FORT GEORGE POST

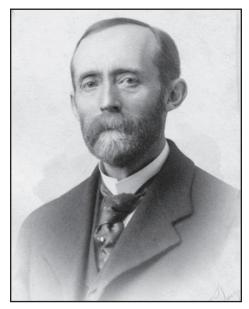
The Newsletter of the Lake George Battlefield Park (Fort George) Alliance PO Box 26, Lake George, New York 12845

www.lakegeorgebattlefield.org

SUMMER 2021

A Hundred Years Ago at the Lake George Battlefield Park

Submitted by Bruce Venter, Board of Trustees Member



Elwyn Seelye

In the process of conducting research on a totally unrelated topic, I stumbled across this interesting, and somewhat amusing, report on the status of the Lake George Battlefield Park that I thought our members would enjoy.

A hundred years ago, the Lake George Battlefield Park was under the stewardship of the New York State Historical Association (NYSHA). New York State had begun purchasing land associated with the battle site in 1898, but left the administration of the battlefield land to the NYSHA.

This 1917 caretaker's report is also timely, in a sense, as we recently commemorated the centennial of America's participation in World War I. As you will see, the caretaker references the Great

War and its indirect impact on the Lake George area.

In accordance with state law, the New York State Historical Association was required to submit an annual report to the State Comptroller for all properties under its custody. At the time the NYSHA was responsible for the "Lake George Battleground Park, the Crown Point Reservation, Crown Point" (the fort itself) and "the Bennington Battlefield." The purpose of the report was to state the financial requirements necessary to operate these parks. Each park custodian provided a report for consolidation into the Association's budget requests to the state.

Elwyn Seelye was the first custodian of the Lake George Battleground Park. Born in 1848 to a prominent Queensbury family, he could trace his paternal lineage back to service in the French and Indian War and the Revolution. On his mother's side, an ancestor stood on Lexington Green on April 19, 1775.

In 1864 at 16, Elwyn, against his family's wishes, ran off to join the Union army, serving in the 14th New York Heavy Artillery. A train accident in North Carolina permanently injured his spine. After the war, he made a living at farming, construction and real estate. In 1898 Seelye called a meeting at the Fort William Henry Hotel of like-minded gentlemen to form an historical society. "The project was well received, other meetings were held, the scope of the movement enlarged, and a State society determined upon." Elwyn Seelye was a founding member of the New York

State Historical Association.

While living at Dunham's Bay, Seelye became deeply interested in the preservation of the Lake George battlefield. When New York State purchased core battlefield property, Seelye was appointed its first custodian. Each year he would provide a report to the NYSHA on conditions at the park. The following report was provided on August 31, 1917.

I have taken the liberty of creating more paragraphs than in Seelye's original report to make it easier to read:

"I beg to report the following respecting the Lake George Battleground Park:

In view of the advisability of stimulating the use of land because of the need of food products caused by the war, I formed a plan of offering some of the best land within the limits of the park for cultivation. Through the agency of Mr. James A. Holden, permission was granted by the state authorities to carry out this project.

The ground was divided into sections of 50 by 100 feet and offered free to all comers undertaking the plots as vegetable gardens. Advantage was taken of this offer and I am able to report a very successful return for the individual labor and care expended on these gardens. A dozen or more families have been materially benefited by this plan and much has been saved to the public stock of food on which they would otherwise have drawn.

Public enjoyment of the park increases. More people, many of them from long distances, have visited the park this year than ever before.

It has been difficult to get men to do the work desired in developing the park, but the economical result has been more or less gratifying and the natural beauty of the park has been in no way diminished.

Some appropriations will be needed for

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Larry Bennett, Beloved Trustee Passes

It is with a heavy heart that we write of the passing of Larry Bennett. Larry was a long-time member of the Alliance and served as Vice President and Trustee over the years. Larry was a strong advocate for the Park and, if there ever was a cheer leader for spreading the history of the park and this area, it was Larry!

Larry passed on March 16th of this year after a courageous battle with a devastating disease. Only a short time before he passed, I was speaking with him on the phone and he said he planned to make our Memorial Day commemoration. As he said, "if those boys could do what they did in 1755, I can make it to the memorial." I know he was there in spirit, this gentle giant of a man.

