

# In Search of My Grandfathers ~ Stedman Family History

By Victor Burns August 2023

## Stedman Family History

Many graves of the Revolutionary War dead are lost to time. Some may be found in remote wooded areas marked with stones that are unreadable. Most fell victim to property development—built over by homes, commercial buildings, roads, and parking lots. The likelihood of finding the final resting place of your ancestors is rare, if not impossible. Sometimes, we are left with clues as to where they might have been. For my family, the impossible became possible; we were able to find and reinter the remains of some of my Revolutionary War ancestors.

My story begins with my fourth great-grandfather Nathan Alexander Stedman III. Nathan came from a long line of mariners. His second great-grandfather, Thomas Stedman, was a merchant sailor in New London Connecticut in the 1600's. It is also said that his father was a merchant sailor for a time before coming to North Carolina.

In the early stages of the revolution after the British gained possession of New York, they captured or destroyed many of the merchant ships off the New England coast. As an act of self-defense many in the area began to build and arm privateers. A quote from, *History of New London County Connecticut*, reads, "From the beginning to the close of the Revolutionary contest a cloud of depressing gloom hung over New London. Her mariners and artisans were deprived of employment; her shopmen and merchants were impoverished or bankrupt; religion, education and morals were at a low ebb, and the shadows grew deeper from year to year."

This was the environment, in Ashford Connecticut, that young Nathan Stedman III was in, when in 1776 at the age of 14, he joined the Revolutionary army. He was marched to Providence Road Island under the command of Captain Danial Lothrop, serving a company of artillery. He was garrisoned there for three months until his enlistment expired. After this he joined the ranks of the privateers. It is unknown how many ships he may have served on but when, at an older age, he applied for a pension, there were only two left to his memory — the Privateer Bunker Hill and the Benjamin Sampson.

According to his obituary in the Pittsboro, North Carolina paper, *The Communicator*, he was involved in many hard-fought battles, was wounded himself and had a younger brother killed at his side. One of the vessels on which he served was captured by a British Man-of-War and he, along with the rest of the crew, were conveyed to the city of Saint George on one of the Bermuda Islands. He remained a prisoner there until the end of the war and migrated to North Carolina in 1784.

It is not certain which ship he was on when he was captured, however, it is doubtful that it was the Sampson. According to the ship's records, the Sampson was a sloop-of-war, a Connecticut privateer brigantine, under the command of David Brooks. She received her letter of marque on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 1781. She was a 150-ton ship with eighteen 6-pounder cannons and nine swivel cannons. She carried a crew of 100 men.

In July of 1781 the Sampson was involved in a battle with the ship, Swallow — a 226-ton brig sloop-of-war. After a battle of about forty-five minutes, the Sampson bore away. The Swallow was cut up in her rigging and sails and was unable to pursue. The Brig Sampson had four men killed and fourteen wounded. Sampson was so damaged she had to return to port.

The Sampson was captured 18 May 1782 by the HM frigate Bellisarius. Her crew was sent aboard the prison ship, Jersey. Eight of her crew, including Captain Brooks, died there.

The Sampson could possibly be the ship that Nathan was aboard when he was wounded and lost his brother. He must have left the ship when it went in for repairs after the battle with the Swallow.

The other ship that we know Nathan was on was the Bunker Hill. According to Nathan's own report it was under the command of Captain Smith. The Bunker Hill was a Connecticut Privateer schooner. She had ten broadside cannons and five swivel cannons and a crew of forty-six. She was commissioned on 7 April 1780. The Bunker Hill was under command of Sanford Thompson along with Lieutenant John Smith and Lieutenant Samuel Stow. There was a battle with the British privateer sloop, Dolphin, which was enroute from St. Kitts, British West Indies, at which time Lieutenant Stow was killed and Commander Thompson was wounded. Lieutenant Smith took charge and captured the Dolphin. It is unclear what eventually happened to the Bunker Hill. It is possible that this was the ship that Nathan was aboard when he was captured.

In 1784 Nathan migrated to North Carolina with his brothers Winship and Elisha, along with his parents.

