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Rise & Shine
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From the President General

There are history buffs, and then there are re-enactors. Obsessive about getting every historic detail just right, these dedicated men and women devote much of their own time and resources to re-creating important events in our nation’s history. Whether it’s a Revolutionary War skirmish or a War of 1812 battle, our cover story subjects serve as wonderful examples of how rewarding this hobby can be. Coincidentally, our DAR Magazine National Chairman, Pamela Marshall, and her family have been dedicated Civil War re-enactors for 15 years. “Our oldest sons took this hobby to a new level and became U.S. Army artillery officers,” she says. “One served in Afghanistan and the other in Iraq.”

Ms. Marshall’s sons are two of the military service members we salute this Veterans Day for sacrificing so much for the cause of liberty. That’s why this issue features a salute to four DAR members—Kathleen Henderson, Jill Knappenberger, Phyllis Provost McNeil and Marjorie Mosier—whose stories of service to country are inspiring.

Although he is one of our better known Our Patriot subjects, General Nathanael Greene’s biography holds some surprises. It was his ability to lead, strategize and hold troops together amid desperate circumstances—his dogged persistence to “rise and fight again”—that ultimately helped win the American struggle for liberty.

As Greene’s troops were fighting for liberation from Great Britain, Founding Father George Mason was crafting a definition of what this ideal of freedom would mean for a young nation. Author of the Virginia Declaration of Rights, a bedrock document calling for religious tolerance and freedom of the press, Mason was an influential voice in the formative stages of our democracy. We explore his home, Gunston Hall, the Georgian-style house he built in the late 1750s on the Potomac River. Like the man, his home is a hidden treasure worth discovering.

As heating our homes becomes a top priority, we explore the genesis of cast iron stoves. Despite their advantages over fireplaces in fuel economy and basic comfort, it took decades for Americans to forsake open hearths and warm up to closed stoves. More than two centuries later, however, the cast iron stove invokes a simpler time marked by family closeness and hearty food.

Are you a pet lover? If so, you’ll enjoy our feature on the pets of early Americans. Although Europeans arrived in the New World viewing animals as simply necessary for survival, it wasn’t long before colonists’ relationships with their pets grew more affectionate. By the mid-1700s, many Americans began adopting some barn animals and work dogs as favorites, even putting leashes on wild animals, and the idea of animals as companions took hold.

Merry Ann T. Wright

Merry Ann T. Wright
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Today’s Daughters

Celebrating

Women Who Served

An American Red Cross volunteer caught in the crossfire during World War II. An eye surgeon who operated on an enemy combatant in Afghanistan. A U.S. Marine officer serving in Africa and Iraq. A U.S. naval officer and CIA agent who briefed presidents. Meet four Daughters who have served their country as volunteers or members of the U.S. armed forces. This Veterans Day, honor their heroism and discover what inspired them to serve.

By LENA ANTHONY

Balancing Military And Civilian Careers

Kathleen Henderson
U.S. MARINE CORPS

A member of the first class at the U.S. Naval Academy that included women, Kathleen Henderson says the idea of serving her country greatly appealed to her. “I was attracted to that challenge,” she says. “I liked the idea that I was making a contribution with my life.”

Following graduation in 1980, Ms. Henderson served in the U.S. Marine Corps as an internal review officer for six-and-a-half years in New Orleans and then in Okinawa, Japan. After she was relieved of active duty, she went to law school at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala. She began her law career first as a clerk for a federal judge, then as an attorney for the U.S. Department of Labor. Ms. Henderson is now a partner at King & Ballow, a law firm based in Nashville, Tenn. She continued to serve in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves as a colonel, never expecting to be called for duty in Africa.

In 2005, she was deployed to Djibouti, a small country in the Horn of Africa. She was staff judge advocate for a combined joint task force that covered 12 countries, including Kenya, Seychelles, Yemen, Uganda and the Sudan. “Our mission was to provide humanitarian assistance and anti-terrorism support throughout the region,” she says.

She returned to Nashville in 2006, only to be activated again the next year—this time to Iraq. Among her roles, she served as a deposition officer, in which capacity she deposed civilian witnesses, many of whom were children, for the now infamous 2005 killings of 24 Iraqi men, women and children in Haditha, Iraq, by U.S. Marines. “That was a very challenging experience, but also very rewarding,” she says.

Now retired from the military, Ms. Henderson admits that balancing a military career with a civilian one is a challenge. “It’s a sacrifice to your professional career,” she says. “But I feel like there are many benefits, too. I’m physically fit, and the military definitely gave me a sense of perspective on what’s important in life.”

Today, Ms. Henderson, a member of the General Francis Nash Chapter, Nashville, Tenn., focuses most of her energy on building her law practice. She relaxes by exercising, reading and painting with watercolors. “I love to paint scenes from my travels,” she says. “It makes you observant and appreciative of things you otherwise would overlook.”

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Not many women can say they witnessed the Battle of the Bulge—the bloody World War II battle that took the lives of 19,000 American men. But then again, not many women are like Jill Pitts Knappenberger, who can vividly recall her experience as an American Red Cross volunteer in the winter of 1944.

Mrs. Knappenberger was 24 years old when she volunteered for the American Red Cross. The country was in the midst of World War II, and she wanted to serve. “One of my brothers was in the Army and another was in the Navy, and all of my friends were doing something for the service,” she recalls.

She volunteered to operate a Red Cross Clubmobile—a service on wheels that brought good cheer, hot coffee, fresh donuts and other supplies to the combat servicemen. Also on board the Clubmobile were hometown newspapers and a Victrola with loud speakers.

“General Eisenhower, who requested the Clubmobile service, said, ‘There’s nothing worse than a homesick GI,’ ” Mrs. Knappenberger says. “We were there to boost morale. The job was so fulfilling. Our soldiers were always excited to see an American gal.”

Her first post was in Glatton, England, the home of the largest B-17 base in England. “When the missions came back from the front lines, we served the flight crews first thing,” Mrs. Knappenberger recalls. “I think that made them more relaxed for the post-mission interrogations.”

In 1944, Mrs. Knappenberger volunteered to drive the Clubmobile on the Continent, which is how she ended up in the middle of the Battle of the Bulge. She and her crew—two other Clubmobile operators and now lifelong friends—arrived in Saint Vith, Belgium, the day the battle began. “The town was on the very edge of Belgium,” she says. “I could look out the window and see Germany.”

It didn’t take long for them to realize they were in trouble. “They were shelling that area, had cut communication lines and there was nothing coming in or going out,” she says. “And here we were—three American girls in a Clubmobile cut off and completely surrounded.” What’s worse, Mrs. Knappenberger had just received word that her twin brother had been killed in battle that morning. She considers it “a miraculous set of circumstances” that she had been able to see him a few days earlier when he had just arrived on the Continent.

After being trapped for seven days in Saint Vith, the women finally got out. “We survived, but it was terrifying.”

Her experience in battle and her personal tragedy didn’t deter Mrs. Knappenberger, who went back to work on the Clubmobile almost immediately. For the duration of the war, she drove it throughout France, Belgium and Germany. She crossed the Germans’ Siegfried Line twice, flew in B-17s and even toured an old salt mine where the Nazis had stockpiled stolen art. She also saw firsthand the horrors of the Buchenwald concentration camp. “We were there the day after it was taken by the Americans and saw the bodies, the gas rooms and the piles of bones,” she recalls. “It was horrific.

You just couldn’t believe one human being could treat another that way.”

Mrs. Knappenberger earned five battle stars for her European Theater Operations ribbon. After the war, she went back to school to finish her degree at the University of Illinois and then married her late husband, Gaillard. They called Champaign, Ill., home, but spent much of their free time traveling the world. Mrs. Knappenberger has been to all 50 states and 98 countries. “We liked every place we’d been, but it was always great to come back home to the USA,” says this member of the Alliance Chapter, Urbana-Champaign, Ill.
Phyllis Provost McNeil didn’t grow up wanting to join the Navy. Instead, she joined as a student at the University of Notre Dame after the Navy opened up the Naval Reserve Officer’s Training Corps to women. “I decided to look into it and was impressed by the camaraderie and the opportunity to travel,” says Mrs. McNeil, a member of the Lady Fenwick Chapter, Cheshire, Conn. “My father was thrilled by my intent to join the Navy, but my mother was adamantly opposed.”

After graduating with a degree in government and international relations in 1977, Mrs. McNeil served two tours of active duty during the height of the Cold War. Her first post was in London, where she handled visiting VIPs and protocol matters for the four-star admiral who oversaw naval operations in Europe.

Following that post, which earned her a Navy Achievement Medal, Mrs. McNeil applied for the Navy Judge Advocate General program, but she was not selected. “A superior told me, ‘If they pick a woman this year, you’re going,’ because I had the best credentials,” she recalls. “Unfortunately, they had just picked a woman the year before and didn’t pick one that year. That sounds so strange to say today, but it was the reality then.”

Undeterred, she returned to Notre Dame for law school and began her legal career in private practice in 1983. But after a few years, Mrs. McNeil decided to seek an opportunity with the CIA, where she worked for almost a decade. As a litigation attorney, she handled many Iran-Contra investigations. She also wrote the brief for a case that went to the Supreme Court and often drafted bills for Congress. As an analyst, Mrs. McNeil helped brief presidents and policymakers. She recalls that “President Reagan loved video presentations, because he was so used to film, but President H.W. Bush liked reading, so we’d write him papers.”

After leaving the CIA, Mrs. McNeil was tapped in 1995 for a presidential commission exploring the reorganization of the U.S. intelligence community following the Cold War. While on the commission, she wrote the first unclassified government-sanctioned history of the U.S. intelligence activities. Today the paper is used in college textbooks across the country.

Face-to-Face With The Enemy

Dr. Marjorie Mosier
U.S. ARMY RESERVE

When Dr. Marjorie Mosier and her husband, David, also a doctor, joined the U.S. Army in 1983, they were looking for a break from academic medicine. They both worked at the University of California-Irvine—she in surgical ophthalmology, he in pediatrics—and were burned out. “We had grown tired of the politics,” explains Dr. Mosier.

Joining the Army also fit in with Dr. Mosier’s philosophy on service to country: “I had always felt strongly that young people ought to devote some period of time in their life to their country,” says the member of Katuku Chapter, Tustin, Calif. “And I had a strong, positive feeling for the life this country gave me, and I wanted to pay that back.”

During the Gulf War, Dr. Mosier and her husband were both based at Fort Ord in Monterey, Calif., for eight months. She oversaw the EENT (ear, eyes, nose and throat) clinic, and he was a staff pediatrician.

“It was a delightful experience, both personally and professionally,” Dr. Mosier says. “We look back on that time with pleasure.”

Later, Dr. Mosier would command a team of Army eye experts that could be rapidly deployed on short notice. She eventually left the university and opened her own practice in Irvine in 2002. That same year—just a few months before she would have retired from the Army—she was deployed to Kuwait. “I had been there a few days, and I was sick with dysentery, when they came and told me, ‘You’ll be leaving for Afghanistan in a few hours.’”

