



Col. William Grayson Chapter *Sons of the American Revolution* —Newsletter—



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Volume 14, Issue 1

January-March 2021

Lifting Our Voice in the Public Square

Virginia SAR President Jeff Thomas has issued the call for Virginia to lead the way!

“There is nothing wrong with a chapter that is primarily focused on local chapter and community events. In fact, that is a focus this year for our chapters to lift their voice in the public square to represent the SAR in their local communities. However, there is strength in numbers and we demonstrate our shared mission best when we join together through participation in state and national events. Just as Virginia was a leader in the American Revolution, let us demonstrate that the Virginia SAR leads the way today in honoring our Patriot ancestors.

If you have missed prior events, I would encourage you to visit the VASSAR YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJrzGKzULSPLsSUDXvxgtuw>.

If you become a subscriber to the channel today, you will be notified of any new content as it becomes available.”

President’s Comments: Ross H. Schwalm

Looking ahead to the future and to get us connected to our local history, I mentioned an idea in my President’s Report to consider President Thomas’ challenge. This idea, when implemented, will help educate the public as we ramp up to the 250th Anniversary of the birth of our nation. Here is the motivation for the project and the details of what I envision for the chapter over the next few years.

“On this day in [January 10,] 1776, [Thomas Paine](#) published *Common Sense*, a 50-page pamphlet that sold more than 500,000 copies within a few months and called for a war of independence that would become the [American Revolution](#).” <https://www.britannica.com/on-this-day/January-10>

If he could do that, we can do it too.

250th Anniversary Pamphlet Plan – Create and publish pamphlets for sale as fundraising items with a focus on Prince William County and Virginia Patriot perspectives for the specific periods of time during the American Revolution. The periods are modeled after the US Army Center of Military History Pamphlet Series Titles.

Bold Campaign Streamers are on the US Army Flag. Virginia perspective is a rough idea of topics to cover.

Goal is to seek CWG Chapter members as volunteer researchers and writers for creating each pamphlet.

We can also work with other SAR Chapters to help write these and support sales.

Title	Battles	Virginia Perspective, Ancestor Focused
1 OPENING SHOTS IN THE COLONIES, 1775-1776	LEXINGTON & CONCORD, FORT TICONDEROGA (FIRST), BUNKER HILL, NOBLE TRAIN OF ARTILLERY, DORCHESTER HEIGHTS, BRITISH EVACUATION, GREAT BRIDGE AND MORES CREEK: CAMPAIGN STREAMERS LEXINGTON, TICONDEROGA, BOSTON.	Committee of Safety, creation of the Militia, Call to Arms in support of the sister colonies
2 CANADIAN CAMPAIGN, 1775-1776	SAINT JEAN, MONTREAL, QUEBEC, TROIS RIVIERES, VALCOUR ISLAND: CAMPAIGN STREAMER QUEBEC	Virginians in Canada, Business in Dumfries, Expelling the Royal Governor from Williamsburg
3 NEW YORK CAMPAIGN, 1776	SULLIVAN’S ISLAND, LONG ISLAND, KIP’S BAY, HARLEM HEIGHTS, FORT WASHINGTON, RETREAT ACROSS THE JERSEYS: CAMPAIGN STREAMERS CHARLESTON, 1776, LONG ISLAND.	Virginians in defense of New York and New Jersey, Virginia Line on the run
4 WINTER CAMPAIGN, 1776-1777	CROSSING THE DELAWARE, TRENTON, ASSUNPINK CREEK, PRINCETON, MORRISTOWN (FIRST) WINTER ENCAMPMENT, PARTISAN / FORAGE WAR: CAMPAIGN STREAMERS TRENTON, PRINCETON.	Virginia Line on the Offensive, wounding of Richard Clough Anderson, Dumfries becomes a Prisoner Camp

5 SARATOGA CAMPAIGN, 1777	FORT TICONDEROGA (SECOND), FORT STANWIX, ORISKANY, HUBBARDTON, BENNINGTON, FORTS MONTGOMERY AND CLINTON, FREEMAN'S FARM, BEMIS HEIGHTS, SARATOGA CONVENTION: CAMPAIGN STREAMER SARATOGA	Winchester as a prison Camp
6 PHILADELPHIA CAMPAIGN, 1777	BRANDYWINE, PAOLI, GERMANTOWN, WHITE MARSH, FORT MIFFLIN, FORT MERCER (RED BANK): CAMPAIGN STREAMERS BRANDYWINE, GERMANTOWN.	War comes closer to home. Dumfries prisoners moved to Winchester and Fredericksburg
7 PHILADELPHIA CAMPAIGN, 1778	VALLEY FORGE ENCAMPMENT, BARREN HILL, BRITISH EVACUATION OF PHILADELPHIA, MONMOUTH: CAMPAIGN STREAMER MONMOUTH.	The Long Hard Winter, Prisoner Exchanges
8 SOUTHERN CAMPAIGN, 1778-1780	SAVANNAH, CHARLESTON, CAMDEN, KING'S MOUNTAIN, PARTISAN WAR: CAMPAIGN STREAMERS CHARLESTON, 1780, SAVANNAH	
9 NORTHERN CAMPAIGN, 1778-1780	RHODE ISLAND, ILLINOIS CAMPAIGN, STONY POINT, PAULUS HOOK, IROQUOIS CAMPAIGN, CONNECTICUT FARMS / SPRINGFIELD	
10 SOUTHERN CAMPAIGN, 1781-1782	COWPENS, GUILFORD COURTHOUSE, HOBKIRK'S HILL, NINETY SIX, AUGUSTA, EUTAW SPRINGS: CAMPAIGN STREAMERS	

