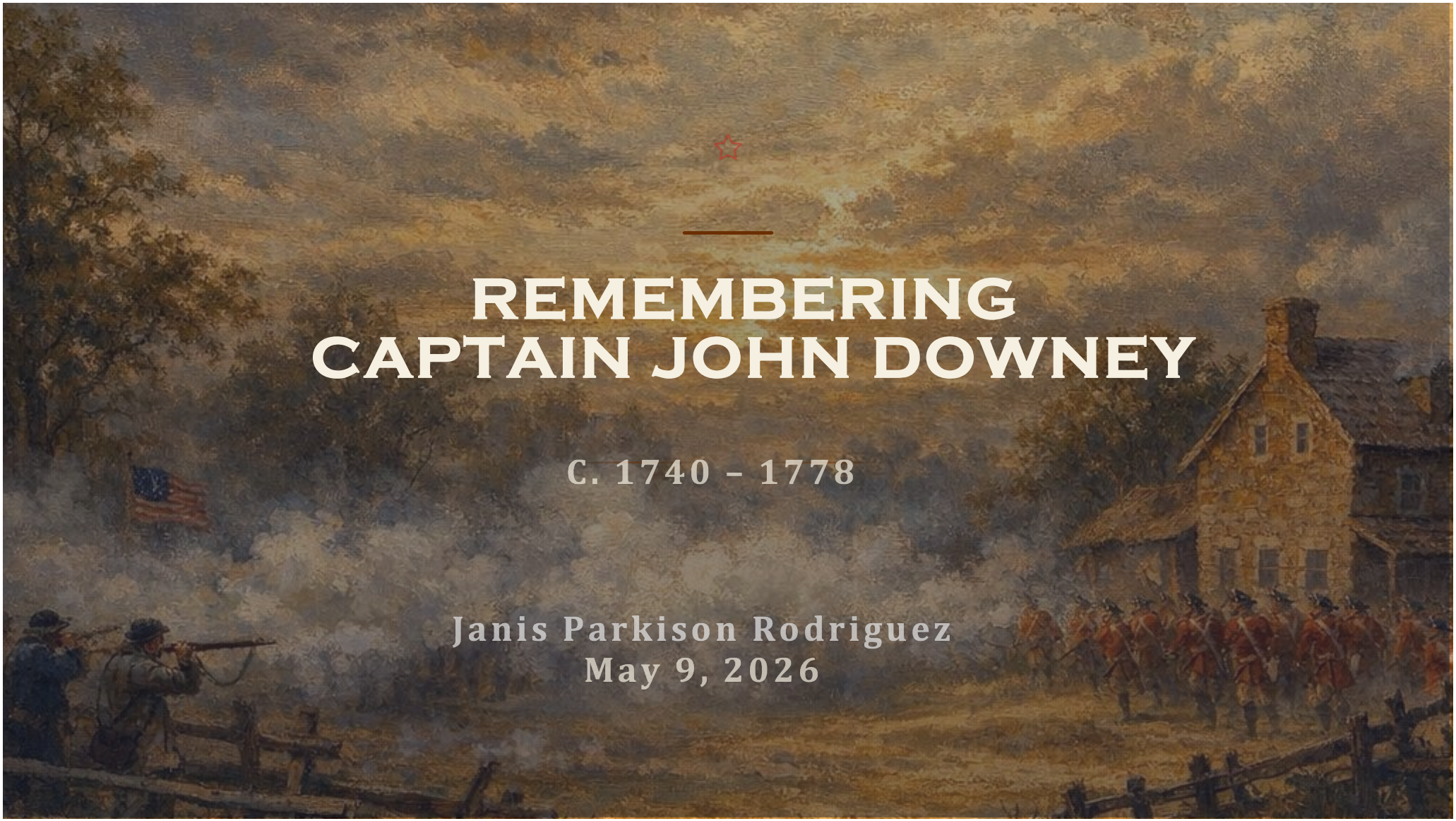


REMEMBERING CAPTAIN JOHN DOWNEY

C. 1740 – 1778

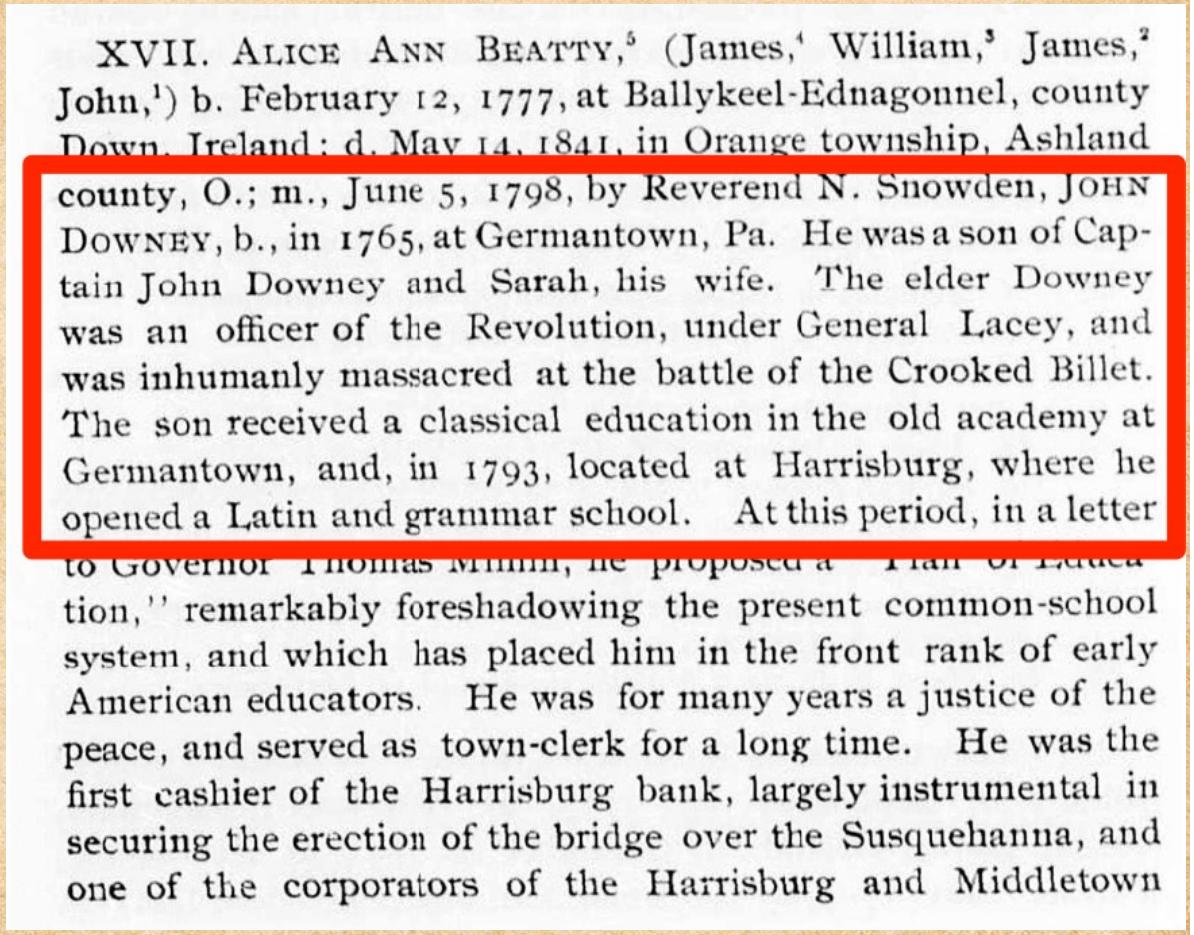
Janis Parkison Rodriguez
May 9, 2026

Found 5th cousin's Downey/Parkinson website in 2002

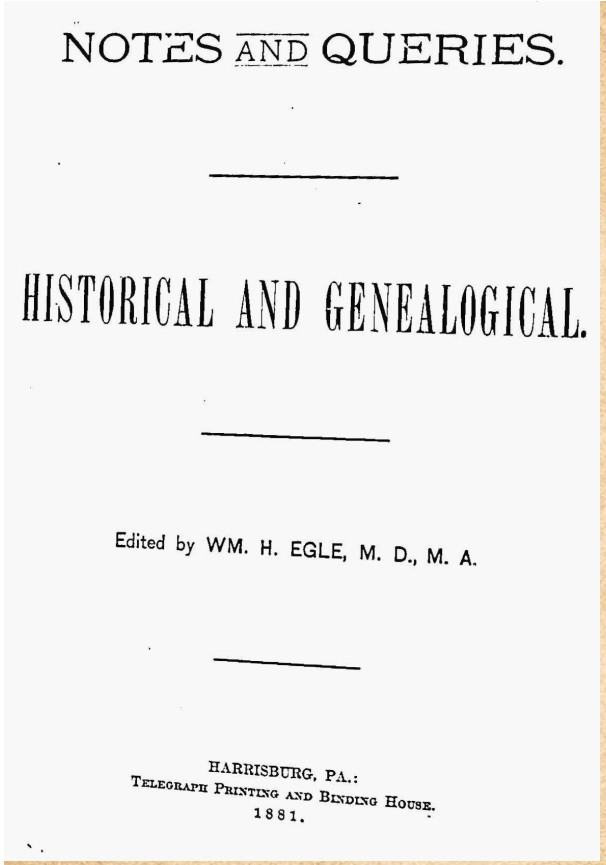
- Transcribed Champaign County, OH marriage records show:
  - John Downey married Sarah/Polly/Mary Parkinson (his 4th gg)
  - Margaret Downey married James W Parkinson (my 4th gg)
- 1850 & 1860 Censuses & tombstone show the four were born between 1791-1801
- 5th cousin claimed these were siblings marrying siblings
  - letters between second cousins in 1880s naming all the children
- 5th cousin claimed John Downey was born in Harrisburg PA