A devoted family man, he leaves his loving wife of 55 years, Bonita Bennett, his four children and seven grandchildren. Larry taught History in the Glens Falls City School District for 33 years and was Chairman of the Social Studies Department for ten years. He was on the Town Council for Lake Luzerne for 16 years and served as Lake Luzerne Town Supervisor for eight years. He is also well known for his 70 years at Bennett's Riding Stable where he shared his love of horses with family and the public. He truly will be missed by many.

A Hundred Years Ago at the Lake George Battlefield Park

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next year. The iron pipe fence surrounding the park needs painting to preserve it from rust. A sum of \$150 will be required for this purpose. Crushed stone, fine enough for walks, delivered by rail and teams, including the cost of distribution will require an outlay of \$300 more. The growth of brush constantly requires attention. There should be an annual appropriation of \$150 more for this purpose.

Three years ago the beginning of a public dock was built on the foundation of the old military dock. Lack of appropriations has caused this work to cease. In order to preserve the section already built a sum of \$50 annually should be expended to protect the dock from being crushed by ice.

I beg to report additionally that a number of trees on this park have died or are dying. Through the cooperation of the Conservation Commission a skilled forester will soon pay a visit to the park and select those trees which should be taken down.

Advantageous bids have been secured for the removal of the decayed and dying timber. The proceeds from their sale, of course, will revert to the State Treasurer.

Someday some action should be taken to outline and wall up the old fort, adding to the memorials of our historic past."

Mr. Seelye died three years after filing his report, but his admiration for the Lake George Battlefield Park is quite evident in his 1917 report.

Members of the Alliance may also observe that some issues of a hundred years ago, like tree problems and the walls of the fort, continue to present modern day challenges in the park. ■

Source: Proceedings of the New York State Historical Association, Vol. XVII (1919) p. 8-9 and Vol. XIX (1921) p. 191-192.

Picture Credit: Elwyn Seelye in later life Picture courtesy of Warren County Historical Society.

President's Welcome

By Lyn Karig Hohmann

his is it! My last newsletter! On August 21 of this year, I pass the presidency of the Alliance and the editing of this newsletter to John DiNuzzo, our current Vice President. While there is some sadness, it is time. The completion of the Visitors Interpretive Center seems a fitting close to these number of years.

As of this writing, we still do not know when the VIC will open! There is an unexpected delay not under our control that needs to be resolved. We have display cases in storage, panels ready to hang, fort models stored in my third bedroom and a uniform in my closet. Russ Bellico has gone to the site and updated the measurements so we can be ready to move in. The NYS Museum has pulled an array of artifacts for our cases including the gun port from the radeau, Land Tortoise. And we have the scale model of the radeau. We are obviously anxious as we know our membership is! We still hope to be able to have you visit the VIC during our annual membership meeting...so whatever you do for good luck, please do it! ■

Path through History

n June 19th, the Alliance lead a Walk in the Park as part of the state-wide celebration of New York State "Paths through History." This was the first time we participated but anticipate doing it again in the fall during the next event. We introduced several families to the wonder of the park. It was a wonderful day!



Introducing our Trustee, Nancy Ross Bellamy



ancy is from Ballston Lake and actually lives right at the lake shore. She is retired from the NYS Department of Taxation and Finance. Nancy has been a long-time member of the Alliance. She is always the one who is ready to volunteer to help us.

That is how she became a Trustee and also trained as a park docent, giving tours to students on school bus trips. With her financial background and experience from the number of other historical organizations to which she belongs, she does our annual internal audit. She is meticulous! She has been active as part of the VIC Management Committee, planning for the day-to-day management of the VIC when it opens. She also recently was asked by the Nominating Committee and has agreed to step up to the position of Secretary. As a usual attendee at our Memorial Day event, she writes:

"I have been fortunate to be able to attend a number of the Memorial Day ceremonies at our monument to the Unknown Soldiers in the park. It is a wonderful way to meet so many new people that have the same love for the Lake George Battlefield Park. It has been a pleasure for me to work with these talented people as they bring the history of this battlefield to the generations of visitors that stop by."

