

# The Untold Story

*Danbury's Unsung Role  
in the Revolution*



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# The Untold Story

## *Danbury's Unsung Role in the Revolution*

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**T**his booklet is about people who lived or worked in Danbury during the American Revolution. It's the untold story of the war years 1775-1783, a story that has been too long neglected.

How did it come to light, this new information?

Of course it has always been there, waiting to be found. We just didn't know where to look.

For years, about all most people knew of Danbury's history during the Revolution was what they could read in J. M. Bailey's "History of Danbury," an 1895 book which by the 1970s we knew to be somewhat inaccurate.

The British raid received high priority in Bailey's, but even so it was quite a meager account. American history books gave Danbury a few lines or ignored the town completely.

Writing history or tracing a family genealogy is very much like working a jigsaw puzzle, which is probably why all three pursuits have been lifelong diversions of mine.

The real story of Danbury's role in the Revolution came to light in much the same fashion as one drops the pieces into a puzzle or finds a clue to a missing ancestor. The piece or the clue comes to attention unexpectedly.

Thus it was with a group of us who were attempting to put together an exhibit for the Bicentennial prior to the celebration's opening in 1975.

As director of the Danbury Scott-Fanton Museum and Historical Society, I had planned several temporary exhibits. But Dr. Truman A. Warner, then president of the society and professor of history and anthropology at Western Connecticut State University, suggested we mount a permanent exhibit on Danbury's role in the Revolution.

Throughout his years as a local and state historian, he had picked up bits and pieces of information that led him to believe Danburians had never learned of the true importance of their town in winning independence. The years from 1775 to 1783 needed deeper study.

We enlisted the help of Imogene Heireth, a Scott-Fanton trustee and an expert researcher of Danbury land records.

Using our own "finds" of information culled from both printed and unpublished records, assembling Revolutionary War artifacts and documents from both the historical society and the DAR collections and obtaining copies of significant area maps from the Library of Congress, we began to build an exhibit.

Even so, we all knew by then that we were only, so to speak, on the tip of the iceberg. There had to be more.

One morning, Mrs. Heireth came into my museum office, waving a letter. "What," she asked, "is an artificer?"

"Beats me," I answered. But we soon learned that artificers were the craftsmen — carpenters, coopers, blacksmiths, tanners, ironmongers and the like — formed into military units to provide the troops with most of the things they needed in camp or on the battlefield.

The letter was from a Florida woman seeking information about her ancestor, Levi Stone, who, she wrote, served as an artificer in Danbury during the American Revolution. The writer said Mrs. Heireth might find some reference to the artificers among the papers of Jeremiah Wadsworth at the Connecticut Historical Society in Hartford.

The next morning I was in Hartford, visited the society and soon had many missing pieces of our Danbury picture falling into place.

However, time was running out to get the new exhibit installed. After a few days of perusing the Wadsworth correspondence, we could include in the exhibit copies of letters to him from Danbury's John McLean and others from Dr. John Wood, a French and Indian war veteran who was then an assistant quartermaster with the Continental Army.

Letters written to Wadsworth from a Colonel Hughes and John Lloyd before and after the raid showed how under-rated had been the importance of the Danbury activities during the war years.

Reluctantly, I had to defer further research, to come back and finish the Bicentennial exhibit, but vowed to return eventually to try to find more pieces of the puzzle.

A substantial number have now been found, enough so that particular emphasis will be placed in the following pages on two groups of participants in the Revolution during this historic period — a corps of Army artificers and a group of wagoneers and teamsters. They worked first under the Commissaries and the Provisioners of the Connecticut Militia and, eventually, under the control of General Washington's Continental Army.

## Danbury as 'Provision State' funnel

Connecticut is often referred to as "The Provision State" for its role in the Revolution, but historians seldom mention that Danbury was the funnel through which provisions from all over the state and from Massachusetts and Rhode Island were carted to the patriot armies.

Food was grown here and stored here; leather came in on the hoof and went out as shoes; wagons were made here; cattle were driven in to graze, eventually to provide food for Washington's troops.

The event that Danbury is best known for is the unfortunate one — those few inglorious days in April 1777 when 2,000 British forces under General Tryon marched up from Compo Beach in Westport, having sailed up Long Island Sound from New York in a small fleet of ships.

With hardly a shot fired on them, they ravaged much of the old part of our village, destroyed the forage, military equipment and other supplies stored here, and terrorized the Danburians who were left behind when many of the community had fled.

For those wishing a refresher on the raid, there are two excellent books: "Tryon's Raid," by James R. Case, first published in 1927 for the Sesquicentennial and reprinted in 1977, and "Connecticut Attacked: the British Raid on Danbury," by Robert W. McDevitt, published in 1976 as one of the volumes in the Bicentennial Series of Connecticut History.

In Page Smith's "People's History of the American Revolution - A New Age Begins," Volumes 1 and 2, one finds recorded several other interesting events as well as a much better account than most national historians have given to the attack itself.

But, rather than the military details of two days out of more than six years of the Revolution, here one will see through letters, diaries and military orders, how very human these Revolutionary people were . . . heroic, quarrelsome, jealous, sometimes conniving, not always patriotic, willing to make a good "Yankee deal," but at the same time re-enlisting when needed to serve under the direst of circumstances.

Why?

Because they believed in "the cause," and felt it was God-directed. They were not only fighting for their rights as Englishmen, which they felt were being denied them by Parliament, but were certain that in the end the world would long remember their efforts. Never, at their darkest hour, did they doubt "the cause."

These men and women, and even children, knew that through their efforts the war would eventually be won. Here they are, telling that different story of the American Revolution that is new to most of us.

It is impossible, of course, to tell the whole story in the few pages of this booklet. The more research is done, the more it becomes clear that additional details remain to be revealed.

## Hatting Act of 1732, other irritants

To understand Danbury's role in the American Revolution, it is wise to go back to an even earlier time.

Resentment against edicts of the British Parliament may have erupted in this town two or three decades before the Sugar Act of 1764, although no town records exist to show this. They were burned by the British in the raid on Danbury in April, 1777.

The earliest trigger of local resentment was probably the hatting act enacted under King George II in 1732.

That parliamentary act was the result of pressure by London hat makers fearful of expanding hat making operations in the northern colonies.

The law prohibited the exportation of hats from one colony to another, limited the pursuit of hat making in the colonies to those who had served a seven-year apprenticeship, allowed only two apprentices per shop and barred employment of Negro apprentices.

Although the law was not firmly enforced, it was bound to have caused concern among the Danbury families now known to have been hatters, earlier Benedicts, for instance, than the Zadoc Benedict credited for so long with being Danbury's first recorded hat maker (1780). In an era when everyone wore a hat, it would have been strange not to have had hat makers in Danbury, then a town of over 2,500 population.

An original print of the rescript promulgating this Hat Act of 1732 may be seen at the Scott-Fanton Museum.

Of course it was the Revenue Act of 1764, the Stamp Act of 1765 and the Townshend Acts that brought the whole question to a boil.

Here as in Boston and elsewhere, it wasn't the actual taxation as much as being taxed at all by a parliament in which there was no representation.

The Stamp Act was the first internal tax the colonies had known. It was deemed by the more educated colonists as being fair (after all the British had sent armies to defend the borders from the French and the Indians) and it actually helped colonial commerce.

But — and this was the great BUT — many of the colonists believed it infringed on “their rights as Englishmen,” as the Rev. Ebenezer Baldwin told the people in his Danbury parish week after week.

In 1774 Baldwin went beyond preaching. He prepared and published an address to the people of the western part of Connecticut, including of course his own parish, arousing them to “the dangers in which their liberties were involved.”

Baldwin's home on Towne Street was near where the Danbury Public Library now stands, a fitting coincidence since Baldwin started the first library Danbury had. It was a subscription type but when it opened in 1771 Baldwin declared that “it should be free to all denominations.”

Unfortunately most of the books were destroyed in the raid of 1777 and by 1795 it was no longer in existence.

The Intolerable Acts enacted in response to the Boston Tea Party led to the convening of the first Continental Congress in September, 1774. On Dec. 4, those in attendance at a Danbury town meeting declared that “because of the oppressive acts of the British Parliament” the meeting “manifested heartfelt sympathy with Boston in the common cause of American Liberty.”

Citizens of the town were asked to contribute liberally to “the cause.”

But on Feb. 6, 1775, another town meeting rescinded support of the Continental Congress.