Downeys in Dauphin County, Pennsylvania

- **Only two Downeys lived in Dauphin County PA 1800-1810**
  - **John Downey**
  - **Charles Downey**
- **Lots of information about John Downey**
  - **Bios claim he was son of Captain John Downey**
- **Charles Downey**
  - **Only 1800 Census for and 1810 Census for Widow Downey**



XVII. ALICE ANN BEATTY,[5] (James,[4] William,[3] James,[2] John,[1]) b. February 12, 1777, at Ballykeel-Ednagonnel, county Down, Ireland; d. May 14, 1841, in Orange township, Ashland county, O.; m., June 5, 1798, by Reverend N. Snowden, JOHN DOWNEY, b., in 1765, at Germantown, Pa. He was a son of Captain John Downey and Sarah, his wife. The elder Downey was an officer of the Revolution, under General Lacey, and was inhumanly massacred at the battle of the Crooked Billet. The son received a classical education in the old academy at Germantown, and, in 1793, located at Harrisburg, where he opened a Latin and grammar school. At this period, in a letter to Governor Thomas Mifflin, he proposed a "Plan of Education," remarkably foreshadowing the present common-school system, and which has placed him in the front rank of early American educators. He was for many years a justice of the peace, and served as town-clerk for a long time. He was the first cashier of the Harrisburg bank, largely instrumental in securing the erection of the bridge over the Susquehanna, and one of the corporators of the Harrisburg and Middletown



NOTES AND QUERIES.

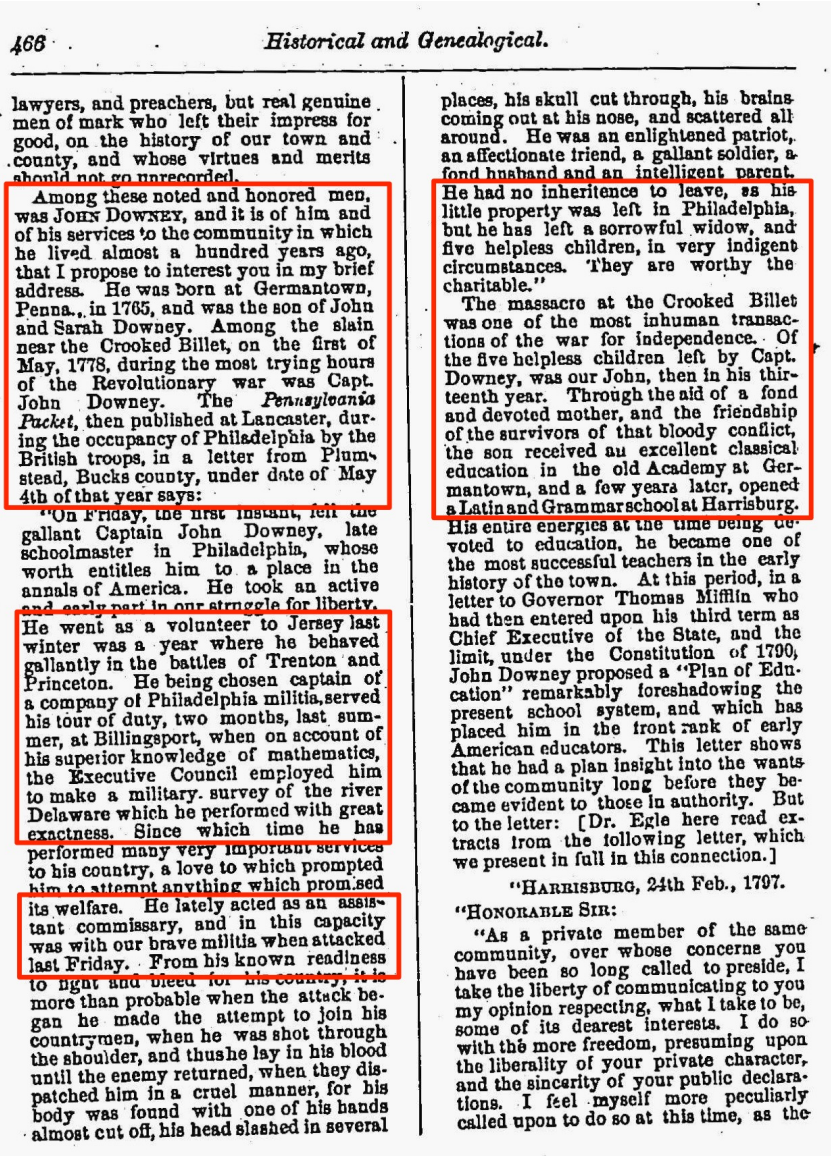
HISTORICAL AND GENEALOGICAL.

Edited by WM. H. EGLE, M. D., M. A.

HARRISBURG, PA.:
TELEGRAPH PRINTING AND BINDING HOUSE.
1881.

