

The Last Cannon Fired from the Walls of Fort George

By Pat Niles

The William G. Pomeroy Foundation has awarded the Lake George Battlefield a Pomeroy Marker for 2023. The marker tells the story of the Carleton Raid, the capture and burning of Fort George in 1780. The grant was developed by the Washington County Historical Society in its goal of creating a series of markers telling the story of the Great Burning of 1780. This marker is one of three that which creates a narrative of the burning and destruction of parts of Warren and Washington Counties in 1780.

The Carleton Raid was one part of four major attacks across Upstate New York and then the New Hampshire Grants (today Vermont). The then Governor/ Commanding General of Canada, Frederick Haldimand wanted to prevent a possible invasion of Canada as it had been invaded and occupied by American Continental forces in 1775 and 1776. To stop that possibility from occurring again, Haldimand devised attacks through the Mohawk Valley, Schenectady, Fort Anne and Fort George and Vermont. These raids were coordinated to create major confusion for Continental and New York officials. The correspondence between Governor George Clinton, General Philip Schuyler, Colonel Webster of Charlotte County and other Continental Officials show a clear lack of defensive force and confusion of where the British were during these attacks. The raids also showed a clear division between Vermont and New York officials. The raids further showed that New York officials did not control their Royalist neighbors as they came to the assistance of Carleton's Force.

Fort George was one of the objectives of the Carleton Raid. The other major objective was the destruction of Fort Anne. Why were these forts so important? These forts could supply a possible Continental Army using the Hudson-Champlain Corridor. The French and English used this route through a series of wars. The importance of the Fort George was as a supply depot. The fort was built as a launch point for British Commander Amherst's campaign attack against French Forts to the North. The fort was originally planned as a massive structure but after the taking of Fort Ticonderoga and Crown Points, Fort George was downgraded to a one bastion fort.ⁱ Fort George was used as a supply depot and transfer station for supplies, repair of boats and men heading to Fort Ticonderoga and Crown Point until the end of the war.ⁱⁱ By the 1775, Fort George had only a 65 year go man occupying it.ⁱⁱⁱ

By May 1775, both Fort Ticonderoga and Skenesborough had been taken by American Forces and Fort George was taken from its caretaker, John Nordberg, a half-pay British officer overseeing the grounds. The Americans used Fort George similarly to the British but added bateaux building for its 1775 invasion of Canada.^{iv} Henry Knox passed through Fort George on his way to deliver artillery taken from Fort Ticonderoga to Boston.^v The fort was later important as a smallpox hospital, ship building station, and Philip Schuyler's Headquarters in 1776 and inoculation site in 1777.^{vi} Fort George, in 1776, had remained a transfer station for men,

supplies, and shipbuilding area. With Burgoyne's taking of Fort Ticonderoga on July 6th, 1777, Philip Schuyler ordered the American forces to withdraw from Lake George. Philip Schuyler reported that twenty artillery pieces along with 13 tons of powder were taken from Fort George. The fort's evacuation was conducted by American Major Christopher Yates, whose men took between forty and fifty wagon loads of supplies. Yates's men blew up the powder magazine and burned the fort.^{vii} Philip Schuyler, in a letter of defense to George Washington in the evacuation of Fort George, stated that it was not defensible. As the fort did not have a ditch, a well, a Cistern nor any pickets. Schuyler goes on to say the placement of the fort did not allow for a clear view of the approach of the enemy. Russell Bellico, Lake George/Lake Champlain historian, goes on to quote, General Frederick Riedesel, "Fort George which stands near the water at the end of the Lake, is a small square Fort faced with masonry and contain Barracks for about a hundred Men secured from Cannon Shot. This fort could not stand a Siege, being commanded, & too confined to be soon reduced by Bombardment. The rebels before they abandon'd it had endeavor'd to destroy the defences and actually blew up the Magazine on the side near the Water, which demonlish'd that Face."^{viii} The British took over Fort George by the end of July and placed two companies there as well as Diamond Island which became a supply depot. Fort George again was used to transfer men, supplies, and ammunitions. The Americans in late September attacked Diamond Island but did not attack Fort George. With the British defeat at Saratoga, Fort George was evacuated and burned once again on November 8th, 1777.^{ix}

According to Bellico, there is no evidence of the Americans occupying Fort George in 1778. He found evidence that the Fort was preoccupied by the Americans in 1779 repairing and building new barracks.^x There were attacks near Fort George but no direct attacks on the Fort itself. In 1779, Seth Warner's Vermont Continental regiment was ordered to Fort George and remained there until Christopher Carleton's Raid in October 1780. The destruction done to the fort was either leaving it to deteriorate or burning it when the occupier evacuated. It is not until the fall of 1780 with the Carleton Raid that the fort was directly attacked.