She didn’t know why she was being sent, but when she arrived in Afghanistan she encountered an enemy combatant in desperate need of emergency eye surgery. The combatant—then a 15-year-old boy—had shrapnel lodged in both eyes after allegedly throwing a grenade that killed an American medic. She performed the surgery and stayed in Afghanistan for four days to monitor her patient, now detained at Guantanamo Bay awaiting trial. Dr. Mosier has been to Guantanamo Bay twice in the past year to testify as a witness. The proceedings are still ongoing.
WITH NO ELECTRIC BLANKETS or heating pads to warm up cold beds during 18th-century winter nights, comfort was often provided by a bed warmer. At the end of its long handle, the warmer held a metal pan filled with hot coals and fitted with a lid. The warmer was placed underneath bed coverings.

The DAR Museum’s example was probably made in the Netherlands. Both practical and beautiful, it features a brass lid with decorative piercing and small etched images. At the bottom of the central design, a vase is filled and surrounded by elaborate scrolled foliage. See if you can find the tiny etched duck.
Insurance can replace material possessions, but photos often lie unprotected when a disaster strikes. OPR steps into the gap to retrieve those vital parts of a family’s history. Founded in January 2006 in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, OPR has since grown into a volunteer network of more than 2,000 professional photo-journalists and amateur digital photographers, graphic designers and image restoration artists from all 50 states and 49 other countries. Volunteers have restored more than 6,000 damaged photos for victims of hurricanes, floods, wildfires and other disasters.

“We’ve had an unbelievable outpouring of support from volunteers who have joined our cause from all over the world,” says Dave Ellis, co-founder of OPR. “What started out as two people trying to make a small difference has turned into a global effort that has helped more people than we ever thought possible.”

For more information, visit www.operationphotorescue.org.

Restoring Photos, Replacing Memories

“Insurance doesn’t replace memories. But we do.”

That’s the motto of Operation Photo Rescue (OPR), a nonprofit organization offering free restoration of photos damaged by house fires and natural disasters. The organization recently gathered a team of volunteers in Nashville, Tenn., to digitally copy family photos damaged during the devastating May floods.

The OPR team set up operations at Belmont University recently and invited Nashville residents with flood-damaged photos to bring in up to 20 images to be restored. Images that could be repaired were digitally copied and later restored, printed and mailed back to their owners at no cost.

Knife River Indian Villages

Forging an Understanding of Plains American Indians

To celebrate National American Indian Heritage Month this November, consider learning more about our nation’s historic sites that commemorate the rich culture of America’s indigenous people. One such site is the Knife River Indian Villages in North Dakota, established in 1974 to preserve archeological remains that give clues about the history of the Plains Indians. As one of the oldest inhabited sites in North America, this area attracted the nomadic Hidatsa and Mandan hunters at least 11,000 years ago with its coveted Knife River flint, which they traded with other tribes for supplies to build this stable community of villages. In 1804, this site served as the meeting place where Lewis and Clark obtained the services of Sacagawea during their trail-blazing journey. The Knife River Villages’ population flourished until 1837, when a smallpox outbreak caused survivors to migrate north.

Today, visible remains of earth-lodge dwellings that were once large enough to hold 20 families dot the three villages where the Knife River and the Missouri River meet. A diverse array of vegetation and wildlife can be found at this national historic site, including many prairie grasses, white-tailed deer, coyotes and a variety of birds. Exhibits tell more about the lives of the area’s first inhabitants, covering their work, gender roles and spiritual knowledge.

For more information, visit www.nps.gov/knri/index.htm.
... To Celebrate Local Craft and Connection

The recently opened Mississippi Craft Center showcases the work of more than 400 talented artisans who create folk, traditional and contemporary crafts. Home to the Craftsmen’s Guild of Mississippi, an organization of professional artisans formed in 1973, the center promotes the work of exceptional craftsmen from 19 states. The 20,000-square-foot facility has an art gallery, museum, educational center and demonstration studios exhibiting media ranging from quilts and blown glass to turned wood, fine jewelry, woven baskets and sculpture.

The guild’s artists—such as a metal worker who creates art from cotton machine parts in the Delta—focus on creating art connected to the distinctive natural resources of Mississippi. This compelling point of view has generated interest in the center from world travelers and regional visitors alike. The center was recently named the Mississippi Travel Attraction of the Year and was recognized by the Smithsonian Institute.

Some of the notable artisans include the Pearl River Glass Studio, one of the nation’s top stained-glass studios, and the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians who demonstrate weaving techniques and sell their sought-after baskets at the center. A collection of historical Choctaw baskets is on display there. The tribe also hosts an annual festival.

Demonstrations by master artisans take place on the grounds most weekends, and classes are taught weekly. One of the best times to visit is during the first weekend in December for the award-winning Chimneyville Crafts Festival, one of the largest showings of fine crafts in the Southeast.

The center is open seven days a week and is located in Ridgeland, Miss., just off the Natchez Trace Parkway. Visit http://mscrafts.org for more details.

... To Retrace Lewis’ Last Days

The National Park Service will soon complete a rehabilitation of the Meriwether Lewis Park and Monument on the Natchez Trace Parkway near Hohenwald, Tenn. This multimillion dollar project includes a variety of improvements designed to enhance visitor education and access to the site that commemorates the life of one of America’s greatest explorers.

Lewis died and is buried at the site along the Natchez Trace, a frontier road through the wilderness linking Nashville to Natchez, Miss.

The improvements to the site will be completed by Spring 2011 using $3.2 million in federal stimulus funds. The work includes a new education trail, exhibits, improved facilities and the rehabilitation of an interpretive cabin resembling the Grinder House, where Lewis stayed at the time of his mysterious death on October 11, 1809.

Visitors will be able to retrace Lewis’ steps from that fateful night as they examine the facts that have left historians divided over the cause of Lewis’ death at age 35. Most historians believe circumstances point to a self-inflicted gunshot wound. Others believe he was assassinated for political reasons, and some descendants are lobbying to exhume Lewis’ body for examination.

In addition to the grave site and recreated cabin, a monument to Lewis currently occupies the site. Erected in 1848, the monument’s inscription includes the famous Thomas Jefferson quote honoring Lewis’s “undaunted courage” as well as one recognizing his tragically short life, “I died before my time, but thou O great and good Republic, live out my years while you live out your own.”

To visit the Meriwether Lewis Historic Site, travel to milepost 385.9 on the Natchez Trace Parkway. For more information, go to www.nps.gov/natr.

Interest in recognizing the Natchez Trace’s historical sites started when the Mississippi State Society DAR erected granite markers along the Old Trace. The first marker went up in Natchez in 1909. The work continued as DAR groups in Alabama and Tennessee became involved.

— Matt Ward
Stories of family scandal captivate readers eager for a glimpse of others’ flawed lives. A shocking patricide and the fact that the family involved is that of Ellen Hardin Walworth, one of the four founders of the DAR and the first editor of the National Society’s magazine, ensure that Geoffrey O’Brien’s *The Fall of the House of Walworth: A Tale of Madness and Murder in Gilded Age America* (Henry Holt and Company, 2010) contains extra intrigue.

Patriarch Reuben Hyde Walworth, the last chancellor of New York, established a family home for his first wife, Maria, and their five children at Pine Grove, later known as the Walworth Mansion, in Saratoga Springs, N.Y. Sons Clarence and Mansfield became a Catholic priest and an author of mediocre novels, respectively, to their father’s dismay. The 1840s brought more disappointment, as the chancellor endured a failed Supreme Court bid, the abolition of the court of chancy, a lost gubernatorial campaign and his wife’s death. As society rapidly changed around him, he became, according to O’Brien, “an emblem of a waning era.” In 1851, he married Sarah Hardin, a young Kentucky widow with three children. Sarah’s daughter Ellen married Mansfield the next year, initiating a disastrous sequence of events.

Early in the marriage, Mansfield established a pattern of habitual physical abuse that escalated over time, leading Ellen and their children to seek refuge frequently in Kentucky. Repeated reconciliation attempts failed, and, after a particularly violent attack by Mansfield in 1871 when she was pregnant with their eighth child, Ellen decided to divorce him. At a time when domestic violence was rarely discussed, the Walworth family and many Saratoga Springs residents supported Ellen’s choice.

But Mansfield refused to retreat quietly. He barraged Ellen with deranged, threatening letters, which their oldest son, Frank, intercepted. Distressed over his father’s behavior, Frank traveled to New York City on June 2, 1873, to entreat Mansfield to end his harassment. During their brief encounter at Frank’s hotel the next morning, Frank shot his father four times. Ellen testified on behalf of her son, defending Frank for killing Mansfield to protect her. Nevertheless, he was convicted and incarcerated. Ellen continually campaigned for Frank’s release. In 1877, Governor Lucius Robinson pardoned Frank on grounds that his conviction was “legally proper but morally unjust,” O’Brien writes. Frank went on to marry and have a daughter before dying in 1886 of acute bronchitis.

Once free of her marriage, Ellen established herself as an independent woman. She devoted herself to work, relishing the intellectual awakening that followed her stifling marriage. To support her family, Ellen converted Pine Grove into a well-regarded boarding school named Walworth Academy. Later, she earned a law degree and became one of the first women elected to the Saratoga board of education. She also published a book, *Saratoga*, about her ancestor’s Revolutionary service. She worked for years to preserve the battlefield and construct a monument at the site. And in 1890, along with three other women, she founded the Daughters of the American Revolution.

In her commitment to patriotic service, Ellen served as director of the Women’s National War Relief Association, formed during the Spanish-American War to provide comfort to military servicemen. At Camp Wikoff on Long Island, Ellen’s youngest daughter Reubena contributed by nursing soldiers returning from Cuba. She died on October 18, 1898, after contracting typhoid from a patient. The Saratoga DAR Chapter, Saratoga Springs, N.Y., of which Reubena was a member, and the Mary Washington Colonial Chapter, New York, N.Y., erected a monument in Reubena’s honor.

Ellen’s story supplies context for the life of a woman whose legacy would be remarkable under any circumstances but, considering what she overcame in order to forge that legacy, is all the more astounding.

—Courtney Peter
Discover the meanings behind some of the DAR chapters’ names.

In 1845, the namesake of Lewis Kingman Chapter, Kingman, Ariz., was born in Massachusetts. As a teen he studied civil engineering at the Boston firm Shedd & Edison. After working in the Pennsylvania oil fields in the 1860s, Kingman turned to the railroad industry, serving the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad, the Santa Fe Railroad and the Mexican Central Railway. He helped build several thousand miles of railway lines during a long and distinguished career marked by ambition and outstanding leadership ability. While working for the Santa Fe Railroad in the late 1870s, Kingman led his crew through deserts and over mountains in search of the shortest route to the Pacific Ocean, finally deciding to cross the Colorado River near Needles, Calif. The route brought the group through what became the town of Kingman.

