if Congress failed to meet its obligations to them.

At war's end, Congress moved rapidly to dissolve its discontented army. Mass furloughs were issued to get men out of camp and off the payroll. Men went home with discharge papers but usually with little or no pay. The Continental Army vanished, leaving behind account books filled with unfulfilled promises. Congress spent much of the next century processing, adjudicating, and resolving the revolutionary claims of veterans and their heirs.



**Henry Knox to John Hancock
October 20, 1782
The Society of the Cincinnati,
The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection**

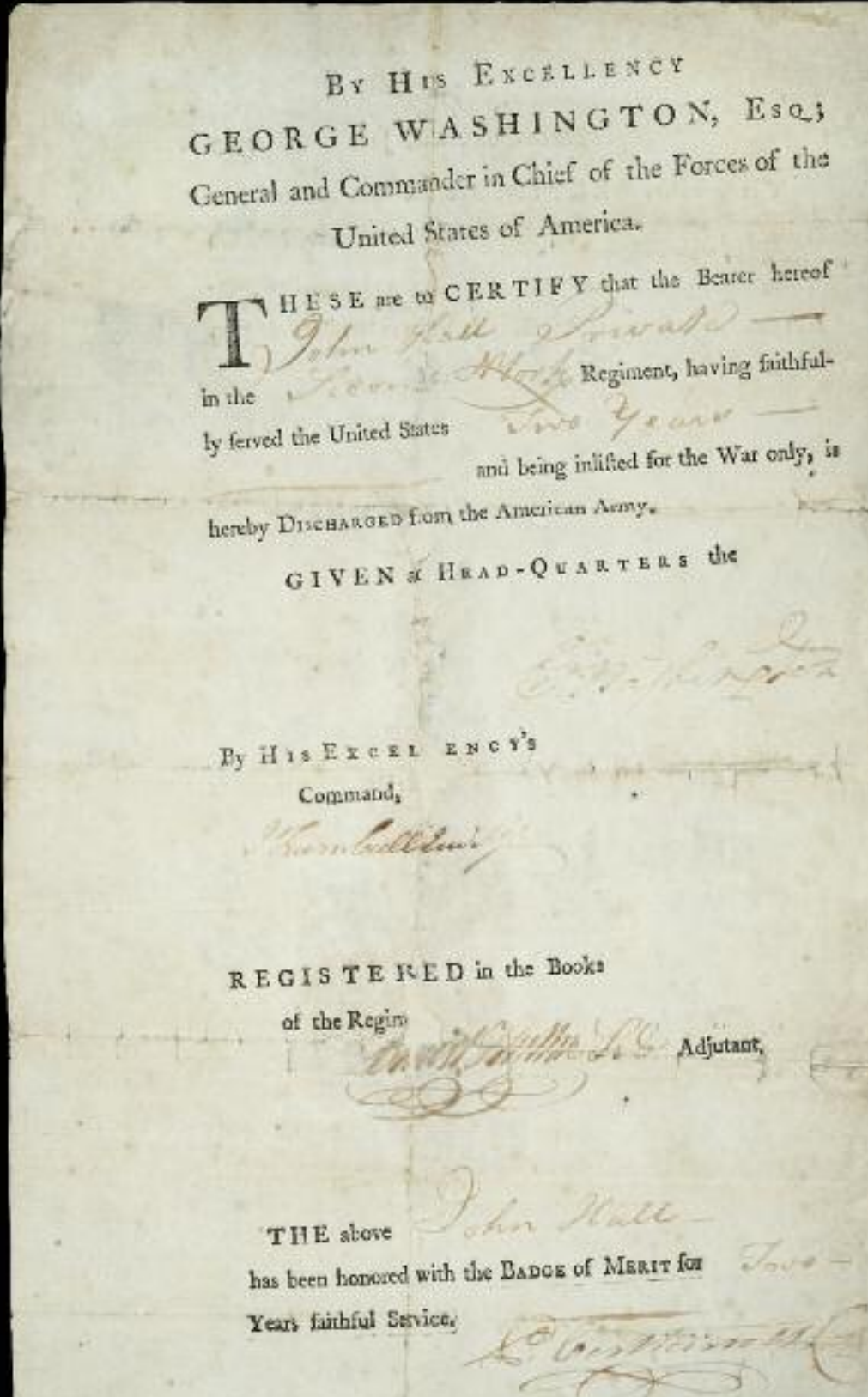
Congress passed an act on August 26, 1776, promising half pay for life to any officer, soldier, or sailor disabled in the service of the United States. Without the power to tax, however, Congress depended on the states to fulfill this promise. In this letter, Henry Knox appealed to Governor John Hancock of Massachusetts for support for Capt. John Sluman of Crane's Artillery Regiment, who was permanently disabled by wounds inflicted at the Battle of Germantown in 1777. "I hope and believe that Your Excellency will take this matter into consideration," Knox wrote, "and use such measures as will effect the relief of the gallant unfortunates, whose sufferings, if too long continued, will tend to tarnish the lustre of the revolution." Sluman was awarded a half-pay disability pension of \$300 per year from Massachusetts in 1784. Congress assumed responsibility for disability pensions in 1790 and paid Sluman \$300 annually until his death in 1816.

**Discharge of Private John Hall
[1783]**

The Society of the Cincinnati, Gift of Robert L. Buell, 1966

In accordance with instructions from Congress, John Hall and the soldiers of the Continental Army who had enlisted for the duration were furloughed in June 1783. Hall had served honorably in the Second New York Regiment under the command of Col. Philip Van Courtlandt. His discharge notes that "the above John Hall has been honored with the Badge of Merit for two years faithful service."

Soldiers like John Hall were sent home with no more than one month's pay in cash. Many received promissory notes for a few months additional pay that they exchanged for food and clothing for their journey home. Hall's discharge is undated, but it was effective when the Continental Army was dissolved by order of Congress in November 1783. In his Farewell Orders, issued on November 2, 1783, George Washington wrote that "the Officers and Soldiers may expect considerable assistance in recommencing their civil occupations from the sums due to them from the public, which must and will most inevitably be paid." When he died in 1817 or 1818, John Hall had not received the land warrant he had been promised when he enlisted.



THE HONOR OF FREE MEN



The Continental Army was the world's first army of free men—a volunteer army of citizens bound together by honor rather than coercion or fear of punishment. When the army disbanded in the summer of 1783, George Washington paid silent tribute to the unselfish patriotism of his men. They were, he wrote, "Veterans who have patiently endured hunger, nakedness and cold, who have suffered and bled

without a murmur, and who with perfect good order have retired to their homes, without the settlement of their Accounts or a farthing of Money in their pockets." They were men of honor—ordinary men made extraordinary by their devotion to a great cause. It would take the nation many years to grasp this truth, and honor its veterans as heroes.

