

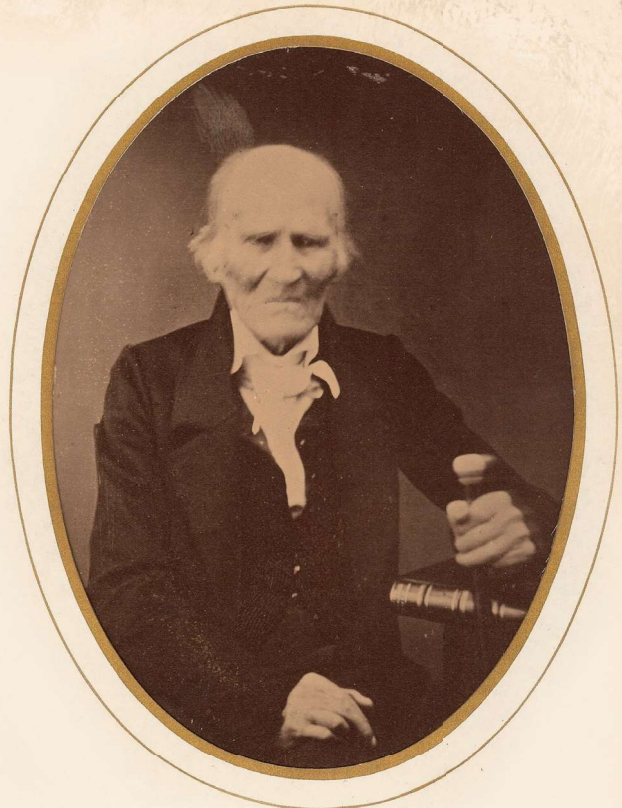


# Eleazer Blake

Preserving the Treasures of a Revolutionary Eyewitness

— By Maureen Taylor —

On April 19, 1775, Eleazer Blake wrote the first entry in his diary: “Left to join the action.” For the next eight years, until his discharge on June 12, 1783, Blake recorded an account of his Revolutionary War experience, detailing his wartime activities and news of battles along with more mundane lists of supplies and weather observations.



**B**lake wrote frequently and often made comments on the action in the margins of his journal. Early on in the diary he remarked on a rumor that the British had taken over Boston’s Old South Meeting House and converted it into a riding school: “The house once set as a part for true worship of God has turned into a den for thieves,” he wrote.

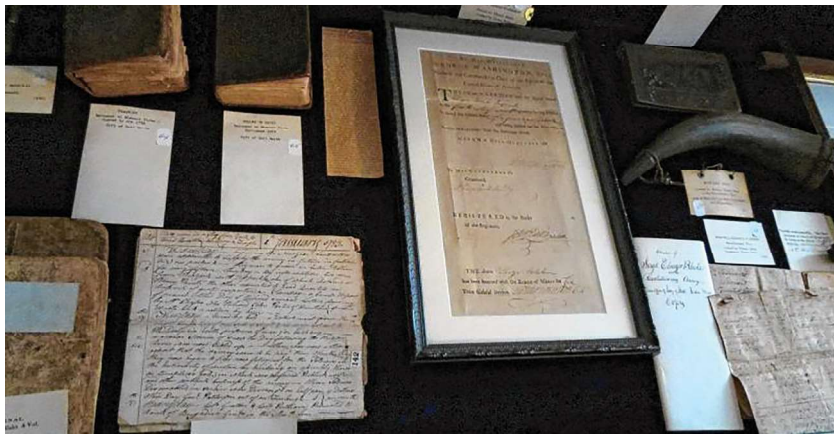
#### Called to Service

Blake was born April 1, 1757, in Wrentham, Mass., to Ebenezer and Tamar (Thomson) Blake. In the mid-1770s, the teenage Blake was apprenticed to a wheelwright, a maker of wagon and carriage wheels. At 18, he left home as a member of a military company raised by his employer, Capt. Samuel Cowell. The men marched for 24 hours to arrive in Roxbury, Mass., on April 20, 1775. Blake didn’t return home until war’s end.

Blake served with various companies until May 19, 1777, when he joined the Continental Army under the command of Capt. Jonathan Felt. His pension application and diary claim he witnessed the battles of Bunker Hill, Monmouth and Saratoga, the burning of Charlestown, Mass., and winter at Valley Forge. He served in Rhode Island, too.

