

## **A Chaplain of The Revolution**

Memoirs of the Rev. John Gano

The Rev. John Gano was of French origin, his first ancestors in this country having been settled at New Rochelle, Westchester County, N.Y. He was born at Hopewell, New Jersey, and began his career as a Baptist clergyman in Virginia; he labored also in New Jersey and the Carolinas. In December 1760 he became a clergyman of the Baptist church, in Philadelphia, and the next year removed to New York. Here he continued in charge of the Baptist congregation till the Revolution broke out. After the war he again collected his flock, but soon after removed to Kentucky, where he died, August 10, 1804, in the 78<sup>th</sup> year of his age.

In 1790, at the instance [sic] of one of his sons, he wrote a sketch of his life, which was printed at New York, in 1806, under the title of: *Biographical Memoirs of the late Rev. John Gano, of Frankfort, (Kentucky), formerly of the City of New York. Written principally by himself* New York: Tiebout, 1806” Pp. 151. From this new rare volume we extract the following account of his Revolutionary services:

“The war now coming on, obliged the church to separate, and many removed from the city, in almost every direction through the Union. I was invited by Mr. Peter Brown, or Horseneck, in the edge of Connecticut, to remove my family to his house, as he understood I was determined to remain in the city till the enemy entered it; the British fleet were in the Narrows, and part of their troops were landing on Long and Staten Islands.

I was invited to become chaplain of the regiment belonging to Colonel Charles Webb, of Stamford, and Lieut.-Col. Charles Hall. This I declined. They then proposed to me to come to their regiment, which lay a little distance from the city, and preach to them one service on Lord’s-day, and attend them every morning. To this I acceded.

The enemy’s shipping took possession both of the North and East Rivers, and clearly evinced their determination of landing their troops. This left me no possible opportunity of getting my household furniture; I was obliged, there for, to retire precipitately to our camp. The next day, after a little skirmishing, the British took possession of the city, and our army was driven to Harlem Heights. From thence after a few more skirmishes, we had to retreat to King’s-bridge, in West Chester, leaving at Fort Washington a garrison of about fifteen hundred men, all of whom, a little after, fell a sacrifice to the British. From King’s-bridge we retreated to White-plains, where General Washington had the greater part of his army, excepting those that were employed in Pennsylvania. On the heights of White-plains we had a warm though partial battle; for not a third of our army, or probably of theirs, was brought to action. My station, in time of action I knew to be among the surgeons; but in this battle, I, somehow, got in front of the regiment; yet I durst not quit my place, for fear of damping the spirits of the soldier or of bringing on me an imputation of cowardice. Rather than do either, I chose to risk my fate. This circumstance gave an opportunity to the young officers of talking; and I believe it had a good effect on some of them. From this place, we withdrew in a few days to North Castle, and encamped not far from the Presbyterian meeting-house, which was made a hospital for the sick and

wounded. I obtained a furlough to visit my family for a few days; and upon my return found all the army gone from the place, except one poor soldier, whom I found at the hospital with a bottle of water at his side.

The British had passed through New Jersey towards Philadelphia; and had garrisoned a body of men at Brunswick, Princeton, and Trenton, where they had quartered the chief part of their Hessian troops. General Washington had passed over the Delaware with a part of his army, and encamped in Newton, In Pennsylvania; and had ordered the remainder, which I belonged to, and which General Lee commanded to come after him. We marched through Morristown and Baskinridge in New Jersey, where General Lee was taken in the night in the outskirts of our army. The command then devolved on General Glover, who led us through Aynwell over the Delaware to General Washington's Army.

Our troops principally consisted of men enlisted for the year, and the militia. General Washington gave orders for the army to march in the evening across the Delaware to Trenton and attack the Hessians. In this attack eleven hundred Hessians were taken prisoners. The time for which our troops were engaged being out, General Washington visited the various regiments and requested them to serve six weeks longer. In that time, he said, he expected a reinforcement, with an army raised either for three years or during the war. Our affairs were principally conducted by State Congresses. The British hearing of our army being at Trenton, marched their troops after us; and the two armies met at Prince Town, where a skirmish took place, and the British retreated to Brunswick. Here General Washington with a handful of men kept the British in close quarters for the remainder of the year.

