

BROADSIDE

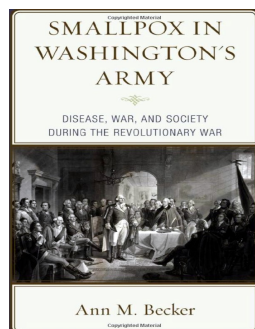
The Newsletter of the
American Revolution Round Table
<http://www.arrrt-ny.org>

April 2023

FEBRUARY SPEAKER:

A MORE DANGEROUS ENEMY THAN THE BRITISH

Smallpox, that is. Smallpox and its role in the American Revolutionary era are the focus of Dr. Ann Becker's work in American History. She teaches at Empire State College and lives on Long Island. Her book is called SMALLPOX IN WASHINGTON'S ARMY: DISEASE, WAR AND SOCIETY IN THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR. It was published in November 2022 by Lexington Books, a division of Rowman and Littlefield.



Ann M. Becker got her PhD. at SUNY Stony Brook. She has written two photo history books on Long Island.

Our 21 attendees got off to a bumpy start due to problems getting Dr. Becker's slides zooming, but then we dug into the "disgusting, horrible" (Dr. Becker's words) subject of smallpox.

This disease was everywhere in 18th century America. Everyone feared it, and with good reason. It was caused by a virus called Variola.

Its mortality rate was between 15 and 50 percent.

You won't believe who introduced inoculation to British America. It was Cotton Mather, of all people, and Dr. Zabdiel Boylston, grand uncle of philanthropist Ward Nicholas Boylston, namesake of Boylston Street in Boston. They got the idea from a slave of Mather's, who said that where he was born, in Africa, inoculation was a folk remedy. And so it was, not only in Africa but in Asia, going back to the first century.

To inoculate a person, the doctor would cut two crossed slices in his upper arm and rub in some pus from a victim suffering a case, preferably mild, of smallpox. The patient would get a (usually) mild, or innocuous, case and be in bed for a week or so, but he would then be immune for life.

During the Seven Years' War the British began inoculating all soldiers, but not the camp followers, of whom there were many. General Washington wanted to inoculate all his troops, but he did not always have victims handy to supply the pus, and if all his soldiers were in bed for a week, he could not put enough healthy men in the field. But after the Canadian campaign, so many soldiers were sick with the pox anyway, and not just innocuous cases, that he had to start army-wide inoculation. But he kept it a secret, so the British would not know

how many of his men were out of commission at any one time. This was at the Morristown, New Jersey camp.

When Virginia's British Governor, Lord Dunmore, offered freedom to escaped slaves if they would join the British Army, slaves all over the south flooded into the British lines and brought their wives and children with them. Dunmore did not give those dependents freedom, and he did not give them inoculation either. Also, the Loyalist militia did not get inoculated, just the Regulars. And as we learned in December from Jack Buchanan, the Loyalist militia did much of the fighting, and the moving around, in the southern campaign.

All over America, the movement of soldiers on both sides spread the disease. After the British began concentrating US POWs on the prison ships in Wallabout Bay, those prisoners suffered terribly from the pox. No inoculation for them. Americans, from General Washington down, were willing to believe the British were deliberately sending infected soldiers and slaves from New York City into US-held areas, to spread the disease.

The tide turned after the Saratoga campaign. General Washington had asked the clergy to urge the civilian population to get inoculated, and, encouraged by the army's example, they did. The rate of infection went down. The spread of the disease by soldiers now began to have a good effect, as inoculation and natural immunity spread. The disease was eradicated worldwide by 1979.



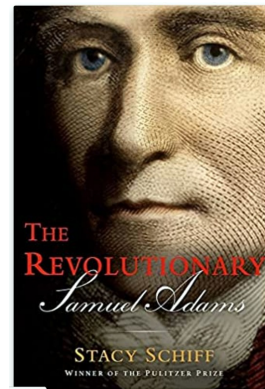
Dr. Becker concludes that General Washington did a good job of fighting a disease that all acknowledged as a more dangerous foe than the military enemy. GW has won another fan.