- **Reknowned educator**
- **Bios mention son of Captain John Downey, Revolutionary War martyr**

Notes and queries : historical, biographical and genealogical, chiefly relating to interior Pennsylvania, *[1st-2d ser., v. 1-2, 1881-1883,* v. 1, No. 7 pp 465-469]
https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/14844



468 Historical and Genealogical.

lawyers, and preachers, but real genuine men of mark who left their impress for good, on the history of our town and county, and whose virtues and merits should not go unrecorded.

Among these noted and honored men, was JOHN DOWNEY, and it is of him and of his services to the community in which he lived almost a hundred years ago, that I propose to interest you in my brief address. He was born at Germantown, Penna., in 1765, and was the son of John and Sarah Downey. Among the slain near the Crooked Billet, on the first of May, 1778, during the most trying hours of the Revolutionary war was Capt. John Downey. The *Pennsylvania Packet*, then published at Lancaster, during the occupancy of Philadelphia by the British troops, in a letter from Plumstead, Bucks county, under date of May 4th of that year says:

"On Friday, the first instant, fell the gallant Captain John Downey, late schoolmaster in Philadelphia, whose worth entitles him to a place in the annals of America. He took an active and early part in our struggle for liberty. He went as a volunteer to Jersey last winter was a year where he behaved gallantly in the battles of Trenton and Princeton. He being chosen captain of a company of Philadelphia militia, served his tour of duty, two months, last summer, at Billingsport, when on account of his superior knowledge of mathematics, the Executive Council employed him to make a military survey of the river Delaware which he performed with great exactness. Since which time he has performed many very important services to his country, a love to which prompted him to attempt anything which promised its welfare. He lately acted as an assistant commissary, and in this capacity was with our brave militia when attacked last Friday. From his known readiness to fight and bleed for his country, it is more than probable when the attack began he made the attempt to join his countrymen, when he was shot through the shoulder, and thus he lay in his blood until the enemy returned, when they dispatched him in a cruel manner, for his body was found with one of his hands almost cut off, his head slashed in several places, his skull cut through, his brains coming out at his nose, and scattered all around. He was an enlightened patriot, an affectionate friend, a gallant soldier, a fond husband and an intelligent parent. He had no inheritence to leave, as his little property was left in Philadelphia, but he has left a sorrowful widow, and five helpless children, in very indigent circumstances. They are worthy the charitable."

The massacre at the Crooked Billet was one of the most inhuman transactions of the war for independence. Of the five helpless children left by Capt. Downey, was our John, then in his thirteenth year. Through the aid of a fond and devoted mother, and the friendship of the survivors of that bloody conflict, the son received an excellent classical education in the old Academy at Germantown, and a few years later, opened a Latin and Grammar school at Harrisburg. His entire energies at the time being devoted to education, he became one of the most successful teachers in the early history of the town. At this period, in a letter to Governor Thomas Mifflin who had then entered upon his third term as Chief Executive of the State, and the limit, under the Constitution of 1790, John Downey proposed a "Plan of Education" remarkably foreshadowing the present school system, and which has placed him in the front rank of early American educators. This letter shows that he had a plan insight into the wants of the community long before they became evident to those in authority. But to the letter: [Dr. Egle here read extracts from the following letter, which we present in full in this connection.]

"HARRISBURG, 24th Feb., 1797.

"HONORABLE SIR:

"As a private member of the same community, over whose concerns you have been so long called to preside, I take the liberty of communicating to you my opinion respecting, what I take to be, some of its dearest interests. I do so with the more freedom, presuming upon the liberality of your private character, and the sincerity of your public declarations. I feel myself more peculiarly called upon to do so at this time, as the

