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THE FIELD OF GROUNDED ARMS

AT SCHUYLERVILLE (OLD SARATOGA), NEW YORK.

(A Report on the Identity of the Site where the Army under
Command of Lieutenant-General John Burgoyne Sur-
rendered its Arms on October 17, 1777.)

by

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(History)

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UNITED STATES
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Reference is made to a Memorandum from Acting Regional Director Elbert Cox to Coordinating Superintendent Francis S. Ronalds, dated January 27, requesting verification of the authenticity of public-owned land at Schuylerville, N. Y., known as the Field of Grounded Arms. The site is pointed out as the ground where the troops — British, German, and Loyalist — under command of Lieutenant-General John Burgoyne laid down their arms on October 17, 1777, thereby ending the British invasion from Canada, which had been intended as one arm of a three-pronged campaign to sever the American Colonies. As the National Park Service is interested in the possibility of securing ownership of this ground as a historic site, the following research report, which brings together all available documentary evidence pertaining to the site, is submitted to determine the authenticity of the ground as the place of surrender. This area constitutes part of a tract of 19½ acres of land on the shore of the Hudson River which the Village of Schuylerville leased in 1929 from Francisca Villa for use as a baseball and recreation field. Subsequently, the Village secured, and still holds, title to the property.

In opening, distinction must be made between the surrender site where the Army grounded its arms, and the surrender site where Burgoyne surrendered his sword to Major-General Horatio Gates, who commanded the American Army. These actions were separate and occurred at localities separated by at least a mile. The site where Burgoyne surrendered his sword, on the south side of Fish Creek, has been ably investigated by former Junior Historical

Technician Francis F. Wilshin in a report dated August 11, 1941, which constitutes part of his Narrative Report for July of that year. All mention by the present writer to the place of surrender in the following report refers to the field where the troops grounded arms.

It may be well, in introduction, to mention a few words concerning the surrender ground: Following the disastrous second battle near Freeman's Farm on October 7, 1777, Burgoyne started to retreat toward Canada in a vain attempt to save the shattered remnants of his Army. The hope he clung to so desperately was never to be fulfilled. He abandoned his camp on the Hudson near the battleground on the night of October 8 and on the following day, the ninth, took position seven miles north on the high ground west of the river at Saratoga. The fortified campground of the British Army was in the present Village of Schuylerville and on the heights where the Saratoga Battle Monument stands. Burgoyne's delay at Saratoga to enable his heavily-laden batteaux to keep pace with his troops enabled the American forces under Gates to envelope his positions and cut off all retreat. Sensing the uselessness of further resistance, he opened overtures for capitulation and signed the Articles of Convention, whereby his Army was to march to New England and embark for Europe. On October 17 Burgoyne surrendered, the Army laid down its arms, and moved down the Hudson and across the river to the prison at Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The Field of Grounded Arms at Schuylerville

The field under consideration on the bank of the Hudson River directly east of the Village of Schuylerville lies eight miles north of the Administration Area at Saratoga National Historical Park. The so-called Field of Grounded Arms in public ownership forms part of a large triangular-shaped plain bordered on the south by Fish Creek, on the west by the abandoned Champlain Canal and Canal Basin at the base of the high ground, and on the east by the river, along which the meadow extends for 2,500 feet before merging into high ground at the north. The greatest width -- at the south end -- approaches 1,000 feet. At the southeastern corner, in the angle of Fish Creek and the Hudson, was situated Fort Hardy, an old French and Indian War fortification of 1757 which was already in ruins at the time of surrender twenty years later. The only road across the plain, Ferry Street, runs downhill from the Village through the center of the fort to a bridge over the river. The major portion of the field lies north of this road. Two markers on the roadside mark the site of the fort; while a third, erected by the New York State Education Department at the edge of the public-owned land, marks a better-known site:

ON THESE FIELDS
THE BRITISH ARMY
GROUNDED ARMS
AT THE SURRENDER

CONTEMPORARY BRITISH EYE-WITNESS ACCOUNTS OF THE SURRENDER

The official statement to the beaten Army describing the place where the arms were to be surrendered is contained in Article One of the Articles of Convention between Burgoyne and Gates. It reads:

"The Troops under Lieut. Genl. Burgoyne to march out of their Camp with the Honors of War, and the Artillery of the Intrenchments, to the Verge of the River, where the Old Fort stood; where the Arms and Artillery are to be left. The Arms are to be piled by Word of Command of their own Officers."¹

Burgoyne's Orderly Book contains no information on the surrender ground. The only entry under date of October 17, when the Army laid down its arms, reads:

"Treaty of Convention signed."²

However, among the British and German captives were several diarists and letter-writers whose accounts contain scattered references to the location and physical appearance of the place of surrender. The writer has italicised in the following extracts the phrases pertaining to the character of the ground:

1. Digby:

Lieutenant William Digby of the 53rd Regiment of Foot, while not mentioning the place of surrender, wrote of this impressive event:

"...About 10 o'clock, we marched out, according to treaty, with drums beating & the honours of war, but the drums seemed to have lost their former inspiring sounds, and though we beat the Grenadiers march, which not long before was so animating, yet then it seemed by its last feeble effort, as if almost ashamed to be heard on such an occasion... I shall never forget the appearance of their troops on our marching past them; a dead silence universally reigned through their numerous columns, and even then, they seemed struck with our situation and dare scarce lift up their eyes to view British troops in such a situation."³

2. Riedesel:

Major-General Baron Friedrich Adolph von Riedesel of the German contingent, in the book written by Max von Eelking, was more specific in describing the place of surrender:

"At eleven o'clock, the army left their old fortified camp, and formed in line on the ground near the so called old fort, this side of the Fishkill. Here they left their cannon and muskets. With a moist eye the artilleryman looked for the last time upon his faithful

gun — parting with it as he would from a bride — and that, forever! With repressed tears the bearded grenadier placed his musket on the pyramid to take it up no more!" *[italics mine]*.⁴

