

DOCUMENTARY RESEARCH REPORT

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Region

on

THE FREEMAN FARM

by

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Introduction The purpose of this study is to assemble all of the information that has been located concerning the Freeman Farm at the time of the Battles of Saratoga, September 19 and October 7, 1777. The objective of this research is to determine the appearance and importance of the Freeman Farm as background for interpretive planning for the development of the site.

Early History of the Freeman Farm Although an effort was made to determine the date when the Freeman family settled the farm that was the center of the field on which the Battles of Saratoga were fought, no reference to the property has been located in the records of Albany County of which Saratoga County was a part until 1791. It is probable that the farm was originally rented for life or in perpetuity from a patentee, probably Killiam de Ridder or the heirs of Robert Livingston. Be that as it may, the first record of ownership indicates that the place was owned by Isaac Freeman in 1792, a record of which is located in the Office of the County Clerk for Saratoga County. No indentures for the pre-Revolutionary period have been located, and descendants of James Freeman know even less about the subject than we do.

Whether the Freeman family resided at the farm or rented it to tenants in 1777 is not clear. There is a tradition that they lived there until shortly before the battles, leaving it to refugee in Albany. Another

tradition relates that Freeman rented the farm to a tenant, while he lived in the village of Stillwater.<sup>2</sup> However, the contemporary materials are precise in noting that the place was abandoned by the time the British forces reached there on September 19, 1777, and the descriptions indicate that the abandonment had occurred long enough prior to the engagements to give the farm an unkempt appearance.

The historic significance of the Freeman Farm is derived from its association with the climax of the Burgoyne campaign, the two Battles of Saratoga, September 19 and October 7, 1777. Following the reorganization of the American forces in the Northern Department, they had taken up a defensive position on Bemis Heights, one mile south of the Freeman Farm on September 13. The British army, moving down the west bank of the Hudson River toward Albany, approached to within approximately four miles of the Americans at the house of a man named Sward, or perhaps Swart. Here Burgoyne divided his troops into three columns - one under Baron von Riedesel continued to move along the road that paralleled the river, another under Brigadier Fraser moved westward for about two miles, then turned southward to parallel the first column, and a third under Brigadier Hamilton and accompanied by Burgoyne. It was this column that first came into contact with American riflemen of Morgan's Corps, and the First Battle of Saratoga began.<sup>3</sup>

#### Contemporary Descriptions of Freeman Farm as of September 19

In his Journal, Lieutenant James Hadden of the Royal Artillery recorded under the date, Friday, September 19:

About 2 o'clock in the afternoon the British Regiments arrived opposite to Freeman's House thro. which I was order'd to fire a shot and it not taking effect Capt. Jones laid the second himself with success, but there being no Enemy it (tho. it was from hence Major Forbes was first attacked) the troops passed a small bridge (over a hollow way or large gutter apparently made by heavy falls of rain)

and took post at the skirt of a wood a little beyond it.

Sep's 19th continued

The enemy being in possession of the wood almost immediately attacked the Corps which took post beyond two log Huts on Freemans Farm.

While testifying before the House of Commons during the inquiry into the campaign the Earl of Harrington recalled that: "The advanced party, consisting of the picquets of the center column, being sent forwards, under the command of Major Forbes, to explore the way by which that column was to pass, fell in with a considerable body of rebels, posted in a house and behind fences, which they attacked, and after a great deal of fire, the detachment nearly drove in the body of rebels..."

The Major Forbes of the 9th Regiment, referred to above, and who commanded the British pickets on September 19, testified in reply to a question concerning the placement of the 9th Regiment: "As soon as they came out of the wood, they filed off to the right, and were drawn off at a small distance from the left of General Fraser's Corps, with orders to occupy two houses, one company in each, and defend them to the last extremity."

Thomas Anbury related the following concerning the Freeman Farm and the opening of the Battle of September 19:

The signal guns for all the columns to advance were fired between one and two o'clock, and after an hour's march, the advanced party, consisting of the picquets of the center column, under the command of Major Forbes, fell in with a considerable body of the enemy, posted in a house and behind fences, which they attacked, and after much firing, nearly drove in the body of Americans, but the woods being filled with men, much annoyed the picquets, who were very fortunately supported by two companies of the 24th regiment, one of which happened to be our company, and a piece of artillery, which General Fraser had detached, on hearing the fire of Major Forbes's party, and we came up just as the enemy fled.

