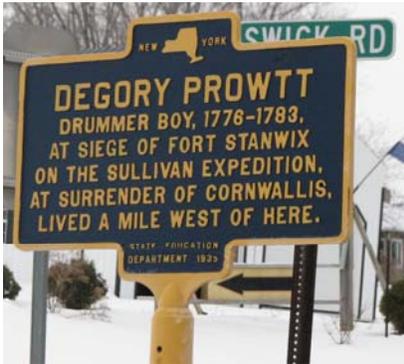


Degory Prowtt



Along Route 89 just south of the Swick Road, there is a historic marker for Degory Prowtt who served as a drummer boy in the American Revolution. His name is spelled in different ways—Prowtt, Proutt, Prout, Prouth—in these records. For convenience, this article uses the spelling that appears on the historic marker.

Degory Prowtt was born May 13, 1761, in Cornwall on the Surrey side of London. His father Thomas Prout was an Irish sea captain. His mother was Charity Hawke, the niece of Edward Hawke who was the Baron of Towton and the First Lord of the Admiralty. Thomas and Charity had three sons, the youngest of whom was Degory. In 1763, Thomas and Charity and their three sons moved to New York where Thomas continued as a sea captain. Unfortunately, on a third trip to India, Thomas and his two oldest sons were lost at sea.

At about age thirteen, his mother apprenticed Degory to a trade. Feeling ill-treated, Degory ran away and enlisted as a drummer boy under Captain James Greig on March 4, 1776, in the 3rd New York Continental Regiment commanded by Colonel Peter Gansevoort. Later he was transferred to Captain DeWitt's Company and then to Captain Van Sitze in the same regiment. In 1780, the last mentioned company was transferred to the 1st NY Regiment commanded by Col. G. Van Schaick.

He was present at the siege of Fort Stanwix in August 1777. Col. Peter Gansvoort had refused British Brigadier General Barry St. Leger's terms of surrender of the fort (which was now renamed as Fort Schuyler). Gansvoort's soldiers held out valiantly for twenty days until reinforcements under Benedict Arnold arrived, causing St. Leger's British forces to withdraw. The failure of the British to capture this fort helps to explain why the British did not gain control of the Mohawk Valley during the Revolutionary War. During 1778 and 1779, Prowtt was part of detachments on duty at several points in the Mohawk Valley and Albany. Prowtt took part in the so-called Sullivan Expedition against the Iroquois Indians in 1779. This means that Prowtt was on lands that would become Seneca County. Following this Sullivan Expedition, his regiment spent the winter at Morristown, New Jersey. Then they were posted in the Highlands of the Hudson River for much of the remainder of the war.

The Prowtt family has a wonderful story about the quick thinking actions of Degory Prowtt in an incident during General Sullivan's campaign against the Iroquois. As the story goes, Degory was crossing a bridge when he spied a crouching Indian. Degory quickly aimed his drumstick at the Indian's head and dealt so powerful a hit that it killed the Indian. The family story goes on to say that Degory used the tanned skin from the Indian's back for his drum-head.

Prowtt also served in the battle of Yorktown, Virginia, the last real battle of the Revolution. It must have been quite an experience for Prowtt to witness the surrender of the British General Cornwallis on October 17, 1781!

During the Revolutionary War, Degory's mother Charity had tried to reconcile with her family, an estrangement that arose because of their opposition to her marrying Thomas Prout. Charity's brother, who was a merchant in London, named her and her sons as his heirs. Charity decided to wait until Degory returned from the War before she would return to England and

actually reconcile with her brother. Unfortunately, just a few days after Degory returned from the War, Charity died of yellow fever. Degory decided to try to make a success of himself here in America before trying to go to England and claim the inheritance that would eventually come from his uncle.

Prowtt married twice. About 1784, he married a Jemima Sherwood of Massachusetts. They had four children: William, Daniel, Thomas and Jemima.

A few years after his first marriage, Degory learned of his uncle's death. On two different occasions, his wife's family scuttled his plans to go to London to claim his uncle's inheritance. About 1825, Degory entrusted a Methodist minister named John B. Youngs to take Degory's paperwork for his claim when Youngs went to London. All trace of the minister and Prowtt's paperwork was lost.

In recognition of his services in the army, New York gave Degory 600 acres in the township of Solon, now Cortland County. Like what so many Revolutionary War soldiers did, Degory sold and deeded away these lands—which were then a wilderness—to a Stephen Hogeboom of Claverick for 15 pounds. According to a history of the Town of Romulus, Degory Prowtt settled on Lot 84 in the town of Romulus. It is easy to speculate that he, like other soldiers in the Sullivan Expedition, such as Lawrence Van Cleef, saw the natural beauty and economic potential of the lands they traversed in destroying Iroquois settlements, and decided to settle in this area. According to the December 13, 1834 Assessment Roll of the Town of Romulus, Prowtt owned 8 acres on Lot 84, worth \$96 for a tax levy of 26 cents! He had purchased this property from Asa and Catharine Church on September 27, 1820. Family records report that Degory was so bothered by arthritis that only four acres of his property had been “cleared” for farming.

While a resident of Seneca County, on May 4, 1818, he applied for a veteran's pension. He received \$8 a month. The history of the town of Romulus stated that he was a local Methodist exhorter (preacher). He was a member of the First Methodist Church of Varick at McDuffietown.

His wife, Jemima, died February 26, 1833, and in 1835 he married Hannah Ball, a widow with two daughters. He lived just a few months after this second marriage. On September 15, 1835, he summoned his neighbors Aaron and Titus Phillips to be witnesses to a will Degory made out. He bequeathed his land, his two cows, household goods, the family Bible, his watch, a big clock, and books to various heirs. He died September 20, 1835, at age 77, and was buried in the Oak Hill Cemetery at McDuffietown. His widow Hannah died in 1847, and is buried next to Degory.

Visiting his grave today, one has only some sense of the exciting experiences that Degory Prowtt had during the Revolutionary War. Approximately one hundred Revolutionary War veterans are buried in Seneca County. The local chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution has been actively seeking to identify information about each of these soldiers and, if necessary, erecting a new gravestone justly honoring the war sacrifices of these individuals.