Peter Puget Chapter, Edmonds, Wash., chose its name in honor of Lieutenant Peter Puget, an officer on board the HMS Discovery, which was commanded by Captain George Vancouver. In May 1792, during a four-year voyage that visited points around the world, the ship sailed through the Strait of Juan de Fuca to discover a sea in the forest. Puget was assigned to explore and survey the shorelines of this inland sea, which Vancouver subsequently named Puget Sound to commemorate the lieutenant’s dedication and outstanding work. Puget rose to the rank of rear admiral before his death in 1822.

Shortly after Peter Puget Chapter was organized in April 1964, Puget’s burial site was discovered in a small country churchyard in Woolley, a suburb of Bath, England.

The Samuel Phoenix Chapter, Delavan, Wis., is named for a prominent early Delavan citizen, Colonel Samuel Faulkner Phoenix. Born in Danville, N.Y., Phoenix was raised by his mother and stepfather, Joshua Bartlett, after his father died when he was 2 years old. Phoenix married Sarah Kelsey in Smyrna, N.Y., in October 1822 and became a colonel in the New York Infantry later in the decade. He ran a tannery business in Danville with his brother, William Phoenix, before leaving for Chicago in search of the ideal site at which to establish a community based on temperance, sobriety and faith. The search ended in the Delavan area, where Phoenix arrived in the summer of 1836. He and William constructed the town’s first grist mill three years later.

Does your chapter name have an unusual story behind it?
E-mail a description to americanspirit@dar.org.
Celebrating Sister Suffragists

In congratulating Ransom Fleming for the excellent article, “Happy 90th Birthday 19th Amendment” in the July/August issue, I cannot help but note the absence of mention of Jeannette Rankin (1880–1973), who was a spearhead in the suffrage movement. Rankin was a pacifist, born in Montana, who made social work and women’s right to vote her life’s mission.

The first woman to serve in Congress (1917–1919), Rankin no doubt gave many Congressmen fits as she strove to move legislation to benefit women. She voted against the first World War and cast the only vote against the second. As difficult as it is for most of us to understand, she unwaveringly stuck to her guns (by voting against them) and to her convictions.

But Rankin’s deepest conviction was that of a suffragist, and make no mistake about it, she was a force to be reckoned with!

Eleanor Mulligan, Regent
Samuel Chase Chapter, Salisbury, Md.

I became a member of the DAR because I love genealogy and early American history. Women’s roles in history have always fascinated me, so I was thrilled when I became a member of the board of trustees of the Alice Paul Institute, a nonprofit organization based in Mount Laurel, N.J.

Alice Paul was the suffragist who organized pickets of Woodrow Wilson’s White House to gain attention for women’s suffrage. She started the National Woman’s Party, headquartered at the Sewall-Belmont House in Washington, D.C., and went on to draft the Equal Rights Amendment and then work for inclusion of sexual discrimination in Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

I was impressed by her lifelong dedication to women’s equality and felt a kinship with her Colonial roots in New Jersey. It was a thrill to read in the latest issue of American Spirit that Alice Paul was a Daughter herself! It is a pleasure and an inspiration to be a trustee of an organization that preserves the legacy of a bold Daughter and her family home, Paulsdale, one of the few National Historic Landmarks related to women.

Kimberly Hess
Princeton Chapter, Princeton, N.J.

Honoring a Hungarian Hero

Thank you so much for the “Michael Kovats: Hussar Hero” article in the July/August issue. My mother was Hungarian and my father’s ancestry enabled me to enter the DAR with five ancestors (so far) who participated in the American Revolution. I thought I was knowledgeable about American history, but never had any idea that there were Hungarian volunteers. Keep up the great job with American Spirit magazine!

Anita Palmer
Charles DiBreall Chapter, Albuquerque, N.M.

Many thanks for the wonderful “Hussar Hero” article. I read it to my husband, a Hungarian freedom fighter who came to the United States in 1956. It brought tears to his eyes to learn of this Hungarian patriot.

Congratulations on your Our Patriots series and please keep all little-known stories coming!

Marilyn A. Paulis
Honorary Connecticut State Regent
Freelove Baldwin Stow Chapter, Milford, Conn.

A Prison Ship Survivor

Your article on Patriot POWs (May/June 2010) struck such a chord with me. My Revolutionary War patriot, Peter Cockrell, was captured by the British during the Battle of Charleston and held on a British prison ship in England for more than three years. His 1818 pension request notes how difficult it was to get back to America after the war ended. I can only imagine how he was able to stay alive those many months and how many of our patriots were not able to survive such conditions. Thank you for writing about a topic that is rarely discussed.

Linda Mansur
Sarah Polk Chapter, Nashville, Tenn.
American Foundations

Doug StanWiens uses the study of architecture as a backdrop to history.

By MEGAN PACELLA | Photography by JOE JASZEWSKI

One way to visualize American history is to study our surrounding architecture. That’s why American history teacher Doug StanWiens uses architecture as the underpinning of many of his lessons for Advanced Placement history students at Boise High School in Boise, Idaho.

“Architecture is the art that we live in,” StanWiens says. “It shows us how people’s lives change over time and how styles change to reflect who we are in history at a given moment.”

No matter which period in history StanWiens is teaching, he turns to architecture first. At the beginning of the school year, when he teaches a Colonial unit, he starts with photos of Puritan houses, and then leads into more complicated architecture, like Georgian-style homes and Neoclassical structures. The evolution of architecture, he says, is symbolic of the complications that arose and the way the colonists changed as they founded our nation.

“Ultimately, I get to Jefferson’s work at the University of Virginia campus or Monticello to show the Neoclassical style,” he says. “That becomes important during the Revolution, because you see the colonists return to the styles of the past, because it supports their connection to history and their ideology.”

Six years ago, StanWiens launched the Boise Architecture Project (boisearchitecture.org) as a means for his students to study architecture and preserve history in their city. Every year, his students choose a structure they believe to be architecturally interesting and document that structure by taking photos, making presentations and writing a research report about its historical significance. The students post their pictures and research findings to the project’s Web site, which features architectural styles ranging from Colonial Revival to Italianate.

“Since the project is online, it has gained recognition for bringing new media into preservation and architecture,” StanWiens says. “That’s important because a lot of preservationists do great work that is stuck in the paper realm. Preservation efforts will last longer if they enter the technological realm and are open to all.”

The National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) took notice of the Boise Architecture Project and recognized StanWiens’ classroom as one of the featured classrooms in the nation for teaching preservation. Over the course of the past year, his students have posted to the Web site more than 50 articles about preservation issues in Boise.

Studying old buildings doesn’t seem like a practice most high school students would enjoy—but every year, StanWiens’ students invest a lot of energy into the preservation project.

“When I first introduce the project, they hate it,” he says. “But about a week in, they start loving the building they chose, and they start taking ownership of it. They say things like, ‘Look how awesome my building is!’”

The Boise Architecture Project has gained so much recognition that Preservation Idaho, a statewide preservation group, allows StanWiens to handpick one of his students to serve on its board every year.

“It’s really important to me that students get involved, because we can’t leave all of these preservation efforts up to the older generations,” he says. “If my students realize the importance of keeping history alive now, who knows what kind of great things they’ll do when they’re older?”

American Spirit • November/December 2010

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A recent biography focuses on a talented, brilliant immigrant who came to America to fight for independence.

**Defender of Freedom**

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Alex Storozynski’s biography *The Peasant Prince: Thaddeus Kosciuszko and the Age of Revolution* (St. Martin’s Press, 2009) often reads like a political thriller, as the author takes readers behind the scenes and into the swirling intrigue of ambitious men mounting a revolution. Kosciuszko, like his fellow Pole, Casimir Pulaski, and the Marquis de Lafayette, was one of those talented foreigners who came to America to contribute their talents to the fight for independence.

Storozynski’s tale ranges from Poland and czarist Russia to the Caribbean to America and back to Poland. The author does a magnificent job of tying seemingly disparate threads back into the fabric of the central narrative and giving the reader a much greater understanding of those complex times.

In Storozynski’s telling, Kosciuszko emerges as a romantic and gallant figure, possessed of a brilliant mind and also a much rarer quality—loyalty. Inspired by a Polish independence movement in his youth, Kosciuszko believed passionately in equality and liberty and devoted his life to fighting for them, both here in America and also in his native Poland.

Born on February 4, 1746, Kosciuszko studied at the Royal Knight School military academy in Warsaw and then in Paris, focusing on engineering and mathematics, critical skills for directing artillery. After wandering about Europe for a time, Kosciuszko sailed for America. He was shipwrecked off Martinique, but managed to get to shore, finally arriving in Philadelphia aboard a fishing boat.

After arriving in America, Kosciuszko quickly looked up Benjamin Franklin, introduced himself and said he wished to join the American cause. Lacking any references, he consented to a geometry examination and did well enough to convince Franklin to recommend him to Congress. Franklin also put him to work on the city’s defenses.

At that time, America had few military men trained in specialized fields such as engineering. However, Kosciuszko found that military leaders did not always follow the advice of their experts: Kosciuszko had advised General Arthur St. Clair to mount cannon on Mount Defiance overlooking Fort Ticonderoga in May of 1777. St. Clair decided not to and was forced to surrender the fort when the British hauled cannon to the summit, giving them command of the area.

Despite being rebuffed by his commander, Kosciuszko demonstrated great loyalty by testifying on St. Clair’s behalf at the general’s court-martial. His fidelity to officers and enlisted men alike were hallmarks of his character that made him one of the Army’s great leaders, Storozynski notes.

The experience at Ticonderoga was just a warm-up for Kosciuszko’s experience as chief engineer overseeing the fortification of West Point, N.Y., to prevent the British from taking control of the Hudson River.

During almost two years at the post, Kosciuszko would fend off repeated efforts to demote or remove him. But the real threat came from a totally unexpected direction: General Benedict Arnold was hatching his plan to deliver West Point to the British.

We know how that turned out. Kosciuszko continued to distinguish himself through the rest of the war.

Kosciuszko returned to Poland in 1784 and soon became embroiled in the effort to liberate it from Russia. When the Polish revolt ultimately failed, he left Europe and returned to America for a time. But his hope of freeing Poland remained strong, and Kosciuszko sailed for France in 1798 when Napoleon began subduing Europe. He hoped to persuade Napoleon to fight for Polish freedom, but again, his hopes were dashed.

One last battle for liberty remained, which would be fought from the grave. Kosciuszko died in 1817, leaving four wills. One of them instructed his friend Thomas Jefferson to use funds from the estate to free as many of the Founder’s slaves as possible, educate them and establish them as free men.

At first, there was enough money to free nearly all the slaves, but Jefferson never did so. Eventually, the courts let him step aside as executor and assigned the duty to others. In 1852, the U.S. Supreme Court declared Kosciuszko had died intestate. Most of the estate was consumed by lawsuits. We know how that turned out.

