

Revolutionary War hero gets historical marker in Upper Township



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Sentinel_admin

July 30, 2025

PETERSBURG — Upper Township's Revolutionary War hero Henry Young will finally get the recognition he deserves with a historical marker on his grave in the family cemetery.

The William G. Pomeroy Foundation historic marker dedication of the Ensign Henry Young Family Burying Ground is scheduled for 10 a.m. Sept. 27 at the Cape May National Wildlife Refuge at 144 Tyler Road in Petersburg. The foundation, based in Syracuse, N.Y., is committed to supporting the celebration and preservation of community history.

The historic marker series, which commemorates patriot burials, is an opportunity to recognize those who fought in or were involved with the struggle for American independence, according to the foundation.

The Patriot Burials Marker Grant Program provides Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) chapters, working with community organizations, the opportunity to apply for historic markers to be placed in locations where Revolutionary War patriots are buried.

According to Paul Sutton, adjutant of the Aaron Wittkamp Colwell American Legion Post 239, this is the second and final step in the renovation of the burial ground.

Two years ago, Sutton said when he took over his duties for the post in 2020, he learned it was responsible for placing a flag on an obscure grave "in the middle of nowhere."

Sutton said he was "advised to not go out there in tick season and not to go specifically on Memorial Day, but get there when you can."

He said it is a family graveyard on the highest point of the land that the Youngs once owned, 1,600 or 1,700 acres stretching all the way to Route 9.

Sutton said he first went to the Young Family Cemetery off Tyler Road in November 2021 and found "this is not some ordinary veteran."

Sutton recognized Young's grave was from the Revolutionary War era. He did some research and found the county had no information and that "his grave has never been recognized in any way, shape or form."

That changed May 6, 2023, when members of the post, Sons of the American Revolution, Daughters of the American Revolution and others gathered to officially mark the grave.

Sutton served as emcee of the event, which brought local veteran and historical groups together with members of the local and state chapters of the SAR and DAR to recognize Young's service and honor his final resting place.

"Little is known of Henry's post-war years, although he owned a substantial plantation and died at the family homestead near Sluice Creek and was buried in the ground that we honor today," Sutton said at the time.

Young, born March 5, 1746, in Cape May County, died Nov. 6, 1795, in Petersburg at age 49. He began his service as an ensign under Capt. James Willetts Jr. in the Second Cape May Militia in 1777. He later served under Joseph Beavers in the 2 Battalion, Hunterdon Militia.

The cemetery had long been neglected.

"The 11-grave cemetery had just become a place that you cannot even find unless you know exactly where you are going," Sutton previously told the Sentinel.

He said the post contacted the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which owns the property, and "they began to cooperate in terms of getting the place cleaned up."

U.S. Fish and Wildlife removed a 90-foot black cherry tree growing amid the graves. Barbi Harris, a local genealogist and member of the General LaFayette Chapter of the DAR, cleaned all of the stones and they appear as they did when installed starting in 1795. They're made of white marble, probably ship's ballast unloaded in Port of Philadelphia and sold to a local gravestone engraver, Sutton said.

"We've been fighting, trying to get this sign taken care of since that dedication in May 2023," Sutton said.

The sign was secured by the Department of the Interior that fall but there was an issue with the county about the location so that it would be visible from the street. Sutton said it finally was placed at the site in May, allowing the groups to hold a formal dedication, which is required by the grant program.

The path leading to the grave, Cedar Swamp Trail, is just across from 144 Tyler Road at the Cape May National Wildlife Refuge.

By CRAIG D. SCHENCK/Sentinel staff