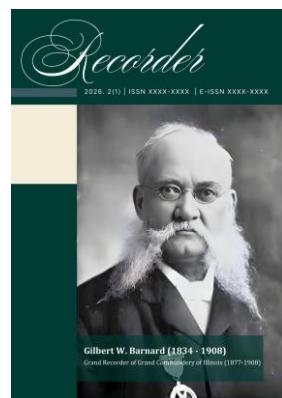




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Original Research

Sir Peter Lauck (1753–1839): Soldier of the Revolution and Knight Templar

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Abstract

This article is devoted to the biography of Sir Peter Lauck (1753–1839) as a Soldier of the American Revolution and a Knight Templar. The source base of the study includes documents from the commercial genealogical database Ancestry.com, as well as a number of published documentary collections.

In the conclusion, the author argues that the life course of Peter Lauck represents a vivid example of service to society, the state, and fraternal ideals in the late eighteenth and the first third of the nineteenth centuries. His biography reflects the characteristic features of the generation of American revolutionaries who, after the War of Independence, not only participated in the formation of political institutions but were also actively engaged in the economic, social, and spiritual development of their towns and states. As an entrepreneur and one of the founders of the Farmers Bank of Virginia, Peter Lauck contributed to strengthening the financial foundations of the region. His involvement in law enforcement and his service with the rank of captain underscore his role in maintaining order and civic stability during the early period of United States history.

Of particular importance is his long-standing and active participation in the Masonic movement. His leadership of lodges during the transition from the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania to that of the Grand Lodge of Virginia testifies to the high level of trust and authority he enjoyed among his contemporaries. The final stage of his life was closely connected with the Order of Knights Templar, in which he held responsible officer positions at both the local and state levels. The continuation of the Masonic tradition within his family further emphasizes the continuity of values and service.

The death of Peter Lauck in 1839 marked the end of the life of a man who can rightfully be characterized as a Soldier of the Revolution, a public figure, and a Knight Templar—one of the notable personalities of his time.

Keywords: Peter Lauck (1753–1839), Soldier of the Revolution, Battle of Quebec, December 31, 1775, Freemason, Knight Templar.

Introduction

In the history of the United States, one can find a considerable number of examples in which individuals who contributed to the formation of American statehood were also Freemasons. There is nothing surprising in this phenomenon, since Masonic lodges in the British provinces of North America began to be established as early as the first half of the eighteenth century. For example, Saint John's Lodge in Boston was chartered in 1733¹. However, cases in which a Soldier of the Revolution later became a Knight Templar are relatively rare. This can be explained by the fact that the formation of the Masonic Order of Knights Templar in the United States began only in the early nineteenth century and was associated with the further development of the York Rite. It should be recalled that the General Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United

¹ Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of Massachusetts. Boston: Press of Rockwell and Churchill, 1877. P. 391.

States was established only in 1816 and at that time numbered no more than about 300 members¹. Several encampments existed in the country that did not join the General Grand Encampment in 1816; among them was the Winchester Grand Encampment (Winchester, Virginia), founded in 1813. Within this body, we identified Sir Knight Peter Lauck—Soldier of the Revolution and Knight Templar. It is this outstanding individual who forms the focus of the present study.

Materials

The source base of this study consists of documents from the commercial genealogical database Ancestry.com, as well as published compilations such as Marriage and Death Notices from the National Intelligencer (Washington, D.C.) 1800–1850² and the Virginia Pension Roll of 1835³. Of particular importance for reconstructing the Masonic biography of Peter Lauck are the Proceedings of the Grand Lodge. We used Proceedings from the following jurisdictions: Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Massachusetts. In addition, the study incorporates materials from the Proceedings of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar Masons of Virginia for 1823. The research also draws upon a number of biographical works devoted to individuals of the period of the American War of Independence.

Results

Peter Lauck was born on December 31, 1753, in Somerset, Pennsylvania.

He began his military service at the age of twenty by taking part in Dunmore's War, a short conflict that lasted from May to October 1774.

In 1775, the American War of Independence began. On June 15, 1775, General George Washington was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, which was being formed in Boston. At the same time, the Continental Congress authorized an invasion of Quebec, one of the British provinces (present-day Canada), with the aim of separating it from Great Britain.

The newly forming army was in urgent need of volunteers, and the Continental Congress called for the creation of ten rifle companies from the middle colonies. At the end of June, the colony of Virginia agreed to raise two companies, one of which began forming on July 4 in the town of Winchester, Frederick County, under the command of Capt. Daniel Morgan⁴.