Six weeks being; now expired, and we about to return home, the colonel and officers of the regiment requested to know if I would join them provided they should raise another body of men. I answered them in the affirmative, but on my return home, I found a letter from Colonel Dunboseque, who was stationed at Fort Montgomery, on the bank of the North River opposite Fishkill. On the receipt of this letter I set off to the colonel's regiment, to refuse the invitation therein contained. On my arrival there, I found General James Clinton, in company with the colonel, both of whom urged me to accept the office of chaplain, in so forcible a manner, that I finally consented. I repaired to the fort, where I remained till the British took it from us by storm.

The North River was a great object both to the Americans and the enemy. For while we had the command of it, the eastern and southern States could operate to great advantage; but if the enemy could control it, it would involve us in great difficulties and embarrassments. They were therefore anxious to have their army come from Canada to Albany, and their navy to take possession of North River, and thereby form a junction with each other. Their navy sailed up the river and landed their soldiers, amounting to about five thousand men. We had both in Fort Montgomery and Fort Clinton just about seven hundred men. We had been taught to believe that we should be reinforced in time of danger, from the neighboring militia; but they were at this time very inactive. We heard of the approach of the enemy, and

that they were about a mile and a half from Fort Clinton. That fort sent out a small detachment, which was immediately driven back. The British army surrounded both our forts and commenced a universal firing. I was walking on the breastwork, viewing their approach, was obliged to quit the station, as the musket-balls frequently passed me. I observed the enemy marching up a little hollow, that they might be secured from our firing until they came within eighty yards of us. Our breastwork immediately before them, was not more than waistband high, and we had but a few men. The enemy kept up a heavy firing, till our men gave them a well-directed fire, which affected them very sensibly. Just at this time we had a reinforcement from a redoubt next to us, which obliged the enemy to withdrawn. I walked to a eminence, where I had a good prospect, and saw the enemy advancing towards our gate. This gate faced Fort Clinton, and Captain Moody, who commanded a piece of artillery at that fort, seeing our desperate situation, gave the enemy a charge of grape-shot, which threw them into great confusion. Moody repeated his charge, which entirely dispersed them for that time.

About sunset the enemy sent a couple of flags, into each of our forts, demanding an immediate surrender, or we should all be put to the sword. General George Clinton, who commanded in Fort Montgomery returned for answer, that the latter was preferable to the former, and that he should *not surrender the fort*. General James Clinton, who commanded in Fort Clinton, answered the demand in the same manner. A few minutes after the heavy firing, which was answered by our army. The dusk of the evening, together with the smoke, and the rushing in of the enemy, made it impossible for us an opportunity of escaping through the enemy over the breastwork. Many escaped to the water's side and got on board a scow and pushed off. Before she had got twice her length, we grappled one of our row-galleys into which we all got and crossed the river. We arrived safe at New Windsor; there in a few days after we were joined by some more of our army who had escaped from the forts. By our returns we had lost, killed and taken prisoners, about three hundred men. The enemy, as we afterwards understood, had one or two field-officers, besides a great number of wounded.

When we arrived at New Windsor, I obtained a furlough, to visit my family, who then lived at New Fairfield, where was born my daughter Susannah, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of November 1777, and from whence, after tarrying a few days, I departed for the army.

The command of the North River, as I before said, was a great object with the Americans as well as the enemy. The British, therefore, made every exertion to unite their northern and southern armies. A spy was dispatched from Sir Henry Clinton, to obtain information of our situation. But providentially for us, the spy was apprehended, and the enemy's scheme frustrated. Their northern army was captured at Bennington, on their way to Albany, principally by the New England militia under the command of General Gates. I obtained another furlough to visit my family, but as our army was encamped near a meeting-house, I was ordered to visit them and preach. My family removed to New Milford, where I often preached when on a visit to them.

