



The Friends & Neighbors of Putnam Memorial State Park



"Connecticut's Valley Forge"

February 2009 NewsLetter

Bethel/Redding CT

Gibbets, Gallops and Guard Duty

The Redding army spent December constructing their log huts ... with the objective of getting warm. The end of December saw the start of a full blown troop mutiny until Gen. Israel Putnam addressed the troops and quelled the uprising. The discontent still permeated the troops, however. Lack of clothes, shoes, blankets, food and de-valued Continental script all made for unhappy campers. By the time February rolled around, the troops had many things to occupy them: Executions to attend, preparation for counter attacks at Horseneck, and special guard duty protecting Connecticut's largest harbor for privateers.

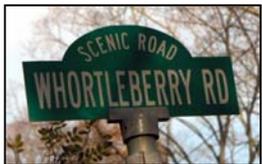
The Gibbet on Gallows Hill



Deserters and spies infiltrated Putnam's area of control.

Putnam was no stranger to deserters and spies. Nothing had so much annoyed Putnam and his officers during the campaigns of the preceding summer on the Hudson than the desertions which had thinned his ranks, and the Tory spies who frequented his camps under every variety of pretext, and forthwith conveyed the information thus gathered on the enemy. To put a stop to this it had been determined that the next offender of either sort (deserter or spy) captured should suffer death as an example. A man was arrested lurking within Putnam's lines in Westchester. He was proven to be a spy for the British. On February 4th, Edward Jones was tried at a General Court Martial and found guilty of all counts. The General approved the sentence and ordered it to be death by hanging.

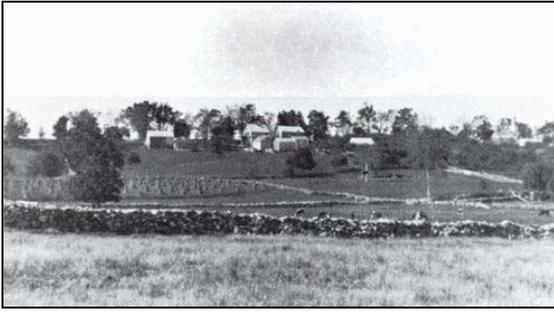
Two days later, another General Court Martial was held for a similar offence: on Feb. 6, 1779, John Smith of the 1st Connecticut Regiment, was tried for desertion and attempting to go to the enemy, found guilty, and further persisted in saying that he would go to the enemy if ever he had an opportunity. The General approved the sentence and orders that he be shot to death. General Putnam, having two prisoners under the sentence of death, determined to execute them both at once, or as he expressed it, "to make a double job of it," and at the same time make the spectacle as terrible and impressive as the circumstances demanded.



Gen. Putnam issued orders to all three of the Redding Brigades On February 15th to appear clean and neat at 9:00AM Tuesday February 16th, to attend the executions of the prisoners under sentence of death. The gallows and the site of the firing squad were near the top of the hill beyond the small triangle at the intersection of Gallows Hill Road and Whortleberry Road. In addition to the almost four thousand troops, hundreds of area civilians attended.

On Tuesday February 16th, 1779, Edward Jones was hung for being a spy; and John Smith was shot for deserting his regiment. The whole spectacle was used to impress the serious penalties awaiting any soldiers (or civilians for that matter) who might think about going off on their own to the enemy.

Redding 1779 Landscape Different From Today's



An old photo of Redding around 1900. Though this is not a shot of Gallows Hill, it will give the viewer an idea of how our entire area appeared at the time of the Revolution. Wood (trees) was already getting to be a scarce commodity. It was used for building homes and barns, fences and furniture, as well as for fuel in stoves and fireplaces. The fact that one of the states original lime kiln operations, from the early 1700's, was on the same hill as the gallows, didn't help the wood supply! The lime kiln ruins can still be seen on the steep slope of Lime Kiln Rd. going down the hill to Rt.53.

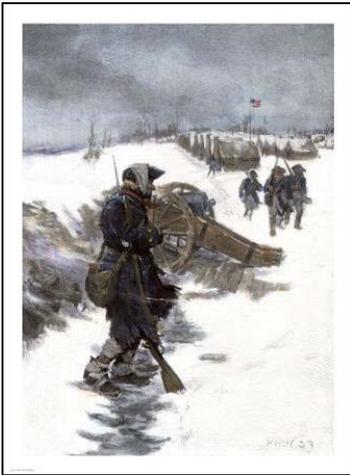
View From The Gable

"View from the gable window of the old Barlow House" which sits down by Rt. 53, was one of the tales told by Redding historian Charles Burr Todd. A wife of one of the condemned prisoners was in the home and viewed the tragic death of her husband at the execution way up on Gallows Hill, which was very visible back in 1779. 



THE OLD COL. AARON" BARLOW HOUSE. From its gable window the wife of one of the condemned men saw her husband executed on Gallows Hill, about a mile to eastward.

