

This Week in Saratoga County History

Incident at Jones Mill

Submitted by Sean Kelleher October 1, 2020

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A production photo of British Captain Alexander Frazier's Select Marksmen camp from the BBC/PBS television documentary Rebels and Redcoats

When most people think about the Battles of Saratoga, they think of the Battles of Freeman's Farm on September 19th and Bemus Heights on October 7th. We hope that people will also remember the Siege period in the modern Schuylerville area from October 10th to 17th. One of the reasons for the name, the Battles (notice the s) of Saratoga, is that there were many combat actions both great and small. One of the small skirmishes is the "Incident at Jones Mill" near Grangerville in the town of Saratoga on October 2, 1777.

A participant in the incident, Sergeant Ebenezer Wild of the 1st Massachusetts Regiment, describes "we started at daylight... came to a mill called Jones...where there (are) a number of houses pretty close around it. We set fire to the mill and several other buildings and a large quantity of grain and took 7 prisoners here. We were discovered by a party of the enemy on the other side of the river, which caused us to leave the place quicker than we should otherwise have done. Notwithstanding, we took a considerable booty, and proceeded on our way home as fast as we could conveniently. We arrived at headquarters between 8 & nine o'clock in the evening with 10 prisoners, 3 of which were commissioned officers, and 12 horses and 18 horned cattle...what was very remarkable we never exchanged a shot the whole scout."

A scouting party of 100 to 150 men from the 1st and 4th Massachusetts Regiment from General Glover's Brigade patrolled behind the British lines. This scouting party moved from the village of Saratoga (now

Schuylerville) situated on the Hudson River westward along Fish Creek towards Saratoga Lake. The American soldiers discovered "Jones" mill and a number of structures. Jones, a local Royalist, was a volunteer guide in British General Burgoyne's army. The mill was operating under the direction of the British, supplying grain to their army. The American patrol captured seven prisoners and set to fire the structures including the mill and grain.

A British patrol from a unit named the Select Marksmen under the command of Captain Alexander Frazier might have seen the smoke from the burning structures. The Select Marksmen, guided by the mill owner, "Jones" observed the Americans pillaging and burning the mill from across Fish Creek without firing a shot. Jones crossed the creek by himself to observe the damage to his property at which time Jones was promptly captured by the Americans. The American scouting party continued with their prisoners to the safety of the American camp at Bemus Heights.

The "Incident at Jones Mills" is representative of the activities of the two armies near Saratoga in fall 1777. The first skirmishes happened when Burgoyne crossed the Hudson River on September 13th and ended with the cessation of combat between the armies on October 14th as the surrender or convention terms were being negotiated. The American Victory at Saratoga in 1777 is called the turning point of the American War of Independence. This timely victory reversed American military fortunes, boosted patriot morale, and gained them international recognition and support, including military assistance from France.

(Much of this research was done by Historian Stephen G. Strach (31 May 1949 - 3 Oct. 2005). Strach had a distinguished career with the National Park Service and wrote numerous manuscripts on Saratoga and military history.)