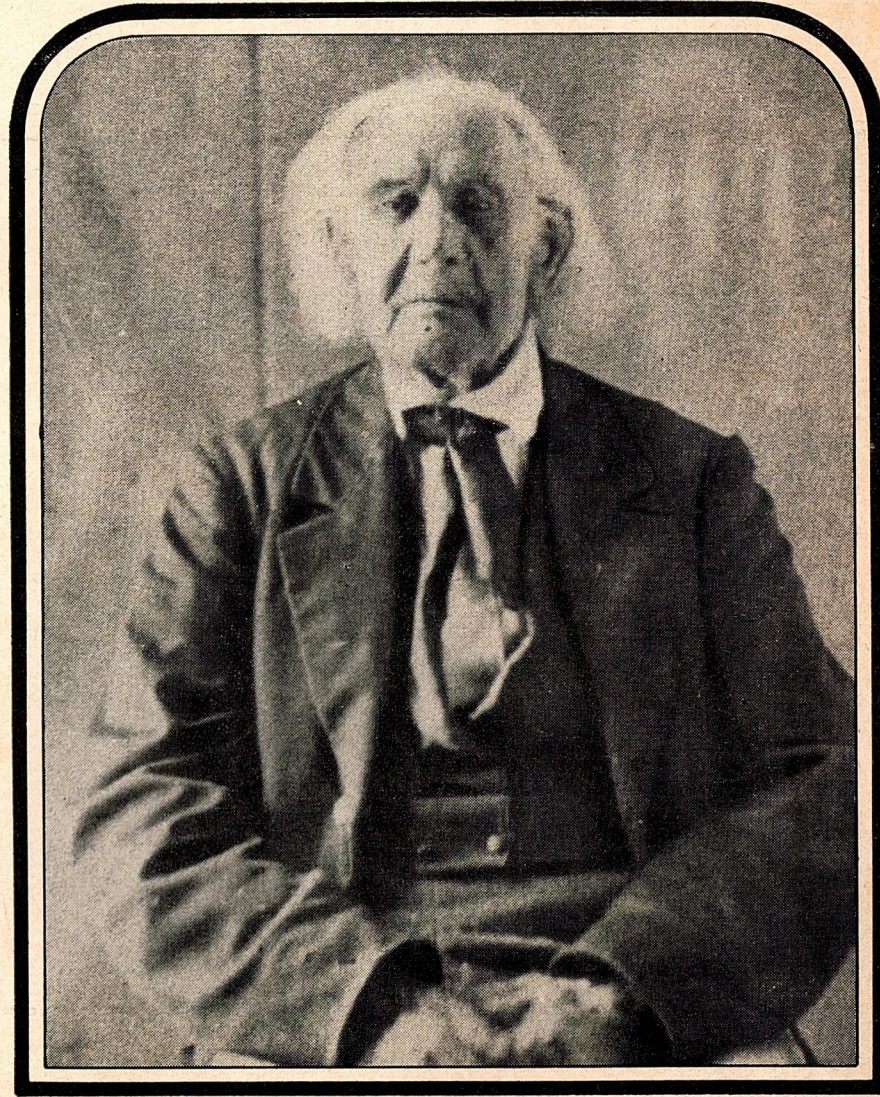


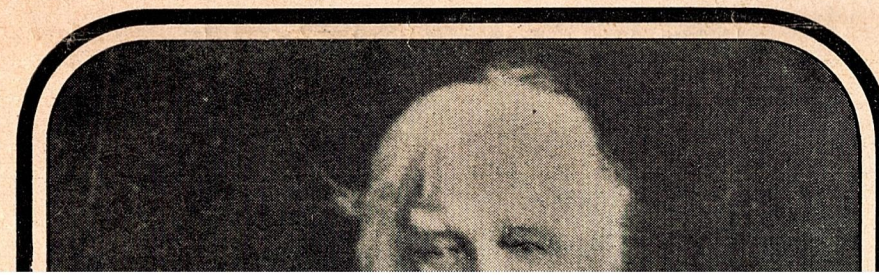
Look Magazine
May - 1948



DANIEL WALDO was most widely known of Revolutionary survivors. He was a Yale man, related to the presidential Adams family. A Congregational minister, he died at 101.

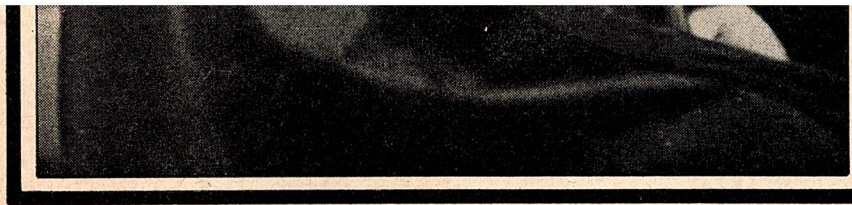


SAM DOWNING at 102 could still walk 5 miles on a hot summer's day to get his boots fixed. He saw Burgoyne surrender to General Gates, "an 'old granny' looking fellow."