Badge of Military Merit

ca. 1782-1783

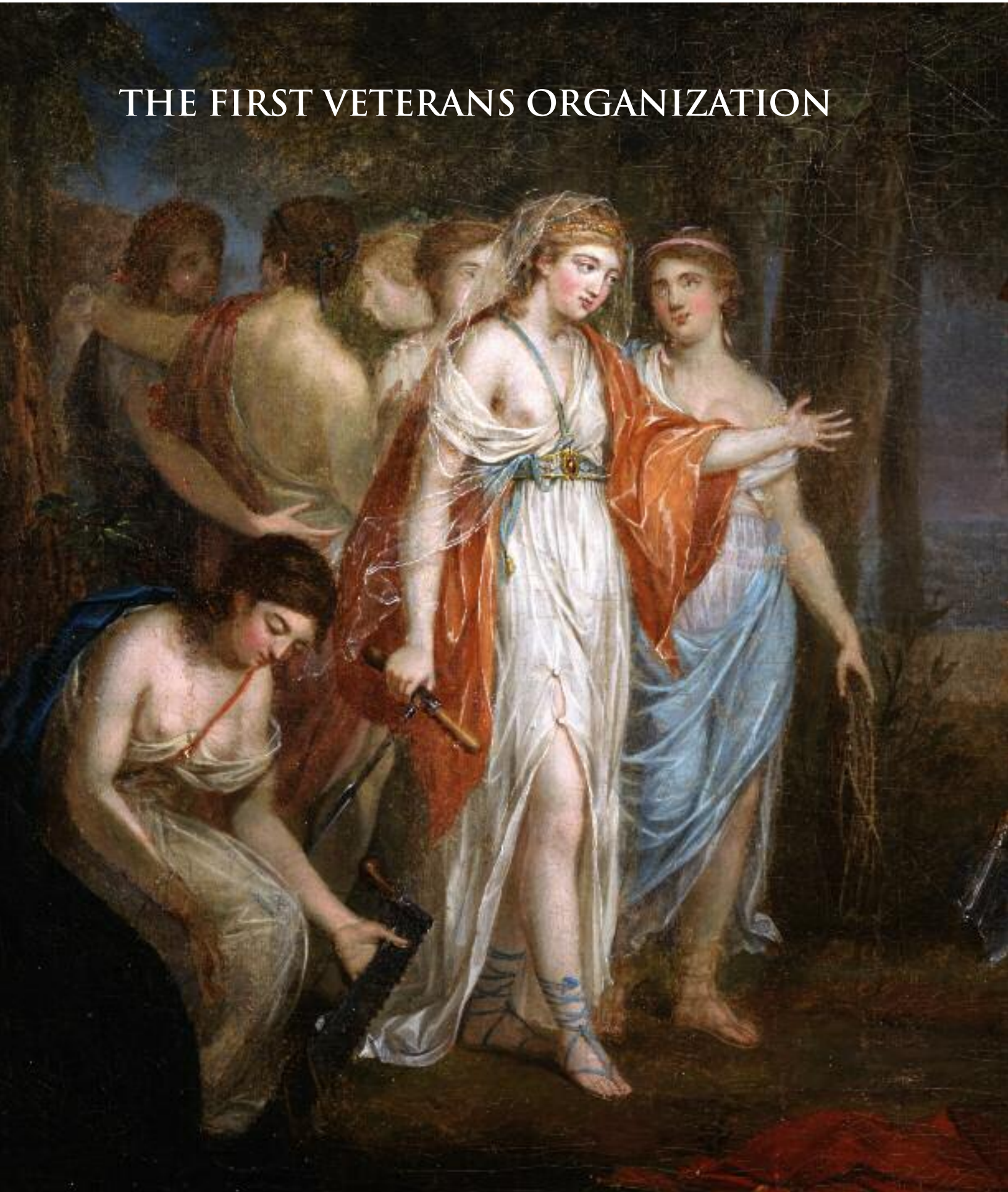
Silk, silver braid, and wool twill

Collection of the American Independence Museum, Exeter, NH and the Society of the Cincinnati in the State of New Hampshire. Gift of William L. Willey.

George Washington's conviction that ordinary soldiers were motivated by honor led him to create the Badge of Military Merit—the first military decoration for enlisted men. Announced on August 7, 1782, the award recognized distinguished conduct, and was intended to encourage "virtuous ambition" and "every species of Military merit." Soldiers honored with the award, Washington directed, "shall be permitted to wear on his facings over the left breast, the figure of a heart in purple cloth, or silk, edged with narrow lace or binding." He further ordered that "those gallant men who are thus designated will on all occasions be treated with particular confidence and consideration."

Veterans may have worn this badge of honor on their civilian coats after the war. The record book of those who received it has been lost, possibly in the fire that consumed the War Department in 1800. Only two reputed examples are known, of which this is one. The decoration fell out of use after the Revolutionary War, but was revived in 1932 as the Purple Heart, which was originally awarded for meritorious conduct as well as to honor those wounded in action. Today it is awarded to honor men and women in any branch of the U.S. military wounded or killed in action.

THE FIRST VETERANS ORGANIZATION





Before going home, the veteran officers of the Continental Army established the Society of the Cincinnati to preserve their fellowship, perpetuate the memory of the American Revolution, and maintain pressure on Congress to fulfill the promises made to them.

The Society of the Cincinnati was the nation's first veterans organization—the predecessor of the Grand Army of the Republic, Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Vietnam Veterans Association, Disabled American Veterans, and many other organizations formed by veterans to advocate and care for their

own as well as to perpetuate the fellowship of their time in active service.

In the absence of any public commitment to care for veteran officers in need, the original members of the Society pledged “brotherly kindness in all things,” including “the most substantial acts of beneficence, according to the ability of the society, towards those officers and their families, who unfortunately may be under the necessity of receiving it.” The original members each contributed one month's pay to create a fund dedicated to the relief of fellow veteran officers and their widows in times of need.

The Return of Cincinnatus
Attributed to Angelica Kauffmann (1740-1807)
ca. 1775
Oil on canvas
The Society of the Cincinnati,
Gift of Margaretta Kingsbury Maganini, 1969

For eighteenth-century Americans, the ancient Roman hero Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus symbolized unselfish patriotism. According to classical historians, he twice led the army of the Roman Republic to victory and then returned to his farm, relinquishing dictatorial power and refusing rewards for his service. Veteran officers of the Continental Army announced their patriotic intentions by naming their fraternal brotherhood the Society of the Cincinnati, though most were anxious to secure the rewards promised to them during the war.

