NEWS FROM THE FRIENDS

UPDATE ON SIGNAGE PROJECT
The signage project under the grant from New York Parks and Trails for the Battlefield is underway. The new panels will give visitors updated and expanded information, and areas of the Battlefield previously not equipped with such panels will now be included.

An exciting feature of the six new interpretive signs installed will be original artwork of scenes from the Battle. These pictures, from paintings prepared for the project by artist John Wright, will feature depictions of Battle events unique to the site. The storming of Hessian Hill, the Tory fort, and the fight at the Bridge will be represented, among others. Mr. Wright's works will portray these scenes from the viewpoint of the participant, as it might have appeared had the viewer been present. These will be images that have not been seen before.

Text for the panels is being written to be supportive to the images. They will briefly and concisely provide a more expansive perspective of what happened, when, and where.

The installation of the new signs is expected to be completed by Battle Weekend, 2020.

BATTLE RE-ENACTMENT AT THE BATTLEFIELD SUMMER 2020

The Friends of the Bennington Battlefield and the Brigade of the American Revolution will be hosting the 243rd Anniversary of the Battle of Bennington on the weekend of August 15 & 16, 2020 at the Bennington Battlefield State Historic Site in the Town of Hoosick, NY.

Authentically attired and equipped living history enthusiasts will bring to life the pivotal actions that took place in the hamlet of Walloomsac 243 years ago. American, German, British and Loyalist troops will be encamped on the grounds of the Barnett Homestead.

In addition to the tactical reenactments, a full and exciting weekend of activities is scheduled. Visitors are encouraged to tour the camps and experience the sights, sounds, smells and tastes of 1777. Watch history come to life we recreate this turning point in our War for Independence.

For more information, visit www.brigade.org or “Battle of Walloomsac” on Facebook.

ANNUAL MEMBERS' MEETING INFO ON LAST PAGE
THE FRIENDS LOSE A FRIEND

John Sheaff, standing third from right, with re-enactors and SAR members at Ceremony on the Battlefield’s “Hessian Hill”.

The Friends lost an important Friend, who was among the founding members of the group, when John Sheaff passed away on November 1, 2019. Born in Merrick, NY, John served in the Navy from 1956-1959. He and his wife, Lois came to the area after he retired from teaching in Long Island, NY for nearly 30 years.

The American Revolution was of particular interest to him, and he enjoyed collecting anything related to it. At events at the Bennington Battlefield, he was often a presence, displaying his collection of prints depicting scenes from the Revolution, and reproduction historic American flags.

John served as President of the local Sons of the American Revolution chapter for many years. With the late Paul Loding, and others, he planned and implemented many of the annual Bennington Battlefield Commemoration ceremonies, which continue to take place every August 16th, at the top of Hessian Hill.

With his many contacts, John brought members of other SAR chapters, DAR members, re-enactors and Parks officials to participate, in what he termed as “not a celebration of war, but a remembrance of those who served.” He had also taken an active part in previous Battlefield re-enactments as a contributor to interpretive programs and pamphlets. He will be deeply missed.

CELEBRATING BATTLE WEEKEND- 2019

The Friends marked Bennington Battle weekend with a new activity; marching in the Bennington Battle Day Parade. The Hoosick Township Historical Society joined members of the Friends in a period-appropriate costumed appearance, with Joyce Brewer, Director of the Louis Miller Museum and Katie Brownell, Director of History Camp. Camp participants, parents, and Friends carried historic flags of the period on the parade route.

Last year's History Camp proved so popular that Mrs. Brownell, along with Peter Schaaphok, Phyllis Chapman, and Kristen Marcoux repeated the experience for 2019 fourth graders. There were some “veteran” campers from last year acting as camp counselors. Campers set up the tented encampment, cooked, drilled, and saw a cannon firing demonstration.

Campers forming up. Right-Young cannoneers learn from a pro.

The Commemoration Ceremony was held on August 16, with the History Campers again taking part in the ceremony. A large crowd was in attendance.
JAMES FENIMORE COOPER'S “NATTY BUMppo”- A NATIVE OF
HOOSICK FALLS?

“Natty” is the legendary hero in James Fenimore Cooper’s five novels called “The Leatherstocking Tales,” written between 1823-1841.

