

My Patriot

How I Buried My Patriot Twice ~ Zachariah Callaway, 1749 - 1816 ~

By Edward Patrick Stapleton
Col. Lemuel Benton Chapter

MYRTLE BEACH, S.C. — As I started tracing my family roots I stumbled across a historian in Beckley, West Virginia, named Pauline Haga. When I told Ms. Haga who my ancestors were, she got excited. She is such an authority on southern West Virginia families that she immediately established a link between Revolutionary War veteran Zachariah Callaway and me.

Over a period of about a year, I painstakingly gathered my evidence linking nine generations between Zachariah Callaway and myself. I finally was able to apply to the Sons of the American Revolution and was accepted March 25, 2008.

I have become close friends with Pauline and her husband Les. Without Pauline it would have been impossible to join the SAR, and I could never repay the kindness she has shown me. Pauline knew that Zachariah Callaway lived in Peters-town, West Virginia, which is about 50 miles south of Beckley, West Virginia. She also knew that Zachariah was buried in the Callaway Cemetery on his farm in a place called Trigger Run. Pauline had a good idea where it was, but had never been there.

Pauline encouraged me to petition the U.S. Government to provide Zachariah Callaway a proper tombstone to honor his service to this country. I located the owner of the farm and asked him if it would be all right with him if I worked on getting Zachariah Callaway a tombstone. The farm owner said he would help me any way he could even though none of the people buried in the small Callaway Cemetery on his farm are related to him. He understood that those people were my ancestors, and he did not want to encumber me in any way.

The process of filing a request with the Veterans Administration for a veteran's tombstone was not as difficult as I had expected. I provided all the documentation, and it was approved within a few weeks. The new tombstone was delivered to my home in Myrtle Beach, and plans were made to take it Peterstown, West Virginia.

I was a little disappointed when the tombstone arrived with a large chip in it and a crack. I contacted the Veterans Administration and they offered to send a replacement stone. I figured that they were being generous by providing Zachariah Callaway a new stone, so I told them that we would keep the damaged stone.

I consulted with Richard Johnson, president of the Col. Lemuel Benton Chapter, and he urged me to contact the SAR chapter closest to Peterstown and invite them to be present when Zachari-

ah Callaway's new tombstone was dedicated. Compatriot Johnson also urged me to have a formal ceremony including a preacher to say a few words. I contacted James E. Johnson, president of the Greenbrier Valley SAR in Lewisburg, West Virginia, who was thrilled to be a part of the dedication.

On June 15, my wife Sherry, my son Edward Markham Stapleton, my daughter Jacklyn Michelle Stapleton, my stepson Jade and I drove from Myrtle Beach to Peterstown. We met Beckley historian Pauline Haga and her husband Les at the farm where Zachariah Callaway is buried. We also met Compatriot James E. Johnson, who also brought Richard Brockway, who is the National Librarian General for the SAR. Also present was retired Pastor Jim Jenkins of the Narrows Methodist Church.

At 10 a.m. we met at the farm and found the Callaway Cemetery to be extremely old, neglected and unkempt. There was no fence around it, and cows had been allowed to seek shade from the trees that cover the cemetery.

I had already assumed that the original tombstone of Zachariah Callaway was long gone (or never existed), and we would simply have to pick a spot in the Callaway Cemetery to place the new stone. Through years of experience, Pauline Haga had a theory that the oldest burials are generally closest to the entrance of the cemetery. Since Zachariah Callaway was buried 193 years ago, logically his stone should be placed somewhere near the entrance.

We all started discussing where the stone should be placed, when Richard Brockway noticed an old tombstone face down in the mud. He began brushing off years of dirt and mud from the stone, and soon the name Zachariah Callaway started becoming clearer and clearer.

As we rinsed more mud away the follow inscription was clear: "IN MEMORY - ZECHARIAH CALLAWAY - DIED OCT ?? 1816 - AGED 67 YEARS." This information is indisputable genealogical evi-



Zechariah Callaway
1749-1816



Richard Brockway, Edward Stapleton and Richard Johnson

dence, but it now posed a serious problem. The birth year on the stone that the Veterans Administration provided was wrong by seven years. Every stitch of information provided through research including the DAR, SAR and multiple other sources put Zachariah Callaway's birth year at 1756 and his death year at 1816. If the tombstone created at the time of his death was to be considered accurate, his actual birth year was 1749.

Since all the people were already gathered there was no reason to postpone the dedication, so the new (and inaccurate) tombstone was placed in the ground next to the 193-year-old stone. Preacher Jenkins, Compatriot Johnson and Compatriot Brockway all got up and gave emotional dissertations about the hardships that Zachariah Callaway and his family faced and the sacrifices that he gave to ensure the freedoms that we have today.

After the dedication, Pauline Haga, Compatriot Johnson, Compatriot Brockway and myself talked about what to do about the inaccurate date on the new tombstone. We all agreed that the stone could not stay there knowing that there was incorrect information on it.

When I returned to Myrtle Beach, I contacted the Veterans Administration for a replacement stone and requested that the birth year be changed to 1749. The replacement tombstone arrived in about two weeks, undamaged and with the corrected birth year on it.

On July 18, the replacement tombstone was taken back to Peterstown, this time with a much smaller gathering. My son, Edward Markham Stapleton, and I drove up and met Pauline and Les Haga again. In addition, Rob Callaway and Mike Callaway (both direct descendants of Zachariah Callaway) also met us there. The damaged and incorrect stone was pulled up and the replacement was installed in its place.

Thus closes one chapter in my genealogy. However, if one thing can be learned from history: when one door closes another often opens.



Members of the Stapleton Family