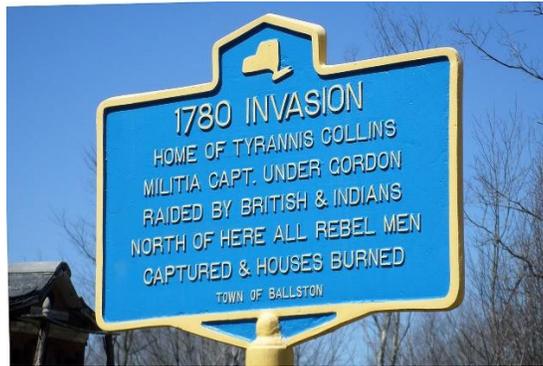


This Week in Saratoga County History

War on the Middleline

Submitted by Jim Richmond, October 15, 2020

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Historical Marker on Middleline Road, Town of Ballston

Life as they knew it changed overnight. For years there had been fear, causing hardships day-by-day, but after this event their lives would never be the same. Much like our response to Pearl Harbor or September 11, October 16, 1780 was a day the people along Middleline Road in the Town of Ballston would never forget.

The families along the road dividing the five-mile square in the Kayaderoseras patent had only recently arrived, most moving northwest less than 200 miles from their family homes in Connecticut. They were immediately met with the disruption of war. As Yankees, many of them responded by supporting the patriot cause. Most of the men joined the 12th Regiment of the Albany County Militia. Their Lt. Colonel, James Gordon and their Captain, Tyrannius Collins lived among them.

The pioneers settled north of their leaders along Middleline Road, clearing land, building their first cabins, barns and fences. The Revolution often took the men away from their families and farms. As militiamen, they were called to serve in the early years running down Loyalists, some of them former neighbors like William Fraser who had purchased 200 acres in Ballston in 1772. James Gordon's militiamen has captured him along with his brother early in 1777 and sent them to the Albany County jail. But they had escaped in time to join Burgoyne's army for the Battle of Saratoga.

Now, Fraser was back, a Captain of 34 Loyalists known as Fraser's Rangers. He was part of a 200-man force commanded by Captain John Munro of the King's Royal Regiment. Munro personally knew militia leaders Gordon and Collins and was well-aware of the 12th Albany County Militia and their harassment of Loyalists. He had been an Albany County Justice of the Peace along the Vermont border in the early 1770's facing off against Ethan Allen and his Green Mountain Boys. So, when decisions had to be made, Munro sided with the Crown.

On October 7, Munro led his force of British Regulars, Loyalists, and Indians southwest from Crown Point, splitting off from a larger force commanded by Major Christopher Carlton of the 29th Regiment. While Carlton went on to raid Ft. Anne and the American fort at Lake George, Munro steadily marched toward Ballston, remaining unknown to the militiamen on Middleline Road or the defenders stationed at the Fort in that town.

For Munro, Ballston may not have been his first choice. Another objective of the raid may have been Schenectady in order to link up with an invasion force lead by Sir John Johnson who was in the midst of causing destruction in the Schoharie and Mohawk valleys. But judging Schenectady too strong to be overrun by his meager force, he turned to Ballston and the men of the 12th AC Militia.

Around midnight on Monday, October 16, the British raiders approached the homes of Gordon and Collins. The forces split up, the larger group broke into the home of the Lt. Colonel and then an unusual thing happened. Faced with certain death by an Indian with tomahawk raised, Captain Munro stayed his hand. Across the Mourning Kill, Captain Collins was taken by his former neighbor Fraser, after being wounded while defending his home long enough to let his son escape. Both militia leaders counted enslaved blacks among their household, not uncommon among the leading citizens of the town. Four of them were captured along with the militia leaders along with two of Gordon's white farmhands. One enslaved woman, Liz, managed to escape capture.

Across the road, Isaac Stow, Collins' nephew and Gordon's miller became the only person killed on the Middleline during the raid, speared and scalped by an Indian as he tried to warn Gordon about the attack. In these and all the other homes raided that night, the men were captured but their wives and children were left behind to fend for themselves.

Continuing northward along Middleline Road, the scene repeated itself. Home after home was pillaged and some were burned, the surprised militiamen herded along in a growing band of captives. Cresting the ridge now known as Court House Hill they reached the farm of Jonathan Filer. Here an act of heroism saved their home from destruction when Filer's mother-in-law, Granny Leake, rushed into the home and squelched the fire started by the raiders.

Crossing over a small creek, Frasier's contingent of about 50 men surrounded the home of George Scott, brother-in-law of Gordon. Frasier warned his former neighbor whom he knew. "Scott, throw down your gun or you are a dead man!" Not responding quick enough, three Mohawks let loose their tomahawks, wounding George. Before there could finish the job, they were stopped

by another raider, Staats Springsteen, who has worked for Scott before the war. George Scott's life had been spared, as had that of James Gordon.

Crossing over into the present town of Milton, the destruction continued, with cabins burned more frequently now. The wife of Josiah Hollister pleaded for her husband's life. But the raiders mission was destruction, not death. As dawn broke, the entire invading force assembled with their 30 captives and their cattle along the banks of the Kayaderosseras Creek at the crossroads now known as Milton Center.

As they journeyed back to Lake Champlain, one more act of mercy and restraint was exhibited. Four of the prisoners, unable to keep up, were released, resisting the demands of their Indian allies to kill them. The others were imprisoned in Canada, most remaining there for two years until released at the end of the war. Gordon and a few others managed to escape and make their way back home. The fate of the enslaved captives was more problematic. All five were sold in Montreal, but two eventually escaped. One escapee, Nero, returned to labor for his former owner, James Gordon.

The raid had been harsh and destructive as all acts of war are. But personal relationships resulted in saved lives, even in the midst of conflict.

A video presentation of this raid will be available soon on Brookside Museum's Facebook page and You Tube channel