



FOURTH EDITION

ORDINARY COURAGE

The Revolutionary War Adventures
of Joseph Plumb Martin

EDITED BY JAMES KIRBY MARTIN

 WILEY-BLACKWELL

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Fourth Edition

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James Kirby Martin

With an essay
The Revolutionary War Soldier on Film
by Karen Guenther

 **WILEY-BLACKWELL**

A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication

This edition first published 2013
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Wiley-Blackwell is an imprint of John Wiley & Sons, formed by the merger of Wiley's global Scientific, Technical and Medical business with Blackwell Publishing.

Registered Office

John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex,
PO19 8SQ, UK

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Martin, Joseph Plumb, 1760-1850.

[Narrative of some of the adventures, dangers, and sufferings of a Revolutionary soldier]
Ordinary Courage : the Revolutionary War Adventures of Joseph Plumb Martin / edited by James Kirby Martin ; with an essay "The Revolutionary War Soldier on Film" by Karen Guenther. – Fourth edition.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4443-5135-4 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Martin, Joseph Plumb, 1760-1850. 2. United States--History--Revolution, 1775-1783--Personal narratives. 3. Soldiers--United States--Biography. I. Martin, James Kirby, 1943- II. Title.

E275.M38 2012

973.3'8--dc23

2011051679

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Set in 10/12.5pt Galliard by SPi Publisher Services, Pondicherry, India

For
Aunt Jane and Uncle Don McClelland
with unbounded affection

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Introductory Comments

On a scenic bluff overlooking the Penobscot River in the mid-coast region of Maine stands a tombstone bearing these modest words, “A Soldier of the Revolution.” Buried there is Joseph Plumb Martin. He was born during 1760 in western Massachusetts, just before the outbreak of the American Revolution. He lived for nearly 90 years, during which time the young United States established itself as a legitimate political entity, if not a potential rising star, among the nations of the world. He died in 1850, an “aged man” living in virtual poverty.¹

Martin never commanded large bodies of troops in battle; he never held major political offices; he never engaged in vital diplomatic negotiations; he never invented anything of consequence or made a notable scientific discovery; and he never acquired great wealth to distribute as a renowned philanthropist. Martin was very much an ordinary person who in his youth served courageously in the Continental army and who in his adult years, according to one of his admirers, regularly displayed “a fund of knowledge, which, with his lively, social disposition, and ready wit, made him a highly entertaining and instructive companion.”²

¹ Martin’s remains are buried at the Sandy Point Cemetery in Sandy Point, Waldo County, Maine, close to where he lived from the mid-1780s to the time of his death in 1850.

² Joseph Williamson, “Biographical Sketch of Joseph P. Martin, of Prospect, Maine, a Revolutionary Soldier,” *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, 30 (1876): 330–31. See also Philip Mead, “Adventures, Dangers, and Sufferings; The Betrayals of Private Joseph Plumb Martin, Continental Soldier,” in *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, eds. Alfred F. Young et al. (New York, 2011), 117–34.

Martin grew to adulthood in times that were truly extraordinary. British North American colonists had begun to believe that their parent nation of Great Britain was attempting to subvert their fundamental liberties. When King and Parliament kept trying to tax them, the Americans vocalized such slogans as “no taxation without representation” and spoke anxiously about a plot by home government leaders to shackle them forever in the chains of imperial tyranny. They also protested defiantly, so much so that King George III during the summer of 1775 declared them to be in open rebellion. Four months earlier warfare had broken out when British regulars, looking for gunpowder and weapons, marched from Boston into the Massachusetts countryside and became entangled in a day of combat with resolute citizen-soldiers that began at the villages of Lexington and Concord.

Even after this initial shedding of blood, large numbers of colonists, including most patriot political leaders who gathered in Philadelphia during May 1775 to attend the Second Continental Congress, hoped and prayed for a peaceful resolution of grievances. More confrontational delegates, however, insisted upon making full provisions for defense. Their will prevailed. On June 14 Congress voted to establish a Continental army, initially to consist of the ten to fifteen thousand New England enthusiasts who had rallied together to challenge the King’s troops and keep them entrapped in Boston. Soon thereafter the delegates selected general officers, and they named as commander in chief the highly regarded Virginia planter George Washington, then attending Congress and an experienced veteran of the French and Indian War.

