



FORT PLAIN MUSEUM

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HISTORY HAPPENED HERE

Newsletter 2009

A look back at the past year.

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Message From the Museum Chairman

It's easy, and somewhat gratifying to look back at how far we have come in such a short time. Our museum is once again making its mark in the historical community, setting records straight on Mohawk Valley history and fulfilling its mission of preservation. But while we look back with a clear view of our accomplishments the look ahead is always a difficult chore. Forging a shared vision of the future can only be accomplished with the input of our volunteer membership, other civic groups and the community at large.

Museums of all kinds share common goals. They must educate and entertain their visitors. They must protect, preserve and interpret those histories and artifacts they have chosen to feature. Finally they must act as a force for the change and betterment of the communities in which they exist. These guiding principles are moving FPM forward as never before. I hope this year to see the revitalization of our volunteer membership organization. As a small museum we rely on volunteers to help us bring programs to the general public. Their hard work is appreciated and most find their experience rewarding and enjoyable. In the years ahead I can see our membership organization taking charge of specific development projects, conducting fundraising activities, having fun and making important contributions to the museum.

When we look ahead at FPM's future the questions I most often hear is "When will you rebuild the fort?" or "When will you rebuild the blockhouse?". I hope that someday we are able to restore the forts original buildings. I can think of no better

way to educate and entertain visitors about Colonial life in the Mohawk Valley. It is certain however that a project of this magnitude will take major community support.

Of paramount importance is the preservation of the original site of Fort Plain itself. Presently the Fort Plain Cemetery Association owns the site. An agreement, which will allow the museum to take charge of the property and preserve its historic value, continues to elude us. However we remain optimistic that our negotiations will eventually reach a successful conclusion.

The future of Fort Plain, as with other communities in the Mohawk Valley, will undoubtedly lie in our ability to work together. The idea of other museums in the valley working together is not a new one. The Mohawk Valley Museums Consortium has been around for years allowing our area's historical organizations to share concerns and discuss future plans. Our section of western Montgomery County has one of the highest concentrations of historic sites in the state. Sites such as Fort Klock, Nellis Tavern, Palatine Church, Stone Arabia Church as well as a number of private homes and battlefields are the makings of an historic attraction, which would draw visitors from all over the world. I hope that in the years ahead we are able to pool these collective resources and make our history work for us as a solid segment of our local economy.



Norm Bollen
Chairman

FPM Wins 2008 County Tourism Award

The Fort Plain Museum was awarded the 4th Annual Montgomery County Barbara V. Spraker Tourism Award, in recognition of its premier event, Holding Down the Fort: General Washington Inspects the Troops. This year's award was sponsored by Capital District Physician's Health Plan, and presented by the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce.

Selected from nine nominees, event chairman Richard Brown stated, "We are deeply honored to have won this award, and are very grateful to the sponsors, volunteers and countless others whom supported us throughout this wonderful

event." The award, along with citations from the various branches of government, is on display in the museum's foyer.



Glendore Wetterau 1918-2009



**Fort Plain Museum
Board of Trustees
1961-2007
Board Member Emeritus**

It is with heavy hearts that we say goodbye to our dear friend and colleague Glenadore Wetterau, age 90. Though this newsletter is meant to look back at 2008, her passing in early 2009 is a great loss, and we can't wait a year to recognize her life.

Glen was a lifelong resident of Fort Plain, having been born in and residing in the house purchased by her grandfather in 1908. During her life, Glen donated many hours as a volunteer in many capacities. She was an avid reader, and her travels include all 50 states and many foreign countries. Her primary interests were history & genealogy, and she served as Historian for Fort Plain Restoration Inc in 1961, which was the start of the Fort Plain Museum, for which she later served as Secretary & then Treasurer.

She was a charter Board Member of our Museum, and served actively on the board through 2007, after which the board decided to make her our first ever Board Trustee Emeritus in honor of her tireless dedication to the Museum. Glen, you are in our hearts, and are a part of our history.