3. Anburey:

Thomas Anburey, a volunteer who served in the Grenadier Company of the 29th Regiment of Foot, author of the Travels through the Interior Parts of America, said:

"On the plain where we piled up our arms, there were numbers of dead horses, from the stench of which, and from the performance of so humiliating an act, you will easily imagine our haste in quitting such a spot." *[italics mine]*.⁵

4. A German Officer:

A letter written by a German officer at Saratoga said:

"On the 17th of October our army marched to the banks of the Hudson, stacked their arms (neither of the enemy's officers nor commissioners being in sight), and began their march to Boston." *[italics mine]*.⁶

5. Lamb:

Sergeant Roger Lamb, who was in Burgoyne's Army, wrote that the troops marched "from the heights of Saratoga to the verge of the river . . . The arms were piled by order of the British officers." *[italics mine]*.⁷

Examination of other journals — those of Georg Pausch, Charlotte Luise von Riedesel, and James M. Hadden — proved disappointing.

Contemporary British Maps

Contemporary British maps of the position at Saratoga at the time of the surrender unfortunately do not indicate, by legend, the place of surrender. Of these, there are two:

1. The first is the map which appears in Burgoyne's A State of the Expedition from Canada, entitled "PLAN OF THE POSITION which the ARMY under Lt GEN^L BURGOINE took at SARATOGA on the 10th of September, 1777, and in which it remained till THE CONVENTION was signed." This was engraved by William Faden and was published in London in 1780.

The chart covers the ground from the Schuyler estate south of Fish Creek and extends north as far as the location of the British bridge

of boats near the Batten Kill. However, the map is useful for the purpose of this paper in that it clearly delineates the location of the "Ruins of Fort Hardy" — the Old Fort mentioned in the Articles of Convention.

Another map, similar in topographical detail, roads, troop positions, and legend, has been found in the Map Archives of the Minister of War in Paris (Plan N 14, Serie No. 1 — Paris Guerre Etat Major, Archives des Cartes). It was evidently copied by a Frenchman from the plan in the State of the Expedition. A copy of this chart is in the Map Division of the Library of Congress. The notations are in French and, like the original, it bears legend: "Plan of the Position which the Army under Lieutenant Gal^{al} Burgoyne took at Saratoga on the 10th of September 1777 and in which it remained till the Convention was Signed." A photostatic copy is in the collection at Saratoga National Historical Park.

2. The second map is a chart drawn by Captain Heinrich Dan. Gerlach, Quarter Master General, who served on the Brunswick Staff in the army of invasion. This valuable map was found by Mrs. Hans Huth in the winter of 1939-40 among the Riedesel Papers at the home of Freiherr Von Rotenham near Eisenach, Germany. It bears title: "PLAN de la Position de l'Armee sous les Ordres de son Excellence le Lieutenant General Bourgoyne a SARATOGA etant sur la Retraite de Fremanns Ferme." The accompanying legend is also in French.

This map covers the same ground as the chart published by Faden in Burgoyne's book. However, topographical details and the positions of the beleaguered Army are shown in greater detail than on the map engraved by Faden. The Gerlach plan, which also indicates Fort Hardy, does not indicate the surrender ground by legend.

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN EYE-WITNESS ACCOUNTS OF THE SURRENDER

Few American accounts describe the place of surrender, due to the fact that no American soldier was permitted to be present as a witness while the arms were being deposited by the British on the plain north of Fish Creek. Some accounts state that Morgan Lewis and James Wilkinson of the American Army were present in a supervisory capacity, but Wilkinson makes no reference of this fact in his Memoirs, and British and German accounts are emphatic in stating that no member of the American Army was present.

However, several accounts are of interest:

1. Wilkinson

Colonel James Wilkinson, Adjutant-General of the Northern Army, wrote that early in the morning of October 17 he visited Burgoyne in the British camp "and accompanied him to the ground where his army was to lay down their arms, from whence we rode to the bank of the Hudson's river, which he surveyed with attention."⁸

2. Hughes:

James Miles Hughes, aide-de-camp to Major-General Gates, wrote that the British "piled their arms on the low grounds of General Schuyler's farm, about ten o'clock." */italics mine/*.⁹

3. Boardman:

Oliver Boardman, who was with Gates, wrote that on October 17:

"According to the Agreement of Gen^{rl} Burgoyne Yesterday he march'd his Army out of his works at Ten O Clock In Brigades & Paraded their Arms on the Meddow at Saritoga." */italics mine/*.¹⁰

4. Hitchcock:

Enos Hitchcock, another soldier in Gates' Army, wrote in his diary on the day of surrender:

"17. This is the important Day in Burgoyne & his Army marched out of their Camp with fife & Drum at half past ten, on the flat near the old Fort at Sarratoga, the British locked their Arms, the Germans grounded theirs." */italics mine/*.¹¹

5. Mattoon:

One of the few American soldiers who actually saw the British piling their arms in surrender was Ebenezer Mattoon of Amherst, Massachusetts, who at the time of his service in an artillery company under Gates was twenty-two years of age. When Burgoyne retreated on October 8, Mattoon was ordered to take post on the east bank of the Hudson near the Batten Kill, opposite the positions taken by the British at Saratoga. Due to the illness of his commanding officer, Mattoon served as officer-in-charge when a house (Marshall House) within the British lines was cannonaded by American artillerists. After a brief tour of duty to Fort Edward, Mattoon was again at the Batten Kill on the morning of October 17 when orders arrived to report to American Headquarters. The artillerymen marched down the east shore of the river and witnessed, as they passed, the act of surrender. In 1835 Mattoon wrote of what he saw:

"As we passed along we saw the British army piling (not stacking) their arms; the piles of arms extended from Schuyler's creek northward nearly to the house on the hill before mentioned. The range of piles ran along the ground west of the road then travelled and east of the canal as it now runs."¹²

Schuyler's Creek was Fish Creek; the house on the hill was the Marshall House opposite the Batten Kill.

