

Newsletter

Friends of the Bennington Battlefield

Summer 2020



Issue #6

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

NEWS FROM THE FRIENDS

SIGNAGE PROJECT COMPLETED



"Baum's at the Bridge", by John Wright, one of the original art images on the new signage.

The Friends is pleased to announce that the enhanced interpretive signage project is nearing completion. Six new panels will be installed mostly by August, in various locations, some of which have not previously had such resources for the visitor. A combination of vivid Battle images with brief, explanatory text, will highlight among others, the engagement at "Hessian Hill", a rendering of Baum's view from the bridge (near where the Barnet House is today), and the events in the retreat fields.

The artist John Wright, known for his Revolutionary Battle scenes, has created images that to offer a first-person perspective of the events of the Battle, as the participants may have witnessed them. Don Troiani supplied a splendid painting of Baum leading his men in their last attempt to break free from Stark's encircling attackers. He also supplied several small images including a Tory soldier and a rebel using his musket as a club as well as a photo of one of the captured dragoon swords.



Each panel will have a small map to show the locations of the others.

FRIENDS OF THE BATTLEFIELD EVENTS POSTPONED DUE TO THE PANDEMIC

The arrival of the COVID pandemic in March necessitated cancellation and adjustments to plans that had been made for a variety of events, beginning with our Annual Members' Meeting on March 22. Along with updates of Friends' activities, election of officers was to take place. Given that it will likely be next spring before the next Members' meeting can occur, the current slate of officers have agreed to continue until then.

The postponement of the large re-enactment and the students' History Camp was a deep disappointment, but one that could not be avoided. The re-enactment is now scheduled for August 2022, The 245th Anniversary of the Battle. Hopefully, next summer, the History Camp under Katie Brownell's direction will resume.

The annual Commemoration Ceremony on August 16 will take place, observing the required social distancing measures outlined in the New York State guidelines for crowd capacity at outdoor events. The ceremony will take place at 4 pm in the usual location. Those wishing to RSVP may contact Peter Schaaphok at dragoon@taconic.net or Call 518-369-0910.

FRIENDS OF THE BENNINGTON BATTLEFIELD OFFICERS & OPRHP CONTACTS

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

President: Peter Schaaphok
Vice President: Jonah Spivak
Treasurer: Joyce Brewer
Secretary: Phyllis Chapman

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

PRESERVING THE BATTLEFIELD

AMERICAN BATTLEFIELD TRUST PURCHASE ENLARGES THE BENNINGTON BATTLEFIELD



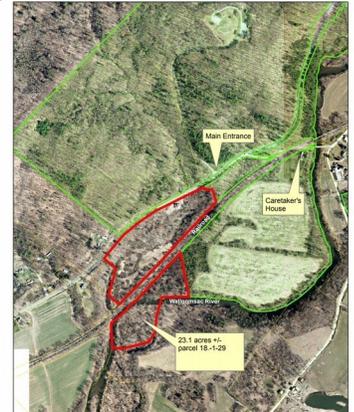
A portion of a large, grassy meadow on the newly acquired area.

The map to the right indicates the area, which is south and west of the existing historic site. This property borders that of the Barnet House from the rear and to the west. The addition of this property offers intriguing possibilities for exploration and study, and provides expansive space for events and re-enactments. The property will be formally transferred to the NYS Parks to be incorporated into the present site.



Trails meander through the hilly portion of the parcel.

The American Battlefield Trust, a national, non-profit organization has the mission to preserve American battlefields from the Revolution, War of 1812, and Civil War, through purchase of property to preserve these areas from modern development. In collaboration with the Friends of the Bennington Battlefield and the NYS Parks, the Trust has purchased a large tract on Route 67 that was part of the original theater of battle. The property encompasses over 23 acres of land, the topography including wooded sections with rudimentary hiking trails, and large grassy meadows.



The new property is the parcel indicated by the pointer.

Many important battlefields, particularly Revolutionary sites, have been lost over time, becoming industrial sites or undergoing development into residential or commercial areas. The Bennington Battlefield is one of the fortunate few that has not been subject to obliteration.

As places where important, formative events in our country's history took place, they connect us to the past in their own unique way. Preservation of these places leads to conservation, not only of our heritage, but the land on which history took place.

To learn more about the American Battlefield Trust, visit their website www.battlefields.org.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

“LIVING HISTORY” IN HISTORIC TIMES *by Phyllis Chapman*

“Living History” is, for many, an enjoyable hobby in which they can indulge a passion for history; for teachers, it is an excellent tool for making the events of the past real and immediate for students. From simply stating, “what happened and when”, we have the opportunity to find out, (however imperfectly), “what was it like to be alive then?” Living history events and programs allow us to escape our own times for a while, learn about the everyday life of our ancestors, and practice favorite hobbies and pastimes, from black-powder arms to candle-making.