These decisions had a lasting impact on the life of Joseph Plumb Martin, who was not yet 15 years old when Washington traveled north-east from Philadelphia to the vicinity of Boston to assume command of his newly adopted Continental force. Joseph was born on November 21, 1760, in the western Massachusetts town of Becket. His family lineage was certainly respectable. His father, the Reverend Ebenezer Martin, had graduated from Yale College in 1756. Two years later Ebenezer became the first Congregational minister in frontier Becket, where he moved with his wife Susanna. The daughter of a freehold farmer named Joseph Plumb, Susanna grew up in Milford, Connecticut, a few miles west of New Haven, the home of Yale. She wed Ebenezer while he was still in college. Joseph was one of seven children produced by their union.

Family life with Ebenezer was tumultuous. Throughout his checkered, largely unsuccessful ministerial career, he was continually quarrelsome,

besides being enamored of his own opinions and careless in the handling of his personal finances. In late 1764 he lost his Becket pastorate because of an unpleasant disagreement with the town fathers over land ownership issues, this among other undefined “indiscretions.” The latter likely related to his spendthrift habits.³

How Ebenezer provided for himself and his family during the next three and a half years remains unclear. Possibly Susanna’s father gave them extended shelter in Milford. When Ebenezer finally secured another pastorate in June 1768 with the newly formed parish of Westford in the northeastern Connecticut town of Ashford, 7-year-old Joseph remained with his Plumb grandparents, who assumed permanent responsibility for his upbringing. Perhaps, among other reasons, they did so to help lighten the burden of family expenses as Ebenezer began anew his ministerial calling. Also, Susanna may have wanted to keep her young son away from his overbearing father.

Ebenezer Martin soon showed that he could not shed his imprudent ways. In 1772 he sidestepped debtors’ prison by appearing before Connecticut’s General Assembly and declaring his insolvency. Five years later his Westford congregants dismissed him for ongoing “complaints of unministerial conduct.” Because he offered a public apology, he gained “a regular dismissal.” Ebenezer then migrated with his family to frontier New York and offered his pastoral services at various locations before his death in 1795. “His reputation” was never that of a saintly divine, wrote one Congregational church historian, but rather “of an able, but not always *wise* man—one who said smart things and *odd* things, that were remembered sometimes to his discredit and injury.”⁴

While his father was ministering to his Westford parishioners, Joseph sprouted toward adulthood under the stern but benevolent nurturing of his grandparents. Grandfather Plumb was not “wealthy,” as his grandson later described him, but he was a respectable, hard-working farmer. His desire was to teach his grandson how to make a satisfactory living from farming the land, but then Lexington and Concord inter-

³ Joseph S. Clark et al., “Churches and Ministers in Windham County, Connecticut,” *The Congregational Quarterly*, 1 (1859): 268–69. For additional information, see the sketch of Ebenezer Martin in Franklin Bowditch Dexter, *Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Yale College, 1701–1815* (6 vols., New York, 1885–1912), 2: 420–21; and “A Complete List of the Congregational and Presbyterian Ministers in Massachusetts, from Settlement of the Colonies to the Present Time,” *The American Quarterly Register*, 7 (1834): 32, 35.

⁴ Clark et al., “Churches and Ministers,” *Congregational Quarterly*, 269.

vened. Joseph found himself caught up in the *rage militaire* of 1775, or what seemed like a universal obsession to bear arms against the King's forces. Romantic images about the glories of marching off to war filled his youthful mind, a beguiling prospect in comparison to his tedious daily routine of farm chores. The life of a soldier was what Joseph was sure he most wanted, but he was not yet old enough to enlist without his grandparents' permission. The Plumbs refused to indulge his fancies, at least not during the first year of the Revolutionary War.

Joseph had no way of foreseeing that the *rage militaire* would not last. The patriot enthusiasts of 1775 found military service to be anything but glamorous. They had expected to fire a few musket shots at those damnable British "lobsterbacks," but they did not relish the rigorous training and discipline by which soldiers learn to function effectively in battle. Camp life was not only boring but very hazardous to personal health because of continuous exposure to the elements, rotten food, accumulated filth, and the ever lurking presence of such deadly diseases as smallpox. Combat, as some of these sunshine patriots soon learned, could result in permanent disablement or death from enemy gunfire and thrusting bayonets. For all of these reasons the patriot rush to arms of 1775 quickly waned. Washington's Continental force began the 1776 campaign season critically short of troop strength, which helped give Joseph his opening. When the Continental Congress called for special levies of state troops to serve for the remainder of the year, he was able to enlist without strong opposition from his grandparents.

As Martin explained, he thought he had formed "pretty correct ideas" regarding the reasons why the revolution was necessary. His romantic notions about war, however, did not prepare him for the terrible privations—he called them his "constant companions, Fatigue, Hunger, and Cold"—that he endured year after year as a Continental soldier. Repeatedly he risked life and limb as he fought in major engagements that in 1776 included the defense of Long Island and New York City and the Battle of White Plains; in 1777 the Battle of Germantown in Pennsylvania and the defense of the Delaware River forts; in 1778 the Battle of Monmouth in New Jersey; and in 1781 the siege of Yorktown in Virginia. Martin's length of service, his version of going to high school and college in making the passage to adulthood, made him a "duration" or long-term Continental enlistee, of whom there were very few, probably no more than 1 out of every 250 persons in the Revolutionary populace.

Only 22 years old at the war's end in 1783, Martin had to find some means to provide for himself in the days and years ahead. For a brief time he taught school among Dutch settlers in the Hudson Highlands region north of New York City. Even though the inhabitants encouraged Martin to remain with them, he had to reckon with his own academic shortcomings. Unlike his father, he had only the bare rudiments of a formal education. "I had never studied grammar an hour in my life," he admitted, then adding crisply: "When I ought to have been doing that, I was forced to be studying the rules and articles of war."

Farming was Martin's only real alternative. Before leaving the army, he had considered traveling with one of his comrades to western New York in search of tillable land. He did not make the trip. The most likely reason was that the Six Nations of Iroquois Indians still had not lost their long-standing claim to that region. Nor did Martin return to Milford. His Plumb grandparents had died during the war, and their farm holdings had likely passed to one or more of their sons—brothers of Joseph's mother—if not sold off for payment of debts.

Looking elsewhere for opportunity, Martin, like hundreds of other penniless veterans who mustered out of the service with little else except the clothes they were wearing, followed up on rumors that an abundance of decent land was available on easy terms in what would be the future state of Maine. In the spring of 1784 he traveled east with "no material halt" until he reached the mouth of the Penobscot River along the ruggedly beautiful mid-Maine coastline. Here in the vicinity of old, crumbling Fort Pownal, an important military post during the French and Indian War, he settled in and made his home for the remaining 66 years of his existence.⁵

Martin prospered at first, and he eventually moved from a rude cabin to a more impressive framed structure. In May 1794 he married Lucy, the 19-year-old daughter of Sara (Stimpson) and Isaac Clewley, a prominent local farmer and ship's carpenter. Over the years, Lucy bore several children, including Joseph (b. 1801), described in the records as "an idiot from birth"; twins Thomas and Nathan (b. 1805); James

⁵ Alan Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760–1820* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1990), 14–21. Taylor points out that the deceptive lure of cheap land was a major reason for the tripling of Maine's population to 100,000 people between 1775 and 1790.

Sullivan (b. 1810); and Susan (b. 1814).⁶ Martin gained the respect of his neighbors in the bustling little fishing and farming community that became the incorporated town of Prospect (now Stockton Springs) in the same year as his marriage. Seven times he won election to the town's board of selectmen. He was also a local justice of the peace and served in the Maine legislature. In 1818 he became Prospect's town clerk, a post he held for the next 25 years.⁷

