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SUPPLEMENT TO DOCUMENTARY STUDY
OF
THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF GENERAL SIMON FRASER

By
John F. Luzader, Park Historian

May 1, 1958

SUPPLEMENT TO DOCUMENTARY STUDY
OF
THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF GENERAL SIMON FRASER

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Saratoga National Historical Park

Introduction: The purpose of this Supplement is to correct deficiencies noted in Regional Historian Barnes' review of Documentary Study of the Death and Burial of General Simon Fraser, May 1, 1938.

A Study of Sources Relating to the Location of Fraser's Grave:

In an attempt to determine, in so far as possible, the location of Fraser's grave, an examination of the primary documentary sources reveals that the General was buried in a fortification on the hill behind the house in which he died. Thus the first problem that arises is the location of the house in which Fraser died.

According to Amburey, Fraser was carried to his tent, where his wound was dressed, and where the surgeon advised him that his injury was mortal. He then made his will and distributed some of his personal effects, after which he requested that he be removed to the general hospital.¹

While Ambury stated that Fraser was taken to the hospital, Baroness von Riedesel related that he was brought to the house in which she was staying. Her statement was:

....About four o'clock in the afternoon, instead of the guests we were to have dined with, they brought in on a litter poor General Fraser, mortally wounded. Our dining table, which was already spread, was taken away, and in its place they fixed up a bed for the general.²

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1. Amburey, Thomas, Travels Through the Interior Parts of America, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston and New York, 1923, Vol.I, p.260
 2. Riedesel, Baroness Charlotte, von, Bernfs Reise, 1800, p.124.

In evaluating these conflicting statements, it should be noted that the Baroness's account is more nearly contemporaneous and that she was an eye-witness, while Amburey, who was some distance to the west with his unit, was apparently repeating hear-say.

Because the Baroness did not identify the house in which she was quartered, later sources were consulted in an effort to determine what house she occupied.

One of the earliest visits to the Saratoga of which we have a record was made by the mother of Theodore Dwight in 1791. She wrote:

We dined at the house which was General Burgoyne's headquarters in 1777,^{*} and one of the females who attended us was there during the battle. She informed us of many particulars and showed us a spot upon the floor which was stained with the blood of General Fraser, who, she added, when brought in mortally wounded from the field, was laid upon the very table at which we were seated.³

In a footnote, the editor, William P. Stone, stated:

The house mentioned by Mrs. Dwight, and which was formerly known as the "Taylor House," and since as the "Smith House," stood in tolerable preservation until 1864. The site is now (1894) marked by a few of the foundation stones and a small poplar tree. At the time of the battles it stood under the knoll where Fraser was buried, but was afterward moved down to the bank of the Hudson, on the right hand of the river road, going south.⁴

* Note: This was a mistake. Burgoyne's headquarters were located on a hill to the southwest.

3. Stone, William L., Visits to the Saratoga Battle - Grounds, 1780-1880, Joel Munsell's Sons, Albany, 1893, pp. 92-3.

4. Ibid.

In 1820, Theodore Dwight visited Saratoga and wrote:

....The house (Smith's) stands by the roadside, but the place where it then was is a spot at the foot of the hill (where Fraser is buried), and about 200 yards from the river. The cellar is still to be seen (now, 1894) in a field near an apple tree, a little north of the road that crosses the canal.

In 1821, P. Stansbury visited the house in which Fraser reputedly died, and wrote:

....The house which the British army made their hospital is about three miles from the town where I had stopped (Stillwater), and is colloquially termed in the neighborhood the house where Fraser died. It is now called Smith's tavern. There is a wide meadow between it and the high grounds under which it formerly stood. It has since been removed half a mile to the bank of the river. Its form is antique, the rooms are large and not in the least ruinous.⁶

Epaphras Hoyt wrote of his visit in 1823:

....The freight boats constantly passing along the canal, within a few yards of our traverse, afforded us a passage about two and one-half miles, up to Smith's tavern, the cottage in which the unfortunate General Fraser died of his wounds the morning after the battle of the 7th of October,...

