

Fonday family

**NYG&B MEMBERSHIP HELPS UNCOVER FACTS ABOUT MAJOR DOUW FONDEY:
Patriot, Statesman, and Eyewitness to History**

by Joe Fondy

There were many men named Douw Fonda in the Mohawk Valley in the late eighteenth century. There were Douw Fondas in the Revolutionary War and in the New York State Legislature. Some genealogical resources have mixed up the various facts regarding each Douw Fonda and redistributed them under variations of the name. Not only has this made my genealogical search difficult, but these errors led me to draw incorrect conclusions.

The Early American Newspapers, Series I, (part of the Readex Digital Collection from NewsBank, Inc.) online database offered by the NYG&B helped me punch a big hole in a fifty year-old brick wall!

My family has been researching its origins for over five decades. In the 1950s, my cousin, Henry Fondy, began researching the life of my great-great-grandfather. George W. Fondy served in the 6th Illinois Cavalry for a brief period of time using the last name of Fondy. Then, at age 22, with his residence listed as Vienna, Johnson Co., Illinois, he enlisted under the name George W. Fonda as a Corporal in the 128th Illinois Infantry. He died of pneumonia at Nashville Hospital #8, January 30, 1865. His name is spelled Fondy on his headstone.

We have a picture of George W. Fondy, and have visited his gravesite in Nashville, but he left no family bible or information about his parents. Military records indicate that he was born around 1840. We suspect that his father was Isaac V. Fonday, who died in Johnson Co. around 1852.

Isaac V. Fonday married Mary Jane Stubblefield in Bond Co., Illinois, on January 14, 1840. Isaac married for a second time December 8, 1844. Mary (Polly) Davis and Isaac were wed in Johnson Co., Illinois. I have a copy of their certificate, recorded in Vienna, Illinois. They had two children: Mary Ann Fondy, born in 1847, and Delia Fondy, born in 1850.

On June 12 1852, Polly Fondy filed Isaac V. Fondy's probate papers in Goreville, Johnson Co., Illinois. I have a copy of the probate papers that spell his name Fondy. They do not list a death date. I suspect that Isaac V. Fondy's middle name is Vrooman. *The Vrooman Family in America* by Wickersham and Comstock, 1949, states that Gertude Vroman married a man named Douw Isaac Fonda. This marriage was also noted on Mark Fonda's website Fonda.org, which lists their marriage in November of 1788 at the First Presbyterian Church at Ballston Center, Saratoga Co. Gertrude Vrooman's family was from the Town of Middleburgh, Schoharie Co. I have not independently verified this marriage record. More about Gertrude Vroman later in this article.

My cousin Betty Ritchey found some information in the National Archives which show a man named Vrooman Fondy (born around 1804) enlisted in Company B of the First Regiment of the U.S. Infantry on May 25, 1829, at Albany. He then went from New York to Fort Winnebago in the Michigan Territory (present-day Wisconsin) where he participated in a project to harvest timber and construct Forts Crawford and Winnebago.

He was discharged with a half disability on Nov. 11, 1830,

by Jefferson Davis, acting Adjutant. We have copies of about 15 pages of his pension documents, some of which list him as 25 years old in 1829, and 26 in 1830. His residence is listed as Middleburgh, Schoharie Co., New York.

Vrooman Fondy was eligible for an invalid pension, which he applied for, and began collecting at Philadelphia in September of 1836. He then went briefly to Mississippi, then to Missouri in July of 1838, where he collected his pension from September 1838 thru March of 1847. He listed his residence as St. Louis, which is just 45 miles from Bond Co., Illinois. National Archives Roll T718 listed payments in Missouri and Illinois until "September 3rd, 1851 — last payment."

That's the last we heard of Vrooman Fondy. His arrival in Illinois roughly coincides with the birth of Mary A. Fondy, and his final payment in 1851 leads us to believe that he is, indeed, Isaac V. Fondy, whose estate was probated in June of 1852. Some of the documents found under both Vrooman's and Isaac's names spell their last name "Fonday," and Vrooman seems to have signed his name that way, so the Fondy spelling may have been an Army transcription error that he had been stuck with.

My cousins and I had been pretty sure that we had some connection with the Fonda family of New York, due to the spelling of George W. Fondy's last name in some military records, but when we saw that Vrooman Fondy was from Schoharie Co., we were a bit more certain.

