



A few thoughts about William Floyd....

When I was approached by library staff to write an article regarding William Floyd I immediately thought to myself, what can I add to the picture already painted by William Maxwell and Larry Lowenthal. Both of them have written authoritative biographies on our Founding Father. I would refer anyone interested in a detailed look at his life to borrow a copy of Mr. Lowenthal's book from your local library. That being said, I thought it might be of interest to mention a few brief thoughts with regard to General Floyd's life and character.

Unfortunately, Floyd did not leave much in the way of personal journal writings or notes. Held up high, as with the others, on the pedestal of greatness with regard to the birth of our nation, we can rest assured that his role and actions to move the American people to independence were equally as important as the more well known of the group, such as Jefferson, Madison, Washington, Adams and Franklin. But, who was the esteemed William Floyd, already past the age of 40, during the Revolution and thereafter? What was he like as a gentleman and estate owner in Mastic?

To begin to answer these questions, we have a wealth of information made available by the William Floyd Estate now managed by the Federal Parks Department as well as some personal anecdotes such as that given by Julia Floyd Delafield, granddaughter of the General, in her personal journal. From print sources such as his letters, some of which are available online through the New York Public Library, we can see that he was indeed a very astute and careful businessman with regard to all matters of agriculture and industry.

We also know that Floyd as a child received a limited education, yet was literate and well informed in current affairs of the day, and was fond of hunting. His ability to manage his family and estate, after the death of his parents while only 17 years of age, lends credence to what we can be sure to know as his belief in hard work and astute leadership. To better understand the man in person, I would like to submit the following text by Rev. Charles A. Goodrich, published in 1829 in the work "Lives of the Signers of the Declaration":

In his person, General Floyd was of a middle stature. He possessed a natural dignity, which seldom failed to impress those into whose company he was thrown. He appeared to enjoy the pleasures of private life, yet in his manners he was less familiar, and in his disposition less affable, than most men. Few men, however, were more respected. He was eminently a practical man. The projects to which he gave his sanction, or which he attempted, were those which judgment could approve. When his purposes were once formed, he seldom found reason to alter them. His firmness and resolution were not often equaled.

In his political character, there was much to admire. He was uniform and independent. He manifested great candor and sincerity towards those from whom he happened to differ; and such was his well known integrity, that his motives were rarely, if ever, impeached. He seldom took part in the public discussion of a subject, nor was he dependent upon others for the opinions which he adopted. His views were his own, and his opinions the result of reason and reflection. If the public estimation of a man be a just criterion by which to judge of him, General Floyd was excelled by few of his contemporaries, since, for more than fifty years he was honored with offices of trust and responsibility by his fellow citizens.

William Floyd in many ways embodied the American spirit of freedom and Independence, of common good and progress. He went on in later years from 1794 forward, to work and settle what was then the frontier, in a new estate up in Oneida County, in what is now called the town of Westernville, NY. Floyd left his Mastic estate to his son Nicoll. After the end of the war, he married his second wife in 1784, Joanna Strong of Setauket, and started a new family.

Finally, I would like to leave you with the following letter, penned Just one month prior to his death at the age of 87, so elegantly stated, with regard to an invitation to celebrate the nation's Independence on July 4, 1821:

Gentleman,

The friendly, and respectful address which you present me as coming from a number of inhabitants who are met together for the purpose of celebrating the Independence of America gives me pleasure because it brings to my mind that the measures which were pursued and the firmness of these men who lived in and were active in the Revolution had laid the foundation for that happiness and prosperity which the inhabitants of North America enjoy, beyond what is enjoyed by the people of any other country in the world and is a consolation to me to hope that the same happiness and prosperity may be enjoyed by generations yet unborn. I am with great respect your humble servant.

July 4th 1821

William Floyd



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