The Iowa Compatriot

The Journal of the Iowa Society, Sons of the American Revolution February 17, 2024

We the descendants of the heroes of the American Revolution, who by their sacrifice established the United States of America, reaffirm our faith in the principles of liberty and solemnly pledge to defend them against every foe.

Martin Luther King Jr. Day

By Mike Rowley

In spite of the cold, the work of members continued on the 15th of January, attending two different Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebrations in Des Moines.

The first MLK Day event was at Hope+Elim Church near Drake University and featured speaker Brittany K. Barnett, an attorney, author, entrepreneur, and criminal justice reform advocate.

The second event was at the Forest Avenue Library and featured Des Moines Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Ian Roberts. At both events, our members were able to share some of the "forgotten history" of black veterans in Woodland Cemetery.

Doug Frazer Receives SAR Liberty Medal Certificate

By Mike Rowley

Iowa SAR member Doug Frazer was presented with an SAR Liberty Medal Certificate and oak leaf cluster in honor of being the first-line sponsor of 10 new member applications. The award was given at the SUVCW Dodge Camp monthly meeting at Urbandale Library on Jan 24th, 2024.

Operation Child Read Begins Close to Home

By Randy Lyon

Operation Child Read was first announced to the Iowa Society in last month's newsletter. The program, another way of saying "Thanks for your service," is based on early childhood reading for the grandchildren of veterans visiting the Dubuque VA Clinic.

Caregivers attending to elderly veterans often bring young children with them to the clinic. These children range in age from babies to preschoolers. In five minutes a night, parents with preschoolers of around the age of three or grandparents taking care of young grandchildren can become masterful teachers of reading.

Sight words, which also go by the name Dolch words, are 220 of the most used words in the English language.

Youngsters beginning school who know the Dolch words are miles ahead of the other students. The Iowa SAR will be making the Dolch words available to anyone interested. Using a very easy game, these words, which cannot be sounded out, can be quickly learned five minutes at a time. If you are a grandparent or parent of preschool children, please contact Randy Lyon at randylyon1915@gmail.com and I will be glad to mail a set to you.

As it happened, I found two clinicians in the Dubuque Clinic who were eager to give the words a try. They appreciated the efforts of the SAR in this area and I look forward to many more clients in the future.

Private Eber Townsend and the Music Video "Freedom Isn't Free"

By Tony Townsend

Genealogy research can lead to many discoveries. This was certainly my case when I started research in 2016 and discovered that my 5th great-grandfather, Eber Townsend (1760-1822), was a Revolutionary War Patriot in New York State. Not only did he participate, but 11 other members of his family also served in Colonel Ludington's 7th Regiment of the New York Militia out of Dutchess County, NY. His father, Charles Sr., three brothers, and several uncles and first cousins all volunteered.

The unit these 12 men served in was involved for the most part in patrol and guard type duties along the area of the Hudson River north of New York City. The youngest of the 12 Townsend family members was Private Eber Townsend at just 17 years of age. The war was not easy for Eber as he was wounded, captured, and taken as a prisoner of war according to several reports and D.A.R. and S.A.R. applications. The exact details of his imprisonment is still not known. Those details were likely lost in the Great Albany Fire of 1911, which destroyed the New York State Library and most of the archives related to the New York Militia (1).

After the war, young Eber would marry and have three children but he struggled in life. Various accounts that have been handed down from ancestors indicate he may have had PTSD-like symptoms, as we know them today. That is understandable for a 17-year old kid who was a prisoner of war. We believe he had a great deal of assistance in life from his best friend and fellow soldier, Samuel Drew (1760-1853), who later became his brother-in-law.

As a tribute to Eber and the 12 family members who served during the Revolution, I teamed up with a much more talented cousin of mine named Darrin Williams to produce a song and music video called "Freedom Isn't Free." Darrin is also a 5th great-grandson of Eber Townsend. I wrote the original lines and offered some broad concepts related to the video but Darrin really deserves the credit as he created the musical arrangement, sang the lyrics, and played guitar, keyboards and drums on the tracks he created in his home studio in Indiana.

During the creation process, I asked Darrin if he knew anyone who could play the fife and snare drum to give the song a Revolutionary War feel. Sure enough, Darrin's friend Billy Anderson, a highly talented sound engineer in Nashville, stepped up. Billy was working on the mixing and mastering for this project at his studio in Nashville already and he had experience with these instruments and recorded those tracks for us along with the violin. Billy also arranged to have some outdoor video scenes shot in 4K of the local Revolutionary War reenactors that can be seen at the beginning of the video. Darrin then added these scenes along with other stock footage to create the video master.

