

# America's First Veterans



THE  
AMERICAN  
REVOLUTION  
INSTITUTE

of The Society of the Cincinnati



# THE OLD SOLDIER—A Fact.

## AMERICANS! READ AND REFLECT.

The following touching Narrative of Facts is dedicated to *every generous American*. Let any man who has a heart, READ IT—PONDER ON IT—and vote for Mr. Adams, if he can. The true character of the man is seen in this simple transaction—He was here, acting out the dictates of his nature. Is he not at heart a TYRANT? And shall such a man rule over a free People?

Who has not heard the sorrowful story of Richard Nagle, the old soldier of the revolution? and who can hear it without being moved with pity for the poor unfortunate old man? I can figure to my mind all the circumstances and the scene.

Richard Nagle, an Old Soldier of the Revolution, by the reverses of fortune and inability to work, finds himself reduced to poverty in his old age. He determines to apply to the country for relief, as many of his fellow soldiers have done before. In the inclement month of January, 1828, he takes leave of the aged partner of his bosom, his sons and daughters, throws his little wallet over his shoulder, carefully collects his papers and vouchers, puts them in his pocket, and with a heart full of hope, sets out for the city of Washington. As he travels over hill and dale, he looks around and beholds houses and barns, and all the comforts of civilized life.—His heart rejoices at the prospect, and he says, "Fifty years ago, these fields which lately yielded an abundant harvest to their proprietors, were desert wilds. Nought but the yell of the Indian resounded upon these shores.—Where that village now rears its peaceful head, once stood an Indian wigwam; near the spot occupied by that fine house, was formerly erected an Indian fort. Well do I remember, when in that valley we were attacked at night by a party of savages, who had been for some time committing the most horrid massacres in the neighbouring settlements—After a hard fight of several hours, we drove them off with great slaughter."

Thus he plodded along, contemplating the happy changes which had been wrought by the valour of his brave compatriots and himself, who 'fought and bled in freedom's cause.' At night he arrives at a farm-house when it is only necessary for him to say, "I am Richard Nagle, an old Soldier of the Revolution, from Cambria county, bound to Washington to ask a Pension of government." Immediately he is invited in, the best seat offered him at the fire, the best supper prepared for him; after which the family gathers round him, and hears the old soldier tell how the spot on which they now live, was the haunt of the deadly savage, who roamed abroad with tomahawk and scalping knife, sparing neither age nor sex. In the morning he gets his breakfast, has his wallet filled, and departs with the blessings of the whole family, the father of which calls after him saying, come this way on your return, and tell us all about Washington city and president Adams. Thus he travels on, receiving the best cheer from the hospitable and thrifty farmers who inhabit the beautiful borders of the Susquehanna, till he reaches Harrisburg, the seat of government of Pennsylvania. The legislature is in session. He calls upon the representative from Cambria county, and states his business. In an instant the worthy representative's heart is moved with compassion for the old soldier; he enquires, "Is it possible you have walked all the way from Cambria county, Richard Nagle?" "I have, says the veteran. I am used to walking; I have marched over the mountains in pursuit of the Indians in my younger days; I have fought them; whipt them; and as cold a night as this, have laid out under a tree, with no pillow but my knapsack, no covering but my blanket, and the snow that fell on top of it; and if I have health, I will walk all the way to the city of Washington, and show them there, that Richard Nagle, although the snows of 81 winters have whitened his locks, can still keep time to the tap of the drum." The old man was cheerful, because he felt confident his country would reward his services. "You are too feeble, my old friend, says the representative, to walk so far at such a season as this; you must stay with us to-night, and we will see that the soldier who marched so well in his young days, shall ride in his old age." He then takes the veteran to lodgings, informs the other members who he is, and what is his condition; they immediately raise money among themselves to procure him more comfortable clothing, and in the morning with money in his pocket, and a light heart, he takes his seat in the stage for Washington.