At the opening of the next campaign, General Clinton's brigade consisted of two regiments from New York, one from New England, and one from New Jersey, neither of which had a chaplain. I was therefore constituted chaplain to the brigade, by General Clinton, and soon after commissioned as such by Congress. During this campaign the principal operations of the enemy were in Pennsylvania and New England. In the latter they burnt part of Old Stratfield and attacked Danbury, where they were so warmly repulsed that with difficulty they escaped. At the close of the campaign Gen. Clinton's brigade was ordered to take winter-quarters in Albany. While we remained there, a message came from our troops which lay at Canajoharie to General Clinton, requesting to let me go and spend a little time with them. To this the general consented, and I went. When I got there, they asked me to preach; and wished I would dwell a little more on politics than I commonly did. In one of my discourses, I took the words of Moses to his father-in-law: *"Come, go thou with us, and we will do thee good; for he that seeketh my life, seeketh thy life, but with us thou shalt be in safeguard."*

About this time the western expedition was mediated, to be conducted by General Sullivan. General Maxfield, of New Jersey was to go up the Susquehanna and form a junction with General Clinton. General Banis's brigade, from New England, to go to Otsego, at the head of the Susquehanna, and wait for orders, to come down the river with flat-bottomed boats, which were for the conveyance of troops and provisions. Accordingly, one hundred and eight boats were provided, and went up the North and Mohawk rivers to Canajoharie. From thence they were carried through woods and swamps sixteen miles to Otsego, which forms the Susquehanna. While some of the army were cutting and preparing the road for the conveyance of the boats, the general sent others to dam the outlet, which was so effectually done that the whole lake was raised three or four feet. We encamped at Otsego for five or six weeks previous to our receiving orders for marching. We lay here on the fourth of July, and the officers insisted on my preaching, which I did from these words: *"This day shall be a memorial unto you throughout your generations."* On this occasion the soldiery behaved with the most decency that I ever knew them to during the war. Some of them usually absented themselves from worship on Lord's-day, and the only punishment they were subjected to was the digging up of stumps, which in some instances, had a good effect.

Our troops, both officers and privates, grew extremely impatient of remaining so inactive, fearing the campaign would fall through. The general informed me that he had received orders to move, and that he should do it on the next Monday. He requested me not to mention it, till after service the next day, which was Sunday. I preached to them from these words: *"Being ready to depart on the morrow."* As soon as the service was closed, the general rose up and ordered each captain to appoint a certain number of men out of his company to draw the boats from the lake and string them along the Susquehanna, below the dam and load them, that they might be ready to depart the next morning. Notwithstanding the dam had been opened several hours, yet the swell it had occasioned in the river served to carry the boats over the shoals and flats, which would have been impossible otherwise. It was at that time very dry; it

was therefore matter of astonishment to the inhabitants down the river, for above an hundred miles, what could have occasioned such a freshet in the river. The soldiers marched on both sides of the river, excepting the invalids, who went in the boats with the baggage and provision. In a few days we formed a junction at Cayuga with the troops from below. The general calculated the route and the time it would consequently take them; examined the provisions, and finally concluded to form a garrison, leave all the baggage and provision, (excepting that in charge of Colonel Butler,) and proceed with two or three pieces of light cannon, for the place of destination. The next day we had a little skirmish with the Indians, who we believed a secretly watched the motions of both divisions of our army.