Attendees asked Dr. Becker how old the virus is. It was known in ancient Egypt. What was the naval experience with the pox? A ship's crew might all come from the same town, and if there was currently no pox in that town, then the ship was safe – until it came into port. Was anyone ever tried for mistreatment of POWs? Major William Cunningham, the British Provost (officer in charge of POWs) in New York City, was hanged once he returned to England, but for embezzlement, not for his crimes against American POWs on the prison ships and in the sugar warehouses and other prisons. He confessed to those crimes while awaiting hanging.

One attendee asked whether smallpox should be spelled as one word or two, and whether it should be capitalized. Strangely enough, that question did not come from your Editor. One word, no cap.

BOOKS BOOKS BOOKS

At the February meeting, Book Review Editrix Lynne Saginaw offered three books for review: *THE REVOLUTIONARY: SAMUEL ADAMS*, 2022, by Stacy Schiff, *LIBERTY IS SWEET: THE*



HIDDEN HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, 2021, by Woody Holton, and *THE GREAT NEW YORK FIRE*, the subject of our April meeting. Only the last was picked up. But your Editor soon bought the book in a store, since I need it for my walking tour research. The author took one of my tours years ago, and gave me some pointers relative to the Great Fire.

Your Editor also bought Adam Van Doren's book *IN THE FOUNDERS' FOOTSTEPS:*

LANDMARKS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, in part because I am mentioned in the Acknowledgments.

I have recently read Eric Burns' INFAMOUS SCRIBBLERS: THE FOUNDING FATHERS AND THE ROWDY BEGINNINGS OF AMERICAN JOURNALISM, very entertaining and informative, and GEORGE S. KAUFMAN: AN INTIMATE PORTRAIT. The Rev connection here is that Kaufman, with Moss Hart, wrote the 1940 Broadway hit "George Washington Slept Here," in which a couple buys a house in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, where Kaufman and other Broadway writers had summer homes. The house is rumored to be one that His Excellency had slept in, but the couple finds that it was really Benedict Arnold who had slept there. But that would be a great historical coup, too! It is always gratifying to see the Rev remembered in popular culture. My brother-in-law Rick Negron has been playing King George in a road production of "Hamilton" for four years now. He is currently in Toronto.

One more book notice brings with it a great sadness. Jim Renner died in January. Jim was for many years the official historian of upper Manhattan. We have given tours together of the battleground of Fort Washington, and have shown Jim's vast collection of pictures and maps to neighbors each year at the annual commemoration of the battle in Fort Tryon Park. Jim was the author of IMAGES OF AMERICA: WASHINGTON HEIGHTS, INWOOD AND MARBLE HILL, 2007, Arcadia Publishing.

IN THE NEWS

Dr. Joanne Grasso, an expert in Long Island's Rev history, sends this report from Center Moriches:

My sister and I visited the Ketcham Inn, which was run by Benjamin Havens during the



Revolutionary War. I was there to research a book. The President of the Ketcham Inn Foundation, Inc., Bert Seides, gave us a tour of the many rooms and eras of the inn. He is dedicated to the renovation and legacy of the inn as an historic site and event location. The inn hosts food events, seminars and school groups. The hostess in the authentic colonial kitchen wears period clothing and shares her extensive knowledge of colonial cooking and utensils. How about a soft-baked pretzel with a butter glaze? The inn has an archive and a bookstore, and has artifacts on display.

The inn is at 81 Main Street, Center Moriches. The phone number is 631-878-1855.

Round Table member Christopher Thuilot wrote a short piece for the Anglo-American History Journal, about a Redcoat grave in Hunterdon County, New Jersey. The grave has a new monument with brass lettering. It is adorned with fresh British flags. It is the grave of Cornet Francis Geary, a British dragoon who was ambushed and shot while on a recon mission in December, 1776. New Jersey militia must have been the ambushers. Geary's regimental buttons were marked "QLD": Queen's Light Dragoons. Chris regrets to say there may be countless Rev graves that have gone unmarked.

