

❧ FORT GEORGE ADVICE ❧

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

PO BOX 26, LAKE GEORGE, NEW YORK 12845

Winter 2012



HUZZAH! HUZZAH! HUZZAH! HUZZAH!

The Lake George Battlefield Park (Fort George) Alliance is excited and pleased to announce that the Lake George Battlefield Park and associated lands has been officially added to the National Register of Historic Places as of December 30, 2011.

The Officers and Board of Trustees would like to thank our membership for its continuing support in obtaining this distinction. There is a special thank you due to Col. Herman Charles Brown for his steadfast leadership in reaching this goal.

The Fort George Hospital During the American Revolution ❧

By Russell P. Bellico, *Professor Emeritus, Westfield State University*

There were many descriptions written of Fort George during the American Revolution, including that of Charles Carroll, one of the emissaries to Canada in 1776, who noted that the fort was "a small bastion, faced with stone" with "one barrack, which occupied almost the whole space between the walls."¹ However, there has been some ambiguous material relating to the type of structures comprising the "General Hospital" at Fort George during this period.

Following the chaotic American retreat from Canada in June 1776, Major General Horatio Gates established a hospital at Fort George in order to remove soldiers with smallpox and other infectious diseases from the rest of the army at Ticonderoga. Gates

informed George Washington that the Northern Army was "infected with pestilence... To put this evil from us, a General Hospital is established at Fort George... where every infected person is immediately sent."² On July 7 Dr. Samuel Stringer, the medical director of the Northern Department, ordered Dr. Jonathan Potts "to have the sheds on the lake shore [Lake George] fitted up with cribs or berths for their reception; and hurry those that are to be built where the old fort stood, as fast as possible" and suggested that "hemlock tops... will be no[t] bad bedding."³ Potts, a 29-year-old Pennsylvania physician, had initially been appointed to direct the hospital in Canada but had been reassigned to take charge of the general hospital at Fort George after the American

retreat from Canada. While Potts' correspondence only mentions sheds, others described different structures. In a letter written to George Washington on July 12, Major General Philip Schuyler, the commander of the Northern Army, noted that "two houses, capable of containing about three hundred and fifty" men were ready for the sick at Fort George "and a sufficient quantity of boards is collected under which to shelter the remainder comfortably until hospitals can be erected."⁴

Fort George was primarily a hospital for smallpox and other highly infectious diseases, therefore reinforcements for the Northern Army were often routed through Skenesborough (present-day Whitehall) to avoid *continued on page 4*

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

It is with extreme pleasure that I add my thoughts to this very special edition of the *Fort George Advice*. Having participated along with all of you on what has turned out to be a long and arduous journey on the trail to Fort George's placement on the National Register of Historic Places, I can only say that my heart is joyous because of our spectacular news!

Because I live near Fort George, I am able to frequently visit and take walks through the profoundly historic grounds. Many times, through these last seasons when I arrived at the Fort, I would shake my head and just say, "Not yet!" to the spirit of the park. But by the time to leave came around, I always felt lifted and reassured that we would prevail in our intention. And, we have! It is one of the greater experiences of my life to have been able to help honor in perpetuity those who lived, fought and died at Fort George during the infancy of our nation, and I couldn't possibly take greater pride in having taken every step on this long trip together with you, the best people on the planet!

I'd like to remember Chris Verville, Marcia Verville's late husband. Chris was one of our founding members. The protections that would one day be provided to Fort George upon inclusion on the National Register were within his vision and close to his heart from the earliest days, even before the Alliance came into being. I know how happy the Verville family is.

And finally, more good news! From what I understand, when the weather

gets warmer, there will be an event planned to celebrate Fort George's listing on the National Register of Historic Places. I do not know when this will take place, but rest assured I will alert everyone as soon as I learn the details so that anyone interested in attending will have time to make the necessary scheduling plans. So keep an eye open for a message from me – please feel free to email me or telephone me at any time for information (tedda@frontiernet.net 518 696-5889).

As usual, please tell your friends and all whom you think may be interested in Fort George about our good news and our Alliance, they may wish to become a member – there is a membership application on the back page of the newsletter.

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



President's Message

By Lyn Karig Hohmann

Welcome to this Winter Edition of the *Fort George Advice!* As Charlie Brown noted when this newsletter was inaugurated, "Advice" was commonly used in the 18th Century to mean "a communication containing information." As we enter our second ten years, we hope to keep that tradition open.