The music video is at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Up-iNgYSyrQ or can also be found on YouTube by searching on "Freedom Isn't Free Darrin Williams". The song is also available on Pandora, iHeart Radio, iTunes, and other music streaming services. All proceeds from the song are being donated to veterans groups.

Sources:

1. Times Union, Albany, NY; Paul Grondahl, March 28, 2011.

"I'll Make Me a World" Festival

By Mike Rowley

On Friday February 9th, the Iowa SAR Color Guard, in an effort to recognize February as Black History Month and serve the community, attended the "I'll Make Me a World" event in Clive, Iowa. The event celebrates African-American arts, culture, and contributions. Color Guard Commander Mike Rowley shared some of the local history of Cato Mead, the only known Revolutionary War Veteran of color buried west of the Mississippi River in Montross, Iowa.

At this year's "I'll Make Me a World" festival, actor, writer, producer, and singer Christian Keyes was the headline speaker. Middle and high school students enjoyed workshops, prizes, culture, and STEM-based activities.

Megan Graves Wins Iowa SAR Knight Essay Contest

Megan Graves of Linn-Mar High School in Marion, Iowa, won first place in the 2023 George S. and Stella M. Knight Essay Contest. She received her medal and certificate at her home on February 12th, 2024.

The following arcticle is her essay, reprinted with permission.

Unum Necessarium

By Megan Graves

The struggle for victory in the American Revolution only served to make the triumph more meaningful. Through endless persistence, clever strategy, and the rallying of the American people, freedom was won. Few things show this as clearly as the trials faced to obtain the vital substance Samuel Adams called “The one thing needful” or *unum necessarium* (qtd. in Phillips 301). Gunpowder.

Gunpowder was vital to the Colonial Army—without it, muskets, cannons, and rifles could not fire. Cannons required six to twelve pounds of powder in a single shot and one pound could only supply forty-eight musket shots. Even before the Revolution, the American people had to struggle through raids, ruined powder mills, and import embargoes for a chance at victory. As historian Kevin Phillips writes, “Few portions of the Revolution have been less saluted, but obtaining gunpowder…was the unsung battle that had to be fought before the Revolution itself could be undertaken and won” (Phillips 113).

Leading up to the war, gunpowder was controlled by the British. With tensions rising between the Redcoats and the colonists, the British tried preventing revolution by strangling the gunpowder supply. During the 1760s, British officials stopped importing extraneous gunpowder to the colonies. In the early 1770s, with revolution looming, royal officers barred Americans from storing powder and even conducted raids on American powder stores. The most famous of these occurred on September 1, 1774, when the Charlestown powder house was raided by Redcoats who seized hundreds of barrels of gunpowder. The local Patriots rushed to stop the raid, but arrived too late to prevent the thievery. This event kicked off the “Powder Alarm” that would spread through the colonies, prompting further cries for war from the Americans.

With so little powder stored before the revolution, the colonies would need to acquire more. Unfortunately, manufacturing gunpowder would be difficult. Along with removing powder stores in the decades before war broke out, the British had prohibited large-scale munitions manufacturing. There were few gunpowder mills in the colonies and those that did exist were in ruin. Not only that, but according to Orlando Stephenson of *The American Historical Review*, “the manufacture of the explosive was almost a lost art” (Stephenson 271). Due to British intervention and subsequent disuse of the mills, it was likely that the necessary gunpowder would have to be shipped into the revolting colonies.

Importing powder would be another obstacle to overcome. The British crown had plans to make obtaining supplies even more difficult for the colonial war effort. On October 19, 1774, King George III officially embargoed arms, ammunition, and other goods from entering the colonies under the “Restraining Acts,” leaving the colonies critically undersupplied. By 1775, the gunpowder situation was dire. The colonies found themselves in this dilemma as they initiated their Revolutionary War.

After war broke out, the lack of gunpowder was terrifying for General Washington and the Colonial Army. Washington’s staff calculated that for their size of army and number of cannons, they would need over two thousand barrels of gunpowder—or 100 tons. This goal would not be met, as historian Rick Atkinson writes, “a survey taken soon after Washington’s arrival reported 303 barrels in his magazines, or fifteen tons” (Atkinson 126). Washington wrote letter upon letter to Congress addressing the shortage, discussing the army’s “melancholy situation” and “the necessity of an immediate supply” of powder (qtd. in Greenlee 52-53). To halt the daily waste, Washington banned his army from firing guns for shooting practice. The soldiers were unable to practice, and every battle fought used up more powder and lives. The British confiscations leading up to the war paid off—the American army was unable to fight for their freedom.