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Where is the heart of sympathy that does not feel for the old soldier who fought to secure the blessings that we now enjoy? Reader, what think you of the conduct of Mr. Adams to old Richard Nagle? Wasn't it cruel, unfeeling and heartless? Would you—could you have acted so, if placed in similar circumstances? Would you have treated him like a dog, and said, "Begone you impostor, and dirty old rascal, or I will have you horsewhipped?" No—never. Yet such was the conduct of Mr. Adams.

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To prove that the foregoing is not merely a picture of fancy, the reader is referred to the following authentic and attested documents:

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2018 FLORIDA STATUTES  
1003.42 Required Instruction  
(t) In order to encourage patriotism, the sacrifices that veterans and Medal of Honor recipients have made in serving our country and protecting democratic values worldwide. Such instruction must occur on or before Medal of Honor Day, Veterans' Day, and Memorial Day. Members of instructional staff are encouraged to use the assistance of local veterans and Medal of Honor recipients when practicable.



Receipt of Pay-Table-Committee

Hartford, CT

June 7<sup>th</sup> 1782

The Society of the Cincinnati,

The Robert Charles Lawrence

Fergusson Collection

Dick Freedom and Cuff

Liberty were the aspirational  
names taken by two enlisted  
men serving in the all-black  
Second Company,  
Fourth Connecticut Regiment.

Among other deployments,  
the Regiment was rallied  
under the direction of  
Alexander Hamilton at  
redoubt ten during the Siege  
of Yorktown.

Hartford, *June 1<sup>th</sup>* — 1782.

**R**ECEIVED, of Pay-Table-Committee, their Order  
on the Treasurer, of this State, to secure the Payment

of *Thirty two pounds ten shillings & two pence*  
it being the Balances due to ~~me~~ *Dick Freedom* on the first Day of January 1780

~~last~~, as stated by the Committees of the State and of the  
Army. *in behalf of Dick Freedom*

*L-32, 10 & 2*

*Cuff Liberty*



Henry Knox to John Hancock

West Point, NY

October 20, 1782

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

*"I hope and believe that Your Excellency will take this matter into consideration, and use such measures as will effect the relief of the gallant unfortunates, whose sufferings, if too long continued, will tarnish the lustre of the revolution."*

General Knox appeals to Massachusetts Governor Hancock for state support of disabled soldier Captain John Slewman/Sluman who was gravely wounded at Germantown in 1777—Sluman received a half-pay disability stipend with an annual stipend of \$300 in 1784.

West Point.  
20 Oct. 1782.

Sir,

I am constrained to state to Your Excellency a subject, which will be as distressing to you as it is painful to humanity. Capt. Slewman, of Colonel Banes' regiment of artillery, was dangerously wounded in the battle of Germantown. Although he lingered for a long time, yet unfortunately for him, the wound did not prove mortal. He is incapacitated from further service by its effects, which are such as to subject him to continual apprehensions, and totally to deprive him from pursuing any business to obtain a subsistence.

Congress have recommended to the several States to make provision for their wounded officers; but Captain Slewman represents that he never has been able to derive any benefit from it, as the States have passed no laws for that purpose. I was inclined to believe he was mistaken, until upon further enquiry, I found he was certainly right in his information.

It would be great presumption in me to suppose ~~it possible~~ <sup>it possible</sup> to urge any reasons to induce a measure which has lain so long, probably only through a multiplicity of more weighty matters. The State have too much dignity and too high a character to support, to suffer the men who have shed their blood in its cause, and who in consequence are untimely cut off from all

all the sweet enjoyments of society, to solicit the aid of charity, for that food, which a less decided conduct would have given them in ease and plenty. I hope and believe that Your Excellency will take this matter into consideration, 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.

I have the honor  
to be, with high respect,  
Your Excellency's  
most obedient servant

H. Knox, M. Gen.  
(Commanding the Artillery)

His Excellency  
Governor Hancock.



