

“How Our Elder Changed American History”

C. F. William Maurer, Hilltop Church, Mendham, NJ

When the Continental Congress met on June 17, 1775, it was “Resolved unanimously, Whereas, the delegates of all the colonies, from Nova-Scotia to Georgia, in Congress assembled, have unanimously chosen George Washington, Esq. to be General and commander in chief, of such forces as are, or shall be, raised for the maintenance and preservation of American liberty; this Congress doth now declare, that they will maintain and assist him, and adhere to him, the said George Washington, Esqr., with their lives and fortunes in the same cause.

The Congress then proceeded to choose the officers of the army by ballot: Artemus Ward, Esq. was chosen first major general and second in command. Charles Lee, Esq. was unanimously chosen second major general to be third in command.” (1)

Each proposed general had military histories, with prior service, of course, in the British Army during the French and Indian War.

After his experience, General Ward served in various offices, such as the general court and on the taxation committee with Sam Adams and John Hancock. He certainly voiced his opinions and the Royal Governor had his military commission revoked and then removed him from the assembly. His regiment resigned from British service in mass, publicly then declaring themselves in rebellion and elected Ward their leader. The Committee of Safety appointed Ward as General and Commander-in-Chief of the Massachusetts militia. When he was named a “major general” under Washington, he had a fine and distinguished career until his weight and his health led to his resignation in 1777. (2)

And that now leaves General Lee as second in command. Lee’s father was a colonel in the British army and Lee was enrolled in a Swiss military school, was commissioned as an ensign in the army at the age of 12 and just three years later entered the regular service in his father’s regiment. (3)

Like many career soldiers of the era, Lee sought employment in foreign armies during England’s peacetime. He served twice in the Polish army and hoped to parlay that experience into a lucrative appointment from George III. During a face-to-face meeting with the His Majesty - who declined to offer the desired command - Lee rebuked the monarch and swore that he would never give the king an opportunity to break another promise. An embittered Lee became enmeshed in Whig politics and retired to America on half pay in 1773. (4)

From the beginning of his new life in the colonies, Lee was an outspoken radical. He aligned himself with the emerging patriot cause and became an early advocate of a separate colonial army.

Politics, too, were involved in the choices of these officers. Being from Virginia certainly helped Washington and then Ward from Massachusetts balanced the appointments. After hostilities commenced, Lee's pride was slighted when the less experienced Washington was appointed commander of all the American forces. Thanks to the support of the Adam cousins in Massachusetts (and encouraging words from Washington), Lee was made a major general and third in the line of command. (5)

The appointment of younger officers happened pretty much the same way. If the gentleman's father had military experience and knew the right people, that would help get his son a commission. For example, at the "Newmarket" plantation just north of Richmond, twenty-two year old George Baylor opposed Colonel James Taylor for a seat in the Virginia House of Burgess. (6) His father, Colonel John Baylor Sr. was a close friend of George Washington who had once ordered a shoemaker to make a pair of shoes from the lasts of Colonel Baylor. Both Colonel Baylor and General Washington had a love for good horses and for the plantation life of the aristocracy of Virginia. Washington, Baylor and William Byrd III – whose grandfather surveyed and laid off the town of Richmond in about 1737 – were among the landed gentry that controlled both the political and social life of Virginia. Baylor's son, George, and Byrd's son, Otway, would become key officers in the formation of the Third Dragoons who met the British in River Vale or "Old" Tappan during the war. But Francis Otway Byrd played an important role in another story too.

Young Otway was a midshipman in the British Navy when he was quite young and served on several of His Majesty's ships. His last ship was the frigate HMS Fowey under the command of Captain George Montague. When the ship arrived to evacuate Governor Dunmore at the time of the "Gunpowder Incident," Otway jumped ship and returned home to his plantation and to his very upset father, then to offer his services to his colony. (7)

On July 12, 1775, Baylor, Byrd and Edmund Pendleton wrote to Washington recommending young Baylor for service on his staff and had three others sign the proposal – Patrick Henry, Richard Lee and Benjamin Harrison. Captain Baylor got the position. (8)

When George Baylor went to Boston now as an aide de camp to General Washington, Otway was appointed as an aide to General Lee in the south. General Lee may have asked for Byrd because he too had served and resigned his commission in the British Army to serve with the American cause. (9)

General Washington did write to his ex-aide Colonel Joseph Reed, that "...Mr. Baylor contrary to my expectations, is not in the slightest degree a penman though spirited and willing." (10) and that note probably led to the discussion between Lee and Washington when Lee wrote, "...Messieurs Griffin and Byrd are very good young men, but pretty much in the predicament of your Baylor. They can ride, understand and deliver orders: but you might as well set them to the task of translating an 'Arabick' or Irish manuscript, as expect that they should, in half a day, copy a sheet of orders..." (11)

General Lee, on August 30, 1776, suggested that Major Byrd should be appointed to raise recruits, however, for the time being, Otway did remain on General Lee's staff and beside him at all times. (12)

Soon, General Lee was ordered to join his forces with those of General Washington, but Lee was taking his time getting there.

General Washington (and now Major Baylor) on December 8, 1776, crossed the Delaware River and encamped at the Berkley House, Morrisville, opposite Trenton. On December 14th, the Guard had moved the headquarters to a farmhouse owned by William Keith on the road from Brownsburg within half an hour's ride from Newton, near McKonkley's Ferry (13)

And to jump ahead a week, on the evening of Christmas Day, General Washington ended his retreat and attacked the British and Hessian soldiers at Trenton for a major morale victory. During the battle, George Baylor approached the Hessians, ordered them to cease fighting and took their surrender. This will lead to his commanding the soon to be organized cavalry of the Third Dragoons.

But General Lee - a week earlier - had a problem near Morristown in the town of Basking Ridge, NJ.

The story of Lee's capture, depending on the source, goes something like this: "Charles Lee, brave soldier, upholder of liberty, world patriot, was degenerating into a thing of meanness and a potential traitor. Just at this moment a strange thing happened to Lee. He had spent the night of December 13th (1776) at the Widow White's Tavern in Basking Ridge, (New Jersey) several miles from his unit. Early in the morning an officer (Major Wilkinson) arrived at the inn with a dispatch from General Gates, and Lee, thrusting an old flannel gown over his night-clothes, placidly got out of bed and proceeded to write a letter to Gates. He naturally did not know that a "Tory busybody" (10) had given the British, in camp fifteen or twenty miles away, due notice of his presence in the tavern. As he was finishing the letter, Wilkinson, looking out of the bedroom window, saw a troop of red-coated British soldiers riding rapidly up to the house. They were men from the Sixteenth Light Dragoons, under the command of Colonel William Harcourt, some of whom, by a curious coincidence, had served with Lee in Portugal and remembered him as a brave if somewhat irascible soldier." [14]

Major Byrd is also taken prisoner. The prisoner exchange in those days was by rank. Byrd was shortly released on his parole but General Lee was to remain, removed from the war, until he was exchanged on May 6, 1778, shortly before the Battle of Monmouth. (15)

Further details of the capture of Lee are that his capture was a "measure accidental." "It seems that Elder Muklewrath of the Mendham Presbyterian Church had been with the general line the night before, complaining that the American troops had stolen one of his horses. On the following morning he fell in with a detachment of the Sixteenth British Light Dragoons under the command of Lieutenant Colonel, the Honorable William Harcourt, which was

reconnoitering in the neighborhood. In some manner the Elder divulged the proximity of Lee, and, it is said, either voluntarily or involuntarily guided the enemy to the General's quarters. This regiment of Harcourt's - called the Queen's Own - was considered the crack cavalry corps of the British forces. (16)

A recent version of the story, "an entirely different version was provided to the authors of a history of New Jersey in about 1842. They wrote: "Col. J. W. Drake of Mendham, * in conversation with one of the compilers of this volume, stated that the individual who acted as a guide to Col. Harcourt's party was a Mr. Macklewrath, an elder of the Presbyterian church at Mendham. While walking in the road, he was suddenly surrounded by a party of British cavalry who pressed him into their service." (17)

*Col. Drake and his wife, Martha, were also members of the Mendham parish. She was killed instantly by lightning as she sat in the Church on the 16th May, 1813, aged 33 years, 6 months and 24 days. S. Baker, "Old Cemetery at Mendham."