Natty, the principal character of these five novels, is a wild, white frontiersman, brought up primarily by the Delaware Indians of present-day upstate NY. Throughout the series, he is described as a woodsman known by various names including Natty, Leatherstocking, Hawkeye, Pathfinder, and Deerslayer. He is portrayed as a free spirit who lives close to nature.

Growing up in Otsego County, Mr. Cooper was greatly influenced by the way the country was changing. In his yarns, he tells of trappers, fur traders, Indians and the early white men who struggled to bring civilization to the frontier, yet all the while destroying the wilderness. As one of our country’s first early novelists, his writing helped to create a sense of American history. Today, we would call this genre “historical fiction.” Cooper’s novels were immensely popular in 19th century America and even greater around the world.

So, what does Cooper’s Natty Bumppo have to do with Hoosick Falls, you might ask. Well, over the years the people of Hoosick Falls, mainly Judge L. Chandler Ball, grew more and more convinced of the legitimacy of its claim that Cooper used a local man, Nathaniel Shipman, as his inspiration for the main character in the Leatherstocking tales. After he discovered where Shipman was buried, he marked it with “an oak slab” intending to have a suitable monument erected to his memory. It was rounded at the top with the name Nathaniel Shipman. In 1865, it was publicly announced that plans were in the works to collect money to erect a monument over the Shipman’s grave identifying him as the original Leather-stocking. The articles were published in several newspapers around the country.

When this was brought to the attention of Mrs. H. Delos Mallory of Otsego County (the great-granddaughter of David Shipman who also laid claim to being the model for the Leather-stocking character), a controversy was started which flared into a full-scale war of words. Later on, in 1874, when the story of Nathaniel’s claim was published in the Rensselaer County Standard, the editor was threatened with prosecution to the fullest extent of the law if he should dare to erect a monument over the grave of Nathaniel as Leather-stocking!

Unfortunately, Mr. Ball, who was a leading figure in the community, died the following year, 1875. After more than a century and decades of debating this issue, interest died out along with those who eagerly sought to promote the “Leatherstocking” legend in our area. Then, in a 1987 interview with Edith Beaumont, the testimony of several area residents verified that a wooden marker did exist up until the early 1930s.

Now, 210 years after the death of Nathaniel Shipman, this subject has come up again amidst a group of volunteers at our local museum and we would like to see Mr. Shipman receive his rightful place in our local history. Cooperstown can claim JF Cooper’s “Leatherstocking” character, but “Natty Bumppo” belongs to Hoosick Falls!

More on Natty Bumppo....
The Hoosick Township Historical Society on July 18, 2019, publicly recognized the local story of Nathaniel Shipman, a town resident who was the inspiration for the character of “Natty Bumppo”, or “Leatherstocking” from the novels of James Fenimore Cooper. He is now formally recognized by the installment of a granite marker in the First Baptist Churchyard on Main Street, and the placement of a sign procured telling the story of Shipman. Cooper's novels: *The Deerslayer*, *The Pathfinders*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *The Pioneers*, and *The Prairie*, depict Natty as an independent hunter and trapper who lived in the woods, and was friends with the Mohican Native Americans in the area of present-day Cooperstown, New York.

In researching Shipman's life, it came to light that his retreat to the woods from Walloomsac, where he had been living with his wife and daughter, may have been in reaction to his perceived status as a Loyalist in his Revolutionary politics. His having fought and served as a scout with the British in the French and Indian War, and his lasting friendship with a British officer did not serve him well with the locals in the town of Hoosick. In the days when Burgoyne's forces presented imminent danger, Shipman was tarred and feathered, and driven from the town. It was rude treatment, dispensed to patriot and loyalist.

Most people today are aware that the Revolutionary era was riven with deep partisan convictions among Americans. Many have heard John Adam's remark that one-third were patriots, one-third loyalists, and one third indifferent. Historian Ray Raphael (*A People's History of the American Revolution*) points out that common indicators of opinion (oaths of allegiance, military service, wealth and property ownership) are not reliable factors in determining sides as some choices may have been made under duress. An accurate breakdown of political affiliation in those times would be nearly impossible.