The focus of this article will be the Major Carleton's movement through Warren and Washington County and specifically the taking of Fort George. Carleton forces gathered on September 27th, at St. Johns. Units of the 29th, 34th, 53rd, and 84th regiments were the regular forces for Carleton Expedition. Chasseurs, German Light Infantry were also part of the expedition. Royalists, who were familiar with the raiding area, were also included in Carleton's Forces as were Native Americans. Included in Carleton's forces was Captain Munro, Captain in the Royal Yorkers, who with his force were going to raid Schenectady. After a short stop at Ile aux Nois on September 28th, the expedition, of eight ships and at least 26 bateaux, sailed South.^{xi} By October 2nd, Carleton's Expedition had reached Valcour Island where they were joined by Mohawk Indians as well as Claus' Ranger as they were going with Captain Munro's troops.^{xii} At Split Rock on the afternoon October 5th, Lt. Johnson arrived with the 108 St. Regis Indians who were to be used on the expedition. On October 6th at 2am, the expedition arrived at West Bay (Bulwagga Bay) behind Crown Point. At day break October 7th, Captain Munro forces set off across the bay to hide their bateaux and set off to raid Schenectady. Carleton's men set their packs with 12 days of provisions. On the evening of October 7th, Carleton's force sailed south past Fort Ticonderoga, they concealed themselves for the day. On the evening of October 7th into

October 8th they set off once again arriving at the West South Bay at 2am. Carleton force stayed at West South Bay until 9am in the morning.^{xiii}

Major Carleton, at day break, ordered Captain Fraser with two subalterns and fifty men back to Fort Ticonderoga to cover the expeditions' return. A second party under Lt. McFarland 53rd, with thirty men was to take back two boats over to Lake George with four coehorn mortars to be used by Carleton to attack Fort George. That same party was to take charge of all the bateaux back to Fort Ticonderoga to be used by Carleton's forces on their return to Fort Ticonderoga.^{xiv}

Once the preparations were finalized, the expedition marched off toward Fort Anne. That evening Carleton and his men marched and stayed at Parks Farm, a mile and half from the Fort Anne blockhouse and sawmill. During the evening, Carleton sent out scouts to Fort Anne to see the condition of the fort and also sent men, to Friends of Government, to find out if the expedition had been discovered. The scouts returned, within two hours, telling Carleton the fort was unaware of his presences, the men sent out to friends of government had intelligence that Carleton forces had been discovered. According to the intelligence from the Friends of Government, a rebel scouting party had come across the expeditions tracks and sent information to Fort Anne. The fort then sent a courier to Fort Edward to report the expedition's presences. The Fort Anne Commander, Adiel Sherwood, was at Fort Edward dining with Colonel Henry Livingston, Fort Edward commander. Once the message had been sent Sherwood returned to Fort Anne.^{xv} In the meantime, Carleton ordered the men to go without fires fearing discovery. Between 2 and 3 am, Carleton sent Lt. Forquhor, 29th Regiment, with thirty regulars and 30 Royalists, to cut the road between Forts Anne and Edward. At 4 am, the expedition set out for Fort Anne, over some of the roughest terrain that Carleton and Enys had ever seen. They marched through swamps, broken ground, over fallen trees which caused the soldiers stumbled and fall throughout the march. When the expedition came to the blockhouse and sawmill which was a mile to a mile and half from Fort Anne, the Major sent twenty men and a sergeant to see if it was still unguarded, which it was. The main force marched on to Fort Anne and the sergeant and the twenty men stayed and burned the blockhouse and sawmill.^{xvi}

