



THE BURNING ISSUES



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Volume 14 Issue 1 Official Newsletter of the Burning of the Valleys Military Association, Inc.

March 2006

From the Chair

Spring is nearly here, and for those who are following the 225th Anniversary Cycle, it's 1781. We are licking our wounds from the many 1780 raids that happened last year in the Valleys. And if you listen to all the national reenacting hoopla - "its all down South in 1781 - Cowpens, Guildford Courthouse, Green Spring, and Yorktown" - you'd think we were all taking naps under shade trees in the NY Valleys this year. But we know better.

The BVMA is supporting many civilian oriented events this year which give us time to reflect under that shade tree — A Sheep & Wool Festival at Clermont, Mabee House, and Old Fort Johnson, as well as un-civil warfare among neighbors at Gilboa, and German Flatts.

But we do have two 225th Anniversary events to Commemorate in our humble Valleys and we intend to do so. A Kidnapping Attempt was made on General Phillip Schuyler at the Schuyler Mansion and we will recreate this thwarted abduction on August 6th.

And on September 30th and October 1st, we will have the only BVMA Sponsored event for the year to be held near the original site in Poland, NY — the 225th Anniversary of The Battle of West Canada Creek . This has great meaning to us because our former neighbor and frequent raider

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1781

**The War moves South, but
the Valleys are still on Alert**

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Parting Words...

Greetings!

I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone for the support I've gotten over the last four years, first as deputy, then as Chairman. It's been an interesting ride...

I look forward to seeing the BVMA grow. There's the potential to do a lot in these "Valley's", and by "a lot" I don't necessarily mean big events. We occupy an important niche, and we can and will do things that other organizations will not. I encourage everyone to continue to support the BVMA and its new executive board. Good Luck, Dean and Dave... but you really aren't going to need it!

Things are shaping up nicely for "War in Schoharie", the first weekend in May. I hope to see you all there.

John [Ex Officio]

Behind the Lines

Behind the Lines has a new face; our contact officer is now Jonathan Reynolds. For those of you who thought Behind the Lines was strictly for females and people under 15, Jonathan is living proof that "civilian" has a much broader definition. Anyone who wishes to interpret that part of period history which didn't involve the military is welcome to develop a demonstration, presentation, or persona that gives life to the many interesting facets of civilian life during the 1770s and should con-

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From the Chair (cont'd from p. 1)

on our farms, Walter Butler is slain. It brings a certain closure to the wars on the NY western frontier. This is a BVMA only event, for us and our guests, on private land. Its our show, lets do it proud. As such we'll need people to pitch in to make this a success and I look forward to working with you all.

By the end of 1781, Butler may be gone, but Bettis is still on the loose and the scourge of the Champlain Valley - his capture won't happen until 1782 ... so all is not over in New York on the 225th Cycle but the 230th of the Year of the Hangman — 1777 is 2007 and the cycle of burning begins again in the Valleys. People of the Valleys — be strong in mind as well as heart, as I know the raiders shall be.

Cheers,

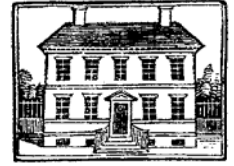
Dean

**Behind the Lines** (cont'd from p. 1)

tact Jonathan (check the BVMA website) for information on programs to be showcased at BVMA events. Nora Smith is also representing Behind the Lines as your delegate.