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING OF THE LGBP ALLIANCE

Please mark your calendars for August 21st for our Annual Membership Meeting. The meeting is planned to start at 10 am with our usual Walk in the Park followed by the business meeting and lunch. The business meeting will include election of new officers and trustees as well as considering a By-Laws modification to increase the number of Trustees from 5 – 7 trustees to 7 – 9 trustees. Instead of our usual program, members will be encouraged to explore the new Visitors Interpretive Center. We look forward to seeing you. Expect an invitation in your email/mail in a few weeks!

Fort George 1777: Evacuation and Occupation 📾

By Russell Bellico, Board of Trustees Member



Lieutenant General John Burgoyne. Painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds. (Library of Congress)

After the suspension of the British invasion of the American colonies through Lake Champlain in the fall of 1776, a new plan was formulated in England during the winter of 1777 to sever the rebel colonies along the Hudson River. The strategy called for a convergence of three British armies at Albany the main division, under Lieutenant General John Burgoyne, advance south on Lake Champlain and the Hudson River, the second from southern New York would move north on the Hudson, and a smaller diversionary force would push east through the Mohawk Valley to Albany.

Anticipating a renewed British invasion, Major General Philip Schuyler, the American commander of the Northern Department, issued orders in early 1777 to strengthen the defenses at Fort Ticonderoga and Mount Independence, as well as Fort George. Unfortunately, the American forts remained drastically undermanned in 1777. Schuyler had written to

George Washington, the commander in chief of the American army, on January 30, requesting 10,000 troops to check the expected British invasion, but Washington and Congress mistakenly believed that the British troops in Canada were destined for an attack on Philadelphia and farther south.

On February 13, 1777, Schuyler informed Colonel Jeduthan Baldwin, the chief engineer at the Lake Champlain forts, that the Continental Congress had resolved to bolster the defenses in the northern theater. Plans included sinking "Calilssons [piers] from Island to Island in the Narrows" of Lake George in an effort to obstruct the passage of British vessels.1 On February 24 Baldwin examined a site in the Narrows where the channel measured 280 yards wide between two islands, and he sounded the depth of the water.2 The Lake George project never materialized, but Baldwin later supervised the construction of caissons and the Great Bridge, which connected Fort Ticonderoga to Mount Independence.

In March, Sabbath Day Point was the site of a bloody ambush of American troops. On their way to Fort George, a party of American troops bivouacked overnight at Sabbath Day Point, but were attacked at three o'clock in the morning by a detachment of Native Americans led by a Canadian loyalist (a former British lieutenant) and a lieutenant in the Quebec Indian Department. Four Americans were killed and 19-20 captured; the prisoners were later taken to Montreal. A party of American rangers were subsequently sent to bury the dead at Sabbath Day Point.3

Expecting that the British invasion route would involve Lake George, as well as Lake Champlain, Schuyler wrote to John Hancock, president of the

Continental Congress, on December 30, 1776, recommending that five or six "Vessels of considerable Force on Lake George" be built.4 On March 17, 1777, Schuyler issued an order that the existing "S[c]hooner ... be overhauled on Lake George."5 A week later, Schuyler ordered Captain Jacobus Wynkoop to Fort George to supervise the construction of a new naval fleet. Winkoop was directed to build "two strong schooners of sixty feet keel and twenty feet beam ... three other vessels [row galleys] are to be built without decks ... to carry a cannon of twelve pound shot in the bow, and as many on each side as possible."6

Preparations for the 1777 campaign also included a hospital at Fort George. In January, Dr. Jonathan Potts, who had directed the Fort George hospital the year earlier, was commissioned the Director-General of General Hospitals in the Northern Department. On April 3, Potts was ordered by Schuyler to "establish the General Hospital at Fort George" to accommodate the troops who "choose to be Inoculated" against

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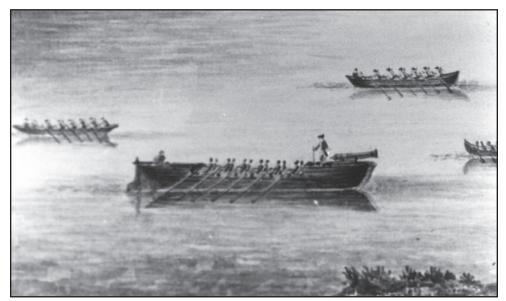
LECTURE ON DR. JOHN WARREN TO BE GIVEN AUGUST 5TH

We are excited to announce that
Christian Di Spigna,
the nation's leading authority
on Dr. John Warren and author
of the book, FOUNDING
MARTYR: THE LIFE AND
DEATH OF DR. JOSEPH
WARREN,THE AMERICAN
REVOLUTION'S LOST HERO,

will be presenting a lecture on this topic on August 5th, at 7 pm at the Fort William Henry Conference Center in Lake George.

