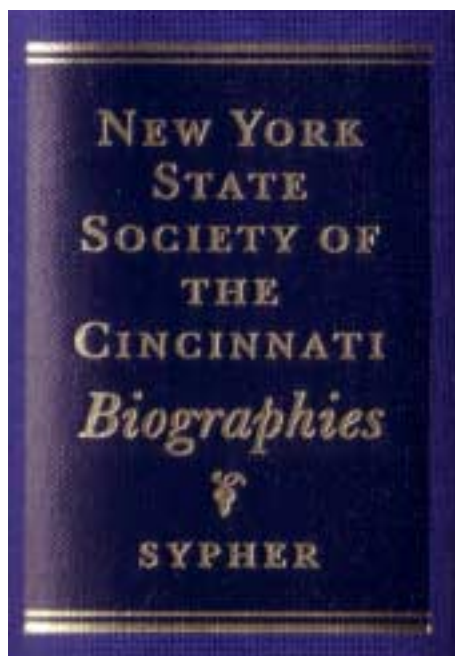


Publications

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→ *New York State Society of the Cincinnati: Biographies of Original Members & Other Continental Officers*, by Francis J. Sypher, Jr., New York State Society of the Cincinnati, Fishkill, NY, 2004, Hardcover; 659 pp., illustrated, notes, bibliography, \$200.00. Purchase from New York State Society of the Cincinnati, DeWitt Clinton, Jr., Treasurer, 15 Webhannet Harbor Road, Wells, Maine 04090.

In 1886 the New York State Society of the Cincinnati published a volume containing 234 biographies of the original members and the history of the society entitled *The Institution of the Society of the Cincinnati, Formed by the Officers of the American Army of the Revolution, for the Laudable*

Purposes Therein Mentioned, at the Cantonment on the Banks of the Hudson River, May, 1783; Together with Some of the Proceedings of the General Society, and of the New-York State Society; also, a List of the Officers and Members of the New-York State Society, from Its Organization to the Year 1851. Written by the group's secretary, John Schuyler, this book has now been updated.

In 2004, Francis J. Sypher, Jr., with the assistance of the New York State Society of the Cincinnati Publications Committee, revised John Schuyler's original work and expanded it to a treasure trove of 475 biographies. These biographies include the original members, of course, plus eligible members who never joined, and members who transferred membership from other states to the New York society.

Here, in this beautifully bound volume, you will read easy to understand biographical studies of all the famous New York officer corps, Alexander McDougall, Goose van Schaick, John Lamb, Marinus Willett, Philip van Cortlandt, and a bucket full of Livingstons. Also included are the lesser-known officers like Edward Antil, Philip Dubois Bevier, Andrew Finck, Frederick Weissenfels, and Guy Young, as well as some naval officers. The biographies include military and postwar career and family information. They can run from a simple paragraph to several pages, depending on available

information. All are copiously footnoted with primary and secondary sources as long, if not longer, than the biographies themselves.

Among the members of the New York State Society, were the two famous protagonists, Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton. These two aggressive, talented, and fearless young officers, as we all know, ultimately ended up hating each other enough for one to kill the other in a duel. But, what is interesting is that at least one pair of not-so-famous rivals was also among the members of the New York Society.

Though not accounted for in the book, in a bizarre little-known incident, Anthony Walton White, while Lieutenant Colonel of the 3rd New Jersey regiment in 1776-77, had physically assaulted Lt. Col. Richard Varick, the Deputy Muster Master of the Army, when they were both stationed at Fort Ticonderoga. After escaping from the Fort's gaol, White heavily armed himself and was found waiting in ambush for Varick.¹ Oh, to have been a fly on the wall at the Society's meetings!

Like Anthony White, Samuel Blachley Webb, was a non-resident who did not serve in any New York unit. However, since they both settled in New York after the war, they were able to join the New York Society. Officers serving less than three years in the Continental Army or Navy were not eligible for membership. However, if their time was cut short by derangement (*a*

period euphemism for downsizing) or the war ended they could join. Militia and state troop (levy) officers were not allowed to be members either — unless they had also served with the Continental forces for the required time. If the officer died in service, the oldest male offspring, or closest male heir, was able to join in their place.

This book will serve as a tremendous research tool to Revolutionary War era historians, researchers, and genealogists. In no other reference source will you find this amount of accurate and documented biographical material. Its source list is so detailed that it will, and has, lead to many a lost repository of information.