Though thwarted in his efforts to free Poland and spark the end of slavery in America, Kosciuszko became an icon of freedom on two continents. Storozynski’s book, which won the 2010 Fraunces Tavern Museum Book Award, reinvigorates the memory of this dashing and powerful figure.

—Bill Hudgins
Crafts

Mining the History of Punched Tin

BY ADRIA LENOIRE LAMBERT
Crafts

In doing so, he was engaging in a form of craftsmanship that reached its height in the early days of American independence: punching tin.

The craft of making household products out of tin reached the shores of England in the mid-1600s and gained popularity in America after the Revolutionary War. The items were made out of tinplate—sheets of iron rolled thin in a mill and dipped into molten tin, then fashioned into various utensils, containers and other household fixtures. Prior to American independence, the Iron Act of 1750 prohibited the Colonies from manufacturing any equipment used to roll sheet metal, thus protecting British industries. Without rolling mills or raw tin to work with, sheets of tinplate had to be imported from England, making tin products costly.

After the Revolutionary War, the tin industry began to gain momentum in the young nation. Though tin goods were already popular among the elite in the 1700s, both the discovery of tin ore in the United States and the development of tools for mass production in the 1800s made tin works as common as plastic is today. The tin shop became a community staple, and tinsmiths were considered among a region’s more prominent citizens.

Punched tin involved piercing the tinplate with sharp tools to form geometric patterns, words or images. While many tin products were decorated for ornamental purposes, the production of punched tin items developed out of necessity. Most commonly used for food storage and lighting, punched tin was often employed in the manufacture of pie safes—food pantries or cabinets used to store prepared goods such as breads and pies. The front of a pie safe was plated with sheets of punched tin or copper, with the rough side of the puncture facing outward, allowing air to circulate while denying pests access to the food.

Punched tin was also used in lanterns, in which the puncture holes served a similar purpose to those of the punched tin pie safes. The lantern holes were large enough to allow enough ventilation to sustain the flame but small enough to prevent the wind from extinguishing it. This design also kept debris, such as straw, out of the flame, helping to prevent barn fires.

Today, punched tin items are coveted by antique enthusiasts and used mainly for decorative purposes—adding accents to cabinetry, light fixtures, candleholders and other household pieces. A few professional tinsmiths still craft custom-made punched tin items for consumers. And many folks, like Grandpa Eugene, still take on the challenge of doing it themselves.

Adria Lenore Lambert is a freelance writer in Indianapolis.
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Portrait of Daniel Crommelin Verplanck (1762–1834), American politician and U.S. representative, at the age of nine with his pet squirrel. Oil on canvas by John Singleton Copley, 1771.
A Colonist’s best friend

Whether we have a soft spot for dogs, cats, birds or fish, one thing is certain: Americans love their pets. But before it became socially acceptable to let a dog or cat inside the house (and in some people’s cases, onto their beds), pet ownership looked entirely different. By Megan Pacella

Before European settlers came to North America, bringing along cats and dogs as workers and companions, indigenous people had already developed a long and complex history with animals. In pre-Colonial times, American Indians used animals as sources of everything from food to raw materials to sheer muscle power; but occasionally, they kept them as pets.

"Depending on the tribe, Native American dogs were sources of muscle power pulling travois and sleds, representatives of cosmic forces that were sometimes sacrificed in religious ceremonies, fellow hunters, livestock herders, sources of protein, playmates for children, and beloved companions," writes Katherine C. Grier in Pets in Colonial America: A History (University of North Carolina Press, 2006). "In many Native American groups, dogs occupied multiple and, to modern eyes, contradictory roles simultaneously."

In the pre-Colonial era, it was not uncommon for dogs to serve as children’s playthings before they were sacrificed in a religious ceremony. But as European settlers moved in, the simultaneous roles of animals as both pets and chattel slowly evolved.

From Work Animals to Pets

The practice of pet-keeping that we recognize today progressed from the 1600s, when Europeans arrived in the New World with the dogs, cats and domestic farm animals they needed to eke out an existence. Over the course of the following century, the colonists’ relationships with their pets slowly grew more affectionate, and by the mid-1700s, many Americans began adopting some barn animals and work dogs as favorites.

The diary kept by Philadelphia resident Elizabeth Sandwith Drinker in the mid- to late 18th century illustrates the tender relationship some colonists had with their work animals. Drinker recorded that when her family fled Philadelphia to escape the yellow fever epidemic in 1797, their cat, Puss, accompanied them in a basket, even though most felines had been left behind.

Artifacts like birdcages, brass dog collars and paintings from the 18th century give us a good idea of the various pets kept by Colonial Americans. Middle-class families like the Drinkers kept smaller pets such as squirrels, turtles, birds, fish, barn cats and dogs.

Even in the 18th century, dogs were the most documented pets in America. While most pet animals were...
confined to a specific economic class, dogs were found in many households. Americans’ love of canines can be traced back to the father of our country—George Washington had a particular affinity for pet dogs, and owned a large and varied population at his Mount Vernon estate. Today, Washington is credited with owning one of the original kennels of American foxhounds.

In 1787, Washington imported seven French hounds through his good friend the Marquis de Lafayette. Over the years, he kept meticulous records of these dogs’ breeding and offspring. According to Grier, Washington’s pack of hunting dogs doubled as a status symbol because they were used for the gentlemanly pursuit of foxhunting. Additionally, the dalmatians that frequently accompanied Washington’s carriage were a mark of his high economic and political status. However, not all of Washington’s dogs were pets—many of the dogs at Mount Vernon were work dogs.

“There is evidence of other working dogs at Mount Vernon,” Grier writes. “Two ‘tarriers’ used to catch mice and rats on the estate, and at least one ‘Shepard’s dog.’ The mansion itself housed companion dogs including the ‘Little hound …’ Chloe and the small spaniels Pompey and Frish. Other dogs also ran on the plantation’s acreage.”

Washington’s slaves had dogs of their own, which served as companions, but they also hunted wild animals—and, on occasion, some of Washington’s own livestock—for their masters.

“The predations of the slave cur-dog population grew so extensive that the general … forbid new dogs from showing up in the quarters. However, it seems that campaigns to prevent slaves from keeping dogs were never successful,” Grier writes.

**Taming Wild Animals**

The desire for companionship with animals evolved further, and by the early 19th century, people had begun taming wild animals to turn them into pets. At this time, visitors to the Colonies would sometimes find deer wandering in and out of yards, wearing gold collars and colored handkerchiefs around their necks. Because deer were systematically overhunted in the northeastern part of the country, their rarity made them desirable as living lawn ornaments for well-to-do families.

In her book, Grier notes that, “in the 1820s, the du Pont family of Delaware had deer named Azore, Zelia, Hector, Zamor and Fanny.” Although the animals had their own house to live in, they were allowed to wander the estate. Sophie du Pont wrote that the deer felt so comfortable with humans that they sometimes explored populated areas like the front porch.

Squirrels were popular among adolescents, who led their pets through the streets on leashes, or allowed the small animals to perch atop their shoulders. Adults and children alike raided squirrel nests for their babies, and either kept them as pets or sold them in city markets.
Tinsmiths sold special cages for squirrels made from sturdy metal bars that were strong enough to keep squirrels’ sharp teeth from cutting through them.

In 1798, Drinker recorded that her son, William, “bought a flying squirrel in market, brought it home to please the children,” and added, “I should have been better pleased had it remained in the woods.”

Birds, another popular pet in the 19th century, could be considered the most favored indoor pet because they were easy and inexpensive to care for, and therefore owned by families of nearly every class and ethnicity. Although bird-keeping didn’t become popular in America until the 1800s, it was an old practice that was transported to the New World from Europe in the 17th century. Goldfinches, mockingbirds and cardinals were the most common caged birds in America, most likely because they were hardy and lived long lives when cared for properly.

It is known that Norborne, Baron de Botetourt, the royal governor of Virginia from 1768 to 1770, kept 28 red birds (probably cardinals) in cages in his home. But middle-class and lower-class families trapped wild birds as well. Sometimes the birds were sold in the markets, but often, at least one was kept as a family pet.

“That the colonists hunted [birds and squirrels] in the wild should come as no surprise,” writes Ben Miller in his essay “Wild’ Colonial American Pets.” “Americans had long evinced a fondness for the very things they came into conflict with—for instance, adopting the arts, games, styles and methods of the Native Americans—while battling them incessantly.”

**Pet-Keeping Today**

Fondness for our pets has become an integral part of American culture. According to a survey by the American Pet Products Association, nearly 62 percent of American households own at least one.

Humans’ evolving relationship with animals—moving them from work objects to beloved companions—is part of a larger history of the country. Grier asserts:

“Our history with animals, like American history generally, is a story rich with contradiction, complexity, violence, sorrow, cruelty, greed, gentleness, kindness, love and joy. Perhaps this history with pets ... offers one small path into thoughtful and historically grounded public consideration of what our relationships with animals should be like in the future. In relation to our lives with animals generally, however, there is much more history to be told.”

Megan Pacella’s article in the September/October issue provided hints for recording a family history.
Battle Ready
The World of Historic Re-enactors

BY SHARON McDONNELL
OPENING PHOTOGRAPHY BY JUSTIN HOFFMANN
There are history buffs. And then there are those who don’t stop at reading about history but yearn to relive it—those who crave an immersion into a long-ago era, relish the thrill of research and jump at the chance to time travel in period costume. These are historic battle re-enactors, those who enjoy the camaraderie of like-minded people who share their obsessive attention to detail and desire to carry on a living history.
Battle of New Orleans

“It’s the only way to learn history. Reading and watching TV or a movie doesn’t give the smell of black powder, the concept of how to maneuver those troops, or tell you what it was like with the cavalry charging down on you,” explains Tim Pickles, a British re-enactor who lives in the United States. He portrays General Edward Pakenham in a re-enactment of the Battle of New Orleans held every January near Jean Lafitte National Historical Park’s Chalmette Battlefield. The British general was defeated by future President Andrew Jackson and the pirate Jean Lafitte in the last major battle of the War of 1812.

Thousands of fervent volunteers spend time and money striving for authenticity in the uniforms they wear; the muskets, rifles and cannons they shoot; the battle lines they form; the encampments between battles; and the specific historical figures many play. Many travel hundreds of miles, even abroad, to pursue their hobby.

A re-enactor for more than 30 years, Pickles has portrayed British officers all over the world. He also has served as technical advisor to historic films and TV programs such as “The Patriot” and The History Channel’s “Battle of New Orleans.” Like many re-enactors, he takes pride in making his own uniforms. He plays Pakenham in a dark blue coat adorned with regimental lace, white breeches, a cocked hat, black leather tasseled boots and a saber. His entire look is modeled after the statue of the dying general—killed in New Orleans—at St. Paul’s Cathedral in London.

