

Casparus Westervelt Revolutionary War Soldier



Long-time Butler resident Peter Mabey told Susie Riley he remembered seeing her grandfather. “He was a little old man, all bent over sitting in a rocker on the porch of the Westervelt Homestead on Valley Road.” The Revolutionary War veteran’s funeral was the first one Peter could remember attending.

Sometime in 1763, a young Casparus Westervelt, while practicing his arithmetic and other subjects, took time out to draw a picture of a British soldier on the top of his paper. Under it he wrote, “God Save King George and All His Men.” Little did he know that, within a short dozen years, he would be taking up arms against that very same King. His book and its fine linen paper have survived the test of time and his handwriting is a work of art.

At the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, all able-bodied men were required to serve in the local militia. Casparus signed up with the Dutchess County Militia under Captain Bernardus Swartout and in June 1777, he served for fourteen days. In September 1777, he served for one month under the same captain in Colonel Johannes Fryer’s Regiment. In April 1778, Casparus moved his family to Orange County, New York where he enlisted the Classed Militia of Orange County, under Captain Hendrick Tenne in Colonel “Hawk” Hay’s Regiment.

Militia units served many useful functions for the regular army. The part-time soldiers stood garrison duty to release regular troops for active duty, built and maintained fortifications, acted as constables, provided valuable intelligence, manned lookout posts, and when necessary, reinforced the Continental Army on the battlefield.

From May to December 1778, Casparus was called out every fourth week and in 1779, he served a total of two months. From March to December 1780, he served two months and from May to October 1782, he served one month. When the men were on active duty, not only was the hard work of running a farm delegated to the women and children, at times, they were forced to defend themselves as well. The war in New York and New Jersey was sometimes more like a civil war with Tories vs. Whigs, neighbor vs. neighbor, even family members pitted against each other.

Times were tough during the war years. No one had any money; it was rarely used because it was seldom seen. People grew their own food, made their own clothes, and what they couldn't make, they bartered for with their neighbors. One family story tells how the Westervelts peeled apples for weeks, then left them in the sun to dry. On a trip to the city, Casparus was crossing the North River on an overloaded ferry when it capsized, taking their barrels of apples and their wagon to the bottom of the river. He saved himself by holding fast to the reins of the horse, which pulled him to safety. The loss of the goods and the wagon were a personal tragedy for the family. Things improved after the war, but tragedy struck again when his wife, Nancy, died on April 12, 1789.

Casparus moved to New York City in 1790 where he met and married his second wife, Jane Ryder. Jane and Casparus had ten children, the first, named Nancy, was baptized at Trinity Church on August 14, 1791. In 1794, he "went upon a farm in Franklin, NJ," but in 1800, he returned to the city where he owned considerable property. After a stay of twelve years, he again became a resident of New Jersey, moving to a farm in West Bloomingdale (later Butler) NJ.

Another family story tells how sometime around 1815, Casparus tried his hand at raising silkworms. To feed them, he planted a dozen mulberry trees along the ridge above his farm. The plan failed and the trees are gone, but the old Westervelt house remains at the corner of Valley Road and Grace Valley Road. It is the oldest home in Butler.

Casparus applied for a veteran pension on January 29, 1834. Two years later, he passed away on January 18, 1836; he was 86 years old. He was buried in Grave E2 in the old section of the Manning Avenue Cemetery. His wife applied for a veteran widow's pension on September 8, 1858 and was awarded 168 acres of bounty land. Jane was 79 years old and living in New York City. For many years, a white limestone marked his grave, but as time passed, the inscription became so faint it could hardly be read. In 1937, his great-grandson, George Riley, read in the *New York Times* about a WPA (Works Progress Administration) project that was marking veterans' graves and providing replacements for lost or broken headstones. Casparus got a new headstone, but the birthdate on it is incorrect; he was probably born in 1750.

A number of Casparus's possessions have been handed down through the family as heirlooms. The musket he used in the Revolution went to his son William Westervelt, and his cherry wood fife is still treasured by family members. Another son, Silas, inherited a beautiful cedar chest. As mentioned, his school copy book still exists, and a large iron kettle, said to have come from Holland with the first Westervelt brothers, was donated to the Morris County Historical Society.

At least 26 members of the Westervelt family are buried in the Historic Manning Avenue Cemetery.



Source: *The Historic Manning Avenue Cemetery* by Tom Riley
National Archives Military Records