

# BROADSIDE

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

December 2022

## OCTOBER SPEAKER:

### PORWANCHER: PROBABILISTIC PASSION!

Our October 2022 Round Table – the next-to-last Zoom meeting, we hope – was opened by Dr. Joanne Grasso. Chairman David Jacobs had a conflict. When he was

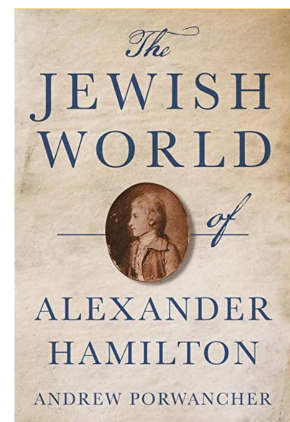


able to join us, he and Dr. Grasso co-chaired the rest of the meeting. Eighteen attended.

Two new members introduced themselves. Barb is a New Jersey re-enactor. She has raised two kids as re-enactors. Her specialty is colonial era garments and fabrics. Bob Mohr is a battlefield docent at the Battle of Bennington site. He is writing a book to reply to a 2020 tome published by the Vermont Historical Society called THE

REBEL AND THE TORY: ETHAN ALLEN, PHILIP SKENE, AND THE DAWN OF VERMONT, by John J. Duffy, H. Nicholas Muller III, and Gary G. Shattuck. The Green Mountains were a disputed area on the eve of independence, between the provinces of New York and New Hampshire. The settlers mostly came from New Hampshire, while the landlords came from New York. The Duffy book sympathizes with New York, so Mr. Mohr is writing a pro-Hampshiremen counter-argument. He says that the Province of New York was corrupt! Imagine that.

Our main speaker was Professor Andrew Porwancher, who teaches at the University of Oklahoma. His 2021 book is THE JEWISH WORLD OF ALEXANDER HAMILTON winner of the Book of the Year award from the *Journal of the American Revolution*, and two other awards.



Dr. Porwancher had told us that he did not plan to give the usual PowerPoint

presentation. We soon understood why. He had no use for maps and charts, as other authors would when giving a talk about a battle. His talk *was* a battle. It was an impassioned plea for his position on Hamilton's origins. He sounded to more than one of his listeners like Perry Mason thundering to the climax of a summation to a jury. No one fell asleep at this meeting!

But what exactly *was* his position? The key words in his presentation were "probably," "in all likelihood," and "probabilistic." Rachel Faucett Lavien Hamilton was not



born Jewish. Then for her son to be considered Jewish, Rachel must have converted when she married Lavien, right? But Porwancher replies that he never *said* that Rachel had converted, only that she *probably* converted.

He singled out our member Stephen Weiner for debate. Stephen had reviewed Porwancher's book back in June for the Round Table.

Dr. Porwancher said that he is a professional historian. "What I write is probabilistic," he said. Unfortunately, readers and listeners never seem to hear you when you put qualifiers in your presentation. What the public gets is the idea that Porwancher has proven beyond the shadow of a doubt that Alexander Hamilton was raised Jewish. Or he thinks he has. Jonathan D. Sarna, the top authority on Jewish-American history, found Porwancher's book convincing. But convincing of what? That Hamilton was raised Jewish, or only that he may or may not have been raised Jewish?

(Sarna is the author of *AMERICAN JUDAISM: A HISTORY*, Yale U. Press, 2005. He teaches at Brandeis.)

Some more solid and less Schroedingeresque facts about Hamilton came out in the talk. Porwancher (pronounced POR-wahn-cher) went to Copenhagen and learned enough Danish to translate the relevant portions of some documents. Neither Johan Lavien nor any other Jew on St. Croix was identified in official documents as Jewish. But they were not identified as Christian either.

Peter Lavien, Alexander's half-brother, was not baptized at birth.

Ron Chernow writes that Alexander had a Jewish tutor, but he did not. He went to a Jewish school – and Jewish schools, as religious and not civil institutions, do not admit non-Jewish students.

Rachel was not buried in a Christian cemetery, but on a relative's estate. Historians quote other historians that a Christian clergyman officiated at Rachel's funeral, but there is absolutely no evidence for it. Porwancher warns that this is how widespread myths get started: historians quoting other historians and not taking the time to check the primary sources.

It is no surprise to Porwancher that historians have ignored Hamilton's probable Jewish origins for two hundred years. After all, they ignored Jefferson's concubinage of Sally Hemings for just as long. And speaking of TJ, someone has found a tiny fraction of Sephardic DNA in the third President. That puts him ahead of Hamilton if you are looking for Jewish blood.

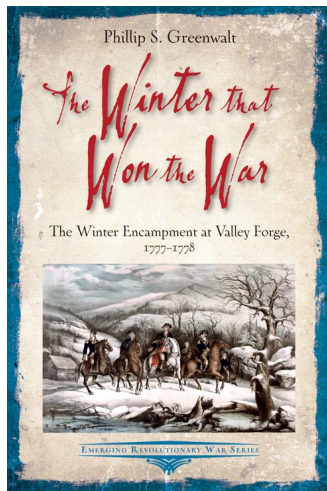
Hamilton was silent all his life about his origins, even to his own children.

General Washington deserves enormous credit for the famous Touro Synagogue letter. He was the first national leader in the history of the world to go on record championing Jewish civil rights.

Porwancher said that the Hamilton musical was great. He has written a historical defense of the musical. A rap battle in the Cabinet shows that this is just a musical and not a treatise on history, but Lin-Manuel Miranda was being a good historian in finding answers in Hamilton's childhood to the question of where he got some of his policies in adulthood.

## BOOKS BOOKS BOOKS

At the October Round Table, member Victor Miranda reviewed Phillip S. Greenwalt's **THE WINTER THAT WON THE WAR: THE WINTER ENCAMPMENT AT VALLEY FORGE, 1777-1778**. This book is one of a series called "The Emerging Revolutionary War Series." Published June, 2021 by Savas Beatie.



The book has 167 pages and many pictures and maps. It gives a self-guided tour of the storied encampment. Vic finds it better for the casual reader than for the expert.

Under the Greenwalt book on the Amazon page is another tome called **REVOLUTIONARY MONSTERS: FIVE MEN WHO TURNED LIBERATION INTO TYRANNY**, by Donald T. Critchlow. It looked really interesting, but sadly, it turned about to be about Lenin, Mao, Castro, Mugabe and Khomeini, not about our Rev. I thought he might have found some dirt on Ethan Allen, who certainly had a cult of personality going in Vermont.

Keith Muchowski reviewed **THE LAST KING OF AMERICA: THE MISUNDERSTOOD REIGN OF GEORGE III**,



by Andrew Roberts, published by Viking in 2021. Keith finds this book to be a

great social and political history. Lynne asked Keith "If King George was so smart, how did he stumble into the Revolution and lose his thirteen American colonies? Keith replied that, according to Roberts, George had no choice. Parliament would not let him fail to go to war to keep his American subjects subjugated. So the debate still goes on, after two hundred years. Historians still have not reached consensus on whom to blame for the loss of the colonies, King George or Parliament.

Stacy Schiff was interviewed on the CBS Morning Show on October 15 about her new book, **THE REVOLUTIONARY SAMUEL ADAMS** (Little, Brown & Co., October 25, 2022). She said that the custom of calling him "Sam Adams" was started long after his lifetime by people trying to minimize his historical importance. So it's "Samuel" to you, if you please! He is more than just a brand of beer. Stacy Schiff is a professional

writer and mainly a biographer. Her 2005 book *A GREAT IMPROVISATION: FRANKLIN, FRANCE, AND THE BIRTH OF AMERICA*, won the George Washington Book Prize.

Peter Feinman, of the Institute of History, Archaeology and Education, sent out an interesting review, on November 14, of *NOAH'S CURSE: THE BIBLICAL JUSTIFICATION OF AMERICAN SLAVERY*, by Stephen R. Haynes.



Lynne offered, for review, *REBELS AT SEA: PRIVATEERING IN THE AMERICAN*

*REVOLUTION*, by Eric Jay Dolan, published by Liveright in May, 2022. Later, two more books became available for review: *LIBERTY IS SWEET: THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION*, by Woody Holton, and *THE SEWING GIRL'S TALE: A STORY OF CRIME AND CONSEQUENCES IN REVOLUTIONARY AMERICA*, by John Wood Sweet. The first tells of the “ordinary and underrepresented members of society.” The second deals with a true crime story in Revolutionary New York. The trial was said to have had a long-lasting effect on criminal law in the fledgling democracy.

PLEASE CONTACT LYNNE SAGINAW AT [lynneess@juno.com](mailto:lynneess@juno.com) AND VOLUNTEER TO REVIEW A BOOK. YOU GET TO KEEP THE BOOK!

## IN THE NEWS

Facebook Mistress Maria Dering reports that her Culper Spy Ring post attracted 1,510 views in the first week. Two hundred eighty of those viewers clicked into the photo to read more. And some viewers shared the piece with other Rev groups, spreading the name and fame of the ARRT-New York! One new member has been the result so far. Maria checks the Facebook page every day and reports that we have had no spam or other unwanted posts. Good job, Maria!

Secret Agent Andrea Meyer sends, by carrier pigeon, intelligence that the East Hampton library has the Townsend account books and related items fully digitized and transcribed on their website, where they prove a popular subject. Robert Townsend was a spy for the Culper Ring. He lived in New York City during the occupation. He was required, as a Loyalist militiaman, to stand guard at the Commander-in-Chief's residence, Number 1 Broadway, spying all the while for General Washington.



Robert Townsend

Christian Di Spigna, who addressed the Round Table on Dr. Joseph Warren in February 2019, can be seen in a trailer for a new documentary on Dr. Warren, produced by the Dr. Joseph Warren Foundation. Coming in 2025. Seek and ye shall find, through Google, along with other videos on Warren.