I began looking at the Fonda and Fonday families of the Mohawk Valley. Two gentlemen who lived in Albany in the late 18th century were known by the last name of Fonday, and signed their names "Fonday," even though they were born into the Fonda family. Major Douw Fonday (1759-1806) and his brother, Ensign John Fonday, Jr. (1761-1814) may have had a number of good reasons to spell their names Fonday. The brothers may have served with other Fondas of the same first name, gotten their mail mixed up, or just been called Fonday by an Army Paymaster or roll taker who wanted to keep everybody straight.

I knew that John Fonday Jr. had brothers named David and Douw. I eventually came to the conclusion that I was not a direct descendant of David or John, based on all of the data that I could find about their sons and descendants. I had previously ruled out Douw Fonday because of Jonathan Pearson's claim that Douwe Jacobse Fonda married Machtelt Lansing (both of the Boght) on September 20, 1788.¹

Pearson's account of the Fonda family stated that David Fonda, born in 1757; Douwe Fonda, born August 26, 1759; and Johannes Fonda, born April 6, 1761, were the children of Isaac D. Fonda and Susanna DeForest. A listing at the bottom of the page has David Fonda's wife and family, followed closely on the next page by the wife and family of a Douw Fonda and then the wife and family of John Fonda (aka John Fonday Jr.).

The order and listing of the above group matches the family

¹ Pearson, Jonathan, *Contributions for the Genealogies of the First Settlers of the Ancient County of Albany, from 1630 to 1800*, J. Munsell's Sons, printers, 1872, reprinted Baltimore: Genealogical Pub. Co., 1976, 182 pp. 49-50.

FONDEY (continued)

shown in *The Dutch Settlers Society Yearbook*.² David Fonda married Catrina Ten Broeck, and John Fonda Jr. married Cornelia Hun. These entries led me to think that the Douw Fonda who was mentioned in the Yearbook between David and



John Fonday, Jr. (1761-1814)³

John (and married to Matilda Lansing) corresponded with the Douwe Fonda who married Machtel Lansing in Pearson. Using the above data, I could find no connection between Isaac V. Fonday or George W. Fondy and Douw I. Fonda and Machtel Lansing.

In 2004 I took a trip to New York and did more research on the Fonda family. One of my first stops on my genealogical

search was the NYG&B Library. I found there a book titled *The Institution of the Society of the Cincinnati, 1783*.⁴ The book shows signatures of Ensigns D. I. Fonday and John Fonday, who were founding members of the Society of the Cincinnati. Both men sign their last names in capital letters.

I also found a letter at The New York State Library that gave more clues about Major Douw Fonday. The signature in the letter matches that of D. I. Fonday in the book about the Cincinnati of New York. The letter was mailed from the Town of Stillwater on February 9, 1791. The letter, addressed to The Honorable Stephen Van Rensselaer, mentions the towns of Ballston, Stillwater, and Halfmoon, and deals with the creation of a "New Town" as the new county of Saratoga was being formed from Albany Co.

I was intrigued by finding Douw Fonday's signatures. I had seen references to a Douw Fonday in books, but assumed that they referred to another line. These signatures left no doubt in my mind that Douw and John were brothers. The last names of D. I. and John Fonday are signed in a strikingly similar style.

The 2005 inclusion of the Early American Newspapers online database as one of the many benefits of my membership with the G&B provided the breakthrough I needed to tie up a lot of loose ends. I could feel the Fondy family's fifty year old genealogical brick wall begin to crumble when I read an obituary in the *New York Evening Post*, dated 28 Nov. 1806:

DIED. At Albany, on the 19th Inst, Douw I. Fonday, aged 47 years—One of the Revolutionary Officers and Major in the late Provisional Army of the United States.⁵

After researching the Fonda and Fonday families for

decades, searching libraries in thirty states, and scouring the Internet, we never did find a death date of 1806 for Douw Fonday or any Douw Fonda. This new information was just

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one tidbit that would lead to many other revelations. By having the signature on the letter from Stillwater, I was able to deduce that Douw I. Fonday was from Saratoga Co.

Other articles found in the Early American Newspapers database helped me confirm the fact that Major Douw I. Fonday served as an Ensign in the Revolutionary War, was an Associate Justice of the Peace and Sheriff of Saratoga County, and at one time was Collector of the Revenue. His office was at his home at Ballston in 1798. He also served in the New York State Assembly in 1797 and 1798. He may have been referred to at times as Douw J. Fonday or Douw I. Fonda.



Douw I. Fonday (1759-1806)⁶

The parents of Douw I. Fonday were Revolutionary War Officer, Major Isaac Douw Fonda (1728-?) and Susanna DeForest (1731-1798) who were married in 1752.

