

JAMES O'KELLEY PATRIOT REMARKS, 4 MAY 08

IN PREPARING FOR TODAY'S GRAVEMARKING CEREMONY, I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO VISIT THE DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION'S CONSTITUTIONAL HALL IN WASHINGTON D.C.

THE BUILDING CONTAINS A TREASURE TROVE OF HISTORICAL DATA ON THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR AND INFORMATION ON OUR PATRIOTS FROM THAT ERA.

TURNS OUT I FOUND SOME INTERESTING INFORMATION ABOUT PATRIOT JAMES O'KELLEY THAT REFLECTS ON HIS CHARACTER, HIS PATRIOTIC ZEAL, AND HIS UNYIELDING DETERMINATION WHEN HE MADE HIS MIND UP TO PURSUE HIS GOALS.

HIS TENACITY AND TALENTS WERE EVIDENT IN EARLY LIFE BECAUSE HE WAS A CHAMPION FIGHTER AND FIDDLER.

APPARENTLY, HE COULD BEAT ANYONE THAT CHALLENGED HIM TO A FIGHT AND NO ONE COULD HANDLE A FIDDLE THE WAY O'KELLEY DID.

HE BECAME A MINISTER LATER IN LIFE, AT AGE 34 OR 35, AND WAS TRAVELLING AROUND THE AREA AS A CIRCUIT PREACHER WHEN THE WAR BEGAN.

DR. BENNETT WROTE IN THE MEMORIALS OF METHODISM IN VIRGINIA

"WHEN THE WAR WAS BROUGHT INTO VIRGINIA MANY METHODISTS WERE WHIPPED FOR REFUSING TO BEAR ARMS"

BUT THE SPIRIT OF LIBERTY IN O'KELLEY WAS TOO STRONG FOR HIM TO REFUSE THE CALL OF PATRIOTISM, AND NO SUCH IGNOMINIOUS (IGNOMINIOUS) PUNISHMENT AS THE WHIPPING POST COULD EVER HAVE BEEN HIS PORTION FOR REFUSING TO BEAR ARMS IN BEHALF OF FREEDOM.

HE SUPPORTED THE CALL TO ARMS BECAUSE OF HIS FIERCE DESIRE FOR FREEDOM AND INDEPENDENCE.

HE WAS DESCRIBED AS A WHIG AMONG WHIGS, WHIGS BEING SUPPORTERS OF OUR INDEPENDENCE FROM ENGLAND.

WHEN THE CALL CAME FOR VOLUNTEERS, JAMES O'KELLEY, LIKE ALL THE OTHER PATRIOTS AT THAT TIME, STEPPED FORWARD AND SAID YOU CAN COUNT ON ME.

HE AND THE OTHERS KNEW WHAT WAS AT STAKE AND THAT ESTABLISHING THE NEW REPUBLIC WOULD REQUIRE SACRIFICES TO ENSURE OUR FREEDOM, KNOWING FULL WELL THAT FREEDOM IS NOT FREE AND THAT THEIR PERSONAL SAFETY, FAMILY, AND WEALTH WOULD BE PLACED IN GREAT JEOPARDY.

AND YET ---- THEY CAME FORWARD AND VOLUNTEERED TO FIGHT FOR THE HIGHER COMMON GOOD OF ESTABLISHING OUR NEW REPUBLIC AND OF DEFENDING OUR NEW CONSTITUTION AGAINST THE BRITISH CROWN.

JOHN ADAMS, OUR SECOND PRESIDENT, WROTE:

"LIBERTY MUST AT ALL HAZARDS BE SUPPORTED. WE HAVE A RIGHT TO IT, DERIVED FROM OUR MAKER. BUT IF WE HAD NOT, OUR FATHERS HAVE EARNED AND BOUGHT IT FOR US, AT THE EXPENSE OF THEIR EASE, THEIR ESTATES, THEIR PLEASURE, AND THEIR BLOOD."

PATRIOT O'KELLEY WAS NEARLY KILLED IN THE WAR.

HE WAS CAPTURED BY A GROUP OF TORIES, THOSE CITIZENS LOYAL TO ENGLAND, UNDER THE COMMAND OF COLONEL SLINGSBY.

COLONEL SLINGSBY RECOGNIZED O'KELLEY AND ASKED HIM TO PREACH TO HIS MEN, WHICH O'KELLEY DID BECAUSE HIS FAITH TRANSCENDED ANIMOSITY TOWARDS THE TORIES EVEN THOUGH THEY WERE KILLING FELLOW WHIGS AND PATRIOTS.

O'KELLEY WAS HELD PRISONER ALONG WITH THE OWNER OF THE HOUSE NEAR WHERE O'KELLEY WAS CAPTURED. O'KELLEY AND THE OWNER WERE BOUND TO THE SAME TREE.

DURING THE WHIG SKIRMISH TO RELEASE THE TWO MEN, THE OTHER MAN WAS KILLED, BUT O'KELLEY WAS NOT HARMED.