Belen Negron passed along a September 6 preview, by Jennifer Schuessler, *New York Times*, of the Broadway revival of “1776,” which opened October 6. It is being re-written as a play within a play: female, non-

binary, and non-white actors are seen meeting onstage to produce a production of “1776.”

Michael Wolf advises us of an entry on Wikipedia on an unknown heroine of the Rev: Elizabeth Burgin (before 1760-after 1790) took food to the American POWs on the infamous prison ships in Wallabout Bay in the East River, and helped over 200 of them escape. Wikipedia provides a link to an article by an historian seeking to find out how she did that.

British military historian Christopher Duffy has died. Born 1936. Taught at Sandhurst. Author of twenty books. Expert on 18<sup>th</sup> century European warfare. Not particularly the Rev War, but he wrote about the Prussians and Russians and Austrians, and about the Seven Years’ War, of which our “French and Indian War” was one theater. So if you want to know where Baron de Steuben was coming from, Duffy could tell you about Steuben’s old boss, Frederick the Great of Prussia. And you could learn something from Duffy about the uprising of Bonnie Prince Charlie in 1745. A lot of Scots fled to these shores as a result of losing that war. That loss helped put them and their sons in a revolutionary mood thirty years later.

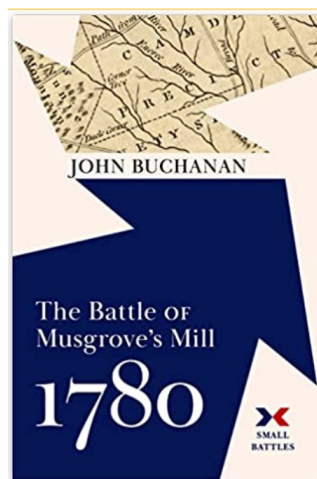
Someone in a position to know tells us that our New York Round Table newsletter, the *Broadside*, is better, in content and appearance, than the newsletter of the DC Round Table, or any other he has seen. Thank you!

Lynne Saginaw suggested last December that we all be on the lookout for Rev-themed Christmas gifts, like the novel JOHNNY TREMAIN, 1943, by Esther Forbes. A good

present for the Young Adult reader. Maybe you can find a DVD of the Disney movie version.

## DECEMBER SPEAKER

Jack Buchanan will speak December 6 about his latest book, THE BATTLE OF MUSGROVE’S MILL, 1780. Out just a few days ago. His talk will be called “Picked Men Well Mounted.” This was a case of



Rebel militia from the Carolinas and Georgia defending a ridge against twice their number of Loyalist militia and Provincial Regulars. This American victory was not a huge or famous battle, but if the Rebels had lost, it would

have discouraged the back-country independence movement and made it harder to gather sufficient troops for the soon-to-be-fought Battle of Kings Mountain, which proved the turning point in the Southern Campaign.

John Buchanan has been a Round Table and Board member for many years. He was the temporary Editor of this publication in the months following the death of Thomas Fleming in 2017. He is a native of Glens Falls, New York. He retired in 1993 from a career on the staff of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where he became Chief Registrar and Archivist. He has written short stories and many books on the Rev War. The University of Virginia Press called Jack’s

THE ROAD TO GUILFORD COURTHOUSE "... one of the most acclaimed military histories of the Revolutionary War ever written."

## DEADLINE

Midnight, Tuesday, January 17 will be the deadline for submissions to the February *Broadside*, which should reach you about Tuesday, January 31, a week before the February meeting, on Tuesday, February 7, which we hope will be an actual meeting and not just another Zoom.

The *Broadside* needs pieces such as reports on any Rev sites you visited on your summer vacation, any Rev cannonballs or other relics discovered and reported in the papers, grizzly bear or rattlesnake recipes, recently discovered love letters between Sir William Howe and Mrs. Loring, or news of any books or research on the Rev in the offing.

## AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

We are still in need of a new Treasurer for the Round Table. Are you good with figures? Please reply to the Editor, Fred Cookinham, at [fcookinham@juno.com](mailto:fcookinham@juno.com). The Treasurer, while we are still Zooming, need only keep the checking account and mail the honorarium to the speaker. When we resume our dinners, the Treasurer will also collect funds at meetings, such as book auction

payments and dues, pay the restaurant, fill out one uncomplicated NYS tax form every June, and report on finances to the Board. Other duties could be shared among more than one person: arrange the audio/visual set-up, arrange a hotel for out-of-town speakers, and liaison with the restaurant. (Jon Carriel has volunteered to Zoom-talk any volunteers through the process.)

The December meeting will be by Zoom. *Alas!* But maybe the last. There is still hope for a live dinner in February.

So we will Zoom in at 7:30, Tuesday, December 6. As always, the Zoom link will be in the same emailing that contains the link to the *Broadside*.

Yr obdt svt,  
Dr. David W. Jacobs