

The Friends & Neighbors of Putnam Memorial State Park



“Connecticut’s Valley Forge”

April 2008 NewsLetter

Bethel/Redding CT

19 APRIL 1775 - 0500 - AT LEXINGTON



Don Troiani

Daylight was breaking when 230 (of the 700) British regulars filed around the town’s meeting house and faced the 70 Lexington militia men. No one knows who fired that first shot ... but it was truly “the shot heard round the world”. The British officers did their best to stop the firing. They finally gained control. Firing ceased.



This action lit the fuse to the powder keg. Lexington was just the beginning of a war that lasted for eight long years. Thousands of casualties accrued on both sides.

April would become an important month in the rebellion against the mother country and the king. At this point in time, most senior British officers thought the Americans were mere untrained rabble; farmers who were far from being soldiers; men who would turn-tail and run at the sight of the Kings troops. By the end of this very day, opinions would begin to change about this “rabble”!



The British left 8 Americans dead and 14 wounded in the first skirmish which only lasted a few minutes. The British reformed and marched off the green onto the road to Concord ... and the Old North Bridge.

The real* “shot fired heard ‘round the world’”.....

As dawn broke, the seventy local militia assembled on Lexington Green, an open grassy area in the middle of town. No one expected the British to fire upon the Americans.

Captain Parker formed his men into a line and waited for the British to arrive. ***“Don’t fire unless fired upon... But if they want a war, let it begin here”.***

No one would ever be certain which side fired first. Each claimed that the other side did. However, within moments of that first shot, the guns from both sides blazed. The British commander, Major Pitcairn, ordered his men to stop firing, but he had lost control of the soldiers. The American militia scattered in the face of so many armed British troops. The British commander frantically ordered them to stop firing, but no one listened. Finally a cease-fire was called, and the soldiers put down their guns. 8 Americans were dead on Lexington Green, and 14 more were wounded. The British had suffered no casualties. They gave three loud cheers for victory. The British then reassembled and marched out toward Concord.

* Ralph Waldo Emerson, famous American poet and writer, penned the *Concord Hymn* in 1837. Emerson was writing about the battle at Old North Bridge, which was next to his grandfather’s home (Rev. William Emerson. The first stanza contained “shot fired heard ‘round the world’”. But the first was at Lexington Green.



The war had started ...

20 APRIL 1775 - 0800 - BROOKLYN CT



(Formerly part of Pomfret)



IN THE FIELD BEHIND THIS STONE
 AFTER THE CLOSE OF THE FRENCH AND INDIAN WARS,
 RETURNING FROM MANY EXPEDITIONS TO TICONDEROGA,
 FORT
 EDWARD, QUEBEC, MONTREAL, HAVANA, DETROIT, AND NEW
 ORLEANS,
 LIVED COL. ISRAEL PUTNAM.
 HERE, WITH HIS WIFE (2ND) MRS. DEBORAH (AVERY
 GARDINER) PUTNAM
 HE DISPENSED A FAMOUS HOSPITALITY AT THE
 GENERAL WOLFE TAVERN.
 NEAR THIS SPOT ALSO, APRIL 20, 1775, PUTNAM RECEIVED
 NEWS OF THE BATTLE OF LEXINGTON. LEAVING HIS PLOW
 IN THE FURROW WITH HIS SON DANIEL, HE RODE
 ONE HUNDRED MILES IN EIGHTEEN HOURS,
 REACHING CAMBRIDGE THE NEXT DAY. THERE SOON AFTER
 HE PLANNED AND ON JUNE 17, 1775, COMMANDED AT
 THE BATTLE OF BUNKER HILL
 RECEIVING THEREAFTER FROM THE CONTINENTAL
 CONGRESS
 BY THE HAND OF WASHINGTON THE FIRST COMMISSION OF
 MAJOR GENERAL (AND THE ONLY ONE UNANIMOUSLY VOTED)
 WHICH MADE HIM SECOND IN RANK TO HIS CHIEF.

Putnam Leaves His Plow For Lexington

"On Thursday morning, April 20th 1775, Putnam and his son Daniel, who was then fifteen years of age, had gone into the field near the tavern at Brooklyn Green to plow. They were busy at work when, at about eight o'clock, a messenger rode into the village in hot haste with a dispatch for Daniel Tyler Jr. It was from the town clerk of Worcester, Massachusetts, who had forwarded a copy of a letter which he had received from the Committee of Safety at Watertown, dated "Wednesday morning, Near 10 o'clock, April 19, 1775," announcing that the British had fired on the militia at Lexington, had "killed six men and wounded four others," and were on their march into the country. Young Tyler hurried with the news to his father-in-law in the field. In instant response to the alarm, Putnam - so wrote his son Daniel in later years - "loitered not but left me, the driver of his team, to unyoke it in the furrow, and not many days after to follow him to camp." Without changing his working clothes, the energetic patriot mounted a horse at the stable that he might himself spread the alarming tidings and also consult with the militia officers and the committees of the neighbouring towns of Windam County. He hastened to the home of Governor Jonathan Trumbull at Lebanon, and received orders from him to go to Boston.



One of Putnam's plows from his farm in Brooklyn, CT can be seen in the park Visitor Center.



Putnam also ran the inn on the town green. This is the inn's sign board:
-The General Wolfe Tavern-



Maj. General Israel Putnam's final resting place is in the sarcophagus within the memorial tomb across the road from the tavern site.

April was a crucial time for Israel Putnam. Already a folk hero from his exploits and daring accomplishments in the French & Indian War, he had returned home to Brooklyn to his family, farm and tavern. He was a patriot and a leader in his community. Brooklyn is in the northeast corner of the state at the cross-roads of Rts. 6 and 169. It makes for a nice ride through the "quiet corner" of Connecticut, which also contains Lebanon, the home of CT Gov. Jonathan Trumbull and his War Office. Trumbull was the only royal colonial governor (appointed by the crown) that went over to the side of the Patriots and independence.

26 APRIL 1777 - 1200 – REDDING RIDGE



Redcoats in Redding!

On April 26, 1777, the British came to Redding itself. British Gen. William Tryon led 1850 troops through Redding by way of the Fairfield Road (today's Black Rock Turnpike) on his way to Danbury to destroy the Continental Army Stores.

The expedition arrived in Redding Ridge just before noon time. Tryon ordered his troops to rest and have lunch in the large training field just north of the intersection. The field is still there today. Tryon and some of his officers dined with Squire Wm. Heron at his home on the south side of the Christ Church cemetery. (Heron was a double-agent spy for the British.) During this short respite, British troops had apprehended fourteen known patriots from around the immediate area. These prisoners were taken along with the column all the way back to their waiting ships. The men were imprisoned in the in the notorious sugar warehouses and/or prison ships in the East River. Many never returned. The names of these patriot prisoners are etched in the granite monument at the intersection by Christ Church.

This scene is depicted in the award winning book, *My Brother Sam Is Dead*. The story takes place in Redding and includes General Putnam, the army camps, and the heartache of the people in time of war..



Memorial to Redding prisoners captured on April 26th



Destruction was their game

This April incursion of Tryon's troops set the scene for what was to happen in our area for the next few years. The troops went onto Danbury and destroyed, by burning, all barns and warehouses which were used to store the military supplies. The loyalists from the area, who were traveling with the British as guides, pointed out the homes of the patriots. These, too, were set to the torch. The town was afire. Tons of military stores were destroyed. The largest supply warehouse being used by the American Army... the Anglican Church, or the Church of England, was left untouched. The British continued their march to Ridgefield where they finally clashed with American forces led by generals Wooster, Silliman and Arnold. Arnold was the true battle leader. Gen. Wooster was mortally wounded. The British finally made it back to Westport and their ships. They were under fire the entire way.

The following year, CT governor Jonathan Trumbull convinced his friend Gen. Washington to quarter a Continental brigade in the Danbury area to prevent any further British visitations. Maj. Gen Israel Putnam brought his division to Redding for winter quarters for the 1778-79 hiatus. More than 4,000 troops and support personnel spent between 5 and 7 months at the three separate camps along the northern border of Redding (Danbury abutted Redding in those days).

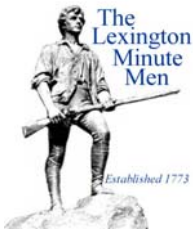


To contact us: friendsofputnampark@comcast.net

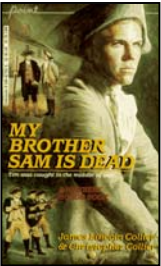


The April meeting was held at the visitor center on Tuesday, April 8, 2008.

Notes from the prez ...



1. **President** Steve Levine opened meeting .
2. **Treasurers Report** was given by T.G.Henderson. T.G. also reported that he had taken an inventory of all FANs gift items in the center.
3. **Membership.** TG's concept of membership cards was approved. Cards will be mailed to paid-dues members this month. A letter will also be sent out by Steve Levine as a follow-up to past members.
4. **New FANs Putnam Park Website** was covered by innovator Brent Colley. He will register the website as www.putnampark.org. (Home page is now up and running at above url.) Brent will work on adding to site over time. Will use the "Under Construction" umbrella while adding pieces..New Home Page great.
5. **DEP Park Update** was given by long time park ranger Andy Sullivan (In Nate Hales absence). Crew is working on new railings at the museum, a new base and a refurbishment of the Diorama in the visitor center, new entrance signs indicating hours of operation for buildings, new number markers for new walking tour/maps, and a new pavilion shelter on recreation side of park.
6. **Visitor Center Update.** Harry Gibson updated progress of visitor center displays, park signage, and handouts. The committee is still awaiting input from DEP Staffers in Hartford for info on display space floor allotment, and info on fiberglas sign production for sites in historic section. New pads of walking tour/ maps are being produced for park opening in May. Park brochure text is still being discussed.
7. **Next Event – School Days.** Nancy Cowles updated the School Days program which is scheduled for Tuesday-Thursday May 20-22. We will host four school systems this year. The reenactors are ready to go. Anyone interested in volunteering for one of the days should contact Nancy at 203-797-8604.
8. **230th Anniversary Living History Weekend** is scheduled for the weekend of Nov. 1-2. The reenactment will be on Saturday afternoon and then followed by the Ghost Tour that night. CT 5th is the lead group for the weekend. Other groups are invited to participate in the weekend.
9. **Other Events on drawing board.** The **Summer Craftsman Program** and the **December Winter Walk** are being planned right now.
10. **Restoration of the Officers Hut** bid came in. Needs further discussion to resolve plan. Dan Cruson said the FANs microfilm reader being housed at the Mark Twain Library, needs maintenance. Group voted to proceed asap.



Mark your calendar now ...

The next FAN's Meeting will be on **Tuesday, May 13th, 2008**
at **7:00PM** at the **Visitor Center** at Putnam Park.

