

# THE MOUNT AMWELL NEWS

## Major Samuel Reading and the Society of the Cincinnati By David R. Reading

The Revolutionary War was nearly at an end in March of 1783 when General George Washington faced one of his most difficult challenges. His officer corps was frustrated and on the verge of mutiny over years of no pay. In a brilliant demonstration of leadership, Washington assembled the men for an address that was stern, patriotic and personal. The speech moved the officers to tears and the mutiny was over, but the pay issue remained.

Henry Knox, Washington's commander of artillery, was sympathetic to the mutiny and was in attendance that day in Newburgh, New York. Knox had had the idea of a fraternal organization of Army officers since the beginning of the war and now post-mutiny he sensed the time was right to finally bring it to fruition. He knew that the officers would be receptive to a solution to their discontent that was a viable alternative to mutiny. With other like minded officers, Knox drafted the founding document of the Society of the Cincinnati in April. The organization would be named after the Roman General Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus who returned to civilian life after serving as a general with near dictatorial powers rather than become emperor. He exemplified the citizen warrior much as the Continental Army officers had been, especially George Washington.

General Knox wanted to form "a national organization of officers that might maintain the political momentum requisite to protect officers' interests." To that end, the founding document, called the Institution, enumerated three tenets for the organization: 1) preserve the rights and liberties for they which they fought and bled, 2) promote and cherish the union of the states, and 3) render

### Inside This Issue

Major Samuel Reading and the Society of the Cincinnati	1
Cemetery Protection Update	3



Joseph Bloomfield

permanent the cordial affection among the officers and extend acts of beneficence towards the officers and families with necessity of receiving it. It also codified the membership requirements as "...the officers of the American Army... or any of their eldest male posterity; and in failure thereof, the collateral branches, who may be judged worthy of becoming the supporters and members."

In short, the Society of the Cincinnati was established as a hereditary, fraternal, charitable, and political body governed by a written constitution (the Institution) in all thirteen states and France. George Washington was asked and accepted, albeit reluctantly, to serve as the first president general.

## The Mount Amwell News

Three years later the society had enrolled 2,100 of 3,000 eligible officers in the society and was now a formidable political organization. The new nation was struggling to find a viable government under the weak Articles of Confederation and was on the verge of anarchy. Spurred on in part by Shay's rebellion, a constitutional convention was called for in the summer of 1787. Of the 55 delegates 21 were members of the Cincinnati. The society members generally supported a stronger central government favoring the Hamiltonian position over the Jeffersonian. This led critics already suspicious of the Societies' aristocratic leanings to charge that the society was a threat to republican government by trying to establish an American aristocracy on the European model.

This fear of an aristocracy was not completely unwarranted. After all, the society had a provision of hereditary membership, suggestive of inherited class status. Furthermore, the society was viewed in part by the officers who joined not only as an organization devoted to the assistance of less fortunate members, but also as an opportunity to advance socially. But it never became the aristocratic force feared by its early critics including Thomas Jefferson. Aristocracy was incompatible with American sense of social equality and as Alexis de Tocqueville wrote, "Today[1830], therefore, the aristocratic element in America, weak from the outset, has been if not destroyed then at least weakened to the point where it is difficult to ascribe to it any influence whatsoever in the course of affairs."<sup>1</sup>

Aristocratic or not, the society was attractive to many veteran officers. Approximately 40% of the eligible officers joined the New Jersey society including Major Samuel Reading<sup>4</sup> (*Colonel George*<sup>3</sup>, *Governor John*<sup>2</sup>, *Colonel John*<sup>1</sup>). Two other notable members were Col. Elias Dayton, the commander of the 3rd New Jersey Regiment and Major Joseph Bloomfield later governor of New Jersey. Bloomfield had served with Major Reading's uncle Captain Thomas<sup>3</sup> (*Governor John*<sup>2</sup>, *Colonel John*<sup>1</sup>) and Cousin Ensign John<sup>4</sup> (*John*<sup>3</sup>, *Governor John*<sup>2</sup>, *Colonel John*<sup>1</sup>) under Dayton in the Mohawk Valley campaign of 1776.