An Isaac Fonda of Ballston District appears in Albany County in 1779 on a tax list. An Isaac Fonda was in the 12th Regiment of the Albany County Militia. There are two men named Isaac Fonda listed in the Albany Committee of Correspondence who signed an oath of Secrecy on January 27, 1777. I wonder if the Ballston home of Douw I. Fonday came into his possession as part of his father's estate, or perhaps it was bounty land for his war service?

The January 21st 1797, edition of the *Minerva and Mercantile Evening Advertiser*, found in *Early American Newspapers* in the Members' Area of the NYG&B website, mentions that on January 7th, the State Assembly considered Douw Fonda of Albany's petition dealing with a lot of land in the Royal Grant.

Here are some other articles I found at this website:

Greenleaf's *NY Journal & Patriotic Register*, dated 22 Feb. 1794: "Appointment of Sheriffs, in addition to these given in our Journal of Feb. 12 : Douw I. Fonday, Saratoga."

American Minerva, 21 Feb. 1794, announced same.

⁶ From the collection of the Fonday family.

² *The Dutch Settlers Society Yearbook*, Vol 49, Page 28

³ Attributed to Peter J. Méance, formerly attributed to Ezra Ames (1768-1836), and to Anson Dickinson (1779-1852), ca. 1803. Watercolor on ivory, ht. 2 7/8" X 2 1/4" (oval), in frame, ht. 5 3/8" X 4 5/16" Albany Institute of History and Art Gift of Leontine de Kay Townsend (Mrs. J. Townsend Lansing 1908.8.1.

⁴ *The Institution of the Society of the Cincinnati, 1783*, photostat of an original manuscript, pp. 11, 12. From the collection of the NYG&B Library.

⁵ *The New-York Evening Post*, 1806-11-28; Iss: 1553; Page: [3]

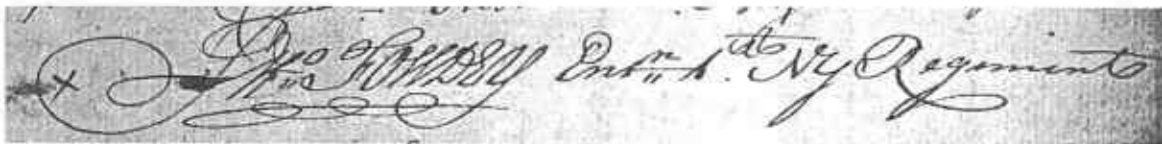
FONDEY (continued)

Mohawk Mercury, dated 6 June 1797, stated that Douw I. Fonday was elected to the Assembly from Saratoga County.

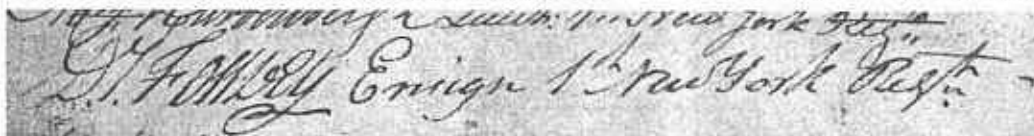
Douw I. Fonda was elected (in Albany) member of assembly from Saratoga County, according to the 6 June 1797 *Minerva & Mercantile Evening Advertiser*, page 3. 18 Jan. 1798 *Albany Centinel* mentions "... House of Assembly, Wednesday, Jan. 2, ... Douw I. Fonda, member of this house, returned as duly elected in the County of Saratoga ... appeared in the assembly chamber."

Douw I. Fonday was mentioned in *Albany Centinel* 23 Jan. 1798, and in a *Commercial Advertiser* article dated 24 Jan. 1798: "From Albany ... yesterday, ... Appointments. By the hon. the council of appointment ... Sheriff of Saratoga, vice Douw I. Fonday, resigned."

A Letter to the Printers of the *Albany Chronicle* from James Gordon, dated 25 Jan. 1798 mentions election returns published 23 Jan. 1798 "... giving to Williams,



Gordon, Fonday, and Russel, the number of votes each had ... " Greenleaf's *New York Journal and Patriotic*



Register of 10 Feb. 1798 mentioned a vote in the Assembly in which Mr. Fonday voted "aye."

Aaron Burr was also a member of the twenty-first session of the New York State Legislature, which met at Albany from Jan. 2nd through April 6th in 1798. *The Commercial Advertiser*, dated Feb. 16th, 1798, mentioned Messrs. Fonda and Burr being appointed to a joint committee on Jan 25th to determine if any fees, salaries and compensations of the several officers of government and ministers of justice within this state should be altered.