	COWPENS, GUILFORD COURTHOUSE.	
11 VIRGINIA CAMPAIGN, 1781	MORRISTON (SECOND) WINTER ENCAMPMENT, SPENCER'S ORDINARY, GREEN SPRING, MARCH TO VIRGINIA, GLOUCESTR POINT, SIEGE OF YORKTOWN: CAMPAIGN STREAMER YORKTOWN.	
12 SECURING VICTORY, 1782-1783	NEW WINDSOR CANTONMENT, BRITISH EVACUATION OF CHARLESTON, NEWBURGH CONSPIRACY, TREATY OF PARIS, BRITISH EVACUATION OF NEW YORK, DISBANDING THE CONTINENTAL ARMY, WASHINGTON'S RESIGNATION, OFFICIAL END OF THE WAR	Rebuilding Virginia, establishing local, state and national government, Role of Virginians in building the society and governance.

If you would like to help with this project, please email President Schwalm at pahessian@gmail.com or call at 571-330-2745.

On March 28, 2021, Color Guard Commander Leamon Duncan, Past President Mike Weyler, and I participated in a Vietnam Veterans Day event organized by Fairfax Resolves President David Cook. I offered comments about what Vietnam veterans taught me, followed by President Cook on his Vietnam experiences and then Past President Weyler spoke about his service and those he remembered as never getting the chance to be veterans. It was conducted at the Fairfax County Courthouse. Several cars stopped along Route 123 and photographed our flags, wreaths and our assembled guests. I was honored to support this event in a small way.



Vietnam Veterans Day event at Fairfax County Courthouse

Upcoming Events

Note: All events subject to change or cancellation due to the coronavirus situation.

April 11, 2021: Thomas Jefferson's Birthday - SAR Onsite Wreath Laying at Historic Tuckahoe 1:00 PM -4:00 PM.

April 12, 2021: 245th Anniversary of the Halifax Resolves (Virtual) 10:00.

April 17, 2021: Multi-Chapter Meeting at Graves Mountain Lodge, Saturday, 17 Apr, 11:00am, Graves Mountain Lodge, Syria, VA.

April 18, 2021: Patriots Day at Arlington National Cemetery 3:00pm. A Virginia SAR Presidential Initiative. This event is designed to honor the memory of the minutemen killed at Lexington on 17 Apr 1775. Note: No weapons or large flags are permitted.

Location: Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, VA - Lexington Minuteman Memorial Sec 1-297-34. Meet at the second guard post at the entrance at Arlington and carpool to the site. Time: 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM.

May 8, 2021: Raid at Martin's Station, time TBD, Wilderness Road State Park, Ewing, VA.

May 15: Colonel William Grayson Chapter Meeting. This meeting will be virtual and will begin at 10:30.

May 28, 2021: Patrick Henry's 285th Birthday - Virginia SAR Presidential Initiative, Friday, 28 May, time TBD, Patrick Henry's Red Hill Plantation, 1250 Red Hill Road, Brookneal, VA.

June 5, 2021: 240th Anniversary of Wayne's Crossing of the Potomac, Saturday, 5 Jun, Location: Spirit of Loudoun Revolutionary War Memorial, Loudoun County Courthouse, 18 E Market Street, Leesburg, VA 20176
Time: 11:00 AM 1:00 PM.

June 26, 2021: 240th Anniversary of the Battle of Spencer's Ordinary, Saturday, 26 Jun, time TBD, James City County, VA.

June 26, 2021: 245th Anniversary of the Election of Patrick Henry to be Governor of Virginia, Saturday, 26 Jun, time and place TBD.

July 4, 2021: Independence Day at Mt. Vernon, Sunday, 4 July , 10:00am, Mount Vernon. Come march up the Bowling Green to the Mansion then down to the Grove and the Tomb.

Registrar's Report

New Members Approved in January – March 2021

None approved this quarter. Nine new member applications are pending review at the National Headquarters and one more is at VASSAR.

Supplemental Applications Approved in January – March 2021

Applicant	Date Approved	Patriot
Michael Blythe	3 March 2021	Jesse Toliver, Private in Captain Lenoir's Company, Colonel Armstrong's Regiment, NC Continental Line

Six supplemental applications are pending review at the National Headquarters.

At present, new member applications are reviewed less than two months after receipt at the headquarters; supplements are reviewed eight months after receipt.

Chapter Activities and News

January 9, 2021: Compatriot Ross H. Schwalm installed as President of the Col. William Grayson Chapter.

