

December 2005 NewsLetter

Pvt. Joseph Plumb Martin at Reading – 1778/79



Private Joseph Plumb Martin,
8th CT Regiment - Dec. 1778

Private Joseph Plumb Martin of the 8th CT Regiment was camped at the middle encampment in Reading, with Gen. Parson's Brigade and Colonel Wyllys' Regiment. Martin was a young enlistee, age 15, and stayed with the Continental Army for 7 long years. His book of recollections of the war is a classic in Revolutionary War narratives. Martin gives us opinions and insight from a common infantry soldier's perspective, rather than the usual source of officers diaries. Though he was in the middle camp two miles west of the camp which is now Putnam Park, it was the same army suffering under the same weather conditions and shortages.

"We arrived at Reading about Christmas or a little before, and prepared to build our huts for our winter quarters. And now came on the time again between grass and hay, that is, the winter campaign of starving" (Martin 1962:149).

"... I assisted in the building our winter huts. We got them in such a state of readiness that we moved into them about New Year's Day. The reader may take my word, if he pleases, when I tell him we had nothing extraordinary, either of eatables or drinkables, to keep a new year or housewarming" (Martin 1962:150).

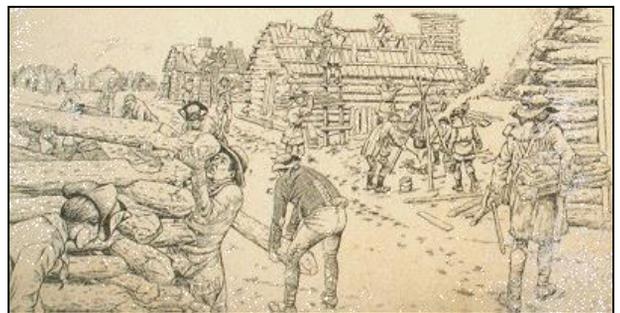
"We settled in our winter quarters at the commencement of the new year and went on in our old Continental Line of starving and freezing. We now and then got a little bad bread and salt beef (I believe chiefly horse-beef for it was generally thought to be such at the time). The month of January was very stormy, a good deal of snow fell, and in such weather it was mere chance if we got anything at all to eat" (Martin 1962:150).

Office of Public Archaeology, Boston University - 1991

Read about Pvt. Martin in, **Private Yankee Doodle**,
by Joseph Plumb Martin

The Winter Campaign of Starving

There are perhaps a handful of historians who are in the "expert" class on the history of the three winter encampments, including Putnam Park in 1778-79. But the special report which was created by the Boston University Office of Public Archaeology in 1991 is still the "bible" of source documents.



The troops spent most of snowy and frigid December building the log huts where they would spend the next five or six months.

Ricardo J. Elia and Brendan J. McDermott led their team from Boston University in researching the information for the background and story of the Reading winter encampments. They conducted archaeological digs, they compiled maps of the camp and park. Their published report covered all the bases. They titled the report "*The Winter Campaign of Starving*" using Private Martins apt description of the scene 227 winters ago this month when the troops were building their huts. They needed these shelters to survive the winter so they could continue the war in the spring.

December Winter Walk

Most park visitors come to the park during warm weather to see the Living History event or the Summer Craftsman programs. But the soldiers who occupied the army camp back in 1778/79 were there during cold weather (Dec. – April). To give the public a better “feel’ for the camp during winter months, the Friends of Putnam Park has conducted a “Winter Walk” tour on the first weekend of each December.

Our resident archaeologist/ historians, Dan Cruson and Kathleen von Jena, lead the hikers through the historic section of the park. The history of the army encampment, the artifacts found during seven years of excavations and the history of the park itself are all included in the tour. And the group gets to ask questions.



Tour group met at the new visitor center for coffee, cider and donuts



First stop on the tour was the Huntington sculpture of Old Put riding his horse down the stone steps at Horse Neck.



The tour group was met at the main camp gate by a platoon from the 5th CT Regiment



The 5th CT Regt. formed up under the command of Capt. Thomas Castrovinci.



Tour Guides von Jena, in red, and Cruson confer with Capt. Castrovinci regarding the tour plan.



von Jena and Cruson fill the air with historical facts.

December Winter Walk..... Continued



The 5th CT Regiment formed up on both sides of the tour group and offered protection throughout the walk



History guides explain the possibility of the camp magazine at the north end of the park.



The 5th CT fires a salute to past troops who gave their lives during the revolution.



At various stations on the tour 5th CT soldiers read excerpts from diaries of soldiers present in 1778



5th CT troops were camped near the monument along Company Street. Right where the huts were 227 years ago.



While the public roamed through the 5th CT camp, The troops dined on hot stew cooked in a huge iron kettle

The 5th CT Reg. Set up their camp site on Friday afternoon. They slept in canvas tents just as the Continental troops did at this location while they were constructing their log huts. The temps were down in the twenties for our troopers but they strive for realism and enjoyed it.



January - crews work in the freezing weather.



March – new visitor center is starting to take shape



May – glass company installs custom made widows

The Year 2005



May – Living History School Days week another huge success



September - From the ashes a new pavilion/ visitor center was born



June – Old Put' returns to the park and is placed on a new pedestal near visitor center



July/August – annual Summer Craftsman Program – 8 wks.



October – Gov. Rell inspects the color guard at grand opening



October – Gov. Rell addresses the audience at grand opening



December – the annual Winter Walk at park was a big success

Next Meeting



The next FAN's Meeting will be on **Tuesday Evening January 10th** at the new Visitor Center near the main entrance to Putnam Park. Inter. Rt.107 & 58. The meeting will start at **7:00pm**. The monthly meetings will now be on the **2nd Tuesday** of each month.