



## NEWSLETTER

#1 2007

# A History Of The Blair County Chapter, SAR

Here is part 3 of the "History of the Blair County Chapter" which was included in my book, "Mother Bedford And The American Revolutionary War". In this issue, we will look at more recent years of the Chapter.

### **The Blair County Chapter Weathers Some Stormy Decades}**

The 1960s and 1970s were a turbulent period in the history of the United States of America. Although the United States never formally declared war in Southeast Asia, she sent her young men to Vietnam to fight for a cause which many felt was justified and just as many felt was foolhardy madness. That cause was the effort to keep as much of the world secure from oppressive governments (such as exemplified by Socialist Communism) as possible. As President Dwight D. Eisenhower explained it, the countries of Indochina and Southeast Asia were like a row of dominoes. In his words, "You have... what you would call the 'falling domino' principle. You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly." The Communist invasion of Asia was threatening the peaceful security of the entire Pacific Island region. Something had to be done to prevent the

Communists from taking over that region, and the United States government decided that that something should be aid (in the form of supplies, arms or even troops) to any country that requested it. The United States' response to South Vietnam's such request proceeded to rip the nation apart between those Americans who supported the government's actions and those who were adamant against it.

During the whole emotional struggle that the nation was enduring, the Sons of the American Revolution remained steadfast in its efforts to promote patriotism and support the government. Despite the possibility of ridicule and abuse by those who believed that anyone who chose to stand by the decisions of this country "right or wrong" was old-fashioned (and therefore invalid), the Sons of the American Revolution made the definite choice to stand by her. The SAR Centennial History published in the 1989 issues of

The SAR Magazine, noted that the membership figures of the SAR, rather than declining as one might have assumed, continued to grow throughout these decades of national turmoil.

The Blair County Chapter kept right on course and continued to implement such projects as was seen fit to keep the ideals of the SAR, alive. One of those projects was the awarding of the R.O.T.C. medal to deserving cadets.

Although the minutes to the Blair County Chapter's meetings prior to the one held on 12 June, 1969 are no longer available for reference, that one reveals that the R.O.T.C. medal program was being undertaken in the 60's. In order to put things in the proper perspective, it should be remembered that the R.O.T.C. departments of universities and colleges were the primary targets of vandalism and protest waged by the anti-war movement. The

R.O.T.C. (i.e. the Reserve Officers Training Corps.) was viewed by the anti-war activists as the epitome of the patriotism they claimed to hate so much. The awarding of the R.O.T.C. medal was a way that the local chapters of the SAR, could send a signal to those cadets that they were appreciated and needed. At the June 12 meeting, held at the Penn Alto Motor Hotel, compatriot T. Dean Lower reported that the 1969 R.O.T.C. medal had been presented to Michael J. Shore at the Altoona Campus. A letter was also read at that meeting regarding whether the chapter should take up the project of awarding a Junior R.O.T.C. medal at the

Altoona High School. The chapter would come to award two college level and two high school level R.O.T.C. medals in later years.

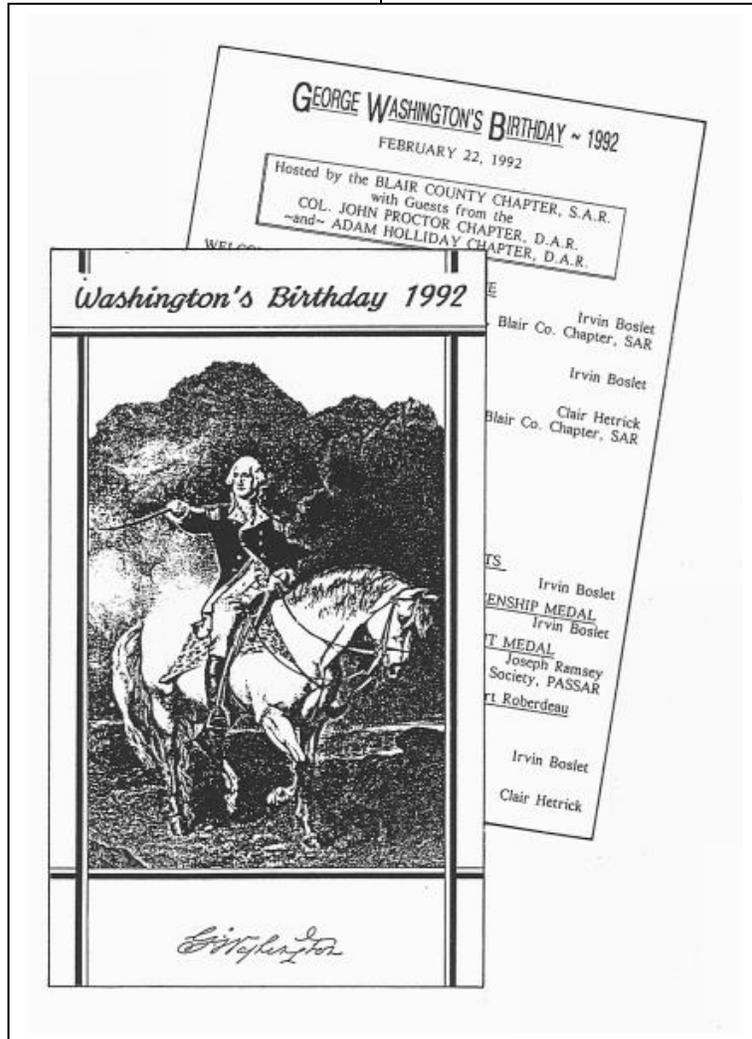
At the 23 April, 1970 meeting, which was held at the Park Hills Country Club, the chapter voted to rent Revolutionary War uniforms to be