Smith's house, which stood at the foot of the hill at the period of the battles, and has been drawn forward to the road on the bank of the river, is situated in a handsome meadow bordering on the Hudson, the same embraced by Burgoyne's hospital camp, and taken up by his whole army in the night succeeding the second battle.⁷

Benson J. Lossing visited the Saratoga vicinity in 1848 while gathering material for his Pictorial Field Book of the Revolution, and he noted that the house in which Fraser died stood until 1848 near the right bank of the Hudson. He included what was purported to be a sketch of the building. However, since, according to Lossing it had ceased to exist at least two years before, the sketch was either a copy or drawn from description.⁸

5. Ibid., p. 143.

6. Ibid., p. 173.

7. Ibid., pp. 198-9

8. Lossing, Benson J., Pictorial Field - Book of the Revolution, Harper Bros., New York, 1851, p. 64 (3)

Writing in 1877, William L. Stone noted:

The quarters which Mrs. Riedesel occupied, and in which General Fraser died - known then as the Taylor house, and since as the Smith house, was situated three miles and a half south of Fish Creek and about one hundred rods north of Wilbur's basin or the old Ensign store. When, some years afterward, the present turnpike was constructed, running twenty rods from the old road, the latter was discontinued, and Mr. Smith (who had purchased the old house) drew it to the west side of the turnpike and turned it into a tavern. It stood within four years, when it was torn down. The foundations can yet be seen. In 1820, the late Theodore Dwight visited the spot, and made a drawing of it, which has been engraved and is here given on the opposite page.⁹

There are differences in Lossing's and Stone's accounts. The former stated that the Taylor house stood until 1846, while Stone asserted in his visits that it was "in tolerable preservation until 1864," and that it was torn down within four years prior to 1877. The sketches offered by the two men are so dissimilar as to indicate two different houses.

It is difficult to reconcile the accounts. Stone lived in the area for many years and his statements concerning the house are supported by statements of other local residents. Then too, the sketch that he offers purports to have been drawn by a person who had seen the house, while Lossing's sketch, according to his own statement, was made after the house ceased to exist. Thus Lossing said that he never saw the house because it had been removed prior to his visit. One or the other of the writers was in error. Perhaps Lossing, who was not too critical of his sources, was misinformed; or Stone, who could be equally credulous, may have been mistaken.

With the exception of Amburey, all accounts agree that Fraser died in the Taylor - Smith house. The problem of determining its location is difficult to solve. As has been noted by Stone, Hoyte, and Lossing, the house was removed from its original site to near the river bank. Stone also said that the former location was marked by a cellar hole and some stones.

9. Stone, William L., The Campaign of Lieut. Gen. John Burgoyne and The Expedition of Lieut. Col. Barry St. Leger, Joel Munsell, Albany, 1877 p.72.

In an effort to identify the site, Map No. 2 of the Champlain Canal, dated 1834, was consulted. This map was drawn on the basis of a survey made by Elwin F. Johnson in 1819-1821. On this map the original and current sites of the house in which Fraser died were used as reference points for triangulations.¹⁰ Using two points on the canal, station 32, readings on the original site were N 76½ W and S 83½ W. The readings from the later site to the two points on the canal were S 71 E and S 83½ E.

At first blush, this map seemed a god-send in providing definite information concerning the location of the Taylor - Smith house. Its value, however, was almost neutralized by the fact that the station markers noted in the survey have either disappeared or have become buried under the sloughed off bank of the tow-path. Without these stations as reference points the usefulness of the map is severely limited. Of course, if one of the stations could be located a survey could be run and pertinent points located.

One fact the map does definitely establish: that the house in which Fraser died had been moved prior to the survey, i.e., prior to 1819.

The end result of the attempt to establish the exact location of the war-time site of the Taylor - Smith house was disappointingly inconclusive. The approximate location may be determined, and perhaps an archeological examination of the site might identify it.

Turning from the location of the house to the redoubt in which the burial occurred, the problem becomes more difficult and the evidence more contradictory.

Turning first to the Baroness's account, we find that she related that while he was dying Fraser sent a message to Burgoyne --

10. See attached Map No. 1

SEATTLE WATER

EL D E S O JV
TB.

road to the village of Stillwater

House in which
Gen. Fraser
and family
remained in
this place.