In 1789, the 2<sup>nd</sup> North Carolina Constitutional Convention was held at Cross Creek, present day Fayetteville. The convention members were housed at the Cool Spring Tavern. It was at this time that North Carolina ratified the US Constitution along with its Bill of Rights. North Carolina was the twelfth state to do so.

In 1795, the Cool Spring Tavern was converted to a private residence by Elisha Stedman, brother of Winship and Nathan Stedman III. The house still stands and is and is the oldest surviving structure in Fayetteville.

On 7 April 1791, Nathan married Anna Frances Clark; it is believed that they were married at the Cool Spring Tavern. Anna was the daughter of William H. Clark, who also served in the Revolutionary War. He served as a Sargent on the North Carolina Continental line. He was awarded 1000 acres for his service to the state and nation.

Nathan and his family were very active in real estate and commerce in the Deep River and Chatham County area of North Carolina. In 1827, at the age of 65, Nathan was elected to the NC House of Representatives. (House of Commons). In 1832, he became a member of the North Carolina Senate. His term began on November 19<sup>th</sup> of that year. In 1834, he became the Comptroller of the state. Nathan also served in many local offices. He was the Clerk of Court for the Chatham County Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions for a decade before his death. He was one of the Commissioners selected by the NC Legislature to layout the town of Pittsboro in 1787. Nathan was a member as well as the Clerk of the Board of Superintendents for common schools for Chatham County.

Nathan Alexander Stedman III died on 13 Nov 1847 at 85 years of age.