In view of the fact that Mattoon mentioned the old Revolutionary road near the Hudson, it may be well to point out that the present main thoroughfare in Schuylerville -- Broad Street -- does not follow the ancient path. John H. Brandow, author of an excellent history of the town, states that the old road "struck through where the canal basin is and ran along the low terrace seen in the meadow north of the Ferry street road, and just east of the canal, thence north through Seeleyville, following the present line of North Broadway." Brandow's historic map of Schuylerville likewise shows the old road running close to the Canal Basin. The Gerlach plan of 1777 depicts the old road in detail.

The fact that the surrender took place along the line of the old road -- located east of the Champlain Canal -- further strengthens the location of the ground of surrender as being on the plain described at the beginning of this report.

6. The Sexagenary (Becker):

John P. Becker, author of The Sexagenary, was a youngster at the time the surrender, and in boyish enthusiasm prowled around the American and British encampments on October 17. Later in life he wrote an anonymous autobiographical account of his experiences on the Hudson, and reported that Burgoyne's troops "made the best of their way with their music playing a British march to the very place now occupied by the canal basin in Schuylerville." Here they piled their arms.¹³

Contemporary American Maps

Rufus Putnam Map:

There is one known contemporary American map which indicates with exact precision the site where the surrender occurred -- and this site was the plain bordering the river, of which the so-called Field of Grounded Arms, owned by the Village of Schuylerville, forms a part. The chart was executed by Rufus Putnam, who was with Gates, and it is entitled: "An Orthographical View of the American and British Armies on the 7th & 8th of October 1777." It shows the American and British positions near Freeman's Farm during the operation from

September 19 to October 8, and also the positions taken by the British at Saratoga on October 9. The site of surrender on the Putnam map is marked with the letter "D". The legend pertaining to this spot states:

"D. Place where the British piled their arms on the glorious & ever memorable 17th of October 1777. On this happy morning the brigades of the American right having their right towards General Gates quarters and their left towards General Schuyler's house at A, were drawn upon the road side when they had the satisfaction to see the haughty Britains ground or file their arms at D and march out through the interval by the river side and to crown all John Burgoyne Colo of the Queen's own regiment of light dragoons etc. etc. etc., with his suite of British and German generals and aides de camp being recd by General Gates at Schuyler's house were marched from left to right of our army saluted with the agreeable tune called Yankee Doodle or the Country's Favorite."14

LATER ACCOUNTS

The site of surrender was never forgotten. In the years which followed many interested visitors were conducted over the battlegrounds and the site of surrender by veterans of the Revolutionary War and aged inhabitants who knew of the historic localities from the lips of the men of 1777. Ezra Buell and John Neilson were two of the better-known guides who served in the war and spent their later years in the vicinity.

The Duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, 1795:

In 1795 the Duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt visited the surrender ground, and in the published account of his travels he wrote:

"You see the way by which the English column, after it had been joined by the Germans, filed off by the left to lay down their arms within an ancient fort, which was constructed in the war under the reign of Queen Anne;..." */italics mine/*15

Silliman, 1819:

The following is an account of a visit to Saratoga by Professor Silliman in 1819. Silliman was not a participant in the battles, yet his narrative has value from the fact that his information was secured from his guide, Ezra Buell:

"We passed the ruins of General Schuyler's house, which are still conspicuous and hastened to the field where the British troops grounded their arms. Although, in 1797, I paced it over in juvenile enthusiasm, I felt scarcely less interested on the present occasion, and again walked

over the whole tract. It is a beautiful meadow, situated at the intersection of the Fish kil with the Hudson, and north of the former. There is nothing now to distinguish the spot, except the ruins of old Fort Hardy, built during the French wars, and the deeply interesting historical associations which will cause this place to be memorable to the latest generation. Thousands and thousands yet unborn will visit Saratoga with feelings of the deepest interest, and it will not be forgotten till Thermopylae and Marathon and Bannockburn and Waterloo shall cease to be remembered. There it will be said were the last entrenchments of a proud invading army; on that spot stood their formidable park of artillery — and, here, on this now peaceful meadow they piled their arms, their arms no longer terrible, but now converted into a glorious trophy of victory!" */italics mine/*.¹⁶

The Champlain Canal Map, 1819-21:

Map No. 2 of the Champlain Canal, 1834, drawn from surveys in 1819-21, indicates the plain by the river as being the "Ground on which Genl. Burgoyne Surrendered."¹⁷

Hoyt, 1825:

In 1825 Epaphras Hoyt, born in 1765, visited the battlegrounds and the place of surrender in company of "one of the heroes of the battle of the 7th of October." Hoyt, with information secured from his guide, who had been there in 1777; wrote that Saratoga in 1777 was covered with woods, except two or three open fields on the heights and the meadow near the river, which "was open, cultivated ground." This meadow was that traversed, said Hoyt, by the Champlain Canal (opened 1822). He and his companion also visited "the meadow near Fort Hardy" where Burgoyne's troops piled their arms on October 17.¹⁸

Woodruff, 1827:

Samuel Woodruff, of Windsor, Connecticut, a participant in the battles, visited the fields of Saratoga in 1827 and the surrender ground where the arms of the Royal army were piled. "This memorable place is situated on the flat, north side of Fish creek, about forty rods west of its entrance into the Hudson, and through which the Champlain canal now passes." */italics mine/*.¹⁹

Sparks, 1830:

The eminent historian Jared Sparks visited Saratoga in August 1830 and was guided over the ground by the grandson of General Philip Schuyler, who lived on the estate south of Fish Creek. Mr. Schuyler, Sparks wrote, pointed out "the plain on which the British surrendered their arms."²⁰

Mattoon, 1835:

Ebenezer Mattoon's account, 1835, has been noted on page 6 and 7, ante.

