

## Founder Robert Lay, Patriot Captain ASA Lay

These are the stories of Founder **Robert Lay, 1st** (b. 1617 d. July 9, 1689), and Revolutionary War soldier and Patriot **Captain ASA Lay** (April 11, 1749 d. February 23, 1814). Both are ancestors of Charles Francis Lay and James Dominic Lay of the Virginia Society, OFPA.

### **ROBERT LAY, 1st**

Robert Lay, Sr, came from England with his two brothers, John & Edward. He is first mentioned as being at Lynn, MA in 1638. The early records of Lynn are lost, so there is no confirmation of this report. By tradition, he was in Saybrook, CT by 1640. He married Sarah (Fenner) Tully (Dec. 1647). In a division of lands, made in 1648, there appears to have been 43 proprietors in the town of Saybrook, among them were ancestors of the....Lays...etc. He was a freeman in 1657, and at October 11, 1666 a representative (deputy) at the General Assembly at Hartford, CT. He was exceptionally well educated. He built Lay's Wharf where West Indies trading vessels berthed. In 1666 he bought the ketch "Diligence", which made regular trips to the West Indies, exporting local produce and importing rum & sugar. He developed Fenwick's farm on Nott's Island, in the river opposite Potapoug. John Lay, Sr. sold his newly built house to his brother, Robert, who lived there the rest of his life. He, Robert, was the second permanent resident of what is now Essex. Robert Lay died in Saybrook at the age of 71 or 72. Both he and his wife Sarah are buried in Essex Cemetery.

Robert Lay, Jr. (II), (1654-1742), Robert Lay, III (1679/80- 1738) and Daniel Lay (1712-1782) were the intervening generations between Robert, 1st and Asa Lay.

References:

1. Saybrook Vital Records – Pgs 3, 19
2. Potapoug Quarter-The First Settlers of Essex, CN - Stevens.
3. Genealogical Dictionary, First settlers of New England, James Savage, Vol. III, pg 65.

### **LT. COL. (CAPTAIN) ASA LAY**

**Asa Lay** was the third son of Daniel Lay (1712-1782) and Anna Bull. He was born in Saybrook, CN April 11, 1749. He married Sarah Wolcott April 18, 1770. They raised twelve children.

**Selection as the family member to enlist for service in the War.** - He was one of three sons of Daniel Lay. The first son, also Daniel could not go as he had a sick wife and seven children. The second son James could not go as he was subject to falling sickness. Thus it was Asa who was chosen. He left home for the War the day after the news of the Battle of Lexington and Concord; Massachusetts (April 1775) reached his town. He enlisted as a private under a Cpt. John Ely. The Connecticut troops at this time had no uniforms. Their clothes were the homespun that they wore at home. They were ordered to supply themselves with a blanket, knapsack, clothing, etc. The men were also to supply their own weapons. Asa carried the 'fowling piece' that he had used to shoot quail.

**Asa Lay's first Battle** was the **Battle of White Plains**, near New York City (October 25, 1776). By this time he had been promoted to corporal, Sergeant, and then to Adjutant. (A rank between

enlisted and officer.) Lt. Lay took part in the battle of Monmouth, NJ June 28, 1778. He served as part of the 6th Connecticut Regiment in and around West Point, NY from 1776 to 1778.

**ASA Lay at Valley Forge, PA** - In February 1778 Lt. Asa Lay was detached from his regiment and ordered to Valley Forge by **General George Washington** to serve as **General Baron Von Steuben's** commander of his personal body guard, while Von Steuben trained Washington's troops in military order, drill and fighting formations. He was at Valley Forge for about a month, and as with other officers he was invited to eat dinner with General Washington and his wife Martha.