The main force arrived at Fort Anne by 7 am. Carleton sent in Lt. Eirkman, 29th, and Lt. Johnson, 47th, to demand the surrender of the Fort. The surrender was accepted and the articles of capitulation was signed by 8 am. According to Carleton, the fort was a picket fort, square, each side was sixteen feet high, twelve inches thick planks and a house sat in the center of the pickets. The fort according to Enys was poorly constructed as the loop holes in the walls allowed soldiers from the outside to easily allowed soldiers on the inside to be shot. The fort was occupied by 72 levies (state hired soldiers), according to Lt. Enys, 29th, they had only 3 to 4 rounds per man, some flour, a little livestock. Enys states that the Indians were allowed into the fort first to collect booty and when pushing on the door it fell into the fort. Lt. Forquhor arrived soon after the fort was secured and brought in one militia officer and reported shooting one and killing another man. After destroying every house except two which belonged to Friends of Government.^{xvii}

Once securing the village of Fort Anne, the fort itself was burned as well as all the livestock destroyed. Carleton then ordered burning parties down the Fort Anne-Fort Edward

road to burn all structures on both sides of the road. Lt. Enys describes the road as, “good cart road.” Burning parties along the road and into the countryside to burn all property that did not belong to Friends of Government.^{xviii} The men brought in a Samuel Sherwood, the father of Adiel Sherwood, the commander of Fort Anne. Samuel Sherwood was a captain of exempts (exempts were men too old to belong the regular militia). Mid-afternoon the expedition came to a fork in the road, one road lead to Fort Edward, three miles away and the other road was thirteen miles to Fort George. Carleton took the road to Fort Edward, stating Fort Edward was too insignificant to attack and would alarm Fort George.^{xix}

The British force marched on to Wing’s House, close to Wing’s Falls (Glens Falls today), which was about seven to eight miles from Fort George. The force camped at the Wing’s House for the evening. Carleton sent out twelve Royalists, with orders to burn homes, barns, mills, forage, kill all cattle on the east side of the Hudson as far as Fort Miller. Carleton gave further orders to the Royalist that they were to hide a day or two and then burn all mills and Barracks at Saratoga (Schuylerville today). According to Enys, the parties returning from the burning expeditions went down 13 miles below Fort Edward on the opposite shore, they burned everything as the inhabitants had left their homes on the first alarm.^{xx}

On the morning of October 11th, the expeditions waited until small parties from the immediate area returned around 7am. Once underway, Carleton’s troops took the Old Military Road burning as they went. The expedition along the military road came across the French and Indian War, Fort Amherst. The fort had been rebuilt by the Germans under Burgoyne and later occupied by the Americans. The fort was burned to keep the Americans from using the fort in the future.^{xxi} Carleton’s force got within a mile and half of Fort George. Carleton halted his force and sent out a party of Indians who soon returned seeing two men, the Indians chased the two men but could not overtake them. A scout was sent out and soon returned reporting that 50 of the enemy were along the road. Carleton left a guard over the Indian packs and went down the road. It was a long period before our Indians were seen again, the Indians returned again and were sent out once more. This time the Indians got between the enemy and Fort Gage Heights. Carleton also sent out 50 soldiers of the 34th regiment with seventy to seventy-five Royalists. The original party of Indians were between the enemy and Fort Gage Heights, the enemy was overpowering the Indians. Once the 34th and Royalists arrived the battle quickly turned to the British side. Our main force waited in the woods a short distance for the battle until the shooting ended. The Indians and Royalist brought back wounded and prisoners. After the battle, the Americans had twenty-three scalped, seven prisoners were brought in and three more were found on the battlefield not scalped. The 34th had one private killed, one sergeant and one private wounded. Royalists had one killed or missing and one wounded. The Indians had one killed and five wounded.^{xxii}

Carleton’s troops went to the top of Gage’s Heights where for the first time his men saw Fort George. A short time later, Fort George began firing its’ six pounder at Carleton’s men. Carleton ordered the men to shelter is a small hollow. Once the expedition established its position, Carleton ordered Lieutenants Kirkland and Johnson to offer terms of surrender to the Fort George. While waiting for the surrender, a wounded man was brought into the British

position. The man had a broken arm, had been scalped, three tomahawks wounds were on the back of the man's head. It turned out the man had been a deserter from the 29th Regiment, he deserted on Lake Champlain in the spring of 1776. He died on one of the boats on the return to Canada.^{xxiii}

