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FORT STANWIX

ROME, NEW YORK



The history of Rome as a water route linking the Great Lakes with the Atlantic Ocean is of historical and commercial importance. Except for the short portage across nearly level ground between the Mohawk River east of the city and Wood Creek to the west, a traveler in colonial times could journey by water all the way from New York City to Canada. Indians used the portage for centuries, calling it the De-O-Wain-Sta. The English called it the Oneida Carry and it became a funnel for commerce, settlement and military activity.

The British built Fort Stanwix here in 1758 to replace three smaller forts, which protected the portage during the early years of the French and Indian War. It was named for its builder, Brigadier General John Stanwix.

During the Revolutionary War, patriot leaders realized the need to defend the Mohawk Valley against British incursions and began rebuilding the fort in 1776. When Colonel Peter Gansevoort took command in the spring of 1777, there were rumors of a British invasion from Canada down the Mohawk Valley by a small force under General Barry St. Leger. Gansevoort doubled the efforts of his garrison, consisting of less than a thousand New York and Massachusetts infantry, to make the fort defensible.





Prior to his coming to bolster the defenses of the Mohawk Valley, Peter Gansevoort, the 28-year-old, Albany born commander of Fort Stanwix, had taken part in the 1775 invasion of Canada under General Richard Montgomery and, since March 1776, had been in charge of Fort George, New York.



Rebuilding the Fort (1776)

When the Revolutionary War began, Fort Stanwix was—if not beyond—the frontier. From his experience in Virginia, George Washington had gained a keen appreciation of the importance of the frontier, and this may explain why he was determined to maintain an American presence at the isolated outpost.

In the Summer of 1776, at the request of Gen. Philip Schuyler, and earlier the Oneidas, the 3rd New Jersey Regiment, commanded by Col. Elias Dayton, occupied and began rebuilding Fort Stanwix.

Jonathan Dayton, the 16 year-old son of the Colonel, an ensign in the regiment, later was a signer of the Constitution and a U.S. Senator.

Another young officer in the 3rd N. J.,



Joseph Bloomfield, kept a diary of his experiences in the Mohawk Valley and went on to become a General in the War of 1812 and Governor of New Jersey.

(Fort Stanwix Exhibit).

Gansevoort's second in command was Lieutenant Colonel Marius Willett. He had spent most of his life before the war in New York City, where he attended Kings College (now Columbia University) and became a wealthy merchant and landowner. During the French and Indian War, he took part in the Ticonderoga and Frontenac expeditions. After the Revolution began he, like Gansevoort, participated in the 1775 Canadian invasion. The following year he was put in command of Constitution Island opposite West Point. He was later transferred to Fort Stanwix.

By the end of July, St. Leger's army of about 1,500 men was approaching Wood Creek. Gansevoort was defending Fort Stanwix with a force about half that of St. Leger's. The siege of Fort Stanwix officially began on August 3rd, after Gansevoort "rejected with disdain" the British demand for surrender.

Four days before, learning of the British advance, General Nicholas Herkimer ordered his Tryon County militia to muster at Fort Dayton near German Flatts on the Mohawk River about 50 miles east of Fort Stanwix. On August 4th some 900 men marched westward to reinforce Gansevoort, but were ambushed at Oriskany, an upcoming site on this road trip.



In the meantime, Gansevoort had sent a detachment of soldiers under Lt. Colonel Marinus Willett, to create a diversion on the militia's behalf. Coming upon British and Indian encampments, Willett's men carried away an assortment of kettles, clothing, muskets, spears, tomahawks, regimental colors and papers belonging to the British officers, including St. Leger. From prisoners taken at the camp, Gansevoort learned for the first time of the battle at Oriskany and the size and strength of the enemy besieging Fort Stanwix.

General Philip Schuyler, commander of the Northern Department of the Continental Army, ordered Major General Benedict Arnold to take a small detachment from Saratoga west to the relief of Fort Stanwix. Rumors filtered into St. Leger's camp that the Americans were coming in overwhelming numbers. This, coupled with the deaths of several chiefs at Oriskany and the loss of their possessions after Willett's raid, caused the Indians to desert. St. Leger, finding Fort Stanwix more difficult to capture than he had expected, was forced to lift the siege on August 22nd and withdraw to Canada.

General St. Leger, whose army besieged the place for nearly three weeks, called Fort Stanwix "a respectable Fortress strongly garrisoned ... and demanding a train of artillery. We were not masters of its speedy subjection."



Here August 3, 1777, the Stars & Stripes first flew in battle above the southwest bastion of Fort Stanwix (Schuler).

Here August 2nd to 22nd, Col. Peter Gansevoort's New York & Massachusetts Continentals successfully withstood a siege by British regulars, Hessians, Mohawk Valley Tories & Indians under Lt. Col Barry St. Leger—Lt. Col. Marinus Willett Aug. 6th conducting the sortie to relieve the enemy pressure upon Gen. Nicholas Herkimer's Militia ambushed in Oriskany's Forest.

1758—Fort erected to protect the Great Oneida carrying place from the French.

1769—Famous boundary line treaty here negotiated.

1784—Treaty of peace with the Indians.

(Fort Stanwix Marker)

Fort Stanwix was garrisoned until 1781, but played no further active part in the war. In October 1784, American and Iroquois representatives met here to negotiate the Treaty of Fort Stanwix, which set terms for a separate peace with the Indians and forced the Iroquois Confederacy (except the Oneida and Tuscarora tribes which had supported the Americans) to cede large parts of their lands to the United States.

Today, Fort Stanwix has been almost completely reconstructed to its 1777 appearance. In the course of excavations prior to reconstructing the fort, a substantial quantity of 18th-century artifacts were unearthed. They offered some evidence of the activities that took place here during various periods of the fort's occupation. Some of the building tools and hardware recovered from the site include picks, gate spikes, chisels, axes, strap hinges, nails, pintles, tomahawks, hammers and pipes.

Fort Stanwix is open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., April 1st to December 31st, except Thanksgiving and Christmas. During the summer, re-enactors can be found giving demonstrations in period dress.



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