Last Soldiers of

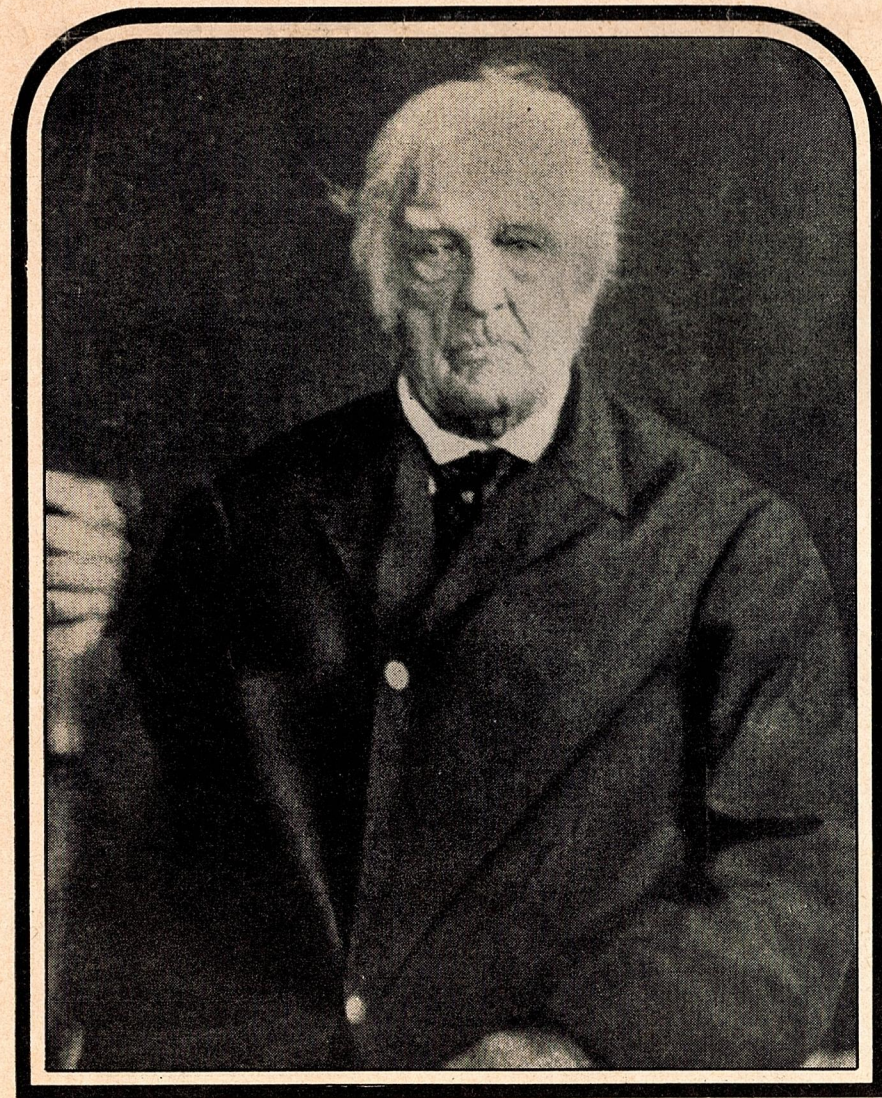
Their memories, recorded 84 years



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LEM COOK was oldest veteran at 105. A huge man, he joined the Army at 16, fought through the entire war and was present when Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown.

