

Gloriana Terry Strong

My name is Gloriana Terry Strong. If you look to your left at my headstone you'll notice it says Glorana wife of William. There is a debate whether it was pronounced Glorana or Glorianna. I tend to think the latter since Gloriana was the name given by the 16th-century poet Edmund Spenser to his character representing Queen Elizabeth I in the poem "The Faerie Queene." It would become the popular name many of the English subjects would refer to their queen by. After the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 the English troops at Tilbury hailed Queen Elizabeth with

cries of "Gloriana, Gloriana, Gloriana." I like to think my parents William and Mary Carmen Terry named me with this royal knowledge in mind.

As you are walking through the yard today you will notice how many stones are so badly damaged. The headstone to the right of mine is toppled and the earth is growing around it. As time goes on this stone will be lost to the earth along with its story. People will sometimes visit these graves and attempt to rub the image with a pencil and paper, not realizing they are doing further damage to the already vulnerable stone. Each name, date and detail

was chisled by hand and are susceptible to the elements. With the help of the Oakdale Historical Society, as well as St. John's Adopt-A-Grave program, I hope to see at least some of our headstones saved from the inevitable.

I was the mother of five children; William Nelson, Edmund, my infant son Charles, Amanda and Hannah. I am buried here with my husband, along-side my eldest son Nelson. My parents, as well as several of my siblings and their families, are also buried here at St. John's. If you attended this event last year you met my sister-in-law Martha Terry who

was married to my brother Silas. My precious niece Amanda, Silas's young daughter is buried in what is affectionately known as St. John's alphabet grave.

My daughters are both buried at Union Cemetery in Sayville and my son Edmund's grave can be found at St. Anne's, also in Sayville. My girls were buried with their husband's families, as was custom in the 19th century. I am not quite sure why Edmund is not found with any of us. But it would stand to reason that by 1891, the year of Edmund's death, St. Anne's had already been established as a mission church to St. John's for

the good part of the previous 46 years. This was in response to the center of Islip's wealth shifting to, in and around, Sayville. Edmund's 26 day old infant daughter Emma is buried here with me. She was the last of my direct family line to be buried at St. John's. The early history of St. John's cemetery is that it was a family plot. Everyone buried here is related closely, or loosely, to everyone else. It was the only cemetery in Islip until just about 1850. My daughter Amanda's young son Edward Smith was buried here as well in 1843, four years after my death. I guess my children thought I would look after

their babies in death the way I had looked after them in life.

Most women in the 18th and 19th centuries gave birth to between five and eight children. Many experienced miscarriages along the way, and one in eight women lost their lives during childbirth. In the 19th century 1 in three children, in both the US and Europe, died before their fifth birthdays. Unfortunatley my family did not escape these statistics.

I was born in 1778 two years after the signing of the Declaration of Independance. My husband William's maternal uncle, Maj. Gen. William

Floyd, was a signer of that document. The Strong family came to America in 1630 from England. William's great grandfather, Elder John Strong sired 18 children. This created a family of descendants that now covers the Northeastern seaboard from Massachusetts to Pennsylvania into New York.

My husband's father was Benijah Strong Jr., a Colonel in Maj. Gen. Floyd's Islip regiment during the Revolutionary War. Benijah's military history can be traced back to Valley Forge in 1777, a period that helped to reinvigorate the will of the Continental Army. He would go on to be

considered a war hero after he volunteered in Tallmadge's raid on Fort St. George in Mastic in 1780. This event is cited as evidence the grip of the British was loosening on Long Island as the Revolutionary War progressed.

By 1772 my father-in-law owned, almost in its entirety, what was the original Gibb Patent tract. This land was first granted to attorney Andrew Gibb in 1692 by English monarchs William and Mary. A way to visualize this property is to picture the current boundaries of the Islip School District. After the war Benijah would subsequently be elected Islip Town

Supervisor in 1787 and would also serve as Town Clerk in 1788 and again in 1795.

In 1783 America won the war against the British and became a new nation when I was just five years old. When I turned 11 in 1789 George Washington became the first president of the United States. My life would take me through eight presidencies. Including those of Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson. I would die while Martin Van Buren was in office. Van Buren had also served as NY govenor and was a founder of the Democratic Party.

As a woman married into a prestigious Islip family I was given a limited amount of formal education. But it did allow me to follow notable women of the time through writings and publications. History sheds little light on the likes of Sarah Hale who lived from 1788-1879 and was America's first woman editor. President Lincoln declared Thanksgiving a national holiday in 1864 after Hale had spent 40 years campaigning for a national day of thanks. I was also greatly impressed with Abigail Adams who I saw become our first lady in 1797. While married to President John Adams she made her concern for American

women be known in one of her many letters to her husband which said “Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the Ladies we are determined to form a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation.” She is considered one of the great inspirations of the women’s suffergist movement which was on the horizon in the late 19th century.

I would never have the right to vote in my lifetime. An interesting fact is if I had been born in 1760 rather than 1778 I would have possessed this liberty as a woman in NY. New York was one of the few states that allowed women local voting rights prior to the Revolutionary War. In 1777 this right would be revoked until 1917. New York would grant this liberty to women again, three years before women would be permitted to vote nationally.

For many of us we associate the pride in our nation through songs and hymns first written in the 19th century. “My Country Tis of Thee” is one of these such songs. The words that

eventually became a tradition, particularly among U.S. school children, were written by Samuel Francis Smith while he was studying at Andover Theological Seminary in 1831. Smith was approached by the famed organist and composer Lowell Mason who had with him some German music books. Mason wanted Smith to either translate the German, or write new text for the tunes. Smith was particularly struck by one tune (most likely unaware that it was the same melody as "God Save the King") and wrote his lyrics to it. The song was debuted by Mason on July 4, 1831, at a children's service at the

Park Street Church in Boston, Massachusetts.

I owe so much of my story to my father-in-law Capt. Benijah Strong Jr. Through his sacrifice and vision he helped to create this great nation and the Town of Islip which I was proud to call home. I'd like to celebrate his service, and that of so many others past, present and future with a rendition of this early anthem. You all know at least the first verse. Feel free to sing along.

