

## COMPATRIOT NEWSLETTER (WINTER, May) ELLIS COUNTY CHAPTER

**Joseph Sydney Smith** was sworn in to the Sons of the American Revolution at the Ellis County Chapter meeting of March 21, 2025. Joe, a native of Bell County, Texas, but resident of Waxahachie for over 50-years, is the descendant of a particularly noteworthy Patriot Ancestor Fielding Lewis, the 5<sup>th</sup> great grandfather of Joseph Sidney Smith.

Fielding Lewis, born on July 7, 1725, was a colonel in the American Revolution and the brother-in-law and second cousin of George Washington through their common great-grandfather, Augustine Warner II. The Lewis family was well known and respected as merchants in Virginia society, owning extensive tracts of land in and around Fredericksburg. Lewis built the mansion on his property that is known today as Kenmore. He is remembered for his dedication to the patriotic cause as well as his close personal ties to George Washington.

Lewis's first wife was Catherine Washington, his second cousin and George Washington's aunt. Catherine passed away in February 1750 after the couple had three children. On May 7, 1750, Lewis married Betty Washington, the only surviving sister of George Washington. The couple had eleven children together, with seven living to adulthood. One of their sons, Lawrence Lewis, would marry Eleanor Parke Custis, the granddaughter of Martha Washington.

George Washington and Fielding Lewis were both major shareholders in the Dismal Swamp Land Company, founded in November 1763 to drain a heavily vegetated area in southeast Virginia and northeast North Carolina and convert it into suitable agricultural land. The swamp is unique because water drains from it, rather than to it like most swamps. The company hoped to collect lumber from the area while draining it, but the venture failed, not turning a profit until after both Washington and Lewis had passed away.

Lewis was an ardent supporter of the American revolutionary cause. During the early portion of the Revolution, he and Washington corresponded on a frequent basis about building an American army and political loyalties in their home state of Virginia. In March 1776, Lewis informed Washington that the cause for independence was growing in Virginia, due in large part to the popularity of Thomas Paine's pamphlet, *Common Sense*.

Lewis most likely would have fought as a soldier in the Revolutionary War, but he suffered from a serious respiratory disease. Instead, he devoted a large portion of his personal fortune to operate a gun manufacturing company during the war. Early in the conflict, Washington and Lewis corresponded about the gun operation, with Lewis describing a bleak scene in Virginia due to the lack of arms and overall supplies needed to sustain the revolutionary effort. Lewis aimed to make about twelve guns a day. He further supported the revolutionary cause by purchasing and building ships for the defense of the Rappahannock River and providing American troops with supplies directly from his store. Despite requesting funding from Congress, Lewis was forced to put a great deal of his own fortune into his gunnery and was never reimbursed.

Lewis was plagued by tuberculosis for most of the Revolutionary War and succumbed to the illness on December 7, 1781, just six weeks after the British surrender at Yorktown. In his will, Lewis listed his shares in the Dismal Swamp Land Company and land in Nansemond County, Virginia, which were both purchased in

partnership with George Washington. After Lewis's death, these properties would have to be sold for the family to make payments on his debts. Washington supported selling the lands mentioned in the will so long as they were sold for a good price to avoid losing money on his investments.

Betty Washington outlived her husband by sixteen years, dying on March 31, 1797, while visiting her daughter in Culpeper, Virginia. Largely due to Fielding Lewis's debts at his time of death, Betty struggled financially during the later stages of her life. Kenmore, named by later owners of the Lewis family mansion, is now open to the public as a museum owned by the George Washington Foundation.

While his contribution with producing arms for the Patriots was invaluable, Lewis is also known for his personal associations. He first married George Washington's cousin, who was in fact Lewis' second cousin, and after her death, married Washington's sister Elizabeth "Betty" Washington, with whom he had 11-children.

Source: <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/fielding-lewis>

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Three **Ellis County Chapter** compatriots attended the 130<sup>th</sup> Texas SAR Convention March 27-30, 2025; Chapter Secretary and Past-President John C. Haughton, Color Guard Commander Larry Kollie, and Chapter Historian Philip Taylor. **Ellis County Chapter received 4 awards, 3 from Division 6 and 1 from State.**

The **Col. Joe M. Hill Membership Award**, Division 6: Is presented in honor of our past President Col. Joe. M. Mill Jr. and is given to each chapter that achieves the goal of 100% membership renewal in the past year.

The **Karl E. Wallace Award**, Division 6: winner in the Texas Society given in honor of Past President Karl E. Wallace to the Chapter having the highest % of membership increase during the past year.

The **John Bruce Stuart Jr. Memorial Award**, Division 6, Group 1: established by Plano Chapter in memory of Compatriot John B. Stuart Jr. and is awarded to the Chapter that best meets the criteria based on Veterans activities in the past year.

The **Texas SAR Americanism Award**: is given to a chapter that develops an exceptional program to recognize patriotic activities of the youth of the state, supports institutions and adults that promote patriotic education, recognizes observance of national holidays, and recognizes outstanding citizenship during the past year.