

BROADSIDE

The Newsletter of the American Revolution Round Table

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

February 2019

LENDER LAUDS LEE!

Our December speaker was Mark Edward Lender, co-author, with Garry Wheeler Stone, of the 2016 book *Fatal Sunday: George Washington, the Monmouth Campaign, and the Politics of Battle*, volume 54 of the University of Oklahoma Press series “Campaigns and Commanders.”

The significance of the Battle of Monmouth is that it was these battles – the one between Washington and Sir Harry Clinton and the one between GW and General Charles Lee – that cemented Washington in place as Commander in Chief. Congress was consid-



Mark Edward Lender (left) chats with Jack Buchanan during the social hour of the December meeting.

ering replacing him with Lee, who was second in line for the C in C title, but the battle and the legal battle that followed made Washington unassailable, and left Lee disgraced. This was a major turning point in His Excellency’s career.

Charles Lee was more experienced than any other American general, except maybe Gates, having served in the British and other armies. He was the most cosmopolitan American outside of Franklin.

But he was, as Adams would say, obnoxious and disliked. His attitude, on meeting people, was “I am smarter than you are and I can’t wait to tell you so.” Lender and Stone argue that Lee was no traitor, as some believed after his capture and exchange by the British, and he was not party to the Conway Cabal. But he was stigmatized because he was a friend of some members of the Cabal. So he had two strikes against him going into the Monmouth action. But our authors (Stone was unable to attend – Lender had to serve Stone’s turn, lest this Stone be left unturned) find Lee to be innocent of the charges leveled against him after the battle by GW.

What really happened in the opening rounds of the battle? – that was our speaker’s focus. Lee did not behave incompetently or cowardly. He found his advance facing almost ten times the enemy numbers they appeared to have at first, and so he retired in an orderly manner to a defensible position. He got his men safely over a bridge under fire (by the Guards and Grenadiers: elite British troops) and may have been the last man to cross. When Washington confronted Lee, he did not relieve him on the spot or send him to the rear, as has been reported. But he reprimanded Lee. Lee, after the battle, demanded a Court Martial, so he could officially clear his name. But that was a mistake, because who would appoint the members of the Court Martial but the Commander in Chief? Lee was blamed for the opening rout while GW’s partisans, his aides Hamilton and Laurens, spread the idea that Monmouth was an American victory engineered solely by Washington. Clinton called this a British victory, since he got his one thousand baggage wagons safely across New Jersey and into New York without losing one.

Lee was generally in favor of a *guerrilla*, and Washington favored a conventional fight by a

conventional army. Maybe Lee, with small partisan bands, could have trapped Clinton in New Jersey and worn him down, as Gates did to Burgoyne at Saratoga. On the other hand, General Nathaniel Greene supported Washington's plan for a formal engagement. "People expect us to do something," he said, as Clinton's huge wagon train left Philadelphia for New York.

Lender's conclusion is: Don't demand a Court Martial when the man blaming you is also the one appointing the members of the Court Martial.

BOOKS BOOKS BOOKS

Those wishing to pursue the Lee affair more might want to look at the book on Lee written by our April, 2014 speaker: *Renegade Revolutionary: The Life of General Charles Lee*, by Phillip Papas.

Christopher Ward, in *The War of the Revolution*, 1952, is brief and leaves only the slight implication that GW was right and Lee was wrong. Douglas Southall Freeman, 1948, shows Generals Wayne and Scott blaming Lee for confusing orders. Chernow's *Alexander Hamilton* is thoroughly on Washington's side, and has GW ordering Lee to the rear. So the debate rages on, with Lender and Stone facing stiff winds on the "Lee" side.

January 8, 2019 will see the release of a roleplaying game based on the 2009 book BLOODY MOHAWK: THE FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR AND AMERICAN REVOLUTION ON NEW YORK'S FRONTIER, by former ARRT-NY speaker Richard Berleth. The book was published by Black Dome Press and runs to 370 pages. The game is written by Bill Molyneaux for Lock 'n' Load Publishing LLC.