Dr. Hamilton's Observations on the Dutch of Albany

He notes of Albany: "The Dutch here keep their houses very neat and clean, both without and within. Their chamber floors are generally laid with rough plank, which in time, by constant rubbing and scrubbing, becomes as smooth as if it had been planed. Their chambers and rooms are large and handsome. They have their beds generally in alcoves, so that you may go thro' all the rooms of a great house and see never a bed. They affect pictures much, particularly scripture history, with which they adorn their rooms. They set out their cabinets and buffets much with china. Their kitchens are likewise very clean, and there they hang earthen or delft plates and dishes all round the walls, in manner of pictures, having a hole drilled thro' the edge of the plate or dish, and a loop of ribbon put into it to hang it by; but notwithstanding all this nicety and cleanliness in their houses they are in their persons slovenly and dirty. They live here very frugally and plain, for the chief merit among them seems to be riches, which they spare no pains or trouble to acquire, but are a civil and hospitable people in their way, but at best rustic and unpolished. I imagined when I first came there that there were some very rich people in the place. They talked of thirty, forty, fifty, and a hundred thousand pounds as of nothing, but I soon found that their riches consisted more in large tracts of land than in cash. " and "They live in their houses in Albany as if it were in prisons, all their doors and windows being perpetually shut. But the reason of this may be the little desire they have for conversation and society, their whole thoughts being turned upon profit and gain, which necessarily makes them live retired and frugal. At least this is the common character of the Dutch everywhere. But indeed the excessive cold winters here oblige them in that season to keep all snug and close, and they have not summer sufficient to revive heat in their veins, so as to make them uneasy or put it in their heads to air themselves. They are a healthy, long-lived people, many in this city being in age near or above 100 years, and eighty is a very common age. They are subject to rotten teeth and scorbutic gums, which, I suppose, is caused by the cold air, and their constant diet of salt provisions in the winter; for in that season they are obliged to lay in, as for a sea voyage, there being no stirring out of doors then for fear of never stirring again."



... "Their women in general, both old and young, are the hardest favoured ever I beheld. Their old women wear a comical head-dress, large pendants, short petticoats, and they stare upon one like witches"

... "They generally eat to their morning's tea raw hung beef, sliced down in thin chips in the manner of parmesan cheese. Their winter here is excessive cold, so as to freeze their cattle stiff in one night in the stables"

... "The young men here call their sweethearts luffees, and a young fellow of eighteen is reckoned a simpleton if he has not a luffee; but their women are so homely that a man must never have seen any other luffees else they will never entrap him."

Excerpts from Dr. Alexander Hamilton's Intineratium, written in 1744
— Submitted by Dean Barnes

The Attempt to Abduct General Phillip Schuyler and the Great Kidnap Plot of 1781

— Submitted by Kevin Richard-Morrow

Albany, Tuesday evening (circa 9 pm, August 7, 1781, Phillip Schuyler to Henry Glen)

Dear Sir,

An hour ago I was attacked by Waltermyer and a party of about twenty, ne of my people bravely defended a door which gave me time for me to gain my room, where I remained without attempting me, by firing I alarmed the town which turn(ed) out with alacrity and expedition, the villains carried of (f) one of my men, wounded another, and took some of my plate. I have to Intreat(sic) you to request the Onieda, Tuscaroras, and Cajhuawagas to turn out. I wish them to divide into parties one towards the Hillebergh another towards the Cannisteghenna and a third to cross the river towards Ballstown, they must take up every suspected person.

**Your Servant,
P. Schuyler**

In the letter above Phillip Schuyler gives the first written account of the attempt to kidnap him. We can forgive his shaky grammar, and his confusion that two, not one, of his guards were actually abducted, in light of his probable shock and excitement of just having his home invaded.

Most citizens of Albany who have any awareness of history have heard of the attempt to kidnap General Philip Schuyler from his home, now known as “Schuyler Mansion”, on August 7th of 1781. The infamous notch in the house’s main stairway banister, according to myth cut by a tomahawk hurled by an Amerindian, has been examined by generations of visitors. Never mind that contemporary eyewitness accounts make no mention of bladed weapons of any sort, or Indians as members of the group of kidnapers, it is far too compelling a story to let facts contravene its retelling. What most members of the public are unaware of is that the attack on the “Pastures”, as Schuyler named his home after its 1765 construction, was only one of a number of covert actions planned for the summer of 1781 under authority of a newly reorganized Northern Department of the British Secret Service.

