

The Friends & Neighbors of Putnam Memorial State Park

"Connecticut's Valley Forge"

July 2006 NewsLetter



Bethel/Redding CT

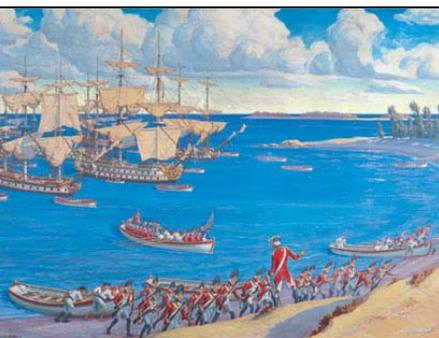
Why was Gen. Putnam's Division Sent to Redding?

Historians can write a book about the reasons Gen. Putnam's Continental Army Division was sent into winter quarters in Redding: to form the eastern part of the arc containing the British in New York City; to spread out the army for better efficiency in getting food and supplies (The Valley Forge winter camp the previous year was a disaster in getting food, clothing and war materials to the concentrated army); to provide a force which could move quickly toward the Highlands and West Point; to move toward the Long Island Sound if the British attacked by sea, or to be in place to move out to Boston in case they Brits planned to retake that port (The French fleet was still there for repairs).

But the real underlying reason was because of the British Raid on Danbury the previous year. This was a devastating loss of the army supplies stored at Danbury, as well as a travesty to the citizens of the town, and Connecticut itself. Connecticut was called the "Provision State" because it provided more supplies to the American war effort than any other. Governor Jonathan Trumbull, the only Colonial Governor to support the Patriot Cause, was instrumental in recruiting soldiers and in gathering supplies for the American Army. His son, Joseph, became Commissary General to Washington. Gov. Trumbull was a personal and highly respected friend of George Washington. When the British conducted their raid on Danbury, and destroyed so much personal property in addition to the war materials, he implored Washington to provide the state with protection against further British incursions. Washington agreed.

The 1777 British Raid On Danbury

25 APR 77 1700 HRS



British forces land on Compo Beach in Fairfield (today's Westport).

Westport Schools Permanent Art Collection.

One would have thought that British commander Sir Wm. Howe would have learned a lesson when he was in stationed in Boston. Though he was not in command at the time, the near annihilation of the British forces which went inland to Lexington and Concord should have been a red flag not to go on anymore raids away from support lines, but Howe decided to send an expedition into the interior of Connecticut to Danbury to capture much needed supplies for his army.



Cannons stand guard on Compo Beach today

26 APR 77 1100 HRS



British forces under the command of Gen. William Tryon began landing around 1850 troops at Cedar Point (today's Compo Beach) in Westport. They received almost no resistance. The force started inland around 11:30pm. They stopped in Fairfield at 2:30am and encamped until 7:45am. Traveling up the Black Rock Turnpike, the next stop was Redding Ridge around 11:00am.



The American troops fought the British as they boarded their ships on the return to Compo Beach

Tryon stopped his expedition at Christ Church, the Anglican parish house in Redding Ridge. The officers had lunch at Squire Wm. Heron's home on the south side of the cemetery. Heron was a double-agent spy for the British. During the 90 minute lunch break, 15 Redding men were captured and taken prisoners back to New York. Some later returned; others never came



The monument commemorating The 15 Redding men taken capti

The British column continued north toward Danbury on today's Black Rock Turnpike. It veered off to the right onto Sunset Hill Rd. which was the colonial road back then; then back onto Black Rock Turnpike just north of Steck's Nursery. It should be pointed out that that the troops did not go by Putnam Park. There was no north-south road back then where the Black Rock Turnpike passes the park today. There was an east-west road from Lonetown Manor (Col. John Read's estate) that followed today's Pocahontas Rd. and climbed the ridge to join Sunset Hill Rd. about a mile to the east of the park maintenance barn. Continuing up Black Rock Turnpike where the road dumps out today from Sunset Hill Rd., the route then veered off to the left and up and over Hoyt's Hill Rd. The route then passed through Bethel onto Coal Pit Hill Rd. and into Danbury's South Street.

The colonial town of Danbury was started on lower Main Street and on South St. The town meeting house (Congregational Church) was then located out in the middle of Main St. in front of the old Jail House by Wooster St. The meeting house in those days functioned in a dual capacity of religious as well as governmental. All vital records were stored there. The other meetinghouse was the Anglican Church located on South Street where the South Street Elementary School is located (next to Buza's Appliance Store). The total march from Compo Beach to Danbury was 26 miles. The British completed the march in about 48 hours time. It was raining cats and dogs when they arrived in town. Again, there was very little American resistance in and around the town. This was because almost all the American troops assigned to guard Danbury had been re-assigned to march toward the Hudson Highlands. The local people, knowing that the British were on the way, worked fast and furious to remove much of the military supplies and medicines out into the countryside for safe keeping. It was just human nature that the residents moved as much of their personal possessions as well. All this moving resulted in an unexpected situation for the British. No wagons were to be found anywhere in town. The British, whose mission was to transport the supplies back to New York, now had to make a change of plan. Plan B as it turned out was to burn or destroy all supplies. Burn all barns, warehouses or buildings that were used to store the supplies. And, lastly, burn the homes of known patriots. Loyalists (the local Tory residents of the region) accompanied Tryon's raiders. They were only too happy to point out and identify the patriot homes and storage facilities for destruction.

**26 APR 77 1700 HRS TO
27 APR 77 0800 HRS**

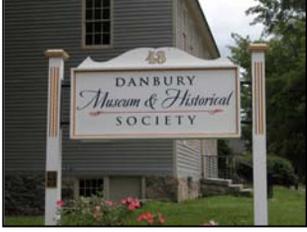


Meeting of the Patriot Generals – Blackman Street in Bethel Parish.

While the British were in Danbury that Saturday night, the American forces were gathering from the coastal regions and following the British route toward Danbury. The Americans halted in Bethel to spend the night in the pouring rain, while their commanders laid plans to meet up with the British.

At this house on Blackman Street in Bethel the three Patriot generals spent the night drawing up a plan of pursuit. Generals David Wooster, Gold Selleck Silliman, and the more famous, Benedict Arnold spent the night in this home. One of these would be mortally wounded the following day.

Sybil Ludington was a teenage girl who lived in Putnam County NY, about a twenty minute drive from Danbury. Her dad was Col. Ludington who commanded the militia. Sybil spent the night of April 27th riding more than 40 miles to alert the militia that Danbury was afire and to assemble post haste.



Danbury Museum & Historical Society is the repository of the history of Danbury.

Statue at Danbury Library



The Rider House on South Main Street - Danbury

The British spent Saturday night into Sunday morning burning supplies and buildings. 19 homes were burned along with 40 warehouses, barns and sheds used for storing military stores, 4-5000 barrels of pork, beef, flour and grain, shoes and clothing, over 1600 tents which were critical to the upcoming campaigns. The meeting house with all the town's records went up in flames. Deeds and vital records prior to 1777 were gone forever.

The Rider House is the home of today's Danbury Museum & Historical Society, a good place to visit and find out more about the Burning of Danbury. This home was built in 1785, probably using the foundation of one of the torched homes on the site.

There are several colonial homes remaining in this section of town today, but all are built upon the ashes

One of the most interesting stories about the Danbury raid is how the largest warehouse for military supplies stayed in business throughout the entire war even during the British raid! The First Episcopal Church, the predecessor of St. James Episcopal Church on West St. was built in 1767. Church records state the edifice could hold 400 to 500 people. No small building. The church sat on the site of today's South Street School next to Buzaid's Appliance store. The church, being the Anglican church, the Tories church, was being used by the Patriots as one of the warehouses holding supplies for the Continental Army. Danbury, after all, was one of the largest supply depots in New England. It is where almost all supplies from the rest of the region funneled through on their way to various army destinations. The army also had its artificers stationed here; craftsmen like wheel wrights, wagon makers, coopers for making the thousands of barrels used in shipment. There were army teamsters with their hundreds of oxen and horse teams to haul the many transport wagons. Interesting enough, a major military hospital was recently opened at today's Division and Pleasant Sts. The British did not see it.



South Street School today was the site of the Anglican church during the entire Revolutionary War. The Tory church was used as a warehouse for military supplies by the Patriots.



South Street School before 1943 when the old church cemetery was moved to the old 1684 cemetery on Main Street.



The latest edition to the school comes right out the road on South Street. There is a stone historical plaque telling about the British Raid.

