

A Family Of Patriots

AT THE ATWOOD HOUSE

by spencer grey

Although much has been written about Colonel Benjamin Godfrey, who formed a company of men to join in the battle for independence in 1776, another Chatham family provided many men to fight in the struggle.

Several generations of the Young family answered the call for patriots to join in the fight against the forces of King George III, the most notable being Hiat Young, who first served in the French and Indian War in the regiment of Major Rogers, during which period he was captured by the Indians. When the Revolution began Young quickly joined Captain Thomas Hamilton's company and served until the last day of December 1775. He served six years during the war and was involved in several battles, including the siege of Boston, the battle of Long Island, as well as those of Trenton, Princeton, the taking of Burgoyne, and the battle of Cornwallis at Yorktown.

After he was discharged from the army, he journeyed home without having received any pay for his service, arriving there without a cent. Legend has it that he arrived, "foot-sore, after having suffered many privations and hardships, [and] left his blood upon the newly scrubbed floor." During part of his service he was one of the soldiers who guarded the traitor Benedict Arnold.

When Hiat left for the war, his 13-year-old son Joseph remained behind to look after and support the family. But three years later, Joseph's patriotism impelled him to join up as well, even though he was still a small adolescent. In the family records, Joseph describes his enlistment as follows: I was so very small and short of stature that I had to resort to a stratagem in order to pass the yielding eye of the enlisting officer. I put on a pair of my father's big cow-hide boots, and filled under my feet all I could, to raise me up. Then I put on all the clothes I could to make me look stout. When I went before the examining officer, I stretched all I could, and was accepted.

Joseph served nine months in Jackson's Regiment, six months in Providence under Captain Jeb Crocker, eight months under Captain Griffin of Yarmouth, nine months in Shepherd's Regiment under his father's name, and another 24 months, at times under his name and at other times under his father's name. After peace was declared, he was discharged in Newburgh, N.Y. without a cent to pay his way home. As he explains, "...after suffering many privations I reached home to find my father and family in distressed circumstances, as neither of us had received any compensation for our services." He explains further that at the time the Continental money was so depreciated in value that a month's wages "would not buy a bushel of corn." He traveled to Boston to try to collect his and his father's wages, only to find that the paymaster had taken the money and run away to Canada. Back in Chatham, Joseph married Anna Nickerson, the daughter of Moses Nickerson, who was a dedicated Tory very much opposed to her marriage to a Patriot. Ironically the proud Tories had no money, making it necessary for Joseph to support them from the profits of his fishing.

During the War of 1812, one of Joseph's vessels was captured by the British with two of his sons, Joseph and Reubin, on board, both of whom were taken prisoners and sent to Dartmoor Prison. They were released at the end of the war, and Reubin returned home to resume fishing. He accumulated what for then was a handsome fortune and reared a large family of six daughters and three sons. At the same time he was a prominent citizen of Chatham, holding several offices in town and serving several years in the state legislature. He also built a cotton factory in Harwich and a woolen factory in Chatham.

A few days before his death Joseph ordered a stone to be inscribed to his father, describing his exploits, and to be sure that it was accurately completed, he had the work done in his yard where he could watch the progress from his bed. The stone now stands in the Universalist Cemetery in Chatham.