Last Soldiers of

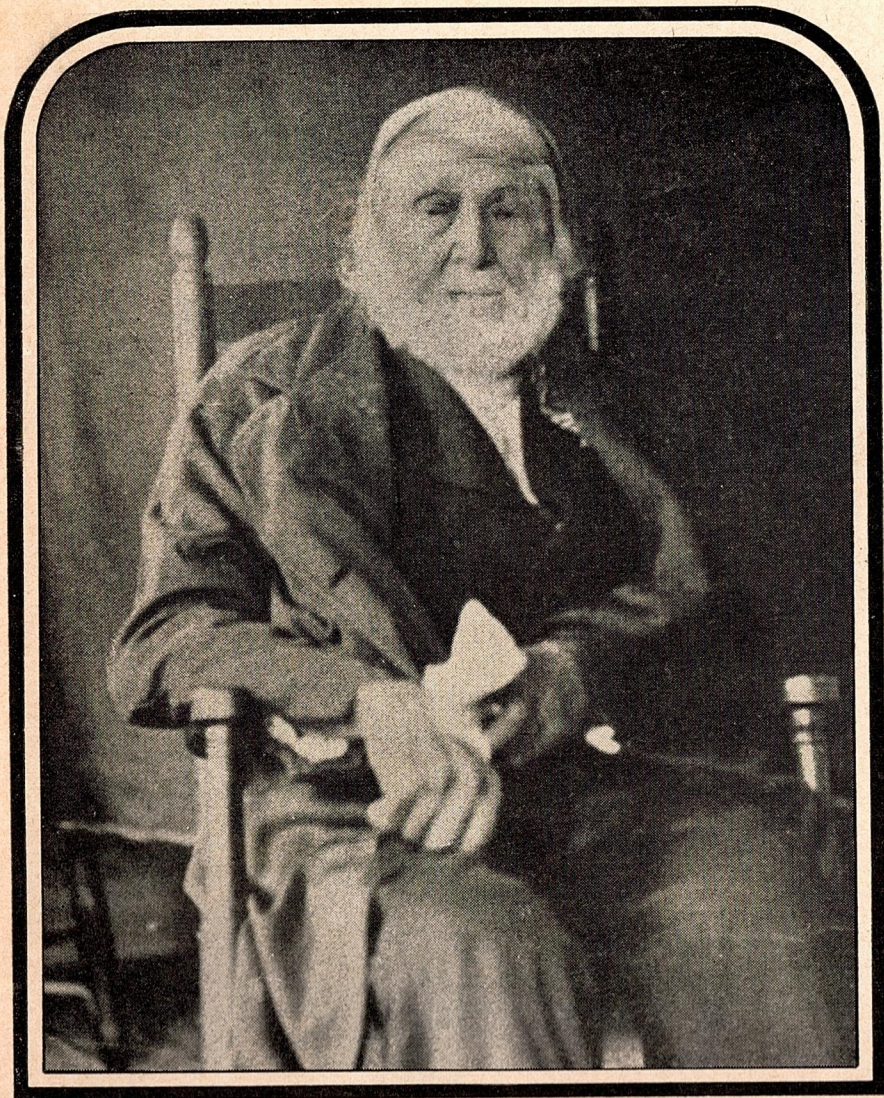
Their memories, recorded 84 years

by ARCHIBALD MACLEISH

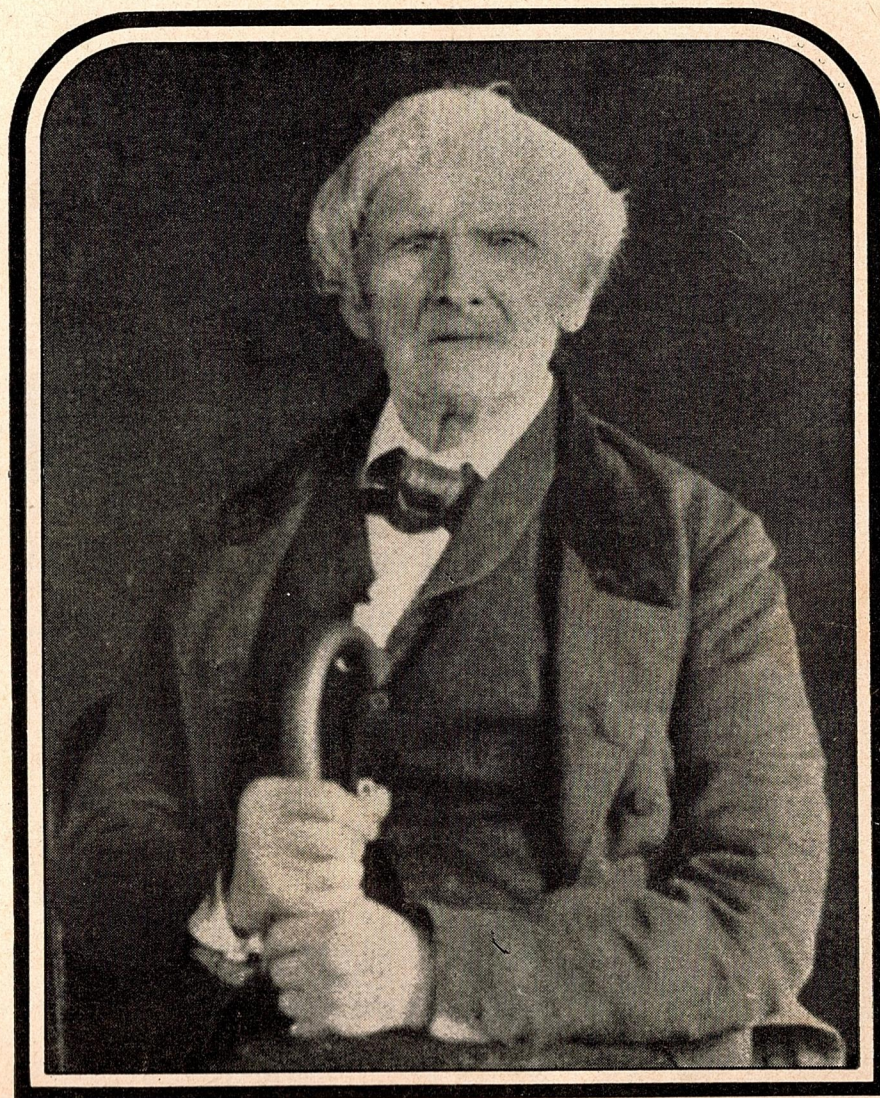
WE think of the War of the American Revolution as a war fought long ago—a war in which armies and generals move like myths across a fading landscape of wilderness and winter. Actually the overlapping memories of two human lifetimes could bring it back. The Grand Army of the Republic musters at its annual encampments men who remember the battles of the Civil War because they fought in them. In 1865, toward the end of the Civil War, there were still definitely alive six of the veterans of the War of Independence. A seventh man, James Barham, reported living in Missouri, was never located.

A curious and all but forgotten book written by my mother's father in 1864 and kept for almost 50 years among her papers is proof of that. My grandfather was a Congregational clergyman in Connecticut named Elias Brewster Hillard, who was apparently approached toward the end of the Civil War by a firm of Hartford publishers with the suggestion that he should find the surviving veterans of '76 and talk to them about that other war and about the Republic and their views of "the present rebellion." The publishers wished to preserve the photographs of the Last Men of the Revolution together with some account of their lives and opinions. My grandfather, whose own Revolutionary connections were close and who had the cares and worries of a war-weary congregation on his mind, was eager to talk to these wise and ancient men. And the result was the little book with its photographs of six of the survivors and its unpretentious text. Since none of the Last Men was less than 100, the eldest being 105, and since some were very weak not all of them could be asked to talk. Only three were vigorous enough to bring back living moments of that far-off time in words which have the sound of the human voice about them.

One was Sam Downing, 102, who lived in the first frame house in the town of Edinburg, in New York, which he had built himself 70 years



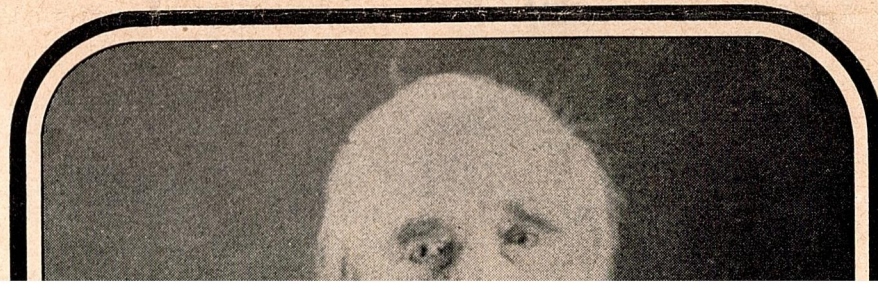
ADAM LINK was an old and feeble man when interviewed, with the past and present dim in his mind. He saw frontier service in Virginia for five years during the Revolution.