Samuel Reading was born in Hunterdon County New Jersey in 1752 and died at Frankfort Kentucky in 1838. He was commissioned as first Lieutenant of Captain Stout's company second battalion First Establishment New Jersey troops on 18 December 1775. He was in the expedition to Canada and taken

prisoner at the battle of Three Rivers (on the St. Lawrence River in Quebec) on 8 June 1776. He was apparently released because he was commissioned Captain of second battalion New Jersey Line by Congress in February 1777. He was promoted to the rank of Major of first regiment New Jersey Line December 29th, 1781. Major Reading remained in service until the close of the war in 1783.

Major Reading married the socially prominent Sarah Gouverneur (1741-1790+) in 1787, the same year as the constitutional convention. She was the daughter of Samuel Gouverneur (1720-1798) of Newark. Samuel was the son of Isaac Gouverneur (1677-1728) and grandson of prominent New York merchant Nicholas Gouverneur (1643-1682). Sarah's nephew, Samuel Laurence Gouverneur (1799-1865), the son of her brother Nicholas Gouverneur, Esq. and Hester Kortright, married his cousin Maria Hester Monroe at the Whitehouse in 1820. Maria was the daughter of President James Monroe and Elizabeth Kortright, Hester's sister. President Monroe was apparently very close to his son-in-law as he died at Gouverneur's home in 1831 and had named Gouverneur as the executor of his estate.

It is not known how much the marriage helped him socially or financially or to what extent he participated in the New Jersey Cincinnati organization, but we do know the he went west to join his brother and nephews in Kentucky about 1805 which is suggestive that it didn't help much.

The society experienced declining membership beginning in the late 1790's and continuing into the early 1800's as original members died off or moved away from their state as Major Reading had done, but by the mid 19th century the society underwent a resurgence under the direction of Hamilton Fish. He proposed that the eligibility requirements for membership should allow descendants of officers who were eligible but did not join in what has become known as the rule of 1854. Although eligibility requirements for membership have remained essentially the same since the 18th century, they may vary with individual state societies. For instance, New Jersey allows more than one descendent to join as well as descendants of eligible officers that never originally joined. The rebirth was complete by 1925 with a complete reconstitution of its original fourteen parts (13 states plus France).

This brings us back to Major Samuel Reading, a bona fide original member of the New Jersey

organization. Rachel Jirka, Research Services Librarian, The Society of the Cincinnati, Washington, D.C. has been confirmed his original membership.<sup>2</sup> Ms. Jirka also reported that he was last represented by his great-great grandson Abram Beach Reading. Abram Beach was the great-grandson of Nicolas Gouverneur Reading, and grandson of Abraham Beach Reading, the Vicksburg, Mississippi plantation owner. Abram Beach Reading died in Alameda, California on November 25, 1968 and left no children and consequently no successor member of the Cincinnati.



**Anderson house: the Society of the Cincinnati  
Headquarters in Washington, D.C.**

The Society of the Cincinnati exist today as an organization still true to its founding, that is to maintain the memory of the original officers, and, of course, it never became a constitutional threat, but evolved into a body dedicated to historic preservation and education regarding the Revolutionary War. Anderson House, the national headquarters, is located in Washington, D.C. and houses a museum and historic document library. It is open to researchers and visitors year round. More information on the Society of the Cincinnati can be found on their web site:

<http://www.societyofthecincinnati.org>.

A fine reference is *Liberty without Anarchy, A History of the Society of the Cincinnati* by Minor Myers, Jr., U. of Virginia Press, 2004.

---

1 Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, (New York, N.Y.: Literary Classics of United States, Inc, 2004.)  
2. In response to inquiry made by MTAP member, Susan Alexander.

---

### Cemetery Protection Legislation Update

The New Jersey Assembly passed the “Family and Private Burial Grounds Preservation Act” on December 3, 2012 and sent it to the Senate where it was referred to the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee. The bill (A1580) was inspired by the tragic destruction of the Hendricks/Hendrickson family cemetery in Holmdel, NJ in 2010.