It was not long before Fort George surrendered. The British 34th Regiment took up a position outside the walls of Fort George. On entering the fort Carleton's men found only one Captain, two ensigns, five corporals, one drummer, and thirty-six privates. Carleton then ordered his men to look for sunken bateaux, the party found thirteen, raised them and bailed them out for the return trip to Canada. Several Royalist families came to Fort George and asked to go to Canada, Carleton gave his permission for their return. Once the enemy was removed from the fort, the Indians were then allowed to take booty from the fort. The Indians were furious over the loss of their men but were controlled by Lt. Johnson. After the Indians were done, troops took up 34th original position outside the walls of Fort George.^{xxiv}

The Indian plunder of the fort had gone quickly as the Americans had very little in the way of supplies. The enemy had only three or four days of supplies. The one garrison wagon was used by one of the American officer to return home under parole; the extra baggage was sent back on that wagon as well. It was found out that the men had only sixteen to eighteen rounds a piece. The fort was one bastion of what had been planned of a very large fort. Due to the taking of Crown Point, Fort George was turned into a small fort. The walls were very thick but having been burned so many times were weak. The well inside the fort was polluted from garbage and other debris being thrown down it. The fort had a thick parapet, good bomb proof, three six pounders. One six pounder was on the ground, another was mounted on the wall and the last cannon was mounted on a carriage.

There was not enough room for both the 34th and 53rd regiment to stay in the fort so the prisoner were placed inside the fort with the 34th and 53rd guarding them.^{xxv}

The next morning October 12th, Major Carleton sent a message to Captain Munro, telling him of his position and that the countryside was totally confused of their location. Lt. McFarland, 53rd regiment arrived with two coehorn mortars which were not needed as Fort George had already surrendered. The two six pounders were loaded into McFarland's bateaux, the third damaged six pounder had the trunnions knocked off and driven down the barrel. The wounded were put into the better bateaux and the rest of the bateaux were used by Royalist Families going to Canada. The fort and the rest of the buildings were burned or destroyed. By 9am, the bateaux pushed off for their trip back to Canada. The commander of Fort George, John Chipman, was also put onto a bateaux to meet with General Haldimand, to seek an exchange. Once the bateaux had been launched, the troops marched off on the west side of Lake George. It was several days march to Fort Ticonderoga where bateaux were waiting. It was more than a month before the expedition would arrive back in Canada.

The aftermath of Carleton's Raid on Fort George was reported by two young militia soldiers of Cambridge and Hebron, New York. George Fowler and Austin Wells knew that Carleton's Force had fled. After a two day march to Lake George, their companies found the

bodies of soldiers from Fort George. The battle had been between Bloody Pond and the Fort Gage Heights. They found twenty-two or twenty-three bodies, laying on their backs, their throats cut, their stock torn from their necks and placed upon their chests, their silver buckles were taken from their shoes. They had been scalped and lay where they fell in battle. Their bodies by this time were mangled, bloated and black with mortification. A hole was dug beside where they lay, they were placed in it and covered up, it was a shallow grave. There was a mulatto, who was the only one to not have his throat cut. He was laying on his face, the only one to be found in this position. The militia men believed that he was a drummer, his arms were tied behind his back with the cord of his drum, and he had been killed by a spear in the back. He had at least six or eight spears in his back. He had been scalped.^{xxvi}

The militia men continued on to Fort George where they found the fort still smoldering from its burning. British dead had been buried or taken away. The soldiers found inside the smoldering fort a platform which had a six pounder on a carriage with a burned wheel which had toppled over. There were a few barrels of ball cartridges which were divided among the militia.^{xxvii}

The initial reaction to the loss of Fort George was expressed by Governor Clinton, in a letter to General Washington, Clinton summarizes the loss of Forts Anne and George:

The little post and garrison of Fort Ann, appeared to me to have been surrendered through treachery or cowardice. Capt. Chipman, the commanding officer of Fort George, having on the first alarm sent out his whole garrison, (supposing the enemy to consist of only abt. 30 Indians and Tories), except 14 men obtained a very honorable capitulation, before he could be induced to surrender.^{xxviii}