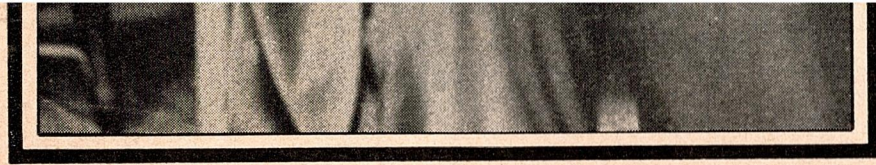


ALEXANDER MILLINER, Washington's drummer boy, was a wiry little man with a clear memory of his Revolutionary days. He also served 5½ years in young U.S. Navy.

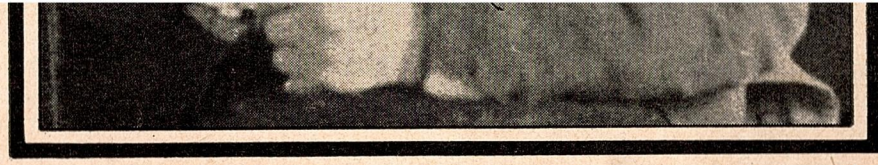
the Revolution

ago, illuminate early days of the U.S.





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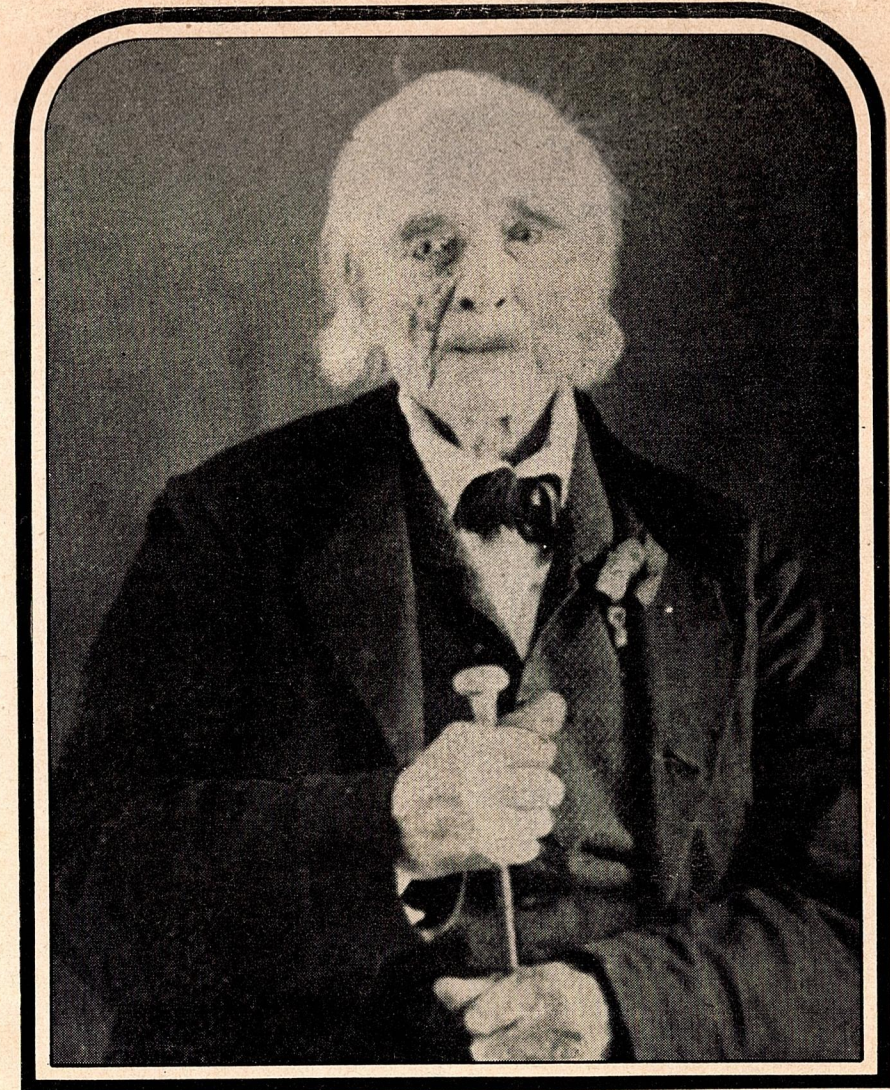
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before. To get to Edinburg in 1864 you took the railroad to Saratoga, rode a stage some 20 miles from Saratoga to Luzerne on the Hudson River and then made your way up the valley of the Sacandaga 25 miles more. The second was Lemuel Cook, 105, who lived in Clarendon in Orleans County near Rochester. The third was Alexander Milliner, 104, who lived nearby at Adams Basin on the Rochester and Niagara Falls railroad.