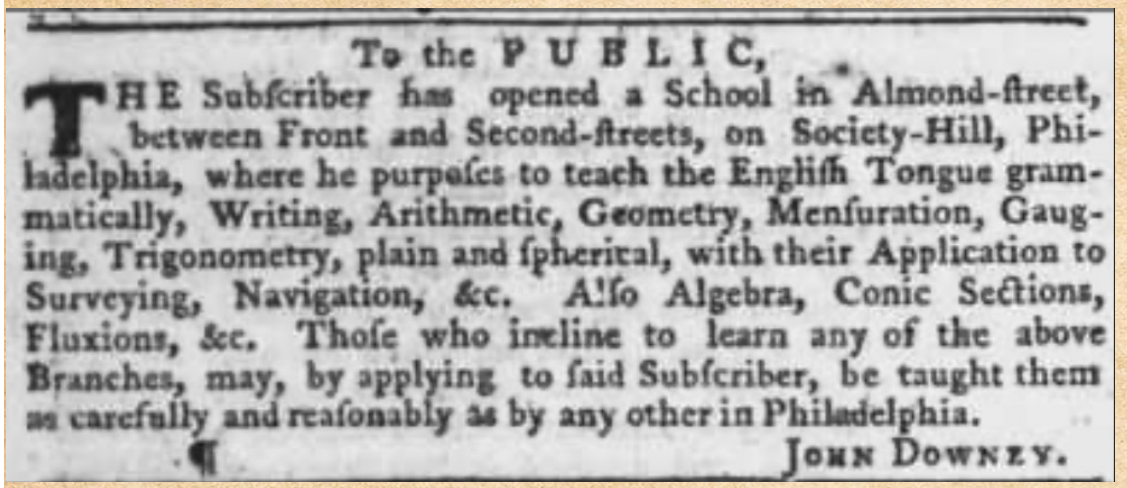
John Downey 5th great-grandfather

Early Life in Colonial Philadelphia

- **Born about 1740, birthplace unknown**
- **Married Sarah Haldon 1767 at the Zion Lutheran Church**
- **Five Children by 1778:**
  - ***Charles Downey 4th gg* m. Widow Downey**
    - Four children: John, ***Margaret 3rd gg***, Nancy & another
  - **John Downey m. Alice Ann Beatty** *no issue*
  - **Elizabeth Mary Downey m. Nathaniel Buchanan**
    - Alice Ann, Nancy, & William Murray Buchanan
  - **Two others died before 1794, one likely a Nancy**
- **Moved to Plumstead, Bucks County, PA when the British occupied Philadelphia in September 1777.**

SCHOOLMASTER – Taught Mathematics & Surveying

Opened School 1766



To the PUBLIC,

THE Subſcriber has opened a School in Almond-ſtreet, between Front and Second-ſtreets, on Society-Hill, Philadelphia, where he purpoſes to teach the Engliſh Tongue grammatically, Writing, Arithmetic, Geometry, Menſuration, Gauging, Trigonometry, plain and ſpherical, with their Application to Surveying, Navigation, &c. Alſo Algebra, Conic Sections, Fluxions, &c. Thoſe who incline to learn any of the above Branches, may, by applying to ſaid Subſcriber, be taught them as carefully and reaſonably as by any other in Philadelphia.

JOHN DOWNEY.

[70] *Ibid*, Oct. 2, 9, 1766: "School-House in Walnut-street."

Ibid, Sept. 12, 1771: "School-room . . . in Second-street, near Lodge-alley."

Ibid, Sept. 30, 1772: "School . . . at the back of the Fountain Tavern, in Chestnut-street."

Alexander Power was appointed tutor in the College and Academy, 1769, and resigned, 1772.

[71] *Ibid*, Oct. 2, 9, 1766. In partnership with Alexander Power.

Schoolmasters of Colonial Philadelphia. 363

[56]	Mary Williams	1759
[57]	Robert Kennedy	1760
[58]	John Maxfield	1760
[59]	David Kennedy	1760
[60]	Joseph Garner	1761, 1766
[61]	Adalbert Ebert	1762
[62]	Edward Jones	1763
[63]	Richard Harrison	1763
[64]	Thomas Adel	1764
[65]	Mrs. Joseph Garner	1766
[66]	—— Carruthers	1766
[67]	—— Hoffneur	1766
[68]	Sarah Venables	1766
[69]	Mary Roberts	1766
[70]	Alexander Power	1766, 1771–72
[71]	John Downey	1766

Revolutionary War Service

- **Volunteered and fought in the Battles of Trenton and Princeton –** Fall 1776
  - *Likely crossed the Delaware with Washington*
- **Captain Pennsylvania Militia in Billingsport, NJ** Summer 1777
  - *After learning of his mathematical knowledge and surveying skills, the Executive Council engaged him to conduct a military survey of the Delaware River*
- **Assistant Commissary in General John Lacey's Militia which was disrupting British supplies to Philadelphia**
- **Died in the Battle of Crooked Billet -** May 1, 1778

HISTORY OF THE BATTLE

OF THE

CROOKED BILLET,

FOUGHT MAY 1st, 1778.

BY W. W. H. DAVIS, A. M.

PRICE 25 CENTS.

4
3168

The proceeds of sale to be applied to the erection of a Monument upon the field of battle.

PRINTED AT THE DEMOCRAT OFFICE,
DOYLESTOWN, PA.
1860.

The following obituary notice of Captain Downey appeared in the Pennsylvania Packet, in May, 1778 :

"PLUMSTEAD, *Bucks County*, May 4th, 1778.

