

Nothing But A Plain Old Soldier
Revolutionary War Veterans of Trumbull County, Part Three

The American Revolution was not just a defining moment in the formation of our nation but also for the people that lived through it. To the men, women, and children that lived through seven long years of strife between the fledgling United States and Great Britain, the Revolution was the catalyst for how many a person thought, acted, and lived, even long after the muskets fell silent. While Connecticut had a long-standing colonial claim to the land that is now Northeast Ohio—the Western Reserve—it wouldn't be until the conclusion of the Revolution that settlement of this region would occur. Indeed, among the earliest settlers to come to the Western Reserve were veterans of this conflict, Trumbull County included. In fact, the very namesake of Trumbull County was borne out of the Revolution, named for Gov. Jonathan Trumbull of Lebanon, Connecticut, the only colonial governor to support the patriot cause and principal supplier of the Continental Army, coordinating shipments from his personal store to further supply lines. According to Katelyn Pfitus of the Trumbull County Historical Society, roughly 200 Revolutionary War veterans settled in Trumbull County, if counting the northern tier of Mahoning County, which was a part of Trumbull until 1846. By the 1840 Census of Pensioners, only 32 Revolutionary War veterans remained in Trumbull County, a dying breed. The third in a series of blogs written for the United States' 250th Anniversary, *'Nothing But A Plain Old Soldier: Revolutionary War Veterans of Trumbull County, Ohio,'* not only examines the lives of some of Trumbull County's earliest settlers but also their military service during the United States' defining conflict.

Edward Drake Dray: Bazetta Township (1741-1828)

A life fraught with mystery and sadness, Edward Drake Dray was born November 3rd, 1741, the second of five children to Edward and Mary (Vail) Drake. Said to have been born in either County Antrim, Ireland; Pennsylvania; or New Jersey, the location that seems the most probable based on historical evidence is the latter, where his father is listed as being born on January 6th, 1713, in Piscataway, Middlesex County. Little is known of Edward's early life; however, at some point, he started going by the surname "Dray" instead of his own, the reason for this change being unknown. At some point during his early adulthood, he became acquainted with Mary Agnes Agnew, a native of County Antrim, Ireland and married her, but like most other aspects of his life, when and where this took place is unknown. Relocating to Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, by the mid-1770s, it was there that he enlisted as a private, 1st class, in the 6th Company, 5th Battalion of the Cumberland County Militia under Col. Arthur Buchanan. Other than serving a "tour of active duty in Capt. Alexander McCoy's Company" dated July 20th, 1777, no other details are given regarding his military service, as a pension was never applied for. By 1790, he is listed as living in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, first in Versailles Township, then by 1800, in Moon Township, where he'd remain until 1809, when he is mentioned on that year's tax list for Wethersfield Township, Trumbull County. Following the death of his wife on September 17th, 1823, Edward relocated to Bazetta Township, where he resided by himself, his fourteen children having dispersed themselves all over. On February 28th, 1828, he drafted a will, stipulating that his sons, Charles, Thomas, James, and Edward, along with their respective wives, were entitled to a share of one hundred acres of land owned by him in Wethersfield Township upon his death. Two months later, on April 5th, he shot himself with a pistol, thus ending his earthly existence. The *Western Reserve Chronicle*, in an issue published five days after the fact, gives no further details, simply stating the cause that motivated this "melancholy event" being "unacquainted" to the publishers. Two years later, in January 1830, the validity of the will was contested by his son, Charles, during a three-day trial, in which it was revealed that Dray had previously "made repeated attempts to commit suicide but had been prevented by his friends." Furthermore, it was suspected that "that the old man was operated upon by improper influence, in the disposition of his property, in his last will and testament." Eventually, the will's validity was upheld, and nothing further is mentioned of it, Edward, or his untimely death. Buried in what is now the Casterline Cemetery, deeded as a burying ground to Bazetta Township by Ziba Casterline only a year after Dray's passing in 1829, Edward rests underneath a quaint mudstone marker without any ornamentation, only a veteran's medallion indicating his service.



Above: A private first class in the 6th Company, 5th Battalion of the Cumberland County Militia, Edward Drake Dray lived a tumultuous life marked by mystery and sorrow, with many details of his personal life remaining questionable at best. In 1828, he met an untimely end when he ended his earthly existence with a shot from a pistol. (Photo by the author).

