

BROADSIDE

The Newsletter of the
American Revolution Round Table

<http://www.arrrt-ny.org>

April 2020

APRIL 7 MEETING CANCELED!! DUE TO CORONAVIRUS

After a flurry of emails, the Board of Governors has faced the sad necessity of canceling a Round Table for the first time in the group's history except for the October, 2001 meeting, which was less than a month after 9/11.

“Corona” means “crown,” so conspiracy theorists may be forgiven for suspecting the virus to be a Biological Warfare attack on our Glorious Cause by agents of the monarch of Perfidious Albion.

As for the June meeting, keep your fingers crossed!

HOW DID DEFEAT AT BRANDYWINE SAVE AMERICA?

Our February speaker was Michael Harris, author of *BRANDYWINE: A MILITARY HISTORY OF THE BATTLE THAT LOST PHILADELPHIA BUT SAVED AMERICA, SEPTEMBER 11, 1777.*

Mr. Harris explained that his book came out six years ago, so it is not “hot off the press,” but he has a book on the Battle of Germantown in the works, and it will be out in a year or so.

There has not been a book-length work on this important battle in a while. Time enough to warrant a new and thorough one. There was one published in 2001 that Mr. Harris dismisses as mere “folklore.” He politely suggested that the information in that book is not reliable. The Round Table has never heard the word “folklore” pronounced with such a drip of contempt. The Bicentennial, in 1976, saw the publication of a better book on the battle, but it is rare and costs \$200.

One significance of the battle is its sheer size: Brandywine was the biggest battle of the war, measured by the number of men in actual combat: 30,000. The Battle of Brooklyn has been called the biggest of the war, but perhaps that soldier count includes reserves. Brandywine raged over ten square miles. Mr. Harris was also careful to add that this was the biggest battle of the war *on a single day.*

Our author made many good explanatory points about this battle:

General John Sullivan was central to the battle, so Harris makes him central to his narrative. Congress did not trust Sullivan. Congress wanted to court martial him after this defeat, but the Commander-in-Chief said that must wait: with the British about to

take Philadelphia, he could hardly take all his Major Generals off the line to attend a court martial. And since Sullivan was a Major General, his judges must also be Major Generals or above.

Sullivan's second-in-command, when he commanded a division, was a French general who spoke almost no English, and Sullivan had to give him command of the division, since GW had placed Sullivan in command of a corps of three divisions.

The army was new in 1777 – few men still served whose enlistments had been for 1776. And this was before Steuben's training at Valley Forge. Lafayette was wounded showing Sullivan's front line troops how to attach their bayonets – they did not know how! But they were getting to know Howe.



Michael Harris chatted with Dave Jacobs before the meeting got under way, while Polly Guérin and Christopher Thuilot conversed in the background.

Moses Hazen was the Colonel of the Canadian regiment. Now there is a surprising sidelight on the war. There were French Canadian volunteers in the rebel army. They called themselves "Congress's Own Regiment." They kind of had to: since they were not from any state, they were Congress's Own.

Then Mr. Harris dropped his big bomb: "Washington is a bad battlefield commander." Rumbles of riot ran rackingly through the ranks of the Round Table! "I know, I know. Take a deep breath. I love George Washington, but the fact is: he was not a good battlefield commander." He had eight hundred mounted men, and he never sent them out scouting. He put a Virginian, who did not know the

area, in charge of some crucial unit when he had a Pennsylvanian officer he could have sent. And GW did not learn from his mistakes. This was the sixth time Howe had flanked GW, and still our man failed to see a flanking maneuver coming.

Some other curiosities about Brandywine:

Already back in '76, Howe had ordered his men to drop prone just as the Yanks leveled their muskets for a volley. This may be why the Americans reported 2,000 British dead. Since the Americans did not hold the field at the end of the day, they had no chance to go over the field later and get an accurate count. They did not kill nearly that many Redcoats.

Harris noted disapprovingly the many illustrations that show GW as an old man wearing a wig. He was only forty-five at Brandywine, and he never wore a wig. James Thomas Flexner pointed this out too. GW never wore a wig in his life.