“A myth is going around that the British always wore red coats and rode white horses—that would be way too expensive. Most wore what the Duke of Wellington wore, who was the pre-eminent soldier of his day,” Pickles adds. He should know: He’s played the Duke who defeated Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo in Belgium. Being in the same location as the person you portray is eerie, Pickles says. “It was the same battlefield. It was the same weather. For a little moment in time, you’re there.”

David Lynch, a lawyer and re-enactor from Palm Springs, Calif., draws a parallel to the timeless appeal of dressing in costume for Halloween. He appeared in “On His Majesty’s Service,” a 2010 documentary about historic re-enactments that features primarily War of 1812 re-enactors and their suppliers.

“Sitting around a beautiful tent, wearing a really cool uniform by candlelight, smoking a pipe and drinking a glass of port is as good as it gets. It’s an opportunity in a defined context to play dress-up,” says Lynch, who portrays a British officer in the 93rd Sutherland Highlanders in the Battle of New Orleans re-enactment.

Maurice DePas, the director and producer of the documentary, concurs. He was bitten by the re-enactment bug after his British naval officer costume won first prize at a Halloween party. He then began to follow the re-enactment circuit.

“The people I met at re-enactments were fascinating and from all walks of life. There was cannon and cavalry, women in gowns and men in splendid uniforms. They ate off period china, with silver tea services and plenty of port in crystal glasses. It was a fabulous experience,” DePas says.
Supplying the Troops

A cottage industry of specialty merchants supplies historic re-enactors. The Smoke & Fire Company in Waterville, Ohio, provides period clothing, costume patterns (including late 18th-century and early 19th-century designs from J.P. Ryan and Rockinghorse Farm), shoes and boots, camp gear, dishware, plus 400 books about costuming. It also publishes Smoke & Fire News, a monthly newspaper listing battle re-enactments and other living history events in North America.

Since Revolutionary uniforms tended to be very specific, owner Donlyn Meyers recommends tailors for re-enactors who need custom-made uniforms.

“Each military unit in different states had its own coat, design and color. With the Civil War, uniforms began to be mass-produced, so they were more standardized, though the insignia was different,” says Meyers, who served as cannon crew in a War of 1812 re-enactment in nearby Fort Meigs, Ohio. In 2009, her employees attended 34 re-enactments, from Fort Ticonderoga National Historic Landmark in upstate New York to Brandywine Battlefield in Pennsylvania. But she sells no weapons for re-enactors since three big companies in North America corner the market: Royalist Arms & Repairs Company, Dixie Gunworks and Discriminating General.

Lexington Green

While some re-enactors portray their own heritage and history—Pickles is a Briton who lives in the States—others don’t. In the Lexington Minute Men Company’s annual re-enactment of the first battle of the Revolution in April 1775 in Lexington, Mass., one dedicated 20-year member is Henry Liu, who is Chinese-American.

Some of the 8,000 to 10,000 spectators who watch the re-enactment of “the shot heard ‘round the world” at Lexington Green start arriving at 3:30 a.m. to secure a good spot. The re-enactment starts when a bell sounds at 5:30 a.m. from the Old Belfry.

Liu once portrayed Captain John Parker, a former commander of the minutemen. (Parker famously said, “Don’t fire unless fired upon; but if they mean to have a war, let it begin here.”) Liu now portrays John Tidd, who fought despite a head wound. He also chairs the re-enactment committee and serves as safety officer. “We may be firing blanks, but the muzzle flash from the musket will still burn skin at six to seven feet,” he says. “The sound can ruin hearing for weeks if fired too close to someone else’s eardrums. Safety is our No. 1 priority.”

The Lexington Minute Men Company warmly welcomed Liu when he joined after urging from his wife, whose stepfather, stepbrother and brother were members and re-enactors. “I quickly realized that despite my obvious difference in outward appearance, and other ‘inaccuracies’ among the members, we all share a common interest in the history of our nation’s liberty, and we all strive for accuracy in our clothing and manual of arms,” Liu says.
The Burning of Kingston

In Kingston, N.Y., the Burning of Kingston re-enactment occurs every other year in October. In 1777, the British set fire to every building except one in the then-capital city in an effort to control the Hudson River and split the New England Colonies from the others. The colonists, outnumbered by nearly 10 to 1, were forced to flee. The blaze was punishment for the “nest of villains” who had defeated the British nine days earlier during the Battle of Saratoga, a turning point in the war.

Re-enactors from the First Ulster County Militia typically start the weekend with a candlelight meeting of the committee of safety in the Hoffman House, where the colonists first heard news the British were approaching. (The late 17th-century stone house was damaged by fire in the attack, but later restored. Its charred attic beams bear silent witness.) The next morning, boats carrying British troops firing muskets, cannon and swivel guns appear on the river. Colonists fire at them from shore and land on Rondout Creek, a Hudson tributary. The British then march into Kingston carrying torches and stacks of cornstalks. While big bonfires were held in the past, today only some cornstalks on the riverfront are burned.

The 2007 Burning of Kingston re-enactment featured one of the biggest 18th-century wooden boat collections in the Northeast United States. Fifteen boats were led by the Mercury, a reproduction Dutch-style, masted flat-bottomed boat of the sort Washington used to patrol the Hudson. First Ulster members added rigging, decking, interior details and oars to the 24-foot pertiauger (also called a periauger), which was built by the Capital District Maritime Academy.

“The Mercury is the first pertiauger to sail the Hudson in more than 150 years. We felt this part of our maritime history had been all but forgotten, and our goal was to bring it back to life,” says Gene Tozzi, an organizer of the boat-building project for First Ulster.

Bringing history to life is the primary goal of most re-enactors, including First Ulster’s founder and president, Ben Carlos Jr., a health-care claims processor in his everyday life. “I’ve lost count of how many re-enactments I’ve done—about 12 a year for 25 years,” he says. “I love doing the research and helping pass it on.” Carlos takes pride in sewing his own uniforms, which include a red wool waistcoat with gold-laced buttonholes, a sage-green linen waistcoat, a captain’s blue coat with red facing and linen breeches.

Battle of Yorktown

In 1981, on the 200th anniversary of the last major battle of the Revolutionary War, more than 5,000 people participated in a re-enactment of the Battle of Yorktown. More than 60,000 people attended, including President Ronald Reagan and French President François Mitterrand. Carl Gnam, founder of the re-enactment group First Virginia Regiment, helped organize the re-enactment of the American victory and commanded 200 men in the 1996 Yorktown re-enactment.

Gnam, a magazine publisher in Herndon, Va., also participated in some fictional re-enactments for the sheer fun of it—like when his regiment went to England and seized Dover Castle.

“My dad took me to Civil War battlefields and re-enactments when I was a kid, but Colonial Williamsburg made a deeper impression on me, maybe because it was an earlier era. When the bicentennial began in 1976, I heard some re-enactment groups were forming, so a bunch of us teenagers formed the First Virginia Regiment,” he says.

Though the reasons they get hooked on playing historic roles might vary, re-enactors of all eras have much in common: They spare no expense for authenticity and are passionate about bringing the public a greater understanding of key events in our nation’s history.

Sharon McDonnell is a New Orleans-based writer who has explored the lives of Jean Lafitte and John Trumbull for American Spirit.
Rise and Fight Again:
Nathanael Greene
by DR DANIEL S MARRONE

Revolutionary War Major General Nathanael Greene’s dogged persistence to “rise and fight again” helped ultimately win the American struggle for liberty. Greene was born to devout Quaker parents in the Rhode Island Colony on August 7, 1742. Raised in a religious pacifist community opposed to war, few would have imagined he would become a soldier, not to mention General George Washington’s next-in-command. However, he joined other American colonists in fighting back against what they viewed as an intolerable rule and unjust taxes imposed by Great Britain. By his 32nd birthday, the Rhode Islander was determined to join the fight for self-rule and independence and enlisted as a private in the Kentish Guards, his local county militia. The decision led to his banishment from his Quaker community in 1774.

In 1775, Greene was elected to the Colony’s General Assembly and appointed a brigadier general in the Rhode Island Army of Observation. He led troops in supporting the American siege of British-held Boston. Greene’s leadership abilities were recognized by the Continental Congress, which on June 22 appointed him a brigadier general of the Army. Twelve days later, Greene first met with General George Washington, who left Greene in charge of military operations in Boston after the British evacuated the city in March 1776.

Greene Takes Command in New York

On August 9, 1776, Congress promoted Greene to the rank of major general and assigned him to the task of establishing Patriot defenses on Long Island, the strategic midpoint between the New England and Mid-Atlantic Colonies. Greene’s military appointment could not come too soon because the Americans correctly feared an impending massive invasion of New York City by the British. Through Greene’s nonstop efforts, defensive fortifications were erected around the outer perimeter of the area called Brooklyn Heights. Unfortunately, just days before the British invasion, dysentery spread among the American troops, and Greene became seriously ill. He wrote to Washington, “I am confined to my bed with a raging fever.” Nearly delirious from illness, Greene was prevented from leading his troops on August 26, 1776, the first day of combat of the Battle of New York.

Unlike the highly trained professional soldiers deployed by the King’s forces, the American army consisted primarily of individuals who days earlier were farmers. Although these ill-equipped citizen soldiers would eventually become the formidable Continental Army, in the summer of 1776, they were no match against the British and Hessian juggernaut invading New York. Patriot defenses quickly crumbled, enabling a complete rout for the King’s army. Washington, displaying equal amounts of insight and desperation, began an immediate, full evacuation from Brooklyn Heights to Manhattan Island. However, this strategic retreat from Brooklyn was only a temporary reprieve for the Americans; British commander General William Howe soon targeted Manhattan Island itself. After cannon fire emanated from British warships at Kip’s Bay on September 15, the Americans once again were on the retreat.

Fortunately for the Americans, Greene had sufficiently recovered from his illness to resume command of his troops. The next day, he led the Continentals to a small but significant victory at the Battle of Harlem Heights. This battlefield success for the Americans did little to slow down the British invasion, however. Immediately after this skirmish, Howe was again in pursuit of Washington’s army.
Misjudgments at Forts Washington and Lee

On October 18, the Continentals faced the King’s forces at the Battle of Pelham. Moving north from there, Washington’s troops 10 days later engaged the British at the Battle of White Plains in Westchester County, N.Y. Sustaining a major defeat in Westchester, Washington subsequently beat a hasty retreat south into New Jersey. By late fall, the only Patriot soldiers remaining in the New York City theater of war were those under siege at Fort Washington, in upper Manhattan. Heated debate as to the viability of holding onto Fort Washington ensued between Washington and his generals. At first, Greene advised Washington to abandon it, then changed his mind and argued that the Americans could hold the fort by sending in additional troops. Unfortunately, Greene horribly misjudged the strength of the British and Hessian forces besieging the fort: More than 2,800 Americans were either killed or captured during the final British assault on November 16, 1776. Three days later, the British overran Fort Lee on the New Jersey side of the then-named North River (today’s Hudson River).