Aside from conversation-starters such as “Where were you when Kennedy was shot?”, or “Did you watch the moon landing live on TV?” or, “How/when did you find out about the attacks on 9/11?”, few people look at the times they are living in as remarkable or historic. In the year 2020, however, few would argue that these are indeed, historic times for our nation and the world.

Few people now correspond via actual paper letters, or live near older relatives who share their personal memories of historic events and times, or keep a daily journal. Historians rely on such sources in writing history, particularly in recording the “average Joe's” perspective. Our online communications and accounts floating “in the cloud” could pose problems for future historians in recounting our days of COVID 19. Reports, data, and news reports can tell us “what” and “when”, but it is only through listening to our fellow creatures do we learn how these times have affected them personally.

My grandfather, who probably never made it further than fourth grade, told me about a belt-driven motorcycle he owned as a young man. The belt, made of leather, had an unfortunate habit of slipping off and slapping him smartly between the shoulder blades, to the point where, exasperated, he threw it to the side of the road and walked home. Another older lady I knew when I was young had kept a daily journal for most of her life, and, had I asked her, she could have checked them and told me what the weather had been on June 18th, 1946. Her entry when she learned she had lost a son in WW II had to have been heartbreaking. Neither of these stories, however interesting, would make it into history books. They are part of the human experience.



In movies, we may see the Patriot soldiers uniformly clad in blue and buff; the reality was quite different. (from H. Charles McBarron's Battle at Guildford Courthouse.)

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

(cont.)

However, more and more history books have begun to appear that compile personal stories and observations. There are also a few memorable published first-hand accounts of historic times, Joseph Plumb Martin's *Memoirs of a Revolutionary Soldier* a well-known example. In this article, I would like to share some first-hand accounts of historic events that have survived.

Beginning with JP Martin: Of he and some of his fellow soldiers trying to rid themselves of “the itch” (likely scabies) with a grease of brimstone and tallow, with plenty of hot-toddy whisky- “...two [of the soldiers], by their too great exertions in the action...they lay all night naked upon the field; the rest of us got to our births somehow, as well as we could, but we killed the itch and we were satisfied, for it had almost killed us.”



The first British volley at the militia in Lexington has been called “the shot heard 'round the world.” Twenty-three-year-old Sylvanus Wood heard the shot in person: “Some guns were fired by the British at us from the first platoon, but no person was killed or hurt, [the guns] being charged only with powder. Just at this time, Captain Parker ordered every man to take care of himself. The company immediately dispersed...the second platoon of the British fired and killed some of our men.” Sylvanus helped carry some of the dead to the meeting house, then took his gun and proceeded to Concord, where the second engagement took place. These two accounts reveal that the Revolutionary soldier fought a variety of foes.



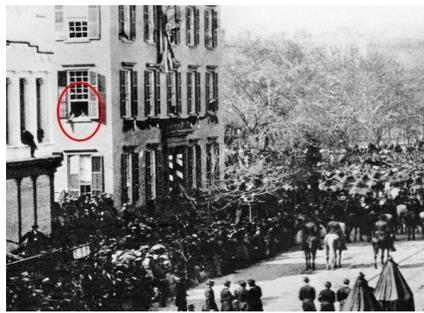
The Mohawk and Hudson Railroad, the third in the nation, made its maiden trip on August 9, 1831, from Albany to Schenectady, NY. A visiting artist, William H Brown, sketched the machine and described the trip:

How shall we describe that start, my readers? It was not that quiet, imperceptible motion...of the present day. Not so. There came a sudden jerk, that bounded the sitters from their places, to the great detriment of their high-top fashionable beavers...the first-hand jerk being over, the engine proceeded with considerable velocity for those times...until it arrived at a water-station, when it suddenly brought up with a jerk No. 2, to the further amusement of some of the excursionists...”

President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth on April 14, 1865, while attending a performance of *Our American Cousin*. The orchestra leader, William Withers, was there.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES (cont.)

I stood with astonishment, thinking why they should fire off a pistol in Our American Cousin. As I turned around, I saw a man running toward me with his head down...I saw it was John Wilkes Booth...Should I live a thousand years, I shall never forget the ten seconds of my life that I spent between Booth and his liberty...He looked terrible. His eyes seemed starting from their sockets, and his hair stood on end. In his left hand, there was a long dagger...