However, the Americans would not give up. Instead, the colonies adopted a new strategy—disinformation. General Washington insisted the gunpowder shortage must “be kept a profound secret” from the British (qtd. in Greenlee 52). He ‘leaked’ false information on having 1,800 barrels of gunpowder. Another strategy was filling empty barrels with sand to fool spies. The British never saw or seized the opportunity to wipe the Patriots out, though in truth many battles were tactically unsound.

Despite the Americans’ perseverance, gunpowder was still a necessity if they wanted to go on the offensive. On July 18, a few months before the official Restraining Acts, Congress encouraged trade for gunpowder in the West Indies, especially those from individual colonies. There were so many ships on the water after the embargoes that “few lawyers could keep up with the flow of deadlines, authorizations, and variable interpretations, and presumably the same was true of the Royal Navy officers and Yankee ship captains” (Phillips 351). Some ports on the colonial coast were more lenient as well. In New York City, in 1776, the Royal Navy blockading the port allowed many trade ships to dock as long as the Navy’s ships were able to peacefully

restock at shore. Substantial smuggling of supplies, particularly gunpowder, ensued. The tenacity of the American trade ships allowed them to circumvent the British embargoes and bring in literal tons of powder for the war effort.

After the war started, American production mills slowly returned to life. One final obstacle to overcome was when a main ingredient of gunpowder—saltpeter—was unable to be found naturally. Fortunately, saltpeter was just as easy to smuggle into the colonies. Nearly 478,000 pounds of saltpeter was imported by 1777 and manufactured into 698,245 pounds of gunpowder. According to historian David Salay, "Disregarding the ultimate source of the ingredients, American mills actually produced 34.6 percent of the gunpowder used during the first two years of the war" (Salay 441). With the smuggled saltpeter, the patriotic American people contributed to the war effort and supported their troops.

Raids and confiscations did not go unanswered either; many counter-raids were conducted. Raiding British officers, governors, and camps grew in scale throughout the war. Georgian Governor James Wright wrote of "Liberty gentlemen" who stole six tons of his gunpowder, and even took his mail (qtd. in Atkinson 178). Another patriot victory was raiding boats on the water. In 1776, the British ordinance ship *Hope* was captured off Boston by the schooner *Franklin*, and lost over £40,000 of supplies and, more importantly, fifteen hundred barrels of powder—seventy-five tons worth. By mid-1776, the hard-fought countermeasures of smuggling, manufacturing, and raiding had supplied the Colonial Army with enough powder to push their offensive, further supporting the American victory.

In 1789, the victorious new states ratified their chosen amendments. The second amendment granted by states was the right to bear arms. The states demanded to be able to keep their arms and ammunition in case they needed it and to ensure the gunpowder difficulties faced during the American Revolution would never be possible again.

In conclusion, the American perseverance in finding ways to obtain *unum necessarium* demonstrates why the colonies were triumphant in the first place. Even with challenge after challenge thrown their way, they found ways around those obstacles, and when they could not, bluffed their way to victory. Phillips aptly writes, "Gunpowder, in retrospect, seems to have transcended its usual wartime role to become a touchstone of American patriotic fulfillment and hoped-for nationhood" (Phillips 308).

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Valentine's Day

By Randy Lyon

Cherry-coated cake donuts were an early morning treat to the staff of the VA Clinic in Dubuque on Valentine's Day. The Sons of the American Revolution is a sponsor of the clinic at festive occasions several times of the year. The Society is also a member of the VA Clinic Advisory Council at the Veterans Hospital in Iowa City. Over 100 veterans have received family trees researched for free by the Society. VA staff in clinics and hospitals are everyday heroes.

Benjamin Banneker, a “Caveated” American, Is Still Not Free

By Randy Lyon

Preface: “Caveated” Americans, an invented term of mine, surround us. Fellow citizens are named, described with a minimum of words surrounded by two commas, and this followed by text. The words between the commas, the “caveat,” carry enormous importance.