Along the way something went awry for Martin and his growing family. When the United States Congress adopted the Revolutionary War Pension Act of 1818 to assist aging veterans who were subsisting in "reduced circumstances," a tactful way of referring to poverty, Martin quickly applied for relief. He testified under oath that "I have no real nor personal estate nor any income whatever[,] my necessary bedding and wearing apparel excepted—except two cows, six sheep, [and] one pig." He described himself as "a laborer" who "by reason of age and infirmity" was "unable to work" and reported that his wife Lucy was both "sickly and rheumatic." Without the proposed pension sum of \$96.00 per year, he would, he declared, be "unable to support myself and family." The court, after establishing the estimated value of his whole estate at only \$52.00, ruled that Martin should have "the assistance of his country."⁸

This portrait of destitution stands in stark contrast to the image of the enthusiastic young veteran who had tasted a modest level of affluence after first migrating to Maine. Clearly, something had gone drastically wrong. Martin may have inherited his father's spendthrift temperament, or perhaps his easygoing, affable disposition undercut his capacity to safeguard his own interests in business dealings. Still another possibility is that Martin, to comply with the terms of the Pension Act, purposely minimized the extent of his material assets. This explanation seems doubtful, however, since neighbors testified under oath about his more than humble if not desperate economic circumstances.

⁶ Henry J. Martin, *Notices: Genealogical and Historical, of the Martin Family, of New England* (Boston, 1880), 289; Ethel Kenney Lord, "Isaac Clewley; Father and Son," *Daughters of the American Revolution Magazine*, 93 (1959): 235–36.

⁷ Alice V. Ellis, *The Story of Stockton Springs, Maine* (Belfast, Me., 1955), 21, 73–75.

⁸ Statement sworn before Judge William Crosby of the Court of Common Pleas, Third Eastern Circuit, Hancock County, Maine, July 7, 1820, contained in the Revolutionary War pension file of Joseph Plumb and Lucy Martin, Number W.1629, National Archives, Washington, DC (microfilm). For additional general information, see John P. Resch, "Politics and Public Culture: The Revolutionary War Pension Act of 1818," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 8 (1988): 139–58.

The most convincing explanation relates to the question of land ownership in mid-Maine. Hoping to obtain free land, Martin settled in the area of the Waldo Patent, which came under the control of Washington's Chief of Artillery, Henry Knox, after the Revolutionary War. Knox, now the patent proprietor, expected to receive substantial purchase payments from everyone, including Martin, for the land they had settled on in the patent region. Having no choice, Martin agreed in 1797 to a payment schedule. In that year, he had finally received title to 100 acres of soldiers' bounty lands in the territory of Ohio, and he quickly assigned this grant to a land agent, hoping to use whatever cash he received to help pay for his 100-acre Waldo Patent farm. In 1801, he begged Knox for more time to meet his obligation but received no sympathy. Ten years later Martin owned only 50 acres, a small portion of which he farmed with no particular success. In the end, his \$8.00 a month pension from the federal government, and for which he expressed much gratitude in his memoir, enabled him to live with his wife Lucy at a poor but dignified subsistence level for the rest of their lives.⁹

Advancing age, physical infirmities, and virtual impoverishment did nothing to blunt the workings of Martin's ever-curious mind. During his elderly years, noted one of his acquaintances, he regularly indulged his "taste for drawing, for poetry, and for composition." More than anything else, his diverse "intellectual pursuits contributed largely to the comfort of his old age."¹⁰ Martin wrote lyrics for church hymns used by local Congregational churches and prepared illustrations of wild birds. He composed many verses of poetry and drafted a historical account of Fort Pownal, long since razed. His masterwork was his autobiographical reminiscence, the *Narrative of Some of the Adventures, Dangers and Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier*, which received virtually no public notice when first published in 1830 by a Hallowell, Maine, printer.¹¹

⁹ Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors*, 247–49. Taylor suggests that Martin's less than flattering commentary in his memoir about Continental army officers, especially their self-indulgent behavior in providing for their own needs first, directly reflected his frustrating land patent dealings with Waldo Patent proprietor Henry Knox.

¹⁰ Williamson, "Biographical Sketch," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, 331.

¹¹ Technically Martin's *Narrative* is not an autobiography, but rather a memoir, since the text focuses only on the years of his youth when he served as a Continental soldier, not his whole life.

