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Aaron Kitchell was a noted man at the time of the Revolutionary war. His birthplace and home were at Hanover Neck (East Hanover)

Research and Tribute presented by John Deep of East Hanover

This man deserves our honorable remembrance as one who rose by the singular force of his character, against every disadvantage, to fill a large place of influence and render great public service in his time.

He was one of the patriot leaders of New Jersey in all that period of doubt and strife that preceded, attended and followed the War of the Revolution. The great conflict was nowhere more bitter and critical than in New Jersey and the ardent patriotism and wise leadership of Aaron Kitchell did much to shape the action of that State during the war, and the polity of the nation after its close.

The style and quality of the man very early appeared.

Bred to a farmer's life, with only the scanty education to be picked up at home, he craved some more active and enterprising field than on the farm. In the opening scenes of the Revolution, he was foremost in the great debate, a zealous and sagacious champion of freedom. He was among the very earliest volunteers in the army. But he was soon found capable of larger service than in the ranks. Now Jersey was full of the King's men, open enemies or secret conspirators against liberty, and then, as later, the 'fire in the rear' was to be watched and met. He was entrusted with much of this work, and the extreme delicacy and difficulty attending it tasked his utmost wisdom. He was put on the Commission of Fortified Estates and dealt with the Tories far and near.

After the close of the war, he was for some years in the State Legislature.

In 1799, he was elected Representative in Congress, and held that position by successive re elections 'till 1807. He was then chosen as Senator, and served four years in that capacity, when continued ill health led him to resign. He is described as a tall, spare, athletic person, who pined in the uncongenial life of Washington, and longed to return to his simple Hanover Neck home. He was an active, faithful and zealous advocate of the freedom of his country, and for thirty- six years was a member in the State and National Councils.

He early displayed a cool sagacity in civil affairs which compelled him into public service.

He was prompt, firm, clear-seeing and tenacious of his purpose. The people recognized his natural gift of leadership, and steadily honored him with public trusts, and held him fast in them, only releasing him when broken health obliged him to retire. In private life he was simple, genial, honored and loved by his neighbors. In Congress he was prized as a wise counselor, with a rare genius for shaping difficult matters discretely. He was an earnest Republican in principle; a zealous adherent of Jefferson, for whose election he labored strenuously, and whom he supported against Burr in the long balloting of the two Houses of Congress that finally gave Jefferson the prize.

THE GHOST OF MORRISTOWN!

An instance is given of his insight and deft handling of all matters, small or large. In 1788 at a time when nearly all Morris County went crazed with an epidemic superstition, in the famous 'Morristown Ghost' affair, he almost alone kept his head in the general panic. A Connecticut school teacher came to Morristown claiming he could communicate with a ghost. He convinced some citizens to pay him money and he would drive the ghost away. Aaron Kitchell came to the haunted spot with "Old Hagar", his favorite five-foot-and-three-inch-barrel gun, and proposed as a test to try one shot at his ghostship, anywhere within ten rods. The busted wreck of Old Hagar is all that remains; but it shows how wisely the ghost declined the trial. The bare proposal shot him through with daylight and made an end of the wretched delusion. And with that, the "ghost" was actually part of the school teachers scam, staging supernatural events to frighten people. He was caught in disguise, covered in a sheet, pretending to be **THE GHOST!**

EDUCATION

Aaron Kitchell was born of a fine ancestry, from those who had filled positions of great responsibility and influence in the public affairs of their times, but handicapped by being one of a family of ten children and born in a new settlement, where rigid economy was necessary he rose by sheer grit to one of the highest offices in the Nation, the United States Senate.

There being no opportunity of obtaining an education except at home, he was practically self-taught pursued a course of reading and study, scarcely allowing himself necessary sleep." He is said to have borrowed and read every book in the neighborhood, and with the assistance of the Presbyterian minister Jacob Green, a fierce patriot from Hanover and the local doctor to have acquired a fine classical education.

THE REVOLUTION

At the breaking out of the Revolution he immediately enlisted as a private, but was soon selected to fill more important positions than that of a soldier. He was in the confidence of both the Continental Congress and Continental Army, and being selected to counteract the Tory influences in northern New Jersey he used all his wit and sagacity to countermine, foil and nip in the bud the many Tory plots which sprang up. He was with Washington at Morristown, a friend of and confidential advisor, and in charge of the War-Chest. Mr. Kitchell continued his friendship with Washington, which had been formed at Morristown, until the death of the latter.

BURIED TREASURE ?

The story runs that while the British army was in the vicinity rumor went about that they were going to make a raid down through Hanover Neck; Aaron Kitchell lived there and had the money which he had brought from Philadelphia to pay the troops at Morristown. He sent word to his wife Phoebe (Farrand) to take the money at midnight down to the Great Meadows and bury it under a tree which stood there and tell no one, which she did, and marked the tree that she might find it again. There has been a story that she could not find the money after burying it, and several times the field has been dug over by treasure-hunters searching for it. However, it was never lost, and Mr. Kitchell had the money when required to pay the troops.

THE TORIES!

Through Mr. Kitchell's activity in suppressing Tory plots he became particularly obnoxious to them, and perhaps the more so as his brother Abraham, who had enlisted as a soldier at the outbreak of the war, had left the army to accept the position from the Continental Congress on "Inquisition," which meant to receive and sell or otherwise dispose of the property confiscated from the Tories. The consequence was that the Tories put a price on both Aaron's and Abraham's heads, and one night three Tories came to Aaron Kitchell's home in Hanover Neck to take him. He was very cool and showed them he did not fear them; asked them to come in and be seated and treated them to cider. His wife and a little niece of eleven years were in the room, and while the Tories were drinking Mrs. Kitchell suddenly said to the child, "come, it is time you were in bed," and taking her from the room dropped her from a window and told her to run home quickly and get her father (Abraham Kitchell) to come with assistance. The little girl proved of ready wit and alarmed her father, who with some neighbors soon arrived and the three Tories were caught in their own trap.

This Memorial is over his grave in the East Hanover First Presbyterian church-yard:

“He was a man of sound, vigorous, and discriminating mind

Of affections warm, steady and charitable

Of genius bright, active and penetrating

Of industry vigorous and enterprising

Of temper mild and resolute

Of manner plain

Of religion, a firm believer in Christ, and died in full assurance of a happy reward.

Thus sleeps the man whom bounteous Heaven hath all the gifts of nature given, Sound in judgment, with a religious mind. To his Savior his breath resigned."

Research from "A history of the Willis family of New England and New Jersey and their ancestors, comprising the families of Farrand, Ball, Kitchell, Cook, Ward, Fairchild.

Mr. H. D. Kitchell, in his book, "Robert Mitchell and His Descendants"

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