

1776—A Few Unpainted Houses

By Ernest C. Marriner

The settlements around Ticonic Falls sent few men to the armies of the Revolution. The place was too new and too small. Even 20 years after the outbreak of that war, a newcomer wrote that he found only a few unpainted houses on this side of the river across from Fort Halifax.

So far as the records reveal, only two men enlisted in the war from all the area that was then Winslow, including what is now Waterville. Those men were Simeon Simpson and John Cool. Although Simpson lived on the east side, Cool was one of the west side's earliest settlers, being owner of two of the big lots surveyed by John McKechnie in 1762. He was here at least ten years before the shots were fired at Concord. He built his home on the Messalonskee where Cool Street now bears his name.

The community, small as it was in 1775, was not unaffected by the war. In September of that year it saw the 1100 men of Arnold's army pass up the Kennebec, and at least two local men served as Arnold's scouts. John McKechnie, who was part-time physician, as well as surveyor and operator of the town's first mill, tended Arnold's sick at Fort Halifax.

The 24 names of local Revolutionary soldiers on the bronze plaque at the Waterville Public Library are those of veterans who lived and died in Waterville, most of them coming here after the war. Indeed the greatest influence of the Revolution on Waterville, besides the general victory for independence, was the civic influence of several of those veterans. Two were most conspicuous, Obadiah Williams and Asa Redington.

Dr. Obadiah Williams was a surgeon in the army who, after his discharge, secured a grant of land in what are now the towns of Mount Vernon and Vienna. Sensing that greater opportunity for development was at Ticonic Falls, he arranged an exchange for Lot 104, 40 rods on the river and extending back a mile to the First Rangeway, a lot that became the heart of the business section.

Like McKechnie, Williams was only a part-time doctor, devoting most of his time to business. He became so prominent that, when Waterville separated from Winslow in 1802, there was a movement to name the new town for him. But because other families also wanted the name, it was decided to call the place by the uncontroversial title of Waterville.

Dr. Williams gave the town the land long known as the Common, on which now stands City Hall.



Revolutionary Memorial Tablet, Public Library

Obadiah Williams died in 1779, three years before the separation, but Asa Redington lived until 1845, thus becoming even more important in the development of the town.

Redington's role in the Revolution was outstanding. In a war in which enlistments were usually short, Asa served from the fall of 1778 until after Cornwallis' surrender at Yorktown in 1781. He was a member of General Washington's honor guard at Valley Forge.

After the war, Redington came to Vassalboro, where he married the daughter of Nehemiah Getchell. In 1792 he and his father-in-law came to Waterville and built the first dam across the river at Ticonic Falls. He soon owned a grist mill and saw mill, shipyard and store, and accumulated more land. As Justice of the Peace, he issued the warrant for Waterville's first town meeting. His sons and grandsons carried on the family name and fame in Waterville and Augusta.

The Waterville Historical Society is now housed in a colonial residence built by Asa Redington for one of his sons in 1814, and is appropriately named the Redington Museum.