Former site
of
Smith's house

John Smith

Holmes Withier

Burgoyne's
Head Quarters

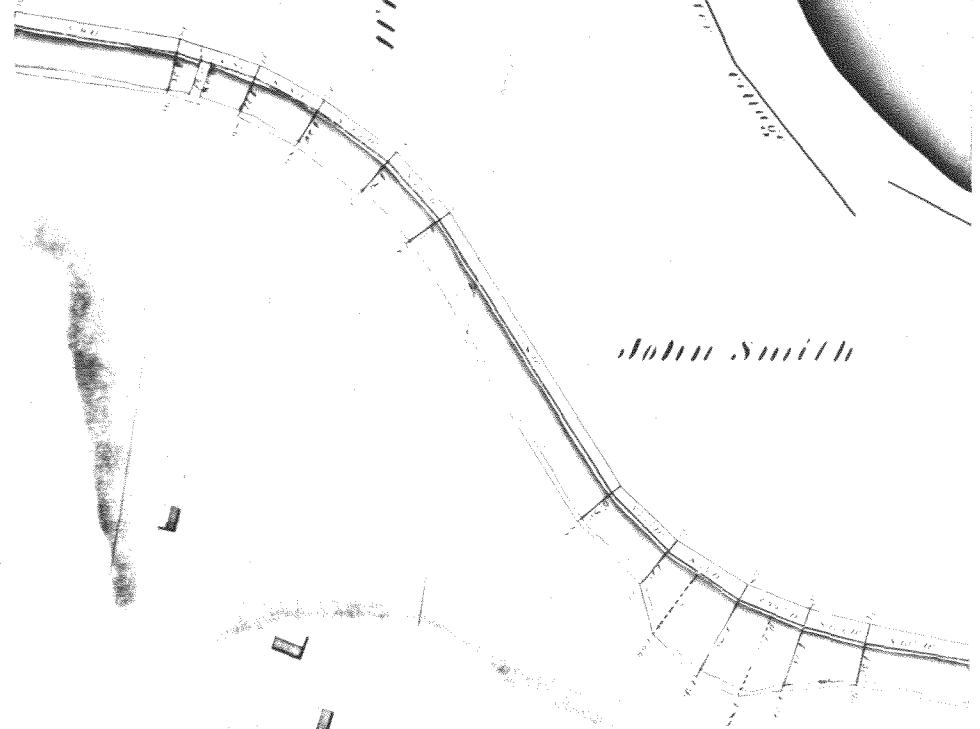
Redoubt in
which Gen.
Fraser was
killed.

Waste
Weir

Site of
Burgoyne's
Hospital

Wm. H. Dotted

road to Stillwater



"begging that he would have him buried the following day at six o'clock in the evening on the top of a hill which was a sort of redoubt."¹¹ She continued, saying, "We learned that General Burgoyne intended to fulfill the last wish of General Fraser, and to have him buried at six o'clock in the place designated by him."...Precisely at six o'clock the corpse was brought out, and we saw all the generals with their retinues attend it to the hill."¹²

Thomas Amburey wrote that, "Early on the morning (October 8) General Fraser breathed his last, and at his particular request, was buried, without any parade, in the great redoubt, by the soldiers of his own Corps."¹³

Burgoyne's account related that, "About sun-set the corpse of General Fraser was brought up the hill,.... To arrive at the redoubt, it passed within view of the greatest part of both armies."¹⁴

Having determined that Fraser was buried within a fortification that was located on a hill above the house where he died, the next step was to undertake to identify the location of the fortification.

William C. Wilkinson's map, "Plan of the Encampment and Position of the Army under his Excellency, Lt. General Burgoyne at Braemus Heights near Stillwater," shows three fortifications of the redoubt type on the high land overlooking the British hospital and artillery park. These were north of the Crumach Kill (Crooked Creek) and the Great Ravine, and on spires of a hill extending north and south above the river.

11. Riedesel, op. cit., p.124.

12. Ibid.

13. Amburey, op. cit., p.265.

14. Burgoyne, John, A. State of the Expedition from Canada, printed by J. Almon, London, 1780, pp.125-6. (6)

According to this map, the first redoubt north of the ravine was the largest and contained four cannon; the second, or center, redoubt contained two cannon; and the third was the smallest, containing no
15
cannon. The map contains no reference to the location of Fraser's burial.

In an effort to determine in which of these fortifications the burial was made, pertinent contemporary sources were examined.

Baron von Riedesel, in his journal, stated, "He (Fraser) requested that he might be buried at four o'clock the next afternoon in the embankment No. 1."
16

In his account of the event, Burgoyne recalled that: "Early in the morning of the 8th, General Fraser breathed his last...his last request was brought to me, that he might be carried without parade by the soldiers of his corps to the great redoubt, and buried there."
17
Anburey also designates Fraser's interment as being within "the great redoubt".