Obed Crosby: Vernon Township (1753-1813)

A native of East Haddam, Middlesex County, Connecticut, Obed Crosby was born there July 22nd, 1753, the fourth out of nine children to Simeon and Lydia (Graves) Crosby. Relocating to Hartland, Hartford County around fifteen years of age, it was here that in “the spring of 1776 or 1777” he enlisted as a non-commissioned officer in Capt. Theodore Woodbridge’s Company of the 1st Connecticut Forces, commanded by Col. Herman Swift. Swift, a resident of Cromwell, Litchfield County, Connecticut, had the reputation of being George Washington’s favorite colonel, having carried a wounded Marquis de Lafayette off the battlefield at Brandywine in 1777. According to James King, Obed’s son-in-law, who spoke on behalf of his reputation while his wife obtained a military pension in 1839, Obed “fought several hard battles,” naming the Battle of Monmouth as a particular engagement. With his term of service expiring on May 26th, 1780, he returned to Hartland and, a year later, married Jershua Phelps on October 28th, 1781. In the spring of 1800, Crosby departed Connecticut for Vernon, then called "Smithfield," and upon arrival, set to work constructing a “round log house,” boarding with Thomas Giddings in the process. Upon completion, Obed returned back to Connecticut one final time to gather his wife and children, bringing them to Vernon in the spring of 1801. Traveling in an open wagon drawn by a yoke of oxen, as it was customary for pioneers of the Western Reserve to do, the trip was largely uneventful, aside from shortly after departure, one of the oxen died and a cow had to be hitched in its place. Traveling by way of Pittsburgh, the trip took six weeks, about the average time for such a journey. A man of the Gospel, though without any formal training, in the summer of 1801 Obed organized the first Methodist congregation in Vernon Township, the first such

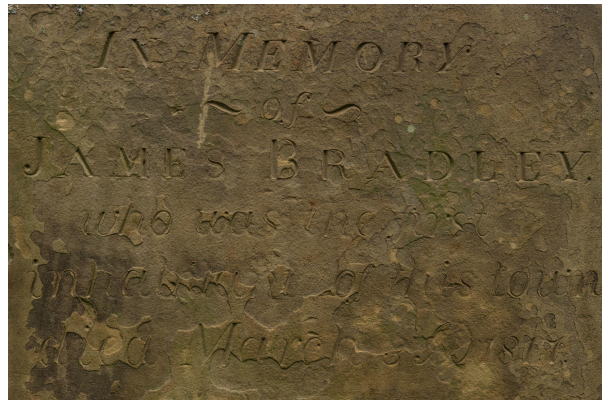
congregation established in the Western Reserve. On January 13th, 1813, Obed Crosby passed away at the age of sixty from the "prevalence of a malignant type of typhoid fever." Buried at the Vernon Center Cemetery, it is likely that his grandson, gravestone carver Obed King, produced his marker; however, in 1888, Dr. John I. King, Crosby’s great-grandson, had the old headstone taken away and a boulder of native stone erected instead, to which a metal plaque is affixed, telling of Obed Crosby’s accomplishments.



Above: In addition to serving in the Revolution, Obed Crosby organized the first Methodist congregation in Vernon Township, the first such on the Western Reserve. His great-grandson, John I. King, proud of his ancestor’s accomplishments, had this boulder of native stone erected over his grave in 1888. (Photo by the author).

James Bradley: Johnston Township (1756-1817)

The third of four children born to Ariel and Amy (Bird) Bradley, James Bradley entered this world on June 15th, 1756, in Salisbury, Litchfield County, Connecticut. Little is recorded of his upbringing; however, as a young man, he left his home for New Haven, where in March, 1782, he enlisted as a sergeant in the 3rd Company, 4th Connecticut Regiment, commanded by Capt. Zebulon Butler. Serving until November of that year, he re-enlisted in the same regiment, though now reformed as the 8th Company, 1st Connecticut Regiment. Sent to guard Milford, southeast of New Haven along Long Island Sound, though he engaged in no combat, his regiment's position was undoubtedly an important task as Connecticut's seaport towns were prone to British raids during the duration of the Revolution. Discharged on April 29th, after 13 months of service, it was certainly sometime before the birth of his first son, Thaeddeus, in February 1787, that he wed Asenath Bird, a fellow native of Salisbury. Going on to have two more sons, it was on June 7th, 1803, that the family bid adieu to their native Connecticut for Ohio, their destination not Johnston but Canfield in what is now Mahoning County. After a trip of six weeks and six hundred some miles, the family arrived at the farm of Philo Breadsley, where they remained briefly before proceeding to Johnston, 30 miles to the north. As much of their trip east had been, the journey to Johnston was marked by a series of blazed trees and bridle paths. Often having to cut away brush to admit their wagons to pass through, the journey apparently took some time, as a stop was made at Warren. At last, after a few days of travel, the family came to an opening "a little west of the center," where they commenced life anew in Johnston, becoming the first settlers of the township. Upon their arrival, the nearest neighbors were a sparse few families settled in Bazetta, Warren, Vienna, and Kinsman, some distance away. Only remaining near the center for a brief while before moving to the western part of Johnston Township, it would be here that James would live the next fourteen years of his life before passing away on March 3rd, 1817, aged 62 years. Buried in the township cemetery, he rests beneath a simple, low brownstone marker carved by local gravestone carver Obed King, of adjoining Vernon Township, identifying him as "the first inhabitant of this town."



Above: Although badly flaking with time, one can still make out the words "first inhabitant of this town" upon the grave of James Bradley, buried at Evergreen Cemetery in Johnston Township. A former native of Litchfield County, Connecticut, he served in the defense of Milford along the coast of Long Island Sound with the 4th and 1st Connecticut Regiments. (Photo by the author).

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