On January 9, 2021, Compatriot Ross H. Schwalm was installed as President of the Col. William Grayson Chapter. Good luck Mr. President!



Compatriot Ross H. Schwalm

January 16, 2021: Daniel Morgan Remembrance

Chapter President Ross Schwalm participated in a ceremony to honor Daniel Morgan and his contributions at the Battle of Cowpens. The ceremony was held at his gravesite at Mt. Hebron Cemetery in Winchester, Virginia, as well as virtually.



January 17, 2021: 240th Commemoration of the Battle of Cowpens (Virtual).

Compatriot John Callaway attended the 240th Commemoration of the Battle of Cowpens, representing the Col. William Grayson Chapter.

January 21, 2021: Compatriot Curtis Robb Receives Distinguished Service Award

On January 21, the outgoing President of the Col. William Grayson Chapter, Mike Weyler (R), presented Compatriot Curtis Robb (L) the Distinguished Service Medal in recognition of his consistent and faithful service to both our chapter and to the Sons of the American Revolution. Compatriot Robb received notification of the award at the chapter's virtual meeting on January 9.



Outgoing President of the Col. William Grayson Chapter, Mike Weyler, presents Compatriot Curtis Robb the SAR Distinguished Service Medal

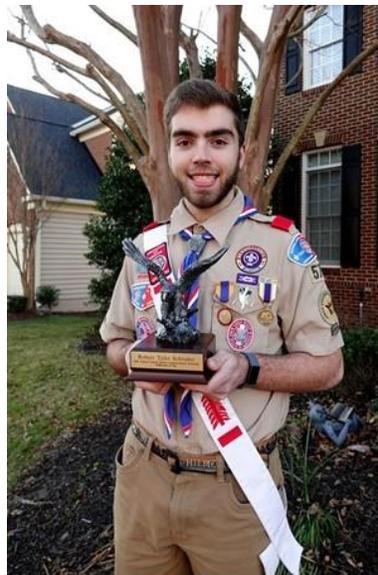
January 21, 2021: Eagle Scout State Trophy Awarded to Tyler Schroder

Eagle Scout Robert Tyler Schroder, the applicant selected by the Colonel William Grayson Chapter, for the SAR Eagle Scout recognition and scholarship programs, advanced to competition at the State level, where he was the First Place winner. Photos and recognition were made at Tyler's residence by Compatriots Mike Weyler, Aaron Bills, Ross Schwalm, Michael Blythe and Troop 577 Scoutmaster Tim Kennedy.

We are pleased to announce that we received notice on Thursday, March 4, that Tyler placed fourth in the National competition, of 35 submissions. State Committee Chair Hawkins does not believe Virginia had placed any higher in the competition than 10th, so this is quite an honor for Tyler, our Chapter, and his Scouting organization. The award carries a monetary prize of \$1000, recently revised up from \$500. We are very proud of Tyler.



Tyler Schroder receives award at home



Tyler Schroder with award

January 24, 2021: Peter Meulenberg Remembrance

Chapter President Ross Schwalm participated in a ceremony to honor Rev Peter Muhlenberg and his "A time to preach and a time to fight..." sermon given at his church on January 21st, 1776 in Woodstock, Virginia. The Ceremony was held at the Courthouse Square in Woodstock, Virginia, as well as virtually. Beginning in 2021 this is a VASSAR State Designated Event.



January 30, 2021: 240th Commemoration of Cowans Ford (virtual).

On Saturday, January 30, 2021, the Col. William Grayson Chapter was represented in a virtual ceremony celebrating the 240th Anniversary at the Battle at Cowan's Ford in North Carolina. The event was hosted for the National Society, Sons of the American Revolution by the Mecklenburg Chapter, North Carolina SAR. Well over 200 participants from around the country, including, among others, Washington state and Texas, were at the Zoom Meeting.

On February 1, 1781, after being held up for three days on the west side of the swollen Catawba River, Cornwallis ordered his army across the river at Cowan's Ford. The Mecklenburg County militia under General Davidson had about 200 men on the east side of the ford to oppose the several thousand British infantry and

cavalry. While General Davidson was killed in that action, the British paid a heavy price for their successful crossing at Cowan's Ford, which further slowed Cornwallis' pursuit of Greene's army.