The size of the fortifications as depicted in Wilkinson's map appear to support the identification of the first spur north of the Great Ravine as the "great redoubt" in which Fraser was buried. This would be in agreement with Canal Map No. 2, which labels the spur as the location of the "fortification in which General Fraser was buried." However, some question remains because we do not know the authority for designating the particular spur as the site of the grave. It would be safe to assume that the surveyor received the information from some local residents. If this was the case, other local persons located the site quite differently.

15. Map, "Plan of the Encampment and Position of the Army under His Excellency Lt. General Burgoyne at Beaman's Heights near Stillwater, on the 20th Sept. with the Position of the Detachments &c in the Action of the 7th of October & the Position of the Army on the 3th Octr. 1777" in Burgoyne's State of the Expedition.

16. Riedesel, Baron Frederick, Journals, Albany, 1868, p.18.

17. Burgoyne, Op. Cit., p. 12h.

The doubt is increased by the account of Silliman's visit to Saratoga in 1819, at the same time that the survey was being made. On that occasion he was shown the location of the grave by Ezra Snell. According to Silliman, the fortifications were still quite distinct and the location of the grave corresponded with the so-called Clarke drawing. This represents a clear disagreement with the map, because the drawing indicates the central hill as the scene of the funeral.¹⁸

Jared Sparks' description of his visit notes that the fortifications were still visible in 1830, but he fails to state on which knoll the grave was located.¹⁹

Thus, the value of the canal map is compromised by the fact that the station points can not be located and by the disagreement with other sources of equal authority.

A later map, prepared after the canal route had been altered to include the construction of Wilbur's Basin at the lower end of the Great Ravine, indicated that the grave was located on the third spur north of the basin, marked by two pine trees. At first glance, this would seem to agree with Lossing's sketch of the grave, which appears on page 66 of volume I of his Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution, depicting two pines and another tree as marking the spot; however, a footnote on the same page states that the grave was located on the "center hill."²⁰²¹

18. Stone, William L., Visits to Saratoga Battle-Grounds, 1780-1880, Joel Munsell's Sons, Albany, 1895, p. 131.

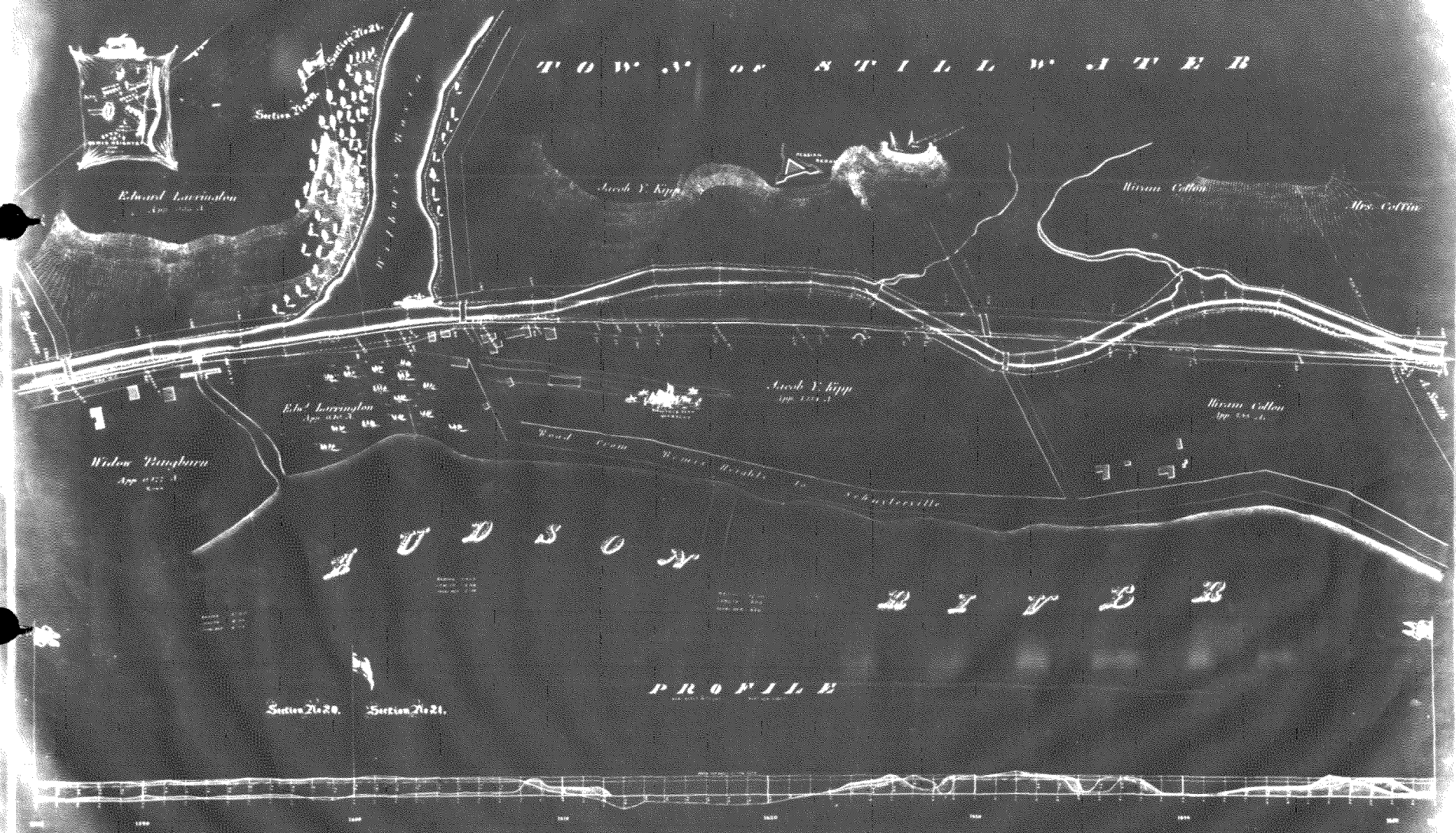
19. Ibid., pp. 173-174.