"This version differs from the British version in that Macklewrath was neither a military man nor a messenger, and nor was he on horseback. Macklewrath could have been one of the civilians who either first informed Harcourt's party that Lee was nearby at Basking Ridge or provided directions to the village." (18)

And one more variation. "The house is still pointed out near the boundary of this township, where General Charles Lee was taken prisoner by a party of British cavalry, December 13th, 1776. The "Mr. Mackelwraith" who has been accused of betraying General Lee to the British was Elder Samuel Mcilrath of Mendham. He was surprised and taken prisoner while walking along the road. He did not reside in the neighborhood and was ignorant of General Lee's movements and whatever he did to point out any house where officers were quartered, or in any way to act as a guide to the British, he did under compulsion and to save his own life, and not as a traitor. Elder Mcilrath was as well-known as any man in Mendham, and it was known and read of all men that he was not a Tory." (19)

Mendham Presbyterian Church was founded in 1738. Pastor Bob Heppenstall and our historian, Patricia Maio, chose a copy of "The First Presbyterian Congregation, Mendham, Morris County" by Helen Martha Wright, published in Jersey City in 1939 for me, a new Deacon to study. (20) There is a lot more to this gentleman's story than being in the wrong (or right) place with General Lee. And Elder "Muklewrath" has had his name spelled wrong in this story for years!

On page 194 is a list of "Elders of the First Presbyterian Church: From the Manual - 1855" and the first on the list was "Samuel Mcilrath, ordained "Time not known," "Died 1804." The "Manual" referred to was prepared by order of the Session and printed in 1855 by Anson D. F. Randolph of NYC. In 1939 Wright wrote "It is a booklet that is now rare." Having the correct name of our subject (and correct spelling) opened up new records.

Wright mentions that the Session book was bought on August the 21 in 1766. In papers from this period there may be some misspellings: and that “proposed whether we should make it a standing rule and abide in that Method in the Congregation to support a Minister in paying ye Salery & all other charges and arrears by laying it on the seats and pews in the Meeting house & that we will pay our propotion of all such charges according to the Seats or pews that we improve. Voted in the Affirmative. - Likewise prepose to Chuse Nine or 11 men to Seat Every Man according to the Best of their discession and that to be done yearly & every year if needs.” One of the men elected on this occasion was our Samuel Mcilrath. The title was “Managers of the Seats & pews” and Wright adds that there was “no mention being made of the communicants.” (21)

Finding this note in Wright’s book was important. She wrote that “In the Manual of the Mendham Presbyterian Church (1855) it is stated that the Rev. John Joline was ordained and installed October 1780.” Then is added, “He began to preach here two or three years earlier, but his ordination was delayed by the invasion.” This is the only direct reference to the war found in the Mendham books. However, the Baptist and Presbyterian Churches opened the doors and the churches as a hospital for the sick and wounded, and some 27 soldiers are buried in the cemetery adjoining the Church. (22)

At the end of the first six months of Mr. Joline’s preaching, the question of extending a call for further service was brought before the Session, September 21st, 1778. It was voted “the Rev. Mr. John Joline” should be continued. At the same Session a group of seven men were chosen to attend the fall meeting of the Presbytery of New York and our Samuel Mcilrath was one of them. (23)

Mcilrath’s name comes up again when talking about Pastor Joline. Wright notes that Joline “was exceedingly doctrinal.” Joline was inclined to choose one doctrine and treat it from various angles during a course of sermons. “After he had thus preached a whole winter on the doctrine of election, it is said that Elder Samuel Mcilrath, a tall thin, dignified Scotchman who usually wore a white skull cap, rose on one occasion and exclaimed with great earnestness, “Mr. Joline, that is false doctrine.” (24)

Elder Mcilrath was born in Aberdeen, Aberdeen City, Scotland on December 25, 1718. Seems that many of the first settlers in the Mendham area were Scotch and Irish Protestants. The founder in 1738 was Ebenezer Byram who moved the Church from nearby “Roxiticus” to the present Mendham. From the fact that it once belonged to New Brunswick it is fair to infer that the members came from Burlington or New Brunswick, and not from Long Island or the east as many subsequently did. (25)

Samuel had married Isabella Aikman on March 16, 1755. She was the daughter of Alexander Aikman who came to New Jersey around 1730 from Arbroath, Scotland. Her children (3 sons and 6 daughters) are all buried in the First Presbyterian Churchyard, Cleveland, Cuyahoga County, Ohio.

