

The Friends & Neighbors of Putnam Memorial State Park

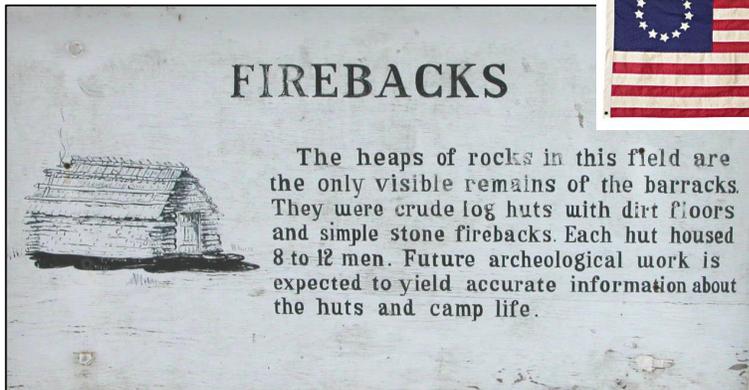


Bethel/Redding CT

February 2007 NewsLetter

Winter 1778-79 – Camp Reading

If you go over to Putnam Park right now while its freezing cold and there is a good snow cover, you can get a good idea of what it was like during February 1779. The long double-line of stone piles called 'firebacks' mark the location of each hut. Each fireback is the remnant of a hut's chimney. The line starts up at the monument by the entrance, and stretches almost a quarter of a mile to the north. Some piles can be easily seen, while others are just barely sticking above ground; and some are completely buried. (the hut line ended about where the road to the museum and north entrance turns off the main enlisted mans row.)



One of the old signs placed at the double-line of firebacks. New signage is on the list of projects at the park, along with a new walking tour guide and map.



The two long lines of firebacks are just sticking above the snow. After 228 years since the huts were occupied by Poor's Brigade, the lines are as straight as an arrow. There were 116 enlisted mens huts in the double line.



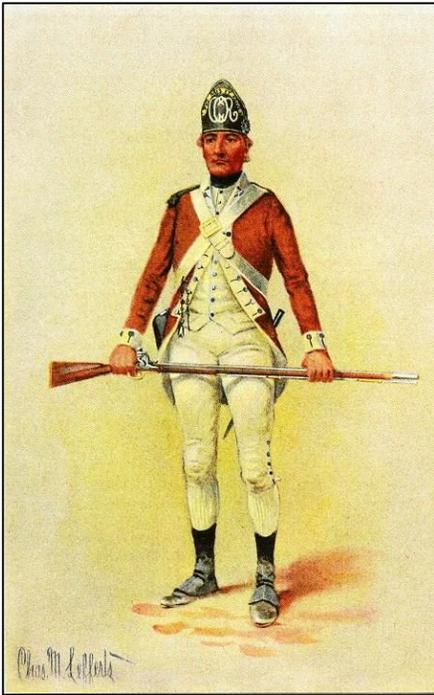
This hut is next to the visitor center. It can give you an idea of the size of the huts in the double-line inside the camp. This hut is actually a bit larger than the 12X16' huts the troops lived in. 12 enlisted soldiers to each hut. There were three-tier crude bunk beds in each of the four corners of the huts. There were 116 huts. Officers, sutlers and camp shops (i.e. bakery, cobbler, soap maker) were all up in back on the higher level. A resident soldier's diary informs us that there were wives and concubines amongst some of the troops.



Here's what 12 soldiers looks like. Just cram them into one smoke-filled hut, along with their weapons, and you have an idea of the living conditions. (Go inside the hut by the visitor center and imagine you and another eleven persons living there with you).



Sgt. Maj. John Hawkins Gives Us A Camp Tour



2nd Canadian Regiment – Light Infantry

Source: *Uniforms of the Armies in the War of the American Revolution*, Lt. Charles Lefferts.

Every once in awhile we receive a new bit of information about the history of the 1778-79 winter army cantonment that is now Putnam Park. In 1998 Pat Wild, Bethel Town Historian, called to say a well known historical researcher named Bob McDonald (one of the creators of the preeminent revwar75.com Web site) had just finished transcribing an old diary; and that part of it related to Camp Reading. Bob sent us the excerpts from a sergeant-major who was quartered at Camp Reading and could pass on to us, 228 years later, a description of the camp.