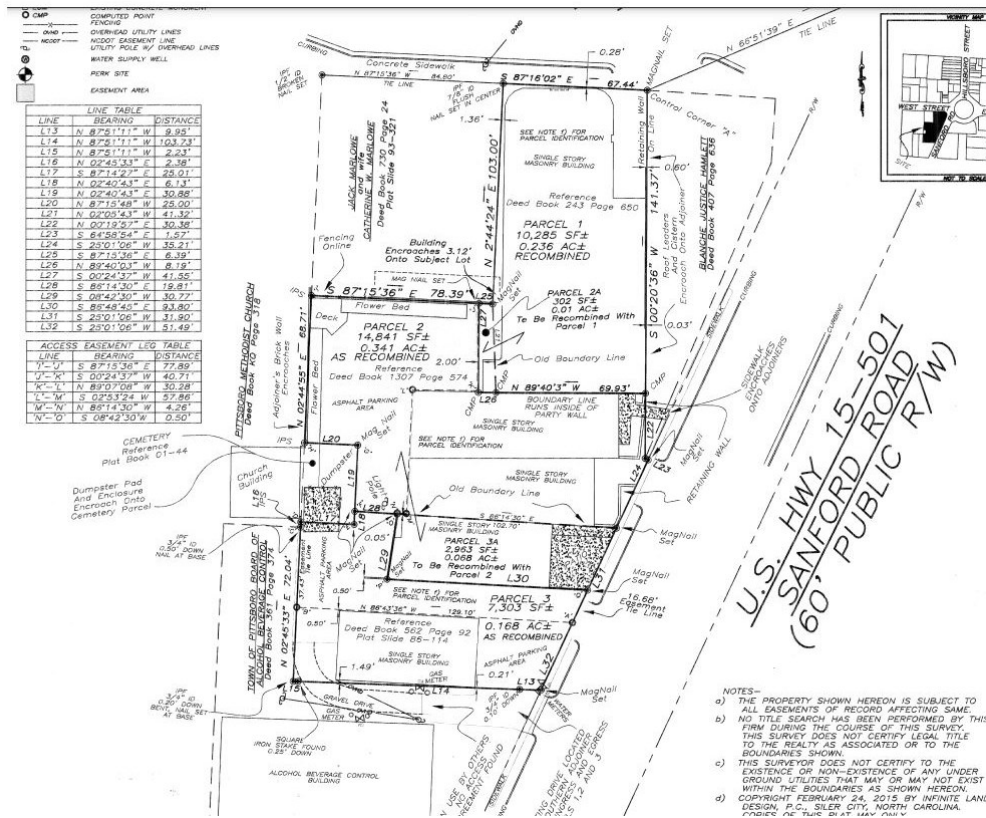
## The Search

Amateur genealogists and family historians spend much time in their research and eventually hit a brick wall. We may set aside our dedicated research only to periodically review computer files, stacks of papers or old books. Then, along comes something that will reignite our interest. It could be coming across a new piece of information or talking to a friend or family member who is interested in genealogy. In my case it was my first cousin's husband, Paul; he contacted me to ask if I would do DNA testing to track our family back to Scotland.

During our correspondence I sent Paul pictures of some family grave markers including one of my third great-grandmother, Nabby Stedman Burns. She was the daughter of Nathan Alexander Stedman III. Because of this I was eligible to join the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR). I contacted the North Carolina state society of the SAR which informed me of a new Sandhills Chapter. With my existing research, a few more verifying documents, and my application, I was honored to gain membership into the Sons of the American Revolution.

Mystery and controversy ensued as Paul and I researched our ancestors, specifically as we tried to locate the Stedman family cemetery. Fortunately, there is plenty of historical information available about Nathan and his family. However, there was conflicting information about where he was buried. The Find a Grave website indicated that he possibly was interred in the Stedman family cemetery in the downtown area of Pittsboro, North Carolina. This information had been provided by deed research undertaken by volunteers of the Chatham County Historical Association's cemetery project. Other information indicated he may have been buried near a home he once owned close to Asbury United Methodist Church in Chatham County outside Pittsboro Township. A friend and family member, Dr. Larry Stedman O'Connell spent many years searching in the Asbury area for a possible burial location with no result—suggesting that the second theory was improbable.

Paul contacted the Historical Society in Chatham County to locate the exact location of the Stedman family cemetery. We knew it was about a block away from the courthouse and had been covered over with a parking lot and was no longer recognizable as a cemetery. The location was indicated on several old deeds and had been recorded in the Chatham County mapping office thanks to the work of the Chatham County Historical Association. Fortunately, Paul discovered there was a developer working in the area that was interested in making improvements to the property. The developer expressed an interest in reinterring any remains to the church graveyard next door to the property and had been working with the Chatham County Historical Association and the State Office of Archaeology to pursue that option. Both organizations supported moving the graves because the original location was so compromised and could not be protected. The developer ran into his own brick wall when he made requests to the state and local authorities for permits, since the cemetery was legally the property of the descendants of those buried there.



It may be coincidence or fate, but either way, it is remarkable that Paul and I should be searching for Nathan Stedman's grave at the same time this benevolent developer was starting his work. Because Paul's wife and I are lineal descendants of Nathan Stedman, we were able to transfer the cemetery property to the developer and begin the process of moving any remains that could be found. I expected the likelihood of finding anything more than dirt, considering the age of the graves, was slim. I hoped that we could at least move any remains and give the family a marker that would show them the respect they deserve.

Paul found all the old documents and drawings showing the chain of custody and possible location of the cemetery. He also contacted other family members to inform them of our intent. The developer and financier of the project, Greg Stafford, managed the legal details, surveys, and scheduling archaeologist to begin the search. I notified other relatives and started the work to acquire markers for the new burial location.

After completing the research, the necessary legal steps, and the survey work to locate the cemetery, the day finally arrived to commence the dig. Although everyone involved completed their due diligence to correctly locate the cemetery, there was still the possibility we could be wrong, or that the years the cemetery was forgotten and the area used for other purposes might have degraded the site so that burial shafts would not be recognized. In fact, ground penetrating radar was used to identify the burial shafts, but the effort was not successful. On the first day, I, Dr. Larry O'Connell, the team of archaeologists, developer Greg Stafford, and a representative from the health department were in attendance when the first grave was discovered. It was a child's grave containing some coffin handles and nails,

but no skeletal remains. To the best of our knowledge, we were expecting one child; Emily Euphania Stedman, who died at three months old in 1836.