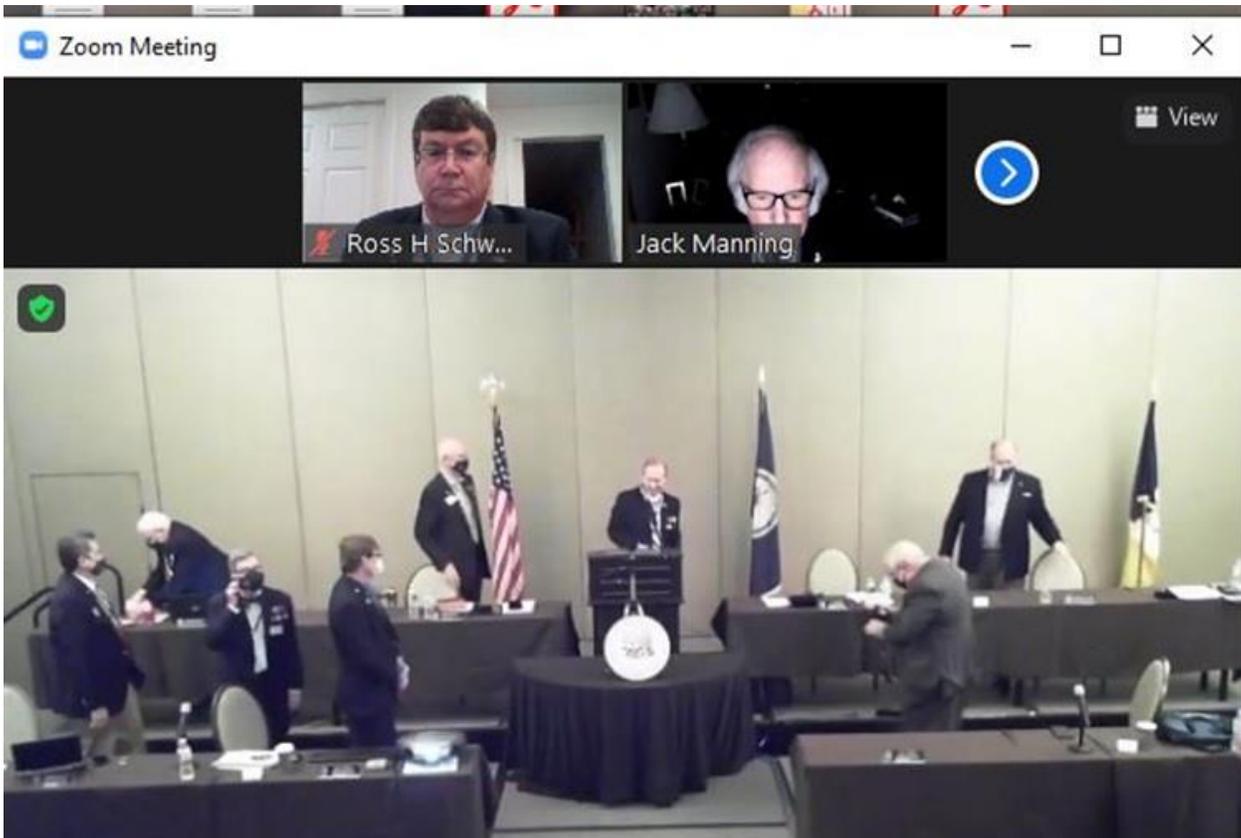
Tarleton's remaining Green Dragoons crossing the Catawba under fire from Patriot Militia.

The Battle of Cowan's Ford on February 1st was the beginning of what we now refer to as the Race to the Dan, at the end of which Greene's army successfully crossed the Dan River to safety on February 14, less than a day ahead of an exhausted Cornwallis.

Compatriots Mike Weyler and John Callaway participated in the Commemoration ceremony.

February 6, 2021: Virginia Society Annual Meeting. (Virtual.)

Meetings were held throughout the day including the General Membership Meeting, Memorial Ceremony, Awards and installation of the state officers and our incoming state president.



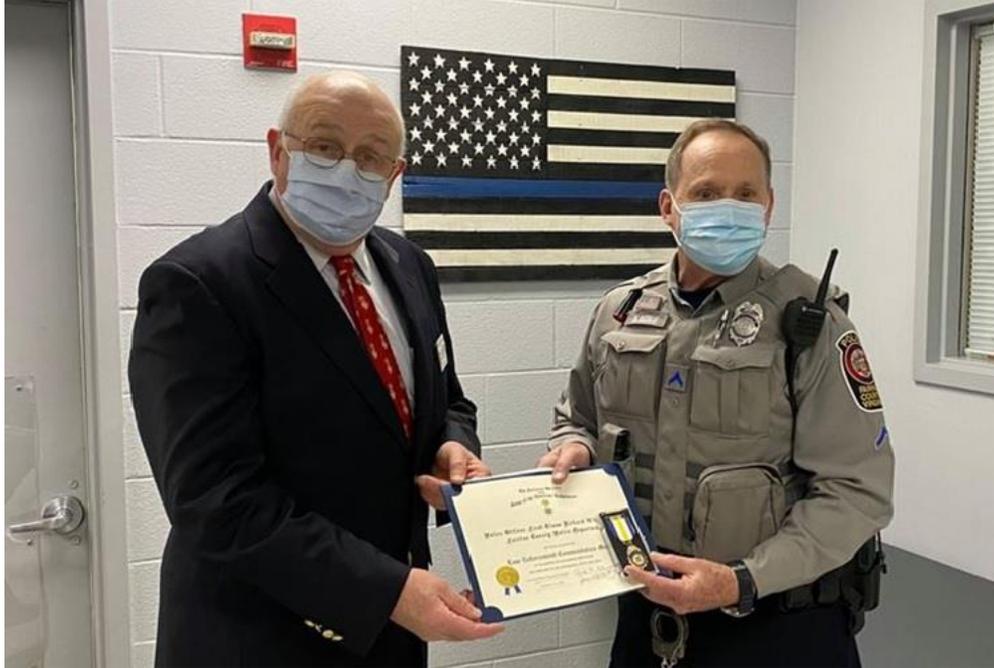
Compatriots Ross Schwalm, Mike Weyler, George Ax, Mike Taimi, Thad Hartman and John Callaway participated.