First, I would like to introduce the officers who were elected at the membership meeting in August. William Herrlich and Nadine Battaglia have graciously consented to continue in the roles of Treasurer and Secretary for this year. Larry Bennett from Lake Luzerne has moved into the Vice President's position. We are very excited about Larry joining us as he is our "feet on the ground" in the Lake George area and is noted for his love and support of history in this area. Welcome, Larry! After ten years of strong leadership as President, Charlie Brown has decided to step down and move into the vacant Trustee position so we are able to take advantage of his expertise and wise counsel. I have moved from Vice President into the role of President. I can assure you this gives me great trepidation. I, in no way, have the strong history background of so many of you. I am learning as I go. However, my attachment to this park started in my youth, growing up in Hudson Falls and spending my summers at Ticonderoga. My father loved history and would share the various stories of the French and Indian War and the Revolutionary War whenever the time was available. Of course, I spent many hours in Lake George. Then in 2000, I volunteered to be part of the two year dig that uncovered those incredible artifacts that this organization has sponsored for preservation. I was hooked! Under our feet as we walk in this park is our history. It is vitally important that it be preserved for future generations so

they have some tangible evidence of the struggle that it was to transform so many various cultures and peoples into the nation that we are now. As the friends' group of this park, we are charged with this task. I hope you will join the officers this year as we all move forward to the next steps in this process.

I want to go back to one point I mentioned earlier. We are ten years old! At the annual meeting, we celebrated our birthday with two fantastic guests and one beautiful birthday cake prepared by our own Nadine! Charlie was appropriately recognized for his leadership over these years with a beautiful plaque which we obviously hope he will proudly display. Under his leadership, we have formed a strong organization; we have preserved key artifacts from the two years of state sponsored archaeological digs; we have commissioned a beautiful painting by Ernie Haas that shows our site as the military camp of 1759 and have achieved official designation of Fort George on the State and National Registers of historic places. Now we must work to engage our communities in supporting our efforts and to increase their support of the mission of the Alliance through membership growth and financial contributions.

Our first guest at our Annual Membership Meeting, House Representative from the New York 20th Congressional District, Chris Gibson shared his interest in the preservation of our history and his support as we move forward. We were honored that he took time from an obviously very busy schedule to stop and share our celebration with us. Thank you to Nadine for arranging this visit.

Our second guest and speaker was Beth Hill, the Executive Director of Fort Ticonderoga. As part of building our relationships with our communities, I thought Beth could share with us her experience, first at Fort Dobbs State

Historic Site, a site much as our site, and then at Fort Ticonderoga where she has worked a great turnaround from the difficult issues she had inherited. At both sites, she has used business principles to establish a strategic plan and then implement it. What is our mission and what is our vision? What do we want to be with the community as we define it? She has challenged us to define ourselves as we move into this next stage. To that end, I asked our membership who attended the meeting to complete a short survey. The results are exciting and will be shared with you after our trustees review and consider the content at a trustee meeting in the near future as we start this planning process.

If you didn't get a chance to complete the survey, feel free to email me at cmb14clx1@verizon.net with your responses to the following questions:

- If someone asked you what the vision/mission for the Alliance is, what would you say? What should it be?
- What do you think the next focus for the Alliance should be?
- How do you think we can increase the exposure of the Alliance in the community to historical societies?
- What do we need to do better?
- Do you have any contacts we can reach out to for membership or other support?
- Do you have any fundraising ideas?
- What are you willing to do to support the Alliance?

Thanks for your help in our second decade! ■



The Fort George Hospital During the American Revolution

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tact with the contagious soldiers. (Supplies, however, were still sent north on the Hudson River to Fort Edward and on to Fort George before being forwarded to Ticonderoga). Dr. Samuel Merrick, attached to a Massachusetts regiment, was sent from Crown Point to Fort George with soldiers infected with smallpox and “forbid[den] to land on the east side of the lake [Mount Independence] or at Ticonderoga.”⁵ Arriving at Fort George on July 13, Merrick “found an empty barrack where we put the sick.”⁶ “All officers and Soldiers” stationed at Fort George were “forbid[den] to go Among the Small pox” sufferers.⁷ Hospitals were also established at Ticonderoga and Mount Independence for non-smallpox illnesses, including “camp disorders” (dysentery, etc.). The hospitals there were apparently just as dreadful as at Fort George: Dr. Lewis Beebe from Sheffield, Massachusetts, remarked that the sick at Mount Independence were “crowded into a dirty, Lousy, stinking Hospital enough to kill well men.”⁸

The number of sick at Fort George grew rapidly during the summer of 1776: 1,497 patients were noted on the “Return of the Sick of the General Hospital at Fort George” between July 12-26, 1776.⁹ On August 10 Dr. Potts recorded “the distressed situation of the sick...without clothing, without bedding, or a shelter sufficient to screen them from the weather...upwards of one thousand sick and wounded in the sheds...laboring under the various disorders of dysenteries, bilious, putrid fevers and the effects of confluent small pox.”¹⁰ In mid-August Chaplain Ebenezer David from Rhode Island “found near 2000 sick” at Fort George and “between 20&30 dying” each day.¹¹ He experienced “sympathetic anguish” as he viewed the men lying in “large sheds called Hospitals.”¹² On August 28 Dr. Beebe