Blake was also present for the escape of Gen. Benedict Arnold and was a member of the guard for Arnold’s co-conspirator, Maj. John Andre. Blake even witnessed Andre’s execution.

*Continued on page 48*



The Rindge Museum's collection of Eleazer Blake artifacts includes his diary and discharge papers signed by George Washington.

*Continued from page 46*

While he began the war as a private, Blake moved up the ranks. He was a sergeant with the 12th Massachusetts Regiment under Col. William Shepherd. In 1782, he became the assistant quartermaster of the 4th Massachusetts Brigade. Those duties earned him a shilling a day. Like many other soldiers, he was only able to collect about half of those wages upon discharge. Released from service at New Windsor, N.Y., he then walked the 220 miles home to Wrentham.

### Life After War

In 1785, he married Jerusha Gerould in Wrentham. Perhaps all his wartime travel made him restless. It wasn't long before Blake and his brother, Ebenezer, traveled to Vermont and New Hampshire, scouting a new place to live. Though they briefly lived in Stoddard, N.H., by 1792, Blake and Jerusha settled in the nearby rural town of Rindge, N.H., where they raised their five children. Blake worked as a farmer and a wheelwright and built his family's home, which still stands on Woodbound Road.

"There were a lot of Blakes in Rindge at that time," said Kenneth Raymond of the Rindge Historical Society. "The present-day western part of town was even called Blakeville once, and many Blakes were buried in the churchyard."

The churchyard belongs to the First Congregational Church, where Blake served as a deacon for 50 years until age 80. Raymond said Blake "would have witnessed all of the transformations of this building," including a major renovation in the 1840s, which was a sign of growth in the community.

**In 1994, the Rindge (N.H.) Historical Society** bought the circa-1815 Freeborn Stearns House near the town center and converted it into a museum to house its collection. The Rindge Museum is open Wednesdays from 10 a.m.–noon, on the first Saturday of each month from 10 a.m.–2 p.m., or by appointment.

When Blake was 62 and in declining health, he applied to the federal government for a pension for his service. He had grown dependent on his teenage son and had to hire help for his ailing wife. To prove his financial need, he listed his belongings—the farm (worth \$417), one ox and two cows, along with farm implements. He made a successful case, and in 1818, he began receiving \$48 twice a year in recognition of his service as a sergeant. He appealed for an increase, stating he was an assistant quartermaster for the

last two years of the war, but that petition was denied. Even with all the personal materials in his possession, he lacked the official proof he needed.

### More Memorabilia Than Most

For a simple farmer, he left behind an unusually rich collection of the remnants of his life, including three copies of the same photographic portrait. A toothless Blake posed for a daguerreotype likeness not long before his death in 1852. These shiny reflective images were sensitive to movement. The blurring in his portrait shows that he wasn't still. The Rindge Historical Society owns two oversize copies of the original, both large enough to hang in a parlor. While one is an exact duplicate of the daguerreotype, the other is enhanced with charcoal, making Blake look heavier and younger. These were the type of portraits usually ordered by descendants.

Blake's children and grandchildren also preserved some of his belongings. The Rindge Historical Society has his diary, signed powder horn and musket, and army discharge papers, signed by George Washington. The musket is thought to be the only remaining musket from Washington's camp in New Windsor. The original daguerreotype, the cane Blake was holding in the photo and other archival materials are owned by Fitzwilliam (N.H.) Historical Society, now housed in the circa-1837 home of his grandson Amos J. Blake.

Blake was revered in his community throughout his long life. According to an article in the July 31, 1851, edition of *New Hampshire Sentinel*: "We learn from a Rindge correspondent that Dea. Eleazer Blake, who 'served during the war' of the revolution, and LOW in his 95th year, is living in that town. He is said to retain his mental faculties to a remarkable degree—occasionally rides to church, a distance of nearly three miles, and is able to write quite legibly. Long life to the heroes of the Revolution!" 🌿

**Maureen Taylor**, the Photo Detective, is author of the two-volume series, *The Last Muster*. Learn more about Eleazer Blake in the film "Revolutionary Voices" at <https://vimeo.com/305864937>.