



YORKTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P. O. Box 355 - Yorktown Heights, NY 10598
<http://www.yorktownhistory.org>

NEWSLETTER

Today, one of the fastest growing areas is that of genealogy – our family tree, our ancestors, and our descendants – our history! Genealogy of towns, cities, and countries, is “history.” It is the record of events of the past. What happened when, where and why – history is the way the present views the past.

So, let us take a trip in the past, and visit Yorktown as it use to be, through chapters and passages of the new book, “Images of America Yorktown” recently published by the Town of Yorktown with the help of many Yorktowners who assisted with the research and writing.

Chapter one “During the Revolutionary War.”

The “shot heard ‘round the world” was fired at Lexington where armed colonists tried to resist British seizure of an arsenal. Eight Americans and 273 British soldiers were killed. The Revolution began.

*Excerpt Chapter One:-*Yorktown like so many other communities is richly steeped in Colonial Heritage from the uncertain turbulent period known as the American Revolution. Between the years of 1775 and 1783, the struggle between Great Britain and the American rebels was to project the ravaging shadow of war across our landscape on a scale never before seen, nor never seen before or since. It is the individual caught in its web who feels its impact and whose lives are so profoundly scarred in the aftermath.

By nature, the American Revolution was a war of divided loyalties that pitted neighbor against neighbor, friend against friend, in a conflict that was to change all their lives. Some inhabitants joined the ranks of the armies never to return, while others stayed at home to protect their families and properties only to be driven off after the war.

The geographical proximity of Yorktown to key strategic areas, such as New England, New York City and the Hudson River, made this town a constant staging ground for both native and foreign armies. Throughout the Revolution, Washington’s American army maintained Yorktown as an encampment housing various army elements that guarded the Croton River Crossing. Late in the conflict, the French army under Rochambeau encamped in Yorktown twice, before and after the climatic battle of Yorktown, Virginia.

This panorama of armies brought to the town many of the famous individuals who so significantly influenced the critical period. Washington, Hamilton, Rochambeau, and Lafayette

.....George Washington, while passing through Crompond on November 11, 1776, grasped this strategic significance of the Croton River and its crossing at Pines Bridge... With the Croton River as the first line of defense against British moves north of New York City, the town of Yorktown would become the focus of much activity during the critical years of 1779-1781

By September, 1779, the British failing to exploit their minor gains on the Hudson, withdrew south to the defenses of Manhattan, relieving pressure on the Croton line..... Washington wasted no time in restoring his supply lines over Pines Bridge, ordered Gen. Robert Howe, with the 2nd North Carolina Regiment and the 5th Massachusetts Regiment, to occupy the vicinity on September 13. With the war reaching low ebb for Gen. George Washington in 1780, an allied French army under the command of Gen. Jean Baptiste Rochambeau landed at Newport, RI on July 10 of that year. Washington, seeking to capture New York, planned with Rochambeau that other armies would rendezvous north of New York and then assault the city with the French Fleet under Adm. DeGrasse in support. For this purpose, Washington in the winter of 1779 ordered missions designed to probe British defenses north of Manhattan.

On May 14, 1781, Col. Christopher Green, in command of the 1st Rhode Island Regiment was surprised and killed by Col. James Delancy’s loyalist refugees at his headquarters at the Davenport House, overlooking the Croton River on its north bank. Green had, in mid-August assumed command of Pines Bridge, with approximately 200 men, most of who were black recruits from Rhode Island. The troops were responsible for guarding Pines Bridge and its approaches, extending over a 20-mile area and including Oblenis Ford, one mile west of the bridge.

(cont'd)

Today, the Davenport House stands on the north side of Croton Heights Road. During the Revolution, the house stood on the south side, but typical of unpaved roads, the road shifted to the opposite side of the house. The remains of Colonel Greene and Major Flagg were interred at the Presbyterian Church cemetery in Yorktown, and mass graves somewhere near the Davenport house accommodate the remains of an unknown number of black soldiers from Green's Rhode Island regiment.

The exit of the Rochambeau army marked the end of the Revolution in Yorktown. To be sure, some American troops remained in the area until the final peace settlement in 1783, while the British remained in New York City. Yet even these victorious rebel troops were tired of war and many just simply left for home without being discharged.

The first chapter was adapted from the book *Yorktown at War* by John Martino

A special thank you to Alice Roker, Yorktown Town Clerk for permission to excerpt the book, "*Images of America Yorktown.*"

I hope you have benefited from your visit with us and that you will come back for another period in Yorktown History.