Martin, like many an aging veteran of his much-venerated generation, took pleasure in talking about his personal deeds and escapades in the martial struggle for American liberty. In turn, willing listeners encouraged him to record his wartime experiences. Setting aside concerns about his educational deficiencies, Martin started writing. At first he “thought a very few pages would contain” his recollections, but once under way he could not bring himself to cut short his writing. “As soon as I let one thought through my mind,” he explained, “another would step up and ask for admittance.” As he scribbled away, Martin felt the intoxicating pleasure of reliving the many memorable days of his youth. Unbeknown to him, he was crafting a priceless account of the Revolutionary era that in our own time has finally begun to receive long overdue and much-deserved recognition as an authentic American classic. Certainly the *Narrative* deserves to stand in the company of another highly regarded memoir of the era, Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography*.

More than 500 diaries and recollections by soldiers who fought for independence are known to exist, but Martin’s *Narrative* represents the most complete memoir by a common soldier. At its core is the highly entertaining story of a robust, fun-loving lad and his rite of passage to adulthood as a short- and long-term enlistee in the Continental army. Experiencing combat for the first time at the tender age of 15 served as the first crucial test of young Martin’s personal fortitude. Since his initial venture in soldiering was anything but a pleasant experience, his decision to re-enlist for the duration of the war in 1777, he stated, was “against my inclination.” Had he had some personal ambition, some clear goal for his life, or more capacity to fend off the self-serving solicitations of the so-called patriots who paid him to serve as their substitute, he would have said “no” to further campaigning. Having signed up again, however, Martin kept facing other examinations in “dangers and sufferings” that tested the depth of his capacity to put up with miserable living conditions along with the mayhem of war.¹²

In the end Martin took pride in having followed through on his long-term commitment, but at no point in describing his wartime journey into adulthood does he take himself too seriously or place himself on some larger-than-life heroic pedestal. Throughout his account he stays

¹² For a listing of diaries and recollections, see J. Todd White and Charles H. Lesser, eds., *Fighters for Independence: A Guide to Sources of Biographical Information on Soldiers and Sailors of the American Revolution* (Chicago, 1977).

within character by invariably presenting himself as a person of ordinary courage. Martin likewise shines a bright light on the ways in which he and other common persons demonstrated their agency as historical actors through their contributions to the hallowed events of the era. His memoir is anything but top-down in its orientation; rather Martin presents history from the point of view of everyday persons like himself. “Alexander [the Great] never could have conquered the world without private soldiers,” he wrote in his preface. Martin thus invites his readers to obtain a more rounded sense of historical reality by not just dwelling on the actions of great leaders but by also regarding the experiences of “one of the lowest in station in an army, a private soldier.”

To ensure greater breadth of focus in his *Narrative*, Martin embraced the thoughts and concerns of his rank-and-file comrades in arms. He depicted them not only as stout-hearted but as increasingly resentful of the civilian patriots for whom they were fighting. Their mounting anger reflected abysmal levels of material support, starting with such basics as food and clothing. Shortages could result in humorous situations, which Martin willingly describes. During the autumn of 1777, for example, a large Continental detachment, having failed after an exhausting march to engage enemy troops near Philadelphia, was returning to camp when the soldiers received a supply of whiskey but without food rations—they had not eaten for more than a day—to help absorb the alcohol. They became uproariously drunk, so much so, quips Martin, that “had the enemy come upon us at this time, there would have been an action worth recording.”

No one guffawed, however, when various Continental brigades finally became mutinous in protesting their miserable circumstances. The two near-uprisings of Martin’s own Connecticut troops in January 1779 and May 1780 helped vent the anger of soldiers “exasperated beyond endurance,” he wrote. From his perspective the blame lay with “their country sitting still and expecting the army to do notable things while fainting from sheer starvation.”¹³

Having experienced the war and its dangers and sufferings firsthand, Martin had little tolerance for any romanticizing of the alleged virtuous character of the Revolutionary generation. As such, he would have dismissed the commentary of most historians of his day. Typical was

¹³ On the subject of mounting soldier anger and forms of protest, see James Kirby Martin, “A ‘Most Undisciplined, Profligate Crew’: Protest and Defiance in the Continental Ranks, 1776–1783,” in *Arms and Independence: The Military Character of the American Revolution*, eds. R. Hoffman and P. J. Albert (Charlottesville, Va., 1984), 119–40.

