

History of the September 1777 Encampment of General Benjamin Lincoln in Pawlet



HISTORY OF THE SEPTEMBER 1777 ENCAMPMENT OF GENERAL BENJAMIN LINCOLN IN PAWLET

This spot holds special significance for the people of Pawlet. Prior to America's rebellion against the oppression caused by England's forced taxation and treatment of America as an unruly child, tradition has it that a battle of the French and Indian War was fought on nearby Indian Hill. It is believed that many of our early settlers had passed and repassed these mountains and when the urge arose to conquer new horizons, what more idyllic spot than "Pawlett".

Here in North Pawlet, the first settler was Dr. Simon Burton, who after assisting in the organization of Arlington, moved on to "Pawlett" and the proprietors awarded him 50 acres of land as the first settler. North Pawlet at that time was the center of the town. The entry for Dec. 5, 1769 in the Pawlet Survey Book, states, "Voted that all pine timber towards the North and West part or Senter of the town shall be Sequestered for the use of the proprietors".

September 1, 1777, General Benjamin Lincoln and General Horatio Gates met at the Sprouts, where the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers join. It was at this time the plans were made for the Pawlet Expedition with General Lincoln as the leader.

On the 8th General Lincoln, fat, affable and extremely capable, arrived at Pawlet, with a portion of the troops necessary to carry through the plans agreed upon by General Gates and himself. It was here that they halted to await the rest of the troops and the supplies so vital for an army of men to expedite a plan such as the attempt to "divide, divert and distract" Burgoyne's Army.

Pawlet was a strong post, both of their flanks were covered by mountains, with Haystack towering above and the rest practically impassable. Not only this, but it was the end of a road passable to wagons, an impenetrable fortress. To add one other advantage of Pawlet as the center for troops and supplies of this maneuver, Pawlet was practically equal distance as the crow flies, from Fort Ticonderoga and Stillwater. Thus movements could be made in either direction with equal speed if the need should arise.

Early in the summer of 1777 Ticonderoga was still held by the Americans, by late in August the forces at the fort were forced to evacuate, the Battle of Hubbardton had been fought and lost, followed by the Battle of Bennington. This last was a glorious victory giving the Americans renewed hope and encouraging more men to join the American forces with the hope of an early victory in these Northern Grants. To add to this, the massacre of Jane McCrea at Fort Edward had so enraged the men that they were fighting mad and more anxious to lick those Redcoats.

In July 1777 the Council of Safety appointed Samuel Herrick Colonel of a regiment of Rangers who established headquarters in Pawlet. Colonel Herrick had raised his company of Rangers in Pawlet and the immediate vicinity. The summer was spent gathering supplies for his men, besides felling trees, moving boulders into paths, knocking out bridges, draining waterways, making swamps where dry lands had been and in every conceivable manner hindering and harassing Burgoyne's troops as they made their way south towards Fort Edward. Burgoyne later referred to them as hanging "like a gathering cloud on my left flank".

General Burgoyne still depended on his outposts in his rear to furnish his army on the move, with supplies. These maneuvers of the Colonials in the Grants would not only block his army if he should deem it necessary to retreat, but would hinder his gathering of provisions, bleeding the whole area not only of food and animals, but other articles useful to an army on the march.

Tradition in the Harmon family has it, Burgoyne's men in search of food stole a large black kettle that Ezekiel Harmon used for cooking food for his hogs. After the Battle of Saratoga the kettle was found at Burgoyne's campsite and today it hangs in the Bennington Battle Monument, labeled "Burgoyne's Kettle",

Quoting from the Journal of Ralph Cross of Newburyport, Mass., "Encamped the Whole Regiment in a Wood by the Side of the Rode facing West. Col. Johnson in a Barn on Right and Myselfe in a Logg-house on Left. The Upper End of this Town their is a Rode which Leads to Fort Edward between Two Large Mountains".

By the 13th of September, General Lincoln's little army of 2500 men and stores had arrived. General Lincoln divided his troops at the crossroads nearby this spot.

Colonel Brown was sent with 500 men, to cross South Bay at the most narrow and southerly end of Lake Champlain. He would then be at the north end of Lake George. He and his men were to destroy all boats and stores belonging to the enemy and release our prisoners held at this post.

Colonel Johnson left with another 500 men to Mount Independence to carry out the same instructions at that post as Colonel Brown was to do at Lake George.

Colonel Woodbridge was ordered with 500 men to Skenesborough, then to proceed to Fort Anne, becoming a cover for Colonel Brown if nothing else.

