



YORKTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P. O. Box 355 - Yorktown Heights, NY 10598

<http://www.yorktownhistory.org>

NEWSLETTER

Preserve the Past - Enlighten the Future

Summer/Fall 2005

“ETERNAL VIGILANCE”

By: Paul R. Martin, III

**New York Militia, First Presbyterian Church, Crompond
June 3 (12), 1779**

“The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural nutrient” (manure.”)

Thomas Jefferson to William S. Smith,
November 13, 1787

Thomas Jefferson is also attributed with saying,
“The Price of Liberty is Eternal Vigilance.” ¹

On a morning in early June, 1779, liberty cost a dear price when vigilance was lax in the hamlet of Crompond. The First Presbyterian Church and its outlying buildings in Crompond served the community as a central meeting place . It was presided over by the Pastor, the reverend Sackett, an outspoken patriot rebel who pronounced his displeasure with the King from the pulpit and at least once had to flee the area for his own safety. Pastor Samuel Sackett belonged to the Presbytery of Suffolk and served several congregations throughout the areas of Westchester and Putnam Counties. In October of 1761 he was asked by the parishioners in Crompond to be their full time Pastor. He was given a parsonage house to live in with 25 cords of wood and paid a salary of 65 pounds (about 300 dollars). Pastor Sackett served until his death in 1784. ²

During the Revolution, Col. Samuel Drakes 3rd and 4th NY Militia had their headquarters, barracks and a munitions storage house at the church . ³ It was also the meeting place of the local “*Committee of Safety*” whose task it was to “*Disarm the disaffected and punish the incorrigible*” meaning the local Tories. The local Committee of Congress also met there. ⁴

From this location the patriots, who were also under the command of Captain Henry Strang, organized and struck out in raids against the British throughout Van Cortlandt Manor and lower Westchester. Ezekial Hyatt had raised a company of minutemen at the request of the Provincial Congress. Committee men, Joseph Strong, Abraham Purdy and Joseph Lee ordered Hyatt to arrest an influential Tory named Chase. Chase was taken to a guard house in Peekskill. Nathaniel Merritt, an influential Tory from Peekskill assembled a large crowd of several hundred armed Tories who demanded Chase’s release. Cpt. Henry Strang and Joseph Strong organized their militia men along with about 600 Continental troops, marched to Peekskill and disarmed the Tory mob. The confiscated weapons were placed in the Parsonage House of the First Presbyterian Church. ⁵

(continued from front page) (page 2)

Attempting to neutralize the pesky patriots, and perhaps as a retaliatory response to the Peekskill incident, British troops under the command of Col. Robertson were sent to the area and landed at Verplank's point. ⁶ On the morning of June 3 or 12 (14), the exact date is unclear, a detachment of men commanded by Col. Abercrombie and guided by a local Tory named Caleb Morgan, struck the town of Crompond, and burned the parsonage house or "corner house" and the munitions store house to the ground. They met little resistance. Caleb Morgan recalled many years later that he, *"Was with the British Army on the North River (Hudson), on board the British Fleet and landed with the British army, under command of Col. Robertson, who commanded me and others, who, being acquainted with the country were to guide a party of British soldiers, under the command of Col. Abercrombie to Crompond. I and the others went with the troops to within about a half mile of the Crompond Meeting House, under cover of a height of land to the West of the place. I stayed with the main body as covering party. I learnt (sic) from them that went, that they had burnt a house, which I have understood since and believe was on the parsonage ground of the First Presbyterian Society in Hanover then called Crompond, now Yorktown."* Col. John Hyatt, a church elder testified, *"In the month of June, 1779, a party of British troops landed at Verplank's Point and proceeded to said Yorktown and burned the Parsonage house, owned by the First Presbyterian Society of the order of the Kirk of Scotland, ⁷ then in possession of the American troops and used as a guard house and store house for the depositing of arms and provisions."* Crompond resident, Margaret Williams testified in 1834, *"During the summer season one year during the Revolutionary War, a party of British troops invaded the village and burned the parsonage house belonging to the Presbyterian Society..."* ⁸

That evening and for several days following the early June raid the local patriots were on a heightened state of alert. It was said that *"For them there was often not so much safety in their own dwellings as in the camp"* and that the patriots *"Tilled the fields with guns slung on their backs, and came to church to pray with one eye open for the approach of British troops."* ⁹

Col. Drake continued to utilize the Church as a staging area for harassing the British throughout the remainder of June. They also supported the defense of the Croton River, specifically Pines Bridge crossing, which hampered the British operations on the Hudson. ¹⁰

The British realized the patriots were still organizing at the Church and determined that a second attack on Crompond was necessary to put down the rebel activities in the area. On June 24 a second raid was launched against Crompond and the church. Col. Tarleton's Legion, consisting of about 700 men, including 200 mounted troops, crossed the Croton River at Vail's Ford and struck the town from the east up Hanover Road from the Pines Bridge, while a light infantry unit of about 130 men, probably the 37th regiment of foot, under Lt. Col. Robert Abercromby, struck from the west from Verplank via The Kings Highway or Kings Road also called at that time the Crompond Road (202)

All total about 1000 British soldiers participated in the attack on the town while some 400 men of The Queens rangers, commanded by Lt. Col. John Simcoe attacked the Pines Bridge, securing the crossing for Tarleton's retreat. On the way through town several horseman attacked and killed John Shaw who was mistaken for Capt. Delavan at Delavan's stable.

