

PLYMOUTH IN THE REVOLUTION:

Hometown Heroes

The officers of the American army, having generally been taken from the citizens of America, possess high veneration for the character of that illustrious Roman, Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus, and being resolved to follow his example, by returning to their citizenship, they think they may with propriety denominate themselves the Society of the Cincinnati.

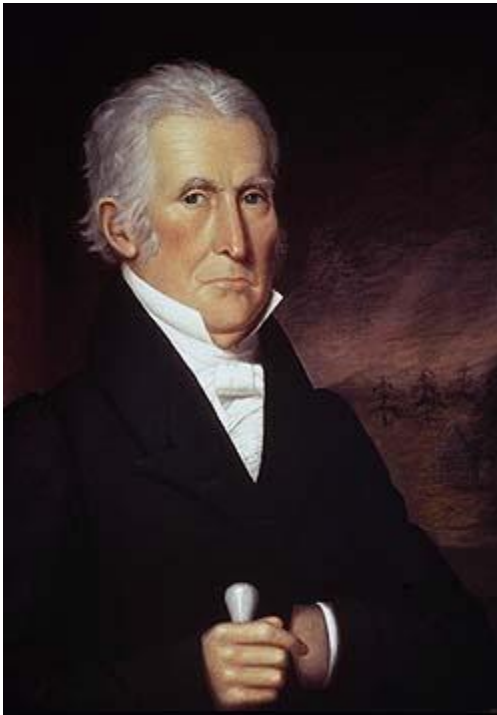
First meeting of the Society of the Cincinnati, 1783

With the end of the Revolutionary war, 13 separate colonies with different backgrounds and needs struggled to form a united country. The people looked for heroes to unite all the different factions. As victorious general and first president, George Washington attracted considerable attention and admiration. Washington was compared to Cincinnatus, a Roman general who left his beloved farm to serve his country as a general and then, at the end of the war, voluntarily gave up his power to return to his farm. The Order of the Cincinnati, a club of Revolutionary officers (and later of their lineal descendants) was formed in 1783. Washington served as its president until his death. Not everyone applauded the Order:

As the officers of the American army had styled themselves of the order, and assumed the name of Cincinnatus, it might have been expected that they would have imitated the humble and disinterested virtues of the ancient Roman ... instead of ostentatiously assuming hereditary distinctions.

Mercy Otis Warren, *Rise and Progress of the American Revolution*, 1805

Many Plymouth area leaders, however, such as veterans James Thacher and Judah Alden, were proud to be members of the Order of the Cincinnati.



On his return to civilian life, Major Judah Alden set himself up as a trader in Duxbury. He had married Welthea Wadsworth in 1780, while on leave from service. The couple had ten children. In spite of a seeming disregard for his customers, Judah made a good living from his store, as well as from investments in ships.

When this portrait was painted (by Cephas J. Thompson), Judah was president of the Massachusetts Order of the Cincinnati; he served in this position from 1829 until his death in 1845 at the age of 94. Alden was also one of the original subscribers to the Pilgrim Society.

James Thacher, as a young man joining the Revolutionary army as a surgeon's mate, had been inspired by Plymouth Rock. Following the war, Thacher married Susanna Hayward of Bridgewater and settled in Plymouth, where he served as a doctor for many years. Due to the loss of his hearing, he gave up medical practice and devoted his attention to history, publishing his *Military Journal During the American Revolutionary War*. Thacher was a founding member of the Pilgrim Society and served as the first Librarian and Keeper of the Cabinet of Pilgrim Hall Museum. Thacher was also an active member of the Order of the Cincinnati. On July 4, 1835, Thacher organized moving Plymouth Rock from Town Square to the front of Pilgrim Hall Museum.

The Pilgrim Society had been founded in 1820. Pilgrim Hall Museum was built in 1824 in the style of a Greek temple, a symbol of republican virtues. The Pilgrims and the *Mayflower* were thus linked with the republican ideals of the nation founded by the Revolutionary War through architecture - and through the rhetoric of the Pilgrim Society's 1824 orator, Edward Everett

That great word of Independence, which, if first uttered in 1776, was most auspiciously anticipated in 1620... the germ of the future growth of America was comprehended within one weather beaten vessel.