This painting is attributed to Angelica Kauffman, a native of Switzerland who worked chiefly in Italy and Britain and who specialized in portraits and classical scenes. It depicts Cincinnatus' arrival home after defeating the Aequi, who had threatened Rome from the east. He has thrown down his senatorial robe and is discarding his ax, both symbols of political authority.

**Memorial of the Officers, now Residing in the State of New-York, of the Late American Army,
in Behalf of Themselves and Their Brethren, the Soldiers of the Said Army**

New-York, September 1792

The Society of the Cincinnati, Library purchase, 1975

The Society of the Cincinnati and its members petitioned Congress repeatedly to fulfill its wartime promise of half pay for life. This memorial of veteran officers residing in New York was printed over the signature of Ebenezer Stevens (1751–1823), a Rhode Islander who rose through the commissioned ranks to become a lieutenant colonel of artillery. After the war he settled in New York and was a successful merchant. Stevens sent this copy to William Moultrie, president of the South Carolina Society of the Cincinnati, assuring him that “we have every Reason to expect Success will attend our Application.” Congress did not make a conclusive settlement of the veteran officers’ claims until 1828.

New-York, September 1792.

GENTLEMEN,

*T*HE Officers of the late Army residing in this State were convened on the 4th Day of July last, to take into Consideration Communications from different States, on the Subject of the unsatisfied Debt due from Government to the late Army—which Meeting was adjourned to the next Day, when certain Resolutions were adopted, and a Committee appointed, a Copy of which we herewith transmit you. Another general Meeting of the Officers, on the same Subject, was called by the said Committee, to be held on the 3d Day of September, inst. when his Excellency George Clinton, and Captain Samuel Craig, were added to the Committee, and Joseph Brown, Esq. was chosen our Agent to solicit our Claim, and present the inclosed Memorial to Congress, early in their next Session. We have every Reason to expect Success will attend our Application.

We have the honor to be,
Gentlemen, your most obedient Servants,

GEORGE CLINTON,	JOHN F. VACHER,
EBENEZER STEVENS,	JOSEPH BROWN,
MARINUS WILLETT,	ISAAC LEDGAR,
SAMUEL CRAIG,	NATH. LAURENCE.
G. LEACRAFT,	

DECADES OF DISAPPOINTMENT

Most soldiers received debt certificates instead of pay when they were discharged from the army. Sergeant Joseph Plumb Martin later recalled that many soldiers sold their debt certificates “to procure decent clothing and money sufficient to enable them to pass with decency through their country and to appear something like themselves when they arrived among friends.” Martin sold his own certificate for seven years of back pay for the money he needed for one new suit of clothes and the expenses of the journey home.

Once home, veterans struggled to establish themselves in civilian life. With no savings or other assets, many became manual laborers or tenant farmers. Other veterans borrowed to make a new start but had trouble paying their debts during the economic downturn following the war—difficulties compounded in some states by taxes imposed to pay down the public debt. Some frustrated veterans evaded tax and debt collectors.

A few veterans organized to resist the execution of the law by force of arms. In western Massachusetts, debtors led by Revolutionary War veterans Daniel Shays, Luke Day, and Job Shattuck took up arms to stop the courts from functioning. Shays and Day, former Continental Army captains, attempted to seize the arsenal at Springfield, but a militia force raised to put down their rebellion forced them to flee after a skirmish in which four of Shays’ men were killed and twenty wounded. Many of the men who participated in what became known as Shays’ Rebellion were veterans in financial distress.

Congress lacked the means to fulfill its promises to veterans during the 1780s, and most of the states acted very slowly to compensate their former soldiers. The adoption of the U.S. Constitution and the establishment of a federal government with the power to tax gave veterans reason to hope that Congress would resolve their claims for back pay and finally provide the land warrants and other compensation promised during the war.

Bryan Rossiter
John Trumbull (1756-1843)
ca. 1806-1808
Oil on canvas
New York State Society of the Cincinnati

Veteran enlisted men like Bryan Rossiter (1760-1834) waited decades to secure what was due to them. After seven years’ service in the Connecticut State Troops and Continental Army, Rossiter was furloughed in June 1783. He was owed back pay, an \$80 bonus, and a warrant for one hundred acres of land, but he went home empty handed. He wouldn’t be fully compensated for his Revolutionary War service until 1828.

After the war, Rossiter married and settled in New York City, where he labored to support his family. As a veteran non-commissioned officer, Rossiter was not eligible to join the Society of the Cincinnati, but the New York State Society appointed him sergeant at arms in 1801. John Trumbull’s portrait of Rossiter in his sergeant at arms uniform includes two white chevrons on his left sleeve, indicating that Rossiter had been awarded the Badge of Merit.



To the Electors of the State of New-Jersey
"A Continental Soldier" [James Blanchard]
[Norfolk, Va.], August 25, 1792
The Society of the Cincinnati of Maryland

Most soldiers received debt certificates instead of pay when they were discharged from the army. Needing cash to support themselves, some veterans sold the certificates to speculators at a small fraction of their face value. Among the most fiercely debated issues of the early 1790s was whether the new federal government should pay the full value of those certificates to the speculators who had bought them up at a discount, or "discriminate" between speculators and original holders—mainly Continental Army veterans—and pay at least some of the value to the soldiers who had earned them. This broadside circulated in New Jersey and elsewhere during the fall of 1792 to influence voters to elect candidates who supported discrimination.

To the ELECTORS of the STATE of
FRIENDS and FELLOW CITIZENS,

AS the time draws near for you to elect your proportion of Representatives, I beg leave to address you (among the other citizens of the United States) on a subject, that notwithstanding is a part for you to act, yet as the respective States are united in Congress, the votes of the Member of one State improperly given, operates to the prejudice of the whole.

When the new Government was instituted, an arrangement of the public debt became necessary; sundry petitions were presented to Congress, praying that some mode might be adopted to ascertain the value of certificates, similar to other paper money that had been emitted.

The Representatives from the State of Virginia, and several from the other States, urged the justice of the application; and the hardship that original creditors should be taxed to redeem a certificate at 20s. that they sold for 2s/6. and was liquidated in the Courts of Justice by a scale of depreciation in payment of all debts from one individual to another, and discriminated by Congress and the several States in the sale of all public property, and rejected in payment of any public debt, unless at the current value and rate of exchange. Therefore these gentlemen proposed a

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THE LURE OF LAND

The Continental Congress and some of the states promised soldiers land warrants as an inducement to secure the services of enlisted men and officers alike. A land warrant was a license to survey and apply for a grant of previously unclaimed land in a specific area. Congress promised warrants for 100 acres to privates, 150 acres to ensigns, 200 acres to lieutenants, and 500 acres to colonels. Later legislation offered 850 acres to brigadier generals and 1,100 acres to major generals. All of these warrants were to be issued after the war.