Fort George 1777: Evacuation and Occupation

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Detail of a watercolor by James Hunter (1777), depicting one of the 26 British gunboats carried into Lake George. (National Archives of Canada)

smallpox and for those suffering from smallpox, as well as "other putrid or infectious disease." Potts also located hospitals at Mount Independence and Albany. The hospital at Fort George never reached capacity due to the withdrawal of American troops in July, but as late as the third week of June, Schuyler continued to order infectious troops at Ticonderoga "be conveyed to Fort George in covered boats, which are made for the purpose."

Fort George functioned as a key transshipment hub for the transportation of provisions, artillery, and supplies north to Fort Ticonderoga and Mount Independence during the spring of 1777. About the same time, British intelligence sources reported "a large storehouse" on the beach at Fort George that held "flour, pork, and beef in abundance."9 In June, Schuyler sent "between three and four hundred barrels of beef and pork" from Fort George to Ticonderoga and expected 1,500 more barrels to reach Fort George by the end of June. 10 By early July, Lieutenant General John Burgoyne's army, amounting to more than three times the size of the American forces, approached the American positions at Ticonderoga and Mount Independence. On July 5, after Burgoyne's army succeeded in establishing a battery on the summit of Mount Defiance overlooking Fort Ticonderoga, the undermanned garrison evacuated the fort, as well as Mount Independence.

After the retreat of the Americans, Burgoyne chose a route south through Wood Creek for his main army, rather than the traditional passage through Lake George. However, he decided to use Lake George to carry provisions, ammunition, and other military supplies. One of the reasons that Burgoyne suggested for his choice of routes was the presence of Fort George, which he maintained would "oblige me to open trenches [for a siege], and consequently delay" his army's progress.11 Burgoyne also had intelligence that the Americans were building "six strong vessels" on Lake George, which were described as "2 armed schooners and 4 cannon boats [that were] on the lake" in subsequent scouting reports.12 The descriptions given by Major General Schuyler, however, suggest a less formidable American fleet on Lake George. Although he mentioned a "large schooner" used for provisions in a letter dated June 24, two weeks later Schuyler wrote that he had insufficient cannons "for the

two small schooners on Lake George."¹³ He described the fleet on Lake George as one vessel afloat and "tolerably fit[t] ed ... the other still upon the Stocks, but if the two had been upon the Water they would have been of little Use, without Rigging or Guns," and the existing schooner on the lake would easily have been captured.¹⁴

Faced with the loss of Ticonderoga and overwhelming odds, Schuyler ordered the evacuation and destruction of Fort George in early July. On July 9 Captain John Calfe wrote from Fort Edward that "Teams [of horses had been] Sent to Fort George to bring offstores with ye utmost D[i]spatch."15 Schuyler reported that he "brought away about twenty pieces of artillery" from Fort George and "nearly all the powder, amounting to about thirteen tons."16 Caravans, consisting of 40 to 50 wagons, had moved the artillery and supplies southward from Fort George. Major Christopher Yates, the commander of Fort George, departed with 700 troops on July 16 after blowing up the magazine and burning the fort.

After the withdrawal, George Washington indirectly questioned Schuyler's judgement by commenting that others had apprised him "that a spirited, brave, judicious officer, with two of three hundred good men, together with the armed vessels you have built, would retard Burgoyne's passage across the Lake for a considerable time."17 General Schuyler defended his strategy of abandoning Fort George by denigrating its strength, suggesting that the fort was only one Bastion of "an intended fortification," holding only 100-150 troops with barracks for 30-50 men, lacking a cistern for water, or a "picket [palisade of log stakes] to prevent the enemy from running over the wall."18 (See also Lynda Karig Hohmann, "Fort George: As described, 1777," Fort George Post (Winter 2021): 3,5.)