February 10, 2021: Officer Richard Whisenhunt Awarded Law Enforcement Commendation Certificate

On February 10, Compatriot Bill Collier, on behalf of the Colonel William Grayson Chapter, presented the SAR Law Enforcement Commendation Certificate and Medal to Fairfax County Police Officer First Class (PFC) Richard Whisenhunt at the Sully District Police Station. PFC Whisenhunt's performance of duty brings great credit not only to himself, but the Fairfax County Police Department and the entire Law Enforcement Profession. His Citation read:

Police Officer First Class (PFC) Richard Whisenhunt consistently exhibits dedication, hard work, and passion for police work. During the past four years, PFC Whisenhunt has taken 95 drunk drivers off Sully District roadways. This includes 13 in 2017, 27 in 2018, 27 in 2019 and 28 arrests in 2020. Currently, he leads the Sully District Station and is the fifth leading officer in Fairfax County for DWI enforcement. Additionally, he assists his fellow Police Officers with domestic disputes or runaway juveniles due to his knowledge and

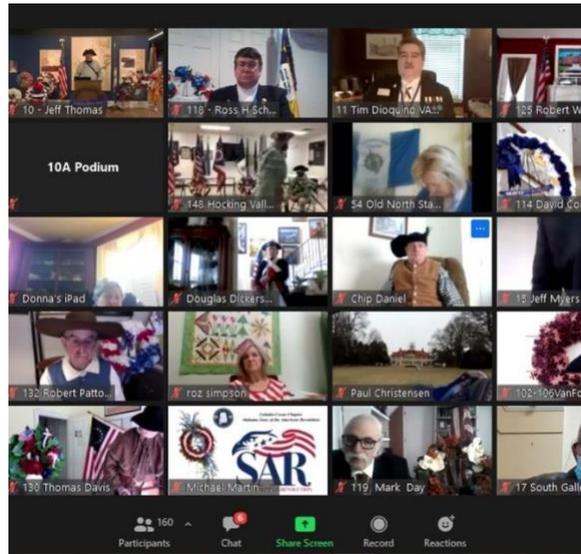
experience. He is constantly initiating traffic stops, enforcing the traffic codes and providing roadside assistance to disabled motorists. In his spare time, he volunteers with a local Boy Scout Troop. PFC Whisenhunt's performance of duty bring great credit not only to himself, but the Fairfax County Police Department and the entire Law Enforcement Profession.



Compatriot Bill Collier and Officer First Class (PFC) Richard Whisenhunt

February 20, 2021: Commemoration of the Crossing the Dan.

Following an American victory at the Battle of Cowpens in South Carolina in January 1781, General Nathanael Greene's southern army outran British forces under Lord Cornwallis as both armies raced northward across the Carolinas. In what became known as the "Race to the Dan," a few weeks later, on February 14, 1781, became "The Crossing of the Dan" when Greene's army crossed the Dan River to safety near South Boston, Virginia, and stopped the British advance. The Crossing of the Dan became a turning point in the American Revolution, precipitating events that led to the British surrender at Yorktown. Because of its historical significance, the National Society Sons of the American Revolution has now recognized the Crossing of the Dan as a nationally sanctioned event.



Compatriot Ross Schwalm presents wreath



Compatriot Mike Weyler (Color Guard)

Compatriots Ross Schwalm (wreath), Mike Weyler (Color Guard), Ward Nickisch, George Ax, Richard Potter, Dave Button, and John Callaway participated in the Commemoration.

February 22, 2021: Commemoration of George Washington’s Birthday in Culpeper.

On Monday, February 22, 2021, in Culpeper, Virginia, the Culpeper Minutemen Chapter of the Virginia Society, Sons of the American Revolution celebrated George Washington’s birthday with a ceremony that focused on his Farewell Address to his fellow citizens when he stepped down as President after two terms. The event featured seven selected readings from that address in which he both warned and encouraged his fellow citizens. Compatriot Mike Weyler (Color Guard) participated.



Color Guard

March 12, 2021: Wreath Laying at the Grave of Col. William Grayson

On March 12, the Colonel William Grayson Chapter proudly saluted our namesake Patriot. Participating were Compatriot Ross Schwalm, President of the Chapter, Compatriot Andrew Mills, Color Guard, Compatriot Jack Mills, Color Guard, and Compatriot Chuck Mills.