Neilson, 1844:

Charles Neilson, the early historian of the Burgoyne campaign, writing in 1844, said that the British troops left their camp on October 17 and "marched to the 'green' in front of Old Fort Hardy, where they deposited their arms and emptied their cartridge boxes, they were again formed in line and marched through the American camp." *[italics mine]*.²¹

Lossing, 1848:

Four years later Benson J. Lossing, whose Field Book of the Revolution has become an indispensable source of Revolutionary lore, visited the surrender site and described it as "directly in front of Schuylerville, between that village and the Hudson."²²

Lossing wrote at a time when veterans of the Revolution were still alive. His description of the ground, and also his accompanying sketch, coincides with the location of the plain by the river now under consideration.

Stone, 1877:

William Leete Stone, whose studies on the Burgoyne campaign, have become classics, wrote in 1877 of the surrender:

"At eleven o'clock on the morning of the 17th, the royal Army left their fortified camp, and marched to the green in front of old Fort Hardy, on the meadow just north of Fish creek, at its junction with the Hudson. Here in the presence only of Morgan Lewis and Wilkinson, representing the American army, they left their cannon and small arms." *[italics mine]*.²³

De Peyster, 1880:

General J. Watts De Peyster, a historian of the Burgoyne campaign and one of the founders of the movement to mark the historic sites on the battlefield, wrote in 1880 that "The British laid down their arms about the site of old Fort Hardy, just north of the Fishkill and east of Schuylerville, across the stream from Schuyler's mansion." *[italics mine]*.²⁴

Ostrander, 1897:

William S. Ostrander wrote in 1897 in his Old Saratoga and the Burgoyne Campaign that the British "marched out before the ruins of old Fort Hardy, on Oct. 17, 1777, piled arms and started southerly

across Fish Creek, between files of Continentals, on their march to Boston." [italics mine].²⁵

Webster:

W. B. Webster, in his Descriptive Guide: Schuylerville (Saratoga, 1777), Saratoga Battle Ground and Vicinity, writes of the site of surrender:

"Going east, down Ferry Street, across the canal terminal -- formerly the original Champlain Canal -- one arrives at what is popularly known as the 'river flats.' This is a low lying plateau, triangular in shape, extending north from Fish Creek as a base, to the northern boundary of the village. Upon this plateau General Burgoyne's army formally surrendered their arms to the army of General Gates, October 17, 1777."²⁶

Brandow, 1919:

John Henry Brandow, author of The Story of Old Saratoga, a very valuable book, wrote of the surrender:

"At eleven a. m. the British army left its camp, marched down the hill to the flat and piled their arms just to the east of the Champlain canal. General Matoon, who afterwards inspected them, said that the piles reached from near the creek to the vicinity of the Marshall house." [italics mine].²⁷

Nickerson, 1928:

Hoffman Nickerson, author of The Turning Point of the Revolution, locates the place of surrender in these words:

"The spot chosen for this first part of the ceremony of surrender was the meadow beside the Hudson and north of the Fishkill. In 1777 it was still faintly dimpled with the grassy remains of an old fort of the Seven Years' War. To it the invaders marched dejectedly enough. Some of the men in impotent anger broke the butts of their muskets against the ground and some of the drummers stamped their drums to pieces."²⁸

Sprague, 1930:

Delos E. Sprague in his Descriptive Guide of the Battlefield of Saratoga writes that Ferry Street "crosses the flats which is known as the 'Field of Grounded Arms.' Here Burgoyne's soldiers stacked their arms in surrender, some breaking the stocks of their muskets in rage. From this point they took up their line of march to

Cambridge, Mass., crossing Fish Creek at the fording place. This 'Field of Grounded Arms' was the site of Fort Hardy, which was erected in 1757, as one of the many forts erected by the English for protection of the settlers and which covered about fifteen acres."²⁹

CONCLUSION

A careful study of all contemporary and subsequent accounts, together with personal examination of the terrain at Schuylerville, points to the fact that the low ground bordering the river was the field of surrender of Burgoyne's Army, and that the public-owned property of the Village of Schuylerville, located thereon, forms part of the area involved in the act of surrender. Physically, no other location in the neighborhood meets the specifications noted in diaries, letters, and maps of the time. The Rufus Putnam Map, furthermore (see ante), dispells all doubt as to the location.

The contemporary accounts refer to the ground, variously, as a plain, a flat, a meadow, or low ground near the Hudson. Mattoon, the American observer, states that the piles lay east of the later Champlain Canal, and extended from Fish Creek almost as far north as the Marshall House -- which would include the entire length of the plain. Becker (The Sexagenary) is emphatic in stating that the surrender occurred where the Canal Basin is situated. The Duc de La Rochefaucauld-Liancourt states that the surrender took place within the old fort. Riesdesel states that they surrendered near the fort. Most accounts merely state that they piled their arms on the plain.

It probably will never be possible to ascertain with exact precision the precise sections of the field where the arms were deposited. They were no doubt piled north and west of Fort Hardy and probably also within the walls of the fort. The Canal Basin occupies only a small area at the southwest corner of the plain, west of Fort Hardy. While arms were undoubtedly deposited at this point, it must be remembered that the place of disposal for the arms, cannon, and equipment of over five-thousand men -- as well as ground for deployment and manoeuvre -- would necessitate a larger area of ground than the limited confines where the Basin was later dug.

Should the National Park Service seek to secure custody of the Field of Grounded Arms as part of the interpretive plan for Saratoga National Historical Park, it is the writer's suggestion that the entire plain be included in purchase or transfer to the United States Government. This would include not only the present public-owned land, but the entire flat bounded on the south by Fish Creek, on the east by the Hudson River, and on the west by the Champlain Canal and Canal Basin. On this site will also be situated the site of Fort Hardy.

Should the National Park Service be interested only in securing the area owned by the Village of Schuylerville, it must be pointed out that the authenticity of the site is correct without doubt; but it will constitute only a part of the total area of some fifty or sixty acres which constitute the plain by the river.

Though under cultivation for many years, the plain in its entirety remains in its original state, free of buildings and modern encumbrances. The only structures and improvements are several houses along the line of Ferry Street, within the obliterated limits of Fort Hardy, and a small bathing beach on the Hudson within the limits of the Village-owned land.