Allow me to introduce you to an uncommon man from early America. This person made great advances in mathematics and astronomy. He helped in the early days of mapping the future site of Washington, D.C. Despite this, Benjamin Banneker came to feel everything he did was being used, the caveat, to either demean him or to advance social causes with which he was only partially interested.

Benjamin Banneker, a free African American, never knew slavery. A native of Baltimore County, Maryland, his life was different from most African Americans. He received a formal education during his youth, kept his property and farm as an adult, and could use his opportunities and intelligence to gain national prestige.

Born on November 9th, 1731, Banneker grew up along the Patapsco River on a 100-acre tobacco farm owned by his parents. His father was a formerly enslaved man and his mother was the daughter of a mixed-race couple. His grandmother, an Irish-born former indentured servant, taught him to read and write. Benjamin continued his education with both white and black classmates at a one-room Quaker school.

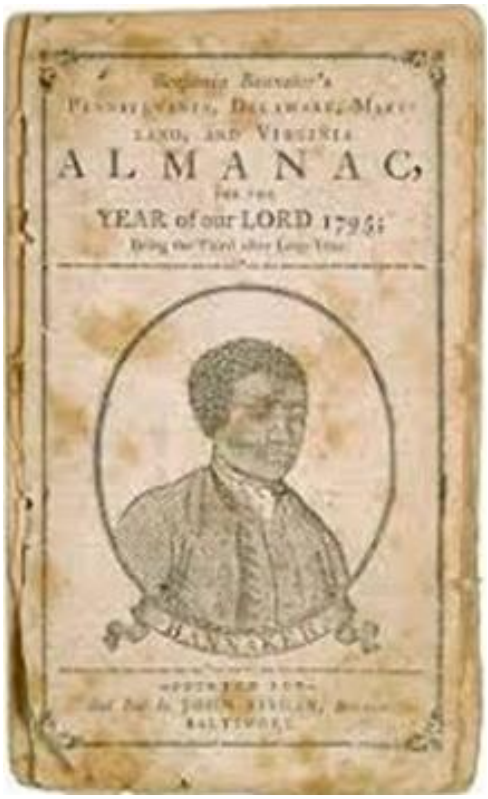
Banneker constructed an irrigation system for his family farm in his early twenties. After studying the gears of a pocket watch and mastering its mechanics, he hand carved a wooden clock that kept perfect time. Few clocks existed in rural Maryland in the mid-eighteenth century. Banneker invited neighbors to visit and see his creation. This probably led to his acquaintance with George Ellicott, a land surveyor interested in astronomy. In 1789, with scientific books loaned by Ellicott, Banneker forecast his first eclipse.

The Ellicott friendship proved beneficial. On July 16th, 1790, Congress appointed three commissioners to direct construction of a new city to become the nation’s capital along the Potomac River. Andrew Ellicott, George’s cousin and a practical engineer, invited Banneker to join him in mapping out the borders of the future community.

> Ellicott is attended by Benjamin Banniker, an Ethiopian, whose abilities as a surveyor and an astronomer clearly prove that Mr. (Thomas) Jefferson’s concluding that race of men were void of mental endowments, was without foundation.
>
> — The Georgetown Weekly Ledger, 1791

Banneker’s primary responsibilities were in the observatory tent. He maintained the regulator clock using a series of thermometers, a transit, and an altitude instrument. Ellicott daily used the regulator clock to set his own timepiece used to determine latitude. Banneker was paid $2.00 daily, an amount equal to the pay of assistant surveyors.

Banneker returned to his farm in April 1791 and resumed writing. He published information about bees and calculated the cycle of 17-year locusts. The almanac would make his name known worldwide. For six consecutive years between 1792 and 1797, white abolitionists published his almanac containing astronomical calculations, medical information, opinion pieces, and tidal information especially useful for local fishermen.



Benjamin Banneker's *Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia Almanack and Ephemeris for the Year of Our Lord 1792* never hid the author's race. It began with a testimonial from James McHenry, an important Maryland statesman. He referred to the author's gifts saying, "I consider this Negro as fresh proof that powers of the mind are disconnected with the colour of the skin."

Few were capable of checking Banneker's calculations. The task fell to David Rittenhouse, an abolitionist, scientist and fellow surveyor. Rittenhouse called the almanac's measurements "a very extraordinary performance, considering the colour of the author."

Rittenhouse was approving his work, but Banneker resented the slight to his efforts. "I am annoyed to find that the subject of my race is so much stressed. The work is either correct or it is not. In this case, I believe it to be perfect."