# DEBORAH SAMPSON

- \* self-educated teacher
- \* enlisted in the Fourth Massachusetts Regiment as "Robert Shurtleff"
- \* served in the Light Infantry in NY, PA and VA
- \* wounded in service and honorably discharged
- \* received compensation for service and a pension

*"no other similar example of female heroism, fidelity and courage"*

*The Female Review: or, Memoirs of an American Young Lady*

Herman Mann

Dedham [Mass.]: Printed by  
Nathaniel and Benjamin Heaton,  
for the author  
1797

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



DEBORAH SAMPSON.

*Published by H. Mann. 1797.*

## THE FEMALE REVIEW:

OR,

MEMOIRS

OF AN

AMERICAN YOUNG LADY;

WHOSE LIFE AND CHARACTER ARE PECULIARLY  
DISTINGUISHED—BEING A CONTINENTAL SOLDIER,  
FOR NEARLY THREE YEARS, IN THE LATE AMERI-  
CAN WAR.

DURING WHICH TIME,  
SHE PERFORMED THE DUTIES OF EVERY DEPART-  
MENT, INTO WHICH SHE WAS CALLED, WITH PUNC-  
TUAL EXACTNESS, FIDELITY AND HONOR, AND PRE-  
SERVED HER CHASTITY INVIOLETE, BY THE MOST  
ARTFUL CONCEALMENT OF HER SEX.

WITH AN  
APPENDIX,

CONTAINING  
CHARACTERISTIC TRAITS, BY DIFFERENT HANDS;  
HER TASTE FOR ECONOMY, PRINCIPLES OF DOMES-  
TIC EDUCATION, &c.

By a CITIZEN of MASSACHUSETTS.

D E D H A M:

PRINTED BY  
NATHANIEL AND BENJAMIN HEATON,  
FOR THE AUTHOR.

M,DCC,XCVII.





*“turned adrift like old worn-out horses”*  
Joseph Plumb Martin

*“singular hardship...can never be forgotten”*  
James Madison

John Neagle painted this 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.”*

*A Pensioner of the Revolution*, John Neagle, 1830, Oil on canvas.

- 1818 Revolutionary War Pension Act—afforded \$96 year to males serving more than nine months in the regular army “*in reduced circumstances*” who swore “*they were in need of assistance from their country*”
- 1820—indigency by means test adopted
- 1832—indigency test removed
- 1836—extension to widows
- Bryan Rossiter of Connecticut enlisted at age 16 and served until the end of the war as a non-commissioned officer. He was owed back pay, an \$80 bonus, and a warrant for one hundred acres of land, but went home empty handed in 1783. His pension was arrested in 1820 when he failed to demonstrate indigency per they newly legislated test. In 1836 his widow Sarah was granted his pension.
- This portrait of Rossiter in his sergeant at arms uniform includes two white chevrons on his left sleeve, indicating that he had been awarded the Badge of Merit per the order of General George Washington. Each chevron represents three years of service.



*Bryan Rossiter*, John Trumbull, ca.1806-1808, Oil on canvas.



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## 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

This broadside tells the story Richard Nagle, a veteran from Cambria County Pennsylvania, who walked to Washington DC to seek his pension, was rebuffed by Congress, and met with John Quincy Adams who responded "begone you impostor, and dirty old rascal, or I'll have you horse-whipped." The plight of aging veterans denied pensions was associated with the presidential campaign of Andrew Jackson (running against the incumbent, Adams). This politicized saga of Nagle's treatment suggests that Jackson, a champion of ordinary Americans and a veteran of the Revolutionary War would correct the injustices of the Adams administration.





### SERGEANT AND<sup>y</sup>. WALLACE.

Aged 105 years.

A Veteran of the REVOLUTION, the rescuer of Lafayette "at the Battle of Brandywine.