His children are listed in his will and that is a good place to start learning about the family. Samuel's will is dated January 23, 1797 in Mendham, Morris Co. "Wife, Isabella, moveable estate. Son. Andrew. 168 acres off south-easterly part of my plantation. Son. Alexander, remainder of home plantation (148 acres) next to James Johnston's land. Son. Thomas. £250. Daughter Mary, dec'd (formerly wife of John Hamler) hath therefore received her portion. Daughter, Agnes (wife of Caleb Edy). £5. Daughter Jane (wife of Samuel Cozad, Jr.) hath received her portion. Daughters Elizabeth, Isabella (Woodruff) and Sarah (Shaw), each £30. Executors – sons, Andrew and Alexander. Witnesses – Lebbens Dod, David Thompson and Thomas Horman. Proved August 13, 1804, Inventory. £ 361.67; made by William Loverage and Aaron Robarts. – File 1191N. (26)

The children and the year of their births are: Mary b. 1756; Andrew b. 1758; Agnes b. 1761; Thomas b. 1764; Jane b. 1766; Alexander b. 1769; Elisabeth b. 1771; Isabel b. 1774 and Sarah born 1777. Mary was deceased by the time Samuel's will was written. A note reads that the children were middle aged when they came to Cleveland.

Samuel's plan must have been to move westward when his children were mature and "if not all of them, married." They all came west and settled in East Cleveland, Ohio. "With other members of the family, they came in ox-teams, drawing household furniture, farming utensils, and the younger and frailer members of the party. They were six months making the journey, therefore they must have traveled at their leisure. They settled in a log house opposite Lake View Cemetery. Son Alexander, and his brother-in-law, John Shaw, came on in 1803, and each purchased 640 acres of land, much of it fronting Euclid Avenue and extending north to the lake.

In a newspaper article dated June 1864, "Another Pioneer Gone" tells the passing of "Samuel McIlrath", son of our Samuel's Thomas. The article reads, "Mr. Samuel McIlrath whose death you noticed yesterday was the third son of Thomas McIlrath who emigrated from New Jersey to Washington County Pennsylvania and from there to Euclid in in 1803 with a large family which proved quite an acquisition to the few families there in what might be well termed a wilderness."

Two of the daughters left some story behind. "Sarah, one of his daughters, married and went with her husband to Pennsylvania. It came to light after her marriage that her husband had murdered a peddler to get money to come and marry her. He was arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to hanging. She traveled on foot and alone to the governor of the State to solicit his pardon and She failed; came back; remained with him to the last moment, and for three nights slept on his grave to prevent the doctors getting his body. She afterward returned to Mendham; married a Mr. Shaw, an Englishman; went with him to Washington County, Pa., and from there to near Cleveland, Ohio; became wealthy; was a ruling elder, in fact, of the Presbyterian Church at Euclid, Ohio, and died at a good age, beloved by all who knew her. She never had children, and her property was left to found the Shaw Academy, seven miles east of Cleveland. She was one of the noblest, bravest, most unselfish souls that ever lived."

“Another daughter of Elder Samuel Mcilrath, the old Scotch Covenanter, was cruelly betrayed in her youth and left that most wretched being – a sensitive conscientious mother, whose poor babe has no legal father. What Elder Samuel Mcilrath would do under such circumstances anyone who has read Scotch domestic history of that day can well understand. The old man, who would have torn out his own heart or held his right hand in the flame rather than tolerate iniquity in himself, could not countenance sin in his daughter. When she was able to walk after her babe was born he told her to take it up. He led her to the road in front of his house and told her never again to darken his door. She never did; but begging her way westward found a home among the hardworking German farmers of Western Pennsylvania, who had no more religion about them than to pity her misfortunes and by their kindness to heal her broken heart. She told her story, was trusted, believed and loved by a young farmer, who married her and adopted her son. They afterward also moved to Ohio, and when her son was a grown man, Aunt Shaw and sister Isabella Woodruff heard for the first time in twenty years of this sister who had been driven for her sin from their father’s door. They immediately saddled their horses, rode through an almost unbroken wilderness a journey of nearly a hundred miles and found her. This story the writer of this article had from Aunt Shaw’s own lips.”

The First Presbyterian Church of East Cleveland was founded 27 August 1807 as the Church of Christ in Euclid and was one of the first churches in the Western Reserve. The Church organized with about 12 members in the home of Andrew Mcilrath. Members first met in homes and barns, then in a log structure on land later purchased from the Mcilraths, in what was then Euclid Twp. And there was a well-known hostelry – The Mcilrath Tavern, on the northwest corner of Euclid and Superior Avenues in East Cleveland.