REVIEW OF *SIEGE*, BY ROXANE ORGILL

By Lynne Saginaw

Chairman Dr. David Jacobs received this book from Candlewick Press, a small, independent house. Ms. Orgill, an experienced children's author, has produced an odd duck. Was it a "juvenile" or a "young adult" book?

I took it to the Midwood Library to ask my friends on the staff. The majority said "young adult," namely for Junior High, aged 12 or thereabouts.

In three readings I found myself in agreement. This is poetry of a very loose sort. No rhyming verse, uneven meter – frankly, it's more like doggerel. Here's an example:

Prize
Blast!
from the swivel gun
Blast!
from the carriage gun
HMS Nancy of the King's Navy
supply ship
bound for Boston
captured!
Hauled to Cape Ann
unloaded –
what a prize!

And so on.

The declamatory style gives one pause. I enlisted Joe Smith, a fine actor, to read a page or two aloud. He obligingly declaimed and confirmed my belief that this is a sort of pageant, like the ones we remember from school. Add music and staging and the fell hand of "Hamilton" appears, only less compelling. Lin-Manuel Miranda she is not.

Still, a kid might find it absorbing, and the history seems correct. It could be made to work, copyright notwithstanding.

Editor's note: Thank you, Lynne! The full title is: SIEGE: HOW GENERAL WASHINGTON KICKED THE BRITISH OUT OF BOSTON AND LAUNCHED A REVOLUTION. See what I mean by writers still confusing the Revolution with the War for Independence? Candlewick Press, of Somerville, MA, published the book in 2018. \$17.99 and the paperback is yours. The website has a link to a Teacher's Guide. The back matter includes notes on sources, the General's general orders, soldiers' letters, and a glossary and bibliography.

Who the target readership is depends on whom you consult online: Candlewick Press itself says "Ages

ten and up.” Kirkus Reviews says ages 9-14. Google classifies it as a “children’s book.” And Barnes & Noble just says “10 years.” Does that mean that the reader must be only ten years old, no more and no less? If you get this book for Christmas, and you are eleven, will Old Man Barnes come down the chimney after Santa, snatch the book out of your hands and say “You’re too old for this book”?

The book is 240 pages long. At least we can agree on that much.

TWENTY QUESTIONS

How did you do on the Twenty Questions Quiz (handed out at the December meeting)? The deadline for submitting your answers is our next meeting, February 5, 2019. All written answers will be graded and the top finishers will be placed in a hat and drawn from at the April meeting, for a special prize. The answers will be given at that time, along with the next quiz. If you can’t make the meeting, send your answers to Lynne at lynneess@juno.com.

SITE CITES SIGHTS: FORT WASHINGTON

Fort Washington stood where James Gordon Bennett Park is now, on Fort Washington Avenue between West 183rd Street and 184th in Washington Heights in northern Manhattan. There is nothing left of the fort now, or its many outworks, but there is a monument on the Ft. Washington Avenue side of the park. It was placed there in 1901 by the Sons of the Revolution. The Avenue was unpaved at that time. The SRs asked Bennett, publisher of the New York Herald, for money for the monument and permission to place it on his property. They staged a parade for the unveiling, and they dressed in Revolutionary army uniforms for the occasion. One of the speakers was one of the many descendants of Alexander Hamilton.

Howard Fast, in his novel *The Unvanquished*, prequel to his *The Crossing* (which became a movie with Jeff Daniels as General Washington), points out that this ill-fated fort was the very first of all the many places named for His Excellency.

On the pavement inside the park is a line of paving stones showing part of the outline of the fort. The whole site of the fort would spill out from the park, over Pinehurst Avenue, and into Hudson View Gardens apartment complex, home of Lin-Manuel Miranda of “Hamilton The Musical” fame. At the northern salient point of the fort is a legend, inlaid in the pavement, identifying the fort and the date it was captured by the British and Hessians, November 16, 1776. In the past five years a Revolutionary-era cannon, field mounted, has been placed nearby, but there is no sign telling the whole story.