20. See Map No. 2.

21. Lossing, op. cit., 66.

No. 2

TOWN OF STILLWATER



PROFILE

Again, the authority for locating the grave on this spur was not cited on the map. However, there was a lingering local tradition that Fraser was located on this site. Nor, is there any way to reconcile the third hill as the location of the Great Redoubt in which the contemporary sources said burial was made with Wilkinson's depiction of the fortification at that point as the weakest and smallest of the three that overlooked the artillery park and hospital.

A review of the sources that have been studied indicates that a considerable area of disagreement exists concerning the location of the Great Redoubt and Fraser's Grave, and there appears to be no way to reconcile them. Former Park Historian Charles W. Snell believed that the grave was located on the second spur north of the Great Ravine, and the Historic Base Map for Saratoga reflects that opinion. ²² This writer is inclined to agree with him, providing the Taylor-Smith House faced north-east; if, on the other hand, it faced the east or a bit south-east, the grave would have been located on the third spur. Since, as has been noted, the Baroness' account states that the burial occurred on the hill back of the house, the location of the house and its orientation would seem basic in locating the grave. Unfortunately, the sources do not indicate the direction in which the house faced. While it seems natural to expect that the building faced east by south, or down-stream, thus placing the grave on the third spur, this can not be stated with any degree of certainty. On the face of it, there seems to be almost equal evidence to support the locating of the burial on any one of the three spurs or knolls. And, unless the Taylor-Smith House is located and subjected to an archeological study, a reconciliation of the conflicting evidence seems unlikely.

22. Historical Base Map, Saratoga National Historical Park, NHP-SAR-2011, October 26, 1950.

Arch - Sale - Saratoga

H2215

Region Five
421 Walnut Street
Philadelphia 6, Pa.

October 30, 1958

Memorandum

To: Superintendent, Saratoga National Historical Park
From: Regional Chief of Interpretation
Subject: Addendum to Research Study on the Death and Burial
of General Fraser

Mr. Luxader is to be complimented on the very useful addendum attached to your memorandum of October 6. We would still have liked some reassurance that all pertinent property records have been searched (are there any in Albany?); also, that the surveyor's field notes prepared in conjunction with the Champlain Canal map have been explored - but these points can be kept in mind as time permits. We feel that the key to the Great Redoubt's identification is very probably the original site of the Tayler-Smith House and we shall try to arrange some further archeological exploration next spring or summer.

Signed

Murray H. Malligan
Regional Chief of Interpretation

In duplicate

Copy to: Director, w/copy of incoming report
✓ Regional Archeologist