

1776-1976 Revolutionary War & Operation Sail

Manhattan, Old New York, N.Y.

May 6, 2015 Submitted by James Edward Mitchell, Chairman
Texas SAR RevWar Graves Index

During our nation's 1976 Bicentennial year, millions of Americans were present on Jul 2-3 at New York Harbor to be inspired by Operation Sail/Tall Ships. On a bright, warm sunny morning our rich sailing heritage lay before our eyes where the host ship (US Coast Guard) **Eagle**, a three-masted training bark led fifty international, tall ships and a few small sail ships to celebrate American Independence.

Anchored within New York Harbor between Ft. Jay (US Coast Guard), Governors Island and Liberty Island (NY) was a straight, line of sight scene of 20 tall ships -all the way to Ft(s). Wadsworth & Hamilton opposite each other at the Verrazano Narrows Bridge! Such a nautical, tall ship scene had rarely been exhibited since (1783) American RevWar -Evacuation Day (NY).

On Jul 3rd fifty (50) tall ships were recorded anchored at 'Gravesend Bay' in the Lower New York Bay opposite Ft. Wadsworth, situated along 5 straight rows; with 32 ships in the 1st two rows, alone; source: *The New York Times*, Fri., Jul 2,, 1976, Section C, pgs 15 – 18.

Tall ship fleets may be gone; however, the historical sites of Old New York await your port of call. Stroll south, down Broadway where one observes a series of permanent markers indicating New York Heritage Trail including (1766) *St. Paul's Chapel*, Manhattan's oldest where George Washington worshiped when, as President, he resided in New York City.

My personal favorite RevWar historic site built in the year 1719, a 4 story red brick Georgian building located at Broad and Pearl Streets – **Fraunces Tavern*. Kept within the tavern's cellar was Samuel Fraunces' fine Colonial period renowned *Madeira*. Unknown during the Colonial time of American independence to the occupying British General Staff dining here, innkeeper **Samuel Fraunces** although aristocratic and favoring the dining of British Gen. Staff was a *cover* as a 'secret friend' of the American Cause! **Fraunces** during the war secretly helped to relieve the agony of American prisoners held there aboard British ships at Gravesend Bay, Brooklyn. He also worked tirelessly to send *secret messages* to Gen. Washington's Staff that assisted to thwart a plot to assassinate Washington.

Following British Army Evacuation Nov 25, 1783, Gen. Washington entered NY City with a small contingent north of the city where lots were empty of buildings, unless burned beyond belief. City churches were despoiled of pews. They obviously, had been used in place of cord wood. Animals and livestock were permitted to roam the city streets, freely.

On Dec. 4, with the peace negotiations in Paris, it seemed only, 'right' that Washington gather at the 2nd floor banquet room of the *Fraunces Tavern* with his officers to bid farewell. After the peace treaty was signed, Congress would later repay **Fraunces** handsomely by housing government officers within

Fraunces Tavern; source, *Washington, A Life* by Ron Chernow publ., by The Penguin Press, New York, NY Copyright 2010, pg 451.

*On Jan 24, 1975, where later my wife and I would celebrate our 'wedding reception' at *Robert Norden's Fraunces Tavern* dining room, a briefcase bomb was detonated upon an exterior tavern stairway killing 4 people and injuring 50 others. I and two dozen New York FBI agents were assigned to personally conduct physical searches, collect evidence, interview witnesses and injured parties that eventually determined a Puerto Rican extremist nationalist group was responsible. Charges against several Chicago affiliated FALN members eventually proved a linkage to the NY City bombing. However, federal bombing charges in the Fraunces Tavern investigation against specific individuals were dropped in favor of presenting other criminal charges against known group members at Chicago.