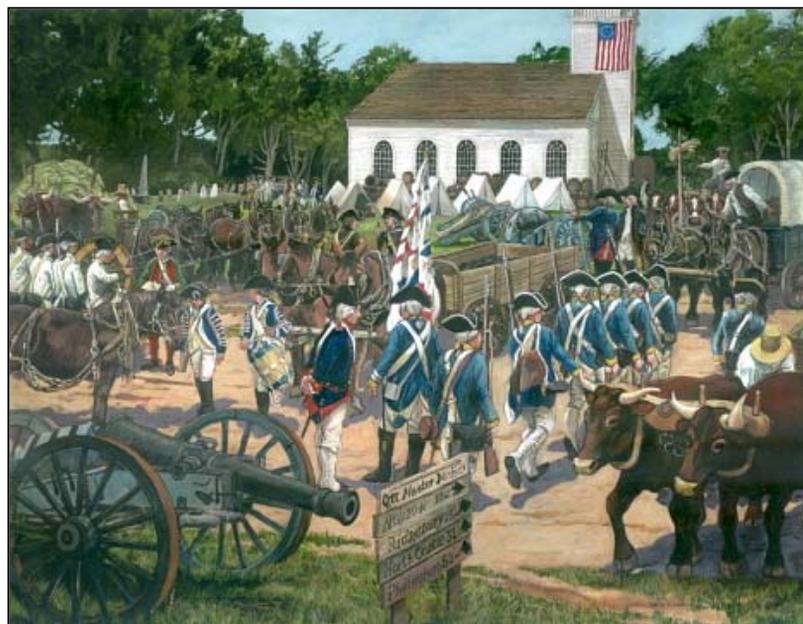


While the British troops were setting fire to the rest of Danbury, they had a predicament with the big warehouse. It was an Anglican church building; the Church of the English King. A decision was made to empty the supplies out of the building and onto the roadway, then set the goods on fire. A monstrous blaze was soon underway, fed by the fat from barrels of pork and beef. When Tryon pulled his troops out of Danbury to march to Ridgefield, the Continental Army still had one big supply warehouse intact and ready for business!

The British were quite aware of the American forces forming behind them. They decided to return to their ships via Ridgefield. Don't forget, they were being guided by local loyalists who knew the roads. Ridgefield was the scene of the battle between the opposing forces. We will write about this portion of the raid another day. Suffice it to say, Brig. Gen. David Wooster was mortally wounded at Ridgefield. Brig. Gen. Benedict Arnold would curse his own ill-trained American militia and strengthen the case of establishing a regular full-time army.

The British skirmished all the way back to Compo Beach. This time the British were under fire. They were bloodied but did get aboard their ships and escape the wrath of the Americans. Never again was an unprotected inland expedition attempted by the British during the war.

The following year, 1778, witnessed the CT and NH Brigades and the Canadian Regiment ... protecting



The painting above, done by historical artist David R. Wagner, shows the Anglican church/ warehouse still in business in 1781. Rochambeau and French troops were passing through Danbury on their way to Yorktown. French commissaries arranged to have tons of supplies awaiting the Yorktown army to pick up on their way through town. Imagine this scene when looking at

July FAN's Meeting



The July meeting of the Friends group was held on Tuesday July 11th at the park Visitor Center.

Discussions held included:

1. The **Treasurer's Report** was covered by Rosemary Payne.
2. Nancy Cowles recapped the **Summer Craftsmen Program**. Harry Gibson passed out signs and posters to be put up in stores and public places. Program was sent to the local newspapers.
3. Nathan Hale said that there will be a meetings held with DEP personnel for discussions on turning the Visitor Center into an interpretative center.
4. Still one of issues was that of sales of souvenirs. Should DEP staff sell FANs gift items? Jeanine will line up FANs volunteers to be at the pavilion one day each weekend to sell gift merchandise.
5. Nate Hale brought up the issue of getting artifacts unearthed in past digs returned to the the park. They are currently being housed at the State Archaeologist's Office in Storrs. Actually, this is a good and safe place to leave them unless specific items are desired for for our museum.
6. Jeanine Herman gave an update of the **October Living History Weekend**.
7. Nate Hale requested that we purchase the muskets (which were already approved last year) for the new visitor center. Possible to fold into grant request.?
8. Karl Epple, by proxy, has requested that we look into the canvas canopies to be used at our events, especially for covering spectators at each station at **School Days** events.



Putnam Park Summercraftsmen Program.

Saturdays & Sundays - 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM
Next to the Putnam Park Museum.



July 8/9 - Blacksmith
 July 15/16 - TBA
 July 22/23 - TBA
 July 29/30 - Blacksmith

August 5/6 - Surgeon
 August 12/13 - Whitesmith
 August 19/20 - Blacksmith
 August 26/27 - Blacksmith

Putnam Memorial State Park at the intersection of Rt. 58 and Rt



Have a fun summer vacation



The next FAN's Meeting will be on **Tuesday Evening**
September 12th at the Visitor Center at Putnam Park.

The meeting will start at **7:00pm.**