Watch the video here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5frRZasIGDM>



Compatriots Andrew (L) and Jack Mills (R) stand vigil

March 13, 2021: Anna Bardorf Receives SAR Awards for Enhanced Junior Reserved Officer Training Corps (JROTC)

Anna Bardorf, a Junior at Battlefield High School, was recognized as the winner of the annual Colonel William Grayson Chapter, Virginia Society of the Sons of the American Revolution Enhanced Junior Reserved Officer Training Corps (JROTC) competition at the 13 March 2021 Chapter virtual meeting. Cadet Bardorf advanced to the Virginia Society of the Sons of the American Revolution (VASSAR) competition taking first place at the state level. She will compete at the National level this May.

Cadets nominated for this competition are judged on their leadership, performance in JROTC, academics and extra-curricular activities, and a personally composed essay on the topic “How JROTC has prepared me to be a better citizen of the United States of America”.

Thus far in the competitions, Cadet Bardorf has won a 1st place Bronze Medallion, 1st place Silver Medallion and scholarship checks totaling \$1100.00. Cadet Bardorf is the daughter of Rene Bardorf and Col Dave Bardorf, USMC



Colonel William Grayson Chapter President Ross Schwalm was joined by Compatriots Dave Button and John Callaway to personally deliver the awards after the earlier virtual meeting.

March 13, 2021: Judging at Virginia History Day (virtual).

This year's District V Virginia History Day competition was held virtually on Saturday, March 13th, 2021. The theme this year was: "Communication in History: The Key to Understanding".

The competition involves inviting Middle and High School students from surrounding local schools to participate in developing history projects relating to the year's theme. It provides an opportunity for students interested in history to go beyond what's taught in a strict curriculum and explore other aspects of history that they wouldn't otherwise research and learn more about.

Projects types include: Individual Documentary, Group Documentary, Individual Exhibit, Group Exhibit, Individual Historical Paper, Individual Performance, Group Performance, Group Websites and Individual Website.

This year due to the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic, the competition was held virtually.

Even with this challenge, the competition attracted 142 students and 103 entries. Five students were awarded SAR Outstanding Citizenship Certificates to be mailed.

Of 53 volunteer judges, 12 were local SAR Chapter members. Representing the Col. William Grayson Chapter were Compatriots Keith Rouleau, Greg Carpenter, John Callaway, Aaron Carpenter and Bob Brunner.

March 13, 2021: Commemoration of the Battle of Guilford Courthouse (virtual

On Saturday, March 13, 2021, the North Carolina Society of the Sons of the American Revolution hosted a Zoom meeting to commemorate the critical Battle at Guilford Courthouse that occurred 240 years ago in North Carolina on March 15, 1781.



Greene's Army facing Cornwallis' Army at Guilford Courthouse – H. Charles McBarron

The Battle of Guilford Courthouse was the largest and most hotly contested battle in American Revolution's southern theater. It was the last in a string of engagements between British General Cornwallis and the American army commander, General Nathanael Greene, that started with General Daniel Morgan's defeat of the British under Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton at the Battle of Cowpens on January 17, 1781. This put Cornwallis on the offensive in North Carolina.

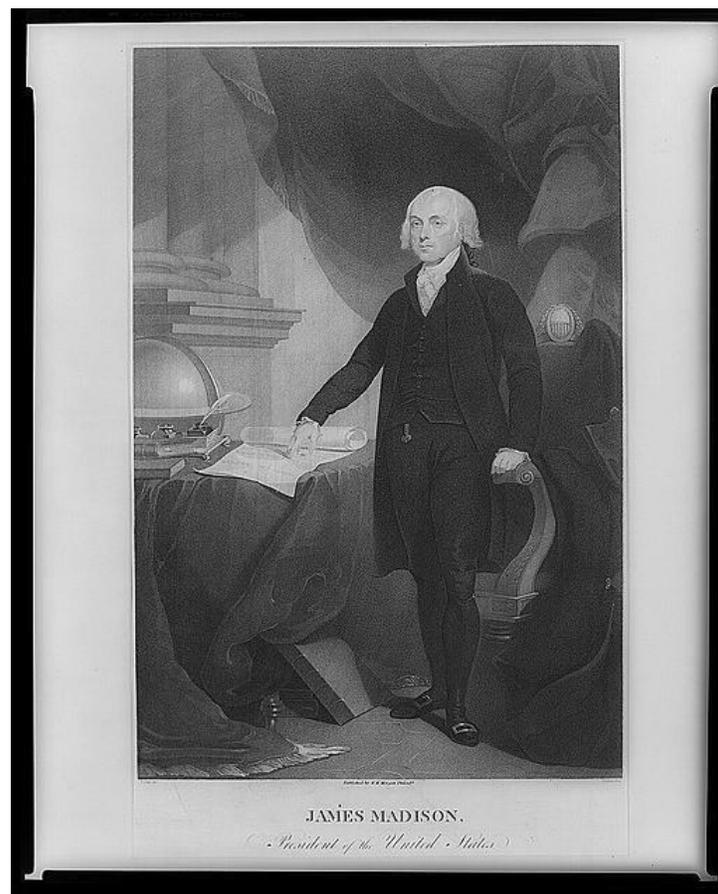
On February 1, Cornwallis pushed aside the patriot forces at the Battle of Cowan's Ford, which started the Race to the Dan, with Cornwallis pursuing Greene's army north toward Virginia, the race that Greene won by one day with the Crossing of the Dan on February 14. Exhausted by the Race, Cornwallis headed east, back into North Carolina to regroup. Greene now followed Cornwallis into North Carolina and chose to stand against him at Guilford Courthouse.

