

Thomas Geran

(March 1, 1760 – April 1, 1842)

Private and Orderly Sergeant, 1st Regiment Monmouth County Militia

by Daisy D. Orr – June 4, 2026

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The military record of Thomas Geran of Matawan shows that, among other services, he first enlisted on July 1, 1776, as a private under Captain Joseph Stillwell and Lieutenant Moses Shepard, guarding the shores at Sandy Hook.

He enlisted in the State Troops under Captain David Gordon in June 1779. He then enlisted, in April 1780, as a sailor aboard the cutter *Rebecca*, a privateer operating under a letter of marque commanded by Captain John Burrowes. Burrowes and his associates, after capturing British vessels, often brought them into Matawan Creek.

On May 1, 1780, the *Rebecca* sailed from Philadelphia but was captured by the copper-bottomed British sloop-of-war *Delight*. The entire crew was taken prisoner and confined aboard the infamous prison ship *HMS Scorpion* on May 18, 1780. Geran was detained there for five weeks before being transferred to the hospital ship *Hunter*, where he remained a prisoner for an additional 72 days until he was released in a prisoner exchange.



Continental Soldier



William Hornor, in *This Old Monmouth of Ours*, mentions that Geran and Philip Freneau were both on the hospital ship and were released at the same time. Freneau was so weak from Typhoid fever that Geran had to help him home. They walked from Elisabeth Town to Middletown Point taking back roads along the way.

By February 1782, he was a horseman under Capt. John Walton. He supplied his own horse, saddle, bridle pistol and holster and sword. His duty was to watch the motions of the enemy and give the

intelligence of their movement to General Washington's headquarters.

He was present along with Philip Freneau at the capture of the British Brig Britannia. A bit about the capturing of Britannia: On the night of December 28, 1779, during a Nor'easter, the *Britannia* broke loose from her mooring in Sandy Hook Bay. The storm's strong winds drove the ship toward the western shore of the harbor dragging its anchor and was discovered by members of the 1st Regiment of the Monmouth Militia stationed on the high ground of the Highlands of the Navesink. The Monmouth Militia were under the command of Colonel Asher Holmes. (Asher Holmes was married to John Burrowes, Jr.'s stepsister.) In 1781, Burrowes retired from the military and by 1783 the American Revolution was officially over.

State of New Jersey
 Monmouth County, ss.
 On this third day of May eighteen hundred and forty three personally appeared before the Court of Common Pleas of the said County Thomas Gearan and John B. Smith and Rebecca his wife, residents of the Township of Freehold in said County, who being first duly sworn according to law, do on their oaths make the following declaration in order to obtain the benefit of the provision made by the Act of Congress passed July 7, 1838, entitled "An Act granting half pay and pensions to certain widows" that the said Thomas Gearan and Rebecca Smith are two of the children of Barbarie Gearan deceased the widow of Thomas Gearan, who was a private and sergeant in the War of the Revolution, and who was a ~~private~~ pensioner under the Act of June 7, 1838 -
 They further declare that the said Barbarie Gearan was married to the said Thomas Gearan on the thirteenth day of July in the year seventeen hundred and eighty six; that her husband the aforesaid Thomas Gearan died on the first day of April eighteen hundred and forty two - that she was not married to him prior to his leaving the service, but the marriage took place previous to the first of January seventeen hundred and ninety four; at the time above stated; and that the said Barbarie Gearan died on the thirteenth day of January eighteen hundred and forty three -
 I am to be Subscribed before the Court on this day by year last aforesaid -
 Thomas Gearan
 John B. Smith
 Rebecca Smith

The document shown on the left is a letter of pension declaration from Freehold Township, Monmouth County, documenting the death of Barbarie (Barbara) Gearan (Geran), widow of Thomas Geran, a private and sergeant in the Revolutionary War. The children — Thomas Geran and Rebecca Smith — are applying for their mother's widow's pension benefits following her death on January 13, 1843. Below is a transcription of the letter.

State of New Jersey, Monmouth County, ss.

On this third day of May eighteen hundred and forty three personally appeared before the Court of Common Pleas of the said County, Thomas Gearan and John B. Smith and Rebecca his wife, residents of the Township of Freehold in said County, who being first duly sworn according to law, do on their oaths make the following declaration in order to obtain the benefit of the provision made by the Act of Congress passed July 7, 1838, entitled "An Act granting half pay and pensions

to certain widows": that the said Thomas Gearon and Rebecca Smith are two of the children of Barbarie Gearon deceased, the widow of Thomas Gearon, who was a private and Sergeant in the War of the Revolution, and who was a pensioner under the Act of June 7, 1832 —

They further declare that the said Barbarie Gearon was married to the said Thomas Gearon on the sixteenth day of July in the year seventeen hundred and eighty six; that her husband the aforesaid Thomas Gearon died on the first day of April eighteen hundred and forty two; that she was not married to him prior to his leaving the service, but the marriage took place previous to the first of January seventeen hundred and ninety four, viz: at the time above stated; and that the said Barbaric Gearon died on the thirteenth day of January eighteen hundred and forty three —

Sworn and Subscribed before the Court on the day & year last aforesaid —

Thomas Geran, John B. Smyth, Rebecca Smyth

W. S. Bowne

Declaration of Thomas Gearon in order to obtain the benefit of the Act of Congress passed June 7, 1832, State of New Jersey, Monmouth County, SS.