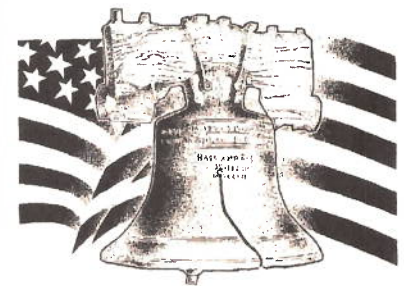
“visited the hospital” at Fort George and “found the number of sick to be about 700, viewed the burying place counted upwards of 300 graves.”¹³ Earlier (July 22), Beebe had noted that “the number of sick in the Hospital was near 2000.”¹⁴ The horrible conditions at the Fort George hospital during the summer of 1776 were made more difficult by the almost complete absence of medicine. Five doctors and four mates attended the sick. An inadequate supply of female nurses resulted in a draft of “one woman from each Company of each Pennsylvania Battalion” to be “sent to the General Hospital at Fort George.”¹⁵ However, 106 male nurses provided most of the nursing care at the hospital. By mid-September conditions had improved at Fort George and Gates was informed that “the sickness here rather abates.”¹⁶

The size and other details of the structures used for hospitals has proven elusive in the original documents. On July 21, 1777, Reverend Ammi Robbins, a chaplain from Norfolk, Connecticut, visited the “west hospital,” concluding that he had never witnessed “such a portrait of human misery as in these hospitals.”¹⁷ In the morning he had preached to “the other side” of the hospital and during the afternoon to the men on “this side.”¹⁸ The next day, July 22, Robbins “visited the long hospital this side” and called on the “others at night,” along with a Massachusetts chaplain.¹⁹ Whether Robbins’ journal entries imply that the hospital structures were so long that he could only preach on one side at a time or whether he meant that he had visited the sheds/hospitals on one side of the whole encampment is difficult to discern. To add to the uncertainty of the nature of the edifices comprising the hospital, a committee from the Continental Congress late in 1776 reported that “a range of buildings [had been] erected” at Fort George.²⁰

In anticipation of renewed hostilities on Lake Champlain in 1777, Major General Philip Schuyler directed Dr. Jonathan Potts to once again “establish the General Hospital at Lake George

in order to receive such of the army as choose to be Inoculated” for smallpox and for those “taken with Small Pox or any other putrid or infectious disease.”²¹ (In 1776 inoculation for smallpox had been prohibited but was allowed in 1777.) As the director-general of hospitals in the Northern Department, Potts also established hospitals at Mount Independence and Albany. Potts vowed “to preserve cleanliness, give particular attention to the Diet & method of dressing provisions delivered to the Troops & above all have the Gardens well taken care of.”²² In 1777 the American army of the Northern Department was far healthier than it had been in the preceding year. Medical preparations, however, were short-lived as a large British expeditionary force under Lieutenant General John Burgoyne forced the Americans to evacuate their forts, including Fort George. Most recorded descriptions from 1777 center on the fort rather than the hospital. Based on earlier intelligence reports, Major General Friedrich Riedesel, commander of the German troops with Burgoyne’s forces, noted, however, that a “large hospital, a building of great dimensions...surrounded by palisades” was located “where Fort William Henry formerly stood.”²³ But Riedesel’s journal had a number of errors and this entry was from a secondhand account. Lieutenant James M. Hadden of the Royal Regiment of Artillery arrived at Fort George in 1777 shortly after the Americans had departed. He observed the fort with one barracks and the ruins of Fort William Henry, but never mentioned a hospital building or remains thereof.

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The Fort George Hospital During the American Revolution

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Further archeological study at Fort George may yet reveal new details about the hospital during the American Revolution. ■