On March 15, Greene with an army of 4,500 militia and Continentals, was tactically defeated by Cornwallis' 1,900 regulars and German allies. Although the British held the field after the battle, they had suffered 27% casualties. Charles James Fox, a leader in Parliament later said: "Another such victory would ruin the British Army."

Compatriot Mike Weyler (Color Guard) participated in the Commemoration.

March 16, 2021: 270th Anniversary Celebration of James Madison's Birthday (virtual).

On the evening of Tuesday, March 16, 2021, the Virginia Society of the Sons of the American Revolution hosted a Zoom meeting to celebrate the 270th birthday of James Madison, fourth president of the United States.

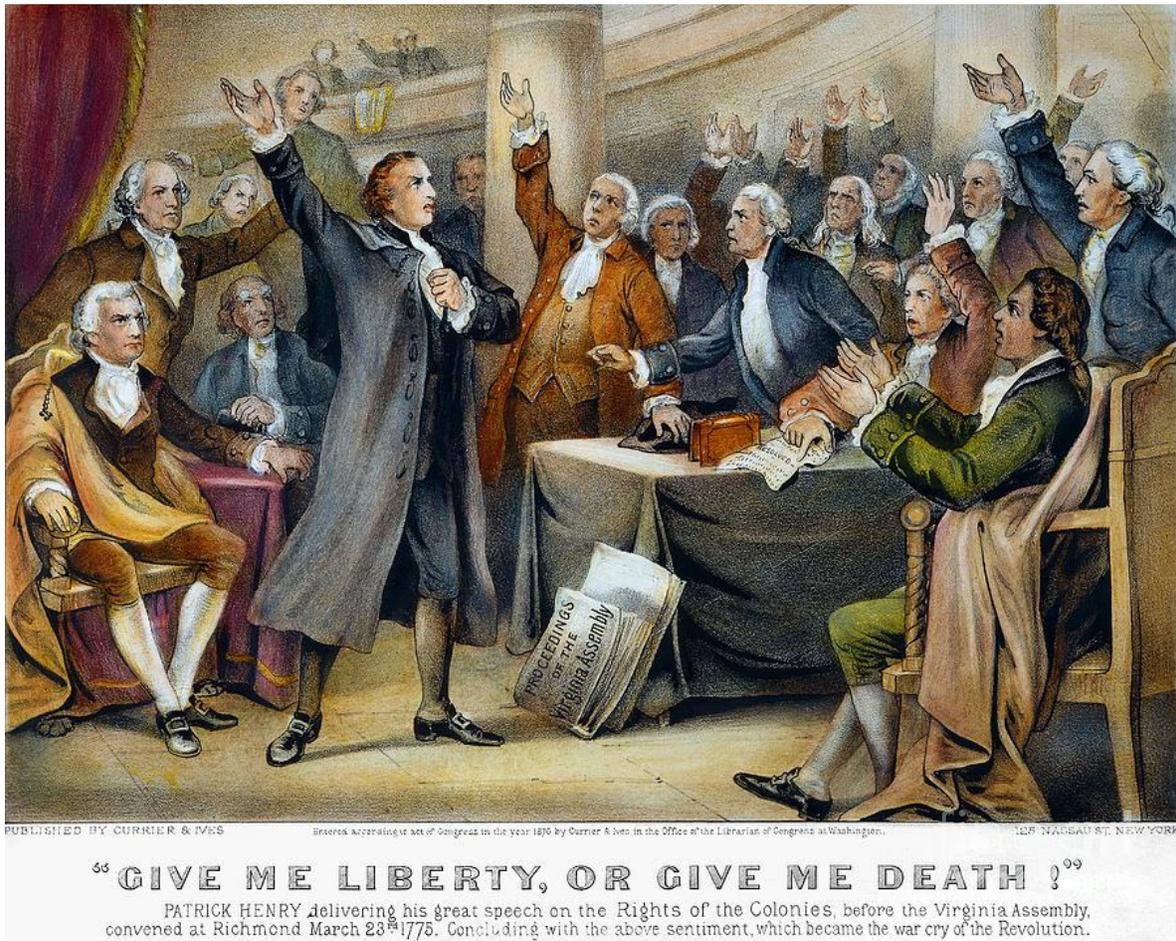


James Madison

The celebration was hosted by Jeff Thomas, President of the Virginia Society, SAR. The guest speaker was Dr. Jeffrey Morrison, head of the James Madison Foundation and a Professor at Christopher Newport University. His subject was: *James Madison – Father of the Constitution*. In a well-received talk, Dr. Morrison focused on how Madison himself had interpreted the Constitution in the years following its ratification.

Compatriots Dave Button (Presented the Chapter wreath), Mike Weyler (Color Guard), and George Ax participated in the Commemoration.