This is not to say the effort was perfect. Mr. Sypher admits that by having so many details, he was liable to commit proportionally more errors and reluctantly accepts it as “*the virtually unavoidable consequence of such an undertaking.*” One cannot disagree with such an assessment. Yet, it appears some readily available biographical information was missed entirely.

Let us take Palmer Cady for example. According to his biographical sketch in the book, he began his service as a Sergeant in Lathrop Allen’s company of Col. Samuel Elmore’s Connecticut Regiment. Well, this is not quite true. Cady began his continental service as a sergeant all right, but in the New York forces.

According to the company muster roll in the National Archives, Cady, Michael Jackson, and Lathrop Allen, enlisted as sergeants in Hezekiah Baldwin’s company of the 2nd New York Battalion on 25 May 1775.² At the end of their initial enlistment period, the captain and 1st

lieutenant left the service, but most of company extended their enlistments. So, 2nd Lt. Rosewell Beebe moved up to captain and Sgt. Allen was promoted to 1st lieutenant. Over the winter of 1776, Beebe died as the result of an early form of smallpox inoculation so the command fell to Allen. The company was absorbed into the Connecticut forces when their enlistment ran out with the Yorkers that spring.³

Beebe’s widow filed a pension application with the government. It is rather detailed and the only place to find out that her husband died while in the service. Consequently, Rosewell Beebe should be included with the 35 officers in this book, like Richard Montgomery, Daniel Mills, Abraham Riker, and “*Jack*” McDougall, who also passed away from various causes during the war. New York’s Lathrop Allen, who also filed for a pension, should be considered for inclusion in the book, provided his subsequent five years of service as an officer meet the qualifications.⁴ Neither Cady nor Baldwin filed, but at the very least, Palmer Cady’s record with the Society should be amended to include his initial service in 1775.

A less severe example is Nicholas Van Rennsalear, whose orderly book, from the later part of the war, is a useful research tool, was also among the handful of officers to file a pension application. According to the papers filed, he was formerly in very easy circumstances, but a loss in trade had brought him to almost total ruin. Though not very helpful on details of his early service, the application does state that at the time, he was the last surviving officer of the original four New York regiments. This is something the

members of the Society might want to know.

Working with the National Archives and Record Administration’s pension application files and muster rolls is tough, exhausting, and time consuming.⁵ Any microfilm work is, but the information these records contain would have gone a long way to enhance the details of this study. Regretfully, these records were apparently not fully utilized, despite being mentioned in the introductory portion of the book, as well as cited in the bibliography.

On the other hand, not taking complete advantage of this information is an error of omission, not commission, so it does not detract from what has been accomplished by this work. It will stand the test of time as an important tool to aid in other more detailed research.

What it is so frustrating for researchers is that this phenomenal book is so good, that with a little more effort it could have been outstanding! Unfortunately, it is priced as the latter. The average person will probably not be able to afford to purchase a copy for his or her own library. Instead, they will have to rely on public and private institutions to acquire copies for use by the general public, or seek out Society members who have their own copies.

Hopefully, once the initial run of these books is depleted, the New York State Society of the Cincinnati will consider finding a publisher willing to produce a less expensive updated second edition for the masses.

Philip D. Weaver

Notes *(Not published with the review)*

¹ Letters from Richard Varick to Philip Schuyler, 18 November 1776 and 20 November 1776, Philip Schuyler Papers, published in *The Politics of Command in the American Revolution*, Jonathan Gregory Rossie, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1975) 215–218.

² A Muster Roll of Captain Hezekiah's Company of the Second Regiment of New York Forces, 13 October 1775, (National Archives Microfilm Publication M246, 138 rolls, Roll 67, Jacket 19, Washington), *Revolutionary War Rolls 1775-1783*, Records Group 93, National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

³ Pension application of Rosewell (Sarah) Beebe (W16997), (National Archives Microfilm Publication M804, 2,670 rolls, Roll 200), *Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files, 1800-1900*, Record Group 15, National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

⁴ Pension application of Lathrop Allen (W17208), Revolutionary War Pension Files, Record Group 15, Roll 40.

⁵ It has been made infinitely easier with such things as the *Genealogical Abstracts of Revolutionary War Pension Files*, Abstracted by Virgil D. White, (Waynesboro, TN: The National Historical Publishing Company, 1992) and the *Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Index* (Ann Arbor, MI, ProQuest Information and Learning Company, 2002) published on a searchable CD by Heritage Quest.