

❧ FORT GEORGE ADVICE ❧

The Newsletter of the Lake George Battlefield Park (Fort George) Alliance

PO BOX 26, LAKE GEORGE, NEW YORK 12845

Summer/Fall 2013

The Ruins of Fort George ❧

By Russell P. Bellico

Although only one stone bastion and casemates were completed at the southwest corner of the fort during the French and Indian War, Fort George underwent further construction during the American Revolution with the addition of barracks located between the walls of the bastion. Part of the fortification was destroyed during the American evacuation of the post in 1777, but the fort was later reoccupied by patriot units until 1780 when the garrison was forced to capitulate to a large force of British regulars, Loyalists, and Native Americans. Shortly thereafter, the fort was set afire by the departing British army.

The ruins of the fort remained relatively untouched after the American Revolution. The first state leases to settlers in 1783 stipulated that no "Bricks, Timber or Stones ... be removed" or any fortifications dismantled.¹ In 1819 the bastion walls of Fort George were described as "still twenty feet high and in pretty good preservation."² Eleven years later Jared Sparks, the future president of Harvard University, recorded that the remains of Fort George were "very irregular, about 70 yds Long & 50 wide" with stone walls "15 to 20 feet" high and "subterranean apartments strongly walled and covered over."³ In a notation attached to his drawing of the fort, Sparks wrote that the space "between the exterior and interior walls, was arched over & covered with earth, containing apparently rooms & vaults."⁴

A 1920 photograph of the ruins of the fort showed two great mounds

where the former bastion walls once stood. In his report to the New York State Historical Association a few years earlier, Elwyn Seelye, the superintendent of the Lake George Battlefield Park, suggested that "removal of the debris and rubbish" from the walls of the fort would reveal "its original form and outlines."⁶ (During the early decades of the twentieth century, the park was under the custodial care of the New York State Historical Association.) In 1921 Stewart MacFarland, a member of the New York State Assembly who had succeeded Seelye as the park superintendent, supervised the rebuilding of the east wall of the fort. George D. Pratt, a life member of the NYSHA and the donor of the bronze Native American statue to the Battlefield Park, had provided the funds to make the repairs to the stone

bastion.⁷ On August 13, 1921, the *Lake George Mirror* reported that the "east wall ha[d] been entirely refaced and the excavation of the interior" had begun and "with the exception of the upper parts, the stone walls of the various rooms are in an excellent state of preservation."⁸ In a subsequent report to the NYSHA, MacFarland commented that many visitors had inquired about a museum, offering "to donate relics," and he hoped that a "small building" could be built "from the stone and on the foundation of the officers barracks which could be used as a museum."⁹

Work at Battlefield Park often revealed features that could be associated with its military past. While constructing stone pillars at the lake

continued on page 4



*Ruins of Fort George looking north. Photo by E. J. Stein taken on July 22, 1920.
(New York State Museum)*

The Alliance supports the historic preservation, conservation, interpretation and associated maintenance, improvement and development of the Lake George Battlefield Park at Lake George, New York.

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Secretary's Notes ❧

By Nadine Battaglia

This message is the first I've penned for the *Fort George Advice* that is touched with sadness. I am sorry to share with you the loss of our charter member, John J. Blanchfield, who left us on November 3, 2012 at age 88. John and Patricia Blanchfield became members of the Alliance on November 5, 2001.

In our earlier days, it was the Blanchfield's energy which helped forge the nexus of events leading to the creation of the Fort George Alliance, which ultimately achieved the prime victory of having the Fort designated on the National Register of Historic Places. Additionally, for those of you who may not be aware, Mr. Blanchfield was not only a U.S. Army World War II combat veteran, but a prisoner of war who escaped German captivity and made his way back safely to the American forces.

We send our most sensitive sympathies to Patricia Blanchfield and her family, as well as to Alliance members Beverly Bischer, who lost her mother last November, and to Fred Thomson, who suddenly and unexpectedly lost his son last November as well.

And, I am unhappy to report that Herman C. (Charlie) Brown resigned as Trustee of the Fort George Alliance on August 17th owing to health related concerns. We wish Charlie a fast recovery of health, so that we may look forward to his continued vision and guidance in Fort George matters.

