After 30 Years, Book is Published

David Swain of Newtown is Editor of New Edition of Revolutionary War Prison Ship Memoir

(News)

Washington Crossing - A book party was given on December 1 at the David Library of the American Revolution to celebrate the publication of

*Recollections of Life on the Prison Ship Jersey by Thomas Dring*, edited by David Swain of Newtown. Swain, a retired community activist and professor of public administration, is a volunteer research assistant at the David Library.

*Recollections of Life on the Prison Ship Jersey by Thomas Dring* is the first hand account of a Revolutionary era privateer who was captured by the British in 1779 and imprisoned aboard the infamous prison ship. Among the few prisoners who lived to tell the tale, Dring wrote down his recollections of the experience in 1824. The manuscript of his account, considered a major primary
source document, lives at the Rhode Island Historical Society, which is where an interested person would have to go to read it. Until now.

According to Pulitzer-Prize winning historian Edwin G. Burrows, “Thomas Dring’s memoir of his incarceration has been available only in the heavily edited version first published in 1829. Now, however, thanks to the careful work of David Swain, students of the Revolutionary War at long last have a reliable edition of this fascinating and important source.”

In 1971, while living in Providence, Rhode Island, Swain was a volunteer at the Rhode Island Historical Society where he was put to work transcribing the Dring manuscript and doing research for an annotated version the Society then planned to publish. He worked away at it over several years, and then left it for the Historical Society to finish after he and Caroline moved to Florida. After a time, when it became apparent that the Historical Society had decided not to complete the project, he asked for and received permission to finish it on his own and try to have it published.

Flash forward to 2009. He and Caroline moved to Pennswood Village and Swain was looking for meaningful volunteer work in the community. Upon learning that the premiere special library dedicated to the study of the American Revolution in the United States was located in nearby Washington Crossing, Swain visited the David Library and offered to volunteer. After joining the library on a weekly basis to help with the development of finding aids and assist patrons with research, Swain mentioned his now nearly finished editing project to Patrick Spero, then Historian at the David Library, and Kathie Ludwig, Librarian. When he asked if anyone knew of any publishers who might be interested, Spero steered
him to Westholme Publishing, an independent publishing house based in Yardley. Publisher Bruce H. Franklin thought the book was a great idea and guided it to its publication last month.

“In this age of electronic media, there’s something especially joyful about the publication of a book,” said Meg McSweeney, Chief Operating Officer of the David Library. “We at the David Library are especially delighted and proud to celebrate the publication of this one because it is the work of a valued member of the David Library family.”

At the book party, Swain gave a short talk about the book’s journey from volunteer task to publication, and the challenges of documentary editing.

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