By the last week of July, the majority of British gunboats on Lake Champlain had been transferred to Lake George. James Murray Hadden, a lieutenant in the Royal Artillery Regiment, arrived at Fort George on July 28 in one of the

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Fort George 1777: Evacuation and Occupation

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Map drawn by Lieutenant James Murray Hadden in 1777, showing Lake George, Fort George, and the surrounding region. (Hadden's Journal and Orderly Books, Horatio Rogers, editor)

gunboats and described the fort as "a small square Fort faced with Masonry and contains Barracks for about a hundred Men secured from Cannon Shot ... The Rebels ... blew up the Magazine on the side next [to] the Water which demolished that Face" and earlier in his journal reported that the Americans had "destroyed their Vessels (5 in number) including two on the Stocks." ¹⁹

Fort George now became a crucial transshipment point for the British army. The road to Fort Edward was improved in order that provisions, supplies, and artillery, and other material could be moved southward as quickly as possible. Thereafter, two companies of soldiers were assigned to Fort George and two more to a supply depot on Diamond Island, the latter protected by six cannons behind a breastwork and two gunboats.

On September 14 Major General Benjamin Lincoln of the Continental Army wrote to Major General Horatio Gates, the new commander of the Northern Army replacing Schuyler, that he would send three 500-man detachments to Lake Champlain "to divide and distract the enemy ... to release prisoners & destroy the stores there."²⁰ A detachment led by Colonel John Brown succeeded in freeing American prisoners at Ticonderoga and taking possession of the fort's outer defenses, but a demand by Brown for the surrender of Fort Ticonderoga was rebuffed by the fort's commander.

Brown subsequently focused on a new target. On September 24 Brown attacked the British supply depot on Diamond Island, manned by two companies of the 47th Regiment, along with a contingent of German troops. The garrison on the island was besieged by 420 American militiamen aboard 17 bateaux, two gunboats, and a threegun sloop, vessels captured by Brown's troops at the northern end of the lake. For more than an hour, the armed vessels and shore batteries engaged in a heavy cannonade. Brown's damaged sloop had to be towed away, and one gunboat was "so damaged" it was abandoned.21 The Americans ran the flotilla into Van Wormer Bay on the eastern shore and burned most of the vessels. However, one gunboat with a 12-pound cannon was later retaken by the British. A shipwreck, first discovered in the early 1950s and examined by Bateaux Below, Inc., in 2002-2003, was not positively identified until a few years ago as one of Brown's vessels, based on a large collection of Revolutionary War artifacts that had been donated to the Lake George Historical Association.

After the British defeat at Saratoga, the posts at Lake George and Lake Champlain were not evacuated immediately. For several weeks, Fort George continued to function as a way station. Canadian bateau men. laborers. drivers. and other noncombatants were not held prisoner by the Americans following the surrender at Saratoga, but allowed to return home - a journey that first involved a stop at Fort George. 22 In early November, Fort George was "abandoned and burned," and the breastwork on Diamond Island was also burned.²³ Before daybreak on November 8, according to a German officer, the signal was given to start the fires [at Fort Ticonderoga and MountIndependence] ... All at once we saw all the log houses, the store houses, the hospital ... everything ... the floating bridge was also cut down and burned."²⁴ Fifty barrels of powder were detonated at Fort Ticonderoga, which "blew up high into the air," as British and German troops departed in their vessels for the melancholy voyage back to Canada.²⁵ In the following years, Fort George was garrisoned by American troops as its northernmost fort in the lake valleys. ■

NOTES

- 1. William James Morgan, ed., *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* (Washington, D.C.: Naval History Division, Department of the Navy, 1976), Volume 7, 1190.
- Jeduthan Baldwin, The Revolutionary Journal of Col Jeduthan Baldwin 1775-1778, ed. Thomas Williams Baldwin (Bangor, ME: DeBurians, 1906), 93.
- 3. Ibid., 95; John Calfe, "Capt. John Calfe's Book" in *A Memorial of the Town of Hampstead, New Hampshire*, comp. by Harriette Elliza Noyes (Boston: George B. Reed, 1899), 289; Gavin K. Watt, "Action at Sabbath Day Point, March 20, 1777," The Journal of the American Revolution, June 5, 2017, online.
- 4. Morgan, NDAR 7: 627.
- William James Morgan, ed., Naval Documents of the American Revolution (Washington, D.C.: Naval History Division, Department of the Navy, 1980), Volume 8, 135.
- Ibid., 187-88; "The Trial of Major General Schuyler, October 1778," Collections of the New-York Historical Society 12 (1879): 78-79.