## News from Lexington and Concord

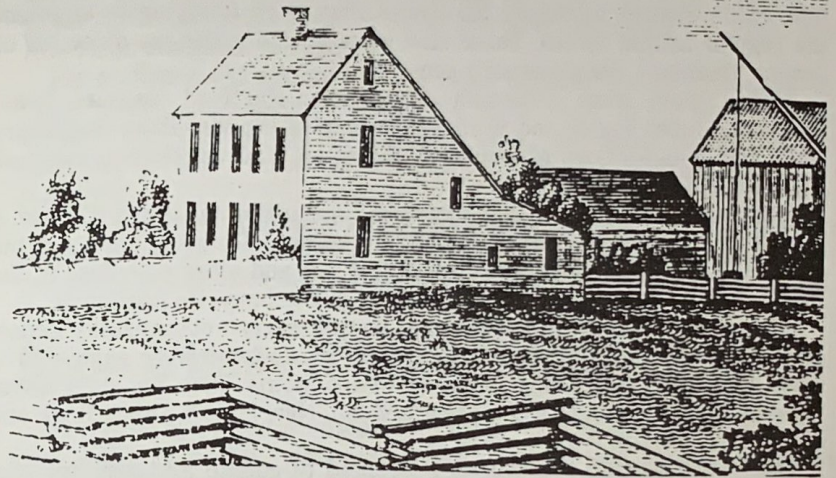
Two months later, on one morning in April, 1775, villagers in this small western Connecticut town of Danbury were going about their usual, everyday tasks when the bells of the Meeting House rang out.

Noble Benedict and Col. Joseph P. Cooke heard them at the north end of Towne Street and immediately started for the center of the village. Ringing of the church bells in midweek was a signal that Pastor Ebenezer Baldwin had some important news to disclose.

Closer neighbors to the church surely put down their tools or stopped household chores and hurried to the church.

South of the church, on the opposite side of the village street, lived Ebenezer White, former minister of the Congregational Society now in the hands of Baldwin, a young Yale graduate.

The meeting house belonging to White's New Danbury Society, as it was called during its short life, had not been used since 1763.



Small farms in the Danbury area and throughout Connecticut, such as the one depicted, produced food for American troops during the Revolution. They helped Connecticut earn its honor as “The Provision State.”

*From John W. Barber's Connecticut Historical Collections*

Probably out on the green before the meeting house to hear the news that April morning was Amelia White, daughter of Ebenezer.

As she heard Minister Baldwin read the news that war had broken out between Great Britain and the Massachusetts Bay Colony, she could not have guessed that war would bring her future husband to Danbury with the Continental Army.

Recent discoveries make it seem possible that her father had strong Tory sympathies, unlike the majority of New England's clergy who were mostly ardent in urging rebellion.

James Clark who with his wife ran a tavern near the south end of the road would have been there. Clark was to serve throughout the war, first in the state militia and later in the Continental forces. His wife was well known to the teamsters and provisioners who frequented their tavern, which she continued to run. It was partially burned during the British attack of 1777.

And members of the John McLean family, Clark's neighbors, would have been there, too. McLean was a prosperous and enterprising farmer, specializing in raising beef cattle and pork.

Some 100 men from the town responded when Captain Noble Benedict, a veteran of the French and Indian Wars, issued a call for Danbury volunteers to take up arms in support of the Minutemen who had been fired on, wounded and killed at Lexington and Concord. All over Connecticut, men did the same thing — picked up their muskets and headed for Massachusetts.

Governor Jonathan Trumbull and the General Assembly appointed nine commissaries to supply the troops they were readying to augment the regular militia forces. These nine were placed under the direction of Joseph Trumbull, the governor's son.

Among them were Jeremiah Wadsworth, Hartford; Samuel Gray, Stamford; Jabez Bacon and Shadrach Osborn of the Woodbury-Southbury area, and John McLean of Danbury. Jeremiah Wadsworth soon assumed a leading role among them.

"Commissaries came in great variety," according to James R. Case, a long time resident of Bethel, leader in National Guard affairs and between the two World Wars the director of 4-H and other activities at the Fairfield County Extension Service office in Danbury. He continued:

"There were Continental and state commissaries, commissary generals and deputies — some in counties, some local. Some were appointed to state regiments sent out of state to action, some were for state naval vessels, some for state forts in New London, New Haven, Black Rock and elsewhere.

"The word or title 'commissary' seemed to equate an agent for purchasing, storage or issue of almost anything needed for the war effort for which some sort of control or price fixing had been established."

In the fall, Governor Trumbull declared Nov. 16 a day of Thanksgiving throughout the colony. On that day, Ebenezer Baldwin preached a sermon that was so widely approved that a member of the Episcopal Church in Danbury paid to have it published and disseminated through the state.

In it, Baldwin declared that the war being fought was "a most unnatural war," adding:

*"It is a great, a rich and a powerful nation we have to contend with. We have not only Enemies from the other side of the Atlantic, but Enemies from among ourselves to combat with . . . but it is a merciful circumstance that God hath not suffered us to be involved in an unjust war."*

*"If we must be involved, it is also a merciful circumstance that war began in the northern colonies where the greatest strength of the colonies lies and the inhabitants have been more generally trained to the military exercises than in any other parts of America."*

Actually, the Connecticut militia was probably the finest trained group among the colonies and the state assembly provisioned and managed it well.

Baldwin continued, "The Controversy has begun where liberty has been most enjoyed and probably most understood."

He expressed what was to become a popular tenet, that "the war was not just for their liberty but was divinely guided to bring freedom and liberty to the whole world."

"A great Empire will evolve from your struggle," he predicted, "and these present calamities will lead to a glorious Kingdom on earth."

He then made an amazing prediction, saying that in another century (by 1875) this country would grow to no less than 48 million inhabitants stretching to the Pacific and although it would grow only half as fast in the second century (by 1975) there would be about 192 million people in a great American empire, which would not be too many for this great north American continent to support.

His audience did not have much to be thankful for as 1775 drew to a close, having gone through one of the worst years in the town's 90-year history. The village had been struck with "the army disease," killing hundreds of men, women and children, and also with an epidemic of smallpox.

The soldiers who enlisted under Noble Benedict and fought in northern campaigns came back to find many family members buried in the town cemetery. Sometimes they found their entire families had been victims.

## Soon a busy military supply center

By mid-1776 the little village of Danbury had been transformed into a busy military center, with post-riders arriving and departing day and night. News of Congress reached Danbury quickly, as did reports on battles of the war, those around New York where the British had gone after abandoning Boston, Long Island and New Jersey.

In July, the news that Congress had declared independence from Great Britain swept the town.

To the officers, soldiers and artificers we now know were here even then, the news was an encouragement. They surely knew the war they were helping to supply was not going to be easy and that a complete break with the mother country was inevitable if they were to keep their freedom and achieve political independence.

Warfare was never far away and as fall came so did the first of large troop movements into town. General Gates was first with an encampment on Eli Mygatt's farm on the outskirts of the town, and even the sounds of war became familiar to residents of the area.

If David Hicock of South Britain (Southbury) could "hear the cannons playing all day" at White Plains, as he wrote in his diary Oct. 28, 1776, certainly Danburians 20 miles closer to the battle heard the gunfire too.

After Gates and his men came a much larger group, 6,000 men under General Benjamin Lincoln, ordered here by Washington in December, 1776. Yet, within a few months, the commander-in-chief would leave the depot at Danbury guarded by only a handful of state militia, moving the other forces to the Peekskill area, believing that town to be the target of a pending British attack.

Activities became even more hectic in the early months of 1777 when Washington, through aide General Thomas Mifflin, ordered a Continental forage depot and military hospital be established here.

It was thus that Danbury appeared to the eyes of young John Lloyd when he arrived in Danbury in early March, 1777, some six weeks before those fateful days of April 26-27, 1777.

Letter to Mr. Jerh Wadsworth  
Fav. Capt.  
McKay

Hartford

Danbury 5 Mar 1777

Dear Sir—

I arrived here yesterday and I am likely to prove tolerably lucky in procuring stores. Have the promise of all that Maj. Starr has to spare which is very considerable — have taken a large new Meeting House and hope I shall be able to obtain the church which is not used, it has a good floor and is without any pews. I go for Stamford this day to return Sunday next.

Pray get an order from Maj. Gen. Hughes for what steel I may want as Major Starr has a quantity belonging to the Continentals — Mr. Mc Kay informs me the Pork in his possession is in extream (sic) bad order, the barrels many of them being little better than flour casks and that Mr. Gray has ordered it to be sent to Peekskill, I believe, to prevent discoveries. I am

Dear Sir, your Hbl. Svt.  
John Lloyd, Jr.

Thus began a correspondence between Jeremiah Wadsworth, Hartford businessman, one of the first Provisioners of Commissary appointed in Connecticut at the beginning of the American Revolution, and 30-year-old John Lloyd Jr., a refugee from the Battle of Long Island, newly appointed assistant quartermaster in the Continental Army.

Lloyd had just arrived in Danbury to take charge of the supply depot being set up in the town and to oversee both the work of the wagoners and teamsters transporting supplies in and out of New England through this small western Connecticut village.

