

Culver Hill; A Brief History of the Battle and the Park

by

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In 1894, the Plattsburgh Institute dedicated a monument at Culver Hill on the Beekmantown Road as a memorial to the major skirmish that took place at that site on September 6, 1814. As years went by, and the thoroughfare transformed into the paved highway State Route 22, the monument was moved and ended perched on a steep embankment by the roadside. Brush grew along the location, and by 2001, the stone obelisk was obscured from passing vehicles. In 2003, an ad hoc committee of community members was formed to discuss and initiate future plans for the monument in preparation for the Battle of Plattsburgh Bicentennial in 2014. Through this cooperation, an agreement was established with the Town of Beekmantown, the Beekmantown Lions Club, and Gladys Fortin, to transfer an acre of land from the Fortin Family to the Town to create a historic park and a permanent home for the monument. In 2006, the NYS Department of Transportation held hearings to upgrade and widen the highway. As a result of those hearings, the DOT took into consideration the desire to establish the Town park, and it included plans in their project. Through their support, designs were drawn and the park was constructed. The monument was moved inside the park and the stonewall that was to the west of the monument was disassembled and reassembled to its current location. The initial dedication of the Culver Hill Historic Park took place on September 12, 2008. Since then, grants were awarded by the Champlain Valley National Heritage Partnership/Lake Champlain Basin Program for three interpretive panels, along with another grant through the William G. Pomeroy Foundation for an historic marker. Also, a flagpole and flags were donated by the Woodmen of the World, Lodge 462. In 2014, during the Bicentennial of the Battle of Plattsburgh, the Culver Hill Monument was rededicated on September 6th, the anniversary date of that bloody battle that took place two so long ago.

The following is the address "A Recounting of the Battle of Beekmantown at Culver Hill" that was given by Town Historian, Gary VanCour, on September 12, 2008, for the initial dedication of the Culver Hill Historic Park.

"History is an interpretation of the evidence found from the past. Often history relies on official records and eyewitness accounts. Like a large jigsaw puzzle, pieces are found and placed together to show us what happened. As new pieces are discovered or interpreted over time, the story unfolds. It is an ever expanding process and sometimes there are changes to what we once thought to be true. Today, mainly through the words of people that were there at the time, I offer you a brief summary of the events of September 6, 1814, as the British army marched from the hamlet of West Chazy to Plattsburgh.

On September 5, 1814, the British had encamped just south of West Chazy. The American militia, under the command of General Benjamin Mooers, which numbered about 700 men, were encamped at East Beekmantown. Rev. Stephen Kinsley, of West Chazy, was home with a very sick son, as two British officers imposed for breakfast. Rev. Kinsley agreed to feed them. However, in his prayer, the reverend asked that, "the enemies of our country may be sent back with shame to their country." Although being very polite, one of the British officers remarked, "I think you haven't much faith in you prayer, sir." Rev. Kinsley answered, "I have full

faith that you will go back with shame to your country." No harm came to Rev. Kinsley or his home, in spite of his defiance, which says much for the British officers.

Henry L. Dominy's family lived just south of the British encampment. In 1886, Henry, who was 7 years old at the time of the invasion, told Dr. David S. Kellogg his recollections. It seems as though Henry's father and uncle exercised a bit of trickery with the British advanced guard on the evening of September 5th, while providing vital information to the American militia. Henry recalled, "I saw the British, 7,000 of them, when they went by my father's place." (It should be noted, more recent estimates place the number at 4,000.) Henry continued, "Early the next morning, just before sunrise, the British army marched. It took two and one half hours for them to pass. There was a large apple tree near our house. An officer got under the tree and used a spyglass to look south with. He then said, "I spy arms." At once a horn was tooted, then another and another all along the line. The soldiers with their guns at a shoulder started on a double quickstep and the whole army was off for Plattsburgh."

The date was September 6, 1814, and it was to be a bloody day for the British. General Alexander Macomb sent Major John Wool along with 250 regular soldiers to assist the militia at East Beekmantown. The British had decided to split their forces into two groups just north of Beekmantown. One column traveled down what is now called the Durand Road, and the other, including the East Kent Regiment known as the 3rd Buffs, took a road east before heading south on what is now the Ashley Road. The first skirmish took place in East Beekmantown as the American militia and Major Wool's regulars encountered the British. This attempt had little effect on slowing the oncoming line. The British, however, suffered 14 wounded, while the Americans had 2 killed and possibly 2 wounded. A neighboring barn became a temporary hospital. Seeing the ever moving formation of British uniforms, many of the militia broke ranks and ran. In a letter to the Secretary of War, Brig. General Macomb wrote, "Major Wool with his party disputed the road with great obstinacy, but the militia could not be prevailed upon to stand, notwithstanding the exertions of their general and staff officers; although the fields were divided by strong stone walls, and they were told that the enemy could not possibly cut them off." According to a letter written years later by Major Wool, "... (General Mooers) endeavored to bring his troops into action but did not succeed. They fled without firing a shot and did not stop until they crossed at or near Pike's Cantonment ..." It should be noted that the Americans were greatly outnumbered and that many of the British troops they met were hardened veterans of the Napoleonic Wars. The Americans had no chance at stopping the British advance. However, Major Wool and his men, along with about 30 militia who remained, continued to contest the determined British line as they continued south on the Beekmantown Road.