Sincerely,
Fort Plain Museum Board of Trustees

Holding Down the Fort



General Washington Inspects the Troops

The 5th Annual "Holding Down the Fort" event was an event like none other since the Grand Encampment of 1992. A year of planning culminated in an event filled with spectacle, memorable moments, and most importantly, the ability to educate the public in a variety of ways about a special segment of our rich history.

The 2008 rendition of this event was subthemed "General Washington Inspects the Troops" and featured a premier reenactment performance by Dean Malissa, who is honored to be the official and sole George Washington historical actor at Mount Vernon - George Washington's Estate & Gardens. He has also portrayed General Washington for the Discovery Channel, NBC, National Geographic, and Showtime; appeared on CNN and in films for the U.S. Navy and the National Flag Foundation. He has appeared at the White House Visitors Center, the Smithsonian, the Na-



Dean Malissa addresses the public and reenactors.

tional Archives, National Portrait Gallery, Independence National Historical Park, Valley Forge National Historical Park, the National Constitution Center, the Betsy Ross House, Liberty Hall, and many historical venues. The Fort Plain Museum is honored to have brought him on his first trip to the Mohawk Valley.



Chairman Richard Brown and Beth Latini enjoy the opening reception at the Isaac Paris House.

This year, in partnering with other historic sites, the event kicked off with a Friday evening opening reception at the Isaac Paris House in Fort Plain, courtesy of the Fort Plain Chapter of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Well over a hundred visitors, most in Colonial attire, mingled and enjoyed parlor music by L'iaison Plaisantes, and Colonial era finger foods catered by Melissa's of Canajoharie.

On Saturday morning, our string of perfect weather weekends for the annual event took a horrid turn as a pass-

ing front dropped torrential rains for almost an hour before abating. Plans were to have the General ride through town on horseback escorted by his personal guard, but the downpour came just as horses were being offloaded from their trailers at McFee Memorials on the opposite side of town. The ride had to be canceled, but after reconvening at the museum, and the cessation of the rains, the event got back on schedule.

Washington's guard were members of Sheldon's Horse, The Second Continental Light Dragoons, based in Connecticut and here by official decree of their Governor M. Jodi Rell. This historic cavalry unit was commissioned by Congress under the command of Colonel Elisha Sheldon in December 1776 at the direct recommendation of General George Washington, and performed the first cavalry charge on American soil at The Battle of The Flockey in nearby Schoharie.



Led by Sal Tarantino, Sheldon's Horse arrives at camp escorting General Washington.

The Dragoons led a memorial service in front of our flagpoles, passing a cup of Colonial Madiera wine to the troops, sponsors and dignitaries, and then called forth any members of the public whom have served in the armed forces. In an emotional moment, they were all asked to share the cup, and then Dragoon leader Sal Tarantino raised a toast to those veterans whom have served

and gone before us, and poured the remaining wine on the ground in front of our new monument commemorating our forefathers.

For the second year in a row, Fyfes & Drumms of Olde Saratoga took the field with rousing Colonial music. Midday saw the first of four programs which Dean Malissa presented over the weekend. The first was "Call to Arms" which is an activity in which General Washington, with the assistance of several soldiers and/or officers, musters the children into new recruits for the Continental Army. Several kids from the watching crowd stepped up and were presented with wooden muskets and taken through their paces.

At 2pm, the main battle reenactment began with the Colonial forces defending against Loyalist forces accompanied by a number of Native Americans.



Cannons roar afield as the enemy attempts to advance.

Shortly after the narrated battle, Malissa presented his second program, "The Road Traveled," a program in which Washington tells us how we got here as a nation through the retelling of the major events in his life up to the Presidency.

As the first day onsite drew to a close, a Tory officer was captured, put on trial, sentenced, and hanged from the stoutest tree, a hearty pine growing in the site of the original Blockhouse fortification.



Sheldon's Horse unit shares in a memorial toast to those whom have served our nation.



Head table: Ken Shults, Commander of the Burning of the Valleys Militia Association; Assemblyman George Amedore; Dean Malissa as George Washington; Chair Richard Brown; and Vice-Chair Norm Bollen (right, not shown)

Later that evening, a four-course Colonial fare dinner was held in General Washington's presence at another historic site partner, the Van Alstyne Homestead in Canajoharie. Over 100 diners enjoyed a meal befitting of the late-1700's, also catered by Melissa's of Canajoharie.