Through his correspondence to Wadsworth and letters from other men active in the Danbury project, such as Col. Hugh Hughes, Deputy-General Quartermaster, John Mc Lean, a local commissary man and John Wood, a veteran of both the French & Indian Wars and early battles of the Revolution, a whole new picture of Danbury in the days before the raid has unfolded.

Almost from the arrival of Hughes and Lloyd on the Danbury scene, bickering between the local men and those attached to the Continental Army began to surface.

Nearly every letter from John Lloyd to Wadsworth complained about either Mc Lean or Wood. Lloyd himself had trouble with Mc Lean who refused to obey any order that did not come from Dr. Wood. Even the

teamsters wouldn't obey the Continental orders at first. It was a situation that continued to some extent throughout the war. Those seeking "independence" were pretty independent themselves!

The shortage of salt was a subject of many of the letters. It was crucial, of course, in packing the meat for shipping to the troops.

Early on, soon after he also arrived in Danbury, Quartermaster Hughes wrote to Wadsworth that it was his intention to establish a grand "nailory" and that he would erect a large shop for that purpose. Several weeks later he requested "nailors for this place."

After the stores were removed from Stamford to Danbury in mid-March, Lloyd became worried about the safety of the combined stores and on March 24, 1777 he wrote to Wadsworth of his concern saying, "the enemy might take possession of the stores in Danbury with 'great ease' if they come this way."

By April 4 he was urging a "guard be had at this place."

He also suggested that a good "Continental garden" of turnips and potatoes be planted "for the use of the troops that may be occasionally stationed at this place," an indication that it was beginning to be apparent to him, at least, that if Danbury was to be an important center, it would have to have troops to protect it. Eventually, of course, this was done and the area was seldom without some soldiers of the Continental line encamped nearby.

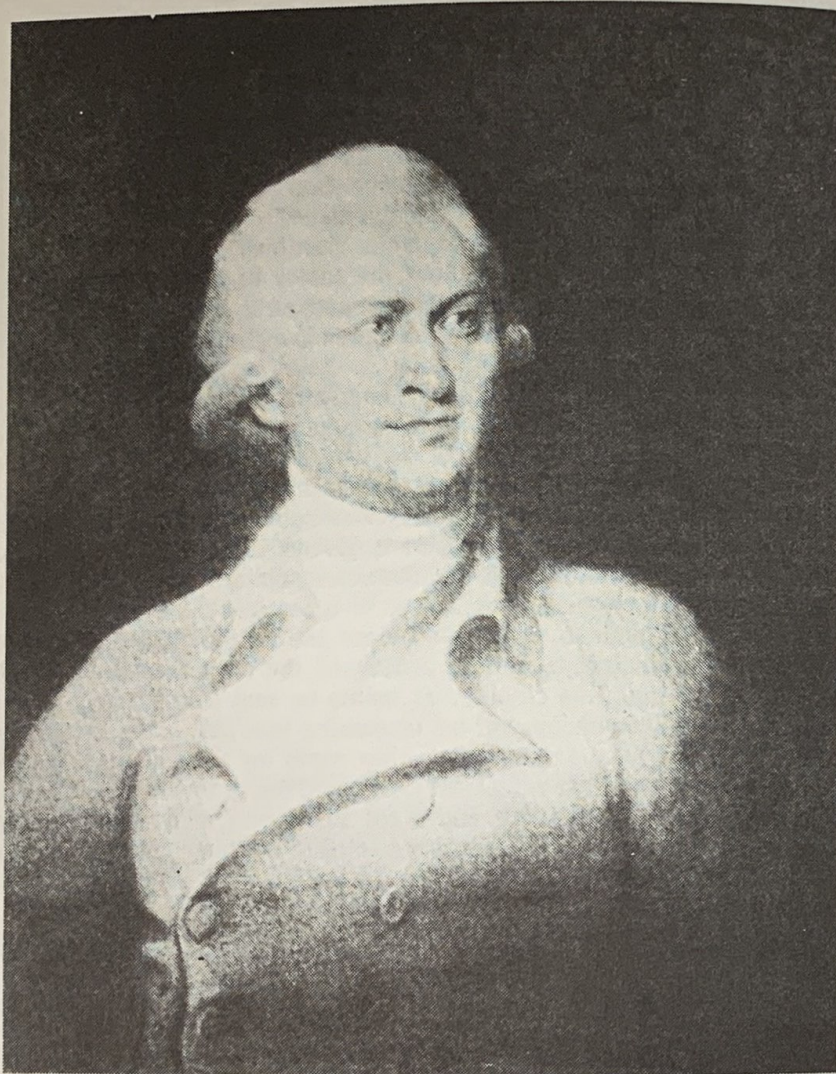
However, on April 25, two days before the raid by the enemy took place, his communication mainly concerned the desperate need of salt and also asked that five or six cart teams be sent immediately — the later may have been because of his increasing fear that if the British did come they would need every vehicle they could lay their hands on to get themselves and whatever materials they could out of town.

The next word Wadsworth had from the young quartermaster was from New Milford while the enemy was still in Danbury, telling him that the stores in Danbury had been totally destroyed.

From the May, 1777 minutes of the General Assembly. Jeremiah Wadsworth papers, Connecticut Historical Society.

Copy of orders to conductors of teams raised for six months - 1777 (source, etc)

"you are desired to raise ten teams & drivers for six months unless sooner discharged, the teams to consist of four or six good cattle (oxen), the cart well found and strong. They are to keep their own cattle shod and their carts in good repair and perform their duty well and for which they will be allowed twelve shillings lawfull money per day from the time they are in active service — they are to draw their provisions and one man as a cook will be allowed for the hall. Your pay & rations the same as a capt. in the Continental Army — your duty will be to attend to all matters that may be transported by you, that they are not injured or embezzled, as well as keep regular acct. of all the expenses that arise and to give receipts. for what you received & take them for what you deliver."



Colonel Jeremiah Wadsworth

Jeremiah Wadsworth, Who during 1778 and 1779, served as the Continental Commissary General. From Henry Greenleaf Pearson, James S. Wadsworth of Geneseo (1913).

## Saving some supplies from harm

The military depot received the news of the British landing at Compo Beach in the early morning hours and by daylight the entire village was on the move. Every available cart was pressed into service. John McLean sent 11 of his wagons loaded with pork and beef to West Point. After getting his own family off to New Milford, he set about burying a few family treasures they could not take with them. He was still hard at it when the British arrived. Quickly jumping on his remaining horse, he sped out of their reach just in time.

His neighbor across the street, Major Taylor (Major was his first name, not a military title) was ready to leave his home (where the entrance to Rogers Park is now found), but at the last minute could not find his little daughter, Sarane. She was located (according to family tradition) making mud pies with some other children.

Over in Bethel parish, the Benedict family heard the news and realized that the British would probably pass near their farm. They too packed up. To safeguard their little six-year-old daughter from wandering or from falling out of the cart, they put her in the family trunk along with their treasures "for safety and convenience," they later told their grandchildren. Perhaps the trunk (to which we shall return later) served as an 18th Century version of the car seats now in use for children!

In the meanwhile, the British troops had reached Redding. Local Tories met General Tryon and members of his staff there with fresh horses, the best they could round up.

While General Agnew was having breakfast with his staff in the home of a local Tory family, his commandeered mount was tied outside.

William Hawley, a Redding member of the Colonial militia, saw the horse was tethered lightly. He made a dash for it, untied the steed and rode it away before the loss was discovered.

Later in the day his brother Samuel, who had remained loyal to the king, found the horse in the cellar of the Hawley home and returned it to its Danbury owner.

Sam then joined the British army, leaving town with them as they returned to Long Island Sound. Brother William, by then in uniform, hastened to join his company and take part in the attack on the retiring British at Ridgefield.

A family split down the middle, with two brothers, or father and sons, espousing opposite sides of the conflict, was not unusual.

Across the New York line, Sybil Ludington, a young daughter of the local militia commander, rode her father's horse at night through the countryside of what is now eastern Putnam County to arouse the patriots in the area that the British were attacking Danbury and help was needed. Many legends have grown about her ride and it was commemorated with a special U.S. postage stamp during the Bicentennial celebration. Her father was a colonel in the New York state militia.

Danbury was not completely evacuated, as some accounts would have us believe. Some Tories stayed in town, feeling they would be safe;



others fled. Some patriots remained because of sick household members they would not leave behind. Taverns owned by Tory and patriot seemed to have been open, or at least their owners stayed behind hoping to protect their property. Others in the village were probably just too old or had no place to run to.

Dr. Isaac Foster moved a substantial lot of hospital supplies to safety and apparently had some help. The only trouble was that in some cases the "helpers" did not return the supplies when the danger was over. Foster advertised in the Hartford Courant that he would be happy to have the supplies returned and advised the "assistants" where to return the goods.

Col. Hugh Hughes, who had headed for Peekskill with the elements of the Danbury militia sent there when it appeared Tryon's troops embarking from New York would head up the Hudson River, made a wild dash back and finally caught up with the British as they were making their last stand at Saugatuck Bridge in Westport.

