



## Sweetland/Swetland Lore #86 Summer 2018

SWEETLAND/SWETLAND FAMILY ASSOCIATION



### **John Sweetland: One of the Tough and Talented Men from Marblehead, Massachusetts in the Revolutionary War**

**By Carolyn Cottrell Hartman**

The year 1776 was nearly over and the Revolutionary War was not going well for George Washington and his troops. They had yet to win a major battle with the well-trained British and Hessian troops who far outnumbered them. George Washington led his men who were tired, often without food, and untrained. Many were sick and even more were going home because their original enlistments were up. If he could not win at Trenton, General Washington knew that the revolution could be over. Washington moved his troops to nine miles north of Trenton, New Jersey to McConkey's Ferry on the Delaware River. He ordered Colonel Cadwalder to make the crossing at Bordertown and Brig. General Ewing to cross at Assunpink Creek Bridge. The severe snowstorm prevented them from crossing.

Colonel Rahl's Hessian/British troops occupied Burlington and Trenton. Other British troops were garrisoned at Princeton, Perth Amboy, Borderton and Pennington. Colonel Rahl settled his troops in Trenton for the winter. Rahl was an experienced leader but had a fondness for hard liquor. He and his Hessian troops celebrated the Christmas holiday with drink and loud revelry. Even though Rahl had been warned that Washington was planning an attack, the German took little note of the warning. Since Washington believe the Hessians would be vulnerable the day after Christmas, he made plans for a daring night crossing of the Delaware River for an early morning assault.

When he prepared to cross the Delaware, Washington's only hope was a surprise attack. As he always did when he needed help crossing a body of water, Washington enlisted the help of Colonel John Glover and his very tough and dedicated group of men from Marblehead, Massachusetts. These "Marblehead Mariners" made their living as commercial fishermen working the rough seas off the coast of Massachusetts. If anyone could get his troops, equipment and horses across the river with the icy and very choppy water and a 'nor'easter' blowing on Christmas, 1776, these men could do it. The mariners confiscated all boats that were needed that night and destroyed any other boats that could possibly float all up and down the river. Washington with his troops crossed at McConkey's Ford. Although the snow made the approach more difficult, it also guaranteed that the Hessian guards would be inside their quarters.

The following is David McCullough's description of the river crossing from his book, *1776*: "Glover's men proved as crucial as the change in the wind. In a feat of extraordinary seamanship, at the helm and manning oars hour after hour, they negotiated the river's swift, contrary currents in boats so loaded with troops and supplies, horses and cannon, that the water was often but inches below the gunnels—and all in pitch dark, with no running lights. Few men ever had so much riding on their skill, or were under such pressure, or performed so superbly."

One of these mariners was JOHN SWEETLAND (christened 28 Oct 1750-died about 1785). As noted in Pam Matthias Peterson's book *Marblehead Myths, Legends and Lore*, "It could not have been accomplished without Glover's men and their seafaring abilities. They knew how to row, how to handle the boats they confiscated for the task and they had the strength, skill and determination to transport 2,400 men, plus horses and artillery across a river filled with chunks of ice. They traveled tirelessly back and forth through the icy water all night long until all the troops finally were on the New Jersey side of the river."

(Continued on p. 2) 

(Continued from p. 1)

The first that Colonel Rahl and his Hessians knew about the attack was when they awoke to the sound of gunfire. Much of the fighting was by bare fists, rifle butts, bayonets and swords. Rahl's ineffectual counter-attack was broken up by small arms fire. When Colonel Rahl fell mortally wounded, the Hessians began surrendering. It is believed that the entire battle lasted only about forty minutes. Washington and his troops later re-crossed the river into Pennsylvania. Casualties that night included:

Hessian/British troops: 40 killed, 60 wounded, 918 captured

American Troops: 4 killed, 8 wounded

Washington's victory that night resulted in a new respect for the Colonial fighters, increased morale, and it caused more volunteers to join Washington's Army.

The Marblehead Mariners still exist in the form of a group of re-enactors who regularly appear in parades and other town events in Marblehead, typically in February, as shown in the photo below:



Regarding the famous painting of "Washington Crossing the Delaware" by Emmanuel Otlieb Leutze, it is unlikely that General Washington would have been standing in the small, overloaded boat in the very rough water. What we do know is that JOHN SWEETLAND and his fellow mariners did their job and were heroes that Christmas night that marked the first victory of the Revolution.

*Editor's Note:*

*Carolyn Cottrell Hartman is the 4th great granddaughter of John Sweetland of Marblehead, Massachusetts.*

Family History Vital Records such as those at Left became Available due to Volunteer Indexers. Page from Revolutionary War Index at Right is Courtesy of Jane Sweetland.

REGISTRATION CARD—(Men born on or after April 28, 1877 and on or before February 16, 1897)

SERIAL NUMBER U-817 NAME (Print) Benjamin Joseph Sweetland ORDER NUMBER

PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print) 306 Wasas St. San Diego SD. Calif.