The Historical Society of Pennsylvania had come into possession of a diary kept by Sergeant-Major John Hawkins of the 2nd Canadian Regiment, also referred to as “Congress’ Own”. The Sgt. Maj. was the senior non-commissioned officer in the regiment commanded by Col. Moses Hazen. Though the diary contained entries pertaining to camp from the first of December 1778 through the encampment period to March 30. We got permission from the Historical Society of PA to use the information for our organization only.

The diary offers us details of events and goings on regarding the camp and Putnam’s Division; but Hawkins’ entry of February 11th gives us a contemporary view of the camp and its physical layout. It’s as though Hawkins were giving us a tour of the camp and offering us insight for our permanent records.:

Feb. 11 This Day a Detachment from our Brigade (under the Command of Major Torrey of our Regt.) consisting of one Major, two Captains, four Subalterns, six Sergeants, six Corporals, two Drums and Fifes, and One Hundred and one Privates, marched from here to reinforce the Detachment at Horse Neck [i.e., modern Greenwich, Connecticut.]

The Soap allowed by Congress being but a small Pittance, and tho’ small but seldom received by the Troops, Col. Hazen has erected a Soap House at the left of the Upper Town, and has offered as an Encouragement to the Soldiers for saving their Ashes, That one Pound of hard soap will be given for every Bushel of good Ashes brought to the Works for the first fifteen Days, and half a Pound for every Bushel from and after the said fifteen Days until the Boiler may receive an ample Supply.

When our Brigade first took up their Habitation here I could not properly describe it, it was then a Valley of Woods that we could scarce turn ourselves in; but having cleared it greatly of that Incumbrance I can now give an Account of our Improvements and present Situation.

Our Town or Towns is planted in a Valley and on a Hill, on the back of the Hill is still rising Ground which almost makes the Hill appear a Valley likewise; it is something like the City of Quebec, has an Upper and a Lower Town, and under that Character I shall consider our City. In our Upper Town are the Field, Staff and other commissioned Officers, their Waiters, with a Number of public Huts, such as the Commissary’s, the Quarter Master’s, the Carpenters, the Shoemakers, the Taylors [i.e., tailors], the Bake Oven inclosed in a Hut, and the Soap Boilers, beside a Hut in each Regiment for the Quarter Guard, etc., etc. I cannot give the precise Number, as the Huts are placed so very irregular and scattered; and the Woods about them not being properly cleared, I did not take the Trouble to count them; I thought the Labour would be greater than the Curiosity.

Hawkin's Camp Tour Continued

In the Lower Town the Non-commissioned Officers and Soldiers, with their wives and concubines reside. It contains One Hundred and Sixteen Huts, on a regular Line, Front and Rear, with a little Vacancy between the Rows like a Lane or an Alley, and a smaller Space between Hut and Hut as a Passage from a Front Hut to a Rear one. The Huts are built with Logs, 12 feet long & and 16 Feet broad wide, plaistered [sic] with wet Dirt, and covered [i.e., roofed] with Slaps [i.e., shingles]; the Houses of the Upper Town is the same only the covering, which is Boards drawn for that purpose. The Huts have all neat Doors fronting to the East, and nice large Stone Chimneys fronting the West, and many has Windows, some to the East and others to the South.

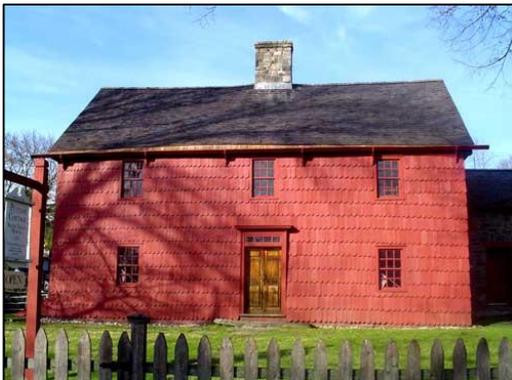
The bountiful Hand of Providence has given us Water in Abundance. The Land is very Springy. Many has little Springs of Water at the Corner of their Huts, others near it, and some even at a Corner of their Huts inside. Wood we have sufficient. Provisions we have plenty. Nothing almost that Life allows but we participate in, except that of seeing fine Prospects around us, such as a beautiful Village or a fine Country. It is but a poor Part of the Country; it swarms with Tories, those disaffected People to America. It is an uncommon changable Climate; scarce two Days has been alike in the Weather since we have been here.