On this nineteenth day of October in the year of our Lords one thousand eight hundred and thirty three, personally appeared in open Court before the Judges of the Inferior Court of Common Pleas in and for the said County of Monmouth, now sitting Thomas Gearon a resident of the Township of Freehold County and State aforesaid aged seventy three years, who being first duly sworn according to law doth on his oath make the following declaration in order to obtain the benefit of the Act of Congress passed June 7, 1832, that he entered the service of the United States under the following named Officers and served as herein stated:

That he entered the Militia of New Jersey about the first of July 1776, and served therein under Captain Joseph Stillwell & Lieutenant Moses Shepherd at Sandy Hook, every other month alternately, during the latter part of the year 1776, and the whole of the year 1777, guarding and defending the inhabitants of the frontiers and shores from the British and Tories, and watching the motions of the enemy. That David Forman was then General, George Taylor then Colonel but he soon became a Tory and went off to the British, and then Asher Holmes the Major was promoted to a Colonel: That sometime during the year 1777 Capt Stillwell was promoted to a Major, and Lieutenant Shepherd to a Capt. That during the year 1778 and part of year 1779 he served in the Militia aforesaid in the same Company under Capt Moses Shepherd, and Lieutenant Samuel Beaton, every other month alternately, stationed at Middletown as their head quarters and guarding and watching the shores from Hook harbor to Long Branch, said officers the same as last mentioned: that some time in the month of June 1779 he enlisted as a volunteer in the Militia of N. J. as one

Another letter that was submitted to the pension benefits that describes more information about Thomas Geran's service. But what is striking is the revelation that **Col. George Taylor became a Tory** and went off to the British, and then **Major Asher Holmes was promoted to a Colonel** and apparently replaced Taylor. This is listed in the document below with the transcription:

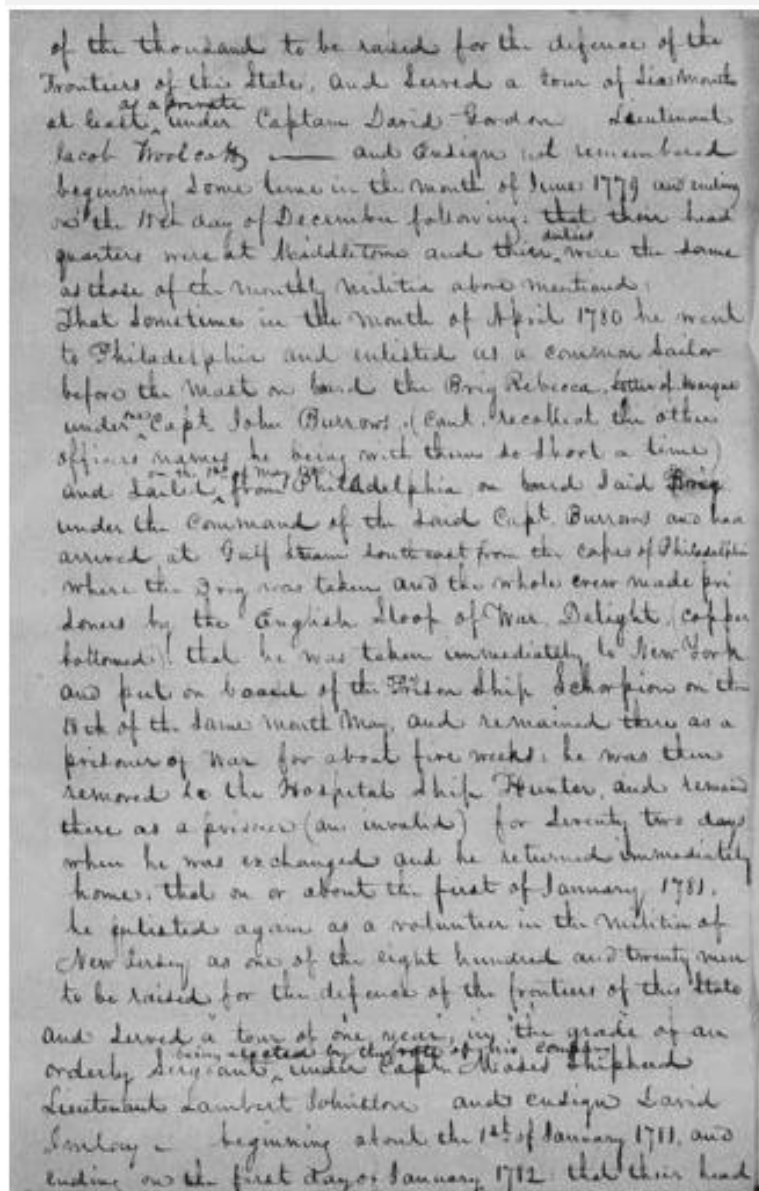
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Act of Congress passed June 7, 1832, that he entered the service of the United States under the following named Officers and served as herein stated:

That he entered the Militia of New Jersey about the first of July 1776, and served therein under Captain Joseph Stillwell & Lieutenant Moses Shepherd at Sandy Hook, every other month alternately during the latter part of the year 1776 and the whole of the year 1777, guarding and defending the inhabitants of the frontiers and shores from the British and Tories, and watching the motions of the enemy. That **David Forman was then General, George Taylor then Colonel** but

he soon became a Tory and went off to the British, and then **Asher Holmes the Major was promoted to a Colonel**. That sometime during the year 1777 **Capt. Stillwell** was promoted to Major, and Lieutenant **Shepherd** to Capt. That during the year 1778 and part of year 1779 he served in the Militia of aforesaid in the same Company under **Capt. Moses Shepherd and Lieutenant Lambert Johnston** every other month alternately, stationed at Middletown as their headquarters and guarding and watching the shores from Shoal Harbour to Long Branch. Field Officers are the same as last mentioned. That sometime in the month of June 1779 he enlisted as a volunteer in the Militia of N.J. as one (continued)



of the thousand to be raised for the defence of the Frontiers of this State, and served a tour of six months at least ^{as a private} under Captain David Gordon Lieutenant Jacob Woolcott — and Ensign not remembered beginning some time in the month of June 1779 and ending on the 15th day of December following: that their headquarters were at Middletown and there were the same as those of the monthly militia above mentioned. That sometime in the month of April 1780 he went to Philadelphia and enlisted as a common sailor before the Mast on board the Brig Rebecca fitted voyage under ^{now} Capt John Burrows. (Cant recollect the other officers names he being with them so short a time) and sailed ^{from} Philadelphia on board said Brig under the Command of the said Capt. Burrows and has arrived at Gulf Stream southeast from the Capes of Philadelphia where the Brig was taken and the whole crew made prisoners by the English Sloop of War Delight (Copper bottomed) that he was taken immediately to New York and put on board of the Prison Ship Scorpion on the 16th of the same month May and remained there as a prisoner of War for about five weeks: he was then removed to the Hospital Ship Hunter, and remained there as a prisoner (an invalid) for seventy two days when he was exchanged and he returned immediately home: that on or about the first of January 1781, he enlisted again as a volunteer in the Militia of New Jersey as one of the eight hundred and twenty men to be raised for the defence of the frontiers of this State and served a tour of one year, in the grade of an orderly ^{being selected by choice of this company} ~~sailor~~ under Capt. Moses Shepherd Lieutenant Lambert Johnston and Ensign David Searley — beginning about the 1st of January 1781, and ending on the first day of January 1782 that their head

of the thousand to be raised for the defense of the Frontiers of this State, and served a tour of twelve months as a private, **Captain David Gordon, Lieutenant Jacob Woolcott**— and Ensigns not remembered, beginning sometime in the Month of June 1779 and ending the 15th day of December following, that their headquarters were at Middletown and thereabouts the same as those of the monthly militia above mentioned. That sometime in the Month of April 1780 he went to Philadelphia and enlisted as a common sailor before the Mast on board the **Brig Rebecca**, fitted voyage under **Capt. John Burrows**. (cant recollect the other officer's name he being with them so short a time) and landed on the 1st of May 1780 in Philadelphia on board said Brig under the Command of the said Capt. Burrows and has arrived at gulf stream southeast from the Capes of Philadelphia where the **Brig was taken and the whole crew made prisoners by the English Sloop of War Delight**, (Copper bottomed)

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Washington at his headquarters. And this applicant rode the express which carried intelligence of the arrival of the Fleet at Sandy Hook from the Chesapeake Bay at Sandy Hook; that all the Militia of the State that were to be raised by enlistment during this year were under the Command of one Major Hays as this applicant was informed, but as he never saw the said Officer he does not know anything about him. **William Van Pelt and John Blakey** are the only persons he knows of now living who ... (Continued to the next page)

...to wit at the Highlands of Neversink, Conkaskunk, Pleasant Valley, and Sandy Hook.

