

Revolutionary War Soldiers that Made Their Home in Kirkwood

By: Karen Ferguson, Town of Kirkwood Historian

While the Town of Kirkwood was officially founded in 1859, the settlers and the formation of the Town happened several decades prior. Many of those early residents were Revolutionary War Soldiers who traveled back to the area after the war. As part of the 250th Celebration, I have been researching to figure out who those Patriots were and, with the assistance of the Sons of the American Revolution, installing Patriot Burial markers at the cemeteries where they were laid to rest to Remember and Honor them.

One of first settlers to arrive was **Jonathon Fitch** and he settled in the Kirkwood Center area (a/k/a Five Mile Point). Fitch served in the Revolutionary War in Colonel Webb's Company and in the Green Mountain Boys Regiment. Originally from Connecticut, he and his wife Esther moved here in 1789 directly from the Wyoming Valley in PA. He is credited for building the first grist mill in Broome County (then known as Tioga) in 1790. The mill was built in Fitch's Creek near the Susquehanna River at 5-mile Point. According to the 1873 edition of Broome County Gazette, this was more than likely the only grist for about 80 miles. Folks from the Newark Valley area would travel as far as 40 miles to purchase the flour from him. Additionally, Mr. Fitch, having studied law while in CT, became the first representative of Tioga County to the NY State Legislature. He was also appointed as the County Judge. He died at his daughter's home in Bainbridge in 1821 at the age of 76 and is buried in Sidney.

Another Revolutionary War Soldier by the name of **Silas Bowker** is mentioned in Broome County History. Bowker had the rank of Private and served as an Indian spy and scout with his son Silas Jr. It was in the battle of Warwarsing in 1781 that he provided a substitute for his son and was taken prisoner by the Indians for 14-15 months until he escaped when the war was about to end. He, along with his family, is said to have arrived in the Kirkwood area in the late 1880s. His residence was described as a log structure about 12 feet square with one small four light window on the north side. Silas moved out of the area around 1892 and settled in Locke, NY and is buried there.

Two other notable families arrived in 1793 and 1794 – the Bounds and the Snedekers. David Bound was Garrett Snedeker's son-in-law. He arrived about a year prior to the Snedekers and settled in the Snake Creek area of Conklin and eventually his family moved to the Village of Kirkwood. **Garrett** served under 4 different captains as a Revolutionary War Soldier. He and his family settled near the Riverside area, just across the river from David. Even though many of his children stayed in the Riverside and Village area and raised their children here, Garrett moved south to the Hart Lake area of Great Bend and is assumed to be buried at the Great Bend Episcopal cemetery. **Cornelius Snedeker**, Garrett's brother, must have traveled to this area about the same time and it is assumed he settled about 1 mile above the Village. He, too, served in the Revolution and was possibly in a unit of Sullivan's army. Cornelius is buried in the Kirkwood Cemetery. The Kirkwood area was known for being rich with valuable pine. It is no wonder then that the Bound

and Snedeker families worked together to clear the land for farming and also to select pine trees that were suitable for tall masts for sailing ships and for constructing rafts. They would float down the Susquehanna River to the mouth of the Chesapeake River to deliver the pine trees and then journey back on foot.

Another Revolutionary War soldier and 2nd Captain of the militia, **David Compton**, arrived in 1798. He settled in the Kirkwood Center area near the river and ran the well-known Greenhorn Tavern. His daughter married William Wentz. David died in 1805 and is buried in the Layton Cemetery located next to the Travel America truck stop. There will be a dedication of his Patriot Marker on June 13.

Nathaniel Taggart, occupied a farm about 2 miles below the Village in 1802. He was referred to as a genial, intelligent Yankee; and served as Captain of the militia. He was known as a spinning wheelwright, brick-maker, and skillful hunter. I am not sure where he is buried.

Let's turn our focus to the development of the Riverside area. Many of the early families that settled in this area did so not only because the land's soil was rich for farming and the topography perfect for raising cattle, but because Great Bend was in close proximity and was more developed than Binghamton at that time.

In addition to the Snedeker family, two other Revolutionary War soldiers named **John Conklin** and **Joseph Thomas** settled here. These men both served in the Army under Colonel Jedathan Baldwin and were friends. So much so, that the two families settled here in 1817 right next to each other. It should also be noted that their graves are near each other in the Riverside cemetery.

John Conklin's property consisted of 300 acres. John did many notable things. Some of them were that he served in the State of Assembly in the years 1807, 1810, 1811, and 1817; he was a chairman of board of supervisors 1810-1817; and a Judge of Sullivan County in 1809. Judge Conklin was described as an adventurer and an honest man. He died in 1846, 14 days short of his 90th birthday.

Joseph Thomas was married to Phoebe Tyler, daughter of Colonel Tyler. Both of their daughters married John Conklin's sons. Sarah married William Conklin and Emily married Joseph Conklin.

Joseph helped to build the fort at West Point and served as a member of the Assembly and a Judge. He and Emily had a son named Thomas Conklin, who was really instrumental in developing this Riverside hamlet. He was born in 1829. He attended local schools and worked on his family farm. At the age of 21, he married Sarah VanBuren. It was then he decided to open a store that became Riverside's most successful mercantile for 30 years. He also served in various roles in the community, including Town Supervisor and Trustee for School #1 (Riverside School). Sarah's father, Tobias VanBuren, was a local wagon maker. He was also the first postmaster for the Riverside post office that opened in 1870. Between those two families, they operated the majority of businesses in this Riverside hamlet.

A few more Revolutionary War soldiers came to the Kirkwood area: **Elias Bevier** in 1815; **Ebenezer Park** in 1815 or 1816; **Elias Conklin** in 1817.

Elias Bevier was a private and served in the battles of Saratoga, Stillwater and at Half Moon in Albany. With his team, he moved the “big chain” to the Hudson River where it was laid to prevent the British from going up the river. Bevier settled in the area near “Bevier Street” and Old State Road. He was originally buried in the Bevier Cemetery but had to be relocated to the Kirkwood Cemetery to make room for the building of a schoolhouse.

Ebenezer Park served in the 6th Regiment of Dutchess County and also in the 3rd Regiment of the NY Line. He settled in the Kirkwood Center area and operated a farm. His brother Edward eventually moved to the area lived next to him. The Creek that ran through their properties was named Park Creek. Eventually the property was sold for the development of the State Hospital and Ebenezer moved to Binghamton. He is buried in Spring Forest Cemetery.

Elias Conklin, John Conklin’s brother, served with him as a private in Capt. Tyler’s Company of Indian spies under Col Rosencrantz’s Regiment and also under Col. Chamber’s NJ Militia. Elias’s family settled in the Kirkwood Village area and he’s buried in the Kirkwood Cemetery.

This documents 11 Revolutionary War Soldiers, with 6 being buried here in the Town of Kirkwood. Ongoing research continues to verify others who may be a part of Kirkwood’s history. It is also believed that many other settlers who called our town home were descendants of those who served and also a part of our Nation’s founding. To all, we are grateful for your service and sacrifice.