The 5 Sept. 1798 *Saratoga Register* had two advertisements: D.I. Fonday proclaimed that he will collect taxes from Carriage owners and retail dealers of Wine or Spirits at his office at his Dwelling-house in Ballston. Fonday identified himself as Collector of the Revenue for the County of Saratoga.

21 Nov. 1798, *Saratoga Register* advertisement: Douw Fonday seized property of Charles Robinson and published an article, signed D. I. Fonday, "late Sheriff" on Sept. 27, 1798.

Massachusetts Mercury, 22 Jan. 1799, and *Albany Centinel*, 18 Jan. 1799, reported that D. J. Fondy was promoted to Captain.

I am hopeful that the facts I have uncovered and shared in this article will lead to a better understanding of the Isaac D. Summer 2006

Fonda and Douw I. Fonday families. My personal feeling is that when some researchers came across any derivation of the name Fonda, (Fonday, Fonday, Fondy, Fundy, etc.) they changed the spelling to "Fonda" in an effort to clarify things. In many cases, this would have been somewhat helpful. In my case, it caused a fifty-year wild goose chase! All of my family researchers, Uncle Henry, Cousins Ted and Betty, and myself had all seen references to Ensign Douw Fonday in books like *New York in the Revolution*, but nearly abandoned our search when confronted with the writings of Talcott, Pearson, and others.

Douw Fonday was a member of the New York 3rd Regiment of Infantry, having served at the rank of Ensign from the 29th of May 1779. In 1781, Ensign Douw Fonday was promoted to Adjutant, and was transferred to the First New York (The Line) and to the light Corps commanded by Lt. Col. Alexander Hamilton. Hamilton led this unit in the assault on Yorktown on Oct. 14, 1781, and secured Redoubt Number 10. This battle effectively ended the Revolutionary War and Cornwallis surrendered. There are a few references to Douw

Fonday in the Alexander Hamilton papers. *Historical and Genealogical Collections*

Relating to the Descendants of Rev. James Hillhouse,⁷ found in the Heritage Quest section of the NYG&B website, tells of Ensign Douw Fonday being at Washington's Headquarters when the General's proclamation to Cease Hostilities was read in the Spring of 1783. "The General offers his most cordial congratulations ... these are the men who ought to be considered as the pride and boast of the American Army ... The Quartermaster General is directed to furnish the necessary materials, and an extra ration of liquor is ordered for each man tomorrow to drink to perpetual peace, independence, and happiness to the United States of America."

On Saturday, April 19th, the proclamation of Congress declaring the formal terms of peace was read to the troops.

The council of appointment at their last meeting, made choice of the following gentlemen as sheriffs, in their respective counties viz.
Cornelius Bergen, Kings; Samuel Haight Westchester; Benjamin Jackson, Orange; Albert Pawling Rensselaer; Andrew White, Washington; Douw I. Fonday, Saratoga; William Colbrath, Herkimer; James M'Master Tioga.

⁷ Margaret P. Hillhouse, *Historical and Genealogical Collections Relating to the Descendants of Rev. James Hillhouse* (New York: T.A. Wright, 1924), p. 573, as found in ProQuest's *HeritageQuest Online* database.

FONDEY (continued)

Headquarters Newburgh 19th April 1783 "entries for the day tomorrow" mentions (among many others) "Ensign Dy Fondey, 1st N.Y. For Patrole."

A few months later, Ensign Douw Fondey left the Army to enjoy civilian life. I am not sure what he did for a living from the time of his discharge in June of 1783 until 1791. Fondey may have served in the Albany Militia before Saratoga County split from Albany County. There was also a "Dow Fonda" on the board of directors of the Hamilton Manufacturing Society (also known as the Dovesburgh or Albany Glass House). After getting married in 1788 to Gertrude Vrooman, he entered public service, and was Justice of the Peace (1791-1794), Sheriff (1794-1798), a Member of the State Assembly from Saratoga County (1797-1798), and Collector of the Revenue (1798-?).

He returned to the Military in 1798 as part of the Provisional Army. He was a Captain in the 12th United States Infantry and was later promoted to Major. He was honorably discharged in 1800.

