

Newsletter

Friends of the Bennington Battlefield

Winter 2019



Issue #4

"...a fair compliment for Hubbardton." Gen. John Stark, 1777

NEWS FROM THE FRIENDS

November 11, 2018 marked the centennial of Armistice Day, or the end of World War I. The war was a major event in New York state history as over half a million New Yorkers served. The date has become familiar to most Americans as Veterans Day. This year we thanked the veterans among us and honored those of the Great War who have faded into memory.

We invited professor Matthew Zembo, who has a well-practiced World War I impression and has studied the subject extensively, to speak. He shared some of the history and lessons of America's involvement in World War I with a surprisingly youthful crowd.

Troop 65 of Hoosick Falls was on hand to assist with the ceremonial flag retreat this year. Other scouts from the region were also in attendance. In addition to being a part of the ceremony, they were also introduced to a chapter of American history that many are unaware of.

Of course, this is a Revolutionary War battlefield. Site Assistant David Pitlyk could not resist sharing another "forgotten" chapter in American History, the brother-against-brother conflict between American patriots and loyalists. Two accounts were read- one of an anonymous Tory, the other of Joab Stafford. The accounts were compiled by Stafford's son, Richard, and are notable for capturing two sides of a personal contest between the two men at the battle.

We are proud to continue marking Veterans Day at the site and plan to do so every year to come.



Flag retreat ceremony on Veteran's Day.

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE FRIENDS

We are pleased to report that the Friends of the Bennington Battlefield has received a charter from the New York State Board of Regents which means we are now a legally incorporated entity. In addition, the IRS has advised that we have been designated a 501(c)(3) charity which means that donations to the Friends are tax deductible.

With these legal and administrative matters accomplished we have been charging ahead with various activities some of which are described in this newsletter. All of our efforts will be guided by our mission statement which says: "The purpose of this non-profit corporation shall be to promote the study of the Battle of Bennington and to conserve, develop, and interpret the Bennington Battlefield State Historic Site and surrounding area for the benefit of the public and posterity."

Peter Schaaphok, President

Membership form found on page 7.

FRIENDS OF THE BENNINGTON BATTLEFIELD OFFICERS & OPRHP CONTACTS

David Pitlyk, Site Manager
Bennington Battlefield
David.Pitlyk@parks.ny.gov

President: Peter Schaaphok
Vice President: Marylou Chicote
Treasurer: Joyce Brewer
Secretary: Phyllis Chapman

Melissa Miller, Park Manager
Grafton Lakes State Park
518-279-1155
MelissaAnn.Miller@parks.ny.gov

Educational Programs at the Battlefield

"...to conduct educational programs, services and activities...for its members and especially for local schools and the public at large." - From the mission statement, Friends of the Bennington Battlefield

Summer Student Encampment at the Battlefield August 15-16, 2018

It is often remarked that young people are not as interested in history as they should be. In the town of Hoosick, one teacher and local volunteers are working to reverse this trend and instill a love of history at an early age.

Elementary students from Hoosick Falls Central School visited the site in August as part of the Summer History Institute put together by local teacher Katie Brownell. Participating students visited other locations



Looks like the militia has arrived!



Setting up camp the Revolutionary way.

besides the battlefield, including Fort Ticonderoga and Saratoga National Historical Park. They conducted research as a prelude to their visit at the Louis Miller Museum. With the help of Peter Schaaphok of the Brigade of the American Revolution and Friends of Bennington Battlefield, students learned how to authentically encamp as Revolutionary War soldiers. Friends member Phyllis Chapman taught students how to cook over an open-fire.

On the anniversary of the battle, August 16, students welcomed visitors into their encampment and gave tours to adults who were occasionally challenged by sentries not much taller than their "muskets."

When it came time for the annual ceremony marking the occasion, a group of students were selected as readers and shared some of the history that they had just learned and lived.



A student reader at the Commemoration Ceremony.



With their mock cannon, campers learn how much teamwork goes into firing one.

A local TV station sent two staff members to the site at 6am (!) to investigate the activities and interview the campers. They enthusiastically described what they had been doing, and invited them to taste test a pit-cooked breakfast of waffles and bacon.



Campfire stories.



Cleanup is just as important as cooking and eating- and not so bad when many hands are employed.