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Submitted by

(Sgd.)

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UNITED STATES
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THE FIELD OF GROUNDING ARMS

AT SCHUYLERVILLE (OLD SARATOGA), NEW YORK.

A Report on the Identity of the Site where
the Army under Command of Lieutenant-General John Burgoyne
Surrendered its Arms on October 17, 1777.

by

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Reference is made to a Memorandum from Acting Regional Director Elbert Cox to Coordinating Superintendent Francis S. Ronalds, dated January 27, requesting verification of the authenticity of public-owned land at Schuylerville, N. Y., known as the Field of Grounded Arms. The site is pointed out as the ground where the troops -- British, German, and Loyalist -- under command of Lieutenant-General John Burgoyne laid down their arms on October 17, 1777, thereby ending the British invasion from Canada, which had been intended as one arm of a three-pronged campaign to sever the American Colonies. As the National Park Service is interested in the possibility of securing ownership of this ground as a historic site, the following research report, which brings together all available documentary evidence pertaining to the site, is submitted to determine the authenticity of the ground as the place of surrender. This area constitutes part of a tract of 19½ acres of land on the shore of the Hudson River which the Village of Schuylerville leased in 1929 from Francisca Villa for use as a baseball and recreation field. Subsequently, the Village secured, and still holds, title to the property.

In opening, distinction must be made between the surrender site where the Army grounded its arms, and the surrender site where Burgoyne surrendered his sword to Major-General Horatio Gates, who commanded the American Army. These actions were separate and occurred at localities separated by at least a mile. The site where Burgoyne surrendered his sword, on the south side of Fish Creek, has been ably investigated by former Junior Historical

Technician Francis F. Wilshin in a report dated August 11, 1941, which constitutes part of his Narrative Report for July of that year. All mention by the present writer to the place of surrender in the following report refers to the field where the troops grounded arms.

It may be well, in introduction, to mention a few words concerning the surrender ground: Following the disastrous second battle near Freeman's Farm on October 7, 1777, Burgoyne started to retreat toward Canada in a vain attempt to save the shattered remnants of his Army. The hope he clung to so desperately was never to be fulfilled. He abandoned his camp on the Hudson near the battleground on the night of October 8 and on the following day, the ninth, took position seven miles north on the high ground west of the river at Saratoga. The fortified campground of the British Army was in the present Village of Schuylerville and on the heights where the Saratoga Battle Monument stands. Burgoyne's delay at Saratoga to enable his heavily-laden batteaux to keep pace with his troops enabled the American forces under Gates to envelope his positions and cut off all retreat. Sensing the uselessness of further resistance, he opened overtures for capitulation and signed the Articles of Convention, whereby his Army was to march to New England and embark for Europe. On October 17 Burgoyne surrendered, the Army laid down its arms, and moved down the Hudson and across the river to the prison at Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The Field of Grounded Arms at Schuylerville

The field under consideration on the bank of the Hudson River directly east of the Village of Schuylerville lies eight miles north of the Administration Area at Saratoga National Historical Park. The so-called Field of Grounded Arms in public ownership forms part of a large triangular-shaped plain bordered on the south by Fish Creek, on the west by the abandoned Champlain Canal and Canal Basin at the base of the high ground, and on the east by the river, along which the meadow extends for 2,500 feet before merging into high ground at the north. The greatest width -- at the south end -- approaches 1,000 feet. At the southeastern corner, in the angle of Fish Creek and the Hudson, was situated Fort Hardy, an old French and Indian War fortification of 1757 which was already in ruins at the time of surrender twenty years later. The only road across the plain, Perry Street, runs downhill from the Village through the center of the fort to a bridge over the river. The major portion of the field lies north of this road. Two markers on the roadside mark the site of the fort; while a third, erected by the New York State Education Department at the edge of the public-owned land, marks a better-known site:

ON THESE FIELDS
THE BRITISH ARMY
GROUNDED ARMS
AT THE SURRENDER

CONTEMPORARY BRITISH EYE-WITNESS ACCOUNTS OF THE SURRENDER

The official statement to the beaten Army describing the place where the arms were to be surrendered is contained in Article One of the Articles of Convention between Burgoyne and Gates. It reads:

"The Troops under Lieut. Genl. Burgoyne to march out of their Camp with the Honors of War, and the Artillery of the Intrenchments, to the Verge of the River, where the Old Fort stood; where the Arms and Artillery are to be left. The Arms are to be piled by Word of Command of their own Officers."¹

Burgoyne's Orderly Book contains no information on the surrender ground. The only entry under date of October 17, when the Army laid down its arms, reads:

"Treaty of Convention signed."²

However, among the British and German captives were several diarists and letter-writers whose accounts contain scattered references to the location and physical appearance of the place of surrender. The writer has italicised in the following extracts the phrases pertaining to the character of the ground:

1. Digby:

Lieutenant William Digby of the 53rd Regiment of Foot, while not mentioning the place of surrender, wrote of this impressive event:

"...About 10 o'clock, we marched out, according to treaty, with drums beating & the honours of war, but the drums seemed to have lost their former inspiriting sounds, and though we beat the Grenadiers march, which not long before was so animating, yet then it seemed by its last feeble effort, as if almost ashamed to be heard on such an occasion... I shall never forget the appearance of their troops on our marching past them; a dead silence universally reigned through their numerous columns, and even then, they seemed struck with our situation and dare scarce lift up their eyes to view British troops in such a situation."³

2. Riedesel:

Major-General Baron Friedrich Adolph von Riedesel of the German contingent, in the book written by Max von Zelking, was more specific in describing the place of surrender:

"At eleven o'clock, the army left their old fortified camp, and formed in line on the ground near the so called old fort, this side of the Fishkill. Here they left their cannon and muskets. With a moist eye the artilleryman looked for the last time upon his faithful

gun -- parting with it as he would from a bride -- and that, forever! With repressed tears the bearded grenadier placed his musket on the pyramid to take it up no more!" [italics mine].⁴