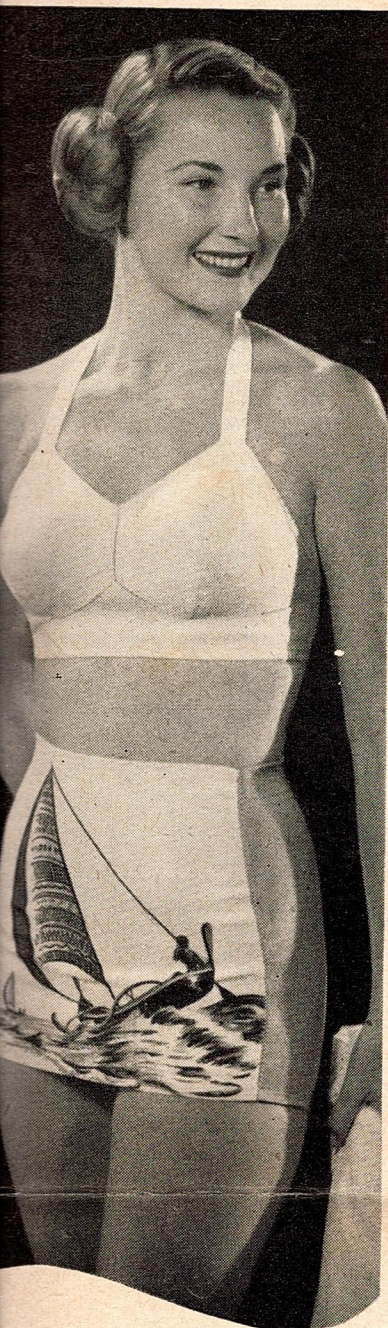
Sam Downing was the spriest. The day before my grandfather's visit—that day being "one of the hottest of the season, so much so that coming up by stage from Saratoga, we could scarcely endure the journey"—Downing had walked 2½ miles "over a very tedious road" to the shoemakers, got his boots tapped and walked home again. Lemuel Cook, a man of gigantic frame, had retained the full power of a voice "marvellous for its volume and strength," but his talk was broken and fragmentary. "He recalls the past slowly, and with difficulty; but when he has fixed his mind upon it, all seems to come up clear." How firmly he was able to fix his mind upon it my grandfather makes evident. "He has voted the Democratic ticket since the organization of the government, supposing that it still represents the same party that it did in Jefferson's time."

But if Sam Downing could walk 5 miles on the hottest day of a hot summer, and if Lemuel Cook, with his great voice and his stubborn loyalty to the past, could feel his way back through the difficult words to the actual bloody business of soldiering and war, it was little Alexander Milliner, the ancient drummer boy, who was the real miracle. Alexander Milliner had had 9 children, 43 grandchildren, 17 great-grandchildren and 3 great-great-grandchildren, but nevertheless "for 62 years he and his wife lived together, without a death in the family or a coffin in the house." He had never troubled himself about his health ("He uses tea and coffee, and still takes regularly his dram."), could read his Bible without glasses at 104,



WILLIAM HUTCHINGS, youngest of the veterans at 100, served in coastal defense of his native Maine. He was captured during the war, released as too young. He was 15.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



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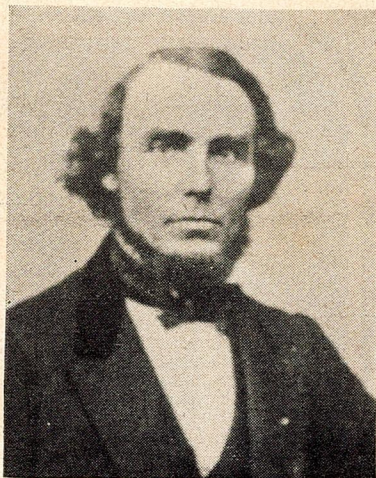
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ELIAS B. HILLARD visited veterans only 84 years ago with a photographer and recorded talks in a book.



ARCHIBALD MACLEISH, Hillard's poet grandson, found the long-forgotten book, tells its story in these pages.

LAST SOLDIERS CONTINUED

played his drum "with excellent time and flourishes" and sang songs "both amorous and warlike . . . half a dozen verses successively, giving correctly both the words and the tune." Only when it came to long connected accounts of the war did Alexander Milliner's memory fail him, and even there he proved to be able to recall precisely individual events which had happened as much as 90 years before.

Samuel Downing

SAMUEL DOWNING, whom my grandfather found beside his frame house at the head of the narrow valley of the Sacandaga at noon of a summer day, "seated between two bee-hives, bending over, leaning upon his cane and looking on the ground, an old man," was ready enough to talk about the bees ("They don't hurt me and I don't hurt them."), the weather ("If I had my way about it, I should like it about so.") and the war.

"What do you think [General Washington] would say if he were here now?"

"Say! . . . I don't know. But he'd be mad to see me sitting here. I tell 'em if they'll give me a horse I'll go as it is. If the rebels come here I shall sartingly take my gun. I can see best furtherest off."

"You don't believe, then, in letting men stay at their homes and help the enemy?"

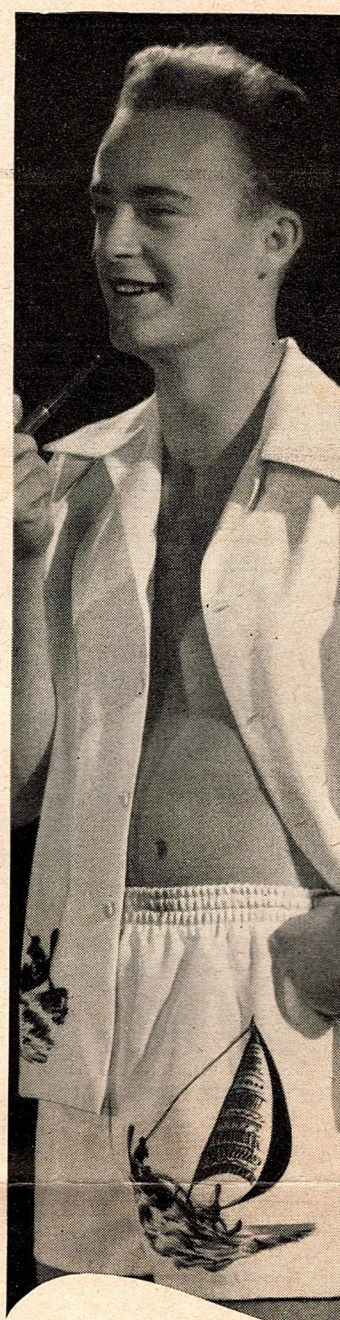
"Not by a grand sight!" And then, lost in the other war: "The men that caught André were true. [Major André, hanged as a British spy in 1780.—ED.] He wanted to get away, offered them everything. Washington hated to hang him; he cried they said."

