

Remembering the Revolution
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Two hundred twenty-five years ago this month, the opening phase of the Sullivan-Clinton campaign began with an attack on the Onondagas. In succeeding months, the two commanders, Maj. Gen. John Sullivan and Brig. Gen. James Clinton, directed their armies against the Iroquois in the Five Fingers district of New York. In the opening move of the campaign, Clinton sent Col. Gose Van Schaick with 500 men from Fort Stanwix toward Oswego. On April 20, after a march of 180 miles over 51/2 days, his force destroyed the 50-some houses of Onondaga Castle, killing over 12 warriors and taking 34 prisoners without losing a single man. Van Schaick's expedition was a harbinger of more destruction to come as American authorities sought to eliminate bases from which Iroquois raids (such as those on Cherry Valley and German Flats in 1778) had come. Gen. George Washington wrote that "we are endeavouring to pay them [the Indians] in their own Coin."

Clinton was a native of the Hudson Valley, having been born in Little Britain (west of Newburgh) in what was then Ulster County. Both he and his brother, George (the state's first governor), served in the French and Indian War. A surveyor and local politician, he would rise to command the 2nd Regiment of Ulster County militia and then the 3rd New York Regiment of Continentals in 1776. A solid performer, he sited the initial fortifications of what became Fort Constitution (and later Fortress West Point), and supervised the building of Fort Montgomery on Popolopen Creek. He was in command at Fort Clinton in the battle there on October 6, 1777. Upon his death in December 1812, his son, New York City Mayor (and future governor) De Witt Clinton wrote: "He was a good man and a sincere patriot, performing in a most exemplary manner all duties of life, and he died as he lived, without fear and without reproach."

Commemoration of the 225th anniversary of the American Revolution by the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area in 2004 will draw attention to the frontier and the Hudson Highlands. Re-enactments of the battles of Minisink and Stony Point are planned for May 15 (at the Orange County Farmers' Museum near Montgomery) and July 17-18, respectively. A remembrance of the British burning of Bedford takes place on July 11. To learn more details of these events, see the Hudson River Valley Institute's digital library at www.hudsonrivervalley.net. - Jim Johnson

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