3. Anburey:

Thomas Anburey, a volunteer who served in the Grenadier Company of the 29th Regiment of Foot, author of the Travels through the Interior Parts of America, said:

"On the plain where we piled up our arms, there were numbers of dead horses, from the stench of which, and from the performance of so humiliating an act, you will easily imagine our haste in quitting such a spot." [italics mine].⁵

4. A German Officer:

A letter written by a German officer at Saratoga said:

"On the 17th of October our army marched to the banks of the Hudson, stacked their arms (neither of the enemy's officers nor commissioners being in sight), and began their march to Boston." [italics mine].⁶

5. Lamb:

Sergeant Roger Lamb, who was in Burgoyne's Army, wrote that the troops marched "from the heights of Saratoga to the verge of the river . . . The arms were piled by order of the British officers." [italics mine].⁷

Examination of other journals -- those of Georg Fausch, Charlotte Luise von Riedesel, and James M. Madden -- proved disappointing.

Contemporary British Maps

Contemporary British maps of the position at Saratoga at the time of the surrender unfortunately do not indicate, by legend, the place of surrender. Of these, there are two:

1. The first is the map which appears in Burgoyne's A State of the Expedition from Canada, entitled "PLAN OF THE POSITION which the ARMY under Lt GEN^l BURGOYNE took at SARATOGA on the 10th of September, 1777, and in which it remained till THE CONVENTION was signed." This was engraved by William Faden and was published in London in 1780.

The chart covers the ground from the Schuyler estate south of Fish Creek and extends north as far as the location of the British bridge

of boats near the Batten Kill. However, the map is useful for the purpose of this paper in that it clearly delineates the location of the "Ruins of Fort Hardy" — the Old Fort mentioned in the Articles of Convention.

Another map, similar in topographical detail, roads, troop positions, and legend, has been found in the Map Archives of the Minister of War in Paris (Plan N 14, Serie No. 1 — Paris Guerre Etat Major, Archives des Cartes). It was evidently copied by a Frenchman from the plan in the State of the Expedition. A copy of this chart is in the Map Division of the Library of Congress. The notations are in French and, like the original, it bears legend: "Plan of the Position which the Army under Lieutenant O^{al} Bourgoine took at Saratoga on the 10th of September 1777 and in which it remained till the Convention was Signed." A photostatic copy is in the collection at Saratoga National Historical Park.

2. The second map is a chart drawn by Captain Heinrich Dan. Gerlach, Quarter Master General, who served on the Brunswick Staff in the army of invasion. This valuable map was found by Mrs. Hans Huth in the winter of 1939-40 among the Riedesel Papers at the home of Freiherr Von Retscham near Eisenach, Germany. It bears title: "PLAN de la Position de l'Armee sous les Ordres de son Excellence le Lieutenant General Bourgoyne a SARATOGA etant sur la Retraite de Freeman's Farm." The accompanying legend is also in French.

This map covers the same ground as the chart published by Faden in Bourgoyne's book. However, topographical details and the positions of the beleaguered Army are shown in greater detail than on the map engraved by Faden. The Gerlach plan, which also indicates Fort Hardy, does not indicate the surrender ground by legend.

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN EYE-WITNESS ACCOUNTS OF THE SURRENDER

Few American accounts describe the place of surrender, due to the fact that no American soldier was permitted to be present as a witness while the arms were being deposited by the British on the plain north of Fish Creek. Some accounts state that Morgan Lewis and James Wilkinson of the American Army were present in a supervisory capacity, but Wilkinson makes no reference of this fact in his Memoirs, and British and German accounts are emphatic in stating that no member of the American Army was present.

However, several accounts are of interest:

1. Wilkinson

Colonel James Wilkinson, Adjutant-General of the Northern Army, wrote that early in the morning of October 17 he visited Burgoyne in the British camp "and accompanied him to the ground where his army was to lay down their arms, from whence we rode to the bank of the Hudson's river, which he surveyed with attention."⁸

2. Hughes

James Miles Hughes, aide-de-camp to Major-General Gates, wrote that the British "piled their arms on the low grounds of General Schuyler's farm, about ten o'clock." *[italics mine]*.⁹

3. Beardman

Oliver Beardman, who was with Gates, wrote that on October 17:

"According to the Agreement of Gen^l Burgoyne Yesterday he march'd his Army out of his works at Ten O Clock In Brigades & Paraded their Arms on the Meadow at Saratoga." *[italics mine]*.¹⁰

4. Hitchcock

Enos Hitchcock, another soldier in Gates' Army, wrote in his diary on the day of surrender:

"17. This is the important Day in Burgoyne & his Army marched out of their Camp with fife & Drum at half past ten, on the flat near the old Fort at Saratoga, the British loaded their Arms, the Germans grounded theirs." *[italics mine]*.¹¹

5. Mattoon

One of the few American soldiers who actually saw the British piling their arms in surrender was Ebeneser Mattoon of Amherst, Massachusetts, who at the time of his service in an artillery company under Gates was twenty-two years of age. When Burgoyne retreated on October 8, Mattoon was ordered to take post on the east bank of the Hudson near the Batten Kill, opposite the positions taken by the British at Saratoga. Due to the illness of his commanding officer, Mattoon served as officer-in-charge when a house (Marshall House) within the British lines was cannonaded by American artillerymen. After a brief tour of duty to Fort Edward, Mattoon was again at the Batten Kill on the morning of October 17 when orders arrived to report to American Headquarters. The artillerymen marched down the east shore of the river and witnessed, as they passed, the act of surrender. In 1835 Mattoon wrote of what he saw:

"As we passed along we saw the British army piling (not stacking) their arms; the piles of arms extended from Schuyler's creek northward nearly to the house on the hill before mentioned. The range of piles ran along the ground west of the road then travelled and east of the canal as it now runs."¹²

Schuyler's Creek was Fish Creek; the house on the hill was the Marshall House opposite the Batten Kill.