Sunday's event day opened with a Colonial morning worship service, which has become a custom of the event in the past few years. This was followed by the very popular fashion show, itself being in its third year running, in which reenactors describe to the audience what attire they wear and why.

Next came Washington's third program of the weekend, "Growing Up Along the Patowmack," a perfect program for

audiences of all ages, in which Washington tells stories that few have ever heard about his childhood and teenage years.

Sheldon's Horse again took the field, this time giving a stirring and educational cavalry demonstration.

Dragoons cut down targets, and crossed swords with one another, along with a demonstration of pistol firing from horseback.

Washington's final program



General Washington educates an attentive crowd on his life.

ensued. "Remembrance" was a program for adults explaining how fragile the gifts of freedom and liberty are and how easy it is to forget what they mean - it tells the incredible yet little known story of the events, most-often referred to as the Newburgh Incident, which was the closest we have ever come as a nation to a full military takeover of the country.

Dean Malissa retired from the field, but the day was far from over. Again scores of reenactors rallied to perform a second battle reenactment. Natives took captives, and the Colonial forces drove them off. The hostages were freed and in tribute to the women who 'held down' the fort in 1780, a line of ladies with muskets formed and fired a final volley at the retreating enemy forces.

The Fort Plain Museum's premier event owes a great debt of gratitude to its sponsors: the William Gundry Broughton Private Charitable Foundation; NBT Bank; Lee Publications; the Arkell Hall Foundation; Stewart's Shops; and many others who stepped forth in support of this unique and extraordinary event.

Major grant funding was provided by the Montgomery

County Board of Supervisors via the Hospitality Grant Program, and by the Tri-County Arts Council via the Decentralization Program, a regrant program of the NYS Council on the Arts.

Staging such an event requires many man-hours and dozens of volunteers. A call for help was made and Jim Katovitich, head of the Fort Plain Community Activity Council answered, bringing with him a small army of eighteen additional volunteers, most of whom had never been involved in museum functions in the past.

The event was sponsored by the Burning of the Valley Militia Association, and would not have been possible without help from the First Tryon County Militia, under the command of Richard Casler. Also, key to the success was the Village of Fort Plain's DPW, Fire and Police departments. Special thanks also to our own Lisa Emden; Sally Adams of *At Your Request*; to A White Rose Bed & Breakfast; to Sodexho catering services; to Jimmy Distefano of the historic General Cochran farm, who boarded the Dragoon's horses; and our partnering historic sites.

Patriot Day Observed at Fort Plain

A new tradition began at the Fort Plain Museum this past year with the observance of Patriot Day. President Bush established it as a day of prayer and remembrance for the victims of the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York and

Washington, DC. The museum ceremony was held at the Patriot's Monument located at the flagpoles on the fort hilltop. A minute of silence was begun at 8:46am, the time at which the first plane struck the World Trade Center. The flags were all lowered to half-mast, and Rev. Nancy Ryan led a prayer. Members of the Fort Plain VFW and the First Tryon County Militia were on hand to fire a salute to those lost on that terrible day. The museum established the Patriot's Monument to salute those who died in the cause of American Liberty in the Mohawk Valley from 1777-1783. The museum plans to continue this tradition in years to come.



Hilltop Exhibit Debuts

2008 saw the opening of our new hilltop exhibit entitled "Guardians of the Mohawk". The display is a series of individual displays laid out on the points of a compass in a thirty-foot circle. Each sign in the display explains the fortified homes, forts, churches and battlefields that lay within a few short miles of Fort Plain. In 1781 after the forces of Sir John Johnson had burned most of the middle Mohawk Valley communities, command of all upstate New York forces was given to Colonel Marinus Willett. Willett made Fort Plain his headquarters and organized a defensive strategy for the Mohawk Valley utilizing the fortified homes and forts surrounding Fort Plain.