The act provides the legal protection necessary to prevent the disturbance and destruction of burial grounds in the State that have been established and used exclusively by private persons or families. The bill would make it unlawful to disturb, destroy or mutilate remains, tombstones, or fences.

Failure to comply with any of the bill’s provisions would subject a violator to both criminal and civil liability of up to \$25,000 for criminal offences and up to \$200,000 for civil recovery of three times costs to repair or restore the disturbance.

A person who violates the provisions of this bill with the specific intent to attain an economic benefit would additionally be subject to a sentence of imprisonment of not less than one year, or more than five years, and a fine of not less than \$100,000, or more than \$10,000,000.

You can review the bill by going to [nj.gov](http://nj.gov) and looking up the bill by number (A1580). You can send email directly to John S. Wisniewski, the primary sponsor, and show your support for this important legislation.

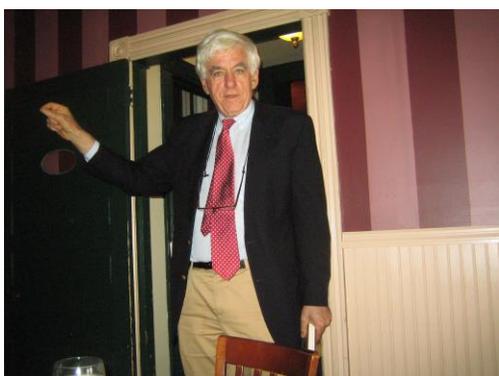
The Hendricks/Hendrickson-Family Association still needs help with their struggle to obtain justice for the mindless destruction of their family cemetery. If you wish to send a donation to organization, you may write directly to the association president:

Andrew A Hendricks, MD,  
President, Hendricks and Hendrickson  
Family Association,  
103 Rosewood Drive,  
Lumberton, NC 28358.



## Fall 2012 Luncheon Meeting

The fall meeting at the Frenchtown Inn was a complete success. 22 members and guests (see pictures at left) enjoyed a delicious lunch, and were treated to a talk by Stephen H. Case on both the new American Revolution Center in Philadelphia and a brief overview of his book *Treacherous Beauty*, the story of Peggy Shippen and her influence on her husband Benedict Arnold.



## Web site Members Access

The MTAP web site ([www.mtamwell.org](http://www.mtamwell.org)) includes a member's only page. Content includes current newsletters. To access simply click on the members page and enter user: member, password: mtap2008



**The Mount Amwell News**  
 The newsletter of the Mount Amwell Project  
 © Copyright 2012  
 Published Spring and Fall

**Phone:**  
 703-549-2738

### Board of Directors

David R. Reading.....Executive Director  
 Jennifer Ellsworth.....Director  
 Richard B. Reading.....Director



## Members

- |                                    |                               |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Carl Shuster, Ph.D. - life         | John & Marielle Reading       |
| Brian & Cindy Murphy - life        | Romy Reading                  |
| Jen Ellsworth- life                | Sybil Albrecht Lewis-life     |
| Bill & Marjorie Luken, PhD. - life | John G. & Susan Reading- life |
| Rick Hayes-Roth, Ph.D. - life      | Leigh Braun-life              |
| Ruth Meeker - life                 | Eugenia Klein-life            |
| David & Jan Reading - life         | Shawn & Theresa Reading       |
| Chris Solliday - life              | Jerry Rosco- life             |
| Albert Reading -life               | George Muller                 |
| Richard B. Reading IV – life       | Bruce Hotchkiss               |
| Audrey R. McAbee – life            | Nancy Herman                  |
| Fred Lathrop-life                  | John Stevenson                |
| Marfy Goodspeed - life             | Sharon Lake                   |
| Stephen H. Case – life             | Peter Kinsella- life          |
| Mark Reading- life                 | William McCrea                |
| Richard Stothoff- life             | Lorena Bennett                |
| Susan Alexander-life               | Bill Fenton                   |
| Charles William Poley, Jr.         |                               |