By July 14, 1775, the rifle company, consisting of 96 men, had been fully organized⁵. The company received the unofficial name "Morgan's Riflemen." One of its volunteers was the unmarried twenty-one-year-old Peter Lauck (Fig. 1) (he would not turn twenty-two until December 1775), who enlisted in the company with the rank of private⁶. It is also important to note that the company was intended for service on the "Continental Line"⁷, meaning that its personnel could be deployed anywhere on the continent at any time. On the same day, Morgan's company set out in full strength toward the town of Cambridge near Boston, arriving there on August 6, 1775. During the twenty-one-day march, the company covered approximately 600 miles.

¹ Taran, K. V. (2025). The materials of the General Grand Encampment of Knights Templar serve as a statistical source for the number of Knights Templars in 1856. *Recorder*. 1(1): 22.

² Martin, G.A., Metcalf, F.J. (1976). Marriage and Death Notices from the National Intelligencer (Washington, D.C.) 1800-1850. Volume II 1835-1850. Washington, D.C.: National Genealogical Society. P. 1107.

³ Virginia Pension Roll of 1835. [Richmond, Va.]: [Auditor of Public Accounts?], [1835].

⁴ Graham, J. (1859). The life of General Daniel Morgan: of the Virginia line of the Army of the United States, with portions of his correspondence. University of California Libraries. New York: Derby & Jackson.

⁵ Cartmell, T.K. (1909). Shenandoah Valley Pioneers and Their Descendants. A History of Frederick County, Virginia (illustrated) from its formation in 1738 to 1908. Winchester, Va.: Printed by the Eddy Press Corp. P. 102.

⁶ Virginia Pension Roll of 1835. [Richmond, Va.]: [Auditor of Public Accounts?], [1835]. P. 776.

⁷ Virginia Pension Roll of 1835. [Richmond, Va.]: [Auditor of Public Accounts?], [1835]. P. 776.



Fig. 1. Soldier of the Revolution Peter Lauck. 1780s

As part of the invasion force, units of the Continental Army were sent to the Province of Quebec.

The invasion of Quebec was carried out by two expeditions of the Continental Army: the first under the command of Brigadier General Richard Montgomery, and the second under the command of General Benedict Arnold. Peter Lauck served in the second expedition led by General Arnold.

At the beginning of the campaign, the expeditions operated separately. The first expedition departed from its base at Fort Ticonderoga, which had been captured from the British on May 10, 1775. On September 17, 1775, the expedition reached and laid siege to the British Fort Saint-Jean. The siege lasted forty-five days and ended on November 3, 1775, with the capitulation of the British garrison.

The fall of Fort Saint-Jean opened the way for the first Continental Army expedition to Montreal, which surrendered without resistance on November 13, 1775.

Meanwhile, the second expedition under General Benedict Arnold set out from Fort Western on September 25 with approximately 1,050 men. "Morgan's Riflemen," together with two other companies, formed the advance battalion commanded by Capt. Daniel Morgan and marched at the head of the column. The route of the expedition ran through roadless and rugged terrain in what is now the state of Maine. As a result of travel by boats along turbulent rivers, the troops lost a significant portion of their gunpowder and provisions. About one third of the personnel fell behind and ultimately decided to turn back. Consequently, by early November, when General Arnold's expedition reached the Saint Lawrence River, only about 600 soldiers remained, exhausted by a 350-mile march. On November 13–14, 1775, the expedition crossed the river and attempted to besiege Quebec. After failing, it withdrew to Point-aux-Trembles, and in early December 1775 the two expeditions united under the overall command of General Benedict Arnold.

On December 31, 1775, his birthday, Private Peter Lauck took part in the Battle of Quebec as a member of the Continental Army during a severe snowstorm. According to the plan, the two expeditions were to assault the city from different directions, meet in the lower town, and then jointly overcome the wall defending the upper town. However, at the very beginning of the battle, General Montgomery was killed by cannon fire (Fig. 2), and his expedition turned back and did not participate further in the assault. At the same time, General Benedict Arnold was wounded early in the attack, and command was assumed by Daniel Morgan, who continued the assault, breached the first barrier, and entered the lower town. Peter Lauck took part in this assault together with the expedition. During the fighting, Private Peter Lauck was wounded by cannon fire, which severely damaged his hearing.

The initially favorable prospects of the assault on Quebec for the Americans largely depended on the element of surprise. However, on the eve of the attack, the British received reinforcements and mobilized militia. As a result, by the start of the battle the British had about 1,800 soldiers and officers, while the Americans had only around 1,200. Under such conditions, the assault already appeared hopeless; in practice, only about half of the available American forces entered the lower town, giving the British a threefold numerical advantage. In the lower town, British forces surrounded the attacking detachment and compelled it to surrender. A total of 372 men were taken prisoner, including Captain Daniel Morgan and Private Peter Lauck; about 50 men were killed and approximately the same number were wounded.

This battle became the first major defeat suffered by the Americans in the war.