Whether or not the old man understood what lay behind Grandfather's question—the whole misery of the draft in the last months of the Civil War—he understood the nature of the problem of loyalty, and the minds of the two met at a point in the history of their country which was not very far away to either of them.

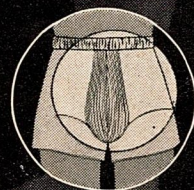
Sam Downing's story of his enlistment in the Continental Army went back to his childhood in Newburyport in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. There, in the absence of his parents, who had sailed across the bay, a man had carried him off as an apprentice to learn the trade of spinning-wheel making in a town out past Haverhill. "It was the fall of the year. I remember the fruit was on the ground, and I went out and gathered it. I was happy yet." But six years later the happiness had worn off and he ran away to enlist, making his way to Colonel Fifield over in Charlestown who accepted him, small as he was. But the colonel wasn't quite ready to go: "He had his haying to do; so I stayed with him and helped him through it, and then I started for the war." He remembered guarding wagons from Exeter to Springfield, and the fighting in the Mohawk Valley and General Benedict Arnold and General Horatio Gates.

"Arnold was our fighting general, and a bloody fellow he was. He didn't care for nothing; he'd ride right in. It was 'Come on, boys!' twasn't 'Go, boys!' He was as brave a man as ever lived. He was dark skinned, with black hair, of middling height. There wasn't any waste timber in him. He was a stern looking man, but kind to his soldiers. They didn't treat him right: he ought to have had Burgoyne's sword. But he ought to have been true." [Benedict Arnold, before his treason, played a major, if not decisive role in the Battle of Saratoga but was studiously passed over by General Gates in the acceptance of Burgoyne's surrender.—ED.]

"Gates was an 'old granny' looking fellow. When Burgoyne came



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LAST SOLDIERS CONTINUED

up to surrender his sword, he said to Gates, 'Are you a general? You look more like a granny than you do like a general.' 'I be a granny,' said Gates, 'and I've delivered you of ten thousand men today.'

Sam Downing had taken part in the later campaigns around New York. "There's always policy, you know, in war. We made the British think we were coming to take the city. We drew up in line of battle: the British drew up over there." He pointed over the beehives. "They looked very handsome."

Was Washington as fine-looking a man as he was reported, my grandfather wanted to know. "Oh!" said the old man, lifting up both hands and pausing. "But you never got a smile out of him. He was a nice man. We loved him. They'd sell their lives for him."

That was the end of the Revolution for Sam Downing, but not of the talk beside the beehives. There had been other wars before and after. Sam Downing's father and his wife's father had been out in the French war. His grandson had fought in "the present rebellion" from the beginning. He talked of both, but in the end the old man came back to the War of Independence. "When peace was declared . . . we burnt thirteen candles in every hut, one for each state." A man who will think back can see those candles from here in the oiled windows under the tremendous trees.

Alexander Milliner

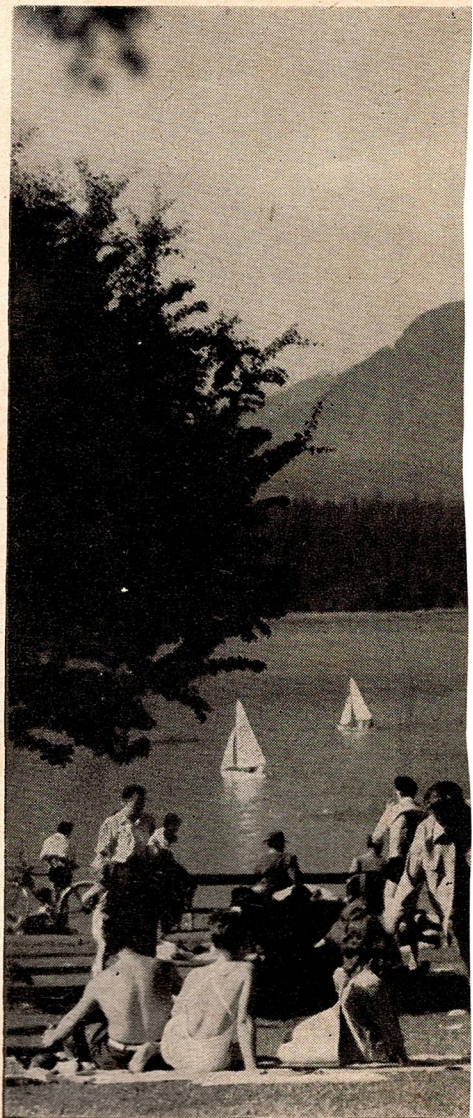
ALEXANDER MILLINER had seen even more of his country's battles. He had been born at Quebec, the son of an artificer in Wolfe's army who died on the Heights of Abraham ("at the close of the battle, lying down to drink at a spring on the plain . . .") and an English woman whom her son described as "high larnt." British-bred though he was, however, Alexander Milliner had served 6½ years in the American Army in the Revolution, 5½ years in the American Navy in and through the War of 1812—three of them on the frigate *Constitution*—uncounted months in the Indian wars in the Mohawk Valley. He had seen action at White Plains ("a nasty battle"), the Brandywine, Saratoga, Monmouth, Yorktown, the Indian attack on Fort Stanwix. He had been in the fight between the *Constitution* and the British ships *Cyane* and *Levant*. He had been badly wounded at Monmouth and captured at sea by the French who mistreated him in prison at Guadeloupe, feeding him bread worse than he had eaten in "seven kingdoms."

Only the brightest moments came back clear—Washington first and clearest. He had served for four years in Washington's Life Guard as drummer boy, his mother following along as washer-woman to be near her son. Washington was "a good man, a beautiful man. He was always pleasant, never changed countenance, but wore the same in defeat and retreat as in victory. . . . Lady Washington . . . was a short, thick woman; very pleasant and kind. . . . They took a great notion to me. One day the General sent for me to come up to headquarters. . . . The Life Guard came out and paraded and the roll was called. There was one Englishman, Bill Dorchester; the General said to him, 'Come, Bill, play up this 'ere Yorkshire tune.' When he got through, the General told me to play. So I took the drum, overhauled her, braced her up, and played a tune. The General put his hand in his pocket and gave me \$3. . . ."

