

POET'S WIFE IS BURIED IN ST. GEORGE'S YARD

In St. George's historical churchyard, under a snowy mantle, this January 1917 lies the mortal remains of beautiful Sarah Eckford, wife of Joseph Rodman Drake, who wrote The American Flag. United in life, parted in death, is the sad ending of the lone story of the poet, and the maiden, who was one of the belles of New York Society in 1816, the year of their union. Drake was a beau of that period a very handsome and a member of a wealthy family, however more were at hand noted suitors though Drake's name was to be written on the sands of time, by "The American Flag." A great match was anticipated for the daughter of Henry Eckford, naval architect and builder of the navy of Lake Erie in 1812. Oliver Hazard Perry and other brave men were his associates, and his children were sought in social circles in New York. Something of Henry Eckford's independence however ran in his daughter Sarah's veins. He had chosen pretty Marion Bedell, daughter of the prosperous farmer, Joseph Bedell instead of a lady of high degree, and Sarah too, pleased herself. Sarah was born in 1800, married Joseph Rodman Drake in 1816 and died, when 28 years of age. Drake died on September 21st, 1820: He was buried at Hunt's Point, Westchester, upper New York. His wife lies here in quaint Hempstead, and also his only child. This little daughter was born in New York in 1819 and was named Janet Rodman Drake. Unlike her parents Janet was to live a fairly long life. She married a noted man, Commodore DeKay, and died at Staten Island, in eighteen-ninety. She lies beside her mother in the Eckford plot in St. George's God's acre. Joseph Rodman Drake's remains are far from wife and child, in an obscure burial ground. Few visit his grave, yet his patriotic lines have fired blood in his countrymen's veins at a time when enthusiasm was needed. In this year of 1917 his lines may well be read as they run in "The American Flag."

Each dying wanderer at sea
Shall look at once to Heaven and thee
And smile to see thy splendors fly
In triumph o'er his closing eye.

Fritz Greene Hallock, Drake's friend, wrote the four last lines of the poem. Hallock too, was young then, and enthusiastic. These lines are "Forever float that standard

sheet where breathes the foe, but falls before us? With Freedom's soil beneath our feet and Freedom's banner streaming o'er us."

That Hallock keenly felt Drake's untimely death, is evidenced by the wonderful lines that touch the heart strings of all who have lost congenial friends, he wrote as Drake's epitaph. "Green be the turf above thee
Friend of my better days!
None knew thee, but to love thee
Nor named thee, but to praise."
Hallock and Drake wrote satirical and humorous verses. They knew something of the struggling life of the Journalist, until his ship comes in. Hallock was to live to enjoy the fruits of his struggles. Drake to pass on, before his ship came to port. Drake's love for his country was strengthened by his affection for his wife. Sarah's father felt deep love for the country of his adoption. Henry Eckford's remains are in his plot at St. George's surrounded by children, and grandchildren's graves. Even his grandchild's husband, Commodore DeKay, is buried there, but Drake's grave is a lonely one at Hunt's Point. Henry Eckford's life knew keen joys and sorrows, most of his children died young. After Joseph and Sarah Drake died, Henry Eckford was called to Turkey, in 1831 by the Sultan Mahomed. The Sultan wanted just such a navy as had won Lake Erie's battles, that Turkey too might triumph on the sea. There in a strange land, Henry Eckford died on Washington's birthday, February 22, 1833. Maria Eckford, his wife, died thirteen years after his death. Both rest in the soil they loved, Hempstead, where hours of their relaxation had been spent, in walks through the woods, and fishing in the prolific streams of those far off days.

A tablet has been placed in St. George's Church to the memory of one of Henry Eckford's daughters who married a noted physician of Philadelphia.

It is of Joseph Rodman Drake, however, who lies apart from wife and child we would speak—The poem "The American Flag" if some what long, should be read by every American. The constitution is long, yet it must be studied by statesmen, who guide the ship of State. Over the graves of the Eckfords the English starling sing, from St. George's belfry, their vesper hymn to those passed on.

When Memorial Day comes round the Woman's Relief Corp 192 of this village will place "old glory" on Sarah Eckford's grave—fitting tribute to the wife of Joseph Rodman Drake author of "The American Flag."

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