March 20, 2021: 246th Anniversary of Patrick Henry’s speech, “Give me Liberty or Give me Death” (virtual).



On Saturday, March 20, 2021, the Virginia Society of the Sons of the American Revolution hosted a Zoom meeting to celebrate the 246th anniversary of Patrick Henry’s famous Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death speech at St. John’s Church in Richmond, Virginia. Bill Haskins, President of the Richmond Chapter of the Virginia Society, SAR was the moderator for the event.

The commemoration included a live feed from St. John’s Church where a reenactor portraying Patrick Henry, told how his life and upbringing had led to the point where in 1775, as a member of the Virginia House of Delegates, he proposed the establishment of a Virginia Militia in a speech that ended with his famous line, give me liberty or give me death!

Compatriots Mike Weyler (Color Guard), George Ax, John Callaway, and Richard Potter participated in the Commemoration.

Historical Notes: George Washington and the Problem Child

George Washington was the “Indispensable Man.” What made him so was his character and integrity. He was the exemplar of what a leader should be. We often lose sight of George Washington the man while admiring Washington the legend. But George Washington the man faced problems that many men before and since have faced. Take, for example, his relationship with his stepson.



John Parke "Jacky" Custis

Washington’s step son, John Parke “Jacky” Custis was destined to inherit his late father’s huge fortune. George Washington wanted to make sure the boy was prepared for the responsibilities that so much wealth entailed.

Jacky’s early education was initially handled by his mother, Martha. But in 1761, when the boy was about seven, a Scottish tutor named Walter Magowan was brought to live at Mount Vernon to begin Jacky’s formal education. Unfortunately the boy was lazy, head strong, and had no interest in his studies.

In 1768 Jacky was sent away to a boarding school in order to prepare him for college. George Washington wrote to the Reverend Jonathan Boucher, an Anglican minister who ran the school for boys noting that Jacky had been introduced to both Greek and Latin by his tutor and described his stepson as a boy “...about 14 yrs. of age, untainted in his morals, and of innocent manners.” He considered him “a promising boy” and expressed “anxiety” that as “the last of his Family,” who would be coming into “a very large Fortune,” he wanted to see the boy made “fit for more useful purposes, than a horse Racer.”

The next five years were frustrating for both George Washington and Reverend Boucher. When Jacky Custis was sixteen, Washington wrote to Boucher that his stepson's mind was wholly centered on “Dogs, Horses, and Guns,” as well as Dress and equipage.” Boucher was unable to give Washington any reassurances noting that young Jack “...does not much like books”. Warming to his subject, Boucher reported that Jack was the laziest

boy he had ever known and also “so surprisingly voluptuous: one would suppose Nature had intended Him for some Asiatic Prince.”

Jacky was always full of surprises. In 1773, he announced his engagement to fifteen year old Eleanor Calvert, who came from a prominent Maryland family. Washington was outraged; Martha was delighted. Washington was initially able to convince the young couple to postpone the marriage until after Jack had finished college and could “thereby render himself more deserving of the Lady and useful to Society.” Jack lasted a few months at King’s College (now Columbia University) in New York City before bolting for home. On February 3, 1774, Jack, now nineteen years old and Eleanor, sixteen, were wed.

Prospects for the young couple were bright. After all, Jack had inherited an enormous fortune. But what the father had made, the son could not keep. Jack bought a plantation called Abingdon in Fairfax County, Virginia. The seller, one Robert Alexander, took every advantage of the inexperienced and impetuous Jack. When he learned of the terms of the purchase, George Washington informed Custis that “No Virginia Estate (except a few under the best management) can stand simple Interest how then can they bear compound Interest?”

George Washington wrote in 1778: “I am afraid Jack Custis, in spite of all of the admonition and advice I gave him about selling faster than he bought, is making a ruinous hand of his Estate.” By 1781, the financial strains of the Abingdon purchase had almost bankrupted Jack Custis.

No hand at business, Jack Custis proved himself equally poor at politics. In 1778 he was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses as a delegate from Fairfax County. Taking time out from his duties as a general in the field, commanding the Continental Army, engaged in a desperate war, Washington wrote to the young politician, “I do not suppose that so young a senator as you are, so little versed in political disquisition, can yet have much influence in a popular assembly, composed of various talents and different views, but it is in your power to be punctual in attendance.” Custis won reelection but missed assignments to important committees because of his habitual late arrival, usually the result of personal matters.

Despite Washington's frequent criticism of Jack, the young man described their relationship fondly. Custis wrote Washington that, “It pleased the Almighty to deprive me at a very early Period of Life of my Father, but I cannot sufficiently adore His Goodness in sending Me so good a Guardian as you Sir.” He went on to assure Washington that, “He best deserves the Name of Father who acts the Part of one. . . .”

As the Revolutionary War came to a close, Custis persuaded Washington to allow him to join the general’s suite at Yorktown as a “civilian aide-de-camp.” This turned out to be another unfortunate choice. Soon after the British surrender, Jack was stricken with the contagious fever spreading throughout the crowded army camps. On November 5, 1781, shortly before his twenty seventh birthday, John Parke Custis died.