Concerning the Freeman Farm and its connection with the first battle Wilkinson wrote:

The theatre of action was such, that although the combatants changed ground a dozen times in the course of the day, the contest terminated on the spot where it began. This may be explained in a few words. The British line was formed on an eminence in a thin pine wood, having before it Freeman's Farm, an oblong field stretching from the center towards its right, the ground in front sloping gently down to the verge of this field, which was bordered on the opposite side by a close wood, the sanguinary scene lay in the cleared ground, between the eminence occupied by the enemy and the wood just described....<sup>8</sup>

Turning to William C. Wilkinson's map of the scene of action of September 19 one may note that he locates two structures on the Freeman Farm, but did not identify either of these buildings.<sup>9</sup>

Contemporary Accounts of the Freeman Farm after the First Battle of Saratoga

Following the action of September 19<sup>8</sup> Burgoyne, confronted with the alternatives of retreating northward, advancing against the American fortified camp on Bemis Heights, or remaining on the scene of the battle to await further developments, chose the last. In order to provide a defensive position and a fortified camp from which to operate if and when the move on Albany should become feasible, Burgoyne began the construction of a system of field fortifications.

In his letter to Lord Germaine Burgoyne stated:

The army lay upon their arms the night of the 19th, and the next day took a position nearly within cannon shot of the enemy, fortifying their right, and extending their left to the brow of the heights, so as to cover the meadows through which the great river runs and where their batteaux and hospitals are placed.<sup>10</sup>

In his journal Lieutenant William Digby of the 53d Regiment of Foot noted:

Sept 20th - about 12 the general reconnoitered our post and contracted the extent of ground we then covered to a more secure one nearer the river, which we took up in the evening - our Left flank near the Hudson River to guard our battows/\_sic.\_/ and stores, and our right extending near two miles to the heights west of the river, with strong ravines, both in our front and rear....<sup>11</sup>

Sergeant Roger Lamb noted:

20th / of September / the army moved forward, and took post nearly within cannon shot of the American's fortified camp. Here the English strengthened their camp by cutting down large trees, which served for breastworks.<sup>12</sup>

Baron von Riedesel wrote concerning the fortification of the British position:

Accordingly, on the 20th, he / Burgoyne / inspected, with his other generals, the entire region of the country which had been hitherto occupied by his three columns. The result of this inspection was the posting of the army from Freeman's Farm across the woods and hills as far as Taylor's House, in front of bridge No. 2, and hence to the Hudson. At the same time - for the defense of the right wing, a redoubt was thrown up on the late battlefield near the corner of the woods that had been occupied by the enemy....<sup>13</sup>

Turning to the basic contemporary cartographic source, the changes that occurred on the Freeman Farm receive their clearest delineation on Wilkinson's Plan of the Encampment and Position of the Army under his Excellency Lt. General Burgoyne at Braemus Heights on Hudson's River near Stillwater, on the 20th Septr. with the Position of the Detachments etc. in the Action of the 7th of Octr. and the Position of the Army on the 8th of Octr. 1777.

By comparing this map with the one noted above,<sup>14</sup> it may be seen that the buildings that comprised the Freeman Farm of September 19 had now been incorporated with a large fortification that extended roughly north and south in a manner that protected the primary line of resistance from an attack on its right flank. The fortification is the one to which the name Dalcarras Redoubt has been applied.<sup>15</sup>

#### Secondary References to the Freeman Farm

Some of the many visitors to the Saratoga battlefields mentioned the

Freeman Farm. Among these was Professor Sillimon<sup>a</sup>, who was guided by Ezra Buel, participant in the battles and local resident, who noted:

On our way to Freeman's farm, we traced the line of the British encampment, still marked by a breastwork of logs, now rotten, but retaining their forms...<sup>16</sup>

In 1825, Epaphras Hoyt visited the area, and guided by Buel, visited the Freeman Farm, noting:

Passing the small ravine south of Leggett's barn we rose an elevation, the post with another on a knoll a little further west, strongly fortified, and the woods cleared off by Burgoyne after the battle of the 19th. These elevations were occupied by Lord Balcarres' light infantry after their retreat from the first position...<sup>17</sup>

Jared Sparks visited the Saratoga region in 1830 and 1831, guided on his examination of the battlefield by Buel and John Neilson, the latter the occupant of the farm on Bemis Heights. Concerning the fortification of the Freeman Farm area he wrote:

After the action of Sept. 19th Burgoyne took possession of the Heights between Freeman's Farm and the River, where he established his camp, and fortified it as well as he could. A few remains of the old breastworks are visible. They were formed of timber and earth. His division was posted nearest the River; Frazer's next; and then Balcarres on the southern part of Freeman's Farm...<sup>18</sup>

In his Field-Book of the Revolution, Benson J. Lossing, who visited Saratoga in 1848, wrote: "The intrenchments extended northward on the west side of Freeman's Farm. "<sup>19</sup>

In The Turning Point of the Revolution, Hoffman Nickerson wrote:

Here was the most exposed part of the position, especially the angle at Freeman's farm in which stood the British light infantry under Balcarres, some of them facing south and others west. To preserve the communication between Balcarres right rear and Breymann there was only a redoubt feebly garrisoned by a handful of spiritless Canadians.<sup>20</sup>

## Conclusions

From these sources, it is apparent that the Freeman Farm, where the First Battle of Saratoga began and the scene of a portion of the Second Battle, was a small frontier farmstead in the autumn of 1777. While the documentary accounts do not describe the farm, the maps indicate that it consisted of two buildings set in a clearing of approximately eighteen acres. No descriptions of the structures have been found, but they were probably small log buildings, one serving as a home - the other a barn. It was from the cabin that the American pickets fired upon Major Forbes' party, thus opening the First Battle of Saratoga.