In view of the fact that Mattoon mentioned the old Revolutionary road near the Hudson, it may be well to point out that the present main thoroughfare in Schuylerville — Broad Street — does not follow the ancient path. John H. Brandow, author of an excellent history of the town, states that the old road "struck through where the canal basin is and ran along the low terrace seen in the meadow north of the Ferry street road, and just east of the canal, thence north through Seelayville, following the present line of North Broadway." Brandow's historic map of Schuylerville likewise shows the old road running close to the Canal Basin. The Gerlach plan of 1777 depicts the old road in detail.

The fact that the surrender took place along the line of the old road — located east of the Champlain Canal — further strengthens the location of the ground of surrender as being on the plain described at the beginning of this report.

6. The Sexagenary (Becker):

John F. Becker, author of The Sexagenary, was a youngster at the time the surrender, and in boyish enthusiasm prowled around the American and British encampments on October 17. Later in life he wrote an anonymous autobiographical account of his experiences on the Hudson, and reported that Burgoyne's troops "made the best of their way with their music playing a British march to the very place now occupied by the canal basin in Schuylerville." Here they piled their arms.¹³

Contemporary American Maps

Rufus Putnam Map:

There is one known contemporary American map which indicates with exact precision the site where the surrender occurred — and this site was the plain bordering the river, of which the so-called Field of Grounded Arms, owned by the Village of Schuylerville, forms a part. The chart was executed by Rufus Putnam, who was with Gates, and it is entitled: "An Orthographical View of the American and British Armies on the 7th & 8th of October 1777." It shows the American and British positions near Freeman's Farm during the operation from

September 19 to October 8, and also the positions taken by the British at Saratoga on October 9. The site of surrender on the Putnam map is marked with the letter "D". The legend pertaining to this spot states:

"D. Place where the British piled their arms on the glorious & ever memorable 17th of October 1777. On this happy morning the brigades of the American right having their right towards General Gates quarters and their left towards General Schuyler's house at A, were drawn upon the road side when they had the satisfaction to see the haughty Britains ground or file their arms at D and march out through the interval by the river side and to crown all John Bargeyns Cole of the Queen's own regiment of light dragoons etc. etc. etc., with his suite of British and German generals and aides de camp being read by General Gates at Schuyler's house were marched from left to right of our army saluted with the agreeable tune called Yankee Doodle or the Country's Favorite."¹⁴

LATER ACCOUNTS

The site of surrender was never forgotten. In the years which followed many interested visitors were conducted over the battlegrounds and the site of surrender by veterans of the Revolutionary War and aged inhabitants who knew of the historic localities from the lips of the men of 1777. Ezra Buell and John Neilson were two of the better-known guides who served in the war and spent their later years in the vicinity.

The Duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, 1795:

In 1795 the Duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt visited the surrender ground, and in the published account of his travels he wrote:

"You see the way by which the English column, after it had been joined by the Germans, filed off by the left to lay down their arms within an ancient fort, which was constructed in the war under the reign of Queen Anne;..." *[Italics mine]*¹⁵

Silliman, 1819:

The following is an account of a visit to Saratoga by Professor Silliman in 1819. Silliman was not a participant in the battles, yet his narrative has value from the fact that his information was secured from his guide, Ezra Buell:

"We passed the ruins of General Schuyler's house, which are still conspicuous and hastened to the field where the British troops grounded their arms. Although, in 1777, I paced it over in juvenile enthusiasm, I felt scarcely less interested on the present occasion, and again walked

over the whole tract. It is a beautiful meadow, situated at the intersection of the Fish kil with the Hudson, and north of the former. There is nothing now to distinguish the spot, except the ruins of old Fort Hardy, built during the French wars, and the deeply interesting historical associations which will cause this place to be memorable to the latest generation. Thousands and thousands yet unborn will visit Saratoga with feelings of the deepest interest, and it will not be forgotten till Thermopylae and Marathon and Bannockburn and Waterloo shall cease to be remembered. There it will be said were the last entrenchments of a proud invading army; on that spot stood their formidable park of artillery -- and, here, on this now peaceful meadow they piled their arms, their arms no longer terrible, but now converted into a glorious trophy of victory!" *[italics mine]*.¹⁶

The Champlain Canal Map, 1819-21:

Map No. 2 of the Champlain Canal, 1834, drawn from surveys in 1819-21, indicates the plain by the river as being the "Ground on which Genl. Burgoyne Surrendered."¹⁷

Hoyt, 1825:

In 1825 Epaphras Hoyt, born in 1765, visited the battlegrounds and the place of surrender in company of "one of the heroes of the battle of the 7th of October." Hoyt, with information secured from his guide, who had been there in 1777, wrote that Saratoga in 1777 was covered with woods, except two or three open fields on the heights and the meadow near the river, which "was open, cultivated ground." This meadow was that traversed, said Hoyt, by the Champlain Canal (opened 1822). He and his companion also visited "the meadow near Fort Hardy" where Burgoyne's troops piled their arms on October 17.¹⁸

Woodruff, 1827:

Samuel Woodruff, of Windsor, Connecticut, a participant in the battles, visited the fields of Saratoga in 1827 and the surrender ground where the arms of the Royal army were piled. "This memorable place is situated on the flat, north side of Fish creek, about forty rods west of its entrance into the Hudson, and through which the Champlain canal now passes." *[italics mine]*.¹⁹

Sparks, 1830:

The eminent historian Jared Sparks visited Saratoga in August 1830 and was guided over the ground by the grandson of General Philip Schuyler, who lived on the estate south of Fish Creek. Mr. Schuyler, Sparks wrote, pointed out "the plain on which the British surrendered their arms."²⁰

Mattoon, 1835:

Ebenezer Mattoon's account, 1835, has been noted on page 6 and 7, ante.