worn by five compatriot members in the May 16 Armed Forces Day parade. The chapter tried to participate in as many local parades as possible in order to keep the society visible to the public.

During the November 4, 1971 meeting it was decided that the chapter would purchase twenty-five copies of the pamphlet, "How To Become A Citizen Of The U.S.A." which would be available in the county court house for distribution to applicants for naturalization.

An interest in the restoration of the

Fort Roberdeau was growing in the chapter. The first step was initiated on 14 August, 1973 when Eugene G. Hamill, Floyd G. Hoenstine and Lloyd M. Morris met with Blair County Commissioner Colson E. Jones and two members of the County Planning Commission to make plans for the project. The result of this meeting was the eventual appointment of nine individuals to serve as a steering committee to decide on the best course of action to take on the restoration of the local historical treasure. Although the project to restore the Fort was begun as a Blair County Chapter, SAR, initiative, the administration of the



project eventually came under the control of the Board of Commissioners-appointed Fort Roberdeau Restoration Committee. The chairman of that committee was Eugene G. Hamill, the vice-chairman was Floyd G. Hoenstine, and the secretary was Lloyd M. Morris. The long-range plan was to complete the restoration project by 1976 in time for the nation's Bicentennial. The chapter undertook a campaign to raise funds necessary for the restoration project. The fund-raising project's goal was \$125,000. The Blair County Chapter made a donation of \$100 to the project in 1976. Fort Roberdeau became the unofficial headquarters for the Tuckahoe Valley Militia, a Revolutionary War reenactment troupe formed in January, 1974. This reenactment troupe participated in many of the events at the Fort and eventually grew from five original members to over sixty. A second troupe, the Cluggage's Ranging Company of the Fort Roberdeau Militia was organized by Blair County Chapter compatriot Robert L. Emerson in the early 1980s. A program was held on the 5th of July, 1976 at Fort Roberdeau to dedicate the fort. By the April, 1977 meeting Col. Morris was able to report that a road was being constructed to the Fort, and would be completed soon. Toilet facilities were being prepared at the old Kiwanis building and an outdoor nature laboratory had been approved to be part of the park complex. The restoration was completed by 1979.

Most organizations experience what the Blair County Chapter, SAR, did from the 1960s through the 1970s and on into the 1980s. When the group initially forms, there is a flurry of activity in which the group engages in new and exciting things. Almost everything that is done and every project that undertaken is noteworthy because of its novelty. Later, as activities are repeated, the excitement level drops a bit. This appears to have been the case of the Blair County Chapter.

Throughout the nearly four decades since the first one of its existence, the Chapter continued to hold meetings on a somewhat regular schedule (at times on a monthly basis, at others on a quarterly basis). Although the meeting place changed from the Penn Alto to other Blair County restaurants such as the Family Host Cafeteria to the Old Canal Inn to Hoss' Restaurant to the Kings Family Restaurant, the meetings were always attended by at least seven or eight to fifteen or sixteen members. During Edgar R. Hartt's two-year term as president, some of the meetings were held at his own home at Hollidaysburg.

It should be noted that in August of 1970 the Chapter made a formal request to the Board of County Commissioners for the use of a room at Highland Hall, the Court House Annex. The 24 August, 1970 letter which then-president Dr. J.F. Buzzard noted:

“Primarily, this room would afford the organization an appropriate place to store and display our various equipment, and especially a considerable amount of flags, banners, emblems and other items which we shall be accumulating in preparation for the bi-centennial in 1976.