Abner Mcilrath opened the tavern in 1837, although some accounts state that his brother, Alexander, had earlier maintained a general store and tavern at the same location. The tavern distinguished itself as an informal community center. Abner, the owner of a pack of foxhounds, organized hunts, and shooting matches at Thanksgiving and Christmas. A garden attached to the tavern was considered a local meeting place for women. For children, a small menagerie was maintained that included an eagle, a wolf, and a bear. Abner himself was celebrated for his size, purportedly 6’6 and 225 lbs. When Abraham Lincoln passed through Cleveland in 1861 on the way to his inauguration in Washington he made a speech from the balcony of the Weddell House. He observed Abner standing near and laughing invited him to measure up and see which was the taller. They stood back to back and Mcilrath won. “There,” said Abner, “you see I am a bigger Republican than you are!” (27)

General Charles Lee’s passing is found in the “Pennsylvania Gazette” for the ninth of October 1792. He died in the “Sign of the Conestoga Wagon” and was buried from the City Tavern in an unmarked grave in the old yard of Christ Church in Philadelphia where he spent his final days. “No stone marked his grave, but tradition placed it next to the grave of General Mercer near the old wall adjoining the Church.” In 1861 Church Alley was ordered to be widened thus cutting off about eight feet of the church yard. (28) All the remains of General Lee were removed and re-interred at the spot designated between the first and second windows east of the southwest door of the church. In his “Will” he wrote, “I give and bequeath to my former

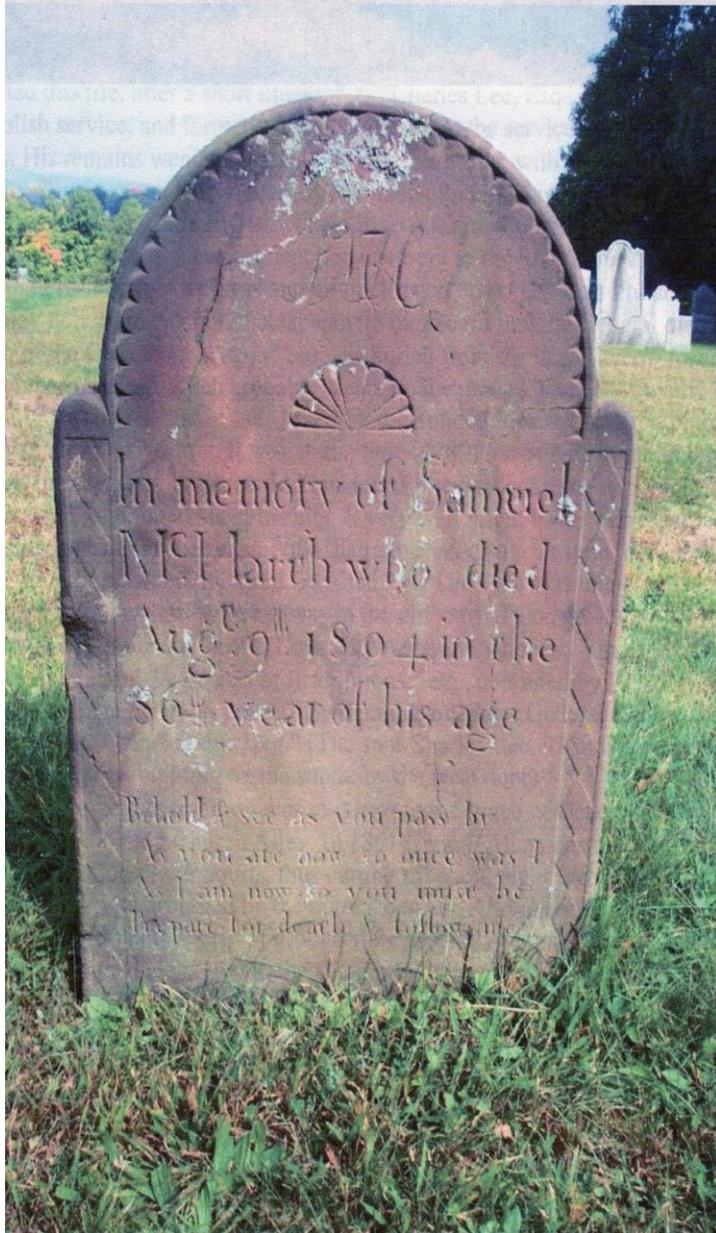
aid de camp, Otway Bird, Esq. the choice of another brood mare and ten guineas for the same purpose of a remembrance ring. (29)

Perhaps you will think it rather curious and paradoxical that Charles Lee eroded his earthly career in consecrated ground when I share with you this clause from his last will and testament: "I desire most earnestly that I may not be buried in any church or church yard, or within miles of any Presbyterian or Anabaptist meeting house, for since I have resided in this country I have kept so much bad company when living, that I do not choose to continue it when dead." (30)

Samuel came back to New Jersey on business and passed away and was buried in the First Presbyterian Church's "Hilltop" cemetery, Mendham, Section 5, ID 9519783 on 9 August 1804 at the age of 85. His monument there, again misspelled his name, this time, as "McHarth."