Mr. Harris was expert in his use of Power Point slides and in his lecturecraft – he teaches in a tough Philadelphia-area high school. He showed us a blow-up of a postcard-sized watercolor he found in a family history in England: one of the British officers drew it during the battle. It shows amazing detail, especially since it was so small. It shows the British infantry in their red coats, and the British artillery in their blue coats. Harris believes that painting to be the very earliest surviving image of Chester County, Pennsylvania.

Questions were aimed at Harris from every quarter with their usual Round Table accuracy. He batted them back with ease. He was careful to say that some factoid had been reported by only one witness, so it must be classed as "uncorroborated." It *probably* happened, but we can't be sure.

Finally, Jon Carriel, our Treasurer, Secretary, and Lord-High-Everything-Else, asked the question several of us had been wondering about since we read the book's title: How did this American defeat "save America?"

Answer: "Howe wasted his army on the Philadelphia campaign. He should have used it that summer to support Burgoyne." Or as Dr. Franklin put it: "Howe has not captured Philadelphia. Philadelphia has cap-

tured Howe.”

One more interesting note about our speaker: He has attended the American Military University. That school has no campus. The students attend electronically. He studied with soldiers who were on patrol in Iraq by day and studying military history by night. And since the challenge in Iraq at the time was insurgency, they were studying the insurgency and counter-insurgency of northern New Jersey in the War for Independence! Tom Fleming, a Jersey City native, used to talk about the guerrilla war in his home state.

JON CARRIEL ON THE LITTLE-KNOWN BATTLE OF GOLDEN HILL

Treasurer Jon Carriel gave us an appetizer before the main course of Mr. Harris’s Brandywine talk. This was a slide show talk on the Battle of Golden Hill, New York City’s version of the better-known Boston Massacre. It pre-dated the Boston dust-up by six weeks. On January 19, 1770, sailors on New York’s waterfront, at the Vly Market on today’s Maiden Lane between Pearl Street and Water Street, got into a fight with off-duty Redcoats. The Regulars quickly found themselves surrounded by an angry mob that grew into the hundreds, and wisely fled up Golden Hill Street, today’s John Street between Pearl and Cliff, toward their barracks on the town commons, today’s City Hall Park. A British officer ran an American through with his sword, giving New York a better claim than Boston’s to the sad title of first American city to see bloodshed in a direct confrontation of citizens and soldiers.

Jon followed up his Round Table presentation with an article that got published in the [Journal of the American Revolution](#). Kudos, Jon!

BOOKS BOOKS BOOKS

Here are the book reviews your absent-minded editor forgot to include last ish.

At the December dinner, Book Review Chair Lynne Saginaw reviewed the novel SAVING WASHING-

TON: THE FORGOTTEN STORY OF THE MARYLAND 400 AND THE BATTLE OF BROOKLYN, by Chris Formant. Published 2019 by Permuted Press.

Lynne finds the Battle of Brooklyn a fine example of the adage that truth is stranger, or more dramatic, than fiction. Author Formant takes a fictional soldier from Baltimore through the Brooklyn battle, where the four hundred Marylanders held the line, allowing the rest of Washington’s army to escape to Brooklyn Heights and then across the East River to New York City.

Formant is a businessman and not an academic, but a dedicated student of Revolutionary history. He intelligently weaves the big historical figures, including Washington, Lord Stirling, and the Howe brothers, into his novel. Mordecai Gist appears, and another pair of historical figures, the Doan brothers, who even the Revwar specialist may have to look up – but that is the sign of a well-researched piece of historical fiction.

Formant describes the confusion and desperation of battle well. But he commits some anachronisms. Zippers are mentioned, though they were not patented until 1851. Sometimes his vernacular is more modern than it should be. A more rigorous editor would have helped.

Lynne wishes that Formant had included a bibliography, so a reader can look deeper into the fact behind the fiction. “The acknowledged master of historical battle fiction, Bernard Cornwell, never failed to include one. And he was absolutely faithful to the time he was writing about.”

Warning! There is language in the novel that is not meant for children.