After confirming the connection between Major Douw Fondey and Alexander Hamilton, I was led to search the Alexander Hamilton Papers. The Papers indicate that Douw Fondey was a Lieutenant in the "Old Army" and a major in the militia. In one letter, dated August 17, 1798, Fondey makes reference to letters of recommendation he has obtained from Governor John Jay, Lt. Governor Stephen Van Rensselaer, and fellow State legislator (and Hamilton's father-in-law) General Philip J. Schuyler. Other Fondey endorsements mentioned in the Hamilton papers are from Abraham Van Vechten (who served with Fondey in the Legislature), Samuel B. Berry, and Sidney Berry.

I mentioned Gertrude Vrooman earlier. Isaac V. Fondy had a daughter named Delia. Gertrude Vrooman's mother's name was Delia. Deliah Hager Vroman (or Vrooman) also lived at Middleburgh, Schoharie Co. Vrooman Fondy's residence was Middleburgh. "Gertrude Fonda, widow" is listed in "Old records (1816-1826) of the Reformed Dutch Church of Middleburgh. George W. Fondy's only granddaughter was named Lillian Gertrude Fondy.

I am finally getting some clues which may eventually lead to some concrete evidence regarding the connection between Douw I. Fondey, Isaac V., or Vrooman, Fondey and George W. Fondy. I'd love to find a birth or baptism record for Isaac V. Fondey, and perhaps of his older brother, born between 1785 and 1790 as indicated in the 1800 census.

The Douw I. Fonda household appears in the 1800 Federal Census at Ballston, Saratoga County, as found in the Members' Area of the G&B website.⁸ The citation shows a couple between ages 26 and 45 with a young boy who would have been born between 1785 and 1790. The entry for the Fonda family appears between Elisha Miller and Epenetus White.

*An Historical Sketch of the Presbyterian Church of Ballston Centre, N.Y.*⁹ mentions Epenetus White, and also mentions White's and Miller's homes on the east side of Ballston Lake

⁸ U.S Census, NARA M32, roll 27, page 13.

⁹ Rev. Alexander S. Hoyt, *An Historical Sketch of the Presbyterian Church of Ballston Centre, N.Y.*, (Ballston, N.Y.: Waterbury & Inman, Steam Printers, 1876.)

near the outlet. White served on the bench at the same time as Douw Fondey.

The 1810 US Census may shed some light on the identity of Vrooman Fondey's older brother. This brother may, in fact, have been named Douw I. Fondey Jr.

Douw I. Fondey is listed in the Town of Moreau at Saratoga County in the 1810 Census.¹⁰ We know that this is not Major Douw I. Fondey, because he died in 1806.

Here's how I think the 1810 Census record breaks down:

- 1 male under 10 years of age (Could be Vrooman Fondey, age 6.) (Military records list birthdate around 1804.)
- 1 male age 16-25 (Could be Douw I. Fondey, Jr, age 22-23) (Fits with son aged 12-13 in 1800 Census.)
- 1 male 45+ (Unknown. Could be farmhand or older relative.)
- 2 females age 10-15 (Unknown. Would be under 10, if this is the family of Major Douw Fondey. Maybe 10-year-old twins?)
- 1 female 16-25 (Unknown. Perhaps Douw Fondey Jr.'s wife?)
- 1 female 26-44 (Maybe Gertrude (Vrooman) Fondey, now age 41.)

In conclusion, I am grateful for all that I have learned by logging on to the NYG&B website, and I look forward to the upcoming launch of Series 2 of the Early American Newspapers database.

Despite all the new information I have gathered, I obviously still have a lot of investigating to do. All of my research was made even more challenging when you consider the fact that there were other Isaac D. and Douw I. Fondas in Saratoga County in 1800. This might also be a good reason for Major Douw Fondey to have changed his name!

Finally, I am sure I will find more references to Major Douw I. Fondey in the decisions of the Saratoga County Courts and minutes of the New York State Assembly. There should be more information about him in records of the First and Third Regiments of N.Y. Infantry, as well as the 12th Regiment in the Provisional Army.

There also may be some clues in The Fish Family letters at Columbia University. Letters from Douw I. Fondey and Isaac D. Fonda are listed in the Special Collections inventory #90- A 75.

I welcome any information available on Vrooman, Winne, Townsend, and White families, plus all other families allied with the Fondas and Fondeys. I have lots of questions. Where are the Fondey brothers buried, and where is the will of Douw I. Fondey? Where did Gertrude (Vrooman) Fondey live in her later years, and where did she die? Did she leave a family Bible to a Vrooman cousin? Did Epenetus White leave any notes on the Fondey family?

Please feel free to contact me at bonzoknew@verizon.net if you have any information which may help.

¹⁰ U.S. Census, NARA M252, roll: 35, page 277.