

## RELICS OF SEVENTY SIX

Under this heading the *Philadelphia Saturday Courier* in an issue of April 1847 reported on the death of one of the few remaining veterans of the Revolution. The subject of the article, John Conrad Aleshire (1755-1847) was 20 years old when he enlisted in Colonel Peter Muhlenberg's 8th Virginia German Regiment. The story told here was essentially the same for the thousands of German settlers in the back parts of Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia and the Carolinas:

### *ANOTHER VETERAN GONE*

Died, at the residence of his son, Col. Jonas Aleshire, in Page County, Va., on the 18th, Mr. John Conrad Aleshire, aged 91 years, 2 months, and 22 days.

Mr. Aleshire was of German descent. His immediate ancestors imigrated from Germany in the year 1749 and settled on the Monongahela near Fort Redstone, now Brownsville, in Pennsylvania. This being the extreme frontier settlement at that time, they soon found it necessary in consequence of their unprotected situation and the frequent depredation of the hostile Indians, to retire farther into the interior. Accordingly, they sunk a pit, into which they put all their implements of husbandry and other articles inconvenient to remove in this hasty retreat, and converting it into a lettuce bed to divert the attention of the Indians, they retired to Cedar Creek, in Frederick, now Shenandoah County. Here on the 24th day of December, 1755, the subject of this notice was born. The settlements were being still annoyed by the Indians. They erected forts or block houses to which they retired for safety on any demonstration of hostilities. In the spring of 1756, when but a few months old, a party of hostile Indians made their appearance in the settlement and murdered several members of a family named Painter, a neighbor of Aleshire's family made a precipitate retreat, but in their haste, entirely neglected the infant who was sleeping in his cradle, until they reached the fort. His sister returned determined to peril her life for his safety, and cautiously approaching the house, entered through the window, succeeded in getting her infant brother in her arms and bore him in triumph to the fort. She had scarcely left the house, ere the demoniac sound of the savage war-whoop rent the air and told how narrow was the escape from their blood thirsting vengeance.

At the commencement of the war of the Revolution, he was mustered into the service, and underwent many hardships in the struggle for freedom. He was one of Washington's forlorn hope, that crossed the Delaware amid the floating ice on Christmas night, 1776, and attacked and routed the Hessians under Rahl at Trenton.

After this engagement his term expired and a dissolution of the old army occurred. Though much worn down with hardships incident to a severe winter campaign, yet he beheld with a patriot's heart the critical situation of his country; and with a lofty zeal characteristic of gallant spirits that periled their all in its behalf, he again entered the

service and in a few days participated in the bloody conflict at Princeton. He continued in the army during three tours and was in several of the hardest contested battles. For a time, he retired from the field, but was not inactive in furthering the common cause. His frequent sallies against the Tories caused them much discomfiture and his name among them struck terror in their ranks.

In the last campaign, when liberty and slavery seemed suspended in the balance, and so nicely equipped that even the most sanguine contemplated these with trepidation—with a shout of defiance to the British Lion, he shouldered his knapsack and musket with a firm resolve, so far as it was in his power, that the equilibrium should be destroyed in the preponderance of freedom. Noble was his resolve! And how noble verified! In the closing scene, near to the side of the father of his country, he stood before Yorktown. The thunder of British cannon was no terror to him. It was familiar to his ears. His country's freedom was at issue and the common sentiment was diffused through the ranks of his compatriots in arms. The struggle was short but decisive, and with eyes swimming in tears of joy, he beheld his country's flag wave in triumph over the ramparts of the enemy.

At the close of the war, he married and settled in Shenandoah, now Page County. Here there may be many interesting incidents mentioned in the eventful life of Mr. Aleshire, did not the limits of a note of this character forbid it; but I will mention the following as one somewhat similar is recorded in the life of General Putnam;—

"During the winter of 1805-6, the wolves were very numerous in the neighboring mountains and committed great depredations on the sheep-fold. The farmers formed hunting parties and ranged the mountains to destroy them or drive them out. Mr. Aleshire and one of his neighbors Mr. Charles Keyser, discovered two wolves at a place called Burner's Gap. Aleshire fired and killed one. Then seizing Mr. Keyser's gun, fired, but missing his aim, the other escaped into its den. The balance of the party assembled, and having exhausted every effort in vain to drive it from its retreat, or to induce the hounds to enter, Mr. Aleshire with torch in hand, descended into the den. Finding the wolf with its head snugly ensconced behind a rock, he laid down his torch, grasped it firmly with both hands by the back of the neck and brought it out alive."

Mr. Aleshire was a pious and respected member of the Baptist Church for sixty years, and the last surviving soldier of the Revolution in Page County. He had voted at every presidential election from that of Washington to that of Polk.

The natural decay of age brought his eventful career to a close, and he died without a pang or murmur, with the brightest hopes of a happy immortality. Truly the grand Reveille is beating on high!