

JOURNAL  
OF THE  
Presbyterian Historical Society

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VOL. IX.

JUNE, 1917.

No. 2.

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THE PRESBYTERY OF NEW BRUNSWICK IN THE  
STRUGGLE FOR AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE UNVEILING OF THE ROSBRUGH  
MEMORIAL,<sup>1</sup> FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, TRENTON, N. J.,  
JANUARY 23, 1917.

BY THE REV. GEORGE H. INGRAM,

Chairman of the Committee on Historical Materials,  
Presbytery of New Brunswick.

A sorrier prospect can scarcely be imagined than that which  
confronted General Washington and his patriot army as they

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<sup>1</sup>The Rosbrugh Memorial was erected by the Presbytery of New Brunswick in the churchyard of the First Presbyterian Church of Trenton. It stands on the east side of the church edifice, facing State Street. It is six feet in height, and is of Georgia marble. The dedication took place January 23, 1917. The inscriptions are as follows:

*South Face—*

IN MEMORY OF  
REV. JOHN ROSBRUGH  
CLERICAL MARTYR OF THE REVOLUTION  
MODERATOR OF THE PRESBYTERY OF NEW BRUNSWICK, 1776  
CHAPLAIN 3<sup>d</sup> BATTALION NORTHAMPTON COUNTY, PA.  
MILITIA, DECEMBER 25, 1776  
BAYONETED TO DEATH BY HESSIANS IN TRENTON  
JANUARY 2, 1777

ERECTED BY THE PRESBYTERY OF NEW BRUNSWICK, 1917

The death of Rosburgh made a profound impression. It called attention to the atrocities<sup>30</sup> that were being committed by the enemy. Congress appointed a committee to inquire into the conduct of the enemy in these matters. *The Pennsylvania Evening Post*, of April 24, 1777, begins the report of this committee. The report, as published, contains the following summary of their investigations: "The committee found it to be the general opinion in the neighborhood of Princeton and Trenton that the enemy before the battle of Princeton had determined to give no quarter. . . . A minister of the gospel at Trenton, who neither was nor had been in arms was massacred in cold blood, though humbly supplicating for mercy." The report is signed by the secretary of Congress, Charles Thomson.<sup>31</sup>

In connection with this report, in the issue of the *Post* of April 29, 1777, there is an affidavit by Rev. George Duffield, as follows:

The following circumstances relative to the death of the Rev. Mr. Rosburgh [*sic*], chaplain of a battalion of the Pennsylvania militia, who was killed at Trenton, on the evening of the second of January, last (the day of the engagement here), I was informed by some of the inhabitants in those parts, on whose veracity I could well depend, viz.:

That, as a party of Hessian jagers marched down the back of the town, after our troops had retreated, they fell in with M. Rosburgh, who surrendered himself a prisoner; notwithstanding which one of them struck him on the head with a sword or cutlas, and then stabbed him several times with a bayonet, while imploring mercy, and begging his life at their hands.

That this account was given by a Hessian who said that he had killed him (save only that he did not know Mr. Rosburgh's name, but called him *a damned rebel minister*) and that Cortland Skinner, and several other officers, who were present at the relation of the fact, highly applauded the perpetrator for what he had done. That after he was thus massacred, he was stripped naked, and in that condition left lying in the open field, till afterwards taken up and buried near the place by some of the inhabitants.

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<sup>30</sup> Hall: *The History of the Presbyterian Church, Trenton, N. J.* (new edition), in Ch. XIII, refers to the atrocities committed in the vicinity of Trenton. See also the Appendix, p. 333.

<sup>31</sup> See Ford's edition of the *Journal of Congress*, Vol. VII, p. 43. The committee consisted of seven members, one of whom was Dr. Witherspoon.

The above was from the information of others.

And on Monday following I saw the corpse, when raised in order to inter it in the burying ground, and observed that besides the strokes which had been given him on the head with some edged weapon, he had been stabbed with a bayonet in the back of the neck, and between his ribs on the right side, which last appeared remarkably deep, and from which, even then, there issued a large quantity of blood.

GEORGE DUFFIELD.

Philadelphia

Personally appeared before me, James Young, Esq., one of the Justices of the Peace, the Rev. George Duffield, and made oath to the truth of the above relation.

Sworn the 25th, day of April, 1777 before me, James Young.

Different stories became current as to the manner of death, the place of death, and the place of burial.

This affidavit of Dr. Duffield, who was afterwards pastor of the Pine Street Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia, settles some of these differences. While Dr. Duffield does not, in so many words, declare that the second burial was in the First Presbyterian churchyard, yet it disposes of two claims, one, that he was buried in Philadelphia, and another that he was buried in Ewing. If the First churchyard was open for the burial of Hessians who fell in the battle of Trenton, surely this same God's acre would be the natural resting place for the Moderator of the Presbytery of New Brunswick.

Rev. John Hall, D.D., states in his *History of the Presbyterian Church of Trenton* some of the facts as here related, and declares that in his day there were no traces of Chaplain Rosbrugh's grave.<sup>32</sup> Taking into consideration the unsettled conditions at the time, and the fact that the friends of the massacred minister lived many miles away, it is not strange that no stone was set up to mark the resting place.

Concerning this tragic death the records of the Presbytery could scarcely say less than they do. The next meeting was held at Bedminster, April 21, 1777. There is the following record:

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<sup>32</sup> See pp. 163, 164.