McIlrath lived in what is today 21 Combs Hollow Road, Randolph. The "Municipal Recognition for the McIlrath-Lorey House," dated Sept 8, 2015, has Dr. Berg's research that Samuel left the property to his son Andrew in his will dated Jan. 23, 1797 as a result of the family's moving to Ohio and then (when Samuel returned to Mendham on business and passed away,) Andrew sold the house to Thomas Wolfe in 1804. Andrew probably lived in the house between 1797 and 1804.

McIlrath, Samuel ~ 1718-1804



1. Philip Papas, *Renegade Revolutionary: The Life of General Charles Lee* (NYU Press, 2014), Chapter 6, note 74, p. 323.
2. Esther Pavao, *General Artemas Ward*, revolutionary-war.net
3. *United States History*, u-s-history.com
4. *United States History*
5. *United States History*
6. C. F. William Maurer, *Dragoon Diary: The History of the Third Continental Light Dragoons* (Authorhouse, 2004) 2
- (7) Maurer, *Dragoon Diary*, 3
- (8) Maurer, *Dragoon Diary*, 2

- (9) Maurer, *Dragoon Diary*, 446
- (10) Maurer, *Dragoon Diary*, 447
- (11) Maurer, *Dragoon Diary*, 447
- (12) "Quotation marks mine"
- [13] Edward Robins, M.A. *Charles Lee - Stormy Petrel of the Revolution*, in an address delivered before the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, March 14, 1921. *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (1921), pp. 66-97, 84-85
- (14) Robins, *Charles Lee – Stormy Petrel of the Revolution*, 79
- (15) Maurer, *Dragoon Diary*, 447-448
- (16) Melick, Andrew D., *The Story of an Old Farm: Or, Life in New Jersey in the Eighteenth Century*, (Unionist-Gazette, 1889, Bedminister, NJ,) 344-345
- (17) Barber, John W., and Howe, Henry, *Historical Collection of the State of New Jersey*, (New York: S. Tuttle, 1846) 445, n.
- [18] McBurney, *Kidnapping the Enemy* (Westholme Publishing, 2013) 235.
- [19] Halsey, Edmund Drake, *The History of Morris County* (W.W.Munsell,1882) 264
- [20] Wright, Helen Martha, *The First Presbyterian Congregation, Mendham, Morris county, New Jersey; history and records, 1738-1938*, (Jersey City, 1939)
- [21] Wright, *The First Presbyterian Congregation*, p. 53-54 & 185-186. Name spelled as "Mclerath" on page 185, "Mucilrath" on page 186.
- (22) Wright, *The First Presbyterian Congregation*, 67-68
- (23) Wright, *The First Presbyterian Congregation*, 165
- (24) Wright, *The First Presbyterian Congregation*, 68
- (25) Halsey, Edmund Drake, *Mendham Township*, by Hon. S. B. Axtell, 245-246
- (26) Berg, Dr. Arthur R. *Ancestry.com*, Abstract of Early Wills (1801-1805, Archives of the State of NJ; First Series Vol. XXXIX; Vol. X *Calendar of Wills*; Elmer T. Hutchinson. (a.berg@tiscali.co.uk)

"Heritable property" means land and buildings, while "moveable property" includes such things as money, shares, furniture and jewelry.

The witnesses to this will were Church members and Elders of the Church along with Mclirath: "Lebeus" Dod and David Thompson. Thomas Horman (Homan) was listed as a member. Mendham residents.