“Members of the S.A.R. are engaged in compiling data on Revolutionary Soldiers of Blair County, their military service and place of burial; events of this area including Indian depredations, massacre of the Holliday children and other events, also the history of Fort Roberdeau, the lead mines of Sinking Valley, etc. We need a place to preserve such records and to plan for the bi-centennial.

“In addition, we would plan to use this room as an office for our Secretary with a desk and filing cabinet and probably a storage cabinet. In time with the accumulation of chairs we may desire to use it for one or more of our business meetings each year.”

None of the Chapter's meeting minutes speak of any meetings being held in the Highland Hall room which the commissioners did allow the Blair County Chapter to use, but the group did store various of the records there through the 1970s and 1980s. By the late 1980s, though, the room was being used for other purposes, and the only storage area available for the SAR's use was a small closet. In 1992, when the room was needed for an office area, the Court House custodian requested that the closet be cleaned out and vacated. At that time, the only papers in storage there were correspondences and cancelled checks from the 1970s. The more important papers were refiled in the Secretary's filing cabinet.

The Chapter continued to hold the Constitution Day dinners and the George Washington Birthday dinners together with various of the DAR chapters. Each year the R.O.T.C. medals and, in more recent years, the Law Enforcement medals were awarded to deserving individuals. Several compatriot members of the Chapter would participate in the local parades to draw attention to the SAR. For the most part, the life of the Chapter became rather routine through these years.

There were some programs that were begun during this period that should be mentioned. One of these programs was the Essay Contest. This was voted into existence at the Annual

Meeting held on 06 December, 1978. The program was suggested by Edward P. DeHaas to encourage school students to research and write essays about varied aspects of the Revolutionary War. The essay contest was well received by the local schools and continued through to 1981.

The idea of presenting a Law Enforcement Award medal was proposed at the Annual Meeting for 1983 and the project was approved to be undertaken for the year 1984. This project has

continued, if somewhat infrequently, to the present time.

During the period of time that Mr. Edgar R. Hartt, Esq., was the chapter president, the Blair County S.A.R. Newsletter was started. This first chapter newsletter was published during the years 1986 and 1987 through the personal efforts of Mr. Hartt. The Newsletter provided a vehicle for the Chapter officers to disseminate information to the membership regarding business that had been taken up during the regular meetings and those subjects to be taken up in future meetings. A basic

problem that tends to affect any organization such as the SAR, is that any project, such as a newsletter, has to be accomplished by a volunteer effort. The first newsletter was discontinued for a few years due, no doubt, to the lack of volunteers to keep it going. At the 1990 Annual Meeting held on 04 December, 1990 at Justine's Restaurant in Hollidaysburg, Mr. Hartt revived the idea and proposed that he would be willing and able to do



the printing of a chapter newsletter if someone else could perform the work of accumulating material and laying it out. Having had experience with producing newsletters and also having inherent interests in both, historical research and writing, the author of this history, Larry D. Smith, agreed to take on the project. The first issue of the new quarterly, *BLAIR CO. CHAP. PASSAR NEWSLETTER* was produced for the 1st Quarter of 1991. The author has attempted, in each issue, to provide a main article on a subject particularly devoted to the region that is today Blair County. The remainder of the issue is devoted to chapter news and miscellaneous filler material on the subject of the Revolutionary War or general life during that time period. Beginning with the 4th Quarter 1993 issue, an ongoing series of articles on the history of the American Revolutionary War, titled *A Chronology Of The Revolutionary War - With Emphasis on Bedford County, Pennsylvania's Role* was introduced. The current newsletter ranges from four to six, 8-1/2 X 11 pages in length. Some of the articles originally composed for the Newsletter have been included in this history.

The Pennsylvania Society encouraged the local chapters to participate in the Eagle Scout Award program in 1988. At the meeting on 18 March, 1988 then-president Joseph Ramsey reported on the request and noted that he would get in contact with the leaders of the Boy Scout troops in this area. This program, conducted by Mr. Ramsey for the next few years to the present time, required that the Eagle Scouts who desired to receive this award would have to achieve certain goals within the realm of the scouting program along with writing an essay. The program was successful throughout the years and has fostered healthy competition between the various troops. The Blair County Chapter was honored in 1990 by having sponsored that year's Pennsylvania State Eagle Scout award winner, Daniel Russell.