The missions were the idea of Dr George Smyth, a loyalist spymaster recently escaped to British held Canada from house arrest in Claverack, New York. He presented his plans to the Governor of the Province of Quebec, General Frederick Haldimand. Eight key individuals, “the most obnoxious to the friends of Government in the neighborhood of Albany and the most zealous supporters of the Rebellion” were to be carried off by raiders. The scheme met with approval and General Haldimand suggested John Walden Meyers, an energetic officer in the loyalist King’s Rangers, to head the company charged with the capture of Phillip Schuyler.

Myers seemed a natural choice. He had been used by General Haldimand as a courier to carry dispatches to British New York City. The men commanding the other elements in this undercover operation seem less efficacious selections however.

By July 29th, 1781 the teams of kidnappers had traveled south and John Walden Meyers’ group was in place for his attempt. It was now that Joseph Bettys, an officer in charge of a party intended to stage a raid in Ballstown, NY and capture a Doctor Samuel Stringer, became distracted from his duty.

The Commissioners for Detecting and Defeating Conspiracies in the State of New York (an arm of the “rebel” government) had been presented with a petition from an unexpected direction. Jellis Lagrange was suspected by the Commissioners to hold Loyalist views but he now turned to them with a complaint. It seems

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...The Great Kidnap Plot of 1781 (*cont'd from p. 3*)

Joseph Bettys had persuaded Lagrange's daughter to run off with him. Lagrange was enraged sufficiently to turn to a quarter he would not otherwise. Bettys was a known agent of the Crown and his presence in the Albany area was a cause for alarm. The activity surrounding the search for Bettys seems to have alerted Meyers and his men and caused delay in the attempt on Schuyler.

The plot was revealed in greater detail when another leader of one of the raiding parties, Mathew Howard whose target was John Bleecker at Hoosick Falls, was captured with written Secret Service instructions in his possession.

As a result of the above and other intelligence gathered by the New York and Continental governments, General Phillip Schuyler was warned of possible threats to his person.

In an August 9th 1781 letter to Governor George Clinton, Schuyler writes, "On the 29th I was informed for the first time that parties were lurking about the place.....and in the course of the last week this intelligence was confirmed by the Commissioners for Detecting Conspiracies..."

Armed with this information the Schuyler household was able to take precautions as shown further on in the letter.

"My Gates and outward doors in the rear of my house were closed & secured at sunset, and four white men and two blacks were armed. But for these precautions and the bravery of the men, I would have been carried off..."

Walden Meyers' party did manage to breach the rear of Schuyler's home between 7 and 9 pm on August 7, 1781. They eventually defeated the guards, captured two of them and took them and some of the General's silver dining service back to Canada. However, the General and his family avoided capture due in no small part to the missteps of the other parties engaged in the larger kidnap plot. Had John Walden Myer and his men been operating as a single detachment not part of a larger operation the results could have been different.

In a letter he wrote to George Washington only one day after the attempt to spirit him away, Phillip Schuyler himself points up his value in the Continental supply chain. After he gives a description of the kidnap attempt, the last two paragraphs are given over to the subject of a boat building contract and the Commissary Generals rum stores.

Loyalist Matthew Howard appears to have survived the war and settled in Canada. Joseph Bettys was captured in the winter of 1781-82 with a secret British message in his possession. He taken to Albany, tried and hanged. The two captured Schuyler guards, John Tubbs and a private Lockley of Van Schaick's Continentals, returned to the Albany area after the war.

SOURCES:

Schuyler Papers, New York State Library, No. 11158, Ascension Number 67, Box 2

Haldiman Papers as quoted in: Fryer, Mary Beacock; JOHN WALDEN MYERS, LOYALIST SPY. Toronto. 1983. Dunburn Press. Page 133

Paltsis, Victor Hugo, editor. Minutes of the Commissioners for Detecting and Defeating Conspiracies in the State of New York, three volumes. 1867-1957. J. B. Lyon company.