**Asa Lay Employed as a Spy** - Early in the War General Washington formed a plan for getting information about the enemy. Washington prevailed upon a gentleman from Virginia to turn Tory and write for a British newspaper in Long Island, NY. He would then pass a packet of information on to a trusted confederate, who would pass it on to Lt. Lay in Long Island. From the hand of that person Lt. Lay was to receive the parcel and then crossing over to Connecticut, put it into the hands of Col. Meigs, who was to deliver it to Washington. Asa Lay was always to go to Long Island in the night. He never knew the man from whom he took the papers; never exchanged a word with him except the countersign; and never told any person what his business was on Long Island, until many years after the War had closed. Lt. Lay was employed in the Secret Service for several months.

**Asa Lay tried by Courts Martial** - During his secret service, he and his detachment of 15 men were able to capture a number of British troops and keep them from destroying American supplies. The British soon captured him in January 1779. As leader of the Raiding party, Lt. Lay was tried by Court Martial. A **Major John Andre** presided at the trial. (This same John Andre was later was hanged as a British Spy by the American Army, for helping **Benedict Arnold** betray his country by attempting to surrender the West Point Army fort.) Because Lt. Lay had destroyed his papers he was unable to be hanged as a spy. He did, however, spend two years and five months, under miserable conditions as a Prisoner of War. He was released in the autumn of 1780, seen as being unfit to fight.

**Almost a combatant at the Battle of Yorktown.** - After a short period of recuperation at home in Saybrook, he rejoined his regiment and was promoted to Captain, August 28, 1780. Captain Lay was scheduled to take his company to join the forces of French **General Count Rochambeau** at

Peekskill, NY to proceed south to Yorktown, VA for the last big battle of the Rev. War. He, however, came down with dysentery and had to be replaced by one of his lieutenants, a Lt. Mansfield. (Lt. Mansfield serving in ASA Lay's place was wounded in one of the first engagements at the Battle at

Yorktown.) At the time of the declaration of peace, in 1783, he was stationed with **Baron Von Steuben** at Fishkill, NY, on the Hudson River. **General Washington's headquarters**, at which he was a frequent visitor, was at Newberg, NY on the opposite side of the river.

**Asa Lay served proudly in his state's Militia after the War.** - Cpt Lay was retired from active service January 1st, 1783. He became a Lieutenant Colonel of the Seventh Conn. Regiment by a commission dated May 31, 1796.

**Cpt. Asa Lay's love for his Commander in Chief General George Washington** - Col Lay had many memories of the War that he related to his children and grandchildren, He was so fond of General Baron Von Steuben that he named one of his twelve children **Steuben**. He spoke fondly of his commanders in his Connecticut regiments. **But none did his heart cling in love, and reverence as it did to General Washington. 'I never saw the man,' he would say, 'I could live for, fight for, and die for as I could for Washington.'**

**Footnote: Asa's son made a set of Ivory teeth for Washington** - **His first son, Asa Wolcott Lay,** "made a set of **ivory teeth** for General Washington, for which he was paid a guinea a tooth... Washington paused for an instant over the signature [to the bill] and then he said, 'I had a captain in the army by the name of ASA Lay; he was from Saybrook in Connecticut, Do you know anything about him?' When Washington learned that this Asa Lay was the son of the captain he took the young man's hand and said 'Give my love to your father; I knew him well; he was a brave man' "

Excerpts for this article taken from:

1. The Descendants of Robert Lay of Saybrook, Conn, Edwin A. Hill, Boston (MA), New England Historic Genealogical society, 1908. Pgs 4, 5, 7, & 9.
2. Captain Asa Lay of the War For Independence, by Mary Hewitt Mitchell, PhD, The Torrington Printing Company, Torrington, CT, 1930, 37pp.
3. Recollections of Eune Elizabeth Lay, daughter of Steuben Lay, granddaughter of Asa Lay, circa April 1893, 19pp
4. The History of Middlesex County (CT) 1635-1885, J.H. Beers & Co., 36 Vesey St., NY, 1884, pp 573-576.



REVOLUTIONARY WAR  
CAPT. ASA LAY  
4TH REGT. CONN. LINE  
DIED FEB. 23, 1813  
Æ 65

