

Lewis Hurd, American Patriot

When the call went out for volunteers for what was to be known as the Continental Army following the conflict between the British regulars and the Massachusetts Militia forever after known as the Lexington Alarm, one of the first respondents was a 17 year old resident of Roxbury, Connecticut named Lewis Hurd. Lewis was the brother of Seth Hurd, one of Colebrook's early settlers, and his involvement with the cause for liberty is one of the truly fascinating sagas that emerged from that conflict.

Colebrook's Michael Hurd, who has returned to the town of his youth and purchased a home so that he and his wife could enjoy his retirement years, wrote a book about his great grandfather, entitled "Remember Me to All Enquiring Friends; the Civil War letters and Diaries of Captain Burritt Newton Hurd". Michael is also, as he puts it, the self-appointed genealogist of the Hurd family. He shared his research papers with me, as I wished to find out more about another of his ancestors, Seth Hurd, who was the first inhabitant of Beech Hill, and who, in 1786, built his home right across the road from the house I was born and raised in. Today, this is at the intersection of Beech Hill Road and Chapin Road. When I was growing up, my uncle, John Crosby, owned the Hurd place, and I spent as much time in that house as I did my own.

After I became an adult, attempts were made to discover whatever became of Seth Hurd, but the Colebrook records were scant; he had sold his land holdings in town in 1806, and had left for parts unknown. Access to Mike's genealogy ended the mystery. Seth Hurd had been born in Roxbury, Litchfield County. He moved to Colebrook in 1786 and began raising his family. After 20 years of farming, Seth and his oldest son, Smith, after selling the land they had wrested from the virgin forest, had gone to the northeastern corner of Ohio, the part that had belonged to Connecticut prior to Ohio becoming a state in 1803. There they began new lives for themselves. Two of Seth's daughters married two Mills brothers and remained in Colebrook.

At this stage, my attention was drawn to the fact that Seth had had a brother, Lewis. Lewis also began life in Roxbury, and when the Lexington Alarm went out across the colonies, although only 17, he became a member of the Continental Army. From this point onward, he kept a diary of what he did, and what was transpiring around him. What unfolds is one of the most fascinating Revolutionary War accounts that I have come across, and the material in his diary has never been published.

Throughout this document the reader has to read between the lines in places, as he proves to be quite modest, and never places himself in a position where he might stand in the reflected glory of a particular moment. However, because of his advancements in rank, which followed military engagements, and the positions of responsibility that were given to him, there can be no doubt that he had been instrumental in certain engagements which resulted in victories for Washington's army. The phrases he uses leave no doubt as to his patriotism. Throughout all the years of the existence of our nation, from the signing of the Paris Peace Treaty in 1783 until the present, speeches are made on the Fourth of July, on Veterans Day and Armed Forces Day, as well as other occasions, where terms exalting our nation abound. I am not suggesting anything is amiss here, I'm only pointing out that when patriotic utterances are written by a soldier who actually

fought for and won the freedom and independence we came so close to not achieving, it carries so much more weight than when we who came years later say the same words.

At the age of 17, at the time he joins the army, Lewis writes “he was drafted in June, 1776, in time to hear the joyful sound of Independence, the first voice of Liberty.” His first action was at the battle of Long Island, as it has come to be called, which ended with Washington’s forces being ejected from both western Long Island as well as Manhattan, which was to remain the headquarters of the British forces throughout the war. It was during this time period that Nathan Hale was exposed as an American spy and hung by the British. Shortly thereafter there occurred a series of small skirmishes around Westchester County designed to deny the British of food and forage. He had several close calls with both death and capture.

In 1777, as his unit marched northward up the Hudson River to meet the British military threat coming down from Canada, news reached them that Gen. Burgoyne had surrendered his army at Saratoga. With this threat lessened, the army proceeded to Pennsylvania, where the main portion of the army spent what turned out to be the worst episode of the entire war as they wintered over at Valley Forge. 1778 saw the army fighting the British forces in the eastern Pennsylvania-central New Jersey area, after which they returned to Connecticut.

The following year the American forces under Gen. Wayne captured the fort at Stony Point, across the river from Peekskill, N.Y., but were forced to abandon it in the face of lively bombardment from British warships firing at them at point-blank range. Hurd, with a small band of men stayed behind and successfully burned the fort so as to deny the British the further use of it. For his heroism, he received an advance in rank.

The last major engagement in which Lewis Hurd fought was the battle of Yorktown, which ended with Gen. Cornwallis surrendering the British forces there on October 19th, 1781. His unit returned to Connecticut where he was discharged September 5th, 1782, having survived 6 years in the War of Independence, which he entered as a youth of 17, and emerged at 23 as a man.