

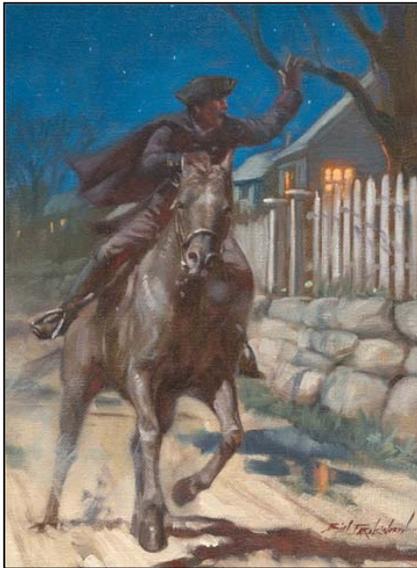
The Friends & Neighbors of Putnam Memorial State Park



Bethel/Redding CT

April 2007 NewsLetter

The Ides of April In The Revolutionary War



Henry Wadsworth Longfellow made a Boston patriot famous for all eternity. Shortly after the Ides of April in 1775 a rider was sent from Boston to notify John Hancock and Sam Adams that the British Regulars were on their way to Concord to destroy the patriot war materials being stored there. Hancock and Adams were staying in Lexington, which was on the route of march for the Redcoats. Patriot rider, Paul Revere, was immortalized as the lead-off hitter in the confrontations that started the Revolutionary War in earnest.

On the 18th of April of 75', Paul Revere spread the alarm that the Regulars were out and on the way to Concord.



The carnage began just at daybreak on April 19th on Lexington green. Around 70 Minutemen lined up in front of several platoons of the more than 800 of the King's forces. It is still not known who fired the first shot, but the result was the first blood drawn on both sides.

Eight Minutemen lay dead on the green or close to it. Ten more local militia lay wounded. The British casualties were only three wounded



The British column left Lexington and marched on to Concord in search of the stores of arms. The next main scene was at Concord's North Bridge. A British contingent was left at the bridge to guard it, while other Redcoats went on in search of arms. The next bloodshed happened here between the Acton Minutemen and the guard unit. Again, several casualties were incurred on both sides. "The shot heard round the world!" For all the months and years of rhetoric between the different sides of Tory and Whig politics these two skirmishes were the catalyst that finally made men choose sides and act. The British column left Concord under extreme fire, which continued all the way back to Boston.

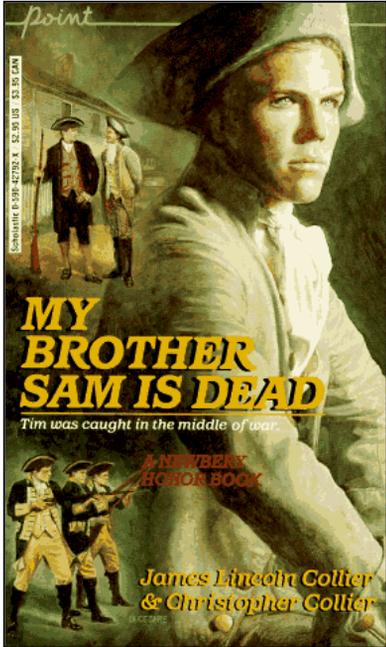


The fighting at the Old North Bridge In Concord started the fighting in earnest. Americans had to choose sides. The rhetoric was over!



***My Brother Sam Is Dead* Starts April 20th ,1775**

Post riders were sent out to all points in the colonies. News of the fighting in Massachusetts arrived the following day in Connecticut.



Two brothers, one a professional writer and the other a professional historian (James and Christopher Collier collaborated on the creation of a book called *My Brother Sam Is Dead*. The book was written for young adults and won the Newbury Honor Award. The story takes place right here in Reading, Connecticut. It depicts the strife and turmoil that separated neighbor from neighbor and even one family member from another. This was a very real situation involving real people that were connected to Reading and Putnam Park. Thousands of school children have read this book as part of their lesson plan. For those adults who have not read the book, pick up a copy a read about the reasons for human conflict right in our own back yard.

This award winning book is an excellent primer for what life was like in Reading CT during the War years, and how it divided the towns people.

This historical novel begins with news of the fighting at Lexington and Concord. The bearer of the news was Sam Meeker, oldest son in the Meeker family (father, mother and two sons). in Reading (note: while the Meekers were most certainly real families in Reading, this family is fictional. However, almost every other character in the story is real.)



Meekers Tavern near the cross roads at Redding Ridge. Many people look for this building today. It is not there. It is fictional. There was a tavern on the corner, however.