Fortunately, Alliance member Nancy Ross Bellamy stepped up to the plate and filled the open Trustee's position by unanimous vote at the annual membership meeting at Fort George on the same day. On that subject, Lyn Karig Hohmann was re-elected for another year as President; Gustaf S. Myhrberg was elected Vice President, Lawrence Bennett was elected Trustee, and Russell Bellico and Todd Earl continue as Trustees. As both Adirondack Trust Bank and Glens Falls National Bank are Alliance members, I will contact them to ask if they might recommend a financial expert who would be willing to become Treasurer of the Alliance as Bill Herrlich wishes to retire from the position.

Otherwise, speaking for the Alliance, we continue our resolve to "... preserve and secure the history of Fort George for posterity." To that end, please remind your friends and neighbors about the important history of Fort George and invite them to come and participate. ■

Till next time -- respectfully submitted from your correspondent,
Nadine



Ernie Hass with Russ Bellico.



President's Welcome

By Lyn Karig Hohmann

Welcome to the summer edition of the *Fort George Advice!* We hope you will find the articles in this edition informative and recognize that the Board is working to implement the advice of the membership. We have more to do but we are working to reach into our community to be seen and to partner with organizations who are also working to preserve, protect and educate about the history we all treasure.

If you have been to the Beach House, you will see a display of our painting of the Park as it appeared in 1759. (And, please, take a ride to the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum if you haven't already and see the original on display at a showing of Ernie Haas' paintings! Russ Bellico and I both went to the opening ceremony and our painting was beautifully displayed as a centerpiece of the show!)

We also provided documentation to the "Trails Master Plan for the West Side of Lake George" that you have probably read about last fall and spring. (<http://www.boltonnewyork.com/public-notice/> Upper right of web page; see page 36 and 37.)

At last year's annual meeting, we spoke of innovations that would appeal to younger persons visiting the Park sites. I hope we can develop this into an walk-around tool/game for use in the Park until better tools are implemented.

One reading was done in the fall and one in the spring. These were done with a hand held GPS unit with the error of about 20 feet. Even so, they do agree quite well. Such GPS readings would be the first step for developing a digital augmented reality program here at the park. The readings are contained in this newsletter and I would invite you to check them out for accuracy and send me your own readings. Some variation is expected based on where

one stands, but I have tried to provide that information. Thank you in advance for your part in advancing our Park! Your readings can be sent to our email (Yes, we have an email!!): FortGeorgeAlliance@gmail.com.

Members, please note: We are looking for a member with some accounting skills and familiarity with regulations regarding not for profits to replace our long time Treasurer, Bill Herrlich, who is looking to retire from this position. If you have this skill set or know an Alliance member who does, please let us know.

We want to thank Dr. Ventner for bringing to our attention the need for enhanced signage on Diamond Island. Much like our own park, signage that is present at this site needs updating to bring the story of the Island more meaningfully to the Island's visitors. There are many projects of this type around our area that needs these type of champions. ■

Thank you



GPS Points of Interest in Lake George Battlefield Park			
Point of Interest	N	W	Notes
Gravestone of the Unknowns	43° 25.032'	073° 42.427'	El 359
	43° 25.031'	073° 42.432'	El 350
King Hendrick/Johnson	43° 25.044'	073° 42.415'	El 376
	43° 25.042'	073° 42.416'	El 390
Stockade Fort/Hospital	43° 25.059'	073° 42.370	El 355 – middle of area
Quarry? On road	43° 24.939'	073° 42.355'	El 429
	43° 24.937'	073° 42.355'	El 406
Fort George at entrance	43° 24.896'	073° 42.403'	El 510
Fort George at signage	43° 24.903'	073° 42.404'	El 426
Entrenchment	43° 24.880'	073° 42.357'	El 452
	43° 24.883'	073° 42.352'	El 487
Sally port	43° 24.889'	073° 42.396'	El 449
Hut Site?	43° 24.843'	073° 42.410'	El 410
	43° 25.022'	073° 42.411'	El 387
Native American Statue	43° 24.984'	073° 42.418'	El 439
	43° 24.985'	073° 42.425'	El 430
Quarry/Kiln – on trail facing	43° 24.966'	073° 42.430	El 429
Kiln (standing by it)	43° 24.960'	073° 42.449'	El 399
Quarry (standing in it)	43° 24.960'	073° 42.437'	El 436