The subject of a Graves Registration Committee was reactivated at the 24 March, 1990 meeting. In earlier years, Harry K. Woodcock had accumulated information on Revolutionary War Patriots who were buried or presumed to be buried within the bounds of Blair, Bedford and

Huntingdon Counties. The information he gathered was maintained in a number of small spiral-bound note-books which were then stored away in the Highland Hall storage closet. Larry D. Smith requested the appointment as Graves Registration Chairman and with the Chapter's approval he started sorting through Mr. Woodcock's records along with researching many other sources, such as the Pennsylvania Archives, Floyd G. Hoenstine's published records and records published by the DAR. The result has been the compilation of the lists which appear in this volume. Rather than rush into the project simply to get a list compiled, each of the "assumed" Patriots' war service records have been researched to verify their accuracy.

The dedication of Revolutionary War Patriots' gravesites was not a new activity for the Blair County Chapter. The Chapter had undertaken the honor of placing decorations and flags on the gravesites of Patriots since 1947 when the SAR, and DAR chapters worked together to honor those interred in Blair County soil. But, with the exception of a nearly annual ceremony held at the Holliday Burial Ground, it had not engaged in the dedication of many new gravesites in recent years.

During the United States Bicentennial year of 1976 the Blair County Chapter took part in a dedication ceremony conducted by the Newry Bicentennial Committee. A bronze plaque was dedicated at the Old St. Patrick's Cemetery in Newry honoring the memory of Revolutionary War Patriot, Patrick Cassidy along with Peter Cassidy and Edward McGraw. Patrick Cassidy who spent his life, following the War, by the profession of surveyor, moved to this region in 1787, and in 1793 surveyed and laid out the town of Newry. Fred T. Leathers, the NSSAR Historian General participated in the dedication ceremony. The dedication was attended by half a dozen Compatriot members of the Blair County Chapter along with representatives of the DAR.

On the 26th of May, 1990 a gravesite dedication ceremony, sponsored by the Blair County Chapter, was held for Jacob Schmitt Sr. Jacob Schmitt, Sr had served in the Bedford County Militia as a Ranger on the Frontier. He

was one of only about ten individuals who were residents of this region prior to the War, served in or supported the American Revolutionary forces, and then continued to reside in the region, and were interred here following their deaths. The dedication ceremony was conducted within the Smith Corner Mennonite Church near the actual gravesite.

A similar ceremony was conducted in the town of Bedford at the St. John's United Church of Christ on 21 September, 1991. The gravesite dedication was for Johan Simon Clar, a captain of the York County Militia, who settled in Bedford after the War. The Glades Rangers, a reenactment troop from Somerset County provided the color guard for the ceremony and fired three volleys with their black powder muskets over the gravesite at the close of the ceremony.

The practice of holding the dedication ceremony inside a church located near the gravesite, and making it possible for the participants to join in singing patriotic hymns to the accompaniment of piano made the two recent dedications very memorable. It is a practice the Chapter hopes to repeat in the future. The Graves Registration Chairman has planned to hold similar dedications at each of the county seats for Bedford, Blair, Fulton and Huntingdon Counties when the list of Patriots interred within each of those counties is fully verified.

The R.O.T.C., the Law Enforcement and the Eagle Scout awards were not the only ones to be given out by the Chapter in recognition of outstanding personal achievement and service. The Sons of the American Revolution also authorizes the presentation of Good Citizenship awards on three different levels: bronze, silver and gold. The bronze medal is awarded to individuals for achievements in their school, community or state; the silver medal is awarded to an individual who has contributed a high degree of service to the community or state; the gold medal is awarded only to an individual who has achieved something of national importance.

Of the individuals on whom the Blair County Chapter, SAR, bestowed a Good Citizenship, one recipient should be noted. In 1990 the Chapter voted to present the Silver Good Citizenship medal to Vaughn E. Whisker, Sr. Mr. Whisker was a resident of Bedford County, and had been a member of the Blair County Chapter from 1961 until his death in 1992. He was a prolific author of books relating to the history of Bedford County. The awarding of this medal to Mr. Whisker was in recognition of his service in documenting the history of Bedford County and for his work with the Pioneer Historical Society of Bedford County and the Old Bedford Village.

To be continued...{~~The Recent Years: A Period Of Ups And Downs~~}

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Quarterly Meeting 2007**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarterly Meeting of the Blair County Chapter, SAR will be held, starting at 12:00 noon on Saturday, 12 May 2007 at the Kings Family Restaurant on 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Altoona, PA.

## **Remainder of Quaterly Meetings for 2007**

3<sup>rd</sup> Quarterly Meeting: 25 August 2007

4<sup>th</sup> Quarterly Meeting: 17 November 2007 (Election of officers)