Thomas Strang (son of Capt. Strang and a member of the regiment) testified, *"He, (John Shaw) defended himself stoutly, but was set upon by five or six burly horsemen and cut to pieces"*

"Eternal Viigilance" will continue in several parts in the YHS newsletter.

Joan J. Fyfe, editor

New Book Covers Revolutionary War in Yorktown

The Yorktown Historical Society announced the publication of a new book, “The Hasty Affair at Pines Bridge.” The book is based on Revolutionary War research by Allison Albee, noted historian, who headed the Westchester County Historical Society a half-century ago. It has been edited and revised by Monica Doherty with an introduction by Lincoln Diamant and a cover design by local artist, Paul R. Martin, III.

The book tells the story of the British guerilla raid on the 1st Rhode Island Regiment, all African-American, who were helping to hold the Patriot lines along the Croton River in 1781.

Col. Drake reorganized and again utilized the church grounds as a staging area for harrassing the British throughout the remainder of June. His troops also supported the defenses of the Croton River, specifically Pines Bridge crossing, which hampered the British operations along the Hudson. Drake’s continued presence at the Church would bring dire consequences to the town, and the men stationed there.

Next issue. The British Attack Again!

The book was prepared through the cooperation of New York State’s Commission of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Bernadette Castro Commissioner and funded by a grant secured by State Senator, Vincent Liebell. Copies of the book will be distributed free to present and new members of the Society attending the September 22nd meeting at the Yorktown Community Cultural Center, Senior Meeting Room, and Yorktown Heights at 8:00 p.m.

Footnotes

1. Curran, John Philip. “The condition upon which God hath given liberty to man is eternal vigilance” Speech upon the Right of Election of the Lord Mayor of Dublin (July 10, 1790). Also attributed to Thomas Jefferson.
2. Barford, Rev. George N. Historical sermon, October 27, 1963. First Presbyterian Church Historical Papers, unpublished
3. Martino, John T. Yorktown at War. Zellel Printing and Communications.

4. Bolton, Robert. The History of Several Towns, Manors and Patents of the 1996. p.14 County of Westchester. 1905 p. 282
5. Bolton p. 667 6. Martino. p.12
7. Cummings. Minister’s Historical Talk, early 1900’s. First Presbyterian Church Historical Papers, unpublished. also Committee of Claims, 31st U S Congress. Report no. 492. 1850 p.7 8. Committee of Claims, 31st U S Congress. Report no. 492. 1850 pp.7-8 9. Gillette. History of the Presbyterian Church, Vol. I p. 89 10. Martino. p. 12

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September - December 2005 Programs - Yorktown Historical Society

September 22, 2005, Thursday - 8:00 PM, Yorktown Community Cultural Center, Senior Meeting Room, Yorktown Heights. "The History of the Mount Beacon Incline Railway." Jim Bopp will talk about the history of Mount Beacon, its Revolutionary War history, historical markers and turn of the century Incline Railway, revered in 1902 as the "World's Steepest Incline Railway", an engineering marvel ahead of its time.

October 27, 2005, Thursday - 8:00 PM, Yorktown Community Cultural Center, Senior Meeting Room, Yorktown Heights. "Fort Montgomery: The Battle for the Hudson." The fort, just north of the Bear Mountain Bridge, overlooking the Hudson River was the site of a bitterly fought battle on October 6, 1777, for control of the Hudson River. Don Fraser, Site Manager for the Revolutionary War fort that disappeared into the woods .. until 21st century "heroes" rescued it, will present the historic background on the recently restored Grand Battery, North Redoubt, foundations, barracks, powder magazine and storehouse.

November 17, 2005, Thursday - 7:30 PM, John C. Hart Memorial Library, East Main Street, Shrub Oak, NY. Paul R. Martin, III will present "They Flew With Tigers," a slide/talk presentation jointly sponsored with the John C. Hart Library. Paul Martin, both a local artist and board member of the Yorktown Historical Society, with his father-in-law (and a crew member), Michael Fevola, will present the story of the B-24 "American Beauty" and her 14th Air Force crew in the China, Burma, India Theatre during WWII. This historic event is being documented and will appear in a soon to be published book by the presenters.

December 4, 2005, Sunday - Yorktown Museum- Opening Day of new exhibit and family program.

December 7, 2005, Wednesday - 7:00 PM, Yorktown Community Cultural Center, Senior Meeting Room, Yorktown Heights. The Yorktown Historical Society will hold a "Holiday Covered Dish Supper-Artifact Exhibit" at its December meeting. An exhibit of paintings, drawings, photographs and artifacts that depict Yorktown's history will be displayed. Members and guests are encourage to bring a dish to share as well as any Yorktown memorabilia they care to exhibit and talk about. Beverages will be provided. The society requests attendance be confirmed by calling 914-245-5153. All Programs are Free and Open to the Public



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