The Ruins of Fort George

continued from page 1

entrance to the park in 1921, laborers unearthed a brick fireplace, and extensive brush cutting in 1928 uncovered "rifle pits and old stone walls."¹⁰ (A photograph taken in 1920 shows a rock depression with a sign for "rifle pits.") Participants in an archaeological dig in 1924 by the Field Exploration Committee of the New York Historical Society discovered a number of military relics, including French buttons.¹¹

There have been suggestions that the original restoration of the fort's bastion occurred during the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps. However, documentary evidence seems to indicate that the work was completed in 1921. Newspaper articles, the Battlefield superintendent reports, and postcards by C.W. Hughes & Co. and J. S. Wooley printed during the 1920s showing the completed bastion's east wall are all consistent with the 1921 date. The CCC did help enlarge the Fort George campsite during the 1930s.¹² (In 1923 the state had acquired an additional eight + acres, which were developed during the 1920s as a "free camping ground adjoining the Park."¹³) One lingering question involves cannonballs that were once displayed at the entrance of a CCC barracks in Bolton Landing during the 1930s – could these have come from the Fort George campsite work?¹⁴

Today the crusty stone wall of the southwest bastion of Fort George still dominates the landscape of the area, as it once did more than 250 years ago. We are fortunate today that earlier history-minded generations made the effort to preserve the hallowed grounds of Battlefield Park. ■



C.W. Hughes & Co. postcard, first printed during the 1920s, showing the restored east wall of the southwest bastion. (Author's collection)

NOTES

1. *New York in the Revolution as Colon and State: A Compilation of Documents and Records from the Office of the State Comptroller* (Albany, 1901), 47-48; [E.B. O'Callaghan], comp., *Calendar of N.Y. Colonial Manuscripts: Indorsed Land Papers 1643-1863* (1864; reprint ed., Harrison, NY: Harbor Hill Books, 1987), 656.
2. Benjamin Silliman, *Remarks, Made on a Short Tour, Between Hartford and Quebec in the Autumn of 1819* (New Haven, S. Converse, 1820), 160.
3. Jared Sparks, "Plans & Descriptions of Gates's Camp, Ticonderoga, Crown Point, St John's and Other Places," 1830, MS 128.3.3a, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; Sparks also mentioned a "covered way to the Lake" from the fort. *Ibid.*, 3a.
4. Sparks, "Plans & Descriptions," 4a.
5. J.H. French, *Gazetteer of the State of New York* (1860; reprint ed., Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, Inc., 2002), 673; B. F. DeCosta, *Notes on the History of Fort George* (New York: J. Sabin & Sons, 1871), 63.
6. "Lake George Battleground Park," *Proceedings of the New York State Historical Association* 16 (1917): 59.
7. "Battlefield Parks," *Proceedings of the New York State Historical Association* 20 (1922): 12.
8. *Lake George Mirror*, 13 August 1921; In 1930 the LGM urged the NYSHA and the state of New York to undertake a more extensive reconstruction of Fort George. LGM, 5 July 1930.
9. "Battlefield Parks." *Proceedings of the New York State Historical Association* 21 (1923): 18.
10. *Ibid.*, 27 (1929): 21; Stewart MacFarland also noted 150,000 visitors to the park in 1928. *Ibid.*
11. William Louis Calver and Reginald Pelham Bolton, *History Written with Pick and Shovel* (New York: The New-York Historical Society, 1950), 229-30; Newspaper stories also mentioned that artifacts had been found in the area of Fort George. *Lake George Mirror*, 30 July 1921; *Glens Falls Post-Star*, 3 July 1936.
12. Martin Podskoch, *Adirondack Civilian Conservation Corps Camps: History, Memories & Legacy of the CCC* (East Hampton, CT: Podskoch Press, 2011), 51, 68; In a telephone interview (12/14/12) Mr. Podskoch stated that he had no information about the CCC being involved in rebuilding the fort.
13. "Report of Lake George Battleground Park," *Proceedings of the New York State Historical Association* 22 (1924): 18; *Ibid.*, 25 (1927): 20.
14. Podskoch, *Adirondack Civilian Conservation Corps Camps*, 73; Cannonballs were discovered at the Saratoga battlefield by CCC men stationed at the Stillwater CCC camp.



The Forgotten Battle of Diamond Island &

By Bruce M. Venter

Today it's a State-owned "picnic" island. But Diamond Island witnessed a horrific bombardment by gun boats manned by Patriots during the American Revolution.

The fight occurred during British Lieutenant General John Burgoyne's 1777 campaign to capture Albany. Initially, Burgoyne's 9,000 man army had successfully captured Fort Ticonderoga and Mount Independence in July.

