

# Standard Presented to The Republican Blues

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER

THE twenty-fifth anniversary of American Independence was celebrated on Saturday, July 4th, 1801, by the inhabitants of Lancaster. The dawn was ushered in by the firing of a gun. At ten o'clock, *The Republican Blues*, a volunteer corps, commanded by Captain William Dickson, one of the editors and publishers of *The Intelligencer and Weekly Advertiser*, paraded in front of the state house. A handsome standard—a gift from ladies of the borough—was presented to the company by Mrs. Timothy Matlack and Mrs. James Trimble. The standard, which was designed and executed by Mr. Eckstein, was received by the corps with presented arms.<sup>1</sup> When displayed, it exhibited the American eagle grasping a thunderbolt from which issued streams of lightning darting upon the symbols of slavery, and a motto "Strike them with your thunderbolts." After the standard had been presented an address was delivered as follows:

"COUNTRYMEN AND FRIENDS:

"We have desired your presence on this day, to receive from our hands a banner, under which, we hope, you will in future march. This is not an unmeaning ceremony. The matrons and daughters of America ought to feel the strongest attachment to the militia of their country. They discern in that body their husbands, their sons and their brothers, associated under the laws in the support of our constitutions. They perceive in those institutions a spirit of justice, quickened by the tenderest humanity, exempting the sex from those countless wrongs, which perverted religion, and the varied forms of cruel policy, in other countries, have heaped upon them. They devoutly rejoice that the same spirit of our government has terminated the unnatural sacrifice of the younger branches of their families on the altar of aristocracy. The rising generation, whose young ideas and virtues they have taught to shoot, and over whose beds of sickness they have wasted the midnight lamp, shall not be reared, as in other countries, for servile dependence, and too often, alas! for worse conditions. Political establishments, breathing like those of America the blended spirit of justice and humanity, must be ever dear to a sex, many of whom are voluntary martyrs to social duty and natural affection. In presenting you with this standard, we solemnly charge you with the defense of those inestimable constitutions.

"The emblems which adorn our offering to '*The Republican Blues*,' will incite them to the contemplation of other objects. The

<sup>1</sup> *The Intelligencer and Weekly Advertiser*, Wednesday, July 15th, 1801.

American militia will not merely defend their homes against foreign invaders; nor will they deem the suppression of internal disorders their only domestic duty. They will be ever ready to resist usurpation, and to oppose the exchange of liberty for despotism. Should tyranny rear its head in our land, *'The Republican Blues'* will read, in the device upon their banner, the confident expectations of their female friends."

To this address an answer was returned as follows:

"Ladies:

"It is the brightest honor of those who have matured society in America, and who have secured its blessings by our happy constitutions, that they have banished those oppressions of your amiable sex, which have disgraced the practice and institutions of other countries. We freely engage that the rights of our female relatives and friends shall never be diminished by us. We foresee, with joy, that the virtue of mankind will render your sex more and more of those advantages, which you claim by the high title of Divine justice.

"The rising generations must always acknowledge the preserving care of our matrons and our sisters, in all the stages of infancy and youth, and in seasons of infirmity, pain and sickness. Nor can they ever cease to remember the lessons of purity and knowledge, infused by their female relations into their opening minds.

"The emblems on your banner will often be the theme of the citizen soldier. The mere defense of our homes against foreign invasion, and the expulsion of disorder from our land, will not be the whole of our duties. Equipment and discipline can alone continue us the standing army of the constitution. The exercise of our civil rights, and the practice of our duties, can alone render us the safe depository of the public arms. Considering the militia as the natural power of the country, we feel it our duty to give its irresistible support to the constitution and laws under the direction of the civil magistrate. But if ever the public functionaries, usurping unlicensed or forbidden authorities, shall commence a despotism in this land, *'The Republican Blues'* will remember the devices on your banner."<sup>2</sup>

The company marched to the common, went through their exercises and firings in honor of the day, and proceeded to Hershe's springs, where they celebrated the anniversary of American Independence in festive gaiety. Seventeen toasts were drunk, interspersed with appropriate music. At six o'clock they returned to the borough in an orderly manner. An evening gun closed the ceremonies of a delightful day.

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<sup>2</sup> The Intelligencer and Weekly Advertiser, Wednesday, July 8th, 1801.

