

Society Announces Three Up-Coming Events

Members should attend and the public is invited to these three events:

July 29th 2017, 2pm: The unveiling of a plaque ceremony conducted by the George Washington Chapter, Virginia Society, Sons of the American Revolution and the War of 1812 Society in the Commonwealth of Virginia at the Pohick Episcopal Church in Lorton, Fairfax County. The two societies have jointly purchased the plaque to be unveiled to make visitors to the historic church aware of the names of the patriots of the Revolutionary War and the veterans of the War of 1812 that are memorialized or interred in the church graveyard. The location is 9301 Richmond Highway, Lorton, Virginia



August 12th, 2017, 10am: The unveiling of a Virginia historic road sign, in Leedstown, Westmoreland County honoring a famous Revolutionary War and War of 1812 veteran, John Pratt Hungerford. The ceremony will be conducted by the Northern Neck of Virginia Historical Society and supported by the James Monroe Chapter, Sons of the American Revolution Society and the War of 1812 Society in Virginia. The location of the ceremony is at the entrance of the campground in Leedstown. The following is a summary of John Pratt Hungerford's life as written by author, and Vice President of the War of 1812 in the Commonwealth of Virginia, Stuart L Butler.

GEN. JOHN PRATT HUNGRFORD 1761 — 1833

Gen. John Pratt Hungerford was a true son of the Northern Neck of Virginia. I based that statement on the fact that he once said that he never lived anywhere more than a mile from where he was born.

Like a number of Northern Neck families in the seventeenth and early eighteen centuries, the Hungerford family first settled in Maryland. Perhaps they, like the others, finally discovered that the grass was really much greener on this side of the Potomac.

When I was first asked about researching General Hungerford's life for a possible article to appear in the NNVHM, I knew the search for information would be a challenging one, and it was. The General left little in the way of private papers and correspondence to posterity. He never married, a fact that probably contributed to the paucity of relevant documentation about his life. Only a few documents from Hungerford—outside of his military and political activities—exist to my knowledge, and those are in the Virginia Historical Society. No doubt he corresponded with many individuals, and if he did, they are yet to be discovered.

What kind of man was John Pratt Hungerford? I think the eulogy by an unidentified admirer which was published in the *Richmond Enquirer* on January 31, 1834, best sums up his character: "His friendships were ardent and sincere. His conduct on all occasions open, firm and decided. As a public character, no man could have had the more entire confidence of his fellow citizens."

What we do know, however, about General Hungerford comes from his military and political careers both on the national and state levels. His older brother, Thomas, who became an officer in the Continental Army, perhaps inspired John to serve in some capacity in the Revolutionary War. By the end of the war, John was commissioned as a captain in the Westmoreland militia and was stationed at Gloucester Point at the time of the British surrender at Yorktown on October 19, 1781. Finding that a military life to suit him, John remained in the Westmoreland County militia becoming its commandant on February 14, 1801, succeeding his brother Thomas, who had held the post before him.

Not content with serving his county as its commandant of militia, John Hungerford was elected to the House of Delegates for two non-consecutive terms, 1797-1801. His voting record in the house indicated that he was an ardent Jeffersonian. He voted for a resolution supporting the Virginia Resolutions authored by James Madison and for a resolution condemning the Alien and Sedition laws and directing Virginia Senators to repeal the pernicious acts. In 1801, Hungerford was elected to the Virginia Senate, serving in that body from 1801 to 1809. During this time he

sat on several important committees including the Militia Committee to which he was certainly qualified to hold. Returning to serve in the House from 1821-1829, he continued to vote consistently with his fellow Democratic-Republicans most of the time, but he was not afraid to vote otherwise whenever he thought it wiser to do so.

Desiring to serve on the national level, Hungerford was elected to two terms as a U.S. Representative from the Northern Neck in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Congress (1813-1817). Unfortunately, Hungerford's first election to the U.S. House of Representatives in December 1811 was overturned by the House because some of Hungerford's voters were declared illegal by the House elections committee after a very close vote. Two years later Hungerford regained the seat that he had lost despite a legal challenge brought by his opponent, John Taliaferro. Hungerford ran for a third term in the House, but lost to William Ball of Lancaster. During his years as congressman, Hungerford was a fierce supporter of the Madison Administration's prosecution of the war, voted against the removal of the U.S. Capitol from Washington, and introduced and supported numerous petitions and claims submitted by his constituents.