A photograph of Lincoln's funeral cortege as it passed through New York City, shows a tiny figure in an upstairs window watching the scene. It was Theodore Roosevelt, with his brother Elliot.

The city of San Francisco suffered a major earthquake at 5:12 am on April 16, 1906. A reporter, James Hopper, described the residents' reactions in the aftermath:

The streets were full of people, half-clad, dishevelled, but silent, absolutely silent, as if they had become speechless idiots...I saw many men and women with gray faces. No one spoke. All of them had a singular hurt expression-not one of physical pain, but rather one of injured sensibilities, as if some trusted friend had suddenly wronged them...



An interesting outsider's description of the American farmer of the early 19th century was written by William Cobbett, a farmer himself and British politician:

...first, the men are tall and well built; they are bony rather than fleshy, and they live, as to food, as well as any man can live. And secondly, they have been educated to do much in a day...Besides the great quantity of work performed by the American laborer, his skill, the versatility of his talent is a great thing.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES (cont.)



Adults are not the only people to witness historic moments. Melba Patillo was one of nine African American students escorted by with the protection of American Guardsmen as the first students integrated into Little Rock's Central High School in Alabama in 1957.

I felt proud and sad at the same time. Proud that I lived in a country that would go this far to bring justice to a Little Rock girl like me, but sad that they had to go to such great lengths. Yes, this is the United States, I thought to myself. There is a reason I salute the flag. If these guys just go with us this first time, everything's going to be okay.

Some vivid memories are not earth-shattering in importance, but bring us forward into a new way of looking at the world, how technology will transform the future. My family bought their first color television in 1968, during the Winter Olympics, and I came home from school to see Peggy Fleming skating her Gold-Medal winning program. She was lovely, and her technique was phenomenal for the period, but my gaze was transfixed by noting, "Look how you can see all of the people in the audience so clearly!" In college, I was given an assignment for a math class I couldn't avoid that had to be performed on the *one computer* at the school. We waited in line for our turn (I confess, the guy ahead of me who actually was interested in the thing did my assignment for me); now, we carry them in our hand, and frantically search for it when we've set it down somewhere.

I'll finish this piece with another family reminiscence. My father-in-law served in the Marines in World War II, playing piano for the Marine Band (when he wasn't a stretcher-bearer). We recently found another of his letters that he wrote home to his wife:

*This Wed. nite they were playing a Gershwin tune which last[s] about 25 minutes and it is similar to his Rhapsody in Blue. Its name is Porgy and Bess. There are about 85 guys playing and when you hear it in the flesh it really sends the chills up your back.
(Great stuff.)*

Perhaps some of you have noticed (as I have) that restriction of movements and activities during the COVID-19 pandemic has led to tackling some of those projects at home you just didn't find the time to do, or to revisit a hobby you haven't practiced in a while, or simply time to sit and quietly think. It won't take long, once we have controlled the outbreak, that it will recede in collective memory and become just another topic of history. If you have never been a person to jot down your thoughts and reactions, or simply sent a traditional letter to someone, consider it. You may be helping some future historian get a fuller picture of what this experience has been.

MEMBERSHIP PAGE

The Friends of the Bennington Battlefield once again wish to give many thanks to our members for your interest and support. Collaborating with the New York State Office of Parks, Historic Preservation and Recreation, Parks and Trails NY, and the American Battlefield Trust has resulted in enlarging the site, improving visitor experience, and the growth of educational programs for schools. We have also been fortunate to work in close cooperation Marylou Chicote, the Bennington Battle Monument in Bennington, VT, who often attends our meetings and suggests the Battlefield to tourists, giving them directions to it that takes them over at least one covered bridge.

Our Board of Trustees is composed of teachers, business people, and people in the museum and historic interpretation fields. We have been a 501.c.3 tax-exempt organization since June 2018.

Our membership form is at the bottom of the page. If you are a member, and haven't renewed it, you can send it anytime. We encourage you to let others know about the Friends, and about the Battlefield as an important historic site. Any donations and membership fees can be used as an income tax deduction. You will receive a membership card, and continue to receive our Winter and Summer newsletters.

Thank you,
The Friends of the Bennington Battlefield

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MEMBERSHIP FORM

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

Please complete the following form and submit with your check:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Town/City: _____

State: _____ Zipcode: _____ Email Address: _____

Phone No. _____

Membership Categories: Please check which applies Individual/Family: \$15.00 _____
Business: \$ 30.00 _____ Patron: \$50.00 _____ Please make checks payable to The Friends
of the Bennington Battlefield and mail to:

PO Box 251, Hoosick Falls, NY 12090 Thank you for your support!