Captain Chipman sent a letter of explanation of the occurrence on October 11th, 1780 to the Connecticut Gazette, February 16th, 1781, as reported in DeCosta's History of Fort George. In the letter Chipman explains that two ships had been seen in northern part of Lake George. It was not usual to have ships at anchor in the northern part of Lake Champlain which was reported to the commanding officer of the Northern Department, Colonel Malcom. October 8th, Captain Sherwood had been informed of the enemy, he sent word to Colonel Henry Livingston, Commander of Fort Edward, who did not inform Chipman of Carleton's presences. Livingston was informed on October 10th by men fleeing Fort Anne of Carleton's attack and burning of Kingsbury. A second letter of intelligence was sent out but it did not go to Fort George. A scout sent out by Chipman found Carleton's party, he had tried to return but was cut off by part of Carleton's force at Fort Ticonderoga. The scout was unable to get back to Fort George with news of Carleton's force. On October 11th, Chipman sent out a supply party to go to Fort Edward where provisions were held. This party saw Indians near Bloody Pond, they came back to Fort George. Captain Chipman sent out a force to clear the road of Indians as Fort George was nearly out of provisions, artillery, and ammunition. Chipman thought he was protecting his provision wagons going out and possible provisions coming from Fort Edward.^{xxix}

Captain Chipman ordered out Captain Sills with forty-eight men and officers with orders to attack Indians but if there was a large party of the enemy return to the fort. Sill had taken

another route missing the Carleton's main force and on his return had run into enemy's rear. Having two options attack or flee, Sill decided to attack, according to Chipman they were outnumbered 30 – 1. What happened was that Sill ran into a small party of Indians and Carleton on hearing and seeing the battle sent out regulars and loyalist which threw the number toward the British. As the fort had one working six pounder and only fifteen muskets, a capitulation was soon agreed upon.^{xxx}

The destruction of Forts Anne and George was successful as well as burning most homes, farms, mills, and the slaughter of livestock from Fort Anne to Saratoga. The lack of communication to Fort George caused the loss of the Fort George Garrison. The lack of men, lack of trained soldiers, lack of supplies and ammunition lost Fort Anne. According to Holden, the Kingsbury area had 17 families before the raid, after the raid those families left until the end of the war. The American borders shrunk, the eastern border was Salem and the northern border was Saratoga (Schuylerville today). The raid illustrated the lack of coordination by the military, lack of military intelligence, lack of soldiers, lack of provisions and a lack of confidence by the citizenry of the area in their government. Fort George ceased to exist as military installation.

Due to the Patriot lack of defenses in the North Country, Fort George could no longer be maintained. The final cannon shot fired by Captain Chipman was the last cannon shot fired from the Walls of Fort George. According to DeCosta and Winston Alder, Fort George was not used again as a fort during the American Revolution and not thought to be used during the War of 1812.^{xxxi}

Alliance Board member Pat Niles is currently the Vice-President of the Washington County Historical Society, Co-chair of the Washington County Historic Preservation Committee, and Co-Chair for the Washington County 250th Committee. He retired after 30 years from Salem Central School as a history teacher and head football coach. He is a Licensed Guide at the Saratoga Battlefield and the President of Adirondack Hudson Military Expeditions, a historic guide service in the Adirondack Hudson corridor.

ⁱ Bellico, Russell, *Empires in the Mountains: French and Indian War Campaign and Forts in the Lake Champlain, Lake George and Hudson River Corridor*, (Flieschmanns: Purple Mountain Press, 2010.)

ⁱⁱ Bellico, Russell, Fort George Between Two Wars, Fort George Post, Spring 2018.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid. p.4.

^{iv} Bellicose, Russell, 1775: Fort George Re-Activated, Fort George Post, Summer 2019, p. 5.

^v Ibid. p. 6.

^{vi} Bellico, Russell, The Fort George Hospital During the American Revolution, Fort George Post, Winter 2012, p. 1.

^{vii} Bellico, Russell, Fort George 1777: Evacuation and Occupation, Fort George Post, Summer 2021, pp. 4 -5.