(27) Wickham, Gertrude Van Rensselaer, *The Pioneer Families of Cleveland 1796-1840, Volume 1*, (Cleveland, 1914) 72-73 and Halsey, Edmund Drake, *History of Morris County, "The McElraths and Dods of Mendham,"* 243

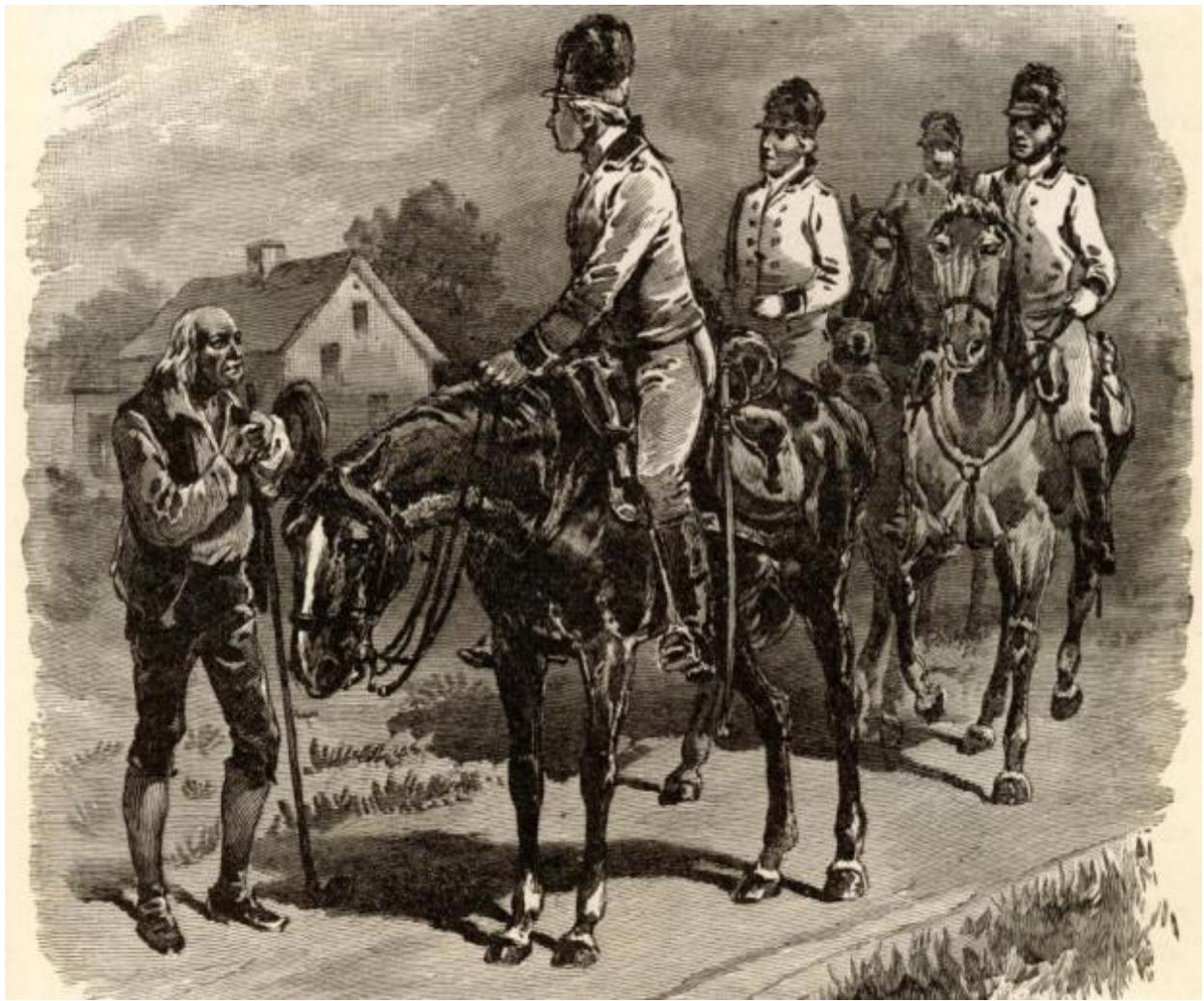
(28) Watson, John Fanning, *Annals of Philadelphia, and Pennsylvania, in the Olden Time:* (Philadelphia, Edwin S. Stuart, 1884) 120

(29) Spare & Shared Letters, 1827: *Eunice (Slawson) McIlrath to Ann Palmer*

(30) Robbins, *Charles Lee*, 92-93

(31) Langworthy, Edward, *Evans Early American, Imprint Collection, Memoirs of the life of the Late Charles Lee, Esq. Lieutenant-colonel of the forty-fourth regiment; and America.* (1738?-1802, ed.) 123

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TARLETON'S LIEUTENANT AND THE FARMER