HIS FREEDOM, FOLLOWING THE SKIRMISH, WAS SHORT BECAUSE SOON HE WAS RECAPTURED BY THE BRITISH.

O'KELLEY LATER WROTE:

"I WAS TAKEN PRISONER BY THE TORIES, AND ROBBED; I WAS RETAKEN BEFORE DAY, BY CAPTAIN PETER ROBERTSON, THE GREAT AND NOTED WHIG."

I WAS AFTERWARD TAKEN PRISONER BY THE BRITISH. THE CHIEF OFFICER URGED ME TO SUBJECT MYSELF TO THE KING AND ALTHOUGH I WAS IN HIS HANDS, I WOULD NOT YIELD. HE OFFERED TO RELEASE ME, IF I WOULD SOLEMNLY PROMISE NOT TO LET ANY MAN KNOW, ASKED OR NOT ASKED, WHERE THE BRITISH LAY. I REFUSED TO DO THAT. THEN I WAS DESPISED, AND VERY NEAR FAMISHED FOR BREAD. AT WHICH TIME I RESOLVED, THROUGH GRACE, TO HOLD TO MY INTEGRITY TILL DEATH."

O'KELLEY ALSO LATER WROTE:

"MY HONOR, MY OATH -- MY SOUL WERE AT STAKE; TILL AT LAST, PROVIDENCE OFFERED ME AN OPPORTUNITY, WHICH I GLADLY EMBRACED, AND NARROWLY ESCAPED THEIR HANDS. AFTER THESE THINGS, I WENT (NOT AS A PRISONER) INTO GENERAL RUTHERFORD'S CAMPS, AND THERE, BY THE TESTIMONY OF TWO WORTHY GENTLEMEN, VIS: COLONEL ROBERTSON AND COLONEL OWENS, OF BLADEN, DID I ESTABLISH MY POLITICAL AND CIVIL CHARACTER. I STOOD MY DRAFT AS OTHER MEN. ONCE MY SUBSTITUE FAITHFULLY SERVED A TOUR. ONCE I MARCHED ON FOOT AS FAR AS I WAS ABLE."

FORTUNATELY, JAMES O'KELLEY SURVIVED THE WAR, BUT MANY OF HIS FELLOW PATRIOTS LOST THEIR WEALTH, FAMILIES, AND LIMB AND LIFE, AS EVIDENCED BY THE MYRIAD CEMETARIES NEAR BATTLEFIELDS THAT ESTABLISHED OUR REPUBLIC: SARATOGA, TRENTON, BRANDYWINE, YORKTOWN, AND HERE IN THE CAROLINAS: GUILFORD COURTHOUSE, COWPINS, KINGS MOUNTAIN, ALAMANCE, CLAPPS MILL, AND SO MANY OTHERS IN OUR STATE.

FREEDOM IS NOT FREE!

WE KNOW FROM WHAT OTHERS HAVE WRITTEN AND WHO KNEW O'KELLEY THAT HE HAD BEEN IN THE ACTIVE MINISTRY FOR THE ENTIRE WAR, SERVED THROUGH TWO CAMPAIGNS, RENDERED OTHER INDEPENDENT AND HAZARDOUS SERVICE TO THE CAUSE, AND WAS HONORABLY DISCHARGED AT THE CLOSE OF THE WAR.

ONE SAID:

"JAMES O'KELLEY WAS ONE WHO COULD NEITHER BE COAXED, NOR BRIBED FROM WHAT HE BELIEVED TO BE RIGHT."

TODAY, WE PARTICIPANTS AND DESCENDANTS OF REVOLUTIONARY WAR PATRIOTS ARE VERY PROUD AND HONORED TO BE A PART OF THIS SOLEMN CEREMONY THAT RECOGNIZES THE O'KELLEY LEGACY OF SERVING THIS GREAT NATION AND OF SUPPORTING OUR LIBERTY AND FREEDOM.

OUR HOPE IS THAT THE RICH O'KELLEY LEGACY OF SUPPORT FOR OUR COUNTRY WILL CONTINUE TO INSPIRE US AND CONTRIBUTE TO OUR COUNTRY'S VALUES AND PRINCIPLES OF FREEDOM, LIBERTY, AND JUSTICE.

WE ALSO THANK ALL PATRIOTS: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE FOR THEIR SACRIFICES AND LOVE FOR THIS COUNTRY.

WE ALL NEED TO BE ON GUARD AND ON THE SAME TEAM AND HAVE THE SAME ZEAL AND DETERMINATION AS OUR PAST PATRIOT O'KELLEY HAS ABLY DEMONSTRATED FOR US.

IN CLOSING, I WANT TO SAY THAT:

-IT IS THE PATRIOT, WHO HAS GIVEN US FREEDOM OF RELIGION

-IT IS THE PATRIOT, WHO HAS GIVEN US FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

-IT IS THE PATRIOT, WHO HAS GIVEN US FREEDOM OF SPEECH

-IT IS THE PATRIOT, WHO HAS GIVEN US THE RIGHT TO VOTE

-IT IS THE PATRIOT, WHO SALUTES THE FLAG

-IT IS THE PATRIOT, WHO SERVES THE FLAG

-IT IS THE PATRIOT, WHO IS BURIED UNDER THE FLAG

GOD BLESS JAMES O'KELLEY, ALL PATRIOTS LIVING AND DEAD, AND GOD BLESS AMERICA!