Congress counted on the states to fulfill its promises, since it had no public land to assign to veterans until the states began ceding western land to it. Virginia ceded to Congress its extensive claims to the region between the Ohio and the Great Lakes in 1783, while retaining its claim to Kentucky. Virginia issued land warrants to Virginia veterans in Kentucky and in a 4.2 million-acre area known as the Virginia Military District, in what became west central Ohio. North Carolina issued warrants in what became Tennessee to its veterans. Massachusetts issued warrants in what became Maine. Six other states issued warrants for land on their western frontiers.

Some veterans were anxious to collect their warrants and move west, but many more expected to sell them. Land warrants were negotiable instruments, commonly bought and sold by people who had no intention of staking a claim and settling west of the Appalachians. Their market value depended mainly on the circumstances prevailing in the regions specified in the warrant, mostly located in the Ohio Valley. Until the mid-1790s, control of that area was contested by Indians, which discouraged settlement and depressed land values.

Congress was slow to issue the land warrants it had promised, but provided for them in legislation passed in 1788. In 1796—after Anthony Wayne's victory over the Indians at Fallen Timbers brought peace to the upper Ohio Valley—Congress set aside the U.S. Military District, an area of 2.5 million acres in what is now central Ohio, for Revolutionary War land grants. By 1802 the federal government had issued some 14,000 land warrants for Revolutionary War service to veterans, their widows, or other heirs. Of the one million acres in the U.S. Military District claimed by land warrant, half were acquired by just twenty-two investors who had bought up land warrants issued to veterans. Veterans and their heirs presented claims for bounty land warrants to the federal government through 1863. The last claims, which were the subject of litigation, were not settled until 1912.

**Detail of *View of the Great Miami (Near Cleves, O.)*
William Wellstood, engraver, after G.N. Frankenskein
Cincinnati: Middleton, Wallace & Co., 1854
The Society of the Cincinnati, Library purchase, 2019
(graphic in exhibition)**



**Plat of a section of Washington
[now Garrett] County, Maryland
ca. 1789**

**The Society of the Cincinnati, Gift of Harry Wright
Newman, Society of the Cincinnati of Maryland, 1983**

In 1777 the Maryland legislature adopted an act providing that “every effective recruit is to receive, besides the continental allowances, a bounty of forty dollars, a pair of shoes, a pair of stockings, and at the expiration of his term, provided he shall not desert from the army, 50 acres of land.” Officers were to receive four fifty-acre parcels, and each recruiter one hundred acres for enlisting at least twenty men.

After the war, the state government set aside 2,575 parcels for veterans, all in what is now Garrett County in the extreme western part of the state. This manuscript plat depicts lots located north of Backbone Mountain in the southwest corner of the county. The larger, irregular parcels shown were already claimed when the surveyors began their work.


**Land warrant issued by the Commonwealth
of Virginia to George Rogers Clark
January 29, 1780**

The Society of the Cincinnati, The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection

The Commonwealth of Virginia issued this land warrant for 560 acres to George Rogers Clark (1752-1818) in January 1780 “in trust for recruiting his Battalion and in lieu of the bounty of 750 Dollars.” In December 1777, Governor Patrick Henry commissioned Clark a lieutenant colonel in the Virginia militia and charged him with raising a regiment for an expedition to take control of the Illinois country.

Clark financed his campaigns with funds he borrowed himself, which the Virginia legislature and Congress refused to repay, contending that Clark’s receipts were fraudulent. Virginia rewarded Clark with warrants for 150,000 acres in what became southern Indiana, but most of the land was turned over to his wartime creditors. In May 1792 he complained to his brother Jonathan: “I have given the U states half the Territory they possess, and for them to suffer me to remain in poverty in consequence will not redound much to their Honour hereafter.” Clark died nearly penniless.





Detail of *Old '76 and Young '48*

**Joseph Ives Pease, engraver, after Richard Caton Woodville
New York: Printed by J. Dalton, ca. 1853**

**The Society of the Cincinnati,
The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection
(not in exhibition)**

MY STORY

Veterans of the Revolutionary War were proud of what they had accomplished, but they were also disappointed by public ingratitude, indifference, and neglect in the decades following the war. Many veterans were frustrated that their countrymen did not understand the sacrifices they had made and the suffering they had endured to secure American independence.

The Revolutionary War was a people's war, fought by ordinary Americans to secure the rights and liberties of ordinary Americans, but the earliest histories of the war—written by people who, for the most part, had been far from the fighting—paid little attention to the experiences of common soldiers and sailors. Many histories of the war, the son of one veteran complained, were “mere fictions, got up for money making purposes.”

Veterans who felt compelled to set the record straight began sharing their stories in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Some wrote memoirs and persuaded a local printer to publish them, taking advantage of changes in the printing business that were making book publishing inexpensive and accessible to ordinary people with stories to tell. They were the first American veterans to publish accounts of their wartime experiences.

Veteran authors nearly all began by acknowledging that they were men of little historical importance. Their common aim, as navy veteran Andrew Sherburne wrote, was to give Americans a “plain, unvarnished account” of the experiences of ordinary soldiers and sailors. The result of their collective labors is a rich literature documenting the experiences of the first American veterans—plain men who risked their lives to create the first great republic of modern times.



***Life and Remarkable Adventures of Israel R. Potter*
Providence: Printed by J. Howard, for I.R. Potter, 1824
The Society of the Cincinnati, The Robert Charles
Lawrence Fergusson Collection**

Israel Potter (1754-1826) of Cranston, Rhode Island, published this short autobiography to capitalize on popular sympathy for veterans seeking benefits under the Pension Act of 1818. Potter applied for a pension in 1822, but it was rejected, probably because the examiners suspected a fraud. Potter claimed he was wounded at Bunker Hill, but no Rhode Island units fought in the battle. He signed on as a sailor aboard the armed brig *Washington*, was captured at sea, and transported to Britain. He claimed he escaped and made his way to London, but Benjamin Franklin encountered Potter in Paris and regarded him as a clumsy British spy. In the 1840s, Herman Melville acquired a copy of Potter's autobiography, and it became the basis of his book *Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile*, published in 1855.