*This extraordinary Man still retains the full power of memory and sound sense, and is a living Chronicle of the days of 'Auld lang syne'.*

*He was born at Inverness (Scotland) in the year of our Lord 1730, & left his country for America in 1752.— At the commencement of the Revolution, he enlisted in the Service of the U. S. in which he continued with little interruption for nearly 30 years.— He assisted at the most remarkable Battles during the War, escaped the Massacre of Paoli and in the Battle of Brandywine when Lafayette was wounded, rescued him from his perilous situation and bore him on his back about 2 miles to the house of a friend.*



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*Sergeant And<sup>y</sup>. Wallace*

ca. 1835

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





Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1860, by RALPH FARNHAM, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court, of the District of Massachusetts.

*Ralph Farnham*

The above is a PHOTOGRAPH and AUTOGRAPH of RALPH FARNHAM, of Acton, Maine, now in his 105th year. He entered the American Army, in May, 1775, aged 18—was engaged in the Battle of Bunker Hill, June 17th, 1775, and is the only survivor of that memorable struggle. These facts are obtained from the Commissioner of Pensions at Washington.

His yearly pension upon which he is dependent for support is only \$61.66.

These Portraits and Autographs are sold for Mr. FARNHAM'S BENEFIT.



**ALEXANDER MILLENER, AGED 104,**  
ONE OF THE SURVIVORS OF THE REVOLUTION.  
Entered according to act of Congress, in the year 1864, by  
N. A. & R. A. Moore, of Hartford, in the clerk's office of the  
district court of Connecticut.

The first photographic portraits of Revolutionary War veterans were daguerreotypes, the most common photographic process of the late 1840s and 1850s.

*Photographic print of Ralph Farnham\**

1860

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

*Alexander Millener, Aged 104*  
Hartford, Conn.: N.A. & R.A. Moore

1864

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

\*sold with autograph to supplement Farnham's annual pension of \$61.66





### **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.”

The record book of those who received this badge of honor has been lost, probably consumed 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.



# MILITARY DECORATION: BADGE OF MILITARY MERIT “PURPLE HEART”



*The American Independence Museum, located in Exeter, New Hampshire, holds one of the only remaining Purple Hearts from George Washington's era.*

## Essential Questions

What is the Badge of Military Merit?

Why did George Washington create the Badge of Military Merit?

Who was eligible to receive the Badge of Military Merit and how was this a departure from tradition?

## Teacher Background

George Washington announced two awards in the summer of 1782, late in the Revolutionary War. The first award recognized soldiers who honorably served in the Continental Army for more than three years, called the Honorary Badge of Distinction. It consisted of strips of white cloth to be sewn above the left cuff of regimental coats, one for every three years of service. The second—the Badge of Military Merit—would be granted to enlisted men for “singularly meritorious service” and given only for “instances of unusual gallantry. . . extraordinary fidelity and essential service.” Candidates were to be recommended by a soldier or officer and then approved by the commander in chief. General Washington designed the badge to have “the figure of a heart in purple cloth, or silk, edged with narrow lace or binding” to be worn on a soldier’s coat above the left breast. The soldier’s name would be entered into the army’s Book of Merit. The recipient would be permitted to pass guards and sentinels without challenge. The Badge of Military Merit honored

## Reading Comprehension

1. What are the reasons General Washington gives for creating the Badge of Military Merit?
2. Who was eligible to receive the Badge of Military Merit?
3. What benefits would a recipient of the Badge of Military Merit receive?

## Class Discussion

1. Why would General Washington want to recognize the amount of time soldiers had served in the army?
2. Why would General Washington want to severely punish soldiers who wear the Honorary Badge of Distinction signaling three or six years of service in the army when they did not earn it?
3. What was General Washington trying to accomplish by creating the Badge of Military Merit?
4. How was it a departure from tradition to make the Badge of Military Merit an eligible award for ordinary soldiers? What did this award indicate about the type of country General Washington envisioned?



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