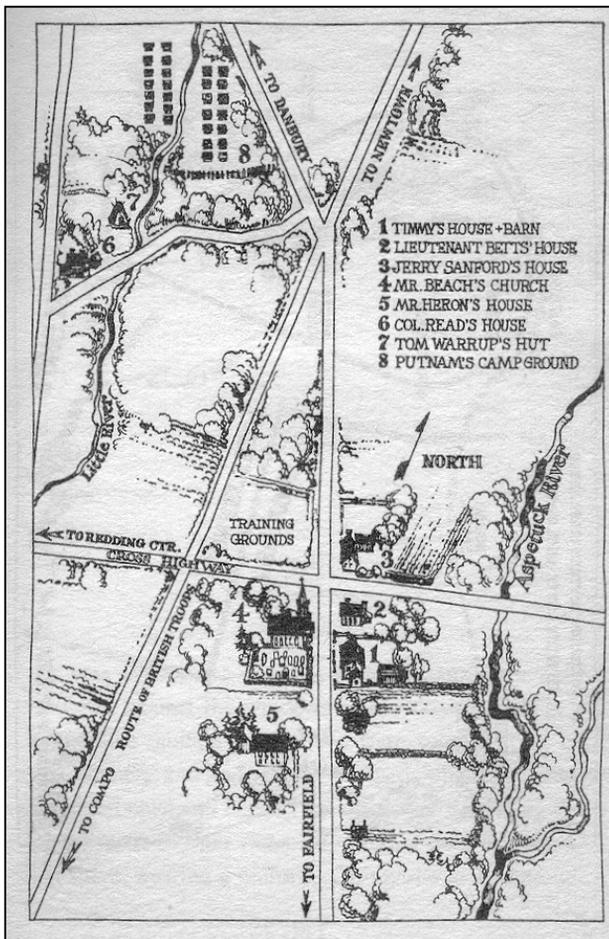
The Meekers ran a tavern just across the street from the Anglican Church at Redding Ridge. Like most of the families in the immediate neighborhood, they belonged to the Anglican Church, which by definition was the King's Church. This congregation was led by the Reverend John Beach, a staunch supporter of the King. He also had a thriving congregation in Newtown, about 8 miles distant. He preached at one church in morning and the other in the afternoon. As a result quite a few families were enrolled in the Anglican Church in both towns, and therefore had Tory sympathies. In actuality the patriots in the area made the Episcopalians agree to not to support any military activity against the American soldiers, and not to influence any men against joining the American forces. Many Anglican Churches were shut down immediately after the war's outbreak. Sam Meeker was enrolled at Yale in New Haven. Sam had joined the militia who were preparing to head to Massachusetts to fight the British. So right off the bat there is conflict within the family.



Mr. Meeker's Brown Bess musket had a prominent role in the storyline.

April 26th 1777 – Reading Ridge

A key scene in the book and in real life, was the day Gen. William Tryon led a 2,000 man British force to Danbury to destroy the military stores. The route went right through Reading Ridge. The British column stopped around noon time. The troops took a lunch/rest break in the Training Field (NW corner of the intersection – across from the Anglican Church.) The officers were entertained by Squire William Heron, who was a spy, at his home located just south of the church cemetery. Reverend John Beach attended. While in Reading, British soldiers captured and detained 14 Reading men. They were taken with the baggage train all the way back to NY City. Some died in the Sugarhouse Prison or the infamous prison ships in the East River. Disease, starvation and temperature extremes permanently harmed even those who returned home. Another site in the story was Lonetown Manor, the home of Col. John Read.



The map in the front of *My Brother Sam Is Dead* book.. Though distances are greatly abbreviated, the map does contain many of the historical sites of Reading. The British troops came up the Fairfield Rd., not Newtown Turnpike. The Danbury Rd. in upper left is Sunset Hill Rd.



British Gen. Tryon led 2,000 troops to Danbury. They entered Reading Ridge via the Fairfield Rd. which is today, Black Rock Turnpike.



Reading Ridge's Anglican Church. Rev. John Beach preached here for 40 years.



The memorial marker listing the Reading men captured by the British on April 26, 1777.



The sign at Lonetown Manor, Col. John Read's home.

April FAN's Meeting

To contact us: friendsofputnampark@comcast.net



1. Rosemary Payne gave the **Treasurers Report**.
2. Nancy Cowles gave **Living History School Days** update. We are now down to two days this year. Week of May 14-19 will be this year's event timeframe. Nancy is creating a new booklet for the school personnel in charge of scheduling field trips for next year's program.
3. This year's **Living History Event** (for public), set for October 20 & 21st. Invitations have been mailed.
4. The Treasurer wrote a FAN's check for the replica firearms to be displayed in the new visitor center. More on this in next month's newsletter.

Book's Ending Scenes Include Putnam's Camp

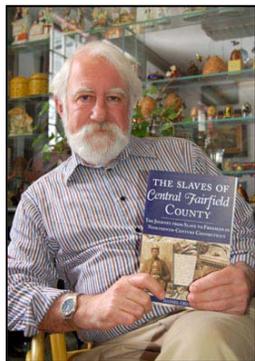
"My Brother Sam's" final chapter includes Camp Reading which is today's Putnam Park; and also scenes from the executions on Gallows Hill, which the troops in all three camps of Putnam's Division were required to witness. Gallows Hill Road still marks the scene 200 years later.

The Colliers' book tells the reader of the conflicts of the people, the towns, the different church allegiances, political leanings, down to individual families during the Revolutionary War years. Unfortunately, similar conflict continued in this country for many years. The Civil War tore apart America physically and politically. It still holds the record for highest casualties. The Vietnam War divided the country once again. And the Iraqi war is ripping apart the country politically even as you read this.



Cruson's Corner

Newtown historian Dan Cruson holds a copy of his newest book *The Slaves of Central Fairfield County: The Journey From Slave To Freeman In Nineteenth Century Connecticut*. The book is an in-depth look at slavery in the north, particularly the lives of slaves and freed blacks in Newtown, Weston, Easton, and Redding. -Bee Photo, Crevier



FAN's resident historian and archaeologist, Dan Cruson

New Pond Farm

is sponsoring the:

"Redding History Lecture series II" by,

Dan Cruson on Wednesdays beginning May 2. Each program is from 7:30 pm to 8:30pm at the farm at 101 Marchant Road in West Redding.

May 2nd, 16th, 30th and June 6th. Pre-registration is required by calling 938-2117.



New Pond Farm on Marchant Road in W. Redding

The next FAN's Meeting will be on **Tuesday Evening, May 8th at 7:00PM** at the **Visitor Center** at Putnam Park.