READERS' CORNER



The Right Reverend Robert McConnell Hatch served on the New Hampshire Bicentennial Commission and wrote *Major John Andre: A Gallant in Spy's Clothing* and *Thrust for Canada: The American Attempt on Quebec, 1775-1776*. His work on Bennington, *Storm on My Left: The Battle of Bennington*, has not been published. The exact date of the manuscript is not certain, but applicable comments have been inserted in the hopes of providing unobtrusive updates. *Storm on My Left* provides ample context for the events and figures that led to the battle before giving a gripping account of the battle itself. This is the focus of the last installment in a series of excerpts published with the consent of Louise Hatch Cass, daughter of the late author.

“Or Molly Sleeps a Widow”

1

The next day, August 16, the Lord gave John Stark his sunshine. The sky was a flat blue, not a leaf moved and it was turning hot. The Walloomsac ran bank-full past the huts where Charles de Lanaudiere and his sixty Canadians were stationed.

The Rev. Jedidiah Dewey, minister of Bennington's meetinghouse and father of Captain Elijah Dewey in Colonel Brush's regiment, was to spend much of the day in prayer. Members of his flock followed his lead, some of them assembling on a hilltop within sound of the battlefield. The women of Williamstown gathered for prayer in a log schoolhouse that had served the early settlers as a church.

Others turned to more mundane pursuits. Mary Fay, daughter of the proprietor of the Catamount Tavern, baked bread for Stark's troops while her small son cut wood and stoked the brick oven. Fifteen-year-old Levi Smedley set forth from Williamstown with freshly baked bread for his father's company.

Refugees continued to stream into Bennington. Several were lodged in the home of Lieutenant Nathaniel Fillmore, who was on duty with Elijah Dewey's company. Others found asylum in Pownal and Williamstown, among them the wife of Colonel John Williams of White Creek, who is recorded as having sold her husband's surgical instruments to Dr. Samuel Porter, a Williamstown physician. John Wallace, a New Hampshire man in Stark's battalion, described some of the refugees he saw: “Women and Children flying before the enemy with there Effects, women crying, sum walking, sum Rideing, the men Joyn our army, the women left to shift for themselves, sum Rideing on horses with there Children at there Brests, Sum before, sum behind tyed to there mothers.”⁶ As they crowded the roads into Massachusetts they met Berkshire recruits on their way north.

The Council of Safety met early at the Catamount Tavern. On the 13th it had urged the colonels of the Vermont militia to speed troops to Bennington “without a moment's Loss of Time” because “a Large Body of the Enemy's Troops Were Discovered two hours ago in St. Koik, 12 Miles from this Place, and another Body at Cambridge, 18 Miles from this.” The colonels were advised that “no small excuse at this Juncture can be received.”⁷

The day before the Council had called for lead for bullets “as it is expected, every minute, an action will commence between our troops and the enemies, within four of five miles of this place.” That morning it sent instructions to Colonel John Williams at White Creek to bring up his troops or, if the enemy should retreat, to patrol the road from Sancoick to Hoosick and from Hoosick to Pownal.⁸

READERS' CORNER (Continued)

Upon receiving Stark's summons, Colonel Stafford and the Green Mountain Boys left Manchester on the rainy 15th and by midnight were camped a mile short of Bennington. About 140 in number, they spent part of the morning trying to dry out their muskets. Moreover, they were short of ammunition and would have to find some in Bennington. Stafford must have wondered if they would be on time for any action that day.

Stark's army prepared for battle. Muskets were readied, ammunition distributed, gunpowder checked against dampness. A pair of flags hung limply in the hot sun. One had a bright green canton with five painted white stars set in a sea-green field. It was small, only about seventeen by nineteen inches, and could be taken into battle. The other, almost ten feet by five, was probably hoisted over Stark's encampment. Its navy canton was stitched with thirteen seven-pointed stars arched over an eloquent "76." And it was graced with thirteen red and white stripes. Some have identified it as the first approximation of the national flag ever unfurled by American troops. [The Bennington flag has been associated with the battle for some time, but is now commonly accepted as a 19th century invention. – Ed.]

That morning David McClary of Nichol's regiment, who on the preceding Sabbath had advised his comrades to observe the Lord's Day respectfully, consulted the Bible he had brought with him from Londonderry. The Pittsfield militia would not set forth until they had been prayed over by Parson Allen, who invoked the Almighty to "teach their hands to war and their fingers to fight" and so fired them up that they were to ascribe the battle's outcome to the efficacy of his prayer. Silas Robinson steeled himself with a shot of gin mixed with gunpowder. "When I drank that," he would admit to his descendants, "I tell you, I fought!"⁹

On Baum's hilltop a courier from Burgoyne declared himself to the pickets at the redoubt. [The account of J.F. Wasmus, published in English in 1990, suggests that amazingly there were no pickets. – Ed.] He was Major John Campbell, husband of St. Luc de LaCorne's daughter Anne Marie, with a message for his father-in-law. He would remain with Baum's corps, and LaCorne assigned him a detail of Indians.