Lynne says “This is the work of a promising writer. It is an entertaining tale for the general audience. For specialists like us, it’s not quite enough.”

Bob Crothers entertained the December diners with a review of Rick Atkinson’s THE BRITISH ARE COMING. Atkinson, an Army brat, Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter, and historian, is following his World War II trilogy of books with a new troika on the War for Independence. It should be completed

by 2025 or 30. This is the first of the three, and it covers the 21 months of the war following Lexington.

One big piece of news about Atkinson is that he is the first American scholar to have unlimited access to the papers of King George III, which are stored in the keep of Windsor Castle. These papers, and Atkinson's use of them, may help bring consensus to the question: Whom shall we blame for the British debacle – George or Frederick Lord North? Or both? Speakers at recent Round Table dinners have argued both sides. And George's papers are only one item in the 42 small-print pages of Atkinson's bibliography! Atkinson writes a prologue of 31 pages, just on King George's motivations. That gives you an idea of the scale of the book, and of the trilogy. And that's not to mention the 24 maps, two 16-page signatures of four-color images, and 135 pages of footnotes!

Bob says "Rick Atkinson is a terrific researcher and a world-class writer of political-military history."

Making his book review debut at the December soiree was Vic Miranda, reviewing Craig L. Symonds's **BATTLEFIELD ATLAS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION**. This was published by the Nautical and Aviation Publishing Company of America in 1986 and re-published in 2018. Symonds was the Chairman of the History Department at the Naval Academy at Annapolis before becoming a Distinguished Visiting Professor at the US Naval War College at Newport, Rhode Island.

Each pair of facing pages in this book features a clear, concise account of a battle, facing a two-color map. Vic finds this uncluttered format very helpful. The author explains the motivations of the British and American commanders. There are many quotes – it always puts the reader into the picture and gives immediacy to the account of the battle if you can hear the voice of a participant while looking at a colored map.

But Vic, like any sharp-eyed Round Tabler will, found a mistake. At the Battle of Fort Montgomery, the author has the British attacking from the east. They attacked from the west. Vic should know: he lives near Fort Montgomery and has been a student of this battle site for years. Vic also finds the type in

this book to be too small. Overall, though, Vic finds this to be "a good classroom book."

Finally, here is a condensation of the very thorough review by Dr. Joanne Grasso, our Speakers Chair, delivered at the February meeting, of **THE WIDOW WASHINGTON: THE LIFE OF MARY WASHINGTON**.

Dr. Martha Saxton is the author of this 2019 biography published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. She goes through Mary Ball Washington's life chronologically over eighteen chapters and 360 pages,



which include 885 notes. Dr. Grasso finds the chapters just the right length: they leave the reader neither bored nor breathless.

Dr. Saxton labels herself a feminist, and that informs her view of Mary, and she draws the reader's attention to the slavery issue, as a 21st Century author would. She paints a picture of a life lived in times very different from our own. Mary lived a life of closeness to death, of deference of women and slaves to white males, and of religious devotion and resignation to God's will. She leavened her son's desire for military glory with cautioning advice about humility and submission to the divine will.

Naturally, the author spends a lot of time on Mary's influence on her famous son's development, and on Mary's relationship with Martha. Both emerge as strong women. Mary was anxious all her life for George's well-being. The strain of her son's long

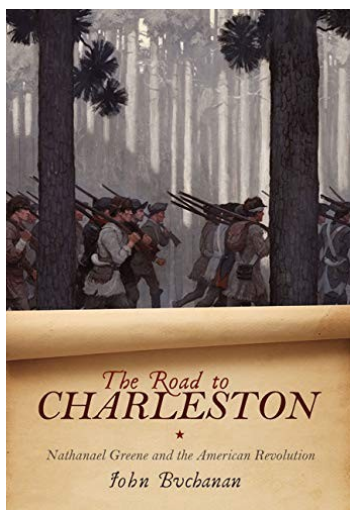
absences and her concern about the dangers of war he faced affected Mary's health.

Dr. Saxton is contending with a dearth of any material on the life of the mother of Washington, and also on the bad reputation Mary has gotten. Mary, she believes, has been maligned. These are the reasons the author gives for writing the book.