The Battle of New York was a complete disaster for the Americans, and Greene was blamed for the loss of forts Washington and Lee. Washington, however, refused to heed angry calls for his replacement and remained confident in Greene’s character and leadership abilities. As for Greene, he saw Washington as a surrogate father. Their mutual trust and confidence helped sustain the American cause, which by the end of 1776 was approaching a state of hopelessness.
Small Victories Add Up

By December, the Continental Army had retreated from New Jersey into Pennsylvania. With troop strength waning due to illness and desertions, Washington faced tough choices. Fearing his army, not to mention the cause for independence, would disintegrate when many enlistments ended on December 31, the American commander chose to act boldly. On December 25, Washington ordered an attack on a Hessian base in Trenton across the nearly frozen Delaware River in New Jersey. At the Battle of Trenton on December 26, Greene led one of the two main columns of troops into what turned out to be an astounding American victory. Ten days later, the Patriots defeated the British again at the Battle of Princeton. These victories, though relatively small, nevertheless spurred re-enlistments in the Continental Army.

On September 11, 1777, Greene displayed superb military leadership at the Battle of Brandywine, where the Americans lost the battlefield but were able to inflict major losses upon the British. But less than a month later, Greene’s disorganized troops were unsuccessful at the Battle of Germantown. With these American losses in Pennsylvania, the British were able to capture Philadelphia in November 1777. Nearing exhaustion, the Americans set up camp in southeastern Pennsylvania in a plateau area known as Valley Forge.

With the bulk of the Continental Army, approximately 12,000 men, encamped at Valley Forge, Washington turned to Greene to serve as quartermaster general. Here, on the south shore of the Schuylkill River 18 miles northwest of Philadelphia, the Americans faced critical shortages of food and clothing as well as widespread disease. More than 2,000 died from dysentery, jaundice, pneumonia and typhoid. As the officer in charge of supplies, Greene did what he could to efficiently and equitably provide whatever food was available to the nearly starved soldiers.

Through the tireless leadership of Washington, Greene and recent émigré General Baron Friedrich Wilhelm Augustus von Steuben, the stalwart Patriot army left Valley Forge in the spring of 1778 ready for a fight. They got their wish on June 28, 1778, at the Battle of Monmouth in New Jersey. Commanding the right wing of Washington’s army, Greene led his troops throughout a daylong struggle. With more troops dying from the debilitating heat than from battlefield injuries, neither side could claim a clear victory. However, the King’s forces were hammered at Monmouth to the point that, for the remainder of the war, their activities in the North were relegated to the confines of New York City. With the British at a stalemate in the North, their focus and invasion armies were redirected to the South.

A Pivotal Role in the Southern Campaign

During 1779 and 1780, the Southern Department of the Continental Army was in miserable shape. Lacking resources and effective leadership, the American army was on the verge of disintegration. In 1779, British General Henry Clinton led an invasion that conquered and

Catharine “Caty” Littlefield Greene (1755–1814) was not only the supportive wife of Revolutionary General Nathanael Greene, but she was also an active participant in the political scene of that time. Born on Block Island, R.I., she married Nathanael in 1774 and they spent less than a year together before he left to join the Revolution. Unlike most wives who remained at home, Caty followed Nathanael and joined him at various encampments during the war. The mother of five children, she became close friends with many important Revolutionary figures and their wives, including George and Martha Washington, and even named their first two children after the Washingtons.

Even after her husband’s death in 1786, Caty continued to create her own path and socialize with elite Revolutionary families. When her plantation was in financial peril, she took matters into her own hands and approached Congress for aid to recover the funds that Nathanael personally paid to Charleston merchants to supply his soldiers. Her petition, supported by Washington, Henry Knox and Alexander Hamilton, was approved and her estate was saved.

In 1792, she rented a room to and employed handyman Eli Whitney to help her on her Savannah, Ga., plantation Mulberry Grove. It was there that Whitney developed the cotton gin. (Some say she helped finance the patent for the device.) The Catharine Greene Chapter, Xenia, Ohio, is named after this influential early American woman.
subsequently occupied Georgia’s largest port city, Savannah. The next year, the British attacked an even larger American city, Charleston. The Continental Army there, under the command of General Benjamin Lincoln, was outnumbered and under siege by the British navy and army. Surrounded, Lincoln surrendered Charleston, and more than 5,000 Continental Army soldiers were captured. Half of these Americans died during confinement. A few months later in 1780, American troops under the command of General Horatio Gates launched a failed attack on the British garrison at Camden in South Carolina. The Camden loss was so completely devastating that the Americans literally ran for their lives.

By late 1780, Washington feared that the British would not only capture the South but also move north to conquer what was left of the new nation. To stop the British juggernaut in the South, Washington appointed Greene commander of the Southern Department of the Continental Army. On December 2, Greene arrived in Charlottetown (present-day Charlotte, N.C.) where he assumed leadership of 1,500 bedraggled, dispirited and starving troops. More than three times as many British and American Loyalists, under the leadership of Lord Cornwallis, faced Greene’s troops. Vastly outnumbered, Greene knew that he could not directly confront Cornwallis. Instead, he astutely chose to buy time in order to organize and restock his Patriot army.

In what turned out to be a brilliant strategic move, Greene split up his already outnumbered troops into two even smaller contingents. He placed 600 men under the command of Brigadier General Daniel “Old Wagoner” Morgan, a veteran frontier fighter from Virginia. Greene ordered Morgan and his men to head west. The 900 troops remaining under Greene’s direct command marched south.

Sensing that Cornwallis would not tolerate Morgan launching an attack on his rear or left flank, Greene knew intuitively that the British general would be forced to divide his forces into two groups, thereby diminishing his numerical advantage. On New Year’s Day, 1781, Cornwallis ordered his ruthless cavalry leader, Lieutenant Colonel Banastre “Bloody Ban” Tarleton, to suppress ...
Morgan’s troops. After eluding Tarleton for more than two weeks, Morgan’s men stood their ground at the pivotal Battle of Cowpens in South Carolina on January 17, 1781. At Cowpens, Morgan tricked Tarleton into believing that the retreating American militiamen were reflective of his entire force. Thinking Morgan’s men were in full retreat, Tarleton ordered an all-out charge on the American line. However, Morgan’s troops stood their ground and fired nonstop. More than 800 British soldiers—90 percent of Tarleton’s forces—were killed, wounded or taken prisoner at the Battle of Cowpens.

Following this battle, Morgan stealthily evaded Cornwallis’ army, a well-trained force more than eager to avenge Cowpens, and wisely withdrew to rejoin Greene’s main army in North Carolina. The now recombined American forces became the prime target for Cornwallis.

Greene knew that his men were exhausted from constant hit-and-run skirmishes—all occurring in the winter of 1781—and judged his army unable to defeat the British in head-to-head battle. Instead, he concentrated on defensive moves that forced the King’s army to pursue the Americans over hundreds of strength-sapping miles throughout North Carolina. Finally catching up with Greene’s men, the British army was poised to attack on February 14, 1781.

Before this could happen, the Americans crossed the Dan River from North Carolina into Virginia. Greene instructed his engineering officer, Polish émigré Thaddeus Kosciuszko, and Quartermaster Edward Carrington to commandeer nearly every boat along the river. Unable to find a crossing, the British were once again thwarted from delivering a crushing blow in the South. Gaining some time to rest and rebuild his troops’ strength, Greene was able to obtain recruits and matériel at Halifax Court House in Virginia. Ten days later, with a re-energized, larger force of 4,000 men, Greene ordered his troops to recross the Dan River. The Americans were now on the offensive.

Successful Strategies

On March 15, Greene’s men faced Cornwallis’ army at Guilford Court House (in what today is Greensboro, N.C.). As the battle raged, the Americans seemed to be headed for victory. In desperation, Cornwallis ordered a massive bombardment of the battlefield despite the knowledge that his men as well as the Americans would be hit by deadly grapeshot fired into the mélange of combatants. This heartless and risky maneuver by Cornwallis paid off—for the moment—when the Americans retreated from the battlefield. However, Cornwallis’ forces sustained 500 casualties, representing one-quarter of the British army in the theatre.

Extended far inland from supply bases on the East Coast, the King’s forces were becoming increasingly tired and vulnerable. As a result, three days after the Battle of Guilford Court House, Cornwallis withdrew his depleted forces to Wilmington, N.C., then moved them on to Yorktown, Va. Greene again utilized brilliant military strategy in allowing Cornwallis to move his waning army to Yorktown, believing that the British would eventually be bottled up at the eastern tip of Virginia.

In the spring of 1781, Greene’s main goal had been to retake territory previously captured by the British rather than continually fight Cornwallis’ army. While the Americans scored some minor successes in capturing British posts, they also lost a large skirmish at the Battle of Hobkirk’s Hill on April 25. Shortly thereafter, Greene wrote to Washington that, “We fight, get beat, rise and fight again. We never have to win a battle to win the war.”

The tide turned for the Americans by late summer. On September 8, 1781, Greene’s men scored a decisive, though bloody, victory at Eutaw Springs in South Carolina. After this engagement, the exhausted British troops fled to Charleston, S.C. The British subsequently surrendered en masse at Yorktown on October 19, 1781.

While Greene’s forces lost most of the battles in the South, he ultimately defeated the British through attrition, stronger leadership and determination. Given the dismal state of America’s southern forces when he assumed command, his ultimate victory over the British was nothing short of amazing. In fact, Washington let it be known that if he were incapacitated, Greene should be named his successor.

After the War

At the conclusion of the war, Greene returned home to his family in Rhode Island. In tribute to his stellar military accomplishments in the Southern Campaign, the state legislatures of North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia voted to bestow land tracts upon Greene. Unfortunately, most of the land had to be sold to pay off massive debts, much of which he incurred by purchasing supplies for his troops before and during the war. In 1785, Greene moved his family to Mulberry Grove Plantation outside Savannah, Ga. He died of heat stroke on June 19, 1786, seven weeks before his 44th birthday.

Numerous cities, counties and streets across the country are named in his honor, and there are also two DAR chapters that bear his name: Nathanael Greene Chapter, Greenville, S.C., and General Nathanael Greene-Pettaquamscutt Chapter, East Greenwich, R.I. §

Dr. Daniel S. Marrone is a distinguished service professor at Farmingdale State College. He wrote about General Nicholas Herkimer for the January/February 2010 issue.
A long, tree-lined drive bordered by meadowlands leads to Gunston Hall, patriot George Mason’s estate on the Potomac River in Mason Neck, Va. The Georgian-style house built in the late 1750s combines elements of English and Colonial design, an appropriate mix for the home of a man who helped guide the Colonies’ transition from British territory to free nation.