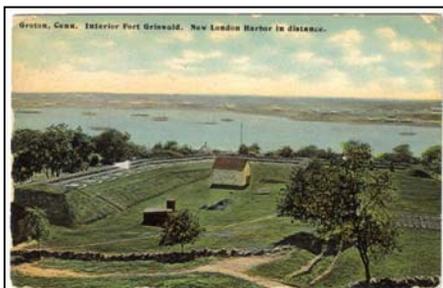
Put's Troops Sent on Guard Duty at New London



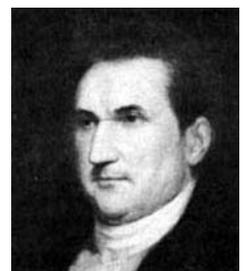
The Continental Soldier faced misery even when in winter quarters.

The soldiers at the Redding camps did not have an easy winter. They were cold, hungry and ill-fed. Many visitors to the park today think the troops just stayed in their little log cabins for the winter and wiled the time away. Not true by any means. Enlisted soldiers were constantly on the move on patrols or picket duty. Pickets were guard posts surrounding the camp. There were usually two or even three layers of pickets at different distances from the camp. Papers from regiments tell us that patrols were constantly being sent into Westchester County's no man's land to prevent British patrols coming into the area on foraging parties or just to damage American supplies. All enlisted men stood guard duty, except in extreme situations, i.e., the soldier did not have shoes or satisfactory clothes.

On February 4th, Lt. Col. Henry Dearborn was ordered to proceed with 400 men to New London. This was the seaport in Connecticut with the most privateers – fast sloops that preyed on British shipping. The success of these naval operations did not escape the notice of the British command. American headquarters heard that an attack by the British might be imminent, thus, Dearborn's mission to guard the harbor. It took seven days for the detachment to reach New London. Gen. Samuel Parsons also was detached to New London.



New London privateers



Lt. Col. Henry Dearborn was stationed at today's Putnam Park.

There were two fortifications at New London. The large Fort Griswold on the Groton side of the Thames River, and the smaller Fort Trumbull on the west side. The British did not molest New London that winter, but did attack the forts two years later inflicting the worst battle casualties and massacre in Connecticut during the entire war.

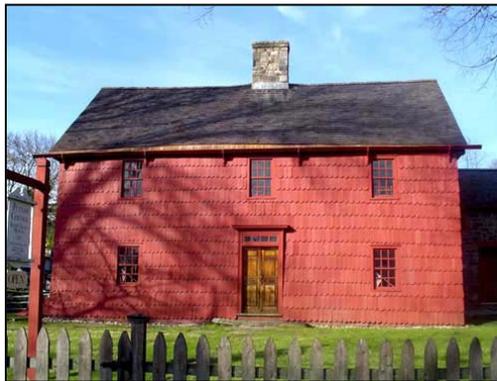
Old Put's Most Famous Gallop

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www.putnampark.org

During the winter, the British made marauding expeditions from New York into Connecticut, and Putnam found it necessary to send out detachments from the Redding camp to watch the enemy. In the latter part of February, 1779, he himself was at Horseneck on a tour of supervision of the outposts. Here occurred his famous ride. On Thursday night, February 25th, Governor Tryon left New York with a force of about fifteen hundred men for an incursion into Connecticut to that part of Greenwich which extended into the Sound and which received its name from having been used for a pasture for horses. He intended to surprise the American outpost there and destroy the salt-works in the vicinity. The approach of the hostile troops was discovered by Captain Titus Hosmer and his men, who were on picket duty at some distance from Horseneck. Arriving at Horseneck at full gallop, Captain Hosmer and his riders had just time to alarm the camp when Tryon and his marauders appeared in sight, about nine o'clock on Friday morning, February 26th. "We discharged some old field pieces," says Putnam, "which were there, a few times, and gave them a small fire of musketry, but without any considerable effect; the superior force of the enemy soon obliged our small detachment to abandon the place. I therefore directed the troops to retire and form on a hill a little distance from Horseneck, while I proceeded to Stamford and collected a body of militia and a few Continental troops which were there." But Putnam omits to mention what happened just after he had ordered his men to retreat a short distance across a swamp to a place inaccessible to horses, while he himself went for reinforcements. When he wheeled his horse into the main road towards Stamford, several British dragoons started to pursue him. He saw them coming. Over the frozen highway sped the General. The ring of steel-shod hoofs behind him told him how fast the enemy's chargers were gaining upon him. Onward the old hero spurred, while the flying horsemen lessened the distance between themselves and their prize. A fourth of a mile was passed in the mad chase, and then the road curved sharply toward the north and led round a steep declivity. Out from the highway the intrepid Putnam leaped his steed and dashed straight on towards the precipice and forced his horse over the brow and down the rocky height. His pursuers - one of them had just been within two lengths of him on the road - reined in their horses in utter astonishment at sight of the General's reckless feat, and, not daring to follow him down the dangerous steep, fired their revolvers at him as he went. An eye-witness of the exploit used to tell how Putnam waved back his sword with taunting words to the baffled British, whose balls whizzed past him. One of the bullets pierced his military cap.