Hastings, Hugh, compiler. PUBLIC PAPERS OF GEORGE CLINTON. Albany. 1899-1914. Vol. 11, 184-186 Library of Congress, Washington Papers, Reel 80

Stone, W. L.; AMERICAN BORDER WARS. Buffalo. 1851 Phiney & Co. Chapter VII

West Canada Creek*— Submitted by James Morrison*

It was now Oct. 30, 1781, Major Ross' men have been on the march in the wilderness for five days. Most of his provisions were left at Canasaraga Creek and the Tory soldiers have been living on horse flesh. Most of the men to escape their pursuers had thrown their packs away with what little provisions they had. Major Ross broke camp and again started on their march. About 40 men lagged behind in camp under a Lieutenant John Rykeman of the Indian Dept.

It was about eight in the morning when the advance of Colonel Willett's men came upon the enemy encampment. A short skirmish took place. Most of the Indians fled, some were killed or wounded and Lieutenant Rykeman was captured as were a few others. Now Major Ross and his weary troops had crossed the West Canada Creek and those who had escaped from Colonel Willett a short time before came straggling in giving reports. Major Ross pushed on leaving Captain Walter Butler with his Rangers with a few men from other detachments to slow down the Americans until he found a suitable position to defend.

Captain Butler deployed his men along the riverbank. Now Colonel Willett's men appeared on the opposite bank. After several Volleys were exchanged, and with Butler sagging to the ground, the rear guard fled leaving the wounded Butler to his fate. The Americans quickly forded the icy water to the other bank. An Oneida Indian by the name of Anthony was one of the first to reach the wounded Butler. On seeing that Butler was still alive he sent his tomahawk crashing through his skull. He now tore off his scalp and robbed the corpse of booty. The British had lost five killed, three men wounded, and four men were taken prisoners. The Americans had no casualties.

Major Ross waited at a defensible position about a mile away, but as no attack came he again started his march to Carleton's Island. Major Ross reached Carleton's Island on November 6, 1781 without further loss. Colonel Willett and his men returned to Fort Dayton and from there the men were either stationed at different forts and outposts or dismissed.

There are several stories as to how and by whom Butler was killed. Here are some that I have found, plus some from those men who were there and what Colonel Willett put in his official report.

It is said that Butler, in fleeing from the Americans, swam his horse across the West Canada Creek, and then turned around to them on the opposite bank and defied them and was shot. An Indian then swam to the opposite bank and found Butler alive. Butler asked for mercy but the Indian replied "I'll give your Sherry Valley Mercy" and he buried his tomahawk in Butler's skull.

Another version is that while standing behind a tree, he was wounded while watching the battle. On his detachment retreating, the Indian then crossed the creek and found Butler alive. He then raised his musket and shot him through the eye.

**The Battle of Johnstown:
21st Century Repercussions**

While Googling around, I came across this interesting "Unpublished Decision" on the United States Court of Federal Claims website.

On October 25, 1781, Colonel Marinus Willett promised 60 Oneida Indians a blanket in exchange for their help in overtaking the British in the Battle of Johnstown. The Natives agreed and joined forces with Willett. (The results of that Battle is not the topic of discussion here).

Then, in 1782, the Senate & Assembly of the State of New York authorized payment "To Colonel Marinus Willett, or such other officer as shall command the levies, to be raised for the defense of the frontiers of this State, to serve to the first day of January next the sum of one hundred and fifty pounds—on account for contingent expenses during the ensuing campaign."