Although he was never a slave, Benjamin Banneker was never free to be just Benjamin Banneker. There were always such remarks as "Benjamin Banneker, an Ethopian;" "Benjamin Banneker, a free black;" and "Benjamin Banneker, a sable descendant of Africa." He was objectively as shackled by racism as thousands of his "brethren" were in southern fields. Banneker chose to use his acclaimed almanac as an example of himself as a man "of the African race...of the darkest dye," to prove that black people were as capable as whites… if they were given their freedom.

Banneker mailed an advance copy of his almanac to Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson on August 19th, 1791. Accompanying the pamphlet came a 1,400-word letter. It challenged Jefferson's attitude toward slavery. Using Jefferson's comparison of British rule to an intolerable "state of servitude," Banneker pointed out the hypocrisy of Americans forcing blacks, "my brethren," into actual servitude:

> How pitiable is it to reflect, that altho (sic) you were so fully convinced of the benevolence of the Father of mankind, and of his equal and impartial distribution of those rights and privileges which he had conferred upon them… that you should at the same time be found guilty of that most criminal act, which you professedly detested in others, with respect to yourselves.
>
> — Benjamin Banneker to Thomas Jefferson, 1791

Jefferson, an owner of an estimated 600 slaves during his lifetime, replied on August 30th. He wrote, "Nobody wishes more ardently to see a good system commenced for raising the condition both of their body and mind to what it ought to be, as fast as the imbecility of their present existence, and other circumstances which cannot be neglected, will admit."

Jefferson wrote that he had forwarded the almanac to Marquis de Condorcet, a French philosopher and mathematician, calling it "a document to which your whole colour (author's note: again the caveat mentioned previously) had a right for their justification against the doubts which have been entertained of them." Banneker published his correspondence with Jefferson shortly after the appearance of the almanac for 1792.

The pamphlet circulated quickly, going through two editions in 1792. Several magazines and almanacs reprinted the exchange during the 1790s, including the Baltimore edition of Banneker's 1793 almanac.

The outpouring of pro-abolition feeling may have been more than Banneker expected. It was dangerous to question slavery further in a state that permitted it. After 1794, Banneker's beliefs about the dignity and intelligence of African Americans came in a more subtle fashion; with an image of the author on the almanac's cover.

On October 9th, 1806, Banneker died at his farm. Days later, during his funeral, his house mysteriously caught on fire, destroying most of his writings and possessions. Much of what we know comes from records left by others. Martha Ellicott Tyson, George Ellicott's daughter, wrote biographies of him in 1854 and 1884.

More than two hundred years after Banneker's death, the caveat is alive. Modern jurists are generally linked through caveat to the president who appointed them. Their legal opinions are scored as "with" or "against" the

attitudes of their sponsor. This simplistic approach ignores the freedom a lifetime appointment should grant a justice. A politician's future can be promoted or slighted by whether a newspaper article's first caveat creates a positive or negative image. Thus "Edward Muskie, unsuccessful candidate for President," cannot be expected to instill faith in his current endeavors or thoughts. Politicians appreciate the power of a caveat. They can appropriate the title of Republican or Democrat and expect to receive party and voter endorsements. Ironically, the caveat of color carried by Banneker could still cast doubt on whether his biography would be allowed in some public schools.

Flag Certificate Presentations

By Randy Lyon

Craig Repp accepted the flag presentation for himself and his wife. Completely surprised by the presence of a "Revolutionary soldier" at his door, he repeatedly thanked me and the Society for making this effort.

Bryce and Cynthia Davis and their son answered the door together after they noticed me pull into their driveway. It probably did not hurt that I immediately complimented them on having a wonderful older home with oak trim introduced by a grand door. We finally got down to business, however, and they were obviously pleased to receive the honor.

Nadine Rusk almost missed the presentation. She was gone when I came to the house and her husband accepted the certificate on her behalf. Driving back past the home, he flagged me down so that I could get this picture.

From the look on his face, it is apparent that Dale Bird was flabbergasted at receiving the flag honor. He wanted me to be sure to thank the Society for the program and the time it took to make the presentations.

Carolyn J. Dawson was another lady with lots of family who had served in World War II, Korea, and the Middle East. She was very proud of her family's military service and flew the flag daily.

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Let us remember our obligation to our forefathers, who gave us our Constitution,
The Bill of Rights, an independent Supreme Court, and a nation of free men.