"Among the slain near the Crooked Billet, on Friday the first instant, fell the gallant Captain Jno. Downey, late school master in Philadelphia, whose worth entitles him to a place in the annals of America. He took an active and early part in our struggle for liberty. He went as a volunteer to Jersey last winter a year, where he behaved gallantly in the battles of Trenton and Princeton. He being chosen captain of a company of Philadelphia militia, served his tour of duty, two months last summer at Billingsport, when, on account of his superior knowledge of mathematics, the Executive Council employed him to make a military survey of the river Delaware, which he performed with great exactness. Since which time he has performed many very important services to his country, a love to which prompted him to attempt any thing which promised its welfare. He lately acted as an assistant commissary, and in this capacity was with our brave militia when attacked last Friday. From his known readiness to fight and bleed for his country, it is more than probable when the attack began he attempted to join his countrymen when he was shot through the shoulder, and that he lay in his blood until the enemy returned, when they dispatched him in a cruel manner, for his body was found with one of his hands almost cut off, his head slashed in several places, his scull cut through, his brains coming out of his nose and scattered all around. He was an enlightened patriot, an affectionate friend, a gallant soldier, a fond husband and an indulgent parent. He had no inheritance to

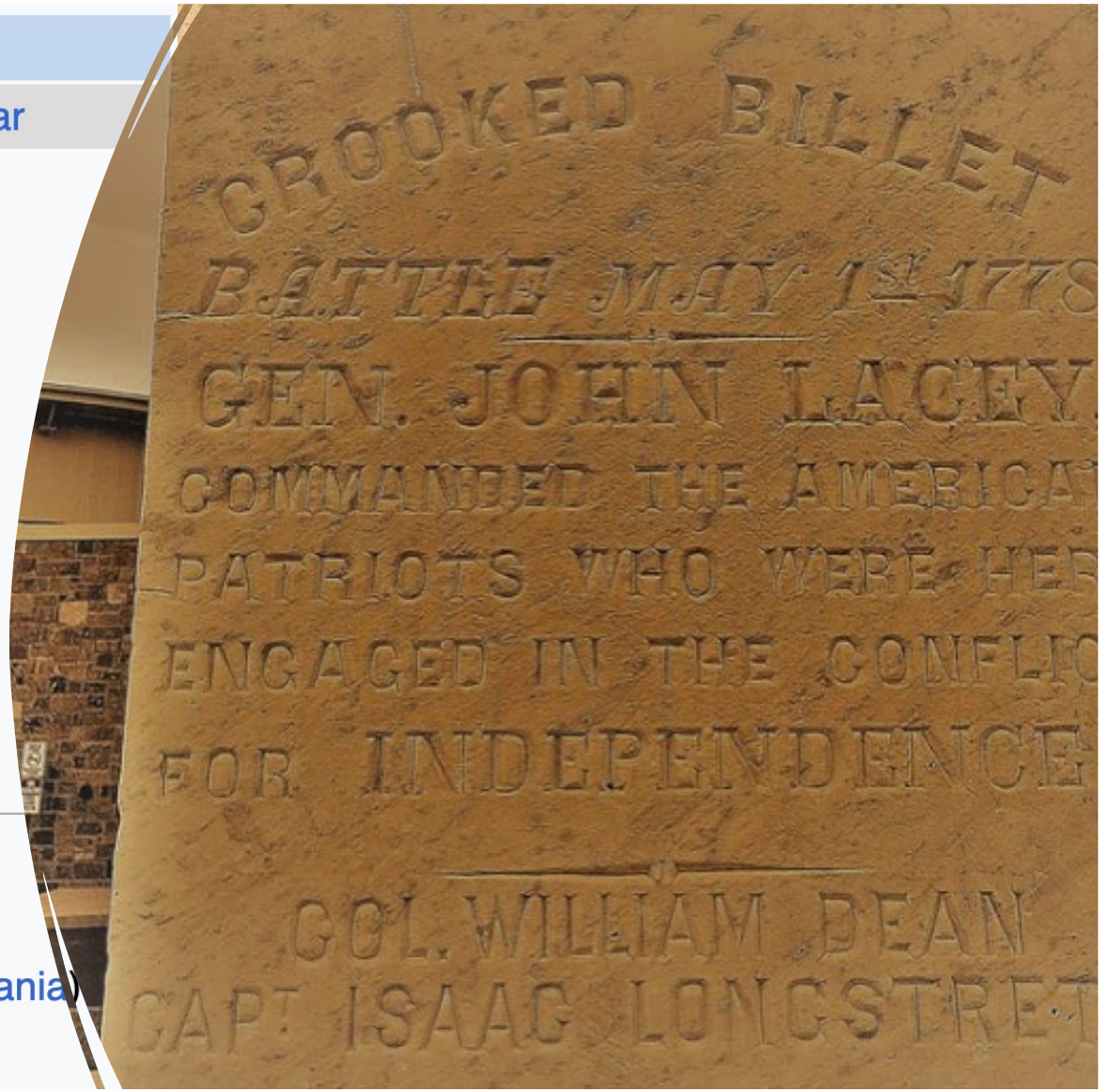
leave, as his little property was left in Philadelphia ; but he has left a sorrowful widow, and five helpless children, in very indigent circumstances. They are worthy the notice of the charitable."