the renowned work of George Bancroft, whose 10-volume history celebrated the establishment of a freedom-loving republic in America as part of a plan inspired by Providence to provide humanity with a safe haven from the debauched political and social systems of Europe. The colonists, wrote Bancroft, were avid participants in God's "grand design," and they eagerly left "behind ... their families and their all" and came forward "swift as a roe or a young hart over the mountains" to engage in combat against the tyrannical British. "The alacrity with which these troops were raised," declared Bancroft, "showed that the public mind heaved like the sea [for liberty] from New England to the Ohio and beyond the Blue Ridge."¹⁴

Martin's memoir does much more than just reject the lyrical chords of patriotic mythology. Through his personal recollections so delightfully assembled in his memoir, he openly assaulted the rapidly forming public memory of the Revolution as a time of universal public virtue in which deeply committed colonists rose up as one and sacrificed their all to overcome the beastly British lion over eight long years of warfare. Martin knew how few patriots had shown the stamina to stay out for the whole contest and how only a small number of resolute veterans had endured deep pangs of hunger if not near starvation, interminable marches in brutal weather, and the cheerless prospect of entering battle in ragged clothing if not half-naked, all standard hallmarks of long-term Continental service. Had the civilian populace truly displayed such abiding selflessness, as later imagined by Bancroft and endless patriot-minded orators at July 4th celebrations, or had they willingly offered the army decent levels of material support, Martin and his comrades would not have suffered so much. They would not have had to endure the persistent shortages of so many necessities, even including straw and blankets that would have given warmth and helped sustain life itself during the long winter encampments at such sites of human suffering as Valley Forge and Jockey Hollow.¹⁵

¹⁴ George Bancroft, *History of the United States from the Discovery of the American Continent* (10 vols., Boston, 1834–1874), 8: 62–64.

¹⁵ On Revolutionary realities in comparison to patriotic mythologies, see James Kirby Martin and Mark Edward Lender, *A Respectable Army: The Military Origins of the Republic, 1763–1789*, 2nd edition (Wheeling, Ill., 2006), *passim*. On public memories and celebrations of the Revolution in comparison to personal memories shared by Martin and others, see Alfred F. Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party* (Boston, 1999), *passim*; Alfred F. Young, *Liberty Tree: Ordinary People and the American Revolution* (New York, 2006), 1–23; Sarah J. Purcell, *Sealed with Blood: War, Sacrifice, and Memory in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia, 2002), *passim*.

With wit, charm, pathos, and an occasional dose of sarcasm, Martin thus framed his recollections in sharp contrast to the standard patriotic canon of his day. He did so because he still had not forgotten how he and his comrades, after so many years of faithful service, had been “turned adrift like old worn-out horses” at the war’s end without receiving duly contracted forms of compensation, especially back wages. He did so because he did not like the “wiseacres” who were recasting reality by telling everyone what “an useless appendage” the Continental army apparently had been, relative to short-term militia units, in securing American independence. He did so because of the “hardhearted wretches” who were complaining about “poor old decrepit soldiers” like himself finally receiving pensions as long overdue compensation for their dedicated service. He did so, finally, because he felt a strong craving, if not compulsion, to present the truth of his experiences, no matter how much at odds with national mythology.

Martin’s irreverence in regard to pronouncements about the Revolution’s patriotic character bothered many of his early readers. One contemporary commentator described the *Narrative* as “a lively view of the privations and sufferings of the common soldiery in the mighty conflict for liberty and independence,” but he also felt compelled to mention its many “defects,” which he left unspecified. He obviously meant matters of content in addition to grammar and punctuation, especially since he “regretted” that Martin, “before sending his book to the press, ... had not placed it in the hands of some judicious friend for revision.”¹⁶ This person, like so many other nineteenth-century Americans, would have preferred to have his history laced through with great heroes and patriotic lore. A “judicious friend” thus might have shown Martin how to modify his words to make them fit more correctly with the mythologized public memories of the Revolution.