***A Retrospect of the Boston Tea-party, with a Memoir
of George R.T. Hewes, a Survivor of the Little Band of
Patriots who Drowned the Tea in Boston Harbour in 1773*
"A Citizen of New-York" [James Hawkes]
New-York: S.S. Bliss, printer, 1834
The Society of the Cincinnati, Library purchase, 1990**

George Robert Twelves Hewes (1742-1840) became a local celebrity in western New York in the 1830s thanks largely to this biography, which the author dedicated to "the surviving officers and soldiers of the American war of the Revolution, as a just tribute of respect and gratitude." Hewes witnessed the Boston Massacre and participated in the Boston Tea Party. During the war he served aboard a privateer for three months and in the Massachusetts militia. This book was the first work to refer to the destruction of the East India Company tea as the "Boston Tea Party."



REVOLUTIONARY REVIVAL

The background of the page is a detailed etching. The central figure is General Lafayette, depicted from the chest up, wearing a dark coat and a cravat. He is holding a flag with stars and stripes in his right hand. To his left, another figure is partially visible, also holding a flag. In the background, there are more figures, some appearing to be in a crowd or a public setting. The style is characteristic of 19th-century political or historical illustrations.

By the middle of the 1820s, most of the surviving veterans of the Revolutionary War were in their sixties and early seventies. Most of their claims to back pay, bounties, and land warrants had been resolved, but the nation's obligation to them, beyond fulfillment of explicit promises made during the war, remained a subject of debate. The Pension Act of 1818 had provided assistance to the poorest veterans. Did the nation owe Revolutionary War veterans more than that?

Three events between 1824 and 1826 shaped this debate. The first was the visit of the marquis de Lafayette to the United States in 1824-1825. President James Monroe, a fellow Continental Army veteran, invited Lafayette to visit the United States in anticipation of the fiftieth anniversary of American independence. In August 1824 Lafayette arrived in New York, where he was met by a party of Revolutionary War veterans. Over the succeeding year Lafayette traveled more than six thousand miles and visited every state—a tour that did more to generate popular appreciation of Revolutionary War veterans than any event since the war.

The second event was the ceremony to lay the cornerstone of an ambitious monument to the American victory at Bunker Hill, held on June 17, 1825. Thousands of people from Boston and the surrounding region attended the ceremony, at which the surviving veterans of the battle and other veterans of the Revolutionary War were placed in the front ranks of the audience and honored as the heroes of American independence. Lafayette laid the cornerstone and Daniel Webster, the son of a Revolutionary War veteran, gave the formal oration, in which he paid tribute to Revolutionary War veterans as the nation's fathers.

The third event was the fiftieth anniversary of independence on July 4, 1826. In cities and towns across the country, Revolutionary War veterans were recognized in public ceremonies, given places of honor at banquets, and celebrated as living links to the nation's founding. Together these events renewed popular appreciation of the achievements of the America's first veterans.

Gen. La Fayette's Visit
Etching published ca. 1824-1825
Special Collections & College Archives,
Skillman Library, Lafayette College
(graphic in exhibition)



**Jug commemorating the
marquis de Lafayette's tour
Richard Hall & Son,
Staffordshire, England
ca. 1824
Earthenware and ink
The Society of the Cincinnati,
Gift of the Friends of the
Boush-Tazewell House, Inc., 1991**

Lafayette's 1824-1825 visit to America generated an enormous range of commemorative products, like this Staffordshire jug bearing a portrait of the general and the legend: "In Commemoration of the Visit, of GEN. L. La Fayette, to the U.S. of America, In the Year 1824." All of these products stirred Americans' pride in their revolutionary past at a moment when the nation's obligation to its

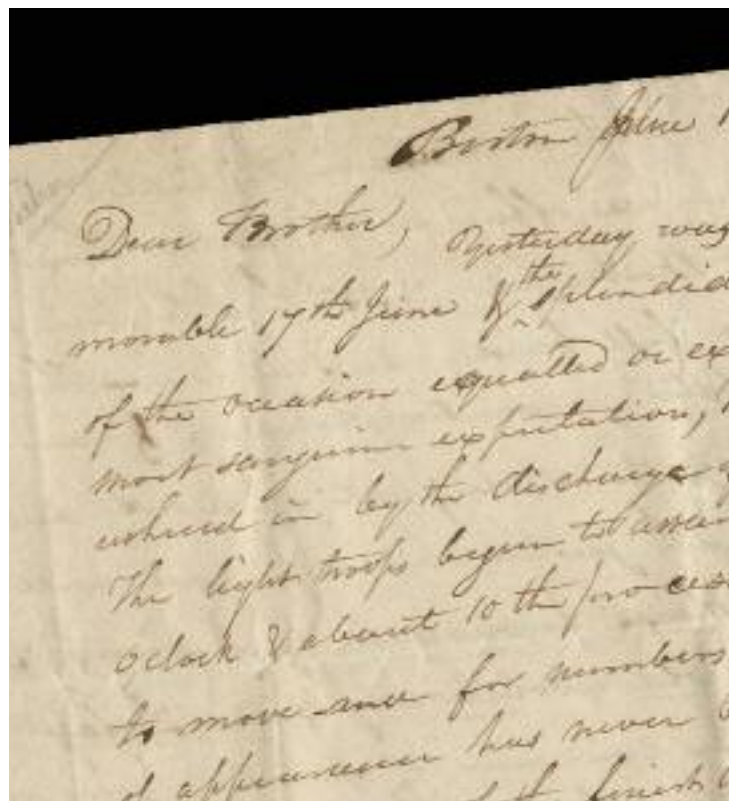
aging veterans was an important issue. Shortly before he returned to France, Congress presented Lafayette—the highest-ranking living veteran of the Revolutionary War—with \$200,000 and a 23,000-acre tract in Florida.

Amasa Walker to Freeman Walker

June 18, 1825

The Society of the Cincinnati, The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection

In this letter to his brother, Amasa Walker (1799-1875) of Boston described the ceremonies he attended the day before, featuring Daniel Webster's oration after the laying of the cornerstone for the new Bunker Hill monument. "When he addressed the old Survivors of the Battle, they all rose & uncovered their white heads, and if the sight was not melting and sublime I don't know what could be, & when he said 'Fathers, fifty years ago this very hour you were here, but how changed the scene,' &c. &c. — I will only say that sometime the tears ran from my eyes & sometimes I laughed, so carried away was I by the eloquence of the speaker and the interesting associations of the place & occasion."