We marched for Newton (Penn.), where the different nations of Indians under their two chiefs, Butler and Brant, had collected and ambuscaded. General Sullivan, by some of his spies, gained information of this the evening before; and therefore planned the attack for the next morning. Sullivan with his division and cannon was to march up and attack, while General Poor with his regiment should march to the right and take possession of a mountain, where it was judged the main body of the Indians lay. General Clinton to advance further to the right, and station himself at the back of the mountain to head the enemy, if they were routed. We pursued our orders till forced by an impassable defile to go nearly into General Poor's Route. Many of the enemy by this means escaped. One circumstance prevented our gaining a complete victory. Our orders were not put in execution when the attack was made by General Sullivan; he commenced with heavy firing from his cannon, which created a general alarm among the Indians. This we learnt from two prisoners whom we took. They also told us, that the instant the first cannon was fired, they broke their ranks and took to running, although Butler and Brant ordered them to stop. When our army collected we saw ourselves surrounded by a large field of Indian corn, pumpkins, squashes, beans, &c., which was no unpleasant sight to soldiers who were as hungry as we were. Here General Sullivan displayed his generalship, by putting the army on half allowance that we might more effectually secure the victory by pursuing the Indians. Our success and the exhortations of our officers induced the soldiery to a cheerful compliance, and they consequently set up a loud huzza! An Irishman observing this, said he had been a long time in the British army, and some time in the service of America, but he had never heard soldiers cry huzza! For half allowance before; however, as they all had, he would. To this place we brought several of our boats; and from there they were sent back to convey wounded soldiers and corn for the garrison.

On our return, the Indians that were settled in Cayuga and Tioga were apprised of our approach, and had left those two places, leaving behind them an old squaw, and a young one to take care of her. The general destroyed the town, but first ordered her into a wigwam, and forbid any one hurting her for her wigwam, and also left a note on the door to that effect. We understood that in going to the Genesee we had to go through a considerable town. The general sent off a lieutenant and sergeant with twenty men to make discoveries and to return that night. Instead of returning, they wished to try the convenience of an Indian wigwam, and therefore tarried all night.

The Indians, hearing of this, formed an ambuscade between them and the army, which our men did not discover till they were entrapped. One of our men, by name Murphy, cleared himself from them, shot an Indian who attempted to oppose him, and brought us the information. The general put the army in motion; but before we arrived to the relief of our man, we were stopped by a rivulet, and were obliged to throw a bridge across it. While this was doing, the general stationed centinels beyond the men who were at work, and nearly within gunshot of the Indians. In crossing the bridge, they shot one or two of our men; one of our centinels, a daring fellow, saw a cluster of them rise from their concealment, and knowing it was impossible for him to escape from them, ran toward them, halloed and waved his hat, as though our army was nigh him. This alarmed them so that they arose and ran, leaving their baggage, &c., behind them. We crossed the bridge, but had not marched far before night overtook us. We were obliged to encamp. The distance between us and the Genesee flats was but small. Next morning we set off on our march, crossed the Genesee, and marched seven miles to a large Indian town. Here we discovered that the Indians had massacred our Lieutenant Boyd and the sergeant, and had burnt down their huts. O Among the ruins of the huts we found a number of human bones, which we supposed were those of Boyd's scout taken in the skirmish, and of their own men who were killed and wounded. Here we encamped for the night.

In the morning we heard the guns from the British garrison. We discovered amazing fields of corn, not yet gathered which our army destroyed. It was supposed that the Indians were gone to the British garrison, and that they had concluded our intention was for the garrison. In the afternoon our army wheeled about, and General Clinton was ordered to encamp at the Genesee, and wait for our division to come up. Sullivan's division encamped in a large corn field. Our division marched with all the dispatch they could, being amazing weak and emaciated by their half allowance and green corn. We returned near to the garrison at Cayuga, the garrison came out to meet us. The next day we had a great feast in the garrison, and then arranged matters for our return to Easton. But here I must not forget a circumstance peculiarly pleasing to me. Two or three young soldiers were under great distress of mind concerning their souls, and frequently came to see and converse with me. I mentioned a text to General Sullivan, which frequently occurred to me when I thought of the Indians, and the devastation which was made in their country. The text was: "They shall walk through them, be an hungry, and curse their God and their King, and look upwards." The general intended to have a sermon when we arrived at Easton, and wished me to preach from these words just mentioned. But when we arrived at Easton, I found there was another chaplain who had made preparations of preach a sermon, I therefore give him the opportunity.