IN MEMORIAM

A. D. 1777.
IN THE OLD CHURCH
ON PRESENT SITE.
A CAMP HOSPITAL
FOR THE AMERICAN ARMY
TWENTY SEVEN SOLDIERS
DIED OF SMALL POX.
AND LIE BURIED HERE
ERECTED 1927



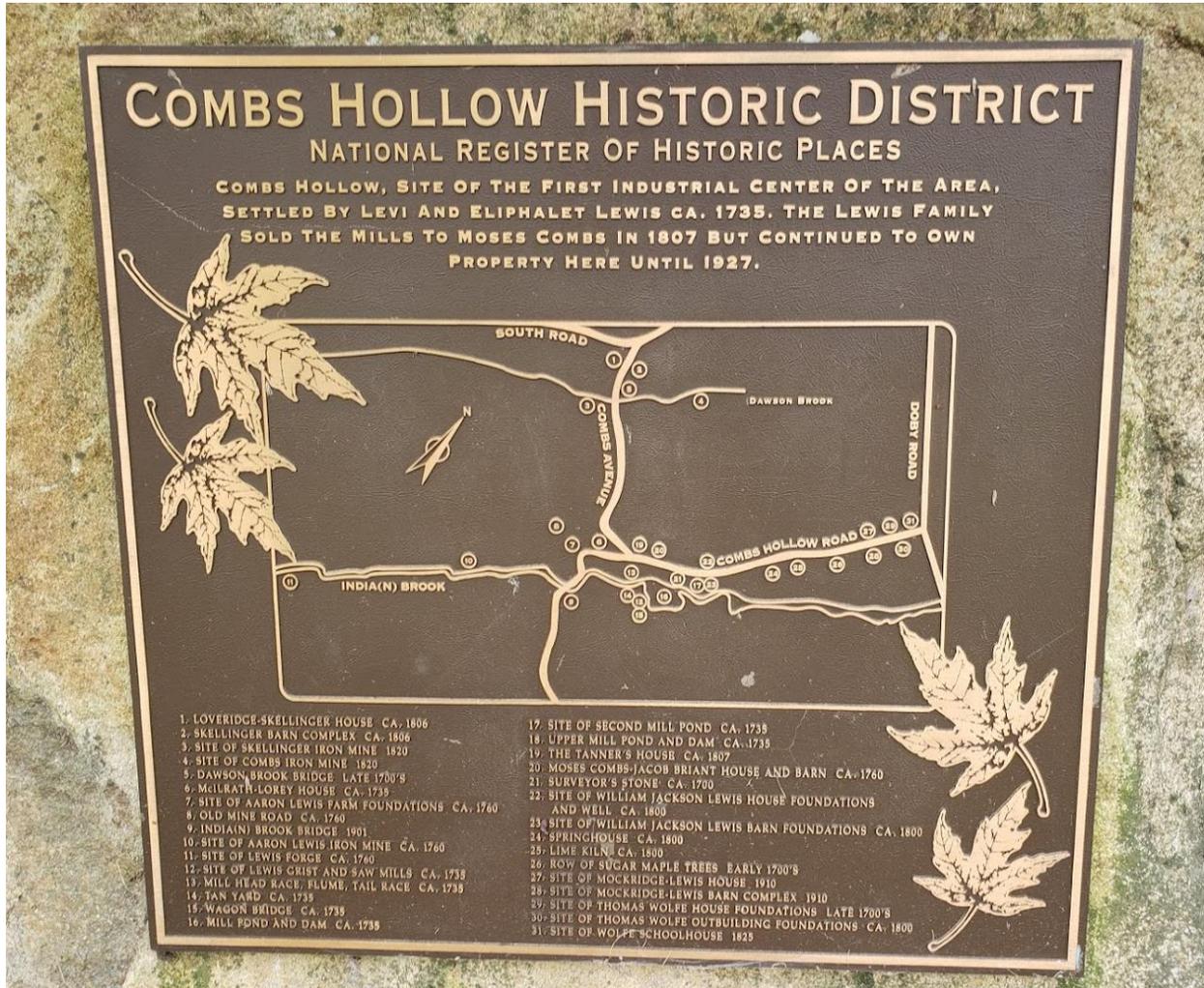


POLLSON

MICHELLE

M.C.
In memory of Samerel
M.C. Larch who died
Aug 9th 1804 in the
50th year of his age

Behold & see as you pass by
As you are now so once was I
As I am now so you must be
Prepare for death & follow me



McIlrath's Home built 1735 in Combs Hollow Historic District.

C. F. William Maurer

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