Battle of Crooked Billet

Part of the American Revolutionary War

Battle of Crooked Billet monument

Date	May 1, 1778
Location	Crooked Billet Tavern (Present-day Hatboro, Pennsylvania)
Result	British victory



The Battle of
The Crooked Billet

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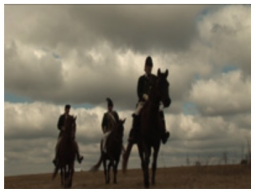
"... I consider it a massacre"
Anita M. Fleck
The Battle of The Crooked Billet

The Battle of Crooked Billet



On the night of April 30th, the British marched out of Philadelphia with 850 men on foot and horse. Their destination was The Billet, present- day Hatboro.

Their mission was to stop the Militia from disrupting supplies reaching Philadelphia. Their other objective was to capture the leader of the Militia General John Lacey. Three hundred militiamen were encamped with Lacey at the Billet; most of them were unarmed and untrained.

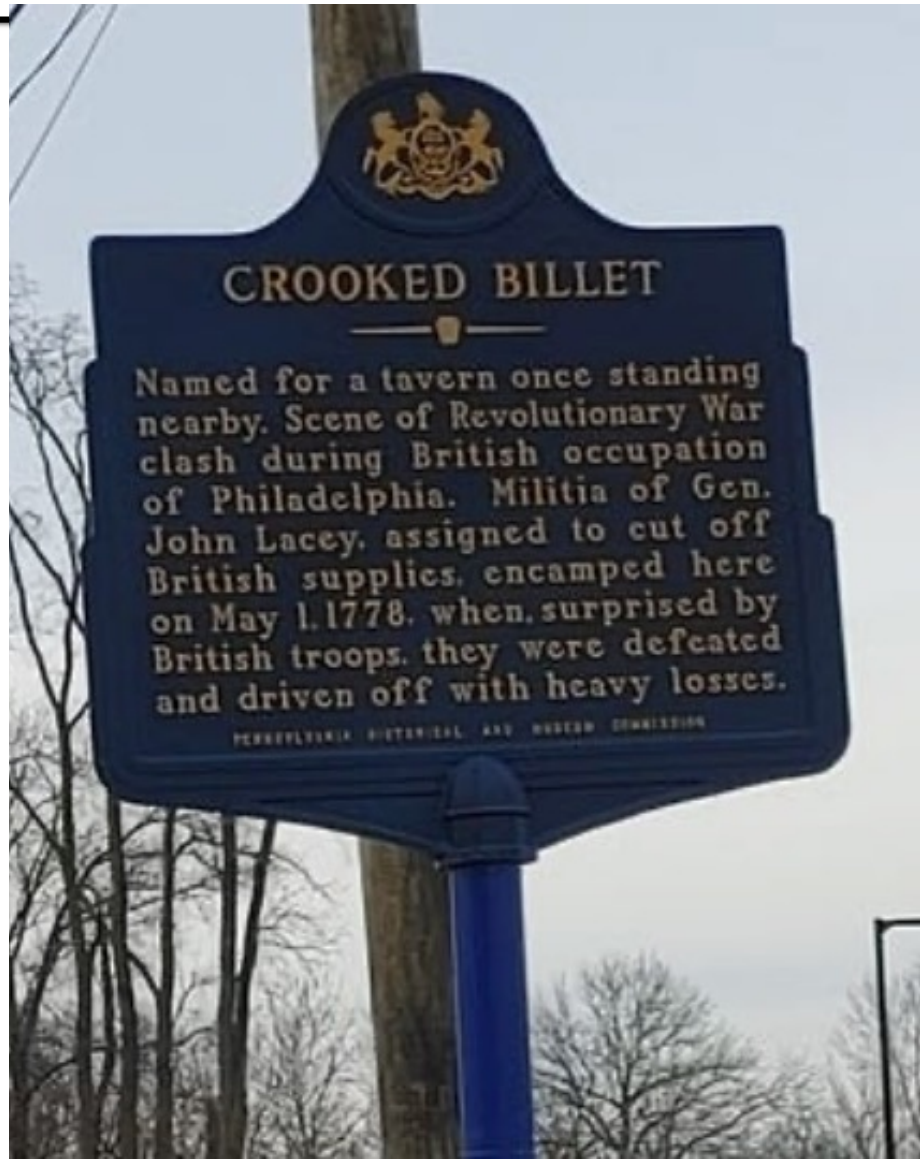
The British marched through the Fox Chase area of Philadelphia down the Huntington Pike where they split. The Queens Rangers, a loyalist regiment continued down the Second Street Pike and the 500 British regulars went left toward Old York Road.

The plan was to have the British regulars wait in ambush along the Horsham Meeting Road near the Old Mill Inn in Hatboro. The Queens Rangers were to drive the Militia into the waiting British troops. The Militia were expected to retreat along the Horsham Meeting Road which leads to Valley Forge and the Continental Army.

General Lacey was a native of Bucks County, Pennsylvania and was the youngest appointed General under Washington's command. During the battle he saved hundreds of lives by keeping his militiamen together and heading his troops north escaping into Bucks County.

The Militia suffered 9 men wounded, 26 killed and 58 captured. The British reported no casualties. However, several were wounded and 3 horses killed.