After the Battle of White Plains, in October, 1776, Washington’s army retreated across the Hudson to Hackensack, New Jersey. That left Colonel Robert Magaw commanding Ft. Washington, “and its



James Gordon Bennett Park, site of Fort Washington
[Photo: Wikipedia]

dependencies” as they said, as an American lodgment in the British rear. The generals debated whether to evacuate the men and tons of weapons and supplies across the Hudson to Fort Lee. They did not expect British General Howe to throw everything he had at the fort. The Americans lost 2,800 men, dozens of irreplaceable cannon, plus muskets, food, uniforms and everything else, on November 16.

In building Bennett Park, where Bennett’s country seat had been, they built retaining walls along the eastern and southern walls of the fort, and on the outline of the southeast bastion. So if you stand at the corner of Ft. Washington Ave. and W. 183rd, look at

that bastion and you will get as close as anyone can now to seeing the fort as it once looked.



Retaining walls at Bennett Park's southeast corner (Fort Washington Avenue & West 183rd Street)
[screen-capture from Google Maps/Street View]

The last earthwork walls of the fort came down in about 1920, as the grid streets were graded. And they were just earthworks – just piles of dirt, stiffened with timbers, not stone like today's park retaining walls. The glaciers had scraped the hill top so clean, though, that there was little soil for the Americans to use in building up the fort's walls. So they had to dig soil at the bottom of the hill and oxcart it up a logging road to the top all spring and summer to build up those walls. The fort had no well, so it could not have held out against a long siege.

You can see plaques and monuments to the fort and its reduction (that is, its capture) for miles around today. At Broadway and West 147th Street there is a plaque marking the first line of trenches the Americans dug on the approaches to the fort against the expected attack by the British marching north from New York City, and at 153rd for the second line, and at 157th for the third. Fort Tryon was the British renaming of the American Forest Hill Fort, and its site is now marked by Fort Tryon Park. Even Fort Independence, way up in the Bronx, was built as an outwork of Fort Washington, guarding the northern approaches to the Kingsbridge across Spuyten Duyvil Creek and the Kingsbridge Road down past Fort Washington and south toward New York City.

There is no marker for the Blue Bell Inn, on Broadway (the Kingsbridge Road in 1776) at W. 181st Street, but one drawing of the inn survives. This was where British General Howe and Gen. Knyphausen of the Hessian contingent treated defeated American Colonel Robert Magaw to dinner

after his surrender.

If you walk along Chittenden Place from W. 187th St., you look out over the lordly Hudson from the parapet of the huge retaining wall of Fort Washington Park. You can see for miles up and down the river. You are seeing about what the Americans in Fort Washington were seeing in 1776 – the Palisades of New Jersey and the site of Fort Lee. The Americans put obstructions into the river between the two forts to prevent British ships sailing up the river. The obstructions did not have to stop the ships; they had only to slow them down while the guns of the two forts banged away at them. This was the whole point of those forts, and of the 1776 river campaign.



Memorial of Fort Washington in Bennett Park
[Wikipedia]

FEBRUARY SPEAKER

Our speaker in February (the Feast of Purification to the Romans, and the Month When the Cold Makes the Trees Crack to the Lenapes) will be Mr. Christian Di Spigna, on his book *Founding Martyr: The Life and Death of Dr. Joseph Warren, The American Revolution's Lost Hero*. Mr. Di Spigna lives in New

York City and Williamsburg, Virginia and is a frequent speaker and volunteer at Colonial Williamsburg. He is an expert on Revolutionary Era history.

Founding Martyr was published in August, 2018 by Crown. It reflects two decades of research, and draws on newly-unearthed primary sources, such as Dr. Warren's medical records from his practice. He spent his childhood on a farm, attended Harvard, and had a successful medical practice. He was born in 1741, about halfway between Washington and Hamilton, and so was only 34 when he was killed at the Battle of Bunker Hill. As with Hamilton, we can only speculate as to what still greater role in American history he might have played had he lived longer.