No one, however, could have persuaded Martin to abandon his point of view, quite simply because he had developed a sense of history at variance with the conventions of his own time. Martin’s wartime experiences had taught him the importance of studying the lives of ordinary persons. In his prefatory remarks, he invited his readers to consider what famous military commanders could have accomplished without their soldiers. “Nothing at all,” he concluded emphatically.

¹⁶ Williamson, “Biographical Sketch,” *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, 330–31.

After describing his modest part in the defense of the Delaware River forts during the campaign of 1777, Martin commented on what “little notice” writers had accorded that valiant but futile effort. The reason, he stated, is that “there was no Washington, Putnam, or Wayne there. Had there been, the affair would have been extolled to the skies.” The fundamental problem lay with the way in which his generation preferred to record history: “Great men get great praise, little men nothing. But it always was so and always will be.”

Martin, who died on May 2, 1850, some 67 years after his military service came to an end, was not prophetic on the latter count. Many historians of our own era are devoting countless hours to reconstructing the lives of ordinary persons. They do so in an effort to comprehend more fully the contributions of the lowly, the forgotten, and the unnoticed in history. More specifically, modern-day historians have come to appreciate that George Washington, for whom Martin held abiding respect, could never have achieved the exalted stature of a great military captain without the services and sacrifices of those ordinary soldiers like Martin who so courageously stood by him during the Revolutionary War. Each was as necessary and essential as the other in their mutual triumph of securing American liberties. That was Joseph Plumb Martin’s insightful message over 180 years ago, as his masterful *Narrative* so engagingly makes clear.

Editorial Method

Martin had a natural ability to express himself clearly in vigorous prose. What he needed was an editor to help him overcome his lack of training in the fundamental rules of grammar and punctuation. Apparently he did not have access to such a person, so I have defined my editor’s role as that of proffering assistance to him as well as to his modern readers. Martin, for instance, occasionally made grammatical errors. He would “sat” out on a journey, rather than “set” out. I have silently corrected these slips along with a handful of minor spelling errors. With respect to punctuation, Martin had a particular fascination with commas. He seemed to think that every good sentence required several of them. I have adjusted or eliminated his extraneous punctuation, especially commas, with an eye toward sharpening the intended meaning of his words. Very occasionally I have added commas for the same reason. In

almost all instances I have eliminated the period and dash combination [.—] that he sometimes employed to separate sentences, a standard form of punctuation in Martin's era but no longer in fashion today. In those instances in which his words have fallen into disuse, changed in meaning, or lost resonance to our modern ear, I have added clarifying terms in brackets. An example would be *mauger*[notwithstanding].

Serving as Martin's surrogate editor, I concluded that brief portions of the *Narrative* repeat points already well established or divert readers from the main story line. Like any prideful writer, Martin probably would have objected to any tampering with his text. Like any worthwhile editor, I would have reminded him of the need to maintain a crisp pacing to ensure an engaging presentation of his many adventures. Since copies of the original 1830 edition have become extremely scarce, those seeking the full text should consult George F. Scheer's 1962 edition of the *Narrative*, which bears the title *Private Yankee Doodle*.

I have prepared a series of notes to help amplify the historical setting of Martin's adventures. He did not dwell on the larger ramifications of the wartime events in which he participated. His battle descriptions, for example, have a tactical emphasis but rarely make reference to broader matters of strategy. The notes provide supplemental information about the sweep of issues, personalities, and events during the Revolutionary era. They also offer information about the many geographic sites mentioned by Martin during his seven years of military campaigning. As an additional aid to readers, I have included five maps originally prepared by the respected nineteenth-century cartographer Colonel Henry B. Carrington. The complete set of these maps may be found in Carrington's *Battle Maps and Charts of the American Revolution*, originally published in 1881.

Acknowledgments

I owe a special debt of gratitude to those individuals who so kindly extended me assistance in the preparation of this volume through its various editions. James L. Kochan and Alan Stein, at one time associated with the Morristown National Historical Park in New Jersey, provided guidance in locating a microfiche version of the 1830 edition of Martin's memoir. A rare original copy of the *Narrative* may be found in the Park's renowned Lloyd W. Smith Collection of Early Americana. The Morristown site encompasses the Jockey Hollow camp site where