

Images of the Revolutionary War Generation

by Maureen A. Taylor

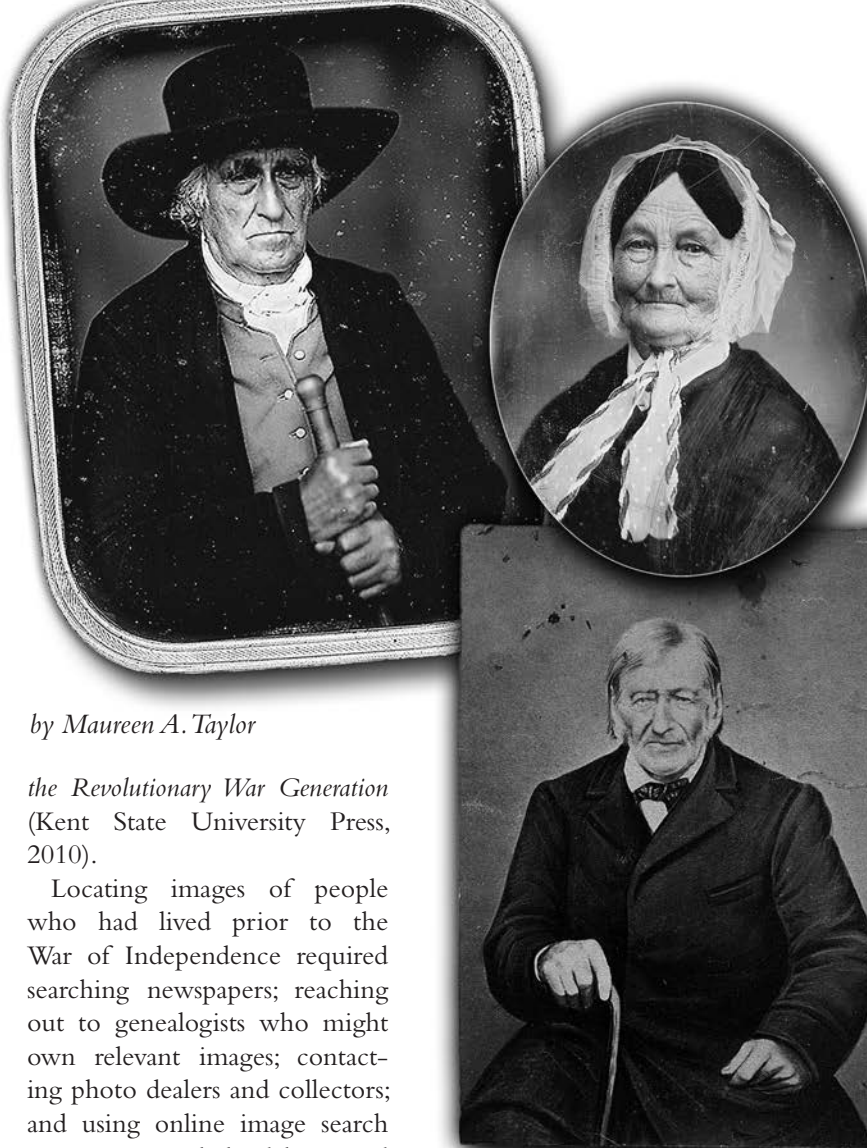
FOR ALMOST A DECADE I'VE BEEN ON A QUEST TO find images of members of the Revolutionary War generation who lived past 1839, the year photography was introduced in the United States. It's been a fascinating experience to locate the men, women, and several children who lived through the struggle for American independence.

In 2002 I presented a photo identification workshop at the New England Regional Genealogical Conference on Cape Cod. At these events attendees often ask me to look at images they've brought with them. In this instance, a man brought a daguerreotype, and I'll never forget looking at this crisp clear picture of a man in formal attire. It looked like it was taken days before rather than 150 years ago. The owner told me that the photograph was of his ancestor Jonathan Leonard, a man with Loyalist leanings who had spent the war in Bermuda. Both the clarity of the image and Leonard's story suddenly inspired my search for more images of the Revolutionary War generation. As a former genealogical librarian, I knew that the *Census of Pensioners for 1840*¹ contained the names of individuals collecting pensions for military service through 1840, and through my photo identification and interpretation work I'd already seen a number of early photographic images of men and women clearly born before the 1770s. All my career paths — historian, curator, genealogist, librarian, and photo researcher/photo detective — came together in *The Last Muster: Images of*

the Revolutionary War Generation (Kent State University Press, 2010).

Locating images of people who had lived prior to the War of Independence required searching newspapers; reaching out to genealogists who might own relevant images; contacting photo dealers and collectors; and using online image search engines. I was helped by David Allen Lambert, the NEHGS Online Genealogist, who has a background in genealogy, an interest in military history, and a collection of images of quite elderly individuals. David contributed images of his own, found additional photographs, and supplied biographical details. When I began, I had no idea how many members of the Revolutionary War generation had lived long enough to sit for a photograph.

