



The Musket Report

Newsletter of the Wiregrass Chapter, ALSSAR Enterprise, Alabama "Home of the Boll Weevil Monument"



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APRIL MEETING

The April meeting of the Wiregrass Chapter will be at **11:30** at the **Rawls Hotel** in Enterprise on the **20th of April**. Former State President and Southern District VPG **Rod Hildreth** will be our guest speaker and will present a program on George Washington's ancestral home in England. Everyone should have filed their income tax by the meeting day, so this would be a great opportunity to take your lady to lunch, hear a great program, bring a prospective member and spend some of that income tax return!

The chapter wants to extend its appreciation to Glenn Nivens for making the trip down to LA (Lower Alabama) in March to discuss the upcoming Blue Star Salute at the Shelby County Airport on 20 May. The ALSSAR has provided \$500.00 toward the event, while the NSSAR's GWEF has given a grant of \$750.00. This will certainly be an experience no one will want to miss, and it is hoped the chapter will have maximum color guard participation for the massing of colors.

Again congratulations to both **Dwight Adams** and **Bob Portman** who received their membership certificates and rosettes at the March meeting. The chapter looks forward to having both of these new compatriots become involved with our local activities. There is something for everyone within the wide range of SAR activities.

Wiregrass Chapter supports GASSAR with Grave Marking



On Saturday 25 March eight members of the ALSSAR Color Guard crossed the Chattahoochee River to join elements of the Georgia, Mississippi and Florida societies' color guard at the Cool Springs Cemetery, near Bainbridge, GA, to mark the grave and honor patriot Zoath Spooner. Those representing the Wiregrass Chapter were **Joe Graves, Mark Steele, Andy Spann** and **Bruce Taylor** while Kenny, Harry and Fletcher Dunaway along with Glenn Nivens rounded out the ALSSAR contingent. It might be noted that the Alabama Society had the largest number of color guard members present at this event.

CALL TO ARMS:

ALSSAR Color Guard members have been asked to muster in force at **Noon, Monday, April 17** to stand in the Old House Chamber in the State Capitol, Montgomery for the Governor's proclamation regarding Blue Star Salute of May 20. This will be the major mass media announcement of the significance of the events of Armed Forces Day, and obviously a large Color Guard visibility is desired.

Registrar's Report

The chapter has received notification that the membership application for **Oliver Finch** has been approved. Congratulations, Oliver and welcome to the Sons of the American Revolution!! Oliver is the son of chapter member David Finch.



At the end of March the new membership application for **William Lawrence Gilmer** went into the mail. If the surname sound's familiar, it is because Bill, who lives in Florence, SC, is the son of past president Jim Gilmer.

Currently the chapter has 54 members, two dual members, two youth members and one application awaiting action.

The Wiregrass chapter is meeting its goal of one new membership application per month! Keep up the good work, and lets see if we cannot have over sixty members by the end of the year!

Reassignment: Word has been received that dual member, and past Wiregrass Chapter treasurer **Jody Creekmore** is giving up his Battalion Command in Huntsville on the 8th of April and will then be heading to Iraq on the 28th for a year assignment with the 2nd Brigade, 5th Iraqi Division. Let us all keep Jody and his family in our thoughts and prayers during this difficult time in his military career.

Dates to Remember:

Wednesday, April 19th, Patriots' Day - "The shot heard around the world!"

Saturday, May 13th, Alabama Society Board of Managers, 1854 Old Courthouse in Columbiana. Registration forms to be posted at <www.alssar.org>

Saturday, May 20th, Blue Star Salute, Shelby County Airport

www.wiregrasssar.org

Have you visited the chapter's website lately? John Kelsoe has been adding pictures along with the chapter newsletter. Eventually, it is hoped to use the website for the distribution of the newsletter to those who would be willing to receive this publication in this manner. At the same time, a listing of chapter members, national numbers and primary patriot ancestors is being developed for posting on the site. Dates of upcoming events will eventually be placed on the site thus making the web page an important source of information for chapter members.

Do not forget that ALSSAR State President Colonel (R) Larry Cornwell will be speaking at the monthly meeting of the Tri-State Chapter on **April 13th, at 7:00 PM, Ryan's Steakhouse, US 231 South in Dothan**. All the members of the Wiregrass Chapter and their ladies have been invited.

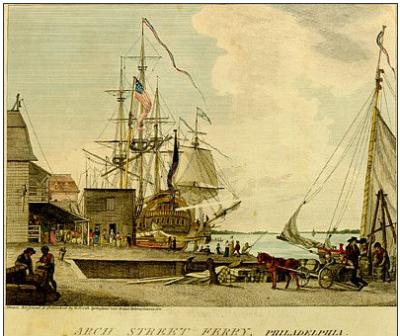
"Opportunities never come to those who wait....they are captured by those who dare to attack."