William Hamilton, editor of the Lancaster Journal, sarcastically stated in the issue of that paper dated Saturday, July 11th, 1801, that when the standard was presented to *The Republican Blues* "nine or ten ladies were collected." He described the standard as displaying "the American eagle grasping a thunderbolt, from whence issued streams of lightning darting upon symbols of monarchy and religion." In employing the word "religion" Mr. Hamilton displayed a serious lack of tact and judgment, and started a "tempest in a teapot." In a lengthy communication, which appeared in *The Intelligencer* of Wednesday, July 15th, Mr. Matlack wrote, in part:

"Mrs. Matlack is here publicly charged with insulting '*Religion*' by presenting a standard, whose motto enjoins its destruction. If this charge were just, she would merit *contempt*; not less for the *folly* than the *impiety* of such an act. It is, therefore, my duty, knowing her innocency, to support her, by *an appeal to the public*, against so bold and unfounded a charge.

"What part of the symbols on that standard this man has perverted to a 'symbol of religion,' he has not stated; and it is, therefore, impossible to know to which of them he alludes. That nothing of this kind was meant, is evident from the declaration of those best acquainted with the design, for in Messrs. Dickson's paper of the 8th, it is declared, that they were the symbols '*of slavery*.' And it is a principle in heraldry (on which things of this kind are founded) that every part shall be construed in a manner the *most favorable* to the design. But in the present case, contrary to this rule, it has been grossly perverted; evidently for the purpose of debasing the character of the Republican matrons and of insult and irritation.

"If, however, the standard were capable of such a construction as is contained in the [Lancaster] Journal paragraph, before *Mrs. Matlack* is censured, surely it ought to be inquired how far *she* is accountable for it. To have taken a lead in complimenting '*The Republican Blues*' with a standard, I should have deemed an honor to any female connection of mine; but it is an honor to which *Mrs. Matlack* has no title. Her name stands lower upon the list of subscribers than I could have wished. The head of the list is very properly graced with the name of *Mrs. Hopkins*, born in this borough, whose family and connections in life place her on a level with the first characters in it; and her name is followed by those of the lady of the Secretary of the Commonwealth, of the State Treasurer, of the late Receiver-General, of the Surveyor-General, of the Register-General, and of others to whom the compliment of an early application was due.

"The presenting of the standard was not the result of combination or concert; but, throughout, was the spontaneous act of

individuals, who were disposed to give support to the militia. And, as there was no meeting of the subscribers previous to that at the hour appointed for the ceremony of presenting the standard, there was no chance of its being known who would attend that meeting. A majority of the ladies then present agreed that the two eldest should present the standard, and of these *Mrs. Matlack* happened to be one. But for this ceremony she was utterly unprepared.

“As *Mrs. Matlack* is almost a stranger in the borough, in order to form an opinion of the probability of her intending to insult *religion* it may be proper to ask, who and of what family she is? To this inquiry it may be truly answered that she is a member of the [Protestant] Episcopal church; the daughter of James Claypoole, who was for many years a warden of St. Paul’s church, Philadelphia, whose wife was considered as an example of piety and virtue. Surely it will require very strong evidence to induce even a suspicion that a woman educated by such parents should *openly* and *publicly* insult ‘*religion*.’ If, however, there should be a doubt in the mind of any, let them read the last sentence of the address, and they will see that it is pointed not against ‘*religion*’ but against ‘*tyranny*,’ in the following plain words: ‘Should tyranny rear its head in our land, *The Republican Blues* will read in the device upon their banner the confident expectations of their female friends.’”

Mr. Hamilton replied to this communication, at some length, in the Lancaster Journal of Saturday, July 18th. It was addressed “To Timothy Matlack, Esq.—alias Timm Gaff, of cock-fighting memory.” Hamilton could use sarcasm with effectiveness when occasion required. That part of his article which helps us visualize the banner, is as follows:

“In the [Lancaster] Journal of Saturday last, I stated that the standard exhibited ‘the American eagle grasping a thunderbolt, from whence issued streams of lightning darting upon the symbols of monarchy and religion.’ The motto ‘Strike them with your thunderbolts.’ You accede to the truth of this, with the bare exception that there was no symbol of religion displayed. On a cursory view of the banner, it appears that among *the emblems* to be destroyed by Captain Dickson’s ‘donner’ and ‘blitzen’ are a crown, a sceptre, chains, a pulpit cushion, and we believe a mitre. Dickson calls these the symbols of ‘*slavery*.’ Yet it is well known that exclusive of the chains, not any of them is emblematic of slavery. They are symbols of royalty and religion.”

It would be interesting to learn what has become of this standard. If it is still in existence it should be preserved in Lancaster’s new museum when that fire-proof structure is erected.