Perhaps we know John P. Hungerford far more as a general during the War of 1812. In 1801, five years after becoming commandant of the Westmoreland militia, he was appointed brigadier general of the Fourteenth Brigade of Virginia Militia, a position which required the approval of the General Assembly. At that time, the Fourteenth Brigade consisted of all of the Northern Neck counties plus six other adjacent counties. Many of these counties would become the scene of naval and military operations during the war especially during 1814 when the British mounted numerous raids up and down the Rappahannock and Potomac rivers. Hungerford took a leading role in the defense of the Northern Neck by coordinating the defensive needs of the counties under his supervision. He took to the field personally during the summer of 1814 when the British seized and occupied Kinsale and parts of Westmoreland County and then marched through portions of Lancaster and Northumberland counties inflicting major destruction of farms and plantations along the way.

In August 1814 Hungerford was ordered to follow the movements of a British naval squadron as it made its way up the Potomac towards Washington, D.C. This squadron, commanded by Capt. James Gordon, was planning to rendezvous with the British military force then making its way to Washington. The naval force arrived too late to aid the British army which invaded and burned portions of the capitol. Hungerford's Northern Neck militias followed the squadron until it reached Alexandria, the squadron anchoring at Alexandria a few days before Hungerford arrived on the outskirts of the city. Hungerford was prepared to defend the city, but was asked not to intervene because the city's mayor and council had previously met the demands of Captain Gordon by allowing the British forces to occupy and take away any goods and provisions such as flour, cotton, and tobacco, in exchange for the British navy's promise not to shell the city into submission. Hungerford's forces remained outside the city encamped at Shuter's Hill, now the location of the George Washington Masonic Temple.

As the British collected what booty they could take with them on captured ships and prepared to sail back down the Potomac, General Hungerford, American naval Hero David Porter, and acting Secretary of War, James Monroe, conferred on Shuter's hill and prepared a plan to destroy the British squadron as it sailed down the Potomac. The plan consisted of placing hastily built batteries on the high cliffs at Belvoir Neck (now Fort Belvoir) overlooking the

Potomac from which to bombard the squadron. Hungerford was in overall command of the militia forces stationed along the cliffs and shoreline. Between September 1 and 5, 1814, Gordon's squadron of gunships and prize ships were subjected to intense shelling as it made its way back down the river. The squadron, consisting of several bomb and rocket ships, retaliated in a fierce bombardment of its own by raking the cliff batteries and shoreline with a barrage of bombs and shot as it passed down. During the most intensive enemy shelling, General Hungerford was almost killed when a shell went through his tent just seconds after he left it. Although Hungerford and Porter tried their best to destroy or to inflict as much damage as possible on the British squadron, it managed to escape any serious injury or lose any of its prize ships.

After the battle, Hungerford praised the heroic performance of his men to Secretary of War James Monroe. "Notwithstanding the dreadful cross fire of every species of missile by the enemy, to which they were exposed without a possibility of returning fire (the most trying of all situations) not a man under my command offered to move, until orders to that effect was given and then it was done safely and in order."

It is remarkable when one considers that John P. Hungerford was a general in the War of 1812 while at the same time he was serving in the U.S. Congress. He only missed 90 out of a 478 roll call votes, or 19 percent, which was the average absentee rate for all congressmen.

After concluding his political career in the U.S. Congress, Hungerford became a major landholder in the Leedstown area. When he sold most of his landholdings, he lived with his nephew at Twiford Plantation only a few miles from where he is buried. Hungerford continued to serve his beloved Westmoreland County as a justice of the peace and also retained his rank as brigadier general until his death on January 31, 1833.

Today we dedicate this historical highway marker in honor of John P. Hungerford, whose accomplishments both as a military leader and political leader have gone far too long without adequate recognition by posterity.

"There are few men," concluded his eulogist, "who possess those qualities of the heart, calculated to endear them to the circle in which they move, in a more eminent degree than did Gen Hungerford. This tribute of respect to his memory is paid by one who knew him long and loved him much."

Stuart L. Butler

September 10th, 2017, 2pm: The dedication of a recently installed interpretive monument for Dr. Daniel Norton, a War of 1812 veteran, located in the Shockoe Hill Cemetery in Richmond. Dr. Norton's original monument was destroyed by a fallen tree last year. By the monument will be a marker summarizing his War of 1812 service which was purchased by the Society of the War of 1812 in the Commonwealth of Virginia. He was a Surgeons Mate in First Virginia Militia Regiment during the War. The cemetery location is at 100 Hospital Street in Richmond.