

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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LEMUEL COOK AT YORKTOWN

“A soldier of the Revolution, entered that army in 1775 and served during the entire war.”

On October 19 two hundred years ago General Cornwallis surrendered his troops to the combined armies of French and American forces at Yorktown. With this surrender came the end of the Revolutionary War.

Lemuel Cook 1759-1866 who has been reputed to be the last survivor of the American Revolution lived in the Town of Clarendon and is buried there in the Root Cemetery off Munger Road. Although his monument states 1759 as his birthdate other sources reveal a 1764 date. At any rate, here is his account of Yorktown in 1781 the way he remembered many years later.

“Then we were in Virginia. There wasn't much fighting. Cornwallis tried to force his way north to New York; but fell into the arms of LaFayette, and he drove him back. Old Rochambeau told 'em, 'I'll land five hundred from the fleet, against your eight hundred.' But they darsn't. We were on a kind of side hill. We had plaguey little to eat and nothing to drink under heaven. We hove up some brush to keep the flies off. Washington ordered that there should be no laughing at the British; said it was bad enough to have to surrender without being insulted. The army came out with guns clubbed on their backs. They were paraded on a great smooth lot, and there they stacked their arms. Then came the devil -- old women, and all (camp followers). One said, 'I wonder if the d--d Yankees will give me any bread.' The horses were starved out. Washington turned out with his horses and helped 'em up the hill. When they see the artillery, they said, 'There, them's the very artillery that belonged to Burgoyne.' Greene came from the southard; the awfulest set you ever see. Some, I should presume, had a pint of lice on 'em. No boots nor shoes.” And so it was two hundred years ago.

David Sturges Copeland in his History of Clarendon 1889 describes Lemuel Cook as follows: “The author has a distinct recollection of Lemuel Cook, the old soldier. He was as white above his eyes as Rip Van Winkle, his hair hanging in long locks down to his coat-collar, with a heavy face, large mouth, prominent nose, and when he opened his lips he could be heard the whole length of Main street by a deep, gasping, choking, exploding ‘A-hems!’ which attracted the attention of all, and would have frightened a modern infant into fits. He was very deliberate in his walk, resting upon a heavy staff, and moving at a snail's pace in his latter days. If one desired to speak with him, he had the pleasure of taking in a full inspiration of breath, with the certainty that he would need the whole supply before the auditorium of the aged veteran was penetrated. He was with Washington at Valley Forge, and at the surrender of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown, when the British Lion forgot to open his jaws.”