In his report to General Horatio Gates he told about the ensuing days, stressing that the biggest loss was the tents which were "irreplaceable" since most of them were made of materials imported from France.

He told of the disarray of the village and how everybody was trying to get things back in order so that the business of the depot could begin again.

## Many trials, tribulations after raid

Lloyd advised Wadsworth from New Milford on April 27 that he was there "forwarding and collecting provisions for our troops that are at or near Danbury." He wrote:

*"I hope that we shall do something that will balance the loss of all our stores. From the first of our knowing the enemy had landed 'till they arrived was only 11 hours, every team absent, not one could be had from the inhabitants. The last accounts say the enemy are still at Danbury and that the town is entirely consumed (which of course it was not).*

*"Fortunately for me, I had detained my waggon which enabled me to remove my sisters, our little all that we saved from our flight from the Island is gone."*

On May 15, Lloyd wrote Wadsworth:

*"Some new fangled regulations forsooth make it necessary that I should everytime I want the least article done by the smith run around the town after Doctor Wood for an order, up until now my orders on the smiths have been executed.*

*"I should most like, and it appears necessary, that one should be set apart separate from Wood to do what shoeing our teams will want done and which cannot be done in season when the teams arrive mentioned in your last letter — without such a one as I have decried.*

*"A stranger to this place and its customs would be most elligible as I*

*find nothing but hot headfullness among those of this town. If you have a good man and could spare him should be very much gratified in having him set agoing in a good shop."*

Another day in May he wrote, "I am plagued to death, then back to life again with applications from Dr. Wood for teams to do the business of the department he directs here, few of which are granted. If it is proper for me to comply with these requests pray signify by a line."

The following day he wrote Wadsworth that the Commissary of Hospital stores had informed him that rum would be needed for the sick and wounded.

*"The last you sent is expended except for two casks which will soon be gone, there being no vinegar to be hand, which if to be obtained will in great degree answer the purpose of rum!"*

*"If the twenty teams you mentioned in your last have not set out for this place it may be well to load two teams with rum and the remainder with salt which will be much wanted if the provisions at Derby, Woodbury and New Milford are to be repackt at this place and forwarded to the troops at Peekskill, Fort Montgomery and Constitution."*

John Lloyd concluded the letter with another plea for a sufficient guard at "this place ... or I dare not direct Gray to forward any considerable quantity of provisions."

In a letter dated May 19, Lloyd called Commissary Gray "a whelp" and "a designing blade" and said he wished he would please mind his own affairs! Gray worked out of Derby.

Lloyd also wrote to Wadsworth that the coopers had been sent to Ridgefield and New Milford for a day or two to repack the provisions that, having lain in fields or temporary storage since the raid, needed fast attention. Many of the barrels had broken open in the fields where they had been dumped in great haste.

The coopers, according to Lloyd, rather than waiting for their rations money, had "dieted" themselves at considerably more cost.

These daily and sometimes more often dispatches show some of the myriad problems faced in the aftermath of the disastrous British raid.

But work went on and stores continued to pour into Danbury. The ironworkers and other artisans were kept busy in the shops.

## Good news traveled fast

By Aug. 15 of that year, the most talked of subject in town among the military was the news from the north that the patriot troops were having some successes.

"I feel confident," wrote the young quartermaster, "in the new arrangement of Gnl. G (Gates) in that quarter and am enthusiast enough to believe that Major Burgoyne will meet the ruthlessness of the countryside ... if" he adds, "the country does it duty." The people of the countryside, as so often, did do their duty when their own homes were in the path of battle, in this case the battle before Saratoga.

"As to Gen. Howe," Lloyd continued, "can only say that our politicians are much at loss how to account for his conduct — wish he may be equally at loss how to act."

In the fall, the news of Burgoyne's defeat was brought to Danbury where it pumped new hope and vigor into the militia and the Continentals, as well as the artificers. Some of the latter asked for permission to move into more active areas with the troops.

Lloyd also passed on to Wadsworth any military news he heard from the teamsters and military groups passing through the area. And news seemed to travel to Danbury rather fast.

## Hospital built on a 6.5-acre tract

Records have always indicated to historians that Washington gave the order for an army hospital to be built in Danbury for sick or convalescent Continental soldiers early in 1777.

We know that medical supplies for the hospital were removed in late April of the same year as the British forces under General Tryon approached Danbury.

After the raid, Dr. Isaac Foster, director of hospital for the patriot army in New England, reported on the number of supplies he had been able to salvage and get to New Milford before the British troops arrived.

Evidence that became available in recent years shows that General Wooster was attended as he lay dying in the Dibble house in Danbury by not only Dr. Foster but Dr. Philip Turner.

Dr. Turner, who later became Surgeon General of the Eastern Department of the Continental Line, was early on the Danbury war scene. Yet the Danbury role of this medical man from Norwich is not clear.

Town land records show that on July 17, 1777, Joseph Wildman conveyed 6.5 acres of land on Frank's Hill Road (now Park Avenue) to Dr. Turner.

The land records also show that Turner sold that property to Dr. Foster "in trust for the United States of America" in 1778.

That is the site where historians have always placed the Continental Army hospital. Records in the correspondence of Dr. John Wood, a local man who was an assistant quartermaster, asked for masons to build chimneys for the hospitals — a request made prior to the raid.

Some light on this matter comes from a publication, "The Public Records of Connecticut," reporting that at a meeting of Governor Jonathan Trumbull and the Council of Safety held Aug. 4, 1778 at Lebanon, the following resolution was passed:

*"Resolved that Doctor Turner be and is hereby desired to dispose of all the medicinal and hospital stores belonging to this state at Danbury to the Director General of the Continental hospitals and to render his account of the avails to the Committee of the Pay Table in settlement of his accounts with the state."*

Did Turner have a private hospital in Danbury, or, more likely, was there a state militia hospital here at the time Washington ordered one for the Continentals?

This appears to be another sign of the overlapping of state and national efforts which caused so much trouble and bickering during the early years of the War for Independence.

## Hospital continues to serve

While Danbury was not invaded by the British again, the enemy raided such coastal towns as New Haven, Fairfield and Norwalk and the hospital and supply depot in Danbury were called on to aid the injured and sick. Supplies were sent to General William Heath, who had been placed in command of patriot forces east of the Hudson River. (This would have disgusted General David Wooster, who before his death had referred to Heath as a former shopkeeper with no military experience.)

In a letter from Danbury dated July 17, 1779, Dr. William Burnet, physician and surgeon of the Continentals, wrote General Heath:

*"My dear General:*

*"My horse was so vy dull & stumbled with me so much that it was not in my Power to reach Danbury the night before last. However. I got here before Breakfast in the Morning, very weary indeed & had the satisfaction to find Dr. Homes was just gone to your assistance with the necessary Operation. As soon as possible I got ready a Waggen & Horses & a Strong Reinforcement of Medical & Hospital Stores, determined to join you again with the greatest speed but in the afternoon I heard that the Enemy has left the Sound & you were returning with the Division, was soon confirmed by the discharged Militia.*

*"Notwithstanding, if I had had a horse that I could ride without Danger to my life, I should have come to you Yesterday . . . Upon Dr. Turner's promising to visit you in a day or two & furnish the Surgeons with what the hospital can afford, I have concluded to set off for Fish Kill this Morning. If I reach it tomorrow night safe, I shall be well off. Dr. Turner will be ready at any Time to assist you with all the Strength of the hospital if needed, though I see no danger of your wanting it, unless it be Medicine and Stores."*

This letter appeared in a 1979 book, "A Salute to Courage," edited by Dennis P. Ryan.

Although warfare came close to Danbury, sometimes only a few miles away, it never actually returned after 1777, probably because Washington and the Congress eventually kept this area well protected.

Washington also moved sizeable numbers of the Continental Line here to some points during the war because of Danbury's halfway position between Long Island Sound and the Hudson. No matter which way the British command might move, Washington would have troops in a strategic position to move quickly to the defense.

After the raid on Danbury in April, the town was seldom unprotected. General Gates returned in late 1777 with four brigades; General Israel Putnam and his men spent the winter of 1778-9 encamped in Redding on the Danbury line. New Hampshire troops camped on the farms of the Benedict and Hoyt families in Bethel parish the following year. General Thacher's regiment was joined for a short while by General Stark in the village. At that time, the officers were billeted in private homes. In 1780 Lafayette was here with 2,000 more soldiers. Later, the French came through on their way to and from Yorktown.

Jeremiah Wadsworth  
Assistant Quartermaster

Philadelphia 6 February 1777

Q. 12

A Magazine of Forage is to be found at Danbury in Connecticut. I therefore desire you to procure one hundred thousand Bushels of Indian Corn Oats & Rye in such Proportions as you may think most advantageous to the Army. Purchase also one hundred and fifty Ox Teams 4 or 6 Oxen each Team.