David and I knew that in 1864 the Reverend Elias B. Hillard, a Congregational minister from Connecticut, photographed and interviewed seven men he believed — based on a Pension Office list — were the last living Revolutionary War veterans: Samuel Downing, Daniel Waldo, Lemuel Cook, Alexander Milliner, William Hutchings, Adam Link, and James Barham. The result was Hillard's 1864 work, *The Last Men of*



Above, clockwise from top left: Clark Stevens (October 15, 1764–November 1853) served with his father in a company of Rochester, Mass., militia. Courtesy of the Boston Athenæum. Mary Hunt Palmer Tyler (March 1, 1775–July 7, 1866) wrote a memoir that included her recollections of the war's end. Courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society. Daniel Frederick Bakeman (1759–1869) holds the distinction of being the longest living Revolutionary War pensioner. Collection of the author.

the Revolution.² Hillard arrived too late to speak with Waldo and could not verify whether Barham was still alive, but each of the others regaled him with stories of wartime exploits and life in the early years of the nation. After seeing the image of Jonathan Leonard, I wondered whether Hillard might have also overlooked a few patriots.

Hillard wasn't alone in his pursuit of these former soldiers. In the mid-nineteenth century Benson J. Lossing traveled about the countryside documenting wartime sites and visiting living veterans for his 1860 *Pictorial Field Book of the Revolution*.³

On December 10, 1852, a Pension Office report printed in the *New York Times* reported that 1,876 former Revolutionary War soldiers and 6,258 widows and orphans from that war still received pensions. (These numbers don't include those who served in the Navy, individuals who received bounty or donation land, and men whose applications were rejected.) Both this Pension Office report and the 1840 pensioners census provided evidence that thousands of Revolutionary-era men and women lived into the age of photography. How many posed for pictures?

I discovered that such photographs were everywhere, from online auction catalogs to private family collections. Every lecture I gave included a call for images and stories. Many people approached me at genealogi-

cal conferences with photographs they thought might fit the project criteria. Articles in the Ancestry.com online newsletter, *American Spirit*, *Family Chronicle*, and the *Daguerreian Society Newsletter*, etc., spread the word. After each event or article, a few more images would arrive in my inbox. During my years of research, more online databases became available from historical societies and museums, many with even more images. Photo dealers occasionally offered images for sale, but the cost was usually prohibitive. I purchased only two images — an unidentified photograph of an elderly man in a chair (later identified as Samuel Curtis) and a carte de visite of Daniel Frederick Bakeman, “the last Revolutionary Soldier.” I had to pay all reproduction fees so I am very grateful to everyone who waived or reduced usage fees. David Lambert owned a copy of *The Last Men of the Revolution* with original cartes-de-visite I could also include.

In my book, each image is paired with a biographical vignette. I sometimes explain how images were located or identified, but the primary focus is the picture and each person's role in the Revolution. I wanted to tell stories of the war from the perspective of contemporary participants — the men who fought, the wives who worked and sacrificed, and even a few of their children. Hillard described his task as an act of preservation: “Our own are the last eyes that will look



During the Revolution, Elizabeth (Rockwood) Cutler (1753–1849) of Holliston, Mass., kept the family farm and inn solvent despite financial hardships. *New England Historic Genealogical Society*.

SEARCHING FOR IMAGES OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR GENERATION

Evaluate the images in your photo collection based on the following criteria.



Esther (Sumner) Damon, the last surviving widow of a Revolutionary soldier. From Merrit L. Dawkins, "The Sands of Time," Daughters of the American Revolution Report (1907–8).

Cartes de visite (CDVs) (introduced in 1854): Inspired by nineteenth-century visiting cards, these small paper prints usually measured 2 x 4 inches.

Submission criteria

If you think your image fits these criteria, please send a 300-dpi tiff color image scanned at 100% scale to Maureen Taylor at mtaylor@taylorandstrong.com.

The subjects

Are the people in your pictures old enough to be part of the Revolutionary War generation? Anyone who was an adult during the American Revolution would have been at least eighty years old by the advent of photography in 1839. The wives and widows of soldiers and patriots might have been considerably younger; Esther (Sumner) Damon, the last surviving widow of a Revolutionary soldier, died in 1906! When she married, at age 21, her husband, veteran Noah Damon, was 75. Pictures of Revolutionary wives and widows might have been taken from 1840 to the early 1900s.

Type of photograph

Look for these types of images:

Daguerreotypes (1839 to 1860s): The first photographs, daguerreotypes have reflective surfaces; you must hold the photos at an angle to see their images. Daguerreotypes are often found in cases.

Ambrotypes (invented in 1854): Often placed in cases because of their fragility, these glass images are backed with dark material.