**Ribbon commemorating
the Bunker Hill monument
G.G. Smith, Boston
1843
Silk and ink
The Society of the Cincinnati,
Museum purchase, 2019**

This printed silk ribbon is one of many keepsakes produced to commemorate the dedication of the Bunker Hill monument, which took place on June 17, 1843. It bears a short passage from Daniel Webster's dedication speech and a scene of Revolutionary War veterans in the clouds looking down approvingly on the monument, reflecting popular awareness that the Revolutionary generation had mostly passed away.



THE PENSION ACT OF 1818

James Monroe, a veteran officer of the Virginia Continental Line, included a plea for the surviving veterans of the Revolutionary War in his first Annual Message, presented to Congress on December 2, 1817. In "contemplating the happy situation of the United States," he said,

our attention is drawn with peculiar interest to the surviving officers and soldiers of our Revolutionary army, who so eminently contributed by their services to lay its foundation. Most of those very meritorious citizens have paid the debt of nature and gone to repose. It is believed that among the survivors there are some not provided for by existing laws, who are reduced to indigence and even to real distress. These men have a claim on the gratitude of their country, and it will do honor to their country to provide for them. The lapse of a few years more and the opportunity will be forever lost; indeed, so long already has been the interval that the number to be benefitted by any provision which may be made will not be great.

Congress responded promptly to Monroe's appeal, adopting a landmark pension act on March 18, 1818, to provide all surviving veterans who had served for at least nine months in the Continental Army and were "in reduced circumstances" to a pension. Disability was no longer the sole qualification. Any Continental Army veteran with sufficient service who was "in need of assistance from his country for support" could secure a pension.

Detail of *The House of Representatives*
Samuel F. B. Morse (1791-1872)

1822-1823

Oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Corcoran Collection (Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund)

(graphic in exhibition)

The Female Review: or, Memoirs of an American Young Lady
"A Citizen of Massachusetts" [Herman Mann]
Dedham, Mass.: Nathaniel and Benjamin Heaton, for the Author, 1797
The Society of the Cincinnati, The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection

Deborah Sampson (1760-1827) enlisted in the Massachusetts Continental Line in May 1782 using the name "Robert Shurtleff." She succeeded in hiding her sex, even when she was wounded in a skirmish near Tarrytown, New York, on July 3, 1782. To avoid detection, she removed a musket ball from her thigh herself, and carried a second ball in her leg for the rest of her life. A doctor learned her secret when she fell ill in 1783 but did not reveal it to her commanding officer until the end of her service. She was honorably discharged in October 1783 but received no pay.

In 1785 Sampson married Benjamin Gannett of Sharon, Massachusetts, and they had three children. Their worn-out farm never prospered and they slipped into poverty. Mixing fact with romantic inventions, this imaginative account of Sampson's wartime service was published to support her case for a pension. In 1805 she received a disability pension of \$4 a month, which she relinquished to accept a pension of \$8 a month awarded under the Pension Act of 1818.



THE PENSION CONTROVERSY

Many more veterans applied for support under the Pension Act of 1818 than expected, and 18,880 applications were approved. As the pension list expanded and federal costs soared, opponents charged that many pensioners had feigned poverty to meet the requirement that applicants show financial need.

The controversy coincided with a severe recession—the Panic of 1819—that cut federal revenues while putting thousands of Americans out of work. Charges that veterans of comfortable means were collecting pensions while ordinary Americans suffered led Congress to amend the Pension Act of 1818. The new law, passed on May 1, 1820, required each pensioner and new applicant to submit a certified schedule of his estate and income to the secretary of war, who was authorized to remove any veteran from the list who, in his opinion, had not demonstrated need. Secretary of War John C. Calhoun struck some 6,549 veterans from the list.

The federal government was deluged with appeals from veterans struck from the pension list, prompting Congress to revise the Pension Act of 1818 a second time. The new law, adopted March 1, 1823, directed the secretary of war to restore the pension of any veteran who furnished evidence that he was “in such indigent circumstances as to be unable to support himself without the assistance of his country.” Thousands of veterans submitted the paperwork required to prove financial need.

Ebenezer Huntington

John Trumbull (1756-1843)

ca. 1835

Oil on wood panel

The Society of the Cincinnati, Museum Acquisitions Fund purchase, 2018

Ebenezer Huntington (1754-1834) of Norwich, Connecticut, was one of the highest-ranking veterans to receive a pension. He retired from the Continental Army in 1783 as a lieutenant colonel and was commissioned a brigadier general during the Quasi-War with France in 1798, but he fell into genteel poverty in the 1810s. Unable to make routine payments on his debts, he secured a Certificate of Pension on May 5, 1819, entitling him to \$20 a month.

Critics charged that Huntington was a rich man taking advantage of the law and his personal connections, that he had mismanaged his affairs, or that he had misrepresented his assets. Calhoun revoked Huntington’s pension in 1824. Huntington wrote the following year, “If poverty is a crime, be it so, I am poor.” Calhoun’s successor, James Barbour, reinstated Huntington’s pension in May 1826.



THE PENSION ACT OF 1832

Federal revenues in 1832, fueled by land sales, were four times the federal budget. This record federal surplus encouraged Congress to take the unprecedented step of extending pensions to nearly all surviving Revolutionary War veterans.

On June 7, 1832, Congress adopted a new pension act, eliminating disability and poverty as conditions to qualify for benefits. The new law extended a full

pension to all veterans of the Revolutionary War who could prove service of least two years, and a partial pension, proportioned to the length of service, to those who could prove service for a period of six months to two years. The act made pensions available to veterans of the Revolutionary War militia, state troops, and state and Continental navies as well as veterans of the Continental Army.

By January 1833, 24,260 Revolutionary War veterans had applied for benefits. In the year after the passage of the Pension Act of 1832, the federal government spent \$4.6 million—twenty-nine percent of federal spending—on pensions for Revolutionary War veterans. By June 1834 the pension list included 33,354 Revolutionary War veterans and widows.

Detail of *Washington—Capitol (East View)*
Lithograph by Isidore Laurent Deroy after Augustus Kollner
New-York & Paris: Published by Goupil, Vibert & Co., ca. 1848
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division
(graphic in exhibition)



The Old Soldier—A Fact

Printed by order of a few surviving Soldiers of the Revolution, 1828

The Society of the Cincinnati, The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection

In the 1820s, stories of poor, aging veterans denied pensions under the strict rules imposed by the Pension Act of 1818 and its amendments circulated widely and stirred popular demands for more generous treatment of surviving Revolutionary War veterans. In 1828 those demands were associated with the presidential campaign of Andrew Jackson, a champion of ordinary Americans and a veteran of the Revolutionary War. This broadside relates the mistreatment of a Revolutionary War veteran seeking a pension and assures readers that Andrew Jackson would correct the injustices of John Quincy Adams and his administration toward veterans. "Where is the heart of sympathy," the broadside asks, "that does not feel for the old soldier who fought for the blessings we now enjoy?"