When Burgoyne's progress stalled near Skenesborough (present-day Whitehall, NY), his supplies were quickly eaten up by his extended campaign. Since his army could not easily live off the land, except for shooting an occasional deer or bear, or boiling up a captured rattlesnake or turtle, the 54-year old general established a long supply line back to Canada. It was anchored by Fort George at the southern end of Lake George and by Fort Ticonderoga at the northern end. Between the two forts, a supply depot, guarded by two companies of the 47th Regiment of Foot under Captain Thomas Aubrey was fixed on Diamond Island.

By mid-September, the British army had crossed the Hudson River near present day Schuylerville. Earlier in the campaign, Major General Philip Schuyler had the foresight to propose keeping some militia in "the Grants" (present-day Vermont) on Burgoyne's left flank, ready to capitalize on any mistake made by the British general.

Eyeing an advantage, Major General Horatio Gates who had succeeded Schuyler sought to benefit from his adversary's predicament. He ordered Major General Benjamin Lincoln with nearly 2,000 New England militiamen to operate against Burgoyne's rear.

Lincoln decided to divide his force into three separate commands of about 500 men each. Colonel Benjamin Woodbridge's command was sent

to capture Skenesborough. Colonel Samuel Johnson marched to Mount Independence where he engaged some Germans guarding that position. The third Patriot command, also about 500 men under Colonel John Brown was ordered to attack the British outer fortifications at Fort Ticonderoga.

Brown's surprise was flawless. A dawn attack on September 18 captured a Lake George landing outpost. Next Brown's men quickly subdued a block house at the saw mill. Over a hundred American prisoners fell into his hands, plus nearly 300 of the enemy.

Lacking siege artillery, Brown sought to bluff his way into the fort. Under a flag of truce he demanded the fort's immediate surrender. His opponent's response was gutsy. Brigadier General Henry Powell calmly assured the 33-year old colonel that, "The garrison entrusted to my care I shall defend to the last." After only four days, Brown abandoned his siege and headed for his next target at Diamond Island.

Brown's flotilla consisted of a sloop mounting three guns, two gun boats with one cannon each and seventeen bateaux, in all carrying 420 officers and men.

Brown was determined to attack Diamond Island at dawn on September 23rd. But a storm forced him ashore for the night. With swells lapping over the gunwales of his bateaux, Brown sought shelter at Sabbath Day Point. Undeterred by the gusty weather, the American armada set out again on September 24th determined to capture Diamond Island.

By about 9 A.M. Brown's fleet reached the island. His battle plan was simple. The captured sloop with three guns mounted sailed through the choppy water in the center of the flotilla. The sloop was flanked on either side by the gunboats. These three boats fired on the north end of the island. The remaining bateaux circled the island waiting for a chance

to launch a landing.

But that opportunity never came. Captain Aubrey, a veteran of Bunker Hill, and his two companies, perhaps 80 men altogether with six cannon, had been warned the Americans were coming. They were well prepared. During the interim 36 hours before Brown's arrival, the regulars had thrown up breastworks and emplaced some heavy guns which Burgoyne had left behind. The Redcoats used this surplus artillery with skill and effect.

As Brown later reported, there was "hot fire" from both sides, but the enemy's accuracy hulled the sloop "between wind and water." One can imagine the difficulty the inexperienced western Massachusetts militiamen-turned-sailors must have been up against, their crafts heaving in the rough water, as they tried to get a well aimed shot at the Redcoat defenses. The British, on the other hand, had the advantage of stationary positions from which to cannonade the enemy.

After nearly a continuous two hour bombardment of Diamond Island, Brown was forced to give up the fight. The hot, unceasing firing caused two of his guns to burst. The water-soaked decks of the boats were spattered with blood and guts. The colonel's sloop was so badly damaged it had to be towed from the action by one of the other boats.

Brown's little fleet limped off to the east side of Lake George, landing in Van Wormer's (Warner) Bay, according to one veteran's pension account. His blackened and bruised troops had suffered two men killed, two mortally

continued on page 6



The Forgotten Battle of Diamond Island

continued from page 5

wounded and several others with minor injuries. Brown later claimed he burned his boats and all the baggage that could not be carried off before heading over an old Indian trail to Skenesborough.