But he was no slouch even by 34. He was a partner to Sam Adams as a Boston revolutionary leader. He excelled with voice, pen and sword. He was notorious among the British leadership as a troublemaker to be reckoned with. One review calls this an unabashedly admiring biography of a romantic adventurer. Another calls the book judicious – it does not shy away from discussing the Warren family's ownership of slaves. The *Wall Street Journal* says "This is no whitewashed version of the Founding Fathers." Every historian of the American Revolution in the 20th and 21st Centuries has to say that, presumably because so much whitewash was applied to the founding era in school texts in the 19th.

All the reviews call Warren "forgotten." There were so many Founding Fathers, and their lives were so well documented (usually) that they seem to take turns being famous. For example, in 2005 Walter Stahr published *John Jay: Founding Father*, and it was the first new, full-length biography of Jay in almost seventy years.

CBS REVEALS ATTEMPT ON GW'S LIFE!

On Tuesday, January 8, 2019 CBS Good Morning profiled the new Brad Meltzer book, *First Conspiracy*. There was a plot to murder General Washington here in New York in June of 1776. One of His Excellency's own bodyguards was hanged for

In Memoriam DICK MOONEY

Dick Mooney, a long-time member and benefactor of ARRT-NY, passed away from cancer on January 9. He was 91. (This sad intelligence comes to us from Frances Vieta of the Coffee House Club, an old friend and neighbor of Dick's.)

Richard E. Mooney, Yale '47 BA, worked at the *New York Times* for 30 years as a reporter, foreign correspondent and editor. He was on the editorial board of the *Times* for more than a decade. An article in the *Hartford Courant* (of which he had been executive editor for five years) sparked his



Commemorating the 250th anniversary of the NYC Stamp Act Riots, at Bowling Green, Nov. 1, 2015: (l. to r.) Richard Melnick; Tom & Alice Fleming; Dick Mooney; Ambrose Richardson. [Screen-capture from the event video by Matt Z. Johnson]

interest in Nathan Hale. He learned that Hale had been hanged around the corner from his apartment, and he started writing a biography of the Revolutionary hero. Dick wrote the plaque that you will find on a building at the northwest corner of Third Avenue and East 65th Street on the Upper East Side, the site of the hanging of Captain Nathan Hale of the 19th Connecticut Regiment – America's first spy.

Dick was a widower, and the father of three sons. As of publication, no details are available regarding memorial services.

his part in the plot. Meltzer was not exactly claiming to be the very first to discover this. He explained that he found the item in a footnote in Ellis's book.

Brad Meltzer is known as a thriller writer, not a history writer. But he found that the story appealed to his thriller sense.

You can find the story in a series of books called *Eyewitness to the Revolution*. The volume *Minutes of a Conspiracy* in that series reproduces the minutes of the interrogations of many New Yorkers who were questioned by the Committee of Safety after a waiter at a tavern reported suspicious talk among his customers.

ANNUAL BOOK AWARD

Nominations are still open for this year's American Revolution Round Table Annual Book Award for 2018. Please email your nominations to Chairman Dr. David Jacobs at djacobs01@snet.net, or you can just hand it to Dave at the February meeting. The winner will be announced before the April meeting.

A nominated book does not have to be one whose author has spoken at the Round Table. Any book published in 2018 on the Revolutionary era qualifies.

The Round Table has given an annual award for fifteen or twenty years. Lately, people in the Revolutionary History field have been contacting us about our award, so it has attracted attention. Your nomination can make a difference in what is read in the Revolutionary History field.

DEADLINE

The April Round Table will foregather on Tuesday, April 2, so the April Broadside should appear two weeks previous, on March 19, and the deadline for submissions will be one week before that, on March 12. Send me stuff! Book reviews, travelogues, news items – anything related to the American Revolution. Send your tidbits and epics to editor Fred Cookinham, fcookinham@juno.com. www.indepthwalkingtours.com.

AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

The February Round Table will convene on Tuesday, February 5, 2019 at 6:00 pm. Dinner will begin with a mixed greens salad with vinaigrette dressing; followed by a chicken marsala entree; and a dessert of bread pudding. As usual, we will meet at the Coffee House Club, General Society Library Building, 20 West 44th Street, 6th floor.

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