THE OLD SOLDIER—A Fact. AMERICANS! READ AND REFLECT.

The following touching Narrative of Facts is dedicated to every generous American. Let my man who has a Heart Read it—Pardon us its—read and vote for Mr. Adams, if you can. The true character of the man is seen in this simple transition—He was here, selling out the rights of his name. Is he not at least a Tyrant? And shall such a man rule over a free People?

What has become of the brave old man of Richard Knight, the old soldier of the Revolution and who can bear it all a long and hard day for the poor old veterans of our country? Every man of the Revolution is now a poor old man. Richard Knight was the first of the Revolution, by the common law he was made to sell his land and his name to the government for a pension. He had fought for the country, for the glory, for the honor of his country. He had fought for the country, for the glory, for the honor of his country. He had fought for the country, for the glory, for the honor of his country.

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WARRIORS AND WIVES

Thousands of women joined American troops in camp, on campaign, and even in combat. They supported themselves doing laundry, mending uniforms, cooking, and nursing the sick and injured in exchange for rations and occasional pay. A few women served in combat, disguising their gender. Deborah Sampson is the best known.

Other women took up arms in the chaos of battle without pretending to be men. Most visibly, women supported artillery crews, carrying water to swab the guns and bringing powder and ammunition forward. In at least two documented cases, a woman took her fallen husband's place on gun crews in the heat of battle.

Wives left behind struggled and sacrificed in less dramatic but no less difficult ways. Congress first acknowledged this in 1836, when it voted to award the widows of veterans entitled to benefits under the Pension Act of 1832 the same pension their husband received or might have received. Limited at first to widows who were married when their husbands were in the army, pension benefits were later extended to any widow of a Revolutionary War soldier. The last pension payment to a widow of a Revolutionary War soldier was made in 1906.

Maria Roosevelt Varick
Unidentified artist
Early 19th century
Pastel on paper
The Society of the Cincinnati,
Museum Acquisitions Fund purchase, 2009

Maria Roosevelt (1763-1841) married a veteran staff officer, Richard Varick, in 1786. He had served first as a captain and aide-de-camp to Generals Philip Schuyler and Benedict Arnold, and later as military secretary to George Washington. He never applied for a pension, but Maria Varick secured a widow's pension under the act of 1838. She sought the full pay for life promised to veteran officers by the act of 1828, but her claim was repeatedly denied on the grounds that her husband had been retired from the army as a staff officer and not an officer of the line, and was thereby disqualified.



Declaration of Prudence Sawyer

September 1838

The Society of the Cincinnati, The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection

The case of Prudence Sawyer (1757-1839) illustrates the difficulties many widows and their families faced in applying for a pension. Prudence was the widow of Nathaniel Sawyer (1750-1807), a Massachusetts veteran. She applied for a widow's pension in 1838 at the age of eighty-one. This draft declaration prepared in September 1838 claimed that Nathaniel served in "Abbott's company" of Enoch Poor's Second New Hampshire Regiment in 1775, when no such company existed. None of her other recollections was sufficient to the pension examiners, who could not find Nathaniel Sawyer in Massachusetts muster rolls. The application was rejected in July 1839 for lack of evidence. Prudence Sawyer died later that year.

DECLARATION.

In order to obtain the benefit of the act of Congress, of the 7th July, 1838, entitled "An act granting half-pay and pensions to certain widows."

State of New York, ss:
County of Albany

On this _____ day of September 1838, personally appeared before the undersigned one of the Judges of the Court of Common Pleas in and for said County, Prudence Sawyer _____ a resident of Cohoes _____ in the county of Albany _____ aged _____ years, who being first duly sworn, according to law, doth, on her oath, make the following declaration, in order to obtain the benefit of the provision made by the act of Congress, passed July 7, 1838, entitled "An act granting half pay and pensions to certain widows:"

That she is the widow of Nathaniel Sawyer who was a private & Sergeant in the army of the revolution, and served as herein after stated, to wit in the Company of Captain Abbott in the Regiment of Colonel Poor, as a private for at least eight months in the year 1775, as a Sergeant for at least one year _____ and _____ in _____ of the _____

THE LAST OF THE FATHERS

Urging Congress to adopt the Pension Act of 1832, Rep. Henry Hubbard had argued that “the surviving soldiers of the revolution have already passed that boundary which has been assigned by high authority as the duration of human existence” and that within a few more years they would all be gone. In fact, some of the youngest soldiers of the Revolutionary War—men born in the 1760s who had been teenage soldiers in the last years of the war—lived into the late 1850s and a few into the 1860s.

As the nation was torn by sectional strife, the last veterans of the Revolutionary War became living symbols of the union. “There must have been something more than common that those men struggled for,” Abraham Lincoln said in a speech to the New Jersey Senate in 1861, “that something even more than National Independence; that something that held out a great promise to all the people of the world to all time to come.” In his Gettysburg Address, Lincoln defined that something—a new nation, “conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” That nation, he explained, was the work of “our fathers,” by which Lincoln meant the common soldiers of the Revolution.

Only a few of those soldiers lived to see the end of the Civil War. The last Revolutionary War veterans receiving payments under the Pension Act of 1832 had died by June 30, 1867. There were still 997 widows of Revolutionary War veterans on the pension rolls at the end of that year, but only one who had been married to a soldier during the war. In February 1867 Congress voted to grant two reputed Revolutionary War veterans—John Gray and Daniel Bakeman—pensions of \$500 per year. Bakeman—who died on April 5, 1869, at the age of 109—was the last surviving veteran of the Revolutionary War recognized by the federal government.

Altogether, 57,623 veterans of the Revolutionary War received pensions from the federal government—20,485 under the Pension Act of 1818, 33,425 under the Pension Act of 1832, and others under the more limited acts. The total cost of Revolutionary War pensions under these laws through 1869 was \$46,178,000.

**Daguerreotype of George Warner, Jr.
ca. 1855
Copper, silver, glass, brass, thermoplastic, and velvet
The Society of the Cincinnati,
Museum purchase, 2016**

The first photographic portraits of Revolutionary War veterans were daguerreotypes, the most common photographic process of the late 1840s and 1850s. This daguerreotype pictures George Warner, Jr., of Rupert, Vermont, said to be the last surviving veteran of the Battle of Bennington, fought on August 17, 1777.