The British saw things differently. The commander at Fort George, Lieutenant George Irwine reported to Burgoyne about the attack on Diamond Island. Irwine claimed Captain Aubrey's men pursued the retreating Americans, recapturing an abandoned gun boat with its cannon intact and "a good quantity of ammunition. There was not a man killed or hurt during the whole action of his Majesty's Troops," he added.

Burgoyne probably found little solace in the stunning British victory on Lake George. Less than a month later, he was forced to surrender to Gates on October 17, 1777.

How much Brown's actions at Ticonderoga and Diamond Island affected Burgoyne's thinking is difficult to assess. The general himself, however, referenced the fight at Diamond Island in detail when he wrote a lengthy defense of his actions to Lord George Germain, British Secretary of State for the Colonies.

Today Diamond Island sits pristinely amid the crystal clear blue waters of Lake George. Without signage to explain the battle site, it is impossible for visitors to recall in their mind's eye the ear-numbing blasts of cannon shot, screaming orders, and the painful cries of bloodied Patriots that once pierced the air above this little piece of land on September 24, 1777. ■

Dr. Bruce M. Venter is president of America's History, LLC, a tour and conference company. A longer version of this article appeared in the May/June 2011 issue of Patriots of the American Revolution magazine.

Alliance remembers the Unknowns in the Park

On Memorial Day this year, the Officers of the Fort George Alliance gathered in the Park to remember and honor the four Unknowns of the Battle of Lake George. Lauren Sheridan, the curator of Fort William Henry, joined the small group. Lyn Hohmann, President, recounted briefly the story of the Battle and noted these four were found during road construction in the 1930's near the site of the Bloody Morning Scout. She noted the significance of this Battle in 1755, the only victory for the British that year. In addition to native Americans, this Battle was fought by colonists, our ancestors. Only one British officer was present with Johnson's troops. The skills that the colonists learned during this and their other activities during this war formed the base for the victory in the Revolution. She noted that they should be remembered as we remember all the other unknowns who have died in the service of their country. The officers placed a wreath and an American flag at the site. The goal is to alert persons enjoying the park that this site represents something significant and deserves a moment of pause.

In researching the story of the Unknowns, an article from the Pueblo Indicator, September 28, 1935, was found that spoke of the efforts to remember the Unknowns. The following is taken from the article, "Unknown, But Not 'Unwept, Unhonored or Unsung'" written by Elmo Scott Watson:

"Where sleeps the Unknown Soldier? One day last September hundreds of visitors gathered at Fort George Battlefield park (sic) near Lake George, N.Y., to attend ceremonies at the burial of four unknown soldiers of Colonial war days. The bones of the soldiers were discovered in 1931 during excavation for a new state

highway between Glens Falls and Lake George and were identified as those of men who fell in 1755 during the Bloody Morning Scout....."

"Many a Colonial American lost his life and found an unmarked grave in the forests surrounding Lake George and Lake Champlain in those days. So this monument is not only a memorial to the four whose dust was given honored burial this year but also to all the other Unknown Soldiers of the days when Great Britain and France were striving mightily for mastery of this continent".

We could not agree more and we hope in future years to find ways to incorporate the honoring of these soldiers into other Memorial Day activities in this region. It is unfortunate that what was celebrated so widely in 1935 did not merit any notice in our local papers in 2013. We hope for better in the future. ■

(The complete article from The Pueblo Indicator is available through Google News on the Internet.)



Membership 2013-14

The Lake George Battlefield Park (Fort George) Alliance extends a sincere Thank You to its members for their generous support during the period from April 1, 2012 to March 31, 2013. We have made every effort to ensure the accuracy of the lists of members that follow. Please notify us immediately of any errors or omissions, so that we may revise our records.

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- Marcia J. Verville, Lake George, NY

Vanished Vessels Made Visible: Marine Artist Ernest Haas

The Lake Champlain Maritime Museum is currently presenting a unique one-time exhibition of the nautical-historical paintings by Ernest Haas, the well-known marine artist from South Burlington, VT. Haas has completed commissions for clients throughout the Northeast and Canada and some of them, including the Fort George Alliance, have been asked to permit the Museum to load

their paintings for this exhibit. Several of the artist's newest paintings will also be shown.

The exhibit will start June 1st and end August 18th. It will be open to visitors 10:00 am to 5:00 pm daily including Sundays. The exhibit is presented in the Owen Education Center on the Museum grounds at Basin Harbor, VT. ■