Various have been the Names offered for our Town, such as Putnam's Folly, Putnam's Valley, Devil's Den, etc. but neither of these has been fully established. In short, our Town is the largest, (tho' not the grandest), that I have seen in this State, except Hartford. As to the Inhabitants of our Town I can with Truth say they are like those to be found in other Towns. We have Good and bad, rich and poor, black and white; we have Courts of Justice, which is opened almost daily, we have Statesmen, Politicians, Doctor, Trades of various Kinds going on, and Camp Colourmen, whose Duty it is to keep clean the Streets, Lanes and Alleys in our City.

Transcribed from a microfilm copy of the manuscript diary of Sergeant-Major Hawkins within the collections of **The Historical Society Of Pennsylvania**, by and for which all rights of reproduction and/or publication are reserved.

Putnam's Historic Ride

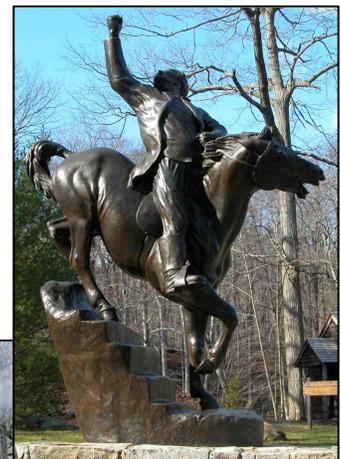
The D.A.R held its annual *Putnam's Ride* event in Greenwich on Sunday February 25th. Reenactors, crowds and black powder.



Putnam Cottage, or Knapp's Tavern as it was called then, is where Gen. Putnam spent the night while he was in the area checking the American picket posts.



The Continentals warding off the British.



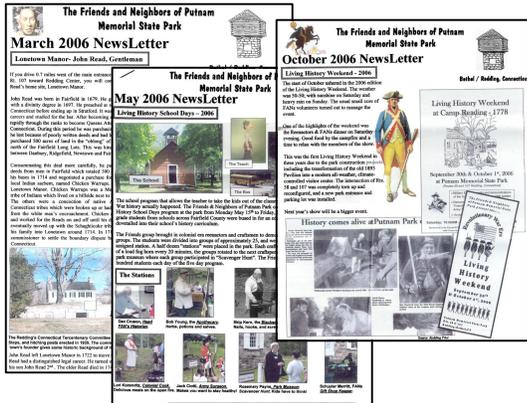
Old Put riding down the stone stairs to escape the British dragoons. The stairs are in Horse Neck – The statue of Old Put is at Putnam Park.

February FAN's Meeting



2nd NH Regiment

1. Jeanine Herman opened meeting. Jeanine reported that Park Supervisor Nathan Hale underwent some tricky surgery to his shoulder. We wish Nate a speedy recovery.
2. Nancy Cowles gave the **Treasurers Report** for Rosemary Payne who is basking in the sun in Florida.
3. **Membership status** was covered. We are going to ask all members who haven't paid their annual dues to do so. We will start paring down the newsletter lists accordingly at the end of March.
4. **Living History School Days** event will be held Mon. May 14th to Fri. May 19th this year. Chairperson Nancy Cowles gave a status update.



NEWSLETTERS VIA CYBERSPACE:

We're getting ready to start sending our monthly newsletter to you via e-mail. You'll be able to read the newsletter on your computer screen, or print-out a copy if you save them. All newsletters will be in full color!



Don't have a computer? Don't worry, we'll still mail you a hard copy via the regular US mail. This new system may take a couple of months to set up. In the mean-while, **please send us your e-mail address to our e-mail address**

To contact us:
friendsofputnampark@comcast.net



Please Clip Here



PLEASE HELP US.....

Yes, we need your support in keeping the Friends & Neighbors (FAN) going as a strong non-profit volunteer organization. You have recently received a letter from our President and Membership Chairman asking you to please renew your membership and send in your annual dues. If you have misplaced your membership letter, here's the Information:



Friends of Putnam Park
 P.O. Box 736
 West Redding, CT 06896

Scout	\$ 5
Individual	\$ 10
Family	\$ 35
Patriot	\$ 50
Loyalist	\$ 75
Captain	\$100
Colonel	\$250
General	\$1000(Life Member)

Name _____

Address _____

Town _____ State _____ Zip _____

Tel. _____ E-Mail Address _____

The next FAN's Meeting will be on **Tuesday Evening, March 13th**
at 7:00PM at the Visitor Center at Putnam Park.