Historian, Nelson Greene discussed Willett's strategy when he wrote about the "10 forts encircling Fort Plain". Our hilltop exhibit pays tribute to Greene's research and gives the viewer a perspective of the distances involved. The exhibit itself replaces the much talked about labyrinth, which often

functioned as a quiet meditation escape. "All in all it came out pretty well", said current museum chairman, Norm Bollen. The information in the displays reflects the most up-to-date research conducted by museum historian and board member Wayne Lenig. Lenig has corrected many of the inaccuracies in our local history books and given us a true and accurate picture of these 18th century Mohawk Valley homes and forts. Everyone should take a few moments to walk the fort hill and view this extraordinary exhibit.



The Southwest Sign

Student Tours Expand to Include 8th Grade



Volunteer Sally Taylor shows historic artifacts to students.

On Thursday, May 15th, approximately sixty fourth graders from the Harry Hoag Elementary School visited and toured the museum. Eileen Chambers, David and Fran Plank, Art and Sue Adams, Tut and Beth Marosek, Julie and Wayne Tucker, Sally Taylor, Micki Lieber, Glenn Bentz, and Richard Casler all served as volunteers,

assisting in the students' tour of the museum and its grounds. Glenn Bentz demonstrated the Native American method of planting the "three sisters," corn, beans, and squash, and Richard Casler demonstrated the firing of a musket. The students received a presentation, followed with questions and answers of approximately eight minutes in each of five rooms in the museum. Their teachers use the visitation as a form of review for their social studies final test focusing on New York State history.

On Tuesday, June 17th, approximately seventy eighth graders from the Fort Plain Middle School, visited and toured the museum. Eileen Chambers,



Volunteer Eunice Bollen discusses exhibits with 8th grade students.

Art Adams, Beth and Tut Marsoek, Lisa Emden, Eunice Bollen, and Ed Pangburn all assisted in showing the museum. The students received a volunteer's presentation with question and answers in each of the five rooms.



Colonial militia reenactor Richard Casler discusses attire and battle engagement.



Native American reenactor Glenn Bentz plants a Native garden with students.

2009 Calendar of Events

(subject to revision)

THU., APRIL 2

Preservation League of N.Y. State
Hosting Conference

SAT., APRIL 18 • 9am-3pm
Annual Grounds Clean-Up

SAT., MAY 2

Palatines to America
Hosting Annual Meeting

THU., MAY 14

Annual 4th Grade Student Visitation

SAT. - SUN., MAY 16-17

Culloden In North America

We are the host site for this historical reenactment of this important battle in the United Kingdom, the last fought on their soil. The Scottish rebellion of 1745 will be presented along with Scottish games. This event travels the country and Canada each year and is recognized by the National Trust For Scotland.

SAT., MAY 30

Opening Day

Open Daily from 10am-4pm

FRI., JULY 3

4th on the 3rd

We will be a part of the Village of Fort Plain's 20th annual event.

SAT., AUGUST 1

Holding Down the Fort

This year will be a one-day event full of programs about this historic event.

FRI., AUGUST 7

Evening Reception

(Plans are underway to have a 4-week exhibition of the art of Rufus Grider, however there are some delays. If it does come to fruition, this reception will be the kick-off to that exhibit)

SAT., AUGUST 8 - SUN., SEPT 6

Rufus Grider Exhibition

(Pending)

SUN., SEPTEMBER 6

Closing Day

FRI., SEPTEMBER 11

Patriot Day Recognition

Tribute to 9-11 victims with cannon and military salute at 8:46 AM.

SAT., SEPTEMBER 19

Annual Picnic for Volunteers

SAT. - SUN., NOVEMBER 28-29

Heritage Holiday Open House

3rd Year being held in conjunction with several other Mohawk Valley sites.

Board of Trustees

Listed By Term Year:

TRUSTEE	TERM
Ron Burch	2009
Deanna Campione	2009
Norm Bollen, Chair	2010
Fred Chambers, Secretary	2010
Richard Brown, Treasurer	2011
Doris Wetterau	2011
Robert Perry, Vice Chair	2012
Wayne Lenig	2013
Ed Pangburn	2013