AT THIS TIME, WE ARE HONORED TO PRESENT AT THE BASE OF THE OBELISK THE SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION MARKER.

IT RECOGNIZES, FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS, THAT AN AMERICAN PATRIOT LIES HERE AND HONORS REVEREND JAMES O'KELLEY FOR HIS SERVICE IN SUPPORTING OUR REVOLUTION FOR INDEPENDENCE.

CAN CHAPLAIN COMPATRIOT CLARK WISER JOIN ME AGAIN FOR THE OFFICIAL UNVEILING OF THE MARKER?

AT THIS TIME, WE WANT TO RENDER HONORS TO THE SERVICE OF PATRIOT JAMES O'KELLEY DURING OUR REVOLUTIONARY WAR WITH A MUSICAL MEDLEY FROM THE WAKE AND PUBLIC SAFETY PIPES AND DRUMS

FOLLOWED BY WREATH LAYING HONORS BY VARIOUS CHAPTERS OF SAR, DAR, AND CAR,

AND FOLLOWED BY A TRADITIONAL MUSKET FIRING TO HONOR OUR DECEASED PATRIOTS AND PERFORMED BY THE JOHNSON COUNTY COLONIAL MILITIA.

BACK UP INFO IF ERNIE DOLLAR CANNOT MAKE IT

HE DEPARTED FROM THE METHODIST CHURCH OVER SEVERAL ISSUES; PROBABLY, THE TWO MOST NOTEWORTHY WERE THE RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY OF THE HEAD OF THE METHODIST CHURCH AT THAT TIME JOHN ASBURY AND SLAVERY. ASBURY WAS A TORY AND WANTED THE CHURCH TO STAY A PART OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND. O'KELLEY WAS A FIERCE ABOLISHIONIST AND EVEN ALLOWED SLAVES TO ATTEND AND BECOME MEMBERS OF HIS CHURCH, A VIOLATION OF CHURCH POLICY.

JAMES O'KELLEY STRUGGLED WITH THESE ISSUES FOR THE REST OF HIS LONG LIFE, DYING IN 1828 AND BEING BURIED HERE ON HIS SON, WILLIAM'S FARM. HIS BELIEFS ALSO NEGATIVELY IMPACTED HIS FAMILY. AFTER HIS DEATH, HIS WIFE, ELIZABETH MEEKS, BURNED ALL HIS PAPERS STORED IN THEIR FAMILY HOME NEAR HERE. DR. J.M. O'KELLEY OF DURHAM AND A DESCENDENT WROTE THEY NOW HAVE NO RECORD OF THEIR NOTED ANCESTOR.

HE WROTE:

"IT IS SAID THAT JAMES O'KELLEY HAD A GREAT MANY MANUSCRIPTS IN HIS HOME AT THE TIME OF HIS DEATH, AND NO DOUBT THEY WERE VALUABLE DOCUMENTS, BUT HIS WIFE HAD LIVED IN THE CONTENTION ABOUT CHURCH GOVERNMENT SO LONG, AND HAD HEARD SO MUCH ABOUT IT, THAT AFTER HIS DEATH SHE SAID SHE WANTED PEACE FROM THE QUESTION, AND SO SHE COLLECTED THESE MANUSCRIPTS AND PUT FIRE TO THEM IN ORDER THAT FURTHER CONTENTION MIGHT BE AVOIDED."

WE DO KNOW THAT JAMES O'KELLEY BEGAN HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY, BUT IT WAS NOT COMPLETED PRIOR TO HIS DEATH. IN AN UNFORTUNATE AND IRONIC TWIST OF EVENTS, O'KELLEY'S GRANDSON HAD THE DRAFT AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN HIS HOUSE WHEN UNION SOLDIERS BURNED HIS HOUSE AND DESTROYED IT DURING THE CIVIL WAR. SO, WE HAVE LITTLE IN THE WAY OF ORIGINAL O'KELLEY DOCUMENTS.

WE KNOW THAT HE ACQUIRED ONE ACRE OF LAND IN 1803 TO START A CHURCH WHERE MARTHA'S CHAPEL CHURCH STANDS TODAY, AND HE ESTABLISHED THE FIRST NEW CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN 1794. IT IS

THE O'KELLEY CHURCH AND, AS MENTIONED EARLIER, IS OPEN FOR VISITORS FOLLOWING OUR CEREMONY.

IN 1850, A COMMITTEE UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF REVEREND JAMES A. TURNER WAS TASKED WITH PLACING AN APPROPRIATE STRUCTURE TO RECOGNIZE JAMES O'KELLEY'S FINAL RESTING PLACE. THE OBELISK BEHIND US WAS ERECTED IN 1854.