Peter Feinman, in his Institute of History, Archeology and Education website, reports on the 136th annual meeting of the American

Historical Association in Philadelphia, January 5 – 8. As usual lately, the contretemps was about the “1619 Project.”

Member Michael Wolf sends an article from the Journal News, a Westchester newspaper, about the Odell House in Greenburgh Township. This is the house where General Rochambeau and



General Washington met upon the arrival of the French army in the New York theater of operations in 1781. Here, Rochambeau persuaded a reluctant Washington to quick march both armies four hundred miles to Yorktown, Virginia, rather than trying to invest or assault New York City. The Sons of the Revolution owned the house until 2020, when they gave it to the Town of Greenburgh. State Attorney General Letitia James has subpoenaed records of the SR in order to get artifacts for the house that the SRs say they own.

One of the columns holding up the roof of the front porch of the Morris-Jumel Mansion is collapsing from thirty years of neglect by the Parks Department. I will be there Saturday morning giving a tour. Wish me luck. Does the name Samson mean anything to you?

APRIL SPEAKER

Dr. Benjamin Carp will tell us about his new book, *THE GREAT NEW YORK FIRE OF 1776: A LOST STORY OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION*. Talk about your hot topic! Dr. Carp has addressed us before. He teaches at Brooklyn College and CUNY Graduate Center. He is also the author of *DEFIANCE OF THE*

PATRIOTS: THE BOSTON TEA PARTY AND THE MAKING OF AMERICA.

This is the first book to examine this crucial incident in depth. New York City had, before the Sons of Liberty seized it in 1775, been the headquarters city for all British army and navy operations in and around North America for many years. In the summer of 1776, the British



re-took the city, and a few days later, one fifth of the city burned, to no one's surprise. As General Washington prepared to retreat from New York, he had to get a decision out of Congress

as to whether he had permission to burn the city, and he was worried that revolutionary hotheads might torch the town, permission or no. There were advantages and disadvantages either way.

ARE YOU GOOD WITH NUMBERS?

The Round Table still needs a new Treasurer. The treasurer's duties are light indeed, since we are not currently spending any money on a meeting place. That will change soon, though. We hope our June meeting will be an actual meeting, so a restaurant must be found and paid for. The Treasurer keeps the checkbook, collects dues and auction proceeds at meetings, sends the honorarium check to the speaker, fills out one uncomplicated tax form every June, and reports on finances to the Board. Our incumbent Treasurer, Jon Carriel, will be happy to train his successor by Zoom. If you wish to fill this important post, please reply to the Editor, Fred Cookinham, at fcokinham@juno.com.

DEADLINE

Midnight Tuesday, May 16, is the deadline for any material you might send to the Broadside for inclusion in the June issue. Do you have any news pertaining to the American Revolution? Museums opening, artifacts dug up, documents found or re-interpreted – anything of interest to Rev fans. If you submit an article of your own, I will be happy to include it, or at least summarize it if it is too long. And of course news of the publication of a new book on the subject is always vital. We can throw in the French and Indian War and the War of 1812, too.

AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

Here's a chance for Round Table members to save money on our April speaker's book! Anyone attending the April Zoom meeting, or reading this notice, can get 30% off Dr. Carp's book by going to the website of Yale University Press, www.yalebooks.yale.edu, and using the discount code BCNYF0323 any time between March 19 and June 19. Or you can call Trilateral at 1-800-405-1619. It has been a question all through the pandemic how to give a discount to attendees at a Zoom meeting. Or an autograph.

Our next meeting will be (hopefully) our last Zoom meeting, but you've heard that before. At 7:30 p.m., Tuesday, April 4, we will Zoom our way into each others' computers. The Zoom link will be in the same emailing as the link to the Broadside.

Yr obdt svt,
Dr. David Jacobs