We had information about nine graves likely to be in the cemetery, based on a Find a Grave entry maintained by Mike and Jane Deal, who had researched newspapers, Bible records, and other sources to identify Stedman deaths during the period that the Stedmans lived in Pittsboro.

Nathan Alexander Stedman II, 10 Feb 1743 - 20 Aug 1790.

Prudence Hurlbut Stedman, 3 Sep 1734 -1805.

Nathan Alexander Stedman III, 11 Jul 1762 - 13 Nov 1847.

Anna Francis Clark Stedman, 24 Apr 1775 - 5 Dec 1846.

Thomas P. Stedman, 26 Feb 1801 - 8 Aug 1836.

Winship Stedman, 1767 - 4 Mar 1828.

Margaret Furguson Stedman, 1765 - 1851.

Robert P. Stedman, 1812 - 1836.

Emily Euphania Stedman, June 1836 - Aug 1836.

Over the next few days, we uncovered seven graves — four adults and three children (two unknown to us). There was evidence of other graves that we could not get to because the area was covered with concrete and utilities which destroyed any of the remaining grave sites.

The remains of the Stedman family are now reinterred in the Pittsboro United Methodist Church graveyard. There is a marker for the family which reads:

“This Monument Was Placed by Descendants of the Stedman Family Whose Family Cemetery Was Located Near Here.”

The names of the family members are listed on the stone.

There is also a commemorative stone for Nathan A. Stedman III for his Revolutionary War Service which reads:

SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION  
PATRIOT

In Memory of Nathan Alexander Stedman III who in 1776 at the age of 14 enlisted in The Army of The Revolution. He later joined the Ranks of The Privateers. After serving for some time, he was captured by a British Man of War. He was imprisoned to the Bermuda Isles until the end of the Revolutionary Conflict, at which time he came to the





Chatham County area. Nathan served in the NC House of Commons and the Senate. He was instrumental in designing the early plan for the Town of Pittsboro.

On November 19<sup>th</sup>, 2022, Compatriots of the Sons of the American Revolution Sandhills chapter were joined by descendants of the Revolutionary War Patriot Nathan Stedman III at Pittsboro United Methodist Church to dedicate the grave marking with a SAR medallion to honor his military service. Also participating in the ceremony were SAR Compatriot Bob Sigmon and Gary Spencer of the NCSSAR Color Guard, Compatriots and President Richard Pena of the Raleigh SAR chapter, The Regent and Daughters of the Alfred Moore DAR chapter of Southern Pines, Daughters of the Deep River DAR Chapter in Pittsboro, and attendants from the Chatham County Historical Society. Sandhills SAR Chapter President Bruce Fensley led the ceremony. Sandhills Chapter Compatriot and family descendant of Nathan Stedman III, Victor Burns, of Carthage NC, provided a life chronology and service record of Nathans's service to the American Revolutionary War. Sandhills Chapter Compatriot and NC Senator Tom McInnis offered the benediction and the invocation prayer.



The story of my ancestors is my story; the more I have discovered that we are all intertwined, the richer my life becomes. It makes me realize that my part in the history of this nation is deep rooted and that we stand on the shoulders of giants.

I would like to thank the following people:

Mike and Jane Deal for maintaining the Find a Grave page for all these years. You gave us a path to follow. Paul Schmehl for all his tireless research in finding land plats and historical information on the Stedman family. Gregory Stafford for his financial support, friendship, and exuberance in discovering the history of the Pittsboro area. Archaeologist, Matthew Jorgenson RPA, Peter Sittig RPA, Mary Glenn Krause RA, and Sarah Potere, all with AECOM Technical Services of North Carolina for getting down in the mud to help us discover our past. Pittsboro UMC for their donation of the new burial site. NC Office of State Archaeology. Chatham County Historical Association. Sandhills Chapter of the SAR. Special thanks go to Dr. Larry Stedman O'Connell, John Gunter, Paul Schmehl, and Gregory Stafford for helping me with the financing of the monuments.

[Find more information about the cemetery and the removal of the graves here.](#)

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