It appears, however, that Colonel Willett did not use the 150 pounds to fulfill his promise to the Oneidas, because he issued a handwritten note on January 26, 1792, reaffirming his promise and inability to perform: "I do hereby certify that in a pursuit of the enemy in the county of Montgomery the latter end of October in the year 1781. In order to stimulate a party of the Oneida Indians then with me. I promised in case of exerting themselves to overtake the enemy who were put to flight. That they should each of them have a blanket. That in conveyance of this promise they began a vigorous pursuit and in a short time overtook and killed a number of the enemy. That at my return it was not in my power to comply with the promise I had made in behalf of the public. Nor have I since been able to have that engagement complied with. New York, January 26th, 1792.

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West Canada Creek (*cont'd from p. 5*)

Still another version is that Butler had dismounted from his horse, and was in the act of drinking water from a tin cup and was shot. The Mohawk Indian crossed the creek and finding Butler alive sent his tomahawk crashing into his skull.

Lodowick Moyer states that they arrived at the West Canada Creek where the enemy crossed, shortly after on the opposite bank Captain Butler was shot by an Oneida Indian. The Indian immediately forded the creek and came up to Butler and in spite of his entreaties, dispatched him.

John Van Eps states that he was with the party of Oneida Indians who pursued Walter Butler to West Canada Creek, when said Walter Butler was shot and tomahawked by one of the Oneidas.

Peter N. Kilts states that they pursued Butler the Indian leader and his party of Indians and Tories into the West Canada Creek where they crossed and Butler was shot by one of the Oneida Indians.

Richard Casler says that Walter Butler was killed by an Oneida Indian. He was there and saw the Indian who killed Butler and who had Butler's coat and scalp. The Indian shot Butler from across the creek.

Nicholas Smith was present when Butler was shot on the West Canada Creek by a Mohawk Indian called "Saucy Nic." He saw Butler after he was dead and scalped.

The following is what Colonel Marinus Willett put in his report to Governor George Clinton. "Altho he was not dead when found by one of our Indians, who finished his business for him and got a considerable booty." The report was dated Fort Rensselaer 2nd November 1781. The report can be found in the **Public Papers of George Clinton, Vol. VII, pp 472-475.**

According to the firsthand accounts, Captain Walter Butler was shot by an Oneida Indian. Also from the facts, Butler was alive when approached by the Oneida and was tomahawked and scalped.

* * *

Publishers Note: Look for more on West Canada Creek from Jim Morrison in the next Burning Issues. — KG

“The Women of those Enemies...”

— Submitted by Kristin Gitler

Wives of Tories were regarded with hostility, and their homes might be robbed and plundered with little hope of recourse. Patriots on the New York frontier were suspicious that the Tory women were aiding and abetting the enemy. In 1777, Peter S. Deygart, the chairman of the Tryon County Committee of Safety wrote to Governor George Clinton, “The Women of those Enemies is still living among us... Some behave very rudely at present, and have proved very active to support and spirit up the opposite Cause.”

This continued to be an issue, and by the summer of 1780, New York state had passed “An Act for the Removal of the Families of Persons who have joined the Enemy,” which allowed for the removal on the basis of the “many and great Mischiefs” that arise “by permitting the Families of Persons who have joined the Enemy, to remain at their respective Habitations, inasmuch as such Persons frequently come out in a private Manner, to gain Intelligence and commit Robberies, Thefts and Murders... and are concealed and comforted by their respective Families.” This empowered justices of the peace to give a twenty-day notice to the wives of persons who were with the enemy “that they depart this State... or repair to such Parts of it as are within the Power of the Enemy; and at their Discretion to take with them all or any of their Children, not above the Age of twelve Years”.

Sources:

Peter S. Deygart to George Clinton, Aug. 25, 1777, Tryon County Committee of Safety Papers;

“An Act for the Removal of the Families of Persons who have joined the Enemy,” July 1, 1780, in *Laws of the State of New York, Passed at the Sessions of the Legislature, Held in the Years 1777...1784*, I (Albany, N.Y., 1886), 282-283.



