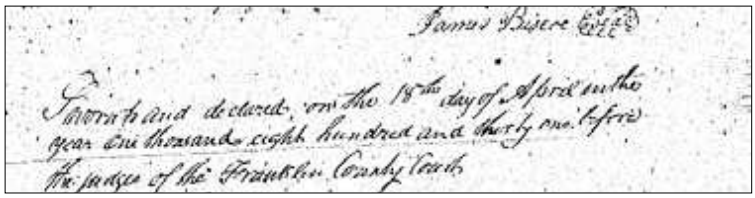
A Journey Through Time
The TIMES Chronicle

Columnist Linda Reno is a historian and genealogist specializing in Southern Maryland history. Mrs. Reno is a member of the St. Mary's County Historical Society, St. Mary's County Genealogical Society, Charles County Genealogical Society, Maryland Historical Society and the Maryland Genealogical Society. She has authored many books and articles on local history. We hope you will enjoy these articles and welcome your comments and suggestions for future subjects.

By Linda Reno
Contributing Writer

I was aware that Josiah Biscoe had a brother named James but had no record of him after 1787 when he was named in the administration accounts of his father. I happened to stumble across him while researching other Revolutionary War soldiers.

Several descendants of James Biscoe thought that he might have been a Marylander, but weren't sure. Just one little clue convinced me he was from St. Mary's County and another son of Joseph Biscoe and Mary Ann Dunbar.


James Biscoe [illegible]

[illegible] declared, on the 18th day of April in the year one thousand eight hundred and thirty one before the judge of the Franklin County Court

On April 18, 1831 James Biscoe, a resident of Franklin County, Kentucky, applied for a pension in which he mentioned James and Sandy Holton. The Holton boys were the sons of Robert Holton and Catherine Fenwick of St. Mary's County, from the same area as the Biscoes, who had also moved their family to Franklin County, Kentucky.

James Biscoe, age 71, further deposed that he enlisted for the term of three years on the 22nd day of May 1778 as a boatswain in the Virginia State Navy on Continental establishment under the command of Commodore James Barron first and then under the command of Commodore Richard Taylor. He said he continued in said service until his term of enlistment had expired which was in May 1781 when he was discharged. The reasons he has not applied for a pension earlier is because that until a few years past he had a competency for a support and was still able to do some work but he states that he is now 71 years of age and is very infirm and entirely unable to work for a support; that from misfortunes which could he could neither see or prevent, he has been stripped of almost every particle of property which he ever possessed. Since March 18, 1818 the following changes have been made in my property. That as the security of James and Sandy Holton, he had two negro girls and one negro boy and one wagon and two horses sold at Sheriff's sale and that they, the said Holtons, are wholly and hopelessly insolvent and unable to pay any part of it back to him again and since said period he had a horse that died.

On July 6, 1832, again in Franklin Co., Kentucky, James Biscoe, aged 72 years the 3rd of July 1832 deposed that he enlisted in the Navy of Virginia on the 22nd day of May 1778 for 3 years under Commodore James Barron and served under him and then was aboard the **Liberty** and in six months or thereabout was made a boat swain (having previous to my enlistment been a sailor on the board the vessel ***John***. This vessel being a lookout vessel was always out (at sea). Our commander of the vessel after Commodore Barron left her changed frequently, and after Commodore Marcum, Commodore Taylor had command of the fleet. James said he had the command of the Schooner ***Liberty*** as a boat swain, but his rank never was higher while he commanded it. His boat was in four minor scrimmages. The whole three years (of my service) was spent in one continual span. At the time he was discharged, they were at Queenstree Tip at York before he had served out his time. His pay as a boat swain was $1 per day.

James Biscoe died in Franklin County, Kentucky December 11, 1853.

James Biscoe, Jr., son of our subject, was killed in 1813 at the Battle of Frenchtown (also known as the River Raisin Massacre) in Michigan.

After the fall of Detroit, President Madison reorganized the Army of the Northwest under William Henry Harrison (elected President in 1841). In January 1813, Harrison attempted to recapture Michigan. He personally led one column to Upper Sandusky. The other column, under Colonel James Winchester, pushed further west. Despite Harrison's orders for Winchester to remain within supporting distance, he moved ahead to Frenchtown where he quickly defeated a small British force. The overconfident Winchester then spread his men throughout the town and chose an isolated house, well outside the settlement for himself.

The British gathered about 500 of their own men and another 500 Indian warriors under the Wyandot chief Roundhead and crossed the frozen river to Frenchtown where they attacked Winchester's men at dawn on January 22. Winchester attempted to rejoin his command but was captured by Chief Roundhead and then promptly surrendered his entire army.

The British retreated with their American prisoners and their own wounded on sleighs. The American wounded were left under Indian guard. Before the British returned, the warriors executed somewhere between 30-60 Americans. "Remember the River Raisin" now became a rallying cry for Kentucky militiamen.

While James Biscoe, Jr. didn't survive, his fellow soldier, George Armstrong Custer lived on and was killed at the Battle of the Little Big Horn in 1876.

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