If you think it practicable to establish a Magazine of Hay at the same Place do it & lay in all you can procure. I expect a Supply of Cash in a day or two when it arrives you shall receive

One of the earliest references showing Danbury's importance as a supply center for Washington's armies is this letter from Brigadier General Thomas Mifflin in Philadelphia to Jeremiah Wadsworth at Hartford in February, 1777. For those who find handwriting of that period hard to read, here is what the letter said:

One hundred thousand Dollars. In the mean time you must borrow so much on the credit of the Department as you may want. Set your Smiths at work & have 5000 Sets of Ox Shoes made immediately with Nails let complete. You are to employ such & so many persons under you as may be necessary.

Each Team is to be numbered to have a good careful Driver — You are to appoint an honest man as a Conductor to every Ox Team who is to keep the accounts of his Brigade & see that they are always in good order & fit for immediate service. The Conductors will be allowed Captains pay & Rations.

The Drivers to have 20 pence per day & Rations each. *Thomas Mifflin*

Philadelphia 6 February 1777

Sir:

A magazine of forage is to be found at Danbury in Connecticut. I therefore desire you to procure one hundred thousand bushels of Indian corn, oats and rye in such a proportion as you may think advantageous to the Army. Purchase also one hundred and fifty ox teams, 4 or 6 oxen each team. If you think it practicable to establish a magazine of hay at the same place do it and lay in all you can procure. I expect a supply of cash in a day or two. When it arrives you shall have one hundred thousand dollars. In the meantime you must borrow as much on the credit of the department as you may want.

Set your smiths at work and have 5000 sets of ox shoes made immediately with nails to complete.

You are to employ as many persons under you as may be necessary.

Each team is to be numbered to have a good careful driver — you are to appoint an honest man as a Conductor to every ten teams who is to keep the accounts of his brigade and to see that they are always in good order and fit for immediate service. The conductors will be allowed Captains pay and rations.

Thomas Mifflin, Brig. gen.

# A R T I F I C I E R S .

**T**HOSE gentlemen who wish to employ Mr. JOHN DODD, to collect their several dues, which remain unsettled, for services in the late war, are requested to authorize him for that purpose, as soon as possible.

**EZRA BENEDICT.**

**Danbury, June 10, 1791.**

**66 2**

Danbury Scott-Fanton Museum & Historical Society

## Artificers' pension bids tell of work

Some of the most interesting insights into Danbury's war years are found in "Revolution Remembered," compiled by John C. Donn from the 1833 pension applications of war veterans. Since many of the applicants had been turned down for pensions previously they wrote detailed accounts of their war records and included affidavits of soldiers or officers they had served with.

Through the application of Joseph Nickerson of Ridgefield we learn that he had enlisted in Danbury in February, 1776 and was put into a Corps of Artificers under Capt. James Clark "in the quartermaster's dept." Major Ezra Starr was an assistant quartermaster, Nickerson recalled.

"At first I helped build barracks and workshops for the men in the corps," he wrote of his duties in Danbury, "and later spent the time building wagons and carriages, ironing them and doing other smith's work."

The young man was 14 the year that he enlisted. He was told that his unit was under the "Continental establishment" and that there were large stores deposited in the town. There was also a commissary department and a paymaster who gave him his pay and rations. Unlike later military operations, each man received his own food and cooked it as best he could in most cases.

Nickerson's statement is the first indication that barracks and shops were in use in Danbury early in the summer of 1776. Up to now, the only published accounts showed that a forage had been ordered for Danbury late in 1776 and that Thomas Mifflin (at that time an aide to General Washington) had written to Jeremiah Wadsworth, the head commissary for New England, on Feb. 6, 1777, telling him that such a depot was in existence.

John McLean, a local commissary, advised the master of the wheelwrights to go to Peekskill, N. Y., for an order for the artificers on March 11, 1777, one learns from the Wadsworth papers. This is an indication that by this date the group was already located and working in town. But whether the barracks and workshops were already built, as Nickerson remembered, we can find no other record.

Could it be possible that the British missed the artificers' camp entirely, or that with the time they had they were too busy destroying more important articles, such as the 1,000 tents, the most devastating loss of the raid?

There is a strong possibility that since they left town via Miry Brook Road, the barracks and shops were hidden below the hill in what was then a remote, secluded part of town. It is easy to understand that the hospital was spared, but it isn't reasonable to think the enemy would have deliberately overlooked buildings of such importance to the patriots.

Since no other record of their construction has come to light, is it reasonable to assume that Nickerson's memory is correct?

Whether the barracks and shops were really part of the state militia organization or of the Continental Line is not clear. The confusion and overlapping of the two departments would continue throughout the conflict.

One reading the pension applications soon realizes that these revolutionary people had never fought a war on their own before. They didn't know how to finance the army, or to feed it or direct it, but they eventually got better at it, especially when the patriots had a few successes to improve their morale.

They found it was a wholly different story fighting the British than it was when fighting alongside them in the French and Indian conflicts.

Nickerson had completed his enlistment by the time the British arrived at Compo for their march on Danbury. Word reached him at his home and he hurried back to Danbury, only to find the British already in possession of the town. He joined the volunteers forming under General David Wooster and was with him when the general was mortally wounded at Ridgefield in a skirmish with the departing British forces.

## Joel Church's later recollections

In 1833, when Joel Church was trying to verify the service record of another artificer, Levi Stone, he wrote that he had served as an artificer under Stone in Danbury from 1777 to 1778, stating: "I was engaged in drawing coal, shoeing horses and oxen and ironing baggage wagons under the Quartermaster Department."

Church added that Stone had been an apprentice blacksmith for his father, Asa. He recalled that Stone had been a captain in Danbury with 30 or 40 men under him, including Church. He said that Major John Wood was Quartermaster and that the superior officer, he believed, was a man named Painter (Gamiel).

Sometime during the year they were in Danbury he assisted Stone in forming chains, writing:

*"I recollect well of working on what were called by Stone 'anchor chains' and that we were told they were to be used on a heavier chain which would be stretched across the Hudson River hopefully to deter the British fleet from attacking the Point.*

*"These chains were each made 36 feet long, each link made of one inch square bars about twenty inches long.*

*"We were not called out to exercise at arms, ever, but were engaged in work so I cannot tell at all who were the other superior officers here at Danbury."*

(General Washington had decreed that artificers were excused from all service in the militia, all drill, and that they would be paid the salary of a captain in the line. The teamsters and wagoneers were to receive six pounds plus rations, the order said.)

In August, 1778, Church "marched for West Point" with a regiment of artificers under Captain Jeduthian Baldwin, with Captain Stephen Osborn in command of his company.

A whole family of males joined up as artificers from the Miry Brook area of Danbury. The father, John Ambler, was in Noble Benedict's 1775 company. Sons Stephen, Peter and Squire Ambler were all members of Captain Kingsley's company. Squire had enlisted at 14 in Captain Osborn's company. Family tradition has it that when his regiment wintered at Valley Forge, young Squire's "exceptional fortitude and fidelity" were

noted by Washington, who promoted him in the spring. He continued in the service and was present at the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown.

Many artificers had a hard time getting their pensions because, unfortunately, they could not prove their service as easily as could those who served in regular units. Many of them never received pensions because they had not received discharge papers or had lost them in the ensuing years.

In 1791, an advertisement had been placed in Danbury's first newspaper, the Farmers Journal, by Ezra Benedict, an artificer himself. It said that John Dodd was willing to help settle any pension claims of Danbury area artificers. Benedict also served in Painter's company.

For us 200 years later, the pension forms are a blessing because the applicants were forced to go into great detail about their service when they applied for their benefits in 1830.

Near the artificers' camp were the home and blacksmith shop of the Church family. And like many another family in the area, the Church family was widely diverse in its feelings about the rebellion against King George. The father, Asa Church, took off for New York with the departing British troops. His son, Joel Winter Church, was a patriot and signed up for service. For a while he continued to live in the family home near Oil Mill Pond and what was then called Frank's Hill Road.

## Slaves also fought for liberty

In the summer of 1777, Jehu Grant enlisted in Danbury. He was black and blacks were not usually taken into the Continental Army unless they had their master's consent or could prove that they were free men.

Grant was taken into a group of teamsters. He remembered later that he served in Captain Giles Galer's company until winter set in and he became a waiter to the "wagon-master general," John Skidmore, according to his application for a pension many years later.

Actually Grant was an escaped slave, owned by a Rhode Island man who eventually traced him down and took him back.

However, Grant made an eloquent plea for a pension in 1836, after having been turned down earlier because, he was told, his service did not count as he was a slave when he served.