DANIEL WALDO.



SAMUEL DOWNING.

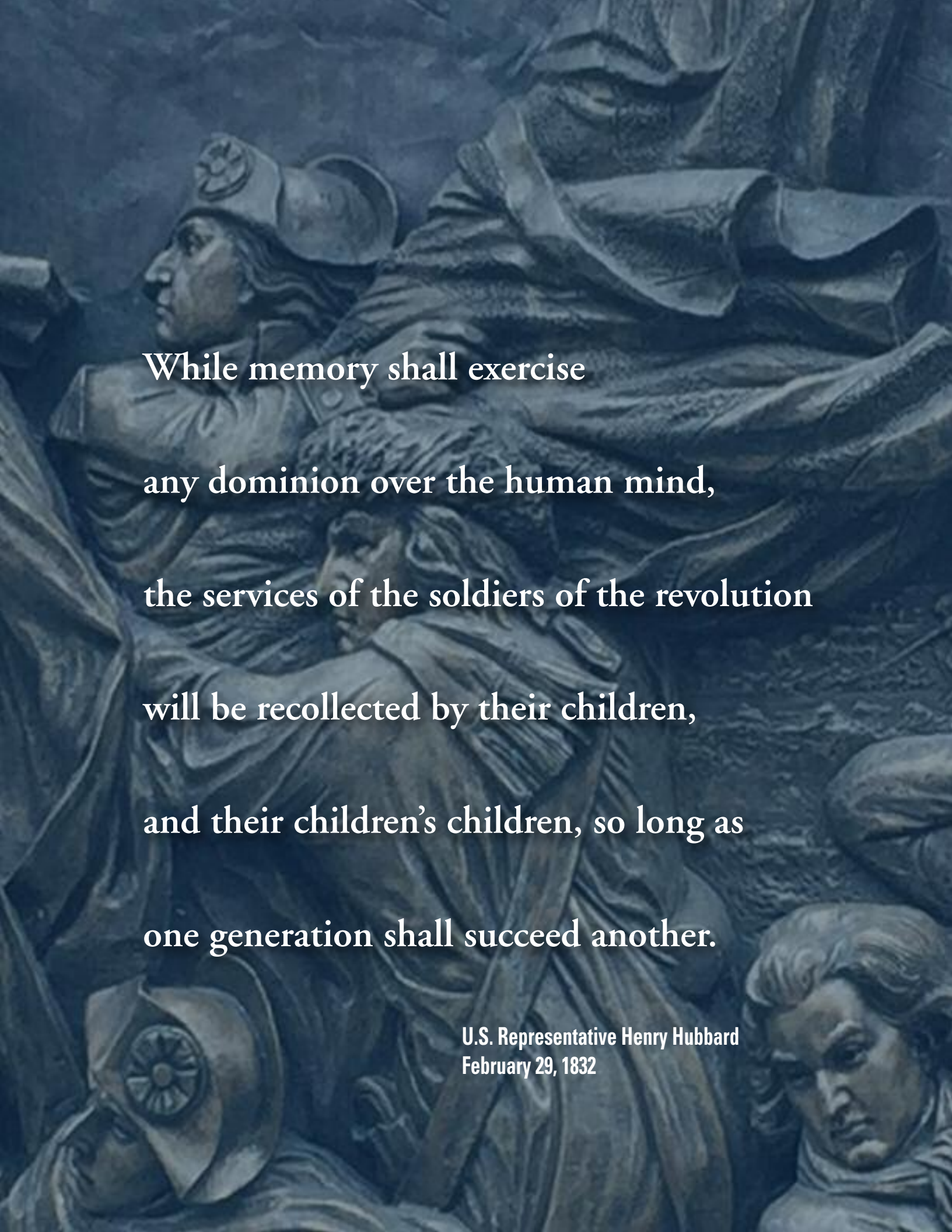
The Last Men of the Revolution

E.B. Hillard

Hartford, Conn.: N. A. & R. A. Moore, 1864

The Society of the Cincinnati, The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection

At the height of the Civil War, Elias Brewster Hillard (1825-1895), a Congregationalist minister from Connecticut, set out to interview the seven men he believed were the last living veterans of the Revolutionary War. The results of this remarkable journey were published in 1864 as *The Last Men of the Revolution*. The book included a photograph of each veteran, taken by Nelson and Roswell Moore of Hartford.

A blue-toned relief sculpture depicting a scene of battle. In the foreground, a soldier in profile looks towards the left. Behind him, another soldier is shown in a more dynamic, possibly falling or being supported, pose. The background shows more figures and the texture of a battlefield. The overall mood is somber and historical.

While memory shall exercise
any dominion over the human mind,
the services of the soldiers of the revolution
will be recollected by their children,
and their children's children, so long as
one generation shall succeed another.

U.S. Representative Henry Hubbard
February 29, 1832

AMERICA'S
FIRST
VETERANS

WAS MADE POSSIBLE
WITH GENEROUS FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM



THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION INSTITUTE
OF THE SOCIETY OF THE CINCINNATI
ALSO THANKS DESIGN CUISINE CATERING
FOR THEIR SUPPORT OF THE
PREVIEW RECEPTION

A 12 POUND ANNUITY FOR HER WIDOWHOOD BEGINNING IN 1779. BRIGADIER GENERAL JAMES IRVIN, PENNSYLVANIA CONTINENTAL LINE, WAS DISABLED BY WOUNDS TO THE NECK AND HAND AT GERMANTOWN, PENSIONED IN 1813, DIED IN 1819. PRIVATE WILLIAM LEARY, PENNSYLVANIA CONTINENTAL LINE, WAS WOUNDED IN THE HAND BY A SWORD, HIS LEG BY A BAYONET, AND HAD HIS JAW BROKEN BY A BAYONET AT PAOLI, PENSIONED AT \$96 A YEAR IN 1819 AT AGE 64, DROPPED FROM THE ROLLS IN 1820. PRIVATE JOSEPH MCREYNOLDS, VIRGINIA MILITIA, WAS SHOT THROUGH HIS ANKLE BY A RIFLE BALL AT CAMDEN AND PERMANENTLY DISABLED, GRANTED A PENSION BY CONGRESS IN 1859. CAPTAIN WILLIAM MACKEY, PENNSYLVANIA CONTINENTAL LINE, SURVIVED BEING SHOT THROUGH THE LUNGS AT BRANDYWINE, APPARENTLY DIED IN 1812 AFTER QUALIFYING FOR A PENSION, BUT NEVER RECEIVING A PAYMENT. PRIVATE FLORENCE