When Stark was ready he ordered Sam Herrick with his Rangers and the Bennington militia to embark on the pincer that would close the southwest corner of the redoubt. His command would total 300. Because he must take his men across pastures where they would be seen from the redoubt he ordered them to go in twos and threes to give the impression that they were an informal assemblage of Tories on their way to join the enemy. The homespun most of them wore would work in his favor. He would ford the Walloomsac where it ran north beneath Stark's encampment, cross into New York State, march the length of a high ridge and again wade the Walloosmac after it had angled west toward its confluence with the Hoosic. Coming out on the road, he would ascend the hillside to the redoubt.

Stark led his army northward on the road toward Sancoick. Where it veered west he sent Moses Nichols with 200 New Hampshire men over the arc that curved into New York State north of the Walloomsac. Nichols would have the advantage of pulling behind a ridge that would hide his troops all the way to the redoubt and allow them to stay in formation instead of masquerading as Tories. He had not gone far when he called for reinforcements and was assigned 100 additional men. He must time his progress so that he emerged at the redoubt from the north when Herrick came in from the southwest.

⁹ Issac Jennings: "Memorials of a Century", p. 197.

READERS' CORNER (cont.)

After crossing the Walloomsac Stark ordered out David Hobart and Thomas Stickney on a smaller pincers movement against the enemy's right, Hobart with his northern New Hampshire men on the left, Stickney on the right with his own troops. Their combined strength was about 300. They would go into action at the moment when they heard gunfire at the redoubt.

To divert his forces while unfolding his army, Stark had 100 men demonstrate on a hillside in sight of the enemy. Private Thomas Mellen would remember: "We were marched round and round in a circular hill I till we were tired. Stark said it was to amuse the Germans. All the while a cannonade was kept up upon us from their breastworks. It hurt nobody, and it lessened our fear of the great guns."¹⁰

Riding forward to size up their foe, Stark and Warner drew an ineffectual cannonade from one of Bach's three-pounders. "Those rascals know I am an officer!" Stark shouted. "Don't you see how they honor me with a big gun as a salute?"

By three o'clock Herrick and Nichols converged on the redoubt. Just as they hoped, Herrick's troops had been taken for Tories, disguised by their casual formation and everyday clothes. In bypassing Baum's rear guard on the Sancoick road their ranks had thinned out so that gaps opened between them. Jesse Field of Dewey's company was alarmed: "I was on the right front of the party. When we came in sight of the works we halted and it seemed that the rear of our party had been detained for some cause and did not come on so quick as they ought to have done. We stood but a short time when the firing commenced from the party on the north. I recollect hearing Lieutenant ----- exclaim, 'My God, what are we doing? They are killing our brothers! Why are we not ordered to fire?' In a moment our adjutant came up and ordered us to advance."¹¹

Nichols opened fire first. When Herrick came up he engaged the Indians outside the redoubt. One of his rangers, Silas Walbridge, would recall: "Just before we arrived at the redoubt we came in sight of a party of Indians and fired on them. They retreated to the northwest, leaving two killed."¹² More may have fallen but soon all of Baum's Indians, some still jangling from their purloined cowbells, funneled through the gap between the American pincers and fled across the country to the Hudson.

Each American was now on his own, taking aim from behind whatever cover he could find. Some crouched in back of blowdowns. Some propped their muskets on stumps and rocks. Many fired from behind trees. It was the kind of warfare Rogers Rangers had waged that grabbed every advantage the forest offered. To the European-trained soldiers in Baum's redoubt it was an unheard-of way to fight.

Stark had waited with his reserve on the road, straining for the sound of gunfire. He had called in the men who were diverting the enemy and had readied his ranks, but he must hold them in leash. One of Bach's three-pounders had fired at the reserve but was wide of the mark. The reserve had advanced slowly and had often halted. Stark had kept consulting his watch. "It's time they were there," he said to Warner.¹³ He was an impatient man who made few allowances, and he was not accustomed to delay. He had grown fretful and testy.