MAILING ADDRESS Home

AGE IN YEARS 53 PLACE OF BIRTH Carson City Nevada

DATE OF BIRTH June 30 1888

NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS S. M. Fuller Sta. R. G. B. San Diego Calif

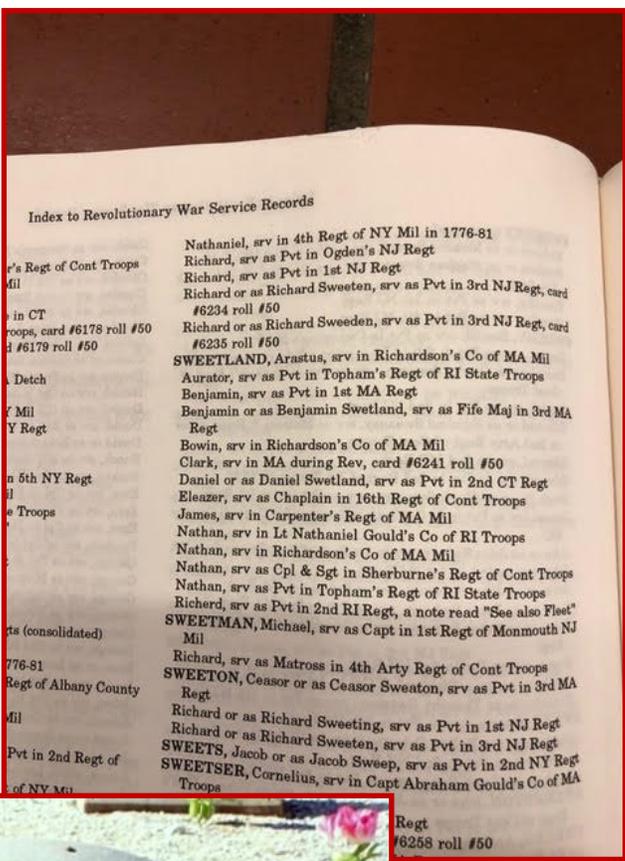
EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS Don Lee Road casting Co. Sta. R. G. B. San Diego SD. Calif.

I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.

D. S. S. FORM 1 (Revised 4-1-42)

Draft Registration Card for Benjamin J. Sweetland 1941

From the Carson City Daily Appeal, Sept. 30, 1890 Funeral of Mrs. Chubbuck. Yesterday afternoon the funeral of Mrs. Chubbuck took place from the residence of her son-in-law, W. D. Cottrell. Notwithstanding the bad weather there was a large gathering of friends at the house, and the numerous floral tributes showed the high esteem held for the deceased (Posted on FamilySearch by Thayne M. Edgington). [See Mary Lovell (Gardner) Chubbuck's Headstone below]



Headstone photos such as the one at left from Lone Mountain Cemetery in Carson City, Nevada may be found along with obituaries on web-sites such as: [findagrave.com](http://findagrave.com)

Father: George W. Chubbuck 1828-1916. Mother: Mary L. Chubbuck 1832-1890.

These were the parents of Louisa M. Chubbuck who married William Harris Sweetland.



### SFA Notes Passing of Longtime Member Mary Watkins Bowers

Mary was born on February 27, 1925 to William and Zoe Watkins. After graduating from Butler University in Indianapolis, she earned her Masters and Ph.D from University of Minnesota. Mary taught at the American School in Tokyo Japan before returning to marry Norman Bowers on November 21, 1954. Mary and Norman lived and worked in Pensacola FL, San Jose CA, Nashville TN and Chapel Hill NC before settling in Illinois. Mary was on the faculty at Northeastern Illinois University, and helped to develop their program in Counselor Education. Mary was a member of First United Methodist Church, Evanston since 1962 and was active in United Methodist Women, serving as president and many other positions. After retirement, Mary traveled to Japan, Norway and Europe and spent winters in Bradenton FL, where she reconnected with childhood friends. Mary passed away on November 18, 2017 in Minneapolis MN. Mary was preceded in death by her husband, Norman D. Bowers, her sister Rachel W. Noffke. Mary is survived by Alice and John Anderson, Karen and Rod Thompson, and Laura Bowers and 8 grandchildren and 1 great-grandchild.

*Editor's Note: Mary and her husband Norman Bowers participated in the Sweetland/Swetland Family Organization and attended reunions, as pictured above. Mary's husband, Norman, was instrumental in placing original Sweetland/Swetland documents, books and diaries in the Allen County Library in Ft. Wayne, Indiana.*

**Do you have interesting Sweetland/Swetland family information to share and be included in the next Lore such as an interesting story, a photo of an ancestor's home, people, a family heirloom, tools, etc., or comments on a previous story? Please send these to our editor, Anne Kirby (see contact information at right). Thank you.**

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[www.swetland.org](http://www.swetland.org)

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