Like many 18th-century Virginia gentlemen, Mason planned and supervised the construction of his house. He chose a site on the Mason Neck peninsula, bordered by the Potomac and Occoquan rivers and Pohick Bay. Historic house interpreter Linda Caldwell theorizes that the property’s situation on high ground at a sheltered point on the Potomac made it especially desirable.
Despite its proximity to centers of Colonial activity such as Alexandria, Va., and Washington, D.C., Gunston Hall is less well known than nearby historic sites like Mount Vernon and Woodlawn Plantation. Its legacy is much like that of its owner, who is less celebrated than contemporaries George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. Discovering the home and the patriot are welcome rewards for the minimal extra effort required to seek them out. “It’s a hidden treasure,” Gunston Hall docent emeritus Peggy Martz says of the estate.

An Elusive Patriot

On December 11, 1725, George Mason IV, a fourth-generation Virginian, was born to George and Ann Thomson Mason in Fairfax County. When his father drowned in a boating accident, 10-year-old Mason inherited about 20,000 acres of land in Virginia and Maryland, which his mother managed for him until he turned 21. In 1750, he married Ann Eilbeck, his adored first wife. The couple had 12 children together, nine of whom—five sons and four daughters—survived childhood. Ann’s death in 1773 at age 39 devastated Mason, who wrote a poignant eulogy to her in the family Bible. Mason married Sarah Brent in 1780.

During his career as a Virginia statesman, Mason drafted dozens of laws and petitions and authored the premier treatise on inherent human rights, the Virginia Declaration of Rights, yet his work is largely unheralded. Jeff Broadwater, author of George Mason: Forgotten Founder (University of North Carolina Press, 2006), attributes Mason’s relative obscurity to “reluctance to seek the historical spotlight” and the fact that he “died too soon to play a major role in the new federal government.” Broadwater also brings up another factor: the idea that “because of his opposition to the Constitution, [Mason] has often been dismissed as a disgruntled loser.”

Mason, who had no formal legal training, distrusted the political process for fear of corruption and believed his efforts were better suited to local government, where he could attend to immediate concerns such as funding the Revolutionary War instead of nation-building. Furthermore, due to frequent episodes of gout and a reluctance to leave his family, especially after Ann’s death, Mason lacked an appetite for long absences from Gunston Hall. But eventually, escalating tension with the British and his fellow Virginians’ political prominence on the national stage, which left vacancies in state government, pressed Mason into service.

In 1776, Mason produced the Virginia Declaration of Rights, which called for freedom of the press, religious tolerance, proscription from unreasonable searches and the right to a fair and speedy trial, among other liberties. Later, the document served as a reference for the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. “George Mason ... first gave concrete expression to those inalienable human rights that belong to every American citizen that are today the bedrock of our democracy,” wrote President Harry S. Truman in an October 5, 1949, letter to Edward Boykin.

During his service at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787, Mason ceaselessly debated constitutional theory. Based in part on his frustration with the Constitution’s empowerment of the federal government and its failure to abolish slavery, Mason refused to sign the document. (It’s clear that Mason, who opposed slavery yet owned slaves, had conflicting feelings about the institution; it is worth noting that his views were based upon an 18th-
century perspective and affected by his status as a wealthy planter.) Whatever damage Mason’s opposition may have wreaked upon his reputation and friendships, Madison wrote to George Mason VI of his grandfather’s service at the Constitutional Convention, “None who differed from him on some points will deny that he sustained throughout the proceedings of the body the high character of a powerful reasoner, a profound statesman and a devoted Republican.”

Mason undoubtedly savored his return to Gunston Hall following the tumult of the convention. He lived there until he died quietly on October 7, 1792.

Open House

Constructed of bricks made on the property, the structure—one of the first brick buildings in Northern Virginia—also features sandstone quoins from an Aquia Creek quarry from which George Washington later ordered cornerstones for the White House. The home’s impressive, symmetrical façade follows a popular Chesapeake architectural form and encases an interior filled with eclectic examples of English Rococo design.

Inside, the spacious entry hall provides immediate evidence of the handiwork of English craftsmen William Buckland, a carpenter and joiner, and William Bernard Sears, a master carver, both indentured to Mason. The two worked together on other buildings in the region as well, including Mount Airy, Colonel John Tayloe’s Warsaw, Va., home, once considered the most spectacular mansion in Virginia. According to Broadwater, “Buckland went on to become one of the most distinguished architects in early America.” Pilasters and two gentle arches frame the passage’s architectural details, including a central staircase and a carved pinecone finial. Amazingly, much of the original woodwork remains, though it has required restoration and repair in places, and the majority of the home’s original loblolly pine floorboards also are intact. Ornate reproduction wallpaper chosen with assistance from the Victorian Art Museum in London adds drama and elegance.

To the right of the entryway lay the home’s formal rooms. The Chinese-style formal dining room features ochre-colored woodwork carved in a scalloped pattern reminiscent of a pagoda. Though rare in Colonial America, chinoiserie, or Chinese-style design, was popular in England at the time. The silverware showcased on the dining table is an authentic family heirloom.

The most elaborate of Gunston Hall’s rooms, the formal parlor is replete with classical woodwork carved in column, scroll and floral motifs. Its dominant feature is the central fireplace and the built-in, recessed shelving units, called beaufats, on either side. The conspicuous blank space above the mantel provides an example of the Gunston Hall staff’s commitment to portraying the home as it appeared in Mason’s day. “There was probably a painting over the mantel, but we don’t know for sure, so until we do it will remain empty,” Caldwell says.

Objects related to or owned by the Masons are displayed wherever possible. A Mason family christening bowl rests on the bottom shelf of the left beaufat, and wedding portraits of George and Ann Mason hang on the red damask-covered walls.
Private Rooms

Across the hall from the formal dining room sits the little parlor, a multipurpose space that served, at various times, as a family dining room, sitting room and Mason’s office. Simpler carvings and a reproduction oil-painted canvas floor covering indicate that this family gathering spot was a more informal area. Beaufats also surround the little parlor fireplace, but these shelving units feature deeper compartments for extra storage and doors that could be closed to secure valuables. In addition to a ladder, writing table and several chairs owned by the Masons, the room holds a notable recent acquisition—a rare 18th-century Virginia Bible box.

The primary bedchamber, paneled in tall, vivid green wainscoting to mimic its finish circa 1780, when the color was fashionable, occupies the front left portion of the house. The room’s two closets—one to hold spices and medicines, the other for clothing—are capped by half-moon carvings. George and Ann Mason shared the space at times, but Mason retired to other quarters when he experienced attacks of gout. Ann probably also used the chamber as a birthing room. A canopy bed surrounded by netting gives the room a feminine, refined feel. But features now considered ornamental were often rooted in function, observes Caldwell, pointing out that netting likely helped keep away the mosquitoes prevalent in the marshy riverside environment.

The staircase to the second floor opens to a small gallery separated from the hallway by fluted pillars and a triple arch. The area also provided space for extra sleeping pallets, when needed. Beyond the pillars, the upper level’s long, narrow hallway runs the length of the house. In the open passageway, Caldwell explains, “Ladies were allowed to sit in an undressed situation, which meant without corset stays.” A small room at the top of the stairs functions as a lumber room, an Old English term for a storage area, which holds a rare antique baby walker and assorted household accessories.

A total of seven bedrooms are arranged to maximize cross ventilation. The corner bedchambers, with fireplaces and extra windows, provided the most desirable accommodations, and those on the river side of the house were considered the best of all. Each sleeping chamber showcases a Colonial vignette. For example, one front bedroom includes a vanity displaying wigs and toiletries, while a mousetrap on the floor nearby guards against unwanted visitors.

Expansive Estate

The extensive property outside the mansion walls is as thoughtfully maintained as the home itself. Just beyond the back porch, which is original to the home, sits a boxwood allee planted during Mason’s lifetime. Although the gnarled hedges are now in poor health, the Gunston Hall staff feels fortunate that the approximately 250-year-old plantings survive at all. The boxwood anchors Mason’s original one-acre garden, which slowly is being restored.
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to its 18th-century state. The restoration project is aided by a decade of research, clues from Recollections, an account of life on the plantation written by Mason’s fourth son John, and an archaeological investigation that have revealed new insights about the landscape. Staff discovered that “Mason couldn’t have any tall plants because he had to see traffic on the river,” says Susan Blankenship, the development program coordinator at Gunston Hall.

To better observe activity on the Potomac River, Mason installed three viewing mounts at the southern end of the garden at the edge of the upper plain. The earthen mounds provided a perfect vantage point for monitoring the arrival and departure of goods and visitors at Mason’s private ship landing, as well as the workforce tending the lower fields. Family members and guests visited the overlooks to admire the fields, woodlands, river and the Maryland shore.

Below, a terrace, common in the region’s hilly gardens, is likely one of several that led to Mason’s deer park, a fenced area populated by domesticated deer. The ornamental park, typical of English estates but rare in Colonial America, is, along with Mount Vernon’s, one of a few known examples of the period. Two trails—the landing road and the barn wharf trail—offer river views and access to the deer park and surrounding woodlands. The latter traverses the forest on its way to the Potomac River, where it terminates at a narrow sand beach. Eagles and herons frequently visit the adjacent marsh.

Outside the garden’s borders sprawled the orchards and farmland that once produced tobacco and wheat for sale and barley, cotton, corn, flax, fruit, nuts, meat, leather and wool for use on the plantation. Mason supervised his own land holdings and managed to keep them financially secure throughout the turbulent Revolutionary period. Though the estate now covers 550 acres, in Mason’s time it comprised 5,000.

A collection of outbuildings, many of which are no longer standing, supported plantation operations. The property’s original wellhead anchors a kitchen yard surrounded by reproduction examples of the dairy, kitchen, smokehouse and laundry structures. Beyond the yard, a sample herb garden supplies seasonings for cooking demonstrations.

Private tutors educated the Mason children at the property’s schoolhouse, where space above the classroom provided living quarters for the teacher. “The schoolmaster was considered an important member of the family because he was educated. He often ate with the family,” Peggy Martz says.

Continuing away from the mansion, a path lined by red cedar trees leads to the brick-walled family graveyard where George and Ann Mason, as well as several of their children and additional family members, are interred. In Recollections, son John writes that Mason visited Ann’s grave often after her death.

The name Gunston Hall pays homage to “the ancestral seat of Mason’s maternal grandfather, Gerald Fowkes,” Broadwater notes. Mason probably envisioned his descendants living there for centuries, but in 1867, a mere two generations removed from Mason, the family sold Gunston Hall. Ownership changed several times before Louis Hertle, the estate’s last private owner, acquired the property. He and his wife, Eleanor, undertook a serious restoration, aiming to regain the early splendor of the mansion and grounds. Hertle bequeathed Gunston Hall to the Commonwealth of Virginia, which owns the property today. A board of regents composed of members of the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America, to which Eleanor Hertle belonged, administers the property as a national memorial to George Mason, the unheralded patriot, champion of human rights and family man.
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Although a merrily crackling fire in the fireplace is a heartwarming sight, that cheerful blaze is not very good at heating a room, nor is it very fuel efficient. Benjamin Franklin famously described fireplaces as leaving one “scorcht [sic] before, and, as it were, froze behind.” So it’s not surprising that Franklin was a leading figure in the movement to switch from open fires to stoves.

