

[Odell, William]

Another Revolutionary Patriot gone

Died, in Kendall, Orleans co., N.Y., on the 12th of February, 1856, Mr. WILLIAM ODELL, at the advanced aged of 94 years. The old gentleman had been blind many years, but with that exception retained his senses and faculties remarkably to the last. He is spoken of by those who knew him well, as having been a very kind-hearted, generous, noble-spirited man. He left several sons and daughters, of the highest respectability, among whom are Mrs. [Margaret, the wife of] Col. [Lester] Barker, of Clinton, and three sons residing in this town. For some years past, the father resided here with his two sons, Abraham and Jacob Odell, where he received the most affectionate care to the moment of his death.

The following sketch of his father, and his grandfather's family, was written by Br. Abraham Odell, for the information and gratification of the relatives and friends scattered abroad. It will also be found exceedingly interesting to all who cherish a holy and filial reverence for the names and the memories of the patriotic fathers of the Revolution.

[Rev.] J. J. Austin

William Odell was the son of Jonathan [and Margaret Dyckman] Odell, who lived on the banks of the Hudson River, three miles below Tarrytown, the place where Major Andre was taken prisoner. When the British landed and took New-York, they followed Gen. Washington as far as White Plains. There Washington halted, and fought the memorable battle of Chatterton's Hill, at which Washington retreated; and they followed him no farther, but crossed over to the Hudson River, and encamped on the farm of Jonathan Odell. William Odell, his son, was then living at home, at the age of 14 years. They took Jonathan Odell and four of his neighbors prisoners, and confined them in the old Dutch church, in the city of New-York. The four neighbors died soon—it was supposed from eating poisonous or bad provisions—and Jonathan Odell would have died also, had it not been for a widowed lady who found out that he was there, and sent her little daughter with provisions to him every day. But to return to the army.

Maj. Gen. John Vaughn was the British commander. They remained about ten days on Mr. Odell's farm, with about ten thousand men, besides a large troop of Light Horse. It was in the fall of the year. They took possession of the dwelling house, for the General and his Officers to quarter in, and only allowed one small bed-room for the family—which consisted on William Odell, his mother, three sisters, one colored woman, and the old negro man whom we will call Cezar. They stripped the farm of all the cattle, sheep, horses, poultry, hay, oats, corn, and in fact everything they could find; and not satisfied with that, burned the barn because it did not contain more, and also burned all the rails on the farm. The mother was sick at the time, and requested a chicken of the General, but he gave his shoulders a shrug, and said: "You have the name of being such rebels, I can do nothing for you."

The General took it in his head that there were goods and money hid, and called Cezar, and told him if he did not tell him where they were, they would hang him; but the old negro refused to tell. So they hung him on a large cherry tree, that stood by the door of the bed-room, where his mistress saw him, and she ran out

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and cut the rope. He could not stand nor speak, but he revived. The General then demanded of him to tell, but the good old negro would not tell—chose to die rather than tell, strange as it may seem, for he and William had buried a large lot of goods. They then let the old negro go.

When the army was about to leave, the General called up the old negro and William, and told them he was going to leave, and they must drive those hogs, about twenty, to the Commissary. They had to obey; but when they got there, the Commissary was gone. They asked the General what they should do with the hogs. He told them they might have them, if they could keep the soldiers from catching them. They turned the hogs toward home, and scared them. The Hessian soldiers ran after them, but the hogs all got home; so the hogs were all they had left. How often William would say, in his older days, of General Vaughn, "Distressed wretch, I never heard of him after he left." William being the youngest son of five, the four older ones having joined Gen. Washington, and his father a prisoner, he and the old negro provided for the family the best they could. Really, such times tried men's souls—especially the old negro, Cezar.

Col. De Lancy, who commanded the Tories and Cow Boys at Morrisiana, a place near the East River, a few miles above the city of New-York, hearing that Jonathan Odell was a prisoner, and having been acquainted with him previous to the war, interceded and had him liberated on parole—about the only good thing a Tory was ever known to do. He was brought home so feeble that he could not walk alone; but he recovered, and lived to be about the age of his son William. The condition of his parole was, that he was to remain on his farm, and not take up arms against the British crown. He remained about one year. During that time he was so harassed and plundered by the "devilish Tories," as William in his old age used to call them, that he could scarcely keep any thing to live on. We will mention one scene that took place, as a specimen. One evening, when the family sat around the supper table, the door was forcibly broken open by a gang of these Tories.—They seized the supper table by the legs, turned it bottom side up, together with all the contents, and then danced on the bottom, and hurrahed for the rebel ship. Indeed, it went so hard with him on his farm, that he concluded to disregard the conditions of his parole. He therefore left his farm, and removed with his family to Peekskill, a place near the Highland Mountains, where he remained until the close of the war—Cezar all the time with him. When the war was over he returned to his farm, where he remained until his death.

William, in the mean time, having become old enough, thought it his duty to render his country some service. He accordingly enrolled himself in the Militia at Peekskill, as Orderly Sergeant, in which capacity he served during the last three years of the war. His duty consisted chiefly in patrolling the fields and woods, in search of those Morrisiana Tories and Cow Boys that infested that part of the country. They would sally out in large armed forces, for the purpose of plunder. It was difficult to prevent them from stealing all the cattle and horses in the country. Consequently William's duty was dangerous and fatiguing, far more so than was the duty of the regular army; for he seldom slept in the house, being obliged to be on guard constantly; and very frequently did he, with his guard, come in contact with those Tories, which they always succeeded in routing and dispersing.—He also stood his draught several times; and when Gen. Washington marched his army

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down through New Jersey and Pennsylvania to Yorktown, where he captured Cornwallis, William accompanied him with his father's team, for the purpose of conveying baggage and munitions of war. And now, after serving his country through all these trying scenes, until the close of the war, he married Johannah, the daughter of Daniel Willsea (who was his Lieutenant through all his service), with whom he lived in the most mutual harmony for the space of sixty-five years, she having died about one year and a half previous to himself, after raising a family of seven sons and three daughters, who were all living at his death except one daughter. And when, in his old age, he would call to mind those Revolutionary scenes, his indignation would rise high, and he would express himself in the following manner—"The British nation had good justice done them for their wicked tyranny and oppression, when General Washington flogged them out so handsomely that they had to leave the country, and acknowledge the independence of the United States."

By the act of Congress of the 7th of June, 1832, granting the Militia pensions, he received ninety-one dollars and sixty-six cents per annum, during his natural life. He never felt satisfied, however, for he claimed one hundred and twenty dollars per annum, that being the pay of an Orderly Sergeant. He frequently would say, "how they can give me less than a private I am unable to know." And also by the late act granting bounty land, he received a warrant for 160 acres of land, which he received about one month previous to his death.

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The reader, no doubt, would like to hear what became of the old negro, Cezar. Well, we will tell you. His master, at his death, freed him, and left directions for his children that they take good care of him. So accordingly the good old negro would go, first with one, and then with another of the children, that suited him best; and they all would treat him as well as they would their own children. He lived to be very old.

A. ODELL

Kendall, May, 1856

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, Sat. 7 Jun 1856
[a Universalist newspaper]
(abridged)

Transcribed on 8 Sep 2008 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY