



# Fenian Graves

## Ours to Honor and Remember

### Timothy Murphy (1751 - 1818)



The year 1751 saw the birth of Tim Murphy in the Delaware Water Gap region of Pennsylvania. His parents, Thomas and Mary Murphy emigrated from County Donegal, Ireland shortly before he was born.

For many Irish families emigration to America was the only option available to escape death or starvation, the intended consequences of the Penal Laws. This mass exodus of the native Irish to America had unintended consequences for the British in that many of them ended up in America's fledgling Continental army. It is estimated that approximately one third to one half of front line soldiers were Irish emigrants who did not forget the treatment that they had received under British rule back home in Ireland and were quite prepared to settle the score with their former oppressors.

Although Murphy was not one of these emigrants, his parent's were, and their recounting of the despicable treatment they suffered at the hands of the British instilled in young Murphy an understandable hatred for all things British. Justice being the great arbitrator, Britain's rampaging crusade in Ireland came back to haunt them here in American. It was in the thirteen colonies that the British military came face-to-face with many of their earlier victims in a losing war that cost them their American colonies along with their false sense of invincibility.

In 1759, when Murphy was eight years old the family moved to Shamokin Flats, now the town of Sunbury. Some time later he was apprenticed to the Van Campen family, who, when they relocated to Wyoming County in western Pennsylvania took him along. At that time Wyoming County, was a frontier region where undoubtedly Murphy became adept at using the rifle not alone as a hunting weapon but also as a means of survival in, what was then, a very hostile environment.

In 1775 at the onset of America's War of independence, Murphy enlisted in Captain John Lowdon's Company of Northumberland County Riflemen. He subsequently served in the Siege of Boston, the Battle of Long Island, and skirmishing in Westchester. Later, he became a Sergeant in the 12th Regiment of the Pennsylvania Line and served at Trenton, Princeton, and New Brunswick.

In 1777, Murphy was one of 500 hand picked riflemen to accompany General Daniel Morgan to Upstate New York to confront General John Burgoyne and his invading British Army. On October 7 of 1777 during the second Battle of Saratoga, General Morgan gave the order for his best marksmen to take out Brigadier General Simon Fraser who was rallying British troops in a counter attack. . Murphy climbed a nearby tree, rested his rifle on a notch, took careful aim and from 300 yards shot Fraser in the abdomen. He fell from his horse and was carried off the field in full view of his troops. He died the next day. Murphy's second shot, from his same perch, felled Sir Frances Clarke, General Burgoyne's chief Aide-de-Camp as he galloped onto the field. He was dead before he hit the ground.

The shooting of the two high ranking Generals, coupled with the arrival of General Tenbroeck and his 3,000 New Yorkers on the field of battle, spread panic among the British troops who scrambled for cover in the entrenchments surrounding the camp they had built at Saratoga. The American army, now over 12,000 strong, surrounded their positions. On 17th October 1777, Burgoyne realizing that no relief was in the offing surrendered to General Gates, commander of the American army.

The consequences of Burgoyne's surrender were catastrophic for the British in that it emboldened the American army and gave France and Spain an incentive to declare war on Britain.

After the Battle of Saratoga, Murphy returned to the main army and spent the winter of 1777 in Valley Forge. During the early months 1778 he was engaged in harassing the British as they withdrew from Philadelphia.

In July 1778, Murphy was amongst the three companies of riflemen General Washington dispatched north to the Mohawk Valley in New York to help stem Tory and Indian raids. He was involved in tracking down and killing Christopher Service the notorious Tory leader who terrorized patriot settlers throughout the region. He also participated in the action at Unadilla in October of 1778, when he and his fellow riflemen caught up with and annihilated the raiders that sacked the Cherry Valley.

After his period of service with Morgan's rifles ended in 1779, he returned to the Schoharie Valley and enlisted in the 15th Regiment of the Albany County Militia. During a scouting expedition with a Captain Harper in the Delaware County forests during the Spring of 1780 both of them were ambushed and taken prisoner by Indians allied with the Tories. During the night the two bound men freed each other while their captors slept. Before escaping they killed all of their captors except for one who was allowed to live to tell what happened.

It was during this period of time that he met and married Peggy Feeck, his first wife.

When British/Canadian forces and their Indians allies, totaling approximately 2,000 men, under the command of Col. John Johnson, raided the Schoharie Valley, Murphy and about 200 other American Militiamen, were surrounded in the "Middle Fort", located in what is now Middleburgh. Outnumbered and demoralized, Major Woolsey, the fort's commanding officer, decided to surrender the fort to Johnson's besieging forces. Three times Johnson sent a emissary with a white flag to accept the surrender of the Fort. Each time Murphy sent a bullet whizzing over the emissary head who made a hasty retreat. After the third attempt Woolsey ordered Murphy arrested. None of the officers or men would obey his order. Instead they sided with Murphy knowing that surrender would result in the massacre of all the defenders including the women and children who had taken refuge within.

Having failed to secure the surrender of the fort Johnson exchanged fire with the defenders before headed back north to Niagara leaving in his wake slaughtered settlers and burned out homes.

Early in 1781, Murphy reenlisted in the Pennsylvania Line under General Wayne and was present for the final battle of Yorktown. He returned to Fultonham in the Schoharie at the war's end.

After Murphy's wife Peggy, who was with him during the siege of the Middle fort, died in 1807, he married Mary Robertson and relocated with her to

Charlottesville. Murphy never applied for a veteran's grant or pension, but nonetheless was able to acquire a number of farms and a grist mill, and become a local political power. Later, he returned to Fultonham, where he died in 1818, at age 67.

Murphy was buried there next to his first wife. In 1872, he was reinterred at Middleburgh cemetery. Although the State Legislature voted to erect a monument to Murphy in 1819, none was built until some of his descendants purchased one to be placed in the cemetery in 1910. In 1913, the Ancient Order of Hibernians placed a marker commemorating Murphy at the Saratoga Battlefield, and the state put up its own marker there in 1929. In dedicating that monument, Governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt said; *"This country has been made by Timothy Murphy's, the men in the ranks. Conditions here called for the qualities of the heart and head that Tim Murphy had in abundance"*.

*Footnote:*

*The Ireland his parents left was a sad place indeed, having endured Cromwell onslaught and the devastation, depravation and agony of the British enacted Penal Laws. When the first of these repressive laws were enacted in 1695, 95% of Ireland's land was owned by the native Irish. By the time they were repealed in 1776, the plantation of Ireland was complete with only 5% of the land left to the Irish. Considering that the native Irish comprised 80% of the population the resultant situation was inhumane and genocidal in its intent.*

*Timothy Murphy never set foot in Ireland, however; it would not be unreasonable to assume that he was influenced in his decision to become a freedom fighter by the horrors recounted by his parents who witnessed first hand British atrocities in Ireland. No doubt, his deeds and his love of liberty were an inspiration to succeeding generations of freedom fighters here in America and elsewhere throughout the world.. He helped create a land of refuge and liberty for his fellow country men and women and for countless millions of others from around the world who fled the yoke of tyranny. He was a true patriot, deserving of a special place in our hearts and in the Fenian Graves Archives*

**CEMETERY AND GRAVE LOCATION**

**NAME:** Middleburgh Cemetery

**PHONE NO.**

**ADDRESS:** Middleburgh, Schoharie County NY 12122

**HEADSTONE**



**INSCRIPTION**



**TO THE MEMORY OF  
1751 --- TIMOTHY MURPHY --- 1818  
PATRIOT SOLDIER SCOUT CITIZEN  
WHO SERVED IN MORGAN'S RIFLES CORPS  
FOUGHT AT SARATOGA AND MONMOUTH  
AND WHOSE BRAVERY REPELLED THE ATTACK  
OF THE BRITISH AND THEIR INDIAN ALLIES  
UPON MIDDLEFORT OCTOBER 17 1780  
AND SAVED THE COLONISTS OF  
SCHOHARIE VALLEY  
ERECTED BY THE ESTATE OF THOMAS G. ROSTER 1910**

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