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Bow section of a wreck identified as one of Colonel John Brown's abandoned vessels. (Photo by Russell Bellico)

100th Year Rededication of the Andian Fountain September 18, 2021

esigned by Alexander Phimister Proctor, donated as a generous gift by George Dupont Pratt and dedicated in the park on October 4th, 1921, the Indian Fountain continues to attract visitors to its powerful but peaceful presence. Its purpose is to honor American Indians who inhabited the region in the 18th century. The beloved statue is now 100 years old and the Alliance will be celebrating this 100th Anniversary on September 18th, during the French and Indian War Encampment. Please watch your Inbox/Mail box for your invitation with additional information.

I Love My Park Day

We had an energetic group of volunteers for I Love My Park Day on May 1, 2021. We cleaned the Indian Fountain enclosure including great work by Joanne Morrison who mucked out the pool and recovered \$4.98 in coins! Several of the group planted the flowers at the Unknown Soldier Memorial. This year we tried petunias after our marigolds didn't make it in the last few years. They are still beautiful! Thank you all who participated.







Fort George 1777: Evacuation and Occupation

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- 7. Mrs. Thomas Potts James, *Memorial of Thomas Potts, Junior* (Cambridge, MA: Privately Printed, 1874), 193,195,197.
- 8. "Trial of Schuyler," 115.
- 9. B. F. DeCosta, *Notes on the History of Fort George During the Colonial and Revolutionary Periods* (New York: J. Sabin & Sons, 1871), "Additions," 3.
- 10. "Trial of Schuyler," 114-15.
- John Burgoyne, A State of the Expedition from Canada (1780; reprint ed., New York: The New York Times & Arno Press, 1969), 17.12. 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 1, 295-96; Helga Doblin, trans. and Mary C. Lynn, ed., American Revolution, Garrison Life in French Canada and New York: Journal of an Officer in the Prinz Friedrich Regiment, 1776-1883 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 76.
- 13. "Trial of Schuyler," 113, 158; Schuyler's letters are somewhat confusing given that on June 25 he described one of the schooners launched "to carry fourteen guns," which would not be "small." Ibid., 116.
- 14. Jared Sparks, Writings of George Washington (Boston: Russell, Odiorne, and Metcalf, 1834), Volume 4, 494.
- 15. Calfe, "Capt. Calfe's Book," 291.
- 16. "Trial of Schuyler," 162-63; Others reported "forty odd pieces of cannon," and "medicines, military chests, etc." being saved. *Boston Gazette*, 28 July 1777.
- 17. Sparks, Writings of Washington, 494; In a subsequent letter, Washington withdrew his questioning of Schuyler's orders to evacuate Fort George. John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., The Writings of George Washington (Washington, D. C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1933), Volume 8, 449.
- 18. Sparks, Writings of Washington, 494.
- Horatio Rogers, ed., Hadden's Journal and Orderly Books: A Journal Kept in Canada and Upon Burgoyne's Campaign in 1776 and 1777, by Lieut. James M. Hadden, Roy. Art. (Albany: Joel Munsell's Sons, 1884), 103, 107.
- 20. "Brown's Attack of September 1777," The Bulletin of the Fort Ticonderoga Museum 11 (July 1964): 212.
- William James Morgan, ed., Naval Documents of the American Revolution (Washington, D. C.: Naval History Division, Department of the Navy, 1986), Volume 9, 968.
- Helga Doblin, trans. and Mary C. Lynn, ed., An Eyewitness Account of the American Revolution and New England Life: The Journal of J. E Wasmus, German Company Surgeon, 1776-1783 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990), 91.
- 23. Charlotte S. J. Epping, trans., *Journal of Du Roi the Elder* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1911), 110.
- 24. Ibid
- 25. Doblin and Lynn, American Revolution, Garrison Life, 86

Need to renew and have a Friend who wants to join? MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Yes, I want to protect this beautiful historic site and join the Alliance.

Name:	☐ Sustaining Member	\$2	2,500
rame.	☐ Associate Member	\$1	,000
Address:	☐ Sponsor Member	\$	500
	☐ Paid Up for Life Member	\$	500
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