His application said:

*"When I saw liberty poles and all the people engaged for the support of freedom, I could not help but like and be pleased with such things (God forgive me if I sinned in such feelings) and I was afraid my master would put me in the British Navy.*

*"The songs of liberty that saluted my ears, thrilled through my heart . . . These feelings induced me to enlist in the American Army where I served faithfully for about ten months."*

Many blacks soldiers did get pensions. Robin Starr of Danbury was one of them. His master, Josiah Starr, a well-to-do Towne Street (Main Street) landowner, had allowed the young slave to enlist and to fight at the Battle of Lake Champlain, where he was wounded.

After his return, he and his owner made an agreement whereby Robin could buy his freedom if he enlisted for the duration and paid for his freedom with his wages. By 1781 he had paid the 22 pounds owed and was at last a free man.

A copy of Robin Starr's discharge papers was found by Adelaide Marek, a Brookfield historian. The original was signed by George Washington. Noted on the papers is that this soldier was awarded the Badge of Merit for six years of faithful service, an award created by Washington to honor war veterans.

Mrs. Marek has found other historians reluctant to admit that this badge is the same as the Congressional Medal of Honor, given to the nation's greatest heroes. They think it is more likely that the award was given to those who had served the revolutionary cause long and well.

Mrs. Marek thinks differently and hopes eventually to find further evidence which would make Starr a recipient of the prestigious award.

## Had been hospitalized in Danbury

Joseph Parker, a shoemaker born in Connecticut, enlisted from New Hampshire and was marched in 1777 to Danbury. He recalled he served a year as an artificer "in Bethel parish" (probably attached to General Israel Putnam's regiment). This provides an inkling that although the workers at Oil Mill Pond were stationed there more or less permanently through the war, other artificers were attached temporarily to various other regiments.

Parker could not rightly remember, more than 50 years later when he applied for a pension, whether he volunteered in 1777 to serve for three years or "for the war." He did know that he too had been in Captain Gamaliel Painter's regiment, and after having marched to Danbury, served in the Bethel parish until the end of April, 1778.

Then his officers allowed him to enlist with Colonel Return Jonathan Meigs' regiment. He spent the summer around "The Plains" (White Plains) doing scout duty. In the fall, he was sent to repair a road from White Plains up to the iron works near Litchfield.

Parker was taken ill of "putrid" fever and after a short stay at a Quaker Meeting House near Quaker Hill in Pawling, N. Y., he was sent to the hospital in Danbury.

Parker recalled how kind the natives were to him. He was allowed to leave the hospital grounds upon the hill west of Towne Street (today's Main Street) and wander around the village regaining his strength. However, he seems never to have returned to shoemaking for the army, even though he did return to his unit, by then in Redding.

Later Parker was captured by one of the so-called "cowboys" in Westchester County's "neutral" territory. Like many a patriot soldier when captured, he took up the British offer to join them, and then looked for the first chance to escape. The food was usually better, the accommodations better and in the strange world of the American Revolution such conduct was not considered treasonous. The soldiers were usually welcomed back to their units.

In Parker's case, when he escaped he streaked for New Hampshire and never fully recuperated from his service-caused illness.

## Hoyt's recollections of war events

It must have been an exciting time to be a young person in Danbury during the Revolution, with all the military activity in the area in addition to the April, 1777 assault on the town by the British.

The children who were hurried out of town by their parents as the British advanced probably felt very differently than their alarmed elders. Certainly those youngsters had a lifelong tale to tell their own children and grandchildren.

Benjamin Hoyt Jr., who was born in Bethel parish in the year of the raid, remembered the later years of the Revolution in his memoirs, written in 1832 "so his children might know of the past."

Hoyt also recalled stories told him by his father of the British attack and how the English troops were not wholly to blame for all the looting and burning that took place.

According to the elder Benjamin Hoyt, he had actually seen some of the Tories in the area set torch to neighbors' houses and buildings as the British departed. Others looted the homes of those who had fled to New Milford or other nearby towns.

The younger Hoyt gave this vivid picture of the New Hampshire troops who were stationed on his family's farm during the bitterly cold winter of 1778-79:

*"In the early winter . . . a few days before the snow began to fall . . . a brigade of New Hampshire troops came onto our ground.*

*"It was the memorable winter called 'the hard winter,' . . . (they) commenced cutting down the beautiful forest beginning a few rods west of Capt. Benedict's and running north over the place where Timothy Benedict and Deacon Hickok lived, building their huts for the winter. The storm howled and buffeted all around them . . . and their beef cattle and other provisions did not arrive until they were almost famished with hunger.*

*"This arrival into our area changed Long Bogs from a dreary retired place to a busy crowded one - and on the whole was in some respects useful to Capt. Benedict and my father for the snow came so fast that it would have been extremely difficult to have kept the roads open to get our wood - to the mill - or get a doctor in case of sickness - but they took in many officers and their waiters as they could in anyway accommodate who made a common cause - broke paths to the wood, mill etc. and what wood they burn'd was of small consequence except the fences which were taken pretty smooth."*

Hoyt remembered the commander's name was Poor and the regiments had been under the immediate commands of Colonels Cilley, Scammell and Read.

In the spring these regiments were ordered to the Hudson River area.

## 1778 a period of darkening hopes

The fall of 1778 was one of the darkest hours of the American Revolu-

tion. The Continental Army had accomplished little during the previous summer. The British had a firm hold on New York and were making bold attacks on the shore towns of Connecticut, which the British considered a "hot bed of rebellion."

But in some way the ill-clad, underfed army must be held together so it could recoup and fight again come spring. But where? Some preferred the Highlands, an area overlooking the Hudson from Stony Point to West Point, where the major part of the Continental Army already was, but old Israel Putnam held out for a "place in western Connecticut where both the Sound and the Hudson and especially Danbury could still be protected." Danbury was still a main storage depot and Putnam wanted no repeat of the raid on Danbury.

Unlike the spring of 1777, the war command listened this time and Putnam's troops went into winter camp in Redding, just over the line from Danbury — today's Israel Putnam Memorial Camp Grounds, a state park.

One of the finest first-hand reports of a private soldier during the Revolution is found in the diary of Joseph Plumb Martin of Milford, including his account of the vicissitudes of that encampment.

Martin had enlisted early in the Continental Line and served until the war was over. As related in Page Smith's "People's History of the American Revolution," Martin wrote of marching into winter quarters in Danbury. He apparently considered himself to be in Danbury, although he was actually in Redding a hundred yards or so below the then Danbury town line.

"Some of our gentlemen officers," he wrote, "took such a 'seasoning' at a tavern that two or three of them became quite frisky . . . they kept running and chasing each other backward and forward by the troops . . . and finally ended up in a bitter fight to the no small diversion of the soldiers —"

About the camp, Martin continued, "We went on in our old Continental Line of starving and freezing. We now and then got a little bad bread and salt beef (chiefly horsemeat)." He reported that one company had a single blanket and clothing was as short as it was at Valley Forge.

"Our condition at length became insupportable. We concluded that we could not or would not bear it any longer," he noted.

The Connecticut men decided that since they were now in their own state, if the officers would not see their grievances redressed, the state should. Martin recounted that one morning after roll call the soldiers turned out without their arms and paraded in front of their huts as a form of dramatic protest.

Some of the soldiers were soon furloughed, Martin among them. He set out to cover the 30 miles to home by foot in one day, declaring the "hopes of soon seeing my friends and the expectation of them filling my belly . . . buoyed up my spirits."

## Arnold's betrayal a bitter blow

When in 1780 the news of Benedict Arnold's betrayal of America

reached Danbury, it was a bitter blow to a community and a state that owed him so much and where he had been greatly admired.

Arnold had been in action soon after the war began at Lexington and Concord. He led 600 New Englanders through the Maine wilderness to rendezvous with General Montgomery at Quebec, and although the expedition failed to take the French fort, Arnold became a hero to his troops.

Then Arnold organized a fresh water navy on Lake Champlain which prevented the English from invading New York State in 1776.

In the spring of 1777, the Continental Congress had passed over Arnold for promotion to major general because, members said, New England's quota for that rank had been filled.

Arnold quite naturally was disturbed by this and had come back to his native state to lick his wounds. Fortunately, he was at New Haven when the British troops sailed up Long Island Sound for the raid on Danbury and its storage depots.

He had a lot of friends and sympathizers throughout the area, and added to them with his gallantry in action against the Danbury raiders.

Arnold hurried to Danbury when he learned of the British attack, joining General David Wooster. While the latter led the troops attacking the British rear as Tryon led his forces from Danbury, Arnold raced a group of state militiamen across the uncharted area lying between Bethel and Ridgefield and had his horse shot out from under him in the battle at Ridgefield.

Col. Hugh Hughes, deputy quartermaster of the Continental Army, described Arnold's subsequent bravery at Compo Point, where the British re-embarked on their ships, to General Horatio Gates in his report on the raid on Danbury.

His other friends included Jeremiah Wadsworth and Colonel Joseph Platt Cooke of Danbury.

In the manuscripts among Jeremiah Wadsworth's correspondence in the Connecticut Historical Society in Hartford is a poignant letter from Arnold to Wadsworth, telling of Arnold's trials with the Continental Congress and asking his friend for understanding.

The act of treason itself was also disturbing because so many of the participants, both in and out of the Army, had not always been as loyal to the cause as their consciences wanted them to be. Arnold was not the only person to have felt overlooked, nor was he the only one who had taken advantage of or even perhaps cheated a bit on the side in dealing with the new government and with the Continental Army.

This feeling was quite general among the population and brought out a very interesting reaction almost immediately after Arnold's treason at West Point became known. The loud outcries may very well have been an expression of self-guilt.

All over the country parades were staged denouncing Arnold. In New Milford on Oct. 25, according to the Dec. 12, 1780 Hartford Courant, an effigy of Arnold was carried through the streets of the village in a two-wheeled cart. The traitor was dressed in uniform. Behind the figure of Arnold was one of the devil. While hundreds of spectators watched, the

effigy of Arnold was hanged, cut down and buried. The explosives were set off. According to the Courant, the townspeople "expressed their joy at the discovery of Arnold's treason by a beautiful exhibit of illumination, all conducted with the greatest of decency and good order!"

A similar event had been staged in Philadelphia earlier. Both parades were similar to Pope's Day celebrations in the colonies, a ritual that traced its origin to Guy Fawkes celebrations in England. In those events, a figure of the Devil stood over the effigy of the pope.

Some authorities think these rituals go back even further in English history and were part of early fertility rites. These same historians point out that in the early period of the Revolution, the events were often more ritualistic than violent. It was a way of letting off steam with little or no bloodshed.

## Taking care of the French troops

Danbury also played a part in provisioning the French troops who arrived in America in 1780.

Jeremiah Wadsworth had resigned as commissary general for the Continental Army because of some differences with Congress, but was asked by Le Comte de Rochambeau, commander of the French forces, to provision his troops.

In a letter to Wadsworth dated April 30, 1781, Rochambeau wrote:

*"A letter from General Washington, under the date of the 20th instant, and another from M. DeBaville, give me to understand that the intelligence from New York are not of so urgent a nature as to hurry the French troops . . . General Washington has ordered M. De Baville to return here (Newport) by way of Danbury, Middletown and Lebanon, because if the road is practicable he looks upon it as more direct and wishes it to be preferred . . . he is of the opinion that provisions may be found in those areas more easily.*

*"I beg you to believe, sir, that if I have a little hurried you, it was relative to the urgent and disturbing news which we had had from the southward . . . and I know that you are too well intentioned not to do everything in your power to put us in condition to be ready against the activity of the enemy."*

John Lloyd, since he first arrived in Danbury in 1777 as a green young assistant quartermaster, a refugee from the Battle of Long Island, had not only acquired four years of experience in provisioning, dealing with teamsters and in placating John McLean, Dr. Wood and the area farmers, but he had also, along with his sisters, become a close friend of Jeremiah Wadsworth and his family.

Wadsworth knew he could count on Lloyd's aid. In early June, replying to a letter he had received from the provisioner, Lloyd reported he had gone to Newtown, one of the stops planned on the southward march of the French to join with Washington, in order to "know the state of the magazine for the French troops."

Lloyd found in store 200 bushels of Indian corn. He assured Wadsworth that the needed wood and hay would be there when the French troops reached Newtown.



*Duc de Lauzan, cavalry commander under Comte de Rochambeau on the march to Yorktown, complimented John Lloyd on the provisioning of the French troops at Newtown.*

*A superb military tactician, Lauzan and his flamboyant cavalry officers caused much heart-fluttering among the ladies at Lebanon one winter and later on the march south.*

*It was widely reported that Lauzan had been one of Marie Antoinette's many lovers. He died as she did on the guillotine during the French Revolution.*

He also said he had selected (for their encampment) a "piece of ground" about a mile east of town "on the road along which runs a fine brook."

Lloyd continued that Morgan (another commissary) was at the posts to the westward on the previous Sunday and that every provision would be ready when needed, evidently referring to the stops at Bedford, White Plains and Hartsdale.

In a separate letter to Wadsworth, Thomas Lewis told of conferring with Lloyd and that the stages will be fully supplied with every article ordered except straw. "There will be some of that at every post," he wrote, adding:



"Mr. Lloyd has procured the church at Danbury for a magazine where he tells me that he shall be able to procure about five thousand bushels of corn or other grain equivalent after supplying the army with the quantity ordered for their march."

The meeting house referred to probably was again the still uncompleted Church of England (the original St. James' Episcopal Church where South Street School stands).

The use of churches for storage of fodder, etc., may seem strange to people today, but actually it was a rather common practice in the 18th Century for churches to rent their gallery space to be used for such purposes. After all, many of the church or society members kept bales of hay in their bedrooms in the winter. There is a tendency among many today to forget these things as they glamorize that period in our history.

The arrangements for the French met with approval, for on June 29, Le Duc de Lauzen, commander of the cavalry on the march to Yorktown, wrote this to Wadsworth:

"I must present to you my sincere compliments for the good order in everything relating to the provisions of the French Army march (through Connecticut). I assure you that nothing could be better in France."

At the Battle of Yorktown, teamsters from Danbury and Woodbury were witnesses, having provisioned the French army on its march south. Joseph Martin, who served with Putnam earlier in the war, was also at Yorktown, as was Squire Ambler of Miry Brook, Danbury.

## Slowdown after Yorktown victory

The support activities in Danbury gradually began to wind down after the victory at Yorktown.

Danbury helped provision the French once again when the troops passed through Connecticut in the fall of 1782 on their way to Boston, where in December they embarked for France.

Benjamin Hoyt Jr., who recalled for his children in his 1832 memoirs the encampment of the New Hampshire troops in the winter of 1778-9, also remembered how he and other neighborhood children gathered along the route the French were scheduled to take through Bethel parish. Wrote Hoyt:

*"I very well remember when the French army ret'd.*

*"We had news overnight that they were encamped in Danbury (on land at Shelter Rock Road and South Street, near the Doran Bros. machine shop) and that they would pass the next day through Stoney Hill.*

*"In the morning, therefore, we went up to have a view of them as they passed.*

*"When we got to the height of land above Deacon Hickok's we could see the front of the army had arrived as far as to where Samuel Dibble lives, and as far as we could see over Shelterrock Hill, a distance of probably two miles, the troops continued to come in sight."*

It must have been a thrilling sight for these farm youngsters who had seen the often ill-clad troops of the Colonial militia and the Continental Line, but nothing to equal the splendor of the French.

Here the French came — the infantry with long white coats and crimson lapels, white buttons and pink collars. The Soissonais (infantry) wore sky-blue collars, yellow buttons with red lapels. The Royal Deux Ponts had blue uniforms with yellow collars and lapels and artillerymen were in gray with red velvet trim. The non-commissioned officers had white plumes on their helmets.

Hoyt continued his recollections:

*"We got a stand at a chamber window in the house where Amon Weed now lives (1821) and had a good view of them as they went by . . . the officers we thought to be a fine set of good looking men remarkably lively and well dressed. The soldiers form'd a striking contrast to the officers . . . they were tawny and almost black. The army was nearly two hours in passing."*

The dark-complexioned soldiers Hoyt referred to were probably Senegalese serving in the French army.

Although it was not generally known at the time, Comte de Rochambeau was not in direct command of his troops when they made the return march through this area).

## Turning back to civilian pursuits

Gradually Danbury began to take up a more normal life as the artificers, those who had staffed the army hospital and others engaged in provisioning the victorious Continental army turned to civilian pursuits.

Many continued plying their assorted crafts, either in Danbury or nearby Connecticut towns. Others went west.

John Lloyd, who had arrived in town early in March, 1777, had time, now that his duties in provisioning the army were over, to woo and win the heart of Amelia White (daughter of Ebenezer White), the girl who had heard the church bell ring one mid-morning back in April, 1775, with the news that hostilities had broken out at Lexington and Concord.

They were married April 1, 1783.

The Whites had had their home occupied by the British during the raid on Danbury in 1777. Ebenezer White had been pastor of the New Danbury Society when it erected its meeting house in 1763. He no longer had an active congregation when John Lloyd, on his arrival in Danbury, arranged to use that meeting house for storage. It was one of the buildings burned to the ground by Tryon's troops.

So far, no early records have been found to show where Lloyd lived during the years he was in Danbury. At the time he was discussing the proposed move of war stores to Litchfield he said his household goods were already there and wonders if he should move them back. He had already told us that he and his sisters had lost much of the meager goods they were able to bring with them when they fled from Long Island.

Amelia and John set up their home on the Lloyd estate on Long Island. He became active in affairs of Long Island and New York City, serving as a regent of New York University (1784-87), among other official duties.



*These portraits of Captain Timothy Taylor, a Revolutionary War hero from Danbury, and his wife, Elizabeth Cooke Taylor, were painted by Richard Jennys after their marriage and remain in the possession of their descendants. Her father, Colonel Joseph P. Cooke, represented Danbury in the General Assembly all during the Revolution.*

*from Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin - October 1955*

Mary White, Amelia's mother, is buried alongside Amelia and John in the Lloyd family plot. Her husband Ebenezer had died in Danbury in 1779.

Dr. John Wood stayed in Danbury for the rest of his life. He rebuilt his home, burned in the British raid, on the Wood property on lower Towne (Main) Street.

His grandfather, Dr. Samuel Wood, had been given a large tract of land when he arrived in town in 1687. Some of it stretched from what is now Main Street west to Deer Hill, then a single, rugged path.

An early section of the house at 48 Main St., now occupied by the Cleary family, may have been part of Wood's original house. It was later owned by his only daughter, Lois, who married Lieutenant Thomas Starr on March 3, 1784.

Starr had enlisted in 1775 as a private and served through the war, rising to lieutenant.

Colonel Joseph Platt Cooke also rebuilt his house on the north Towne Street. It may not have been totally destroyed by the British because Dr. Foster, deputy general of New England hospitals, stayed with Cooke whenever he was in Danbury. It has also been mentioned frequently that Cooke entertained Washington, Lafayette and Gates in his home.

This house of one of the town's most illustrious early citizens was the home and office of Dr. Harris F. Brownlee in the early decades of this century and then became the property of Amerigo Vespucci Lodge. It was torn down in 1970 with hardly an outcry! It was a period before Danbury was beginning to care again about its past. Connecticut Bank and Trust Company's main Danbury office now occupies the site.

Cooke was a graduate of Yale College and, according to Dr. Foster, the best educated man in Danbury. He was usually chosen moderator of town meetings in his later years and was elected to the General Assembly from 1776 to 1783. He had a reputation of being very "crusty" and was known to stalk out of meetings if the vote went against his beliefs.

## Benedict to Rider to museum

Jonah Benedict, who spent time in the notorious Sugar House prison of the British in New York — the same man who, legend has it, was tied to a tree with his father Matthew and made to watch while their house was burned — sold his property to John Rider whose house at 43 Main Street is now the core of the Danbury Scott-Fanton Museum and Historical Society. The land had been in the Benedict family since it was first allotted to Daniel after he joined his brothers James and Samuel in 1685.

Jonah moved to South Salem, N.Y., where he manufactured hats, continuing a family tradition. He died in 1811.

Captain Comfort Hoyt, who had sheltered Joseph Joslin, teamster, in his south Towne Street house (near where the mileage marker is located at the entrance to Rogers Park) took up life again here, as did Oliver Stone, another artificer in Ezra Starr's company. Stone married Margaret Boughton in 1775 and is now resting in the old Westville Cemetery.

Captain Timothy Taylor had an illustrious career in the army throughout the war. Captured by the British while serving with Captain Benedict's company in 1776, he was later freed in a prisoner exchange. He served in the militia, then the Connecticut Line and the Continental Army. He was made a lieutenant colonel in the U. S. Army in 1799.

Taylor married Elizabeth Cooke, daughter of Joseph P., on Dec. 12, 1784, and became a storekeeper at the junction of Towne Street and the present West Street. Benjamin Hoyt walked all the way from his home in Bethel parish, near the Newtown line, to buy a book of Shakespeare's plays from Taylor during his school days. He paid 75 cents for it, quite a sizeable amount then.

Taylor died in 1802 and is buried in Wooster Cemetery, his body having been transferred there from the cemetery on Main Street at Downs Street in 1916. Portraits of him and his wife still occupy a place of honor in the Wilton home of one of his descendants.

Three early casualties of the war were Ebenezer Baldwin, the fiery young minister who rang the church bell when a courier brought the news of war to Danbury, Amos Benedict, young son of Captain Daniel Benedict and his wife Sarah, and Joshua Porter.

Baldwin enlisted as a chaplain in the 16th Connecticut Regiment but died during the summer of 1776 of an army-contracted illness. Benedict, a Yale graduate, had recently been appointed an aide-de-camp to General Washington when on Feb. 18, 1777, having been inoculated for smallpox, he died.

Porter survived the northern campaign with Captain Noah Benedict and came back to Danbury, only to be killed by the British in Major Starr's house when they raided the town.

Joel Winter Church, whose father had run off with the British retreating from their raid on Danbury, served with the patriotic forces until he was discharged at Peekskill in 1781.

Returning to Danbury, he sold the four acres on Frank's Hill Road, where his father's blacksmith shop stood next to the artificers' barracks. His mother Hannah had been able to prove that the property was rightfully hers and should not be forfeited because her sons were serving in the Continental Army.

In 1833 Church attempted to prove the service record of Levi Stone, sergeant of the artificers when Joel enlisted, to help Stone get a pension. At that time Church, in his 70s, was living in Pawling, N.Y., and still working as a blacksmith.

## Osborne became newspaper founder

Others known to have served in the artificer corps included Levi Osborne, who became a weaver after the war and may have served in such a capacity in the corps. Osborne became one of the best known of the former craftsmen because he joined his brother in publishing the Danbury Times, founded in 1837. Through a merger it became the Danbury News in 1870, expanded to the Danbury Evening News in 1883 and eventually The News-Times in 1933.

Osborne was probably best known in town for the split he and his wife caused in the Sandemanian Church, a group which had been founded in 1760 by a Scotsman, Robert Sandeman.

Osborne and his wife found the rites of baptism not to their liking and their splinter group became known as the Osbornites. Their congregation evolved into the present Central Christian Church on West Street.

Elizabeth Benedict, the small girl who was put in "a trunk for safe keeping" when her parents fled Danbury in advance of the British, married a Bethel Taylor and became the grandmother of Laurens S. Seelye, first president of Smith College. The old trunk was handed down through the family for several generations and in 1979 was purchased by the Scott-Fanton Museum with its history well-documented. It is on exhibit in the museum's Revolutionary War gallery.

The little girl who was making mud pies in the Towne Street, Sarane Taylor, grew up, had her portrait painted and married Edward Wilcox. Her great-grandsons included Charles Edward Ives, the famed composer, and J. Moss Ives, a leading figure in Danbury legal and political affairs, an author and president of the Danbury Library at the time of his death in 1939.

Her neighbor across the street, John McLean, eventually (by 1790) brought his wife and children back to a new house (that still stands at 7 Main Street) he had built after the British burned his home. The little girls were too big to make mud pies by then.

McLean, who had been called in the beginning "either a fool or a knave, perhaps a little of both" by Deputy Quartermaster Hughes, turned out to have been a fine provisioner for the army and a canny Scotsman. He was the first to re-record at the town clerk's office not only his property but also his family ancestral line and his movements in coming to New England from Scotland.

The teamsters, few of them local men, took their carts and wagons and went home to New Haven, Lebanon or wherever. Joseph Joslin, who kept a fine diary of his experiences, returned to Killingly.

Wadsworth continued his career as a businessman in the Hartford area. Shadrach Osborn and Jabez Bacon, both commissaries, returned to being storekeepers in Southbury and Woodbury.

Joseph Plumb Martin, whose diary as a common soldier is, it sometimes seems, the most quoted in American history, settled down in his hometown of Milford after eight years of serving in a variety of situations throughout the war.

Mary Jarvis, whose father was a Tory and whose brother fought for the British, married John Rider from across the New York state line. After acquiring the Benedict land on lower Towne Street, he built the house that the Riders, their children and other descendants through great-great-grandchildren lived in until 1925.

Her brother, Stephen Jarvis, was not so lucky. Local patriots never let him come back, even years later. He wrote that his sister once hid him in her bake oven until the locals cooled off enough for him to escape, this time to Canada where he stayed and became a Toronto judge.

Strangely, the post-Revolution Danburians seemed to tolerate the elder Jarvis, even if he was a Loyalist. He lived out his old age near his daughter and grandchildren.

### AND THEN THERE WAS ONE!

Danbury's last survivor of the Revolution was Nathaniel Gregory III, who had served in Captain Ezra Starr's Company and then with General Putnam at Horses Neck, Peekskill and the raid on Norwalk.

Gregory was a cooper by trade, but there is no official record that he served as an artificer in the war. He is listed in the DAR Patriot Index.

In 1851, at the age of 90, Nathaniel Gregory was dead. He was buried in the North Cemetery, overlooking the intersection of Main and Downs Streets.

And then there were none left to tell the story of those days in the 18th Century when Danburians played such an active part in maintaining the War for Independence and making possible the eventual victory for the forces of freedom.

Who knows? Some day, in some attic or storeroom, some new material may be found and more of this story of the people who lived and worked in Danbury during the Revolution will come to light.

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