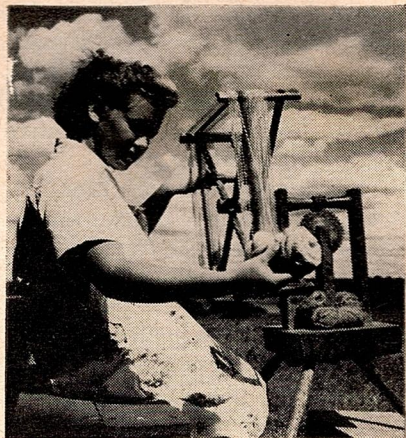
At Valley Forge "Lady Washington visited the army. She used thorns instead of pins on her clothes. The poor soldiers had bloody feet." And then back to the general. "We were going along one day, slow march, and came to where the boys were jerking stones. 'Halt!' came the command. 'Now, boys,' said the General, 'I will show you how to jerk a stone.' He beat 'em all. He smiled but didn't laugh out." (In my grandfather's copy of his book a letter has been placed between the leaves at this point. It is dated at Boston, Jan. 15, 1865 and signed by Edward Everett. "The Biographies," says Mr. Everett with that restraint which was expected of great men and Bostonians, "appear to contain all that can be expected." The anecdote of General Washington stopping to jerk stones with his men, he continues, is excellent and is "in accordance with the traditions of his youth which describe him as being able to throw a stone across the Rappahannock below Fredericksburg.")

Of Arnold, Alexander Milliner's opinion was much like Sam Downing's. "Arnold was a smart man; they didn't sarve him quite straight." Cornwallis was "a fine looking man; very mild." The drummer boy shook hands with him at Yorktown. "The day after the surrender the Life Guard came up. Cornwallis sat on an old bench. 'Halt!' he ordered; then looked at us—viewed us."

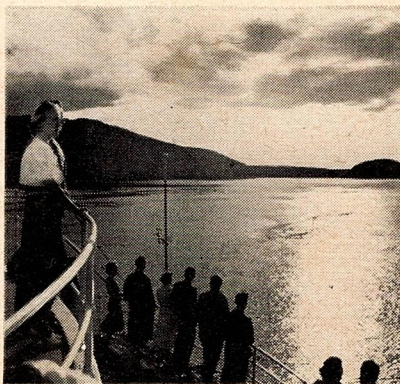
When the Civil War broke out the old man had wanted to take his drum and go down to Rochester and "beat for volunteers." It would have been a sight to remember—Washington's drummer



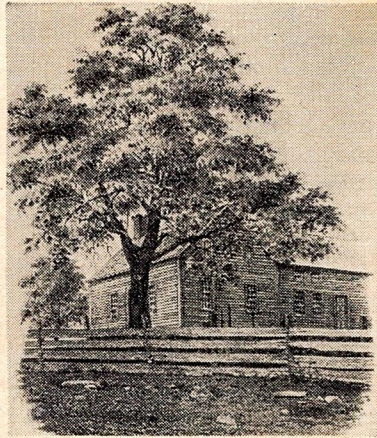
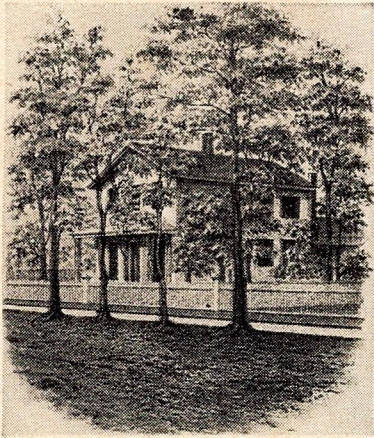
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THE HOME OF DANIEL WALDO SAMUEL DOWNING RESIDENCE

LAST SOLDIERS CONTINUED

boy, no bigger than a boy still for all his thatch of white hair, beating his Revolutionary drum for volunteers to save the Union because it was "too bad this country, so hardly got, should be destroyed by its own people." They hadn't let him go, but just before my grandfather's visit he had marched to the church on his 104th birthday at the head of a procession of Pioneers of Monroe County, where, after they had sung Washington's funeral hymn and heard a memorial address, he had stood on a seat where all could see him and thanked them for their kind attention and appealed to them all to be true to their country, adding with a wry but not wholly irrelevant emphasis that he had seen "worse-looking visages than his own hung up by the neck."

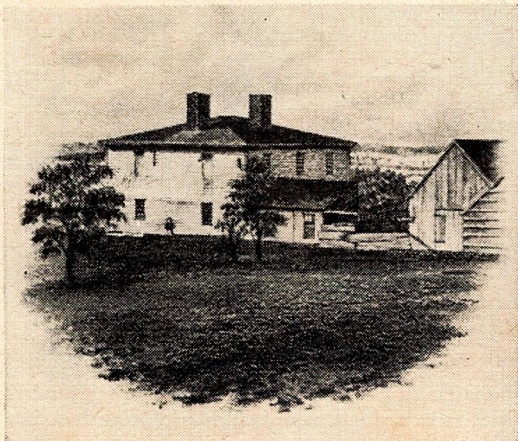
Lemuel Cook

LEMUEL COOK was the oldest of the survivors, having been born in Litchfield County in Connecticut 105 years before. He had served through the entire war, being mustered in at the age of 16 "at Northampton in the Bay State, 2nd Regiment, Light Dragoons; Sheldon, Col.; Stanton, Captain;" mustered out at Danbury, Conn. at the age of 24. He had been in the bitter fighting in Westchester County and the Battle of the Brandywine and he had seen Cornwallis' surrender. But what gives his recollection, in my grandfather's report of it, so moving a character is not the importance of the events the old man relates but the character of the images which return to his mind. Recalling the past painfully as though from a great distance and speaking with a very imperfect articulation "so that it is with difficulty that his story can be made out," Lemuel Cook nevertheless conveys a sense of actuality which neither of the others gives.

