



January 1778 would prove to be a significant month for New York and the United States. Decisions by General George Washington, Governor George Clinton, and the New York Convention would lead to the construction of Fortress West Point, which guarded the Hudson Highlands - and thus the central artery of New York - for the remainder of the American Revolution. Although French engineer Colonel Louis de la Radière would make a persuasive case for rebuilding Fort Clinton, a five-man commission appointed by the Convention recommended West Point as the proper site. Governor Clinton concurred: "I have already given my Opinion in favour of West Point & I have hitherto heard no sufficient Reasons to change my Sentiments." Washington himself resolved the issue by writing to Radière that, "As the Majority of the Council were for erecting the new works upon West Point, in preference to the place upon which Fort Clinton was built, I desire that they may be carried on with all dispatch."

Prodded by Washington's directive on January 25, 1778, to have the works in the Highlands "in a respectable State before the Spring," General Israel Putnam, commander in the Highlands, ordered Colonel Samuel Blachley Webb's Additional Continental Regiment (Connecticut) from Fishkill across the ice at Fort Constitution two days later. Quartermaster Sergeant Simon Giffin described that first day: "A cold morning but clear...marched over the

Rever on the ice marched back a gain for thar was no Place to Loge theon on the West side of the Rever So we had go into the woods and mack fiers and mach ouer Beds on the snow we mad a hut that 15 of us Lay Prity worm considering the wether being so very cold." Once the men had finished the huts, they became the first garrison of West Point, which remains the longest continuously occupied post in the U.S. Army.

Like General Washington before him, Governor George E. Pataki understands that New York's Fortress West Point constituted "the Key of America" in the Revolution. In October 2002, he took two more steps to assist in the telling of that story. First, at the same time that he dedicated Fort Montgomery State Historic Site, he issued a proclamation committing the state to a commemoration of the 225th anniversary of the American Revolution through 2009. Second, on October 19, 2002, 225 years after General John Burgoyne's army began its march into captivity, the governor announced a series of grants totaling \$1 million for 37 Revolutionary War Heritage Trail sites throughout the state. To keep track of how these initiatives of the 225th anniversary will play out, check the "Events" page of www.hudsonrivervalley.net. And huzzah from the Hudson Highlands!

- JIM JOHNSON

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