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2. Peter Force, ed., *American Archives, Fifth Series, Volume I* (Washington, D.C.: M. St. Clair Clarke and Peter Force, 1848), 651.
3. "Biographical Sketch of Doctor Jonathan Potts," *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 18 (1864): 25.
4. B.F. DeCosta, *Notes on the History of Fort George* (New York: J. Sabin & Sons, 1871), 28.
5. Douglas R. Cubbison, *The American Northern Theater Army in 1776: The Ruin and Reconstruction of the Continental Force* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2010), 142.
6. *Ibid.*, 143.
7. DeCosta, *Notes*, 65.
8. Lewis Beebe, "Journal of a Physician on the Expedition Against Canada, 1776," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 59 (October 1935): 347.
9. Force, Fifth Series, 1:857.
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11. Jeanette D. Black and William Greene Roelker, eds., *A Rhode Island Chaplain in the Revolution: Letters of Ebenezer David to Nicholas Brown 1775-1778* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, n.d.), 26.
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13. Beebe, "Journal," 345.
14. *Ibid.*, 344.
15. Peter F. Copeland, "Clothing of the 4th Pennsylvania Battalion, 1776-1777," *Military Collector & Historian* 18 (Fall 1966): 70.
16. DeCosta, *Notes*, 29.
17. Ammi R. Robbins, "Journal of the Rev. Ammi R. Robbins," in *History of Norfolk*, comp. by Theron Wilmot Crissey (Everett, MA: Massachusetts Publishing Company, 1900), 113.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. Cubbison, *Northern Theater*, 158.
21. Mrs. Thomas Potts James, *Memorial of Thomas Potts, Junior* (Cambridge, MA: Privately Printed, 1874), 193, 195.
22. *Ibid.*, 195.
23. William L. Stone, trans. *Memoirs, Letters, and Journals of Major General Riedesel* (1868; reprint ed., New York: The New York Times & Arno Press, 1969), Volume I, 295-96.

Our Annual Membership Meeting and Picnic ~ August, 2011

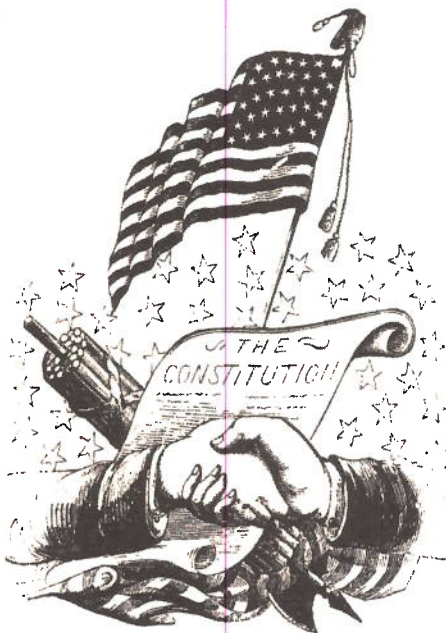


Empires in the Mountains

By Russell Bellico

Published by Purple Mountain Press

Empires in the Mountains is the first volume to focus entirely on the campaigns and forts along the Lake Champlain, Lake George, and Hudson River corridor during the French and Indian War (1754-1763). It covers the epic battles of the war in the lake valleys, as well as the arduous task of building fortresses and warships in the wilderness of northern New York. Relying on original documents, the book provides a firsthand human dimension in recounting the extraordinary events of the war. Nicholas Westbrook, director emeritus at Fort Ticonderoga, has suggested that "Not since Francis Parkman...has the epic story of the "Warpath of Empire" been told with such sweep and such rich detail." Gary Zaboly, author of *A True Ranger*, called *Empires* "a commanding history... highly readable and authoritative, easily the best single book" on the subject. ■



Krug's Review

By Thomas V. Krug

Empires in the Mountains: The French and Indian War Campaigns and Forts in the Lake Champlain, Lake George, and Hudson River Corridor

Russell P. Bellico. Purple Mountain Press, 2010, 366 pages, \$27.50 USD.

Brilliantly employing a wide scope of historic documents, Russ Bellico has produced a broad perspective on the French and Indian War, rich in a wealth of interesting details.

Beginning with accounts of King William's War of 1689, and following through to the end of the French and Indian War in 1763, this work is the most authoritative volume covering this period of history since Howard Peckham's, *The Colonial Wars, 1689-1762*. Richly detailing this chronicle with the use of period maps, artwork, diaries and journals of eyewitness participants, *Empires in the Mountains* will stand the test of time as a major work dedicated to the American colonial experience in the Hudson River, Lake George, and Lake Champlain corridor.

The reader is telescopically swept back into everyday colonial militiamen's lives by reading accounts of their battles, of the political strategies ruling their day and even by the fascinating details of fort construction that would

captivate the attention of modern day civil engineers.

An added dimension of this era is brought to light in the author's "Epilogue: Forts Revisited." It thoughtfully answers the question of what happened to these venerable fortifications, garrison grounds and the surrounding countryside once the conflicts had ended and after the movement of troops, rangers and stealthy Indian raiding parties had departed. In this chapter, the reader accompanies various travelers such as Sparks, Dwight, Silliman, Parkman and others who visited these historic sites from the period immediately following the hostilities to modern times. The Epilogue completes Bellico's work with a fine finishing touch.

Empires in the Mountains deserves to be credited with a status befitting a 'cornerstone book' that should find a home in the library of every person who is devoted to this time in American history, to be read and reread time and again to absorb all that this book offers. ■

Meeting Notice !

Our 11th Annual Membership Meeting and Picnic will be held in August 2012 at the Lake George Battlefield Park picnic pavilion.

Watch for upcoming details!