This cast iron coal stove has a keyhole-shaped hearth plate and rectangular ash box surmounted by a tapered, 12-inch-tall reeded column for the firebox. The cast iron door with handle, feet and anthemion ornaments rests on the hearth and closes the ash pit. The horizontal lever with a ring handle at the top of this door releases a hinged circular grate at the base of the column to empty coals and ash from the firebox. A loose circular plate covers the hole on top of the column through which coal is added.
Despite demonstrated advantages in economy and basic comfort, however, it took decades for Americans to forsake open hearths and warm up to stoves. The transition was marked by heated debates over which form of heat was healthier, marketing hyperbole and claims that the newfangled stoves undermined the feminine domestic ideal.

If You Can’t Stand the Heat …

For millennia, wood was the principal building material and fuel for what the late author William Manchester called “a world lit only by fire.” Though wood is renewable, it takes years to replace a stand of trees.

By the time Europeans began to establish colonies, a rising standard of living accompanied by increasing populations had literally cut down the availability of trees suitable for construction, shipbuilding and fuel. The strain on native forests was particularly acute in Britain, according to Priscilla J. Brewer’s From Fireplace to Cookstove: Technology and the Domestic Ideal in America (Syracuse University Press, 2000). Reports of seemingly endless forests in the New World lent urgency to the desire for colonies.

Besides providing revenue and vital resources such as masts and turpentine, America’s forests promised settlers warmer homes than most had enjoyed back home. Northern colonists needed them: The average winter was much colder than in Europe, and, in the late 17th century, the Northern Hemisphere shivered through what was later called the Little Ice Age. The fireplace dominated the Colonial home. Colonists kept a fire going year-round for cooking, and in cold weather, they built roaring fires and spent most of their time in the kitchen—if you weren’t close to the fireplace, you were freezing. Settlers also needed to clear forests to plant crops, graze livestock and build homes. To the European mind, the unruly wilderness cried out to be tamed. They set to it using axes and saws and “girdling”—cutting a strip of bark from around the tree to kill it.

No More Forest Primeval

By the 1730s, history began to repeat itself: The Colonies’ rapidly growing population and relatively high standard of living, plus the need to satisfy Britain’s demand for timber products, had begun to exhaust the forests. The price of wood rose steadily as it became scarcer; by 1744, Benjamin Franklin noted it had to be transported as far as 100 miles to some towns and cities.

Franklin did not invent the stove; he and other American inventors were relative latecomers to the concept. The Chinese had developed a kind of outdoor stove centuries before European colonization began, and Central Europeans used indoor stoves by the late 1400s.

“German, Scandinavian and other Central European people had indeed used stoves of both iron and ceramic tiles much earlier, but it was not part of the technology of the English settlers,” says Tom Kelleher, curator of mechanical trades at Old Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts. Early on, the word “stove” often described not only a heat source, but also a snug room warmed by a tile or earthenware oven, Brewer writes.

Stoves began to gain favor in the 1600s due to the wider availability of cast iron. Developed first in China in the sixth century B.C. and in Europe in the 1100s, cast iron consists of remelted pig iron and a small percentage of carbon, as well as a variety of other elements depending on the metal’s intended application. Cast
iron is durable and conducts heat well; it can be formed into an infinite variety of shapes by pouring, or casting, the molten metal into sand molds.

Early cast iron stoves were classified by how many cast iron plates were used in their construction—usually five, six or ten. The plates typically had flanges and slots where one met another, and wrought iron bolts, usually four long through-bolts, connecting the top and bottom plates,” Kelleher says. “That locked the side plates in place between them.”

A five-plate, or jamb stove, was a metal box that extended from the back of a fireplace into an adjoining room and was closed on that end. The fire in the fireplace heated the metal, which radiated warmth into the room.

A six-plate, or closed, stove completely encased the fire. It could be freestanding, positioned wherever desired in the room and vented to the outside. It used far less fuel than a fireplace or a five-plate stove.

**Franklin’s New Pennsylvanian Fire-Place Catches On**

While this new technology spread through Northern and Central Europe, Britain was slow to warm up to stoves. Brewer attributes this to an innate British love of gazing into a cheerful blaze instead of a seething hot, black iron box.

Based on inventories of estates in New England, she notes that a few English colonists experimented with stoves, but they were much more common in places like Pennsylvania, where German settlers were already familiar with them. In the Southern Colonies where winters were milder, stoves took much longer to catch on.

A fan of cheery fireplaces himself, Franklin’s stove was an effort to economize on fuel, provide more heat and still afford a view of the blaze. His original design was intended to sit in or in front of a chimney. It vented smoke out the bottom, which tended to snuff the fire. A fellow Pennsylvanian named David R. Rittenhouse devised the stovepipe to carry smoke away. Franklin and later stove designers contrived to direct the smoke in such a way that some of it was burned off.

Though not a true cookstove, the “fire-place” could heat beverages and cook simple dishes. Made by Philadelphia’s Warwick Furnace starting in 1741 and costing a hefty 5 pounds, it sold well. Ironworks in other towns copied the design and sold their versions locally. Brewer notes that Franklin’s stove was complex and could be dangerous if improperly installed and operated. Simpler knockoffs, which were also called “Franklin stoves,” soon appeared.

**America Warms to Cast Iron Stoves**

The 19th century was the golden age of cast iron stoves, as towns and cities grew larger and firewood became dearer. Coal would replace wood in many stoves by the end of the century—although harder to light, it burned hotter and longer and thus was more economical. Central heating and oil- and gas-fired stoves eventually pushed woodstoves aside, though they remained a mainstay for heat in many rural areas for decades.

Between 1790 and 1839, the U.S. Patent Office issued 382 patents dealing with stoves and attachments, according to Brewer. While many of the early patents were for heating stoves, inventors paid increasing attention to cookstoves. Brewer relates that 102 cookstoves were patented between 1835 and 1839.

Cooks used to fireplaces had to learn new cooking skills when they acquired a stove. They had to be able to judge the temperature of the fire and anticipate how long a blaze could maintain a desired temperature for baking, broiling. Even a familiar, well-maintained stove could turn balky without warning. Still, countless cooks mastered the skills required to fry, boil, bake and broil at the same time.

If consumer watchdog agencies had existed then, most of those stoves would have been scrapped. They smoked, they failed to draw well, some were unstable or simply fell apart. Women complained bitterly that the men who built them had no
clue about what constituted a well-designed stove. Differences between models were often trivial, amounting to no improvement at all.

Not that one could glean this information from the manufacturers’ advertisements, which made it seem that each new model would vanquish the drudgery of cooking. Also, Brewer notes that the stoves actually increased the amount of labor involved in cutting wood, because the pieces had to be shorter than those typically used in a fireplace.

Manufacturers realized that cookstoves needed to be short to make it easier to maneuver heavy metal cookware. The tops of some were less than 2 feet from the floor—which made it easier to move pots, but also forced women to stoop over the stove. The quest for a happy medium was long and littered with discarded stoves.

The Cult of Domesticity

As America’s material comfort, technical innovation, urbanization and industrialization soared, a wave of nostalgia for simpler times swelled between 1840 and 1865, Brewer writes. The sentiments are familiar—we’ve lost touch with simplicity in a search for ease and convenience.

Critics focused on stoves as emblems of this supposed loss. Stoves were unhealthy, they said, because the devices leaked noxious fumes and, unlike fireplaces, did not pull copious amounts of fresh air in from outside to cleanse the atmosphere indoors.

Others cited a decline in family togetherness and the domestic ideal of woman as homemaker, an ideal that came to be called “the cult of domesticity.” To them, the open hearth symbolized a better, purer time.

Brewer cites an article in The Young Ladies Class Book of 1851 stating “the domestic fireside is the great guardian of society against the excess of human passions.” The image of a family clustered around the fireplace idealized virtue, love, constancy and simplicity—not the stark need to keep warm.

Anti-stove critics included Harriet Beecher Stowe, though Brewer notes that men—unfamiliar with the rigors of “women’s work”—comprised a significant number. They included poet John Greenleaf Whittier, author Nathaniel Hawthorne and philosopher Henry David Thoreau.

But critics failed to squelch growing consumer demand. Ironically, by the late 19th century stoves had largely replaced hearths as symbols of domesticity.

Manufacturers, meanwhile, had steadily improved their stoves, adding features such as warming ovens, dough-proofing chambers, additional ovens and reservoirs for heating water. The newer stoves were sturdier and leaked less. Heating stoves grew increasingly ornate, becoming decorative items for public rooms.

Cooking With Gas

By the early 20th century, Americans had begun to experiment with oil, gas and electric stoves. Like their cast iron ancestors, these devices went through a lengthy period of development before they became safe and reliable enough for wide acceptance. And as with wood and coal stoves, manufacturers touted convenience and efficiency. They also cited cleanliness and less labor—no wood to chop or split, no ashes to remove and haul away, no stovepipes and flues to clean.

But it seems that every step forward is accompanied by a look back over the shoulder. Today’s “slow food” movement rebels against our dependence on heavily processed convenience foods and microwave ovens. There’s a yearning to go back to that simpler time when most cooking was done on electric or gas ranges.

Heating with wood is also enjoying a comeback in some areas because of its perceived renewability as a fuel source—and the rising price of oil. Today’s woodstoves are virtually airtight and have accessories like fans to circulate heated air. But in their perfection, somehow they seem to lack the smoky soul of those formidable old cast iron heaters.

Bill Hudgins wrote about America’s early postal system for the September/October issue.
It’s amazing how technology has changed the way we live. Since the end of the Second World War, more products have been invented than in all of recorded history. After WWII came the invention of the microwave oven, the pocket calculator, and the first wearable hearing aid. While the first two have gotten smaller and more affordable, hearing aids haven’t changed much. Now there’s an alternative… Neutronic Ear.

First of all, Neutronic Ear is not a hearing aid; it is a PSAP, or Personal Sound Amplification Product. Until PSAPs, everyone was required to see the doctor, have hearing tests, have fitting appointments (numerous visits) and then pay for the instruments without any insurance coverage. These devices can cost up to $5000 each! The high cost and inconvenience drove an innovative scientist to develop the Neutronic Ear PSAP.

Neutronic Ear has been designed with the finest micro-digital electronic components available to offer superb performance and years of use. Many years of engineering and development have created a product that’s ready to use right out of the box. The patented case design and unique clear tube make it practical and easy to use. The entire unit weighs only 1/10th of an ounce, and it hides comfortably behind either ear. The tube is designed to deliver clear crisp sound while leaving the ear canal open. The electronic components are safe from moisture and wax buildup, and you won’t feel like you have a circus peanut jammed in your ear. Thanks to a state-of-the-art manufacturing process and superior design, we can make Neutronic Ear affordable and pass the savings on to you.

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