^{viii} Bellico, Russell, Fort George: As described, 1777, Fort George Post, Winter 2021, pp. 4-5.

^{ix} Bellico, Russell, Fort George: Fort George 1777: Evacuation and Occupation, Fort George Post, Summer 2021, p. 5-6.

^x Bellico, Russell, British Incursions into the Lake Valleys: Fort George 1778-1780, Fort George Post, Summer 2022, pp. 1, 8.

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- ^{xi} Enys, John, *The American Journals of Lt. John Enys*, edited by Elizabeth Commetti, Syracuse Press: Syracuse, New York, pp 35-36; Watt, Gavin, *The Burning of the Valleys: Daring Raids From Canada Against the New York Frontier in the Fall of 1780*, The Durdurn Press: Toronto, 1997, p.95.
- ^{xii} *Enys Journal*, p.36.
- ^{xiii} *Enys Journal*, pp. 36 -40; Loding, Paul, *Washington County Historical Society, Annual Journal*, 2007, Fort Edward:2007, pp.41-42.
- ^{xiv} *Haldimand Papers, Carleton to Powell, October 16th, 1780*, this is an after battle report from Major Carleton to General Powell which was sent on to Major General Haldimand, 21,793, B-133, H-1453, pp. 254-260; *HP Chambers Journal*, 21, 801, B-141, H-1455, p.278.
- ^{xv} *HP, Carleton to Powell, Oct. 16th, 1780*, 21,793, B-133, H-1453, pp. 254-260; Hill, William, P. *Old Fort Edward: Before 1800, An Account of the historic ground now occupied by Village of Fort Edward*, New York, Privately Printed: Fort Edward, New York, 1929, p.336. Johnson, Christopher, *History of Washington County New York*, Everts and Ensign: Philadelphia, 1787, reprinted by the Washington County Historical Society, Interlaken Press: New York, 1991, p.60.
- ^{xvi} *HP, Carleton to Powell Letter*, 21,793, B-133, H-1453; *Enys Journal*, p. 42.
- ^{xvii} *HP, Carleton to Powell*, 21,793, B-133, H-1453; *Enys Journal*, p. 44; *HP, Samuel Sherwood report to Christopher Carleton that the house in the center of the Fort Anne was the home of John Chesure, the caretaker of Phillip Skene's sawmill outside of Fort Anne, late August 1780*, 21,842, H-1737, B-182, I 1553, p. 264.
- ^{xviii} *HP Carleton to Powell Letter*, 21,793, B-133, H-1453; *Enys Journal*, p.45.
- ^{xix} *HP Carleton to Powell Letter*, 21,793, B-133, H-1453.
- ^{xx} *HP Carleton to Powell Letter*, 21,793, B-133, H-1453; *Enys Journal*, p. 45.
- ^{xxi} *HP Carleton to Powell Letter*, 21,793, B-133, H-1453; Holden, Holden, James, A, *History of Halfway Brook*, New York: 1900, p.19.
- ^{xxii} *HP Carleton to Powell Letter*, 21,793, B-133, H-1453; *Enys Journal*, pp.45 - 46.
- ^{xxiii} *HP Carleton to Powell Letter*, 21,793, B-133, H-1453; *Enys Journal*, pp.45 - 46.
- ^{xxiv} *HP Carleton to Powell Letter*, 21,793, B-133, H-1453; *Enys Journal*, pp.45 - 46.
- ^{xxv} *HP Carleton to Powell Letter*, 21,793, B-133, H-1453; *Enys Journal*, p.46.
- ^{xxvi} Adler, Winston, *Their Own Voices: Oral Accounts of Early Settlers in Washington County, New York*, Heart of the Lakes Publishing, 1983, pp. 99 -103.
- ^{xxvii} *Ibid.* pp. 100-103.
- ^{xxviii} DeCosta, B.F., *History of Fort George: During the Colonial and Revolutionary Periods*, J. Sabin and Sons: New York, p.49.
- ^{xxix} *Ibid.* p. 50.
- ^{xxx} *Ibid.* p. 51.
- ^{xxxi} *Ibid.*, p. 61; *In their Own Voices*, p. 103. *Fort George Post*, Bellico, Summer 2022, p12.