It is the plan of the YHS to bring you passages of our Town's "history" in the next few publications of our newsletter.

By: Joan J. Fyfe, Editor

WASHINGTON-ROCHAMBEAU REVOLUTIONARY ROUTE

The historical 225 anniversary of the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route is planned for the Fall of 2006.

The route, which runs more than 600 miles through nine states, is the path George Washington's Continental Army and Gen. Comte de Rochambeau's French Army took to and from their ultimate victory over British Maj. Gen. Charles Cornwallis in Yorktown in 1781-82.

The Washington-Rochambeau Revolution Route is the example of joint Franco-American cooperation under the overall leadership of Gen. George Washington.

A network of roads traversed colonial America, some used for centuries by Native Americans, which were the economic lifelines of the colonies. Known variously as "Post Road," King's Highway, or "Old Trail," these roads were used for multiple purposes such as travel, trade, and military campaigns. The roads that constitute the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route pre-date the war. After the outbreak of the war, the armies took these roads during their operations. Their use as conduits for the deployment of the opposing forces was well established before the French and American armies took them in 1781-1782.

The route consists of sections of various lengths of these colonial roads, such as the Boston Post Road in Connecticut, the Albany Post Road in New York, the Assunpink Trail in New Jersey, and Ding's Highway in Delaware. The roads are interspersed with mountainous passes such as the Clove in Suffern, NY and the crossing over the Susquehanna at Bald Friar Ferry and Ford in Maryland. When strung together, they formed the fastest and most convenient way to reach Williamsburg in 1781.

Source: The Journal News & National Historic Landmarks Survey

Women in the Military

In the beginning of the America we know there was a Revolution. And although the call to arms was for men, several women donned the uniform of a Revolutionary soldier and fought against the British.

A small percentage of women, such as Deborah Sampson, are known to have enlisted under the pretense of being male and served until they were discovered and dismissed.

Mary Ludwig Hays McCauley followed her husband into battle at Monmouth in June 1778 and became famous as Molly Pitcher...

One of the women accompanying the armies to Yorktown was Sarah Mary Matthews, born in 1756 in Blooming Grove, Orange County, New York. After her husband was killed in the early battle of the Revolutionary War, she married Aaron Osborn in January 1780. Osborn was a commissary sergeant in Captain James Gregg's company of Colonel Goose Van Schaick's First New York Regiment.

In the summer of 1781, she and the other women in her regiment – traveled with the regiment across New Jersey working alternately as a seamstress, washerwoman, and baker for the soldiers. In Baltimore she boarded a ship and sailed down Chesapeake Bay to Williamsburg. At the siege of Yorktown, she cooked for four soldiers besides her husband, carrying water and taking care of the wounded. At some point, she encountered Washington who asked, "Young woman, are you not afraid of the bullets?" No, "she replied," "the bullets would not cheat the gallows."

Historic & Landmark Preservation Forum Held

On November 12th a discussion on Preservation, Landmarking and the Certified Local Government (CLG) Program was held at the Yorktown Museum.

Participating were the general public, landmark property owners, Yorktown government and departments and numerous planning professionals from around the county.

The Yorktown Landmark Preservation Committee and the Museum sponsored the event for information sharing within the local community and from neighboring communities concerning the landmarking and protection of historic properties and the methods employed by CLGs to do so.

Representatives from Westchester County and the towns of Peekskill, Yonkers and New Rochelle made presentations and answered questions on the benefits their preservation programs received from the CLG Program.

Established by the National Historic Preservation Act and administered by New York's preservation office, their local preservation efforts have been supported by special grants, technical preservation assistance, professional legal advice, training opportunities and involvement in preservation information networking.

Yorktown has reviewed the CLG Program and made application to become a CLG. The Landmarks Preservation Committee has merged the best aspects of our local ordinance with the model law offered by the state office and also proposed new members for the committee to the Town Board for review, public hearing and adoption.

Women in the Military (cont'd)

The end of the war found Matthews at Continental Village in New York and when Osborn left her for another woman in 1784, she married a third time in 1787. Forty years later, in 1837, she applied for a pension and submitted her autobiography and Revolutionary War experiences as part of her application. Her application was successful and she lived to enjoy her pension for another 20 years. Sarah Matthews died on 25 April 1858, at about 102 years old.

By: Joan J. Fyfe

Source: Statement of National Significance 1/30/03
The Minerva Center



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