The British never achieved their objectives. They did not prevent the Militia from continuing to disrupt supplies and most importantly, General Lacey was never captured. While it is true the British could claim this a military victory, it was however a British failure thanks to the quick thinking and leadership of General John Lacey. He is truly a faceless hero of the American Revolution.



INTERNET ARCHIVE
WayBackMachine
http://www.battleofcrookedbillet.com/aboutfilm.htm
19 captures
27 Mar 2012 - 15 Mar 2025

The Battle of
The Crooked Billet

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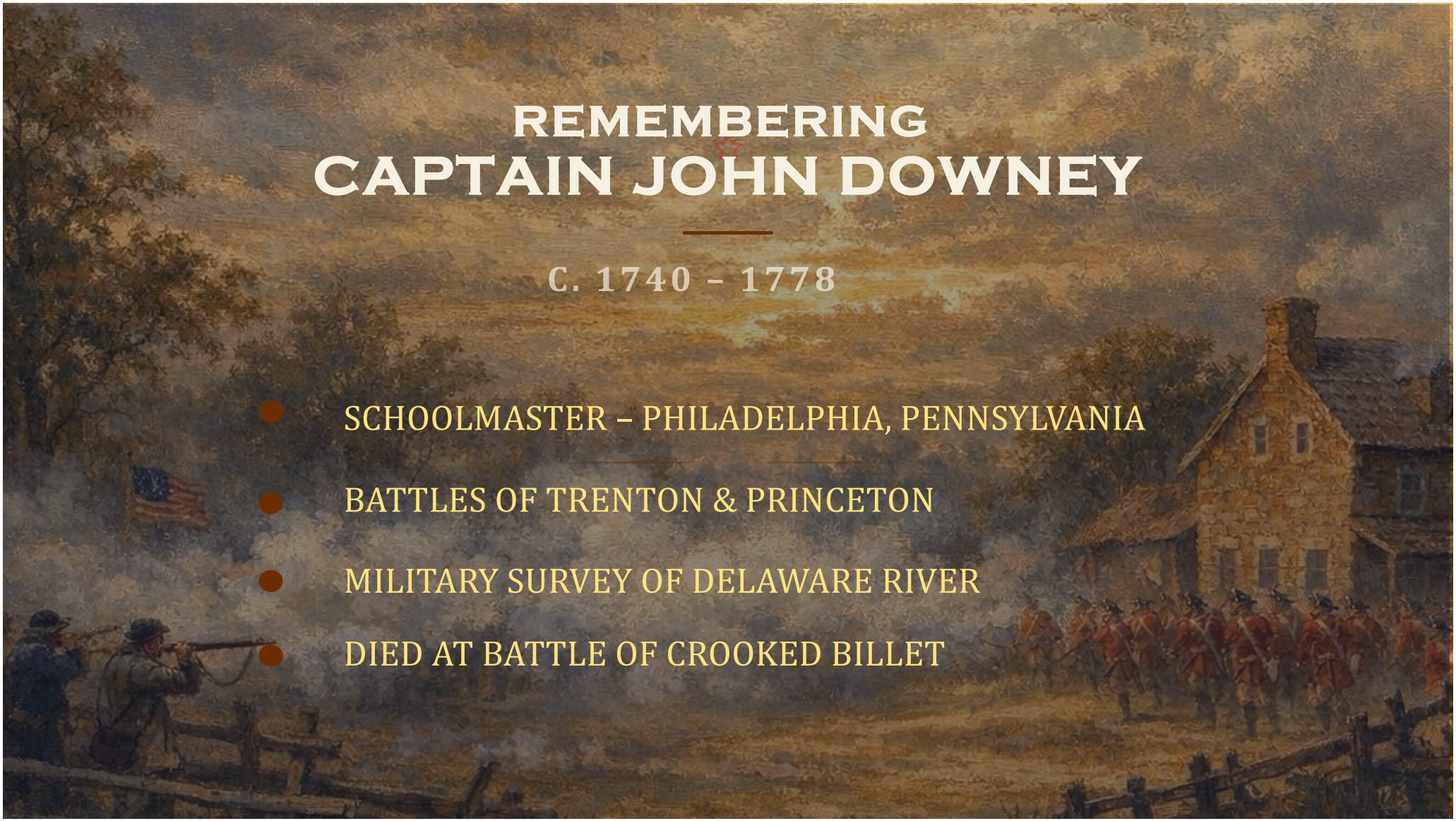
*".. for his body was found with one of his hands almost cut off ...
and his brains coming out of his nose"
Obituary of Captain John Downey
The Battle of The Crooked Billet*

About the Film


REMEMBERING
CAPTAIN JOHN DOWNEY
C. 1740 – 1778
SCHOOLMASTER – PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA
BATTLES OF TRENTON & PRINCETON
MILITARY SURVEY OF DELAWARE RIVER
DIED AT BATTLE OF CROOKED BILLET