When he heard the shots he pointed his sword at the redoubt and proclaimed for all to hear, "There are the redcoats and the Tories! They are ours or tonight Molly Stark sleeps a widow!" It was a battle cry that delighted and exhilarated his troops.

10.. J.D. Butler: "Address on the Battle of Bennington," pp. 26-9.

11 Ibid.

12. Ibid

13`Caleb Stark: "Memoir and Official Correspondence of General Stark, p. 62..

INTERPRETATION AT THE BATTLEFIELD

An important goal of the Friends' Mission Statement is to expand and improve the interpretive and educational resources the site can offer. Bob Hoar, a local historian, has been serving as a tour guide/interpreter at the Battlefield for two seasons. He offers the following remarks about the program.

The Battlefield attracts national historical tourists, who like to visit as many cultural sites as they can. Servicemen and women visit these sites and reflect upon their personal experiences. The four states of New York, Vermont, New Hampshire and Massachusetts all trace back proud historical connections to this battle.

A visit to the Bennington Battlefield or the Battle Monument is often on the “to do” list for visitors from around the region. The town of Hoosick enjoys the Battlefield park and there are many regular local visitors. It is a great place for lunch, a walk or a picnic. People who are just driving by but may not know of the battle and stop in form a large percentage of our visitors, as do “leaf peepers” in the fall. Students and school groups are also becoming more frequent.

The docent sets up a tent and information table whenever on duty and greets visitors interested in history. This is an extension of the monthly schedule of historical talks, nature walks and cultural history programs. The focus is upon answering questions and explaining the battle and battlefield. The bronze relief map made in 1927 is the go to interpretive tool the docents use. Many visitors are impressed by what they learn during their visit. Often people wonder why they were not taught this history in school.

For the past two seasons, Bob has been at his post Thursday through Sunday, and has had volunteer assistance on Thursdays and Fridays. The weather can be a factor and rainy days there may not be a need for staff. The exception being Saturday, when if it is raining, Bob often sets up in the Frank Stevens Pavilion. Saturday is of course the busiest day.

Finding the docents is easy. Bennington Battlefield State Historic site is located on Route 67 in Hoosick, New York. Drive up the hill on Battlefield Lane. At the first parking lot, explore the information and history building, a small green structure with panoramic wall maps and brochures for visitors. There you will also find the Frank Stevens Pavilion and a picnic area. Going further to the top of Hessian Hill, walking or driving, you will now find a friendly docent. There are three interpretive panels near the flagpole explaining the battle. The docents expand upon this information. A newly rebuilt Dragoon Breastworks is also waiting to be explored.

The Battle of Bennington is among the most important and most fascinating battles in our nation’s history. Other local sites exhibit markers noting the Battle. Hiland Hall, a former governor of Vermont, initiated public recognition of the Battle with the building of the Bennington Battle Monument, completed in 1891 and dedicated in 1892. The Bennington Battlefield Park was created in 1927. The Bennington Museum is another partner in interpreting this event, with a gallery of visuals and artifacts relevant to the Battle.



A historic photo of the Battlefield.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS SUMMER 2018

Events for 2019 are still in the planning stage; however, a few are regularly scheduled programs. These include the August 16, (Battle Day) Commemoration Ceremony, which will take place on August 16, time to be determined.

In addition, guided tours of the Battlefield will be offered during New York's Pathways Through History weekend, which will be June 15th and 16th. Check the Bennington Battlefield's web page for upcoming additions to the schedule.

FRIENDS OF THE BENNINGTON BATTLEFIELD MEMBERSHIP ENROLLMENT FORM

Attached is our membership form for 2019. Given that our dues are quite modest, we hope that as many history-minded folks as possible will join and support our organization. We will be holding our first annual membership meeting as an incorporated entity on Sunday, March 3, 2019 at the Louis Miller Museum in Hoosick Falls and look forward to seeing you there.

Detach and mail the completed form

**The Friends of the Bennington Battlefield
PO Box 251
Hoosick Falls, NY 12090**

2019 Membership Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

Town/City: _____ **State:** _____ **Zipcode:** _____

Email Address: _____ **Phone No.:** _____

Membership Categories *Please check which applies*

Individual/Family: \$15.00 _____ Business: \$ 30.00 _____ Patron: \$50.00 _____

Please make checks payable to The Friends of the Bennington Battlefield and mail to:
PO Box 251, Hoosick Falls, NY 12090

Thank you for your support!