Wool decided to make a major stand at Culver Hill, so named for the Daniel Culver house on the road. The Americans were located not only at the crest of the hill, but also under protection of the stonewalls. We are standing on the site of the ensuing assault. The British marched up the hill toward the awaiting Americans. It is at this location that Lt. Col. James Willington of the 3rd Buffs was killed while rallying his troops. Nathaniel Chittenden Culver was a boy at the time and was hiding in the basement of his lathed and plastered house with his grandfather, grandmother, an uncle, and another woman. In his recollections to Dr. David Kellogg in 1887 he said, "The balls went through and through our house." "Colonel W(i)llington was killed just at the top of the hill, north of and near our house. He was urging his men on and, wheeling his horse, was shot right in the throat, in front." It is believed that the colonel was shot by Private Samuel Terry, of Peru, N.Y. Corporal Stephen Patridge of Jay, N.Y. and a member

of the Essex County Militia was also killed along with Ensign John Chapman of the 3rd Foot British Army and reportedly another British officer, a Captain Westropp. Of Corporal Patridge, Nathaniel Culver recalled, "He was nearsighted and was riddled through and through." Several more were wounded and brought to nearby buildings as temporary hospitals. Three wounded, one British and two Americans, were brought to the Culver house. The dead were hastily buried in a garden at the foot of the hill in East Beekmantown.

Nathaniel Culver stated that his grandmother feared the Indians. He said, "The British and Indians did come in, but got some milk and did no damage." However, his grandmother had good reason to be concerned. It had not been that many years since this was the frontier and the many dangers from wild animals and cross border raids. Apparently British Sir General Thomas Brisbane, who had been upset with some events leading up to the battle, was also in command of a large party of Native Americans. He expressed his concerns years later as he described in his private reminiscences, "On my assuming the command of the advance, I found every possible atrocity committed on both sides. The sentries were frequently attacked, and a number of isolated individuals murdered. This system was so opposite to what I had been accustomed to in the Duke of Wellington's army that I immediately wrote to General Macomb, to propose that we should carry on the warfare on the same system as was followed by the European armies. I received a very polite reply from the General, stating that if I would give the orders to my troops, he would undertake to see them enforced on the part of those of the United States. The American commander, General Macomb, asked leave to carry away for burial the dead body of one of their officers at Plattsburgh. I at once granted leave, and continued standing beside the Americans, while at least 700 Indians stood behind me. They would otherwise have fallen on the enemy, and foully murdered them. From that date I am glad that I can freely state that the regulation was most faithfully observed on both sides."

There was some confusion with the British immediately following the death of Col. Willington and the British troops temporarily fell back. However, they quickly rallied and continued on their march. The Americans, seeing that the British were not stopped, fell back to harass the British with sniper fire. The two British columns were rejoined just north of Plattsburgh and proceeded to the village to meet the American forces once more at Halsey's Corners. That story will be continued at the ceremony to be held at Halsey's Corners today at 1:00.

The march from West Chazy down the Beekmantown Road to Plattsburgh on September 6th had its price. By day's end, total losses for the British were: at least 3 officers dead and several more wounded, plus 100 soldier casualties. American losses totaled about 45 including at least 3 dead in Beekmantown.

As for those that fell at Culver Hill, H. K. Averill, Sr., a member of Aiken's Volunteers, entered in his journal on May 3, 1819, "The remains of Colonel W(i)llington of the 3rd British Regiment of Buffs was interred today in the burying ground in the village with military honors by part of the 2nd Regiment of the United States Infantry ..." Corporal Stephen Patridge of the American militia had been taken by his brothers immediately following the battle to be buried in Jay, N. Y. Due in large part to the efforts of Dr. David Kellogg, a monument was purchased commemorating the Battle of Culver Hill and the bravery demonstrated on both sides. Many speeches were made and an extensive program detailing various accounts of the historic event was printed. An entry in Dr. Kellogg's

journal on September 22, 1894 simply states, "This morning from 10 to 11 o'clock at Culver Hill, Beekmantown, were the exercises in connection with placing the monument there by the Plattsburgh Institute. At least 500 people were present and things passed off delightfully."

As you can see, through the donation of land by the Fortin Family and the cooperation and courtesy of the NYS DOT and the Town of Beekmantown, the Culver Hill Monument has been relocated to what will be a new historic park. Today, we will lay wreaths at that monument honoring the sacrifices of both sides on that fateful day in September 1814. On behalf of the Town of Beekmantown and the Battle of Plattsburgh Commemoration Committee, thank you being here today and please join us for the laying of the wreaths."