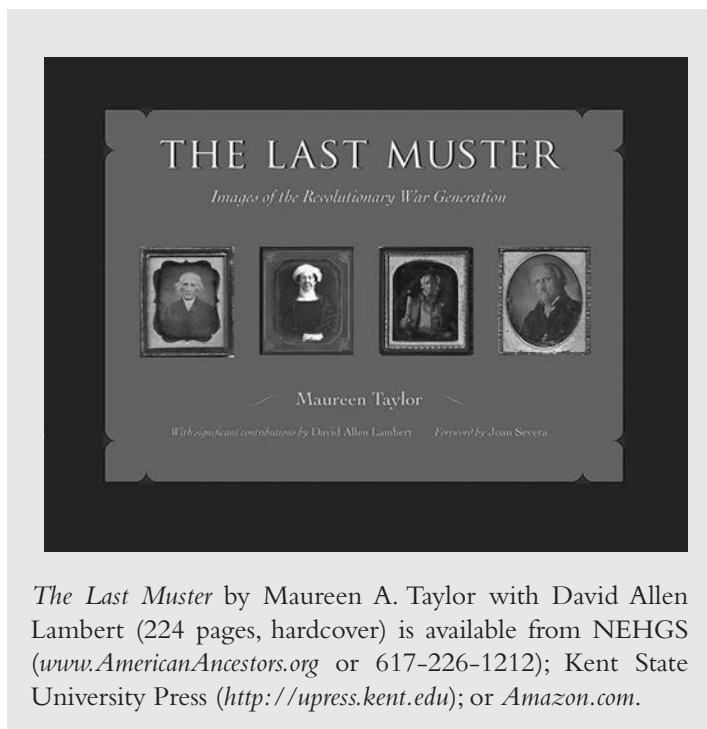
Tintypes or ferrotypes (invented in 1856): This type of cased image is produced on thin sheets of iron.

on men who looked on Washington; our ears the last that will hear the living voices of those who heard his words. Henceforth the American Revolution will be known among men by the silent record of history alone." While we can no longer hear the voices of people from the eighteenth century, we are fortunate many first-person accounts survive.

Whenever possible, I've quoted from autobiographical material found in family collections, published memoirs, or pension applications. The pictures are compelling. Aged faces, captured for eternity, peer out at the viewer. From the 1840s to the 1860s, the vast majority of the Revolutionary generation ranged in age from eighty to one hundred, with quite a number living into a second century. The diversity of their lives surprise us, and their stories, often heartbreaking, en-

gage us. *The Last Muster* features seventy photographs and vignettes, including those of:

- Molly (Ferris) Akin, who alerted the Americans to the location of a British encampment. Her story survived only as oral tradition until 1984, when a descendant finally wrote it down.
- James Allen, known as the last Maine survivor of the Revolution, who never qualified for a pension, despite his brother's passionate statement, "I have no doubt my brother served in the Army of the Revolution...."
- Amos Baker, who lived into his nineties and participated in the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Battles of Lexington and Concord in 1850.



- Jesse and Hannah (Payson) Betts, subjects of two stunning painted daguerreotypes that offer evidence of the couple’s Quaker faith.
- Caesar, the last surviving slave in the North, who served four generations of a New York family, including a Revolutionary officer.
- Elizabeth (Rockwood) Cutler, who successfully ran the family tavern while her husband was at war.
- Esther (Sumner) Damon, the last living Revolutionary War widow, who died in 1906.
- George Fishley, whose recently rediscovered daguerreotype depicts him on his ninetieth birthday in his “cocked” hat.
- Nikonah, the last living full-blooded member of the Tutelo tribe, who fought for the British and posed for his photograph wearing a British military coat.
- Nicholas Veeder, who posed in front of his museum of the American Revolution with muskets and a Liberty flag.

While the images and stories we uncovered are riveting, the vast numbers of unidentified early images of elderly individuals continue to haunt us. The book’s introduction includes pictures of an unknown couple and an anonymous woman in a day cap. At photo shows and at the annual Daguerreian Society conference, tables of unidentified images are displayed,

in the hope that someone will be able to supply relevant information. But without provenance (a history of ownership), information on who sold the image, or the place of purchase, these images will likely continue to be mysteries.

As word spreads about this project, new images continue to appear. I’m actively collecting images for a second volume. If you think you own an image of a Revolutionary War veteran or widow, I’d like to hear from you. I’ll tell more about the search for the original seventy photographs in my blog, www.lastmuster.blogspot.com.

Benson J. Lossing wrote in his preface to *Pictorial Field Book of the Revolution*, “The story of the American Revolution has been well and often told, and yet the most careless observer of the popular mind may perceive that a large proportion of our people are but little instructed in many of the essential details of that event, so important for every intelligent citizen to learn.” The stories in *The Last Muster* instruct us not only in many details of the Revolution but offer the opportunity, through words and images, to connect with the men and women who comprised the Revolutionary generation. ♦

Notes

¹ *A Census of Pensioners for Revolutionary or Military Services with their Names, Ages, and Places of Residence . . .* (Washington: U.S. Secretary of State, 1841).

² Elias Brewster Hillard, *The Last Men of the Revolution* (1864; repr., Barre, Mass.: Barre Publishers, 1968).

³ Benson J. Lossing, *Pictorial Field Book of the Revolution* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1860), also on CD-ROM (Westminster, Md.: Heritage Books, 2004).

MAUREEN A. TAYLOR is the author of several books on photography and family history, including *Fashionable Folks: Hairstyles 1840–1900* (Picture Perfect Press) and *Preserving Your Family Photographs* (Picture Perfect Press). Follow her photo identification work through her free newsletter (sign-up on www.maurentaylor.com), on Facebook, Twitter and Vimeo.com.