Fig. 2. The Death of General Montgomery in the Attack on Quebec, December 31, 1775. Oil Painting. By John Trumbull. 1786.

He remained in captivity until the spring of 1776, and later that year he returned to Winchester¹. For the young soldier, who had nearly lost his hearing, the War of Independence was over, and his civilian life began.

On October 27, 1779, he married Miss Amelia Emily Heiskell. Their family had eleven children: Ann Maria (born November 9, 1760), Jacob (born February 22, 1783), John Heiskell (born August 15, 1785), Rebecca (born April 20, 1787), a son born dead (August 22, 1789), Samuel Heiskell (born December 10, 1790), Isaac Straltt (born August 6, 1793), Morgan Monley (born July 7, 1796), Joseph Hundley (born March 8, 1799), Amelia Susan (born March 30, 1802), and William Cunningham (born March 24, 1805).

In 1781, Peter Lauck was engaged in law enforcement service; he was sworn in as County Constable and held the rank of captain. In 1783, he built the "Red Lion Inn" in the town and became actively involved in business affairs. In 1812, he was among the founding members of the Farmers Bank of Virginia.

Alongside his business activities, he took an active part in social life. Throughout his life, he was an active member of the Lutheran Church in Winchester and participated in Masonic fraternal organizations. It should be noted that at the end of the eighteenth century the town of Winchester was under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania. Lodge No. 12 operated in the town, and Peter Lauck served as its Master in 1805² and again in 1806³.

In 1807, the lodge was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Virginia and its number was changed. In that year it was known as Hiram Lodge No. 21, and its first Worshipful Master was Peter Lauck, as recorded in the Grand Annual Communication of the Grand Lodge of Virginia⁴. The reporting practices of the period listed only senior officers, without publishing information about ordinary members. Given that Peter Lauck held the highest office in the lodge from 1805 to 1807, it is likely that he joined the Masonic movement in the late eighteenth century.

In 1813, the Winchester Grand Encampment of Knights Templar was established in the town⁵. The final stage of Peter Lauck's life was closely connected with this Masonic order. Although the exact date of his

¹ Martin, G.A., Metcalf, F.J. (1976). Marriage and Death Notices from the National Intelligencer (Washington, D.C.) 1800-1850. Volume II 1835-1850. Washington, D.C.: National Genealogical Society. P. 1107.

² Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania. Harrisburg, 1805. P. 146.

³ Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania. Harrisburg, 1806. P. 187.

⁴ Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Winchester, 1807. P. 369.

⁵ Hoover, J. (1902). An Historic Commandery, The American Tyler. Volume XVI. No. 22. P. 519.

affiliation with the Winchester Grand Encampment is unknown, in 1821 he was an active member and was elected to the officer position of Standard Bearer. Moreover, his son, Samuel Heiskell Lauck, held the officer position of Grand Registrar (analogous to Recorder) in this commandery¹. Two years later, the Grand Encampment (Commandery) of Knights Templar of Virginia was established, and Peter Lauck assumed the office of Grand Treasurer². He was re-elected annually to this position until 1831³, after which he most likely remained a member of the Winchester Encampment.

Peter Lauck died on October 2, 1839, in Winchester, Virginia. Thus ended the life of one of the outstanding figures of his time—Peter Lauck, Soldier of the Revolution and Knight Templar.

Conclusion

The life course of Peter Lauck represents a vivid example of service to society, the state, and fraternal ideals in the late eighteenth and the first third of the nineteenth centuries. His biography reflects the characteristic features of the generation of American revolutionaries who, after the War of Independence, not only participated in the formation of political institutions but were also actively engaged in the economic, social, and spiritual development of their towns and states. As an entrepreneur and one of the founders of the Farmers Bank of Virginia, Peter Lauck contributed to strengthening the financial foundations of the region. His involvement in law enforcement and his service with the rank of captain underscore his contribution to maintaining order and civic stability in the early period of United States history.

Of particular significance is his long-standing and active participation in the Masonic movement. His leadership of lodges during the transition from the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania to that of the Grand Lodge of Virginia attests to the high level of trust and authority he enjoyed among his contemporaries. The final stage of his life was closely associated with the Order of Knights Templar, in which he held responsible officer positions at both the local and state levels. The continuation of the Masonic tradition within his family further emphasizes the continuity of values and service.

The death of Peter Lauck in 1839 brought to a close the life of a man who can justly be characterized as a Soldier of the Revolution, a public figure, and a Knight Templar—one of the notable figures of his time.

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¹ Hoover, J. (1902). *An Historic Commandery, The American Tyler*. Volume XVI. No. 22. P. 519.

² Proceedings of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar Masons of Virginia. Winchester, 1823. P. 8.

³ Proceedings of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar Masons of Virginia. Winchester, 1830. P. 43.