I obtained a furlough, to visit and tarry some time with my family. While here I received a letter from the Baptist Church in Philadelphia, as requesting me to come and supply them. I showed the letter to General Clinton, who granted them leave to pay them a visit for two or three weeks. I informed the church that I was not discharged from the army, neither did I wish to engage myself to any people. For if, in

the providence of God, the enemy should be driven from New York, I intended to collect my scattered church, and settle myself in that place. I therefore wished them to look for a supply elsewhere. While in Philadelphia I had a severe turn of the colic, which detained me from the army several days longer than I intended to have staid. That winter we encamped near Newbury, and my family lived at Warwick: as the distance was not great, I had the privilege of being more at home that winter than at any time since the commencement of the war; and it was a providential circumstance, as the winter proved extremely sever, and my family needed all the assistance I could give them.

The operatives of the enemy at this time were principally at the southward, where General Gates and the southern militia, opposed them with no very great success. General Gates, after his defeat, was succeeded by General Greene, which gave new life and vigor to the militia. About this time General Washington collected his army in the neighborhood of the British, at New Jersey. This excited the wonder of everybody. Does he intend to make a forcible attack on the British in New York? was the general question. Neither did the enemy understand this movements. General Washington had large ovens erected, which confirmed the opinion of his intended operation against the enemy at and about New York.

The period now arrived of a forced march of the combined army of French and Americans to Williamsburgh, in Virginia. They marched through New Jersey and Pennsylvania into Virginia; and came in the rear of Lord Cornwallis the same day that the French fleet arrived and blockaded the British at Gloucester Point. After a short siege, in which the whole British force in that quarter was reduced, General Washington moved his arm. This movement was so sudden and unexpected to me, that I was totally unprepared for it. I had with me only one shift of linen, or which I informed General Clinton, requesting leave of absence to get more; but in this he objected, and said I must go on with them at all events. When we arrived at Newark, I found an old lady who had been a member of my church in New York. I told her my situation, and she furnished me with what was needful of the campaign. From Newark we marched to Baltimore. There General Clinton's aid was taken sick, and I was ordered to stay with him till he was able to come after the army. The major's anxiety to follow the army retarded his recovery. However, he attempted, and set out; but after one or two days he was obliged to lay by. In a day or two we set off again, but did not reach the army before the British capitulated. However, we partook of the joy with our brethren.

Matters being adjusted the general ordered the return of the army. On my way home I stopped at a Mr. Hart's in Hopewell in Hopewell, in New Jersey, and after staying there one night, started for home. Between Hopewell and Piscataqua, I met a messenger from Scotch Plains, who informed me he was going to get Mr. Hart to preach a funeral sermon on the death of Mr. Miller, who was to be buried the next day; unless I would stop and preach it. I told him I would stop, but that he had better get Mr. Hart to preach the sermon. He went on, and informed Mr. Hart of what had passed. Mr. Hart said he wished to be excused. The duty then devolved on me: one

circumstances made it very striking to me: it had been a private agreement between Mr. Miller and myself, that the survivor of us, if he had word of the death, should preach the funeral sermon of the other. Never did I esteem a ministering brother so much, or feel the bereavement so sensibly as I did Mr. Miller. At the funeral, I got information that my family had moved; which was a day's ride less distant. I set off for home and found them well, and an addition of another son, whose name was William.

On my return to the army we encamped at Newbury, and erected some huts and a place for public worship on Lord's-day. We had three services a day, and preached in rotation; one from each brigade. We continued here during the winter, and had frequent reports that the British were negotiating a peace, which occasioned expresses being sent to and from the British general at New York, and General Washington.\* The next spring the British evacuated New York; and General Washington entered the city with; his army. The army was soon after disbanded, and we poor ruined Yorkers, returned to our disfigured houses."

\*Gen. Heath, in his "Memoirs," P. 371, mentions: "April 19, 1783. At noon the proclamation of Congress for a cessation of Hostilities was proclaimed at the door of the New Building, followed by three huzzas; after which a prayer was made by the Rev. Mr. Gano, and an anthem (*Independence from Billings*) was performed by vocal and instrumental music."

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