That his marches generally extended along the shores and frontiers of Monmouth County, patrolling

1. mt. at the Highlands of Neversink, Conkaskunk, Pleasant Valley, and Sandy Hook. That his marches generally extended along the shores and frontiers of Monmouth County, patrolling the shores and roads to and from head quarters to the intermediate points along the whole extent of the said shores.

In answering the interrogatories prescribed by the War Department he says:

1. That he was born in Amboy Middlesex County N.J. on the 1st day of March 1760.
2. That he has no record of his age, the family bible which contained it was taken by his older sister and he has not seen or heard of it in forty years, but he has often seen his age recorded in it previous to its being taken away while it was in the possession of his mother.
3. That he lived at Middletown Point when called into service (his mother having moved there when he was sixteen months old), that he lived at Middletown Point aforesaid until the year 1799 after the Revolution, that he then removed into the Township of Freehold where he has resided ever since and still resides; all in Monmouth County New Jersey.
4. That the Manner of his being called into service is stated above.
5. That there were no regular Officers with troops where he served or Continental or Militia Regiments, except the Militia Regiment of Monmouth County under Col. Holmes to which this applicant belonged, and that the Circumstances of his service are mentioned above.
6. That he never received any discharge in writing, none being given to the Militia, and has no documentary evidence of his service, but he knows of John Aldridge, William Van Pelt and John Chasey whose testimony he can procure and who can testify to his services; nor did he receive any warrant as Sergeant.
7. That he is known to Rev. John Fountain who has become so old and infirm as to be unable to perform the duties of a Clergyman and Samuel

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3. That he lived at Middletown Point when called into service (his mother having moved there when he was sixteen months old), that he lived at Middletown Point aforesaid until the year 1799 after the Revolution, that he then removed to the Township of Freehold where he has resided ever since and still resides; all in Monmouth County, New Jersey.

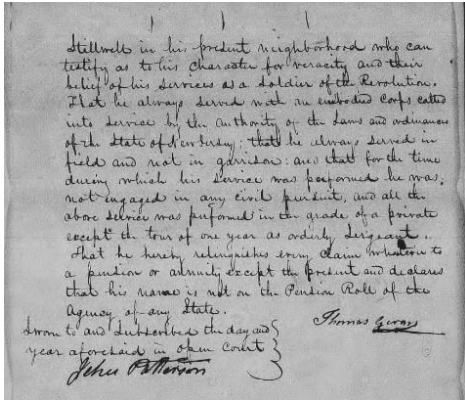
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Stillwell in his present neighborhood who can testify as to his character for veracity and their belief of his services as a soldier of the Revolution. That he always served with an embodied Corps called into service by the authority of the laws and ordinances of the State of New Jersey; that he always served in field and not in garrison; and that for the time during which his service was performed he was not engaged in any civil pursuit, and all the above service was performed in the grade of a private except the tour of one year as orderly Sergeant. That he hereby relinquishes every claim whatsoever

to a pension or annuity, except the present and declares that his name is not on the Pension Roll of the Agency of any State.

Thomas Geran

Sworn to and Subscribed the day and year aforesaid in Open Court John Patterson

This document is on the military records website Fold3 along with this record was the confirmed the testimony of William Van Pelt. Also sworn affidavit from John Fountain, Samuel Stillwell, John R. Whitlock. An additional record shows that John Eldridge also confirmed Thomas Geran's service.

<https://www.fold3.com/image/19729823/gearon-thomas-page-18-us-revolutionary-war-pensions-1800-1900>

Thomas Geran's testimony provides a wealth of information regarding the events that occurred in this area during the Revolutionary War. Following his release and return from captivity, he resumed military service as one of the horsemen on the express. This was a vital position, as he carried intelligence dispatches to General George Washington. Through riders such as Geran, Washington was kept informed of the movements and activities of the British fleet along the New Jersey coast.

The Geran Family:

Thomas Geran, Sr, married Barbara Hymes (1766 – 1843). They were married on July 16, 1786 and had the following children:

- John (1790 – 1874) Moved to Ohio
- Rebecca (1796-1855) (Married John Smyth)
- Thomas Geran, Jr. (1800 -1875)
- Catherine (Married John L. Ackerman)

Thomas Geran is buried at Mt. Pleasant Cemetery.

Note: The Matawan Historical Society received the **Fowler Musket** that Thomas Geran used during the Revolutionary War. This will be on display at the Burrowes Mansion of Matawan, New Jersey Thanks to the work of Kurtis Roinestad, John Lazar, Cathy Zavorskas, and the rest of the Matawan Historical Society board, we were able to obtain this important piece of history from the Geran family and have it professionally restored.

References regarding Geran's military record came from Fold3. Additional information came from *The Burrowes Mansion of Matawan* by Mary Lou Diecker.