Matthew Clarkson

Not a common household name, and if one looks on the internet, only the following short note about Matthew Clarkson's life and activities can be found: "*Born in New York City in April 1733; moved to Philadelphia, Pa.; was justice of the court of common pleas, quarter sessions of the peace, and of the Philadelphia orphans' court in 1771 and 1772; elected to the Continental Congress in 1785, but did not serve; member of the board of aldermen in 1789; mayor of Philadelphia 1792-1796; died in Philadelphia, Pa., October 5, 1800; interment in Christ Church Burying Ground.*" While another source notes: *Quartermaster, 1st Battn., Philadelphia, PA Militia, 1775; Marshall, PA Court of Admiralty, 1779.* Certainly an active career and one dedicated to the law, and helping establish and nurture the growth of the young Republic, but very little is said about his efforts to save the own city.

Late in the evening of August 21, 1793. Dr. Benjamin Rush, Philadelphia's most prominent physician, sat down "much fatigued" to write to his wife to inform her that a "malignant fever" had broken out on the city's water front. The disease, which had carried off twelve persons, was "violent and of short duration." "It had," he wrote, "in one case killed in twelve hours," and in no case had it lasted more than four days. What he did not write was that he had become convinced that it was the dreaded yellow fever. In his earliest assessments Rush blamed rotting coffee on the Arch Street Warf as the spark that set off the epidemic.

On August 22 the mayor of Philadelphia, Matthew Clarkson, officially notified the city commissioners of the outbreak of a contagious fever in the city and issued strict orders for the immediate removal and disposal of all filth from the streets. The death toll, however, mounted unabated. In the first three weeks of August, 1793, there were 160 burials in Philadelphia; from then to the middle of September almost 600; in the last two weeks of the month more than 1,000.



The exodus from the city proceeded at an even greater pace; probably more than one-third of the 50,000 inhabitants fled the stricken city. Philadelphia, the most populous and prosperous town in the United States, the capital of the young American republic, took on the aspect of a ghost town. Many houses and shops were deserted and boarded up. Traffic was almost nonexistent, and in the empty streets "the hearse alone kept up the remembrance of the noise of carriages or carts.." All the city magistrates, with the exception of the mayor, deserted their posts: the governor had retired to the country because of the illness; nearly all the state officers had gone; most, if not all, of the officers of the federal government were absent, and the President of the United States, "according to his annual custom, had removed to Mount Vernon." Actually Washington left on a scheduled vacation on September 10, some days after neighbors and even a cabinet member, Alexander Hamilton, had contracted the disease. And he had a job to do: officiate at the laying of the cornerstone of the Capitol building in the City of Washington.

That left Mayor Matthew Clarkson and he did not abandon his city. He correctly perceived that the challenge was to find those who needed help and provide food for those who remained. Usually the volunteer Overseers of the Poor guided the city in these functions, sending the poor who were sick to the public dispensary and alerting other charities to their other needs. The ranks of the overseers were depleted by flights from the city, so Clarkson organized a public meeting to raise volunteers. In a matter of days, a system was set up in which the dead and dying were identified by volunteers going door to door required. The sick were taken to the fever hospital set up in a temporarily abandoned estate called Bush Hill (last rented by Vice President John Adams then far away in Massachusetts.) The African Society provided men to cart the victims either to the graveyards or Bush Hill. Clarkson also saw to it that several bakers received enough flour to bake bread for any and all. He also provided information to the newspapers, so that the population could be updated on the disease.

Then, suddenly, towards the end of October, the epidemic broke. The death rate dropped precipitously. There had been hardly any rain but the weather had been as warm as during the most fatal period. Again the unexpected had happened. The epidemic's end had come as mysteriously as had its onset. The ravages, however, had been fearsome: more than 4,000 persons had died in a period of three months.

It would be more than a 100 years before Dr. Walter Reed would discover that the mosquito was the carrier of Yellow Fever, and that the eradication of this vector's breeding areas would control the spread of the disease. It is somewhat ironic that on August 29, 1793, there had appeared an anonymous letter in the Philadelphia *American Daily Advertiser*, describing a simple and cheap method of destroying mosquitoes, "those poisonous insects ... so distressing to the sick, and troublesome to those who are well." A little oil poured into cisterns and rain-water casks, the breeding places of mosquitoes, would kill the "whole brood."

Clarkson's tomb stone in the Christ Church Burying Ground in Philadelphia is pictured below. Certainly a very fitting



place, as it is here that Benjamin Franklin is buried along with other signers of the Declaration of Independence and Revolutionary War heroes. As can be seen the original inscription has been totally lost to time. According to Church Records it once read:

The bronze plaque reads:

*Matthew Clarkson 1733 - 1800
Heroic Mayor Philadelphia 1792 - 1796,
during the 1793 Yellow Fever Epidemic
Matthew died of the fever in 1800.*

In memory of
Mary

The wife of Matthew Clarkson
Who departed this life
Nov. 27th 1794
In the 60th year of her age
Also
Matthew Clarkson Esquire
Who departed this life
The 5th day of October AD 1800
In the 67th of his age.

Now, for the rest of the story. Matthew Clarkson is the patriot ancestor of chapter member Bob Whitman. His eldest son Jim located the grave site in 1995, while Bob's brother John raised funds for the plaque to be placed on the headstone. John Whitman is the current president of the Lafayette Chapter, OHSSAR. April also brings Bob's 90th birthday - Happy Birthday Bob, and thanks for all your work in keeping alive the patriotic principals for which our ancestors fought.