As the battle developed, the Freeman Farm became the center of the fighting, and the farm fields changed hands several times as the armies attempted to drive one another from the field.

After the First Battle, with the British in possession of the field, Burgoyne began the construction of the series of fortifications that covered his camp. The sources studied indicate that the east-west front was contracted so that the Freeman Farm was the site of an arc in the primary line of resistance, which extended from northwest of the farm to the bluffs above the Hudson River. The farm buildings were incorporated into the redoubt that was erected on the farm.

No information has been located concerning the use to which the buildings turned after they were incorporated into the fortification.

Because neither the exact location nor the size of the buildings are known, additional knowledge must await a comprehensive archeological examination.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. (1) Office of the County Clerk, Albany County, N. Y., Albany, Book of Grantors, 1680 - 1820; Book of Grantees, 1680 - 1820.  
(2) Office of the County Clerk, Saratoga County, Ballston Spa, N. Y., Deed Book XIII.
2. Noted in local writings of the 19th century.
3. See map, Troop Movements - Battle of Sept. 19, 1777, Part of Master Plan, Saratoga National Historical Park, NHP-SAR-2013.
4. Hadden, James M., Hadden's Journal and Orderly Book, J. Munsell's Sons, Albany, 1884, pp. 164-165.
5. Burgoyne, John, A State of the Expedition from Canada as Laid Before the House of Commons by Lieutenant - General Burgoyne, London, Printed for J. Almon, 1780, pp. 51-52.
6. Ibid, pp. 61-62.
7. Anbury, Thomas, Travels Through the Interior Parts of North America, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston and New York, 2 vols, 1923, Vol. I, pp. 242-243.
8. Wilkinson, James, Memoirs of My Own Times, Abraham Small, Philadelphia, 1816, 3 Vols., Vol. I, pp. 240-1.
9. Map. W. C. Wilkinson, Plan of the Encampment and Position of the Army under His Excell'y Lt. General Burgoyne at Swords House on Hudson's River near Stillwater on Sept'r 17th with the Positions of that part of the Army engaged on 19th Sept'r. 1777, Engraved by Wm Faden, Feb. 1, 1780.
10. Germain Papers, William L. Clements Library, Anne Arbor, Michigan, Saratoga Microfilm No. 30.
11. Baxter, James Phinney, The British Invasion From the North, the Campaigns of Generals Carleton and Burgoyne from Canada, 1776-1777, with the Journal of Lieut. William Digby of the 53d Regiment of Foot, J. Munsells, Albany, 1887, pp. 275-276.
12. Lamb, Roger, An Original and Authentic Journal of Occurances During the Late American War From its Commencement to the Year 1783, Dublin, 1809, p. 161.
13. Riedesel, Baron, Frederick, Journal, Sparks Collection, Widener Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.
14. Supra p. 4.



15. For an account of the documentary research that has been accomplished concerning the Balcarres Redoubt see Snell, Charles W., A Report on the Balcarres and Breymann Redoubts, Saratoga National Historical Park, February 2, 1949.
16. Stone, William L., Visits to Saratoga Battle - Grounds, 1780-1880, Joel Munsell's Sons, Albany 1895, pp. 118-119.
17. Ibid., p. 195.
18. Sparks, Jared, Journal, Sparks Collection, Widener Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.
19. Lossing, Benson J., Pictorial Field Book of the Revolution, 2 Vols. Harper Bros., 1851, Vol. I, p. 58.
20. Nickerson, Hoffman, The Turning Point of the Revolution, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston and New York, 1928, p. 322.

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## MAPS

Wilkinson, William C., Plan of the Encampment and Position of the Army under His Excell'y Lt. General Burgoyne at Sward's house on Hudson's River near Stillwater on Sept. 17th with the Positions of that part of the Army engaged on 19th Sept. 1777, Engraved by Wm. Paden, London, Feb. 1, 1780.

Wilkinson, William C., Plan of the Encampment and Position of the Army under His Excell'y Lt. General Burgoyne at Brancus Heights on Hudson's River near Stillwater, on the 20th Sept. with the position of the Detachments etc. in the action of the 7th of Oct. and the position of the Army on the 8th of Oct. 1777.

Troop Movement Map - Battle of Sept. 19, 1777, Part of Master Plan, Saratoga National Historical Park, NHP-SAR-2013.

## SECONDARY SOURCES

Lossing, Benson J., Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution, 2 vols., Harper Bros., 1851.

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