Neilson, 1844:

Charles Neilson, the early historian of the Burgoyne campaign, writing in 1844, said that the British troops left their camp on October 17 and "marched to the 'green' in front of Old Fort Hardy, where they deposited their arms and emptied their cartridge boxes, they were again formed in line and marched through the American camp." *[italics mine]*²¹

Lossing, 1848:

Four years later Benson J. Lossing, whose Field Book of the Revolution has become an indispensable source of Revolutionary lore, visited the surrender site and described it as "directly in front of Schuylerville, between that village and the Hudson."²²

Lossing wrote at a time when veterans of the Revolution were still alive. His description of the ground, and also his accompanying sketch, coincides with the location of the plain by the river now under consideration.

Stone, 1877:

William Leste Stone, whose studies on the Burgoyne campaign, have become classics, wrote in 1877 of the surrender:

"At eleven o'clock on the morning of the 17th, the royal Army left their fortified camp, and marched to the green in front of old Fort Hardy, on the meadow just north of Fish creek, at its junction with the Hudson. Here in the presence only of Morgan Lewis and Wilkinson, representing the American army, they left their cannon and small arms." *[italics mine]*²³

De Peyster, 1880:

General J. Watts De Peyster, a historian of the Burgoyne campaign and one of the founders of the movement to mark the historic sites on the battlefield, wrote in 1880 that "The British laid down their arms about the site of old Fort Hardy, just north of the Fishkill and east of Schuylerville, across the stream from Schuyler's mansion." *[italics mine]*²⁴

Ostrander, 1897:

William S. Ostrander wrote in 1897 in his Old Saratoga and the Burgoyne Campaign that the British "marched out before the ruins of old Fort Hardy, on Oct. 17, 1777, piled arms and started southerly

across Fish Creek, between files of Continentals, on their march to Boston." [italics mine].²⁵

Webster:

W. B. Webster, in his Descriptive Guide: Schuylerville (Saratoga, 1777), Saratoga Battle Ground and Vicinity, writes of the site of surrender:

"Going east, down Ferry Street, across the canal terminal — formerly the original Champlain Canal — one arrives at what is popularly known as the 'river flats.' This is a low lying plateau, triangular in shape, extending north from Fish Creek as a base, to the northern boundary of the village. Upon this plateau General Burgoyne's army formally surrendered their arms to the army of General Gates, October 17, 1777."²⁶

Brandow, 1919:

John Henry Brandow, author of The Story of Old Saratoga, a very valuable book, wrote of the surrender:

"At eleven a. m. the British army left its camp, marched down the hill to the flat and piled their arms just to the east of the Champlain canal. General Watson, who afterwards inspected them, said that the piles reached from near the creek to the vicinity of the Marshall house." [italics mine].²⁷

Nickerson, 1928:

Hoffman Nickerson, author of The Turning Point of the Revolution, locates the place of surrender in these words:

"The spot chosen for this first part of the ceremony of surrender was the meadow beside the Hudson and north of the Fishkill. In 1777 it was still faintly dimpled with the grassy remains of an old fort of the Seven Years' War. To it the invaders marched dejectedly enough. Some of the men in impotent anger broke the butts of their muskets against the ground and some of the drummers stamped their drums to pieces."²⁸

Sprague, 1930:

Deles E. Sprague in his Descriptive Guide of the Battlefield of Saratoga writes that Ferry Street "crosses the flats which is known as the 'Field of Grounded Arms.' Here Burgoyne's soldiers stacked their arms in surrender, some breaking the stocks of their muskets in rage. From this point they took up their line of march to

Cambridge, Mass., crossing Fish Creek at the fording place. This 'Field of Grounded Arms' was the site of Fort Hardy, which was erected in 1757, as one of the many forts erected by the English for protection of the settlers and which covered about fifteen acres."²⁹

CONCLUSION

A careful study of all contemporary and subsequent accounts, together with personal examination of the terrain at Schuylerville, points to the fact that the low ground bordering the river was the field of surrender of Burgoyne's Army, and that the public-owned property of the Village of Schuylerville, located thereon, forms part of the area involved in the act of surrender. Physically, no other location in the neighborhood meets the specifications noted in diaries, letters, and maps of the time. The Rufus Putnam Map, furthermore (see ante), dispells all doubt as to the location.

The contemporary accounts refer to the ground, variously, as a plain, a flat, a meadow, or low ground near the Hudson. Mattoon, the American observer, states that the piles lay east of the later Champlain Canal, and extended from Fish Creek almost as far north as the Marshall House -- which would include the entire length of the plain. Becker (The Sexagenary) is emphatic in stating that the surrender occurred where the Canal Basin is situated. The Duc de La Rochefauscauld-Liancourt states that the surrender took place within the old fort. Riesdessel states that they surrendered near the fort. Most accounts merely state that they piled their arms on the plain.

It probably will never be possible to ascertain with exact precision the precise sections of the field where the arms were deposited. They were no doubt piled north and west of Fort Hardy and probably also within the walls of the fort. The Canal Basin occupies only a small area at the southwest corner of the plain, west of Fort Hardy. While arms were undoubtedly deposited at this point, it must be remembered that the place of disposal for the arms, cannon, and equipment of over five-thousand men -- as well as ground for deployment and manoeuvre -- would necessitate a larger area of ground than the limited confines where the Basin was later dug.

Should the National Park Service seek to secure custody of the Field of Grounded Arms as part of the interpretive plan for Saratoga National Historical Park, it is the writer's suggestion that the entire plain be included in purchase or transfer to the United States Government. This would include not only the present public-owned land, but the entire flat bounded on the south by Fish Creek, on the east by the Hudson River, and on the west by the Champlain Canal and Canal Basin. On this site will also be situated the site of Fort Hardy.

Should the National Park Service be interested only in securing the area owned by the Village of Schuylerville, it must be pointed out that the authenticity of the site is correct without doubt; but it will constitute only a part of the total area of some fifty or sixty acres which constitute the plain by the river.

Though under cultivation for many years, the plain in its entirety remains in its original state, free of buildings and modern encumbrances. The only structures and improvements are several houses along the line of Ferry Street, within the obliterated limits of Fort Hardy, and a small bathing beach on the Hudson within the limits of the Village-owned land.

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