Dr. Grasso finds the book to combine academic precision with mass-market readability, and flowing narrative with good documentation.

JOHN BUCHANAN WINS BEST BOOK OF 2019 AWARD

Our stalwart Jack Buchanan won the Order of the Cincinnati's "Best Book on the Revolution" Award for 2019 with his latest study of the war in the south, *THE ROAD TO CHARLESTON: NATHANAEL GREENE AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION*. Quoth Jack, "As they say down South, I'm right pleased."



IN THE NEWS

Polly Guérin, Board member and maven of all NYC cultural events, sends some items:

The Museum of the American Revolution marked the 200th anniversary of the Boston Massacre with new artifacts and talks around March 5, the date of the massacre in 1770.

The History Channel ran a miniseries on His Excellency in February. One topic was the question: Did George Washington believe in God? He was "extremely cagey" on the subject all his life. He encouraged religious tolerance, seeing it as one of the great contributions of the American Revolution. Wherever he went, he would attend services at An-

glican, Quaker, Catholic, Jewish, or any other, houses of worship. In 1775, he forbade his soldiers burning an effigy of the Pope for Guy Fawkes Day.

Smithsonian Magazine interviewed Alexis Coe, co-author of *NOTORIOUS RBG*, who has now written a book called *YOU NEVER FORGET YOUR FIRST: A BIOGRAPHY OF GEORGE WASHINGTON*. From the cutesy title and the interview, the impression is conveyed that this book will rise above the dubious seriousness of Marvin Kitman's *GEORGE WASHINGTON'S EXPENSE ACCOUNT*, but not much else. Coe becomes the umpteenth-hundredth author to claim to be the first to discover that GW was a human being, with flaws, and to claim that all previous biographies of the man were more hagio than bio.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Found: A menu from Fraunces Tavern, reading: "Revolutionary Roundtable, April 1, 1997." Sidney Horenstein, Chief Geologist of the Museum of Natural History, was the speaker. His topic was the geology of the New York City area in the Revwar: why the hills and valleys were where they were, and how they were used by the armies. For instance, it was sediment in glacial lakes that made the clay used in New York area bricks. The reason the piers on the New Jersey side of the Hudson are so long is that the western third of the river off Jersey City is very shallow. General Benjamin Lincoln said that British encroachments on American liberty "would fall too heavily on my children, although I might have waded through life as comfortably as I do now." Not a geological quote, but a great insight into the revolutionary mentality.

At this dinner, your memorialist first met Dave Jacobs, Tom Fleming, Jim Davis, Peter Ford, and Lee Wittenberg, the Round Table's webmaster. The Tavern that night offered a choice of London Broil or grilled swordfish.

A loose note found with that menu reads: "Lawrence Everhardt escaped from Fort Washington in a rowboat across the Hudson River to Fort Lee. He saw tears in General Washington's eyes" as he beheld the surrender of Fort Washington – the first of all the places in the world since named after him.

APRIL'S SPEAKER RE-SCHEDULED FOR OCTOBER

* * *

TOM SHACHTMAN TO ADDRESS US IN JUNE

Our April speaker, John McCurdy, Ph.D., will speak to us at the October meeting. The planned October speaker, Christian McBurney, has been moved to December. The June speaker, Tom Shachtman, will address our June meeting – assuming there *is* a June meeting. A bit of re-shuffling, due to the Coronavirus. Could be worse: the whole American Revolution took place during a North America-wide epidemic of smallpox.

AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

As stated above, no April meeting, so see you on Tuesday, June 2, 6:00 p.m. – back to the regular time – at the Coffee House Club, on the sixth floor of the General Society Library, 20 West 44th Street. Please email our Treasurer, Jon Carriel, by noon Monday, June 1 and let him know how many to expect for dinner. You can reach Jon at joncarriel@protonmail.com.

Yr. most obdt. Svt.,
Dr. David W. Jacobs



John DiNuzzo, Ed Strauss, Carl Ellman, and Rich Melnick work on the *hors d'oeuvres* during the social hour preceding the February meeting.