2006 Schedule of Events

- April 9* Herkimer Home Sugaring Off, Little Falls, NY
- April 15* **Chancellor Livingston Sheep & Wool Festival, Clermont, Germantown, NY (BVMA Supported)**
- April 29-30* Philadelphia II Ship Repair Party, Vergennes, VT
- May 6-7* **"War in Schoharie" - Lansing Manor, Gilboa, NY (BVMA Supported)**
- May 20-21* **Mabee Farm Encampment, Rotterdam Junction, NY (BVMA Supported)**
- June 10-11* Johnson Hall Market Fair, Johnstown, NY
- June 24-25* Fort Ticonderoga Grand Encampment of the French and Indian War
- July 7-8* Indian Ambush of Elsworth' Troops, Ilion, NY
- July 22-23* **Old Fort Johnson Colonial Days (BVMA Supported)**
- Aug. 5-6* Holding Down the Fort, Fort Plain Museum, Fort Plain, NY
- Aug. 6* **225th: Kidnap Attempt on General Schuyler, Schuyler Mansion, Albany, NY (BVMA Supported)**
- Aug. 19-20* **1780 Raid on German Flatts (BVMA Supported)**
- Sept. 9-10* Fort Ticonderoga Revolutionary War Encampment
- Sept. 30-Oct. 1* **225th: Battle of West Canada Creek (BVMA Sponsored)**
- Oct. 7-8* Old Stone Fort Timeline, Schoharie, NY
- Oct. 14-15* 1777 Camp of Refugees from Kingston's Burning, Bevier House, Marbletown, NY

More information on these events can be found on the website at www.bvma.org/sched.cfm

21st Century Repercussions (cont'd from p. 5)

M. Willett

note there were sixty Indians in the party.

M. Willett"

In 2004, a complaint was filed in the United States Court of Federal Claims stating that the United States failed to honor this payment. The complaint alleges the cost of a blanket in 1781 was 100 pounds in sterling, equivalent to 500 continental dollars, estimated to be the equivalent of \$30,000. Because of the passage of time, the Complaint alleges that this amount "by default of payment became \$3,000,000." Due to the accumulation of interest at six percent, Plaintiff also seeks a cash payment of "ten times the full amount the Defendant is obligated to pay."

You can find the "Unpublished Decision" at the USCFCS website:

<http://www.uscfc.uscourts.gov/unpublished%20decisions.htm> (it's the one dated 2/18/05, near the bottom).

— Kristin

From the Publisher

Thanks to everyone who submitted articles and suggestions—if I haven't used them yet, watch for them in future issues. Submissions for the newsletter don't have to be whole articles—they can be an interesting term or definition that you've come across, a short excerpt from a journal or book you've read, book reviews, an interesting clothing construction technique you learned, or any other small item of interest. Also of interest, and we haven't seen them in a long time—unit histories, or even an article about one battle or raid that your unit participated in.

Some of you have had problems downloading the newsletters from the website; if they have pictures in them, they can be rather large. I am now using a newer version of Acrobat to create the pdfs—this will allow me to compress them to smaller sizes, but also requires you to have a newer version of the Acrobat Reader. There is a link to download the latest Reader on the Newsletter page on the website. And, as always, if you prefer a mailed copy, please make a notation when you submit your dues, or let me or Sue-Ann know (in writing, or we won't remember!).

— Kristin Gitler, Publisher

The BVMA Online - www.bvma.org

Don't forget to check the web site for the latest news and information, always linked from the home page. And if you haven't joined already, don't forget our members-only lists:

BVMA: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/bvma/> (Moderator - Dean Barnes)

BTL: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/btl_bvma/ (Moderator - Kate Scott)

Please, when subscribing, include your name in the email, so we know who you are.

I always welcome your ideas and input for the website—it should be your source for information & resources! — *KG, Webmistress*

**The Burning of the Valleys
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NEXT ISSUE SUBMISSION DEADLINE

The next issue will be published in June, 2006. Please submit articles, ideas, questions, etc. at any time or by **June 1st** for the next issue.

— *Kristin*



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