On the 17th General Lincoln left 400 men to guard the stores at Pawlet and with about 700 started for Skenesborough to join Colonel Woodbridge and make a more effective cover for Colonel Brown. Having word from General Gates that the enemy had evacuated the posts in their rear, the need to proceed any further then Skenesborough wasn't necessary. The troops were ordered back to Pawlet.

Colonel Brown had marched to the north end of Lake George attacked and carried the place, Mount Defiance also fell into their hands. The loss of men was 3-4 killed and 5 wounded. They took 293 prisoners, 150 watercraft, arms to equal the number of prisoners, a few cannons and some ammunition.

On the 21st General Lincoln left the men to march under their proper officers to Stillwater, while he proceeded to Bemis Heights where General Gates was quartered. Stores were still held at Pawlet and many of the troops remained.

After the Battle of Bennington, Major Wait was sent to take possession of Mount Independence, and found nothing. The boats were sunk, all building and bridges burned, cannon destroyed, nothing left but complete devastation. Captain Ebenezer Allen and fifty Green Mountain Rangers made life miserable for the enemy, harassing the defeated and retreating men from Fort Ticonderoga. He took forty-nine prisoners besides livestock and boats the enemy had hoped to save.

One of the prisoners was Dinah Mattis, a negress, with her child Nancey. They were brought to Pawlet, given their freedom and the right to go anywhere in the United States without molestation, as though she were born free. This was an act of the Continental Congress. Thus the first act of manumission was performed in Pawlet, it being the belief of these men who were throwing off oppression from the Mother Country, England, that no person had the right to hold another human being in bondage.

This ended the War for Independence in the north. Now they could return to the business of clearing and settling the land, although they were still called upon to take up arms for various alarms and the defense of the frontier for several years.

Pawlet played an historic part in the defense of our country. Thus ends one chapter in the building of Pawlet. Men fought and died that we might today enjoy the rich heritage of our town, PAWLET.

Dorothy Offensend

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Unveiling of the historic marker presented to the people of Pawlet in commemoration of the important role Pawlet played in the maneuvers directed by General Benjamin Lincoln, September 1777.

1:30 P.M. - September 3, 1977

Formation of the Pawlet Boy Scouts as "Herrick's Rangers" - Mr. Gilbert Mach, Scoutmaster

Flag Salute - led by Col. John Williams

Welcome - Mr. James Warner - President Pawlett Historical Society

Response - Mr. Harold J.R. Stillwell, President Vermont Society Sons of the American Revolution

Brief history of the September 1777 encampment of General Benjamin Lincoln in Pawlet.

Mrs. Dorothy Offensend - Curator Pawlett Historical Society

Presentation and remarks - Col. John Williams, Chairman Historic Sites and Markers Committee
Vermont Society Sons of the American Revolution

2:30 - 4:30 - Open House - Pawlet Congregational Church
Co-chairmen - Mrs. Elsie Rogers and Mrs. Helen Young
Congregational Ladies Aid
Hostesses - Lake St. Catherine Chapter Daughters of the American Revolution
Pawlett Historical Society
Pawlet Kindergarten Association

10:30 A.M. - 12:00 Noon and 2:30 - 5:30 P.M.
Exhibit of photographs - Grange Room, Pawlet Village
The Pawlet Bicentennial of the American Revolution, 1975-76

Photographer - Mr. Neil Rappaport

In September, 1777, about 2,500 American troops under Gen. Benjamin Lincoln encamped in Pawlet. On 12-13 September, having broken camp and passed through the defile south of here, 500 men under Col. John Brown and 500 under Col. Samuel Johnson marched to Ticonderoga and Mount Independence respectively on the northern road and 500 under Col. Benjamin Ruggles Woodbridge to Skenesborough (Whitehall) on the western road. In the vicinity of Ticonderoga and Lake George Landing the Americans captured over 330 prisoners, took or destroyed considerable war stores, numerous horses, carriages and boats, released about 118 American prisoners and captured several enemy outposts including Mount Defiance, scaled in an heroic assault by Capt. Ebenezer Allen's company of Col. Samuel Herrick's Vermont Rangers.

Pawlet was the base for these successful operations. The presence of troops here as well as the enemy's disabling losses helped prevent the supply, reinforcement and retreat of Gen. Burgoyne's army thereby contributing to its surrender at Saratoga, 17 October, 1777.

Erected by Vermont Society
Sons of the American Revolution and
The Pawlett Historical Society
and Lake St. Catherine D.A.R.
1977