"In conversation with him," my grandfather wrote, "he has to be left to the course of his own thoughts, inquiries and suggestions appearing to confuse him." The course of the old man's thoughts took him from his first whiff of gunpowder at Valentine's Hill ("Up came Darrow, good old soul! . . . said, 'Lem, what do you think of gunpowder? Smell good to you?'" to the first time he was fired at personally and in earnest ("Lem, they mean you; go on the other side of the road.") to his first sight of the French in action ("They stepped as though on edge. They were a dreadful proud nation.") to the siege and surrender at Yorktown.

"Baron Steuben was mustermaster. He had us called out to select men and horses fit for service. When he came to me, he said,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 96



WILLIAM HUTCHINGS' HOUSE IN MAINE

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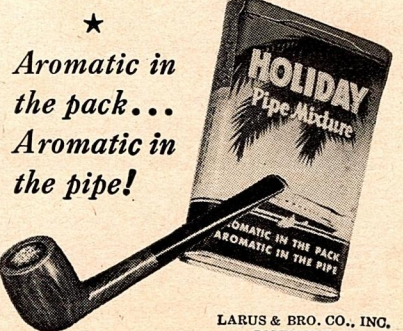


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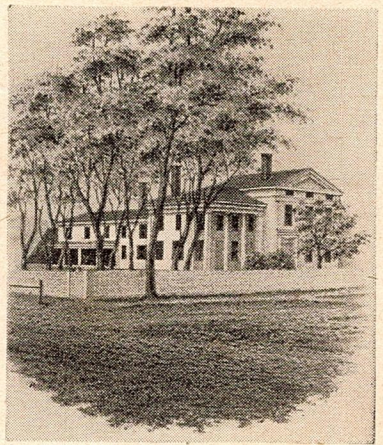
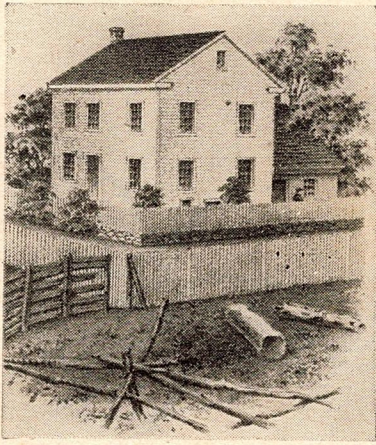
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ALEXANDER MILLINER HOME

LAST SOLDIERS CONTINUED

'Young man, how old are you?' I told him. 'Be on the ground tomorrow morning at nine o'clock,' said he. My colonel didn't like to have me go. . . . 'You're a fool,' said the rest, 'they're going to storm New York.' No more idea of it than of going to Flanders. My horse was a bay, and pretty. . . . We marched off towards White Plains. Then 'left wheel' and struck right north. Got to King's Ferry below Tarrytown. There were boats, scows. We went right across into the Jerseys. That night I stood with my back to a tree.

"Then we went on to the head of Elk. There the French were. It was dusty; 'peared to me I should have choked to death. One of 'em handed me his canteen. 'Lem,' said he, 'take a good horn—we're going to march all night.' I didn't know what it was, so I took a full drink. It liked to have strangled me.

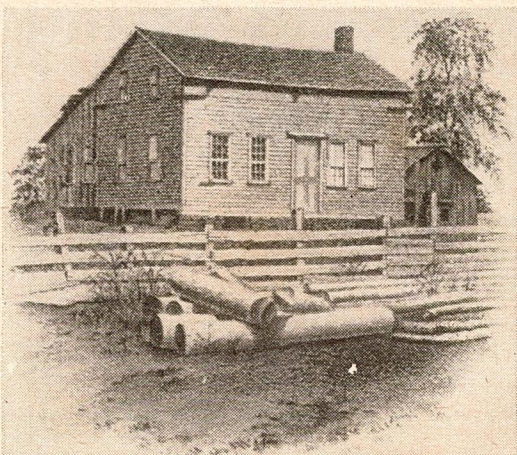
"Then we were in Virginia. There wasn't much fighting. . . . Old Rochambeau told 'em, 'I'll land five hundred from the fleet against your eight hundred.' But they darsn't.

"We were on a kind of side hill. We had plaguey little to eat and nothing to drink under heaven. We hove up some brush to keep the flies off.

"Washington ordered that there should be no laughing at the British; said it was bad enough to have to surrender without being insulted. The army came out with guns clubbed on their backs. They were paraded on a great smooth lot, and there they stacked their arms. Then came the camp followers—old women, and all. One said, 'I wonder if the d—d Yankees will give me any bread.'

"The horses were starved out. Washington turned out with his horses and helped 'em up the hill. When they see the artillery, they said, 'There, them's the very artillery that belonged to Burgoyne.' "

Lem Cook and my grandfather are both dead but the words have breath in them still. They bring the War of the American Revolution out of a scholar's past and put it down where it belongs, within the hearing of living ears. Those who think of the Republic which that war created as already old, those who think of the Declaration on which it was fought as a declaration of antiquated principles which must now be surrendered to the authority of a party or a church, those who doubt and are timid and afraid, might do worse than to reflect upon the fact that the beginnings of the American nation were within the memory of a man whom men still living could remember. They might do worse, too, than to recall to mind Sam Downing's 13 candles and the hope they stood for. That hope has not gone out.



LEMUEL COOK'S HOME NEAR ROCHESTER