

# GRAVEYARD OF THE REVOLUTIONARY SOLDIERS AT LITITZ\*

By HERBERT H. BECK

**F**OR nearly a century the burial place of the 110 Revolutionary soldiers who had been interred in Lititz was a mystery. At least Abraham R. Beck, former archivist of the Lititz Moravian Congregation, who was born in 1833 and who had lived in the town all of his life, did not know the exact site of the graveyard; nor did anyone else. It was only known that of the 120 privates and non-commissioned officers of the Continental army who died in the Brethren's House between Dec. 19, 1777, and Aug. 28, 1778, 110 had been buried somewhere in the eastern end of the town south of Main street.

The church records were indefinite on the subject. Careful analysts though they usually were on community affairs, the early diarists, whose piety inclined them toward pacifism, made but few entries on the portentous events of war about them. The only record pertaining to the graveyard was that of Dec. 21, 1777, which says, "The question arose, where shall the dead be buried if any die in the lazaret? Later, after consultation with the Committee on Temporal Affairs, we determined to set apart a corner of our lowermost field."

Unfortunately in the mass of material in the Lititz Moravian Archives a map indistinctly showing the site had been overlooked. On John Rickert's map of Lititz, 1843, the words "Graveyard of the Revolution" are almost illegible. Rickert showed the place to be about 500 yards directly east of the older portion of the Moravian cemetery and 300 yards south of Main street.

Furthermore tradition had been misled by a wrongly interpreted discovery of the eighteen eighties. John Kahl, in finding darkened earth spots in his excavations for brick clay 300 yards

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\* Supplement of "The Military Hospital at Lititz, 1777-78." Vol. XXIII, pp. 5-14.

northeast of the actual site, started the rumor that he had come upon evidences of the soldiers' remains; which was rather generally accepted. Near the place of the Kahl brickyard and along Main street Congress erected a memorial monument to the soldiers of the Continental Army in 1928.

A fortuitous turn of fate in October, 1932, revealed the bones of the honored dead. In excavating for a cellar on the east side of South Locust street, Morris Frederick, who immediately knew what he had found, came upon the remains. They lay exactly where Rickert's long overlooked map showed them to be.

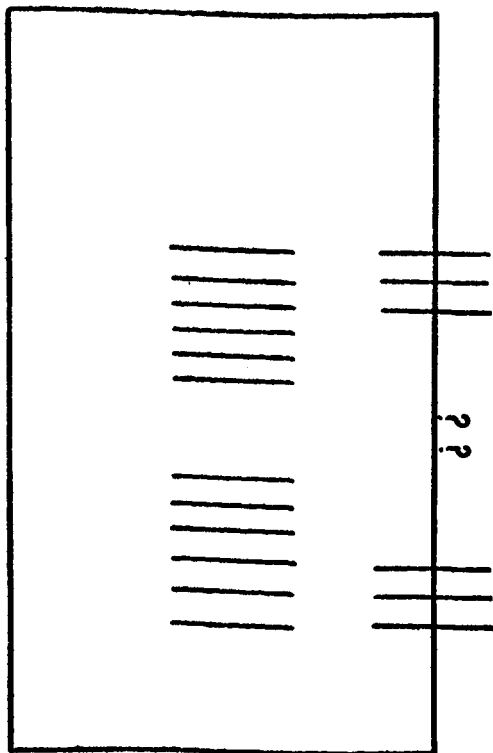
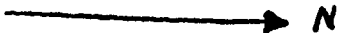
The cellar was that of a house being built for Jacob Hertzler. It is a one and a half story frame building with a concrete block foundation. It stands on South Locust street, 300 yards from Main street. This house is the actual marker of the graveyard, 825 yards southwest of the formal memorial plot.

Called to the scene, the writer beheld an impressive sight. There lay the men who had rammed home the charge, aimed and fired under Washington at Brandywine! From the loosened earth there seemed to arise the life and times of the Revolution with their patriotic enthusiasm and excitement, with their misery and suffering.

The church diary told that "In the event of an officer's death we should be expected to give him a more honorable burial place than that is where all are huddled indiscriminately underground." How well that entry recorded the facts! The soldiers were found lying in trenches, shoulder to shoulder—emergency burials of a battlefield.

The cellar is 26 by 44 feet. Fourteen feet from its west and midway between its north and south walls the first bones were unearthed. From this point east in the cellar there were two trenches apparently of six bodies each. The north wall cut through the center of another trench. In a cess-pool excavation immediately northeast of the building, the bones of three individuals were found. Of the 110 buried thereabouts the remains of about twenty were uncovered. The remainder lie to the north, northeast and east of the house, none being found west of a point sixty feet east of the center of Locust street, nor south of the trench line

LOCUST STREET



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26'



Cellar and cesspool at Lititz in the excavations for which the remains of Revolutionary soldiers were found in trenches at the lines indicated. The south-west corner of a plot in which 110 are buried.

through the longitudinal middle of the cellar. The southwest corner of the graveyard had been opened.

Even allowing for erosion which followed the plowings and waterwashings of more than a century, the graves must have been shallow. The bones were not more than twenty-two inches under the surface. The larger ones, several femurs and a few skull caps, were intact. Some of the jaws with many of the teeth were in their original state. The open sutures of the skull caps in every case revealed youth. No buttons or other imperishable clothing attachments were found; although Frederick, who was keenly interested in his discovery, took great care to search for them in every shovelful of earth. The corpses were probably buried unclothed or wrapped in sheets. The bodies were buried with their heads toward the south.

The western trench of about six men included presumably the first burials in the graveyard, which probably was started at its southwest corner. They were probably some of the soldiers who died between Dec. 19, when the sick and wounded arrived at the hospital, and Dec. 28. Describing this period, on the latter date, the diarist wrote: "The misery in the lazaretto cannot be described; neither can it, without being seen, be imagined. The two doctors [Brown and Allison] are sick and have the attention of Bro. Adolph Meyer." The epidemic of camp fever was spreading at this time from the hospital into the village. During January, 1778, four members of the congregation died of the malady. Deaths in the hospital were frequent. Able hands were few. Shallow trench burial seems to have been necessitated by these conditions of December, 1777, and it probably was continued with minor exceptions throughout the eight months that followed.

All of the bones and teeth were carefully collected by Morris Frederick, placed in a casket 24 by 18 by 10 inches, and interred in the memorial grounds 125 feet south of its entrance.

The "corner of our lowermost field," according to Rickert's map which shows the surroundings, was against a woodlot to its south and east. This grove, which was then on church land, extended north to Main street. Abraham R. Beck remembered it as a beautiful stand of stalwart oaks and other forest trees, which

were cut down only against the urgent opposition of a minority who loved the natural charms of the grove.

The haze of tradition has at last cleared before the breezes of time and change. Along authentic pathways sentiment can now follow the brave boys of '76, dead of wounds from British flintlocks at Brandywine or Germantown or of the local camp fever, as they were hauled from the misery of the lazaretto across the snow clad lowermost field to be "huddled indiscriminately underground" at the elevated corner by the woods.