The American colonies were populated with a wide variety of peoples, over an expansive territory of varying geography and climate. Cultural regions had already been established during 200 years of our self government and settlement. Three large metropolitan areas were humming with activity: Boston, New York City and Philadelphia, with Charleston, South Carolina, not far behind. Even then, ours was one of the most literate of nations, and newspapers proliferated. In addition, Americans were already pushing their western boundaries, looking to better their prospects.
“Choosing sides” in the Revolution could fill a hefty book; however, investigating the question through the eyes of a few, varied characters and groups can still be illuminating. Shipman maintained that he really didn't care about the politics of the Revolution, but was hesitant about taking up arms against the army to which his officer friend belonged. He chose to sit out the whole affair, only coming back to Hoosick Falls years after, at the urging of his daughter.

Vermonters, of whom Ethan Allen and Seth Warner appear to embody the attitudes of their fellows, had already been agitating for independent status for decades, trying to wrest the lands from the concurrent claims of New Hampshire and New York. Attempts to eject Dutch farmers from the Pownal, VT area created “bad blood” between them and Allen's group, resulting in the settlers in Dutch Hoosac siding with the King. According to Raphael, even Allen toyed with the idea of allying with Britain if it would secure what he really wanted— independence for Vermont.

Some assume that the wealthy, having more to lose, tended toward Loyalism. Philip Skene, born in Scotland, was a career soldier in the British army. Through a charter granted by the King, he possessed an large land patent in Whitehall (then known as Skenesborough) which encompassed 56,000 acres. He made extensive improvements on the property, hoping to eventually be named Governor of the area. Burgoyne used his spacious home as headquarters at the beginning of the 1777 campaign, and Skene, volunteering to serve, offered advice that proved devastating to the campaign. Assuring his commanding officer that the area inhabitants were loyal to the King, he also persuaded Burgoyne to move his forces overland to Ft. Edward, perhaps in hopes that a road would be built that would connect his holdings with the Albany area. At the Battle of Bennington, with Breymann's force, two horses were shot from underneath him, but he managed to escape capture. He paid dearly; after the War, his property was seized, and he returned to England, where he lived for the rest of his life.

In contrast, Robert Livingston Jr, owner of the vast Livingston Manor in New York, was a Whig Revolutionary. Prohibitive taxes to the mother country found no favor with him. He was one of the five Continental Congress members charged with the task of drafting the Declaration of Independence. However, his tenants farming on his 160,000 acres had been discontented for years, and had often refused to pay their rents or even took up arms against their landlord. For them, the Revolution offered another opportunity to oppose Livingston; Loyalism perhaps a vehicle to be rewarded by the British with title to land in the event of an American defeat. Guerrilla warfare continued in southern New York between Continental forces and loyalists under Oliver DeLancey even after Yorktown.

Yet, many of the “Founding Revolutionaries” were wealthy men; John Hancock was a successful Boston merchant, Jefferson and James Madison were owners of large estates with many slaves, Alexander Hamilton had married into the wealthy Schuyler family, and George Washington was the richest man in America. As the Colonies became less dependent upon British protection, and Britain more demanding in taxes and limiting trade, many of the upper crust decided it was in their best interests to secure independence.

As in all wars, a large percentage of patriot soldiers were young, landless, and often lacking employment. A soldier's life promised inexperienced youths the opportunity for adventure.
Men in America had been accustomed to providing military service in local militias in times of emergency. However, most Continental soldiers were not prepared for a long war, dealing with privation, disease, and death. Many men with families felt strongly against British interference in their lives, but were torn between patriotism and being at home to care for their homes and families. The patriot soldiers at Bennington were militia; determined to defend what was their own, right under their feet-- and then go home. For the young, poor Continental soldier with little or no family, it was often the determination to not be branded a coward, loyalty to his unit or commander, or the lack of any other choice that kept him involved, much less than high-flown, flowery rhetoric about the rights of man and self-evident equality.

Perhaps least known was the predicament of many who simply wanted no part of the affair at all. Some religious groups, such as the Quakers, and Moravians, were morally opposed to war and did not want to be forced to relinquish their beliefs. Nor would they take oaths of allegiance; sometimes suffering persecution and confiscation of property by “patriots” in consequence.

Consider the man who believed himself lucky to have landed a job as one of the new “Stamp Collectors” to find he was the most unpopular man in town! Particularly despised, they risked threats to life and property; few held the position for long.

Some tenant farmers and small businessmen felt it to their benefit to hedge their bets and take no side, having much to lose and little to gain. Native Americans, given promises by both sides, with no real reason to believe either, were caught in a true dilemma, as time would prove.

If there is a common thread among American attitudes toward the conflict, it may be their desire to maintain the independence in their daily lives that they had enjoyed from the time of the first settlers. They had built their towns and cities, decided what local taxes were necessary and how they would be used, appointed their own judges and elected their own assemblies. Dictates from the mother country began to disrupt their lives and rob them of the self-government they had from the beginning. Resisting that challenge was something nearly everyone could agree upon.
There are three towns that lay claim to being the location of the pivotal Battle of Saratoga: Stillwater, Schuylerville, and Saratoga itself. All have just claims, and reveal how expansive the theater of operations was.

Driving north on Route 4 from Schuylerville, a short distance from the center of town, stands two State Historical Markers, one of which is titled “Stark's Knob”. It is placed at the bottom of a rugged outcropping of rock, and one has to walk a trail to get to the Knob itself.

When Gen. John Stark accepted the command of the New Hampshire militia in the summer of 1777 at the request of the New Hampshire Committee of Safety, it was with the express understanding that he was leading an independent command. When he arrived in Manchester, Vermont with his militia, Continental Major General Benjamin Lincoln was waiting for him. He ordered him and his men to proceed to Stillwater, New York, to support Gen. Philip Schuyler at Saratoga. Stark refused, and proceeded to do what he had been asked to do: defend Vermont against British invaders.

Clearly, at Bennington, Stark performed the duty he had been sent to do admirably. In the aftermath of the Battle, Stark had his horse and saddle stolen, directed the removal and paroling of over 650 prisoners, and sent detailed reports to the Council of New Hampshire and General Gates, commander of the Continental forces gathering at Saratoga. Shortly after, he, and some of his men, fell quite ill, possibly with measles.

Word of the Bennington victory spread quickly, and among accolades for his success, came orders from General Horatio Gates (who had recently replaced Schuyler) to have Stark's men report immediately to Stillwater. In a letter to Gates on September 7, Stark informed him of his illness, and of the fact that his men, being militia, had signed up for two months, and that they would certainly go home when that time was up.

The militia did ultimately march to Stillwater, where Stark met them on September 15. Not long after, his soldiers headed home. Even the offer of a $10 bounty per man would not induce them to stay.

Both Stark and the New Hampshire Council had foreseen this, and had already begun raising more troops to serve under Stark, not as independent militia, but as part of the Continental Army under Gates. Stark went to New Hampshire, to bring the new units to Saratoga.

By the time he and his men arrived at Saratoga, Burgoyne had been defeated at the Battle of Bemis Heights on October 7. Burgoyne had withdrawn to Schuylerville, in order to evacuate his troops toward Ticonderoga, hoping to escape through a narrow corridor on the west bank of the Hudson River. Stark and his troops plugged that hole, taking position by “Stark's Knob” and placing a battery there on October 12. Completely surrounded, the British and German generals called for a meeting with Gates and his staff to discuss terms.

Today's Saratoga National Battlefield Park is a little over five square miles in area, about 3,392 acres. In a park with monuments, historic homes, and trails, John Stark also gets his due for his participation, where he helped seal Burgoyne's fate.
SECOND ANNUAL MEETING ANNOUNCED

The second official Members' Meeting of the Friends of the Bennington Battlefield will take place on March 22, 2020, at 2 pm at the Louis Miller Museum in Hoosick Falls. All paid members, and those wishing to become members, will be invited to attend.

The first order of business will be election of officers whose terms have been completed. For 2020, the following officers stand for election: Peter Schaaphok, President; Joyce Brewer, Treasurer, and Phyllis Chapman, Secretary. Nominations can be offered at the meeting.

The Board consists of seven members; four officers and three Trustees at Large. An Advisory Board has been created of interested people to give input and background information to the Board from time to time. They serve as advisors only, and have no vote on Board decisions. If interested, contact a Friends officer or Trustee.

To become a member complete the end of this newsletter, and give or mail to Joyce Brewer, or any Trustee.

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!