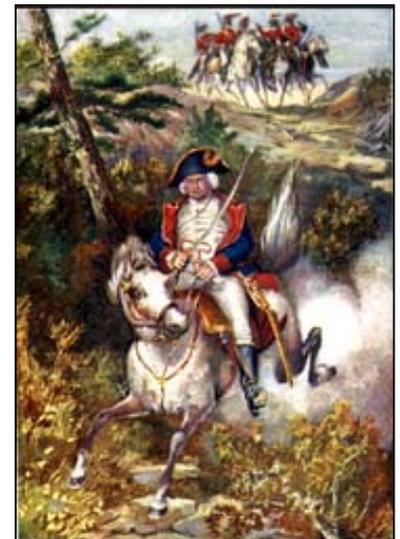
Putnam Cottage, or Knapp's Tavern is where Old Put was staying before almost being captured by the British dragoons.



Each year Putnam Cottage sponsors a reenactment around the last of February to celebrate Old Put's ride. This year it was scheduled for Sunday Feb. 22nd. It was spitting snow and on and off rain drops. The FANs reporter was there to cover the event. The gate was closed, but had a hastily made sign draped on it.



This is the famous bronze statue at Putnam Park which commemorates the ride. It was created by Anna Hyatt Huntington in her 94th year.



Putnam pushed his steed down the steep stairway, cut into the stone cliff, and escaped from the British who were in awe of his amazing and dangerous ride. Did Old Put really ride down the stairs, or is this just myth? There are "eye witnesses" on both sides. Suggestion ... the stairway is still there. Go and stand at the top of the hill and look down the stairway. This will answer the question for you!



The February meeting was held at the visitor center on Monday, February 9th, 2009.

Notes from the prez ...



- 1. President's Opening:** Steve opened the meeting. Welcome to Mike Filler, the new Commander of the 5th CR and to new member Scott Stetler, we're happy to have you on board. And to Schuyler Merritt, welcome back!
- 2. Treasurer's Report:** T.G. was not in attendance, so Steve covered the report.
- 3. Park update:** Nate said at this time he doesn't have any indication of how the state's financial woes might affect the park. He mentioned that there was \$4000 in funding for park brochures, also some funding for a TV monitor for the Visitor Center. He showed more of the site signs for which Sharon is doing the art and lettering. He presented a proposal to do a mural in a side room in the museum as part of a display for Rob Doscher's British uniform loan. See the separate e-mails and responses.
- 4. Membership update:** A list compiled by T.G. of the 42 memberships received up to this point was presented. Buzz will prepare a follow up letter to "delinquent" members.
- 5. Bylaws update:** Steve passed out the suggested bylaw changes. Good suggestions and corrections were made and will be incorporated into the "final" amended bylaws. Steve will e-mail this to the group before the next meeting so that it can be voted on.
- 6. School Week update:** Nancy mentioned that she still needs various re-enactors to fill out the stations. Several members offered suggestions for follow up. Keep us posted. Brent offered to work with Nancy to post her Teacher's "Packet"
- 7. New Events, Ideas, Other:** Brian and several others will camp out in the Guardhouse the weekend of March 21-22. Nate will have the "sandwich" board sign put out to alert the public. The "Rob Doscher May 30, 31 Event" was discussed and supported by the group. Niels Hobbs, a member of his 40th Regiment of Foot is coordinating. FANs offered to provide PR to the Redding paper. Logistics would go through Nate. Steve sent Rob an e-mail to outline this.
- 8.** Doug suggested an idea for a **bi-monthly "Historical Roundtable"** on the period to get interested people to meet and discuss. He will work with Dan, Harry and Brent to flesh this out. Brent suggested an online "chat room" on the park website. Brent and Doug will look into posting park photos taken by visitors on the park website.
- 9. Summer events in the Visitor Center:** Steve to contact "The Reel Thing" music group and Robert Berthelson, who presents programs on Benedict Arnold. Nate offered to look into someone from the DEP to do a Forestry program on the park. Mike Filler to look into members of the 5th CR possibly doing presentations like they did on the Ghost Tour. It was suggested that Dan could do a program. Brent offered to do a program on "My Brother Sam is Dead."
- 10. NEH Grant:** Brent presented the possibility of applying for a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Grant to host a summer 2010 program for scholars on historical sites. The application is due in March, so time is very short. He will discuss this with Harry, Dan et al on the feasibility. Schuyler offered to contact people at WestConn to see about housing, etc. Keep us posted.

The next FAN's Meeting will be on Monday